

Françoise Ugochukwu

Nollywood on the Move

Nigeria on Display

Susanne Gehrmann, Flora Veit-Wild, Tobias Wendl (Hg.)

LuKA

Studien zu Literaturen und Kunst Afrikas

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Françoise Ugochukwu:

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PART I

EXPOSING HOME TRUTHS

CHAPTER I

SCHOLARS ON NOLLYWOOD: A FAST GROWING INTEREST

In the preface to the 1997 Nigerian edition of his seminal book on *Nigerian Video Films*, Haynes (2000: xv) observed that

Nigerian video films – dramatic features shot on video and marketed on cassettes¹, and sometimes exhibited publicly with video projectors or television monitors – are being produced at a rate of nearly one a day. On the basis of sheer commercial vitality they can claim to be the major contemporary Nigerian art form. The history of African cinema offers no precedent for such a huge, popularly based industry.

Within the past fifteen years, this production has seen a multiplication attracting a growing number of scholarly papers, with many of the publications emanating from Nigeria and the US. Books already published on this burgeoning production can be considered as a fair indicator of the growing awareness of the development of a phenomenon defying both statistics and established conventions. Among the landmarks:

- a number of theses and books coming from Nigeria since 1991, on the history and development of the Nigerian video-film industry,
- the US edition of Haynes' book on the subject, published in 2000,
- Krings' paper on Nollywood in Africa, presented in Frankfurt, Germany, in 2001,
- Barrot's book on the same, published in France in 2005 (the first in French),
- Barrot, Pierre, ed. (2008) *Nollywood, the Video Phenomenon in Nigeria*, Oxford, James Currey/Ibadan, HEBN; Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 147p., translated into English by Lynn Taylor,
- Ogunleye, Foluke, ed. (2008) *Africa through the Eye of the Video Camera*, Manzini (Swaziland), Academic Publisher, 283p.,
- Şaul, Mahir and Austen, Ralph A., eds. (2010) *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century – Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 248p.,
- Hamilton, Kunle and Daramola, Yomi (2012) *Nollywood and the Challenge of Movie Subtitles: Assessing Problems of Subtitling in the Nigerian Home Video Industry and Showing the Way Forward*, Saarbrücken, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 56p.,
- Krings, Matthias and Okome, Onookome, eds. (2013) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry (African Expressive Cultures)*, Indiana University Press, 371p.

In addition, a good number of articles have found their way into books on African cinema or global film studies. Others are published in a growing number of learned journals on anthropology, African culture or postcolonial studies, most of them written in

1 These films are now produced on VCDs and DVDs.

English, although some prominent French Africanist journals such as *Journal des Africanistes*, *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines* and *Politique africaine* also featured several articles on the subject within the past ten years. Edited books and articles give a voice to researchers and film practitioners from Nigeria while providing a meeting point between the vibrant Nigerian research culture and its European and American counterparts. They offer a kaleidoscopic view of the field, reveal a keen interest in historical reconstruction and display an effort to build critical tools adapted to the evaluation of this new audiovisual product. A number of publications present a comparative analysis of the francophone celluloid film industry and the Anglophone video-films and weigh their respective local and global impact. Languages are gradually brought to the fore in that venture as communication tools and cultural banners, and studies on that subject reveal the huge potential of language both to divide and to unite.

A budding research field

While Nigerians and Ghanaians enjoyed watching video-films, the two countries' university sector took a long time to get involved in what it first considered a sub-standard production and a sequel to the Nigerian Onitsha market literature. Nigerian scholars meeting in Cambridge, UK, in 1999 for a conference on the Power of the Word gloated over the appalling technical quality of the Nigerian video-films. Four years later, Ogunleye (2003: xi) had to warn scholars that this production "must not be disdained as a mere flash in the pan. Serious academic work must be expended on it to elevate it from the current position of a mere craft and change the pariah status it occupies, especially among condescending critics, both from within Africa and from the western world." The situation has since evolved, as on 22nd February 2007, international media woke up to the discovery of unusual statistics: some 1,200 official productions per year, plus another 800 uncensored, 15,000 video-clubs in Nigeria alone, some 300 production firms, over 300,000 employees and more than 41 billion Francs CFA returns, in the hands of producers and directors trained in Britain where they learnt their marketing techniques. The GTBank Nollywood Studies Centre (NSC), designed as the one-stop resource centre for anyone doing research on the Nigerian video-film and its industry and located at the School of Media and Communication (SMC) of the Pan-African University, Victoria Island, Lagos, was inaugurated on July 22, 2011 by Mr. Emeka Mba, the then Director General of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB).² The Nigerian Government has now come to recognize the crucial importance of this film industry as a boost for Nigerian economy and on Saturday, March 2, 2013, the veteran filmmaker, director and writer Amaka Igwe was invited to deliver a speech on Nollywood to the country's President at the *'Nollywood at 20: Dinner with Goodluck Jonathan'*.

2 <http://www.smc.edu.ng/nsc/>.