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'Appreciating Nollywood: Audiences and Nigerian 'Films''

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Appreciating Nollywood: Audiences and Nigerian 'Films'

Abstract

This paper is an ethnographic study of the Nigerian movies industry, Nollywood. It begins by c antecedents to this industry, in an attempt to identify factors that structure production practice: responses to the films. It notes that practices in Nollywood differ sharply from the established | film industry. These new trends in the production and distribution have been facilitated by new The paper goes on to analyse the responses from a sample of UK based Nollywood audience the online communities of Nollywood fans. It observes how the social context of audiences sh The study discovers peculiar reasons why audiences patronise film, which call for a renegotiat film.

Keywords: Nollywood, Nigerian films, film audiences, identity, audience pleasures, new techn

Introduction

This paper attempts to examine audiences from an ethnographic perspective in order to identi film can assist us in finding the new meanings of 'film'. The aim is to document and explain th in the Nigerian film/video industry and to find transferable lessons from this phenomenon. It is assumption that the audiences are critical to the success of any film industry. To place this in | the antecedents to the growth of the industry in Nigeria will be examined, and other factors the Nollywood's success will be highlighted. These are the factors that structure the observed pat responses. The study examined how audience consumption patterns were facilitated by new t and distribution within this "film industry". It observed that new media technologies and the soc audiences has shaped patterns of reception. It is through audience negotiations of the meanin the study provokes a reconsideration of the concept of 'film'.

The ethnographic approach adopted here was necessary for two key reasons. One is the fact yet unknown about film audiences and this is to be expected. One can argue that since routi research is tied into the promotional systems (awards, fan clubs, film festivals), such efforts ca information that is compromised. The audience factor remains a crucial part of the business in because audience action, custom and preference patterns, loyalty and good will, determine cc The link to the profit motive which characterises much of conventional audience research ther attention to box office hits. This invariably means that research tends to neglect audiences on focussing on the mainstream (Hollywood audiences). (Klinger, 2006; Allison, 2006; Hoskins, M 1997)

Box office reports and such studies which offer panoramic views are compromised on another as informative as they initially appear to be as they merely present aggregates. A different research is required for the many unanswered questions in the summaries and demographics of cinema as a case, as argued by Downing, (2003) such studies are expensive, and the more interesting aspects of the approximations (details of the results) are usually restricted to subscribers, people with vested interests in the industry. It is understandable that the concern in industry, especially one which enjoys such a global market has been to monitor what it has come to regard as its winning formula; what are the factors that guarantee profit. Little wonder therefore that an industry which has such a stranglehold on the market pays little attention to explanations of audience behaviour. This study has sought to look beyond the obvious by focusing on a success story that has defied the Hollywood formula.

Nollywood is a new player that has crept into the market unannounced. It is the Nigerian "movie industry" which has initially been restricted to Nigerian and African audiences, but is progressively making its way into the global scene. It is a regular feature on channels which specialise in the black and African audiences (Multichoice Nigeria, BEN TV - Sky channel 194). Since January 2008, Nollywood has a dedicated 24 hour movies service on Sky digital platform to audiences in the UK and Ireland. There are also satellite channels which also support the circulation of Nollywood. In spite of these developments its incursion into the global market is still debateable.

Reputed to be the third most prolific industry, after Hollywood and Bollywood, (Onishi: 2002) it has achieved this feat by virtue of the volume of production. By conventional wisdom, high volume of trade is evidence of the approval of the products and evidence of success in any industry. Therefore if one would go by the volume of its audiences, Nollywood success would be very clear, but this simple explanation of success is often shallow, even reckless to equate audience patronage with success until a clearer understanding of audience action is obtained. Nollywood audiences offer this opportunity, and being a novel and unexplored market is a chance for a fresh appreciation of film audiences, and a chance to understand the peculiarities of this market.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the views of Nollywood audiences in the diaspora have been sought through a combination of observations and interviews conducted in outlets in London including with distributors and customers of a couple of video shops in Camberwell (South London) and London. These are typical locations for such services as they are within convenient reach of a large population either due to their residence or their patronage of ethnic markets / stores (for food specialist services such as money transfer, fashion supplies, Nigerian news magazines and so on) and a home visit facilitated by a distributor to a customer who has direct subscription. This was an approach worthy of the closer scrutiny as the results showed.

To supplement these, there were sessions of observations conducted at the premiere of two Nollywood movies in London.^[1] The observations were also accompanied by two focus group discussions conducted at these events. This reflects the main distribution network for Nollywood in the U.K. In addition, a sample of weblogs devoted to Nollywood fans was analysed. The blogs had postings mainly from the U.K. These and other news reports give insight into global and domestic Nollywood audiences. The patterns were considered in light of findings from an earlier ethnographic study of Nigerian television audiences (Esan 1993).

