Article

Global Nollywood: The Nigerian movie industry and alternative global networks in production and distribution

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Abstract

While Nollywood, Nigeria's video industry, is largely separate from dominant global cultural industry networks of production inputs and distribution, it is an industry that is still globally linked in a number of ways. In this article, I investigate the nature and layout of these connections via interviews with those populating these networks, from key Nollywood producers to shop owners thousands of miles from Lagos. I conclude that, instead of the formal links of dominant cultural industry networks, these links are mostly via alternative global networks, forged on the flipside of – or the gaps between – the connections that link the Network Society. Some formal international institutions have a presence, but these are largely mediated through Nollywood's situation in global cultural industry networks. I argue that this renders Nollywood as situated in an alternative media capital, central to alternative networks, while too informal to integrate into dominant networks, and it is from this position that we can best understand Nollywood's position in global media flows.

Though Hollywood movies dominate screens and film profits on a global scale, Hollywood takes only third place globally in actual number of productions per year. According to a 2010 UNESCO survey (http://www.uis.unesco.org/culture/Pages/movie-statistics.aspx), the industry producing the most movie titles per year is Bollywood, India's entertainment

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behemoth. According to the same survey, the industry producing the second largest number of titles is one still lesser known on a global scale: Nollywood, the Nigerian movie industry.

Nollywood is virtually invisible to many in the 'global North', but throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and the global African diaspora, Nollywood is not just known, but known as a dominant force. In Nigeria and in countries throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, it has eclipsed Hollywood, Bollywood and much local production to dominate the movie sector, a position that has provoked complaints of oversaturation of local screens in some smaller Sub-Saharan African countries (see *The Economist*, 2010; Ondego, 2008). Unlike Hollywood and Bollywood films, however, Nollywood movies are not made to be shown on a big screen in theaters. Instead, they are produced for and mostly traded in physical home movie form (VCDs, DVDs, etc.), although they are also shown on terrestrial and satellite television – all small screen venues. Most are long – at least three hours in length – and consist of more than one part (e.g. Part I and Part II, the purchase of which is not necessarily linked).

Nollywood movies are produced and distributed with virtually no direct connection to the networks that structure global Hollywood. And they are consumed in places and amongst communities that are generally left out of dominant global cultural industry distribution networks. After all, the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa does not figure in global Hollywood's distribution plans. And the only way to acquire Hollywood movies in places outside of Hollywood's networks is through black market and other alternative networks, as explored by Brian Larkin (2004) and Tristan Mattleart (2009). In this *exclusion* from dominant global networks, however, lies Nollywood's many actual international and global connections. Mostly forged by hand, by individual entrepreneurs, these global connections, taken as a whole, constitute alternative networks that run counter to and under the radar of dominant global networks. In this article, I examine these global connections of Nollywood in both production and distribution through observations and interviews with industry leaders and everyday practitioners, conducted in Lagos, New York City and London, in an effort to articulate the nature of alternative global connections on the flipside of dominant global cultural industry networks.

Conducting this research

This article is a product of the research that I have been conducting on the industrial structure of Nollywood. In an attempt to understand and document the economics and structure of an industry that is famously opaque and operates without much official documentation, I interviewed more than 40 industry practitioners, many of whom are quoted in this article. The interviewees were diverse in both depth (from guild leaders to industry aspirants) and breadth (from equipment salespeople to content aggregators). Initial industry contacts were made through a few key introductions to major industry players. Subsequent contacts came about naturally through introductions made over the course of many months spent doing research in Nollywood's sites, and I attempted to interview as diverse a group of contacts as possible in my attempt to draw a full picture of Nollywood's industrial structure. The interviews took place in Lagos, Abuja, New York City and Los Angeles, with further observations in London and Accra.

Out of this research, this article focuses on the global connections of Nollywood in financing, production and distribution. First, as a background, I will briefly outline Nollywood's industrial structure. I will then address two relevant literatures with which I am in conversation. The first is on global media flows and the second is on alternative global networks, particularly in the context of African cities.

Nollywood's financing and distribution: A background

Average budgets for Nollywood movies range from $25,000 to $50,000, though there are certainly movies made outside those budgets, at both the low and high ends. As Nollywood is generally not stable enough to attract bank loans and is involved in often antagonistic relationships with the government over taxes, the loans and grants upon which other film industries can rely are usually unavailable to movie makers in Lagos. Instead, movies tend to be financed by individual 'marketers', who serve as executive producers, marketers and distributors for each movie. Though 'executive producer' would be the title that most reflects their function, I will use the term, 'marketer', here as it is the term by which they are known in the industry. Marketers tend to have a background in electronics sales in Nigeria's open air markets and many base their operations and sales in those same marketplaces. Marketers control most financing and distribution in the industry and, as such, have great collective power.[1]

Financing decisions are not based on any official estimates of sales potential, nor are they based on any degree of transparency in distribution plans. The only people who can truly feel confident in financing a movie are those who will also be in charge of its distribution, and their decisions are based on informal knowledge of the market resulting from their ownership and management of distribution outlets. In Nigeria, this means that the marketers who began Nollywood also control it, as their control over distribution through informal and opaque networks give them a level of power that is difficult to penetrate and even more difficult to usurp.