Television Industry & Nollywood Practices

Nollywood practices are rooted in the television industry where drama is the most important programming for much of the audience. Whilst news was important to the station and some elite audience, the appeal for drama was quite universal amongst viewers. These drama productions were in local languages. The productions which were in English, the unifying language in a multilingual country, were usually those produced for network transmission. These were often the better resourced routine drama specials which were produced in the local stations were also quite akin to what passes for drama in the West. They were often longer features, in the local language and aired during festive seasons. These productions were a culture of the people and were usually the high point of their viewing experiences. Since these productions, they can be likened to the occasional trip to the cinema, except that in this case, one does not incur the extra costs; one may remain in a home environment to experience the pleasure. These included historical epics, love stories, comedies, and aspirational tales.

Nollywood productions have expanded the range of subject matter featured in such television in the times, and the (Western) fare which Nollywood may now be replacing, the industry now features gangster genres. On the whole there is a preponderance of morality tales, and a glaring attention to occult practices in society. Lines of classification are difficult to draw, as many genres are an effort to create a wide appeal and guarantee quick returns on investment. There are evangelical (but also Islamic) movies which bestride genres whilst retaining their religious sensibilities. The known to explore the conflicts between the traditional ways and the challenges of contemporary feature variations in lifestyles to be found in urban and rural areas. In all, they offer contrasting choices the viewer may have to choose from in the attempt to correct societal ills.

As was the case in television, Nollywood uses language to bring programming closer to the ground. Films were made in the local languages. Some of these were subtitled. The use of subtitles helps to overcome ethnic and cultural barriers that local languages imposed within the multilingual Nigerian market, increasingly a feature in Nollywood. They have the potential to expand the markets, when illiterate constitute a barrier. The facility is invaluable to draw in audiences from other ethnic groups who are disadvantaged.

Music is an integral communication element of Nollywood productions, as songs were to the theatre. Music helps to convey the intended meaning; it underscores the significant points in the plot and sets a mood and emotions of the characters. It heightens the dramatic tension, and viewers are forewarned of danger. Music and songs are crucial for continuity and for bringing closure as audiences contextualise meanings to draw from texts. It is usual to have songs specially commissioned for the production used as non diegetic elements of the production, to add colour and serve as narrative links. Popular music on electronic soundtracks and at times commercial music. In these practices, Nollywood has created a new space. It has helped to sustain an ancillary service from which the television (and music) industry now

The political tensions evident in society which could not be directly addressed on mainstream television contributed to the opportunities available for the video/film industry. In the early to mid 90s, when video began to thrive, Nigeria was under a defiant military regime that was intolerant of the news media. It was the regime in power when Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth in 1995, for its authoritarian practices and its infringements of human rights. Nollywood was largely ignored then. At the time, however, its economic potential had been acknowledged. Then most videos were not overtly political.

political upheavals that framed the regime. Though the Nigerian nation was a pariah state, No overtly address such issues. The prevalent assumptions of Nollywood were of its benign nature. In popular culture, it was perceived as the opiate of the masses because of its wide appeal. But it means apolitical even if it does not adopt the militant style of some popular music. Some prod Mainframe's *Saworoide (Brass Bells*, dir. Tunde Kelani, 1999) were clever satires, which were by the authorities.^[2]

The videos are often social commentaries, reflecting social reality. In so doing, they take swip authority, be it in the dialogue or by inferences in the subtext. They may not rock the boat by a confrontation with those in authority, but they were still potentially subversive in the relationshi the strategies they explored for living under the prevalent harsh conditions. This orientation to developments in society may have led to the premature conclusion that Nollywood was benign society; a conclusion which ignores the hegemonic struggles that occur with cultural artefacts. understand how audiences negotiate the meaning of the viewing experiences we may not fully contribution of the industry in this regard.

It can be argued that in more ways than is readily evident, the economic and political instability Nigeria since the 80s contributed to the development of Nollywood. The austerity measures at life in the 80s was a sharp contrast from the 70s when life was easier; then there was a bubbli cinema attendance was usual. The prevalent need for caution and security consciousness me lifestyles that led to the preference for home based entertainment. This was when 24 hour TV in Nigeria first as a weekend service on Lagos Television.^[3] As stations had a demand for loc on the airwaves independent production became viable. Dwindling public funds had led to cutl of the arts and government owned television stations. In this context independent production t television production as a whole was quite challenging at that time. Independent producers we uncharted paths as television funding had been secure under the public service stations till the needed direct access to audiences, hence their foray into production of home movies. It is in c same instability which contributed to the decline in cinema attendance contributed to the grow movies industry.