Nollywood production is marked by velocity, low cost and informality. An average of 10 scenes are often shot in one day, with two weeks' worth of shooting on an average movie. With one week of pre-production and one week of editing and packaging, a movie *can* go from inception to sale in four weeks, though two months is the more common scenario. Distribution, within and outside of Nigeria, tends to focus on sales of physical copies, both licensed and unlicensed. Viewers also have the opportunity to see many movies via satellite and terrestrial television, but theater screenings are rare: this is a cinema of the small screen, not involving actual film prints. Televised and theater screenings offer much more potential for formalization, but neither have emerged as a consistent source of revenue for the majority of the industry thus far: some players have been able to realize reliable income from outlets such as commissions from television channels, for instance, but this is not the industry standard.[2]

Global media flows and the case of Nollywood

Research in international communication has been concerned for the past 40 years with questions of power in the international distribution of cultural production. In the

wake of Herbert Schiller's theory of cultural imperialism (1976), a number of other theories have addressed power and directionality in global media flows, challenging the one-way directionality of Schiller's model. Polysemy in texts, for instance, or the possibility of multiple meanings and readings of a singular text, and the acknowledgement of an active audience negotiating meaning have both been offered in contrast to the cultural imperialism model. These arguments still focus on media production coming from what has traditionally been known as the global North: media production centers such as Los Angeles, New York City and London. Daya Thussu (2006) has intervened and highlighted contra-flow, the significant production of media in parts of the world traditionally referred to as the global South, examining as examples Bollywood, telenovelas and news programming produced in Arabic-speaking countries, all distributed globally.

There have been debates about the significance of contra-flow, however. Given the frequent mapping of contra-flow via diaspora migration-lines and existent geo-linguistic constituencies (see Chadha and Kavoori, 2000), Thussu questions the effectiveness of those contra-flows in challenging the assumed dominance of Hollywood and its ilk (2006). And Oliver Boyd-Barrett, amongst others, points out the many imperialisms that can exist within regions or between social classes or ethnic groups, even within one nation, in which the elite may become 'co-opted … into transnational business enterprise in opposition to the interests of non-elites' (1998: 173). In a similar vein, if industries become ever more incorporated into 'global Hollywood's' corporate structure through investment and co-productions, as has begun in all of the above examples, how 'contra' is this flow?

I argue that differentiating between media industries based on *place*-based designations is inherently murky and will begin to lose meaning the deeper one investigates ownership and investment networks (see Miller, 2010, for more on this in the context of the telenovela industry). Instead, I argue that the economic and institutional structures producing media are the best way in which we can classify them – to what extent these industries are, or could be, a part of dominant global cultural industry networks.

Michael Curtin (2003) proposes that logics of media flows can no longer be mapped onto a geography based on the shape of the nation-state, and, instead, he proposes an understanding of media as a product of global 'media capitals', hubs of media production that can be understood best at the city level, proffering Hong Kong as a key example. I argue for the exploration of a different typology of media capital, one that will be of increasing importance in a globalizing world: one that exists with few to no connections to major media multinational corporations (MNCs) and little ability to connect to them, given its entirely different industrial structure, based on informality and connections to alternative networks. The formality of an industry allows it to integrate economically into dominant global cultural industry networks. It is my argument that such integration renders it a part of that same network, whether it is based in what has traditionally been referred to as the global North or the global South. Industries like Nollywood, whose structure is largely discrete from integration into those same networks, represent situation in a different and alternative media capital formation – central to alternative networks and near invisible to dominant ones, and governed by some very different industrial logics.

Nollywood, Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa and alternative global networks

AbdouMaliq Simone, in his 2001 work on African cities in the global order, touches on this formation of alternative global networks. Envisioning the African city as a place of intermittent points of contact with the global order that never manages to pull the city forward as a whole, Simone also describes the flipside of these uneven connections. Not only do African urban residents use the city as an opportunity to engage with the world, those who live in these cities have also created new circuits within Africa as well as throughout the developing world, with Dubai, Bangkok, Mumbai and Taipei as examples of global city nodes in the alternative global networks that are important to urban Africa. These cities are linked together with African nodes in circuits of trade, which function as alternative circuits to (and in) the dominant global order. The hallmark of these circuits, Simone says, is informality and unofficial (i.e. semi-legal and illegal) export and trade. This particular informality enables the possibility of individuals acting on a global level on self-built resources.

Brian Larkin (2008) builds on Simone's conceptualization of the uneven role of networks in African cities – particularly those same alternative informal networks. Basing his research in Kano, the dominant city of Muslim and Hausa northern Nigeria, Larkin's work explores the alternative paths of distribution that mark Nigerian commerce, particularly in media, as global 'pirate' networks fill in for official networks of distribution, linking Nigerians to 'a vast array of world media at a speed they could never imagine, hooking them up to the accelerated circuit of global media flows' (Larkin, 2008: 224–225). Larkin argues that the informal (though often meticulously structured) alternative networks of piracy fuel global connections in places disconnected from official global flows.