Nollywood evolved with its own production disciplines as it relied on video technology and per whom cut their teeth as (street) theatre practitioners. The business was risky, the financial sec supportive, production costs were high, and quality was clearly compromised. Funds for the vi sourced locally, and production was hurried to reduce costs and minimise the risks of piracy.

As well as funding and artistic orientations, productions also had to contend with the limitation: quality of available wider social infrastructure such as transport and electricity. The production Nollywood are therefore quite peculiar; a novel approach borne out of the prevalent circumsta production context.

In the early days, there were often no scripts and performers were not always fully briefed on security reasons. Much of the dialogue especially in the Yoruba language productions was ad had to be well versed in the culture to do this successfully. This further engrained the ethnic di conspicuous in the industry. As Kunzler notes, in Nollywood, ad libbing was facilitated by the life. He wrote that "word play and verbal skills are very important and appreciated" (Kunzler, 2 corroborated by accounts of television audiences (Esan 1993).

The sum total of these was that Nollywood in its early days was characterised by its predictabl

pace, questionable sequels, lengthy and noisy dialogues; this style was deemed incompatible film. Consequently the industry elicited sharp criticism from those who sought to defend the cinema film. Yet the industry flourished as the audience's patronage was certain.

Other antecedents to viewing practices

There is a class divide that had been apparent in the film market in Nigeria even before Nollywood separate from the ethnic/language classification of the industry. The evidence for this is to be seen in exhibition patterns that characterised the film industry in the 1950s and 60s when no restrictions on imported films. As is consistent with the patterns in other parts of the world, the market was dominated by Hollywood films, particularly the Westerns and action films. These were also regular features on television schedules in TV's early days.^[4] Indian films and Hong Kong cinema were also popular among each had its niche (Hoskins, McFadyen & Finn 1997; Ikhime 1979). The stratification of the market was reflected in the exhibition spaces. These included large multi national cinema theatre franchises such as Rex at the higher end of the market, with Pen, Scala, Rex at the other. These were features of Nollywood particularly in urban areas until the introduction of Nigeria's policy of indigenisation in 1979^[5].

The cinema theatres were stratified by their location and their fare. Those within (or in close proximity to) high density residential areas were expected to serve the low income groups. They were reputed to be crowded, more likely to show action, romance, and pornographic texts. They tended to show Western and Hong Kong movies. They also exhibited some of the initial domestic efforts which were celluloid. With time these venues were regarded as dens for pickpockets, robbers, prostitutes, drug dealers (see Abdullai Musa's posting on 'Is the big Screen Still Big in Africa?', *BBC News Africa* 'Have

These audiences were less pretentious in their reception practices; they were more likely to react to elements within the film, shouting at characters, applauding their prowess, cheering, jeering, and expressing disapproval to the projectionist if the reel change was not to their satisfaction. They did not exhibit the airs and graces apparent at the other end of the spectrum where the audience viewed in comfortable and air-conditioned cinema halls. Their reception practices were quite comparable to any standard cinemas in Western society. Cinema for the middle and more privileged classes showed polished Western (Hollywood) fare. Their behaviour likewise was more polished. These were more travelled, possibly more *aspirational* and certainly more critical audiences.

Cinema for the low income strata was regarded as low brow because of the context of viewing and the manners of the audiences. Yet these audiences were apparently less critical of what they viewed. By viewing films made in languages that they did not understand, they had cultivated linguistic decoding. They thus demonstrated that audiences were able to deduce storylines from sound tracks even when there was no knowledge of the language in which dialogue was set. This was instructive for identifying Nollywood's market potential. If audiences had learnt to do this with films they had to pay for, it seemed reasonable to expect them to do the same with local productions for greater semblance of cultural affinity. Irrespective of how their taste or appreciation of film is cultivated, audiences had become aware of film as a medium for storytelling, there was clearly an appetite for it. This was recognition of how cinematic codes can be employed to create new spaces for messages

Aspirations of Nollywood

Viewed from a national perspective, there are two key motivations for Nollywood. One is to do cultural identity, and the other relates to economic independence. On both counts, Nollywood is contributing to the fight against *cultural imperialism* in tangible ways.

In the days following Nigeria's hosting of the Festival of African Arts and Culture in 1977, there was goodwill and financial support for promoting the arts and cultural heritage in Nigeria. The quest for distinctiveness and identity has been firmly placed on the national agenda since that time. Although it may have been short-lived, the rhetoric did last, and it has continued to influence production in the creative industries. Video was not widely available then, but it has since become the prevalent medium of dissemination.

The rationale for indigenisation (of the culture industries in particular) is evidence of official concern regarding the impact of engagement with films. These concerns continue to underpin the expectations in Nigeria. Whilst much of this is cultural, the economic concerns to the society and the individual are not to be discounted. The concern for cultural preservation suggested that cinema which portrays Nigerian society and its realities were to be preferred. Implicit in this position are concerns for the political and economic consequences of cross-cultural media. For example, that continued exposure to foreign products would lead to changes in consumption patterns whereby foreign fashions, food, home furnishings, cars and the like would be preferred, and the consumption of these would constitute a drain on the economy. This was particularly true and the brain drain which was observed in the mid 80s was deemed to be further tangible evidence. Evidently Nollywood made good business sense in that it helped to conserve precious foreign exchange which would otherwise be made on the costs of importing films, and further savings on expenditure that would otherwise be required if different tastes were cultivated - when foreign values are promoted.

In recent times there have been aspirations for Nollywood to be a revenue earner as it promotes the tourism industry (Odugbemi, 2004). To do this, it aims to showcase positive aspects of the beautiful landscapes, spectacular practices and attractive ways of life. The industry has potential to promote national identities and foster mutual understanding of different ethnic groups. If it does this, it has the capacity to promote national integration. As with its precursors in the media, the cultural expectations of Nollywood will promote positive behaviour patterns and social development. This expectation is rooted in the didactic nature of the traditional storytelling. It also explains the emphasis on the morality tales in the international market, the industry now helps to champion the African identity to those in the diaspora consistent with the nation's foreign policy in which its leadership role in Africa is well spelt out.

Though the indigenisation decree meant the death of the fledgling, foreign-dominated, celluloid era, it has opened up opportunities for the local industry but the full potential could only be realised with the democratisation of technology. The industry has now made its marks through the use of familiar talent and indigenous storylines.

Defining Nollywood's Success

There is ample evidence in the critical review of Nollywood that by professional standards all in the industry, even to those who are key players within it. The formula for film making in Nigeria developed is familiar elsewhere, especially in the west. For failing to produce in 35 mm format, Nollywood is

as film, even at the largest African film festival, the Pan-African Film and Television Festival (F Ouagadougou (Fofana 2007). The orientation to scripting, the themes, narrative style, the duration of projects, and its marketing may appear alien. Nick Moran (2004) in his BBC sponsored participations the industry was bewildered at these and the fact that a film project could be completed in a week.

As mentioned, the industry has evolved on the back of Nigeria's rich heritage in the arts; the traditional theatres, traditional story telling cultures and early attempts at indigenous television programming. In the precepts of the television industry, Nollywood evolved around a dominant language structure that reflects the original geopolitical structure of Nigeria. The industry thus has 3 distinct sectors; Yoruba movies and Hausa movies. The movies tend to reflect the cultures in these areas and are often distributed from the commercial nerve centres in these regions and Lagos - the nation's commercial structure has been inherited by the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board as a basis of classification for films. There are also English language productions and what has evolved as a distinct category labelled 'Nollywood' because of the tendency to use both Igbo and English languages. 'Nollywood' also reflects modern and traditional Igbo cultures. The ethnic affiliation around the industry is very clear in shooting location, and sometimes even in the cast. To this end, it becomes easier for audiences to identify with Nollywood.

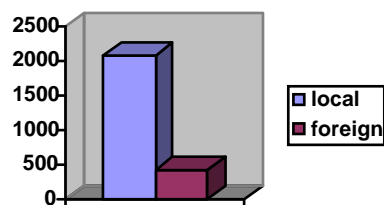
The attempt to adapt the skill of artistes (writers, actors) and performances from other media (radio and television) for cinema was initially a challenge both in terms of the aesthetics and the fiscal costs. Before there was an insistence on appropriate standards for celluloid film, there was little local technical expertise and the costs of projects were astronomical. Much of the local talent was excluded as there were no corporate financing for most of the 'filmmakers'. The challenge of raising funds locally was taken up by the arrival of video technology. It was McCall who noted that:

Nigerian popular videos are nothing like films canonized in African cinema studies. They include comedy, horror, mythic parables, romance, witchcraft, melodrama, Christian and Islamic historical epics. While Africa's celluloid cinema has depended largely on foreign funding and inspiration, Nigeria's video industry is profitable and self sufficient. It is now one of the fastest growing sectors of the Nigerian economy. (McCall, 2004: 103)

The progress of the industry may never have occurred without the flexibility of the new media. The lower costs of video production kits has democratized the chances of participation in the industry. Independent producers, without the yoke of large mainstream corporations, are able to translate their ideas into a format for dissemination in the market. Such an army of talent was available especially with the rise of the television industry. The pioneering government stations had rationalized their staff and many had been made redundant. These, along with the amateur theatre practitioners, and graduates of theatre and mass communication departments from higher institutions had formed a nucleus of the independent production force that served the industry. Without the democratized access facilitated by the video, many of these could have remained on the unemployment queues and their talent undiscovered.