Marston et al. (2007) are also attracted to the concept of networks as the ideal spatial conceptualization with which we can think about the position of an industry like Nollywood in a globalizing world. They point to the conceptual exemption of a network from 'scalar imaginaries' (2007: 46), allowing a flatness in our imagination of Nollywood's place in the world order. In other words, the concept of networks allows us to leave behind the local versus global dichotomy that structures much thinking about globalization, and lets us view Nollywood's networks in their entirety, without needing to scale them to, for instance, Hollywood's networks.

Lagos as an alternative media capital

Simone's general descriptions of individuals connecting globally through informal global networks in African cities are concretized in the realities of trade in daily Lagos. The Alaba market, the sprawling open air market on the outskirts of Lagos that serves as the nerve center for electronics sales (and resales) for all of southern Nigeria – and, in many sectors, even all of West Africa – can be seen as a microcosm of much business practice and industrial structure in Nigeria. A warren of small business owners essentially creating both their inventory (often third- and fourth-hand) and their market (often those unable to afford first-hand merchandise) from scratch, the electronics and VCD traders of Alaba are not only connected nationally across Nigeria, but globally as well.

In their 2001 treatise on Lagos, Koolhaas et al. investigate the global networks that spill out of Alaba's tin-roofed stalls. In their assessment, if Alaba can be considered the hub of this West African electronics network, then Taipei, Moscow, Singapore, Mexico City and Dubai are its key nodes. 'Scouts' are sent to scour these sister cities on what Koolhaas et al. term 'market-funded missions of capitalist reconnaissance' (2001: 709), trading remaindered and used stock sourced around the world. Each of the cities mentioned are alternative nodes in this global network of antiquated, broken and remaindered electronic technologies, or, as Mattleart (2009) put it, 'the underground networks of cultural globalization'.

Far from an anomaly, the alternative global circuits created by Alaban entrepreneurs (many of whom may also be Nollywood marketers) are the hallmark of much business in what Castells (1998) has termed the 'global Fourth World'.[3] When excluded from the dominant or official global networks, alternatives will be created in the spaces left unpaved. A simplistic way of looking at these connections would be to call them periphery-to-periphery. It is more apt to describe them simply as alternative networks – circuits with fewer distinctions between black market, gray market and white market, or between formal and informal, than in dominant global networks. After all, within many of Nigeria's and urban Africa's global networks of trade, we can find Dubai, for example, at the core, or at least as a major hub. And Lagos is, at the very least, at the core of alternative networks of movie production and distribution in Nigeria, in West Africa and, perhaps, even in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, depending on your perspective. While Lagos may be a peripheral node in dominant global cultural industry system – if it even makes an appearance at all – in these alternative networks, it is both central and integral to the functioning of the entire system.

Even in Lagos, though, in the heart of these alternative networks, there seems to be a general sense amongst many practitioners not in control in Nollywood (i.e. anyone besides the marketers) that the international or American system of doing things is the model to which Nollywood should aspire. As an actress active in guild leadership put it, '[W]e want to do things the right way – the international way' (Ufuoma Ejenoboor, personal communication, 8 July 2009). There seems to be a consistent equating of this 'international way' with extensive regulation of the industry, including a recently implemented system of requiring all levels of distributors to be licensed by a federal authority, which has wreaked havoc in the industry. Some of the authors of this initiative have asserted that it is based on the US system.

If those aiming for change have any intention of joining up to or mimicking the formalized global cultural industry networks in the future, their attention might be better applied directly to legal frameworks. Those formalized networks, after all, are underscored by reliable contracts and copyrights taken seriously. And it is an important point that those copyrights are governed by a series of international agreements that pave the way for global trade in cultural industry products on an official and global scale. On the other hand, those currently running the industry – the marketers – have little motivation to pursue such goals, at least at this point. And it is unclear whether joining the Hollywood-dominated global cultural industry networks is even a desirable goal for Nollywood practitioners; there may be sustainability in persisting in informal and alternative cultural industry networks of financing and distribution. Before discussing

these international agreements, however, let us first address the myriad global connections marking the industry in production and distribution.

Production

Production in Nollywood is not very global in nature. With the exception of the many collaborations and exchanges with the nearby Ghanaian movie industry, Nollywood movies tend to be homegrown affairs, borne on Nigerian funds, run by Nigerian producers and using Nigeria-grown talent (again, with the exception of frequent exchanges with the Ghanaian movie industry). Yet, Nollywood is not entirely insular and global forces do have some presence in Nollywood production processes.

In terms of funding, Nollywood movies almost never receive foreign aid, a source of pride for the industry's producers, yet some resourceful Nigerian directors have found themselves eligible for such funding. Directors wishing to fund movies while breaking out of the control of the marketers have at times pursued such resources, although this is quite a rarity. Foreign governments have a degree of involvement in Nollywood production not only through funding, but also through various cultural diplomacy efforts. These are mostly topical, however, and mostly consist of, for instance, the US consulate in Lagos agreeing to host a workshop for the Screenwriters Guild of Nigeria with a few American practitioners as guests. The Nigerian Foreign Ministry, similarly, has begun to utilize the international star power of Nollywood actors in their own cultural diplomacy efforts (Ayo Olukanni, personal communication, 30 July 2009). For the most part, though, these are side missions and afterthoughts. After all, the bulk of the cultural diplomacy of Nollywood occurs simply in the actors and movies popularizing Nigerian manners of dress, speaking and living throughout African and African diaspora communities. It is a powerful national soft power (see Nye, 2004) produced without any effort at all from Nigeria's government. Nigerian cultural influence has been extended far and wide through black market networks of distribution and informal links to the diaspora, both extremely powerful and far-reaching alternative networks, the importance of which cannot be overemphasized.

There are other non-government-based training programs with international connections as well. Yet, while there have been initiatives in which foreign schools have partnered with Nigerian training programs or attracted Nigerian students directly to them, it remains unlikely that foreign education will become an integral part of the industry. Informal apprenticeships forged through personal connections and introductions are likely to remain dominant.

Nollywood practitioners also consistently receive internationally sponsored training in a less formal way. The Sony store in Lagos' upscale Victoria Island offers occasional workshops for Nollywood's cinematographers, teaching prospective clients how to use Sony's new equipment. The Victoria Island Sony store is more than just a supplier of equipment and knowledge about equipment to the industry. It marks the only appearance in the production chain (along with less popular competitors JVC and Panasonic) of a major international corporation making profits from the industry and involved for motives other than altruism, cultural diplomacy or exchange. Ruth Shashore, sales representative at the store since 2005, says that, as the industry has matured, demand for

new equipment (as opposed to used and repaired equipment) has grown (personal communication, 19 July 2009).

While equipment purchased in Nigeria is more expensive than the same equipment purchased in Europe due to import duties and the costs of shipping, the Sony store is popular for a number of reasons. For one, the store offers Nollywood practitioners the opportunity to order products without having to deal with shipping, as package delivery in Lagos is often fraught with difficulties. Shashore reports that they usually order this equipment from a Sony central office in Singapore, though, at times, from other Asian or European offices as well. Besides delivery, the Sony store also offers service and warranties. These are not available when cinematographers buy equipment more cheaply independently via their own or friends' trips abroad to locations with a place in the dominant global equipment sales circuit: locations such as London and Dubai, without the inflated prices for import that mark international electronics (and many other) imports in Nigeria. While acquiring equipment through such informal shopping trips is popular, cinematographers who work frequently will accept the expense of the Lagos Sony store equipment in return for the reliability that a formal exchange with the representatives of an MNC can offer.

This is significant as it is one of the only places in the Nollywood production chain where international corporations have an official presence. Shashore notes that the drive to obtain market share and sell more to Nollywood comes from the store's own entrepreneurial instincts, without directives from any foreign Sony office. So, while this store is an example of MNC participation in the Nollywood value chain, the identification of this opportunity, that this gap that could be filled by MNC involvement, came from within Nigeria, by Nigeria-based entrepreneurs.[4]

All the equipment used in Nollywood is not new, of course. Nollywood movie sets often incorporate at least some second-hand equipment (generators, for instance, tend to look consistently weathered) that also began their life-cycle abroad. The electronics markets of Lagos, like the markets of other places excluded from MNC global distribution networks, are full of previously used electronics, imported in bulk, many in broken or distressed form (see Sundaram (1999) for more on such 'recycled modernity'). In places such as Lagos' Alaba and Computer Village markets, workers may piece together parts of broken equipment to create newly workable, saleable electronic goods. In this way, used equipment is sourced globally and then filtered through importers, repairmen and resellers.

Similarly, it is worth noting that software created by Western companies is used for various stages in the production process, from script-writing to editing to the creation of special effects. This software is most likely acquired through the black market for all but the most established of users, marking more alternative international networks. The hardware (computers and laptops) is, of course, also the product of MNCs, but computers in Nigeria are often purchased second-hand (or third-hand or fourth-hand, and so on) from resellers at electronics markets, again having arrived in Nigeria through alternative global networks of electronics distribution.

Distribution

While international inputs into production are mostly one-off and haphazard, with the exception of physical hardware and software, Nollywood's contacts in international

distribution spread out like a vast web, and mostly an invisible web, due to its informality and opacity. Global connections exist, but they follow the logics of informality, opacity and small-scale enterprises that mark the rest of the industry. These global connections, informally made on a small scale, form the alternative networks of the industry, connecting Lagos to markets from Dar-es-Salaam to East London to St Lucia in the Caribbean.

Nollywood movies are available all over the world, throughout the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa and the African diaspora (including places many generations removed from Africa, such as a number of Caribbean nations).[5] Countries throughout Africa (and particularly the rest of West Africa) have complained about the proliferation of Nigerian movies, which are seen as riding roughshod over local cultural production. Markets from Tanzania to the Ivory Coast are overflowing with Nigerian productions, usually dubbed in non-English speaking countries.[6] The main markets are the UK, the US, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, but countries with smaller whole numbers of African immigrants figure as well, such as Spain, Italy and Germany. Despite the wide and rapid global networks dedicated to distributing Nollywood movies, very little, if any, money from foreign distribution goes back into the pockets of those producing the movies.