The flexibility of distribution occasioned by the use of VHS and more recently Video CDs (VCD) and DVDs has contributed in no small measure to the development of the industry. It is on record that the year 1992 which marked the actual debut of Nollywood^[6] was due to an importer of blank VHS tapes who was adding value to the blank tapes, recording and selling copies of popular TV dramas, he had found a more profitable, more efficient way of distributing his stock of tapes. The success of the initial effort that taking 'cinema' into the private (personal or group) spaces was a viable venture.

Besides releasing the titles for VHS / VCD / DVD sales, Nollywood is also in the television syn This market has been enhanced by the demand for programming by terrestrial and satellite Ni stations^[7] and those transmitting outside the African continent to Nigerians in the diaspora. Ne the challenge of sourcing more affordable and more culturally appropriate content rather than precise Hollywood) fare that had dominated the airwaves and Nollywood fills the gap. Such ar constitute alternative streams of income for Nollywood producers. It also meant that audience: ardent followers could be courted. For example the AfricaMagic channel on South Africa's sat company Multichoice has a fare that is largely devoted to Nigerian movies and this helped to t those exposed to Nollywood.^[8] This is just a glimpse into Nollywood's success story. As at 20 release as many as 54 titles per month. The statistics available on the website of the Nigerian Censors Board (NFVCB) shows that by 2006, as many as 2069 local films had been classifiec foreign film. (see also Kunzler, 2006; also National film and Video Censors Board www.nfvcb.gov.ng)



Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board List

Clearly there is a high volume of business in this market. According to Aderinokun (2004) who Film Makers Cooperative of Nigeria, there is a potential audience of 15 million people for each is for the domestic Nigerian market alone. It is reckoned that another 5 million regular custome from the foreign market which spans the West African sub region crossing over into East and the Southern African markets. This is remarkable, considering the fact that it is a relatively you

Nollywood's growth has been meteoric in comparison with Hollywood and Bollywood to which likened. A Guardian special report in March 2006 claims that the industry "in just 13 years, has to an estimated earnings of US\$200 million (£114 m) a year." By 2006, Kunzler was already p conservative estimate of £52 billion that could be made from sales of videos alone. Perhaps t explained by the fact that Nigeria is the most populous African nation. The latest census figure estimates Nigeria's population as being about 140 million^[9]; and World Bank estimates sugge million Nigerians all over the world. These are dispersed across Britain, U.S.A., Canada and n amongst others; an apparent ready made market for Nollywood, but also a potential challenge

Key amongst the challenges faced by the industry is the task of satisfying such a large hetero sheer size alone may explain how the market could accommodate such a high proliferation of there were real anxieties about the market becoming saturated. Concerns about how the glut undermine profitability suggest that market size is not sufficient explanation of the success of l is measured by high demand. This suggests that a successful industry must manage supply a Nollywood has begun to do so. Since 2002, some voluntary regulatory measures have been t industry to reverse the glut in supply and manage other elements of the industry. Sectors with Yoruba and the English / Igbo) went on self imposed recess. For instance a year's ban was pl performers, to make room for new talent in markets that had become dominated by the stars.

important the star system is, and the need for fresh faces for success in this industry. McCall (reckons that the recess allowed participants in the industry to improve their organisation and introduce professionalism into their practice.

Along with these regulatory efforts, the industry had to devise means of addressing the interests and preferences of its diverse audiences. The diversity of interests is rooted in the range of ethnic, cultural, and other social factors within Nigeria (and other parts of Africa) that constitute the primary market factors. These factors inform the values and preferences which inform the cultural regulation of the industry. The culture of the people are central to their identity and aspirations for self determination. There is a focus within the industry in the story lines and the use of language - the use of Nigerian vernaculars and foreign markets. Though the language of the productions is an important element in the success, as will later be discussed, one can argue that it is the cultural fit of the stories that is more important. Language is a pathway into the cultures, but it is not always the primary means of communication explained. Indeed the use of English language is no barrier to the success of Nollywood business in other countries. This means that there is more to be uncovered in the explanation of Nollywood's success. Key to this is in the audience response to Nollywood.