International sales of physical copies

Physical sales are the dominant method of Nollywood's global distribution. As Nollywood movies have virtually no theatrical film-based distribution, this means VCD or DVD sales.[7] (In the past few years, there has also been a rise in one-off screenings of Nollywood movies abroad, but this has not become institutionalized or standardized.) Distribution in Sub-Saharan Africa often looks similar to distribution within Nigeria: open air markets and small dedicated shops. Outside of Sub-Saharan Africa, the movies are most usually available in shops dedicated to selling a number of products from the diaspora. In almost all cases, there is no export of large numbers of copies produced in Nigeria. Instead, resellers need only one copy from Nigerian sources to populate their offerings. Small African grocery stores, for instance, may have copies of a few movies behind the counter, brought over from friends' trips back to their respective countries, and this copy itself is, as likely as not, an unauthorized reproduction. If a customer requests one, the proprietor can quickly burn a copy on the spot. The streets of certain East and South London neighborhoods, in particular, are peppered with grocery shops and small restaurants catering to the large Nigerian population, and each of these will likely offer some opportunity to purchase a Nollywood movie as a sideline of the business. However, dedicated movie shops catering to the diaspora do exist.

For the most part, these copies for sale internationally are unlicensed, with no profits going back to any of those making the movie. In the cases where the copies are legitimate, profits are usually in the form of a flat fee for rights, and that fee can be insubstantial. However, in recent years, the US and UK markets have offered opportunities for legitimate sales with substantial profits to be made for the producers. Tony Abulu, president of the US-based Filmmakers Association of Nigeria – USA, an organization of US-based producers of Nollywood movies that are sold in the US market, puts forth an accounting of plausible film profits in the international context. He claims that a

high-end movie can garner up to $5000 from one of three major distributors in the US: Sanga, Executive Image and Franco, with another $5000 from the European market, making a plausible total of $10,000 in international sales (Abulu, 2010). It is unclear, however, how many producers are able to realize such profits and most mid-level producers in Nollywood have had little profit from these outlets.

Many producers in Nollywood make no active efforts to sell their movies outside of Nigeria or to combat the sales of their movies by others globally. There is so much concentration on known and visible piracy *in* Nigeria that unauthorized copies *outside* Nigeria are just not a focus for most producers. Those producers that do attempt a level of control over foreign sales do so almost exclusively through sales agents. They have a standing relationship with someone involved in sales in the destination country, and that person acts as a representative for a significant cut of the proceeds. It is most common for Nollywood producers to have partnerships with Ghanaian sellers in Accra, as the movie cultures in Ghana and Nigeria have a number of overlaps and synergies. London and Johannesburg are two other major hubs in international distribution. In virtually all these instances, connections with sales agents in these foreign markets are made informally and through personal connections and introductions as well as chance meetings. Each of these sales agents has multiple clients and they are not exclusively contracted with just one producer or distributor, but these relationships are rarely well organized or documented.

It is virtually impossible to verify that someone claiming to be a sales agent for a Nollywood producer is in fact engaged in an ongoing business relationship with that producer, both inside Nigeria and outside Nigeria. False agents proliferate. And, of course, most sales outlets have little incentive to buy en masse from sales agents, as they too can make copies of others' work while only paying for one copy. Networks of unauthorized distribution are de rigueur in Nollywood's global distribution circuits, but the line between the black market and the formal market is blurred here, too. Unauthorized resale agents, operating with the promise of near 100 percent profits on Nollywood's inexpensive movies, can be incredibly rapid and pervasive, and have spread Nollywood's productions much further than they ever could have been had they been distributed with centralized top-down distribution networks. And these pirate networks may add value to their merchandise. Some may, for instance, decide to create more 'professional' looking packaging, in sturdier cases and with higher quality artwork or more intelligible blurbs on the casing (this usually applies to markets in the US and Europe, where such packaging is expected). In Francophone countries, unauthorized parties often undertake an entire dubbing of the movie into French and subsequently sell their value-added version with no permission and no rights. It would appear that the original producers have neither the impetus nor the incentive to dub their movies into French for sales to Francophone Africa anyway, so these markets are economically feasible export markets only due to the economic logic of black-market distribution. In this way, Nollywood is altered to be culturally specific to the country into which it is imported, even in canned form.[8] However, this customization comes not from the ingenuity and business acumen of the original producers. Instead, this customization comes from the local contacts in each country, who are incentivized by 100 percent profits (in the case of unauthorized

distributors) or even near 100 percent profits (in the case of many sales agents) on the low-cost merchandise, with little formally standing between an individual sale and profit.

Some of Nollywood's more powerful and august producers have made an effort to profit directly from foreign sales, but these producers tend to be the exceptions rather than the rule and tend to come from the creative side of the industry as opposed to the marketer networks that make up the lifeblood of sales and profits in the industry. One veteran producer and distributor, for instance, has set up a satellite office in the London suburb of Essex, through which he hopes to profit from his own movies by selling directly to shops in the UK and, perhaps, even be able to actively pursue piracy prosecutions with his increased London presence (Gabosky, personal communication, 20 July 2009). Others have relationships that, while not necessarily lucrative, do allow them some surety of profit from foreign markets.

Internet distribution

While the lack of reliability and penetration of robust Internet connections in Nigeria has meant that web-based distribution is not a significant distribution method there, Internet-based services are a significant distribution system for Nollywood movies in much of the rest of the world – specifically in those places where Nollywood fans are likely to have the ability to easily stream free video or engage in e-commerce. In addition to pay-per-view sites run by entrepreneurs in places such as New York City, many Nollywood movies are available for free via venues such as YouTube and free video sites targeted at Nollywood fans.

There are also significant Internet sales of physical copies in the US, Caribbean and Europe. This, of course, is predicated on a reliable postal service and address system, which make Internet commerce a possibility, conditions not in place in Nigeria. As such, the Internet is most useful in Nollywood's distribution system outside of the 'Fourth World', specifically in those places that are connected to the dominant global high-speed Internet and postal networks. The fan sites that organize and bring together fans from Nigeria to California, however, are ways in which global audiences unite (Haynes, 2010). Message boards needing very little bandwidth to access are one way in which Nollywood forms a global audience via established global networks.

African Movies Mall/Sanga Entertainment

A big figure in the small world of legitimate international distribution is Rabiu Mohammed, whose distribution business, African Movies Mall, is based in a heavily Caribbean and African neighborhood in the Bronx in New York City. His business can serve as a case study, a glimpse into the dynamics of Nollywood's international distribution through the window of the newer legitimate international distributor. Mohammed had been involved in informally selling copies of Nollywood movies (Peace Anyiam-Osigwe, personal communication, 3 August 2009), when he realized the opportunity to connect with Nollywood producers and offer legitimate authorized copies for sale, a business move which has led him to do brisk business in the small North American market in a number of ways. A number of producers have standing relationships with African Movies Mall,

wherein they give Mohammed a master copy on DV-CAM and he buys the rights to reproduce the movie for a flat fee. This flat fee is not fixed, but can be fairly low. Again, both Mohammed and the producers are often only making decent profits based on large catalogs of movies for sale as opposed to individual movies. Mohammed sometimes edits these, uploading the movie onto his computer to adjust the audio and fix glitches.

African Movies Mall has been open since 2000, selling not only to individual consumers, but also to store owners across the US. While these owners generally don't care about legality, Mohammed believes his business is popular both because it is a reliable source with new content consistently on offer and because of the effort he puts into marketing, with posters he makes and circulates himself and professional-looking DVD packaging. 'They look like Hollywood,' he says (personal communication, 18 December 2009). While his business includes a few shop owners in Canada and the Caribbean, Mohammed says the biggest markets for the movies are New York, the greater Washington, DC, area, Houston and Florida. The first three are Nigerian hubs, while the last is a base for Haitians, a group that adores Nollywood nearly as much as the West African diaspora.

Just as African Movies Mall has a business that spreads across North America through a network of small business and individual entrepreneurs and is built on the basis of personal connections between Mohammed and Nollywood producers, so too go Nollywood's networks on a global level. Built on informality, Nollywood's networks run counter to global ones, yet powerfully spread a Nigerian cultural product (see Athique (2008) for an alternative case of the informal global networks of Bollywood, India's movie industry).

African Movies Mall also offers an interesting case study with which to view copyright even in cases of active efforts to do everything in a formal manner in Nollywood. Mohammed's selling point is the exclusive contracts he has with movie producers. While he admits to paying low fees in many cases, he says it is often difficult to recoup even those, so he must ask for official guarantees of exclusivity. However, it is extremely difficult to prosecute those violating his rights to the title. On the one hand, Mohammed has a relationship with some lawyers who will pursue violations pro bono; on the other hand, most violators are small shops, usually grocery stores, selling only three to five copies of any given title and it often seems hardly worth the time and effort of prosecution when little money will be gleaned from the defendants.

Additionally, there are problems connecting legal standards (or disregard thereof) in Nigeria with standards that would be a given in the US. For one, the copyright holders didn't want to provide any documentation of the agreements they had with Mohammed, as they thought they were selling all the rights to their movies outright, though he was eventually able to convince them to do so (personal communication, 18 December 2009). Another problem is with chain of title issues. While Nigerian producers usually use local music they might have permission to use, some use foreign music.[9] Although Mohammed says most claim to have purchased the rights, he certainly cannot pay the copyright fees to music produced by the global entertainment complex, and, because he receives the sound all on one track, he can't replace the music in his post-post-production editing, leaving some films simply unable to be legally distributed in the US. In these ways, Mohammed has become a mostly formalized outlet in the US for movies produced via

informal means. Engaging with US copyright protections for better and for worse, African Movies Mall is a mostly formal spigot to an informal alternative network. Still, headquartered in a small storefront in the South Bronx, even African Movies Mall is mostly separate from dominant cultural industry networks.