Nollywood Audience Pleasures

This section is primarily a report of the empirical inquiry with audiences in London. In the interviews at two video clubs, the most frequently mentioned pleasure identified by the viewers interviewed was to relax or pass the time. This was a typical initial response given by the respondents when they were asked why they watched Nollywood. This pattern is indicative of audiences' reluctance to critically reflect on the (popular) medium; an attitude that reflects the low cultural value attached to relaxation. The attitude towards that viewing, whether by going to the cinema or by watching television, is self explanatory. Because it is classified as entertainment it needs no further discussion. An attempt to study the phenomenon was considered ridiculous in the first instance. It is akin to the guilty pleasures referred to by Morley (1986) and

I just want to while away the time.

It keeps me company when I come back from the market.

If you are busy, no time [to watch but it is good for] people who are jobless at the moment.

I play them in my restaurant and the customers enjoy their food.

I just want to enjoy myself, just something to make me laugh; nothing controversial or €

This pattern of response masked the thoughtful consideration that goes into the selection of what to watch. At the two video clubs where Nollywood fans were observed, it was usual for customers to deliberate over their choice and select from a range of titles. This was more pronounced when they had company to discuss their choice with customers. The interviews with vendors and customers show that purchases were largely on the stars in the movies. For them, the stars are indicative of the nature of the story and the use of language. The cover of the videos and other promotional materials are very important

The collage of images on the cover of the videos, and posters which adorned the shops as we

The responses from these audiences show that being able to reconstitute time and space is a from Nollywood. They were pleased that Nollywood had found its way to the mainstream cine U.K. and were willing to support it. It was like an act of defiance, choosing to watch Lucky Joe instead of Casino Royale; it was the breaking of boundaries - an achievement. But it was also resistance to the mainstream culture that threatened to engulf them. This is similar to the accl: *Cosby Show* for its representation of the black people (Jhally & Lewis 2003; Havens, 2000). That this may be a short lived or occasional pleasure when compared to the convenience, cost habit of home videos. Thus defiance alone may not be sustainable basis for Nollywood's busin

Closer analysis of the respondents from the video club, reveals what may be the typical viewir woman with a bit of time to spare. Some of these watch as many as 5 – 10 films a week. The is justified by the fact that nursing mothers, shift workers and students on holidays have large albeit temporary. To them, viewing Nollywood film is an act to be engaged in when it can be re extension of work or 'productive' activity. Recreation was not very important unless there was This attitude comes from cultural views of leisure. As one of the subjects explained there were for recreation that were open to her because of the restrictions imposed by her upbringing.

My course takes [requires] a lot of reading [studying]. I don't go out, I don't go clubbing I do to relax. I learn from it. Just watch it.

This is a female, postgraduate Law student whose concept of leisure does not include clubbin partying. She had learnt that as a female, night crawling was not an option for her. She would settle at home with a good Nollywood film from which she can learn some life skills.

Settling with a film creates the impression that audiences watch with rapt attention, but this is The mothers interviewed found that the presence of the children (or indeed husbands) was a In this we see that the classic struggle for the remote control (Morley 1986) remains, even wh was a child under-five who wants to watch CBeebies.

In such cases the replication or similarity in storylines helped, though such replicas were tires respondents suggested. That the stories were predictable helps Nollywood become 'easily pu magazines (Hermes 1995). Though they did not seem to mind the predictable stories, they w stories were drawn out unduly as is the case with plots that have sequels. This is evidence the titles does take its toll, and that the act of viewing was also quite 'productive' after all. The aud in a position where they could work at the construction of meaning.

The quality of the story was crucial to the audience as the stories were important for keeping i home culture. Nollywood as a basis for moral instruction ranked high amongst audience resp regarded as viewing pleasure. Viewers expected to learn from the stories, as is typical with tra In this way the aspiration of transmitting cultural heritage is achieved but people also watched contemporary life skills. In reconciling the two, the question of identity becomes apparent. Pec culturally appropriate positions to adopt or negotiate. This may be a universal pleasure, but it central to audiences in Diasporas who seek assistance for instructing the younger generation greater need to be realigned with the home cultures lest they become subsumed in the culture community, as they adopt less appropriate aspects of the Western culture. In this regard, the mostly concerned about cultural definitions regarding respect for age, relationships, priorities v problem – resolution strategies, and self pride.

Another pleasure which could only be deduced from most responses, is the fact that Nollywood points on various aspects of social life. It helps people engage with the Nigerian society if only regard Nollywood was a medium for discussing current affairs both by the subjects it covered viewing that it tends to generate in certain quarters. As one respondent explained, Nollywood interaction. Though she was very busy and hardly had the time to watch on her own, she was renting films in order to have something to entertain her guests with and to keep up with new r

The communal viewing of films appeared to have its own pleasures. This is consistent with tel practices observed by Esan (1993) amongst women audiences in Nigeria where audiences hu view and chat. Viewing Nollywood in the diaspora thus appears to serve a dual (social and me creating the feel of home.