International television sales

The dynamics of legitimate movie distribution in North America (as seen through the window of one of the dominant legal international distributors) marks, again, the informal nature of the industry – and the breadth of Nollywood's popularity. Nollywood movies do not circulate just as physical copies, however. They are televised internationally as well. They are shown on terrestrial television stations throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and on some major satellite channels. The UK is home to three satellite television channels that consistently screen Nollywood movies: OBE-TV, BEN-TV and Passion TV. Sky competitor Triscali TV offers the African Movie Channel. All cater to the African diaspora living in Europe and North Africa. The largest screener of televised Nollywood movies, however, is the extremely popular Africa Magic, which airs Nollywood movies 24 hours a day for Sub-Saharan African satellite television subscribers. Africa Magic is part of a suite of channels linked by the M-Net brand and carried exclusively by DSTV, the dominant satellite television provider in Sub-Saharan Africa. DSTV is fully owned by South African media company MultiChoice, which is in turn owned by South African media giant Naspers, a major MNC with global business interests.

Despite the formality one might expect from deals regarding movies aired by a large MNC on its highly visible satellite offerings, there is largely no consistent relationship between these movies being aired and their producers receiving payment for it: independent channels such as Britain's Passion and BEN have an even worse track record. This is not to say that these channels are intentionally cheating Nollywood producers. In most cases, *someone* is getting money for supplying the Nollywood movies and that person is offering to sign over the broadcast rights in return. The problem is that this person is frequently not representing the person who originally produced or made the movie. It can be easy to approach the buying desks at a television channel offering a portfolio of Nollywood movies, as verifying the identities of sales agents will take much more effort than simply buying a piece of documentation from an agent whose word is taken at face value.

While the average Nollywood producer does not see significant (or, in some cases, any) income from the televised broadcasts of their existent productions, M-Net has begun commissioning some movies directly, specifying minimum standards in production values and financially supporting the entire production process. While this has yet to become a widespread and significant force in Nollywood, the scenario would have the potential to formalize income in Nollywood and cut into the marketers' hold on the industry were it to expand. As it stands now, this relationship serves to formalize the income and productions of the small number of producers who have been able to enter into such an agreement with M-Net. While the business of this subset of Nollywood producers has been formalized as a result, it remains to be seen whether this scenario has the potential to formalize a wider sector of Nollywood producers.

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons most producers have not been more proactive in pursuing their own sales to satellite channels is the amount of money each movie garners for broadcast rights. While M-Net commissioned movies can get significant income from their relationship with the channel, the rights to broadcast movies multiple times on satellite channels may fetch only US$200–600 per title for the seller, though others can make between $2000 and $3000. This adds to the business logic of profits from breadth of catalog versus a small holding of individual movies. Very few, if any, producers make enough movies to justify spending much time or energy on self-representation in such sales as opposed to going through a sales agent. And, as the sales agent takes much of the small levels of profit, there is also not much motivation to cultivate relationships with sales agents. Thus, informality, opacity and unofficial manners of trade persist and the web of Nollywood's global connections continues to spread Nigerian cultural productions without necessarily returning profits to the coffers of those funding and running the industry. As mentioned before, the biggest barriers to official trade on a global scale lie in Nigeria's lack of more than lip-service participation in the global agreements that pave the way for formal international cooperation – things like copyright and contracts. However, whether official global trade is a desirable move for Nollywood the industry is another question entirely. As Athique (2008), Mattleart (2009) and Larkin (2004) all point out, when informality is a source of power and a motor for an industry, morphing for participation in official global networks might well hurt more than it helps. Copyright and contract enforcement are not a panacea.

Conclusion

Los Angeles-based distribution and copyright expert Rob Aft presented a paper on chain of title and clearances at a conference on the future and business of Nollywood held in Lagos in October 2008. The paper he presented spanned nine single-spaced pages, outlining the intricacies of securing rights in advance of selling a film in the official global film industry marketplace made up of film markets and official business meetings (Aft, 2008). These rights, which tend to be required from global film distributors and broadcasters, run from music clearances to actor agreements and usually include $3 million in errors and omissions insurance, sure to be a particularly expensive venture for anybody without all of their other paperwork already in order.

Yet, without anything resembling any of these myriad varied clearances, Nollywood productions *are* sold in the global marketplace – in its unofficial corners. On the underbelly of the global network of the global entertainment industry is another global network, with very different nodes and hubs. In London, the centers are in South London, Dalston and Essex, as opposed to the refined palaces of the BBC headquarters and film production houses. Instead of Manhattan and Los Angeles, there might be un-gentrified areas of Brooklyn and the Caribbean; there might be Accra, Onitsha, Beirut, Johannesburg. In this alternate network, there are few documents that can reliably certify rights ownership; in fact, the majority used can fairly reliably be considered doctored.