News reports show that the popularity of such communal viewing practices has presented anc It has paved way for the video parlours that have been observed in other African countries wh shown. (Kunzler, 2006; *BBC News* 'Have Your Say' Forum, February 2007) In this case, distri existing cultural practices and the flexibility afforded by technology to establish less conventio This is further evidence of the democratic potential of the video technology enhancing access contributing to the success of Nollywood.

The appreciation of the skilful use of language was identified as a pleasure by the audience es ardent Nigerian fans who aimed to appreciate and teach culture through films. As discussed e market are divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. With the economies of scale in production groups were niche markets. This made economic sense. However, there is evidence to sugge other ethnic groups who, in the absence of their preferred options, simply aligned with the est: market. Their real preference would have been for productions in their own languages, as was certain Edo speaking respondents (Edo is one of the other minority Nigerian languages). So : language of production constitutes a pleasure for many, for others limited command of the lan access and pleasures.

The exception to this pattern was seen in the case of a French speaking Congolese viewer for incompetence in the language was no barrier to the viewing pleasure. She was truly exceptio titles that she bought and watched. As the carer of a severely disabled child she was often ho videos offered relief from the Western fare that the UK based mass media offered.

Her viewing was not the social kind as she did not have the network of Nigerians who watche husband would not usually watch with her. For her, the films helped her overcome her nostalg relate the presented stories and situations with her experiences from the Congo. On a practic: films to help her learn the English language. According to her, the African accent in the Nigeri: much easier for her to comprehend as her proficiency in English was still quite poor. It is not c this pattern is, but the popularity of Nollywood amongst other African audiences has been doc 2003; Muchimba 2004).

There is a certain measure of fantasy in the pleasures audiences derived from Nollywood. Irre boundaries that audiences cross through the polarities within the storylines (urban – rural; rich traditional; present – past) viewers are drawn in to imagine what life is like on the other side. T from the stars, their costumes and set pieces and furniture, other cultural artefacts on display (location) attests to this. It is useful to note that these and gossip about the performers are usu the Nollywood related web-logs, and it is similar to what Hermes (1995) describes as a repert

knowing. The pleasure here is more than an obsession with celebrity gossip; it shows the imp connected, albeit in a virtual community. It also offers an opportunity for participants to form o personal situations (whether as Nigerians or as Africans).

The following example shows how a comment about a seemingly innocuous element of the *m* generate more serious comment. What began as an appreciation for Nigerians' flair for fashio of the poor state of infrastructural facilities within the educational system:

Naija people dey dress

They need to “dress” their uni infrastructure a bit more and decently as well. . . I mean a higher institution”

(Meaning)

Nigerians are trendy in their dressing

Yes, but they also need to maintain decent infrastructure in their universities

This evidence illustrates how audiences process information; it shows that there may be no ur they make sense of the media, but through discussions they can arrive at some consensus of mean. They are selective in what they attend to, and they are able to negotiate the meaning o their contexts, reference groups, and critical concerns. In this is an example of how pleasures constructed but more to the point, an indication of how Nollywood contributes to the world view

Conclusion

This paper set out to understand the reasons for Nollywood's success and, to appreciate why support the industry. Nollywood was presented as an example of a marginalised industry that much in such a short space of time due to social and technological factors. These have been paper.

The study found that in spite of the proliferation of titles and high volume of sales, there are sti industry. A number of regulatory mechanisms which should bring some order to Nollywood's c foster professional standards in the industry were discussed. It can be argued that these were consideration for the audience.

Nollywood audiences are aware of the deficiencies in the industry, yet they remain loyal. The l the industry is very evident in the online communities where stars are cut down to size for thei social misdemeanours yet they continue to patronise these stories about their land – their peo

By far the most striking of the pleasures discussed by the audiences was their ability to suppo was most evident in the respondents at the film premieres, who paid so much to see Nollywo London. They were clearly thrilled by this. They demonstrated more visibly the sense of duty v had as captured in the rhetorical question with which one of the persons in a focus group end we do not support them how will they improve?”

In their defiance of mainstream (western) entertainment and their willingness to overlook the stylistic qualities of film, the audience response is consistent with patterns of audiences of alte (Downing, 2003) who were more interested in particular concerns that they championed. Perhaps should be read in this frame. Nigerian films give a voice to the stories that are not likely to be found in mainstream media, especially Hollywood. Studying industries that are marginalised within a market amongst communities in Diaspora, will show the alternative world views which citizens subscribe to and contemplate. Thus film consumption patterns have the potential of illuminating complex relational aspirations.

The study has shown that pleasures of Nollywood are complex but logical. It is clear that audiences are deeply political and closely linked to personal and group identities. The popularity of Nollywood suggests that there are affinities in experiences of African populations, and Nollywood is able to reach beyond Nigeria's borders. For this it has earned its leadership position. Possible cultural differences of leisure and the types of stories that African audiences find engaging must continue to be explored if we are to understand the performance of a film industry within those communities whether in the home where they reside as migrants.

The issues of identity, preservation of cultural heritage and resistance of dominant western influences are factors contributing to the success of this industry, and these deserve further attention. How does Nollywood differ from Western fare for it to remain appreciated by the audiences? Given the dynamic nature of identity, it will be useful to study how widespread are the sentiments that require Nollywood to be different; these cut across class, gender and even location of viewers? Are Nigerian based Nollywood films perceived differently? The small sample size and the qualitative nature of the study suggest that, without further research there are limits to the extent that these findings can be generalised.

In the meantime, practitioners remain optimistic that if given the space, the Nigerian industry will become an acceptable practice for its market. In an interview with the press Amaka Igwe, one of Nollywood's leading practitioners, that each industry has had its own difficult path to success.

In Nigeria who says the technique we develop is not really good, it does not have to meet international standards but it meets our own standards and the people are watching it, no matter how poor the quality and *it is speaking to the people*. [my emphasis] (Igwe, 2007)

This study has attempted to clarify what the people are hearing; what do audiences want to hear for pleasure, what will keep them coming for more? Nollywood has acquired its ranking as one of the most successful industries globally and this is largely because its audiences accept its products. That its status is a matter of contention, even within the African continent, in spite of all its accomplishments, raises questions about what constitutes film. Presently it appears that film is defined by the technology of production, aesthetics, the exhibition practices and Nollywood marks a radical departure from the norm or the flexibility of the video format which allows audiences to reconstitute time, space and pleasures as possible. In its use of this format Nollywood exemplifies democratisation of the media and film is now no longer the exclusive product of expensive processes. Its reception is no longer restricted to elite venues. With the complicity of audiences and producers, films are now consumed in the privacy and security of homes. Nollywood has shown that the film viewer is no longer just the lone figure, watching attention in a dark space. Rather it shows that film viewing is more about the social experience of the stories that are shared. These practices are not restricted to Nollywood as home entertainment consumption of DVD are popular in western societies as well. These trends beckon to researchers and practitioners alike to review the canons of film as is fitting in contemporary times. When this is

may at last get its dues in the film industry.

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Notes

[1] The Successor premiered at the Odeon in Surrey Quays in September 2006; it also showed at the Odeon in Croydon, and Lee Valley, Streatham. Lucky Joe premiered in November 2006 at Odeon Surrey, thereafter in Odeon West Thurrock, and Manchester Trafford Centre, in Cineworld Staples Court, Wandsworth. Warrior's Heart has since been shown in February 2006. by Film Africa.

[2] This was unlike those performances which were banned in earlier years for the alleged sexual content. Two prominent cases come to mind, both were theatre performances; Yoruba Ronu by Hubert Ogunde in the first republic; and Opera Wonyosi (1977) by Wole Soyinka banned by one of the military regimes.

[3] This was on Lagos Television (LTV). The service was known as Lagos Weekend Television until 1982.

[4] Television transmission began in 1959; the first station Western Nigerian Television Service in Lagos. By 1979 television coverage was virtually national through the network of the Nigerian Television Authority.

[5] The Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree (1972) also known as the indigenisation decree was a phase of a protectionist policy which aimed to give to Nigerians exclusive rights of ownership in enterprises, and increase their equity ownership in others. Cinema business, along with textile and other industries which had been configured as 'small' Lebanese concerns were amongst those sold outright.

[6] Prior to Kenneth Nnebue's *Living Bondage* (1992) regarded as the turning point for Nigeria had been a number of notable efforts on celluloid film by veteran theatre and literary artistes.

[7] In addition to the extensive network of government owned stations, Nigeria now boasts of independent television stations meaning that Nigeria has the largest and oldest television industry above.

[8] Multichoice is reputed to have about 1.5 million subscribers across Africa, Europe and the

[9] UN (2005) estimates this as 130.2 million.

[10] In Nigeria alone, there are more than 250 languages spoken. There are 36 states in the federal government authorities with a history of incessant clamour for more.

[11] Some cinema theatres have matinees, but attendance tended to be poor.

[12] She was seen paying a £242 fine for late return of films.

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