In this article, I set out to illustrate the alternative networks that mark global trade in Nollywood, circuits marked by informality and unofficial trade, circuits that enable

disconnected individuals to act on a global level. The realities of global trade in Nollywood reflect the theorizing done, most notably by Simone (2001), on the African city's role in the global order: disembedded, but peppered with opportunities for connections to global networks – alternative and dominant – on an informal and individual level. Alternative networks, as also explored by Larkin (2008), are created in this way – one-off personal connections and via informal globalization – and, in this way, a city such as Lagos, disembedded from dominant global networks, becomes an important hub in alternative ones.

Despite these disconnects, some official connections exist. There are opportunities for funding from foreign altruistic bodies, for example, cultural exchanges and training exchange opportunities. The Nigerian Foreign Ministry, too, offers legitimated recognition from time to time, but that is often spurned by those who feel they have thrived in a state of neglect and feel no impetus to make formal connections to their own globally connected government bodies in a way that benefits the government more than themselves. But those are mostly one-off international connections. Most significant are the consistent connections to the official global economy through the industry supply chain: Sony (and other international) equipment, editing software, lights, generators and computers are all originally sourced from MNCs – and some are even purchased first-hand through an official retail outlet *in* Nigeria. This connection (epitomized here by the Victoria Island Sony store) is a key place of connection between Nollywood and official global networks, but all such inputs into the industry supply chain reflect connections to official global networks, even if mediated through multiple previous owners, 'tropicalization' in a dusty marketplace, black-market networks, a significant mark-up on official global prices, or a lengthy journey with a hard-won visa to purchase new from a duty-free electronics shop in a far-flung location such as Dubai or London.

Nollywood's distribution offers no such parallels. Available anywhere where Africans live, Nollywood has achieved global distribution without any top-down architecture devoted to it. While much of this distribution is 'pirate' and unofficial, sending no money back to support production, it is still a success in its ability to spread Nollywood as a cultural product – and it enriches many along the way. From foreign sales agents to Nigerian aggregators to buying desks at satellite channels to small African grocery stores and open air market stalls, there are few checks on ownership and rights, though recent efforts such as licensed international distribution and satellite TV commissioned movie production may provide some blueprint for at least increased formality successfully integrating in the industry in the future. These aren't the first such efforts at formalization and greater transparency, however, and their future remains to be seen.

Despite Nollywood's general disconnect from dominant global networks of cultural industries, the industry is in fact connected globally. These connections are for the most part alternative, reflecting the capacity of Nollywood's producers and distributors for innovation – and the disconnect between the industry and the very agreements that pave global networks in the creative industries: enforced copyright and respected legal contracts. Yet, there are places where Nollywood is also connected to the global economy in direct, official and formal ways, such as the efforts of Sony's equipment sales team on Victoria Island. These salespeople are directly plugged into dominant networks of creative industry technology supplies, and they help Sony, an internationally networked

global Japan-based MNC, profit. This may mark the beginning of global MNC investment in and integration into Nollywood. Alternatively, their involvement may mark no such thing and, at least for the immediate future, this seems more likely to be the case. The foreign equipment sales entrepreneurs in Lagos may instead be indicative of the ability of these global MNCs to profit from – and, in many ways, support (e.g. workshops, reliable equipment supply) – emerging creative industries, even if it is in the only corners in which formal industry can hope to play a role.

Notes

1. While they dominate the scene, it is not just the marketers who undertake an executive producer's functions. Independent producers can also sell their completed projects directly to the marketers – or even distribute the films on their own. Producers with more access to capital, either through personal connections, the strength of their name or their own prior film profits, will often prefer to attempt this in order to retain more control over their product.
2. Years of unstable security conditions left Nigerians unwilling to leave home after dark out of fear for their safety and movie theaters never reopened on a mass basis once security improved. While sales of broadcast rights have been a mostly unreliable source of income in the industry due to the unreliability of sales agents, I discuss the possible increased role of satellite television commissions in Nollywood in the section of this article on international television distribution.
3. The Fourth World in Castells' definition consists of any place that is excluded from the global Network Society. It could be as large as a continent and as small as a few apartments of undocumented immigrants in a major global city.
4. It should be noted, however, that the Sony store is not an example of homegrown Nigerian entrepreneurship. The shop was actually founded and is managed by South Asian entrepreneurs, one of the more visible ethnic groups realizing individual entrepreneurial opportunities in Lagos. The extent to which profits stay in Nigeria is unclear.
5. For more on Nollywood in the Caribbean, see Cartelli (2007).
6. Tanzania's local production has recently had a remarkable, successful and sizable resurgence in response to this flood. See Krings (2010) for more on the connections between Tanzania's burgeoning movie industry and Nollywood.
7. Depending on the market. In Sub-Saharan Africa, VCDs are most common, whereas in the diaspora, DVDs are more common.
8. See Krings (2010) for more on the customization of Nollywood in different linguistic markets, in which he discusses comic books based on the plots of Nollywood movies in Tanzania as well as whether original Tanzanian productions can themselves be considered translations of Nollywood movies.
9. This is a much greater problem for Ghanaian movies than Nigerian films.

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Biography

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