

JONATHAN HAYNES:

*Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres.*

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Nollywood has become a major force on the global film stage over the past couple of decades due to the industry's dynamic approach to film production and distribution, and because of its popularity in many parts of Africa and with the African diaspora. Jonathan Haynes has helped pioneer the scholarship on Nollywood since its conception; his work has long inspired younger scholars whilst sparking more systematic and in depth research in African Film and Screen Studies, acting as a much needed and valued catalyst in establishing the academic field. Marking Haynes' first monograph on the topic, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres*, distils his more than twenty years' experience researching the English/Pidgin video film industry in Nigeria, inspired by his friendship with fellow film scholar Onookome Okome after they met during Haynes' first visit to Nigeria in 1991. The resultant book is a refined and illuminating text encompassing structural, thematic and historical elements of the Nigerian film industry through the lens of local genres. Haynes' clear and concise writing style, with neatly compartmentalised subheadings and chapters, takes the reader on an accessible tour of modern Nigeria's socio-political and economic history whilst relating this history to important themes, ideologies and aspects of culture which run through the films and genres he discusses.

Haynes harnesses the everyday genre usages of film producers and consumers in Nigeria, grounding the study in the Nigerian context and importantly in colourfully described personal encounters the author uses to bookend the study. This ground-up approach to studying film genres in Nigeria allows Haynes to highlight the natural fluidity and hybridity of genre evolutions, cycles and definitions which is too often lacking in mainstream genre studies overly concerned with established Hollywood genres and their demarcated conventions. The value of this research is that the Nigerian case-study opens doors for genre exploration in other emerging film industries across the globe and interrogates mainstream understanding of certain genres such as melodrama, comedy, epic and crime film genres.

The structure of the book also cleverly harnesses the genre mantle to guide the reader through the history and development of commercial filmmaking in southern Nigeria. This is particularly useful as Part 1 sets out the social, political, economic and structural conditions which gave rise to video filmmaking in Nigeria and traces this history through two polemical and widely cited films, *Living in Bondage* (1992) and *Money Girls* (1994). The perennial thematic issues in Nollywood films – such as the depiction of wealth, the presence of the supernatural and spiritual, the centrality of female characters and the commitment to exploring emotional extremities – are all marked out as important contributing factors to films associated with the key genres of the money ritual film and the family film. The latter genre is correctly identified by Haynes as “the queen of Nollywood genres and [one that] holds sway over nearly all of them” (p77). Haynes ends Part 1 with a chapter dedicated to the influential and successful Yoruba video film director Tunde Kelani; this widens the parameters of the genre remit of the book's title by also focusing on a film auteur, a concept often regarded as the opposite of film genre. This has the three-fold impact of bringing in to question the

impacts of specific directors on genres and visa-versa, embracing a more inclusive approach to Nigerian film culture and bridging established film theory boundaries.

Part 2 of the book focuses on the developments which occurred in the Nigerian film industry around the turn of the millennium, from filmmaking shifts away from Lagos (mainly to Igbo parts of Nigeria) and the emergence of genres such as comedies and the political film which focus on more socio-political themes, along with the crime films and the cultural epic, set in the rural pre-colonial past. The thematic issues of wealth, the supernatural and emotional extremes are again discussed in relation with these genres whilst highlighting how these new genres engage with politics and violence. This change from a predominant focus on domestic and family scenarios to a broadening out into the more public socio-political arena is largely attributed to the end of military rule in 1999 and the transition to civilian-held power which opened up a space for video films to reflect and inflect the various popular moods in the country. Part 3 then branches out again, moving away from the more conventionally bounded genres to discuss diaspora and campus films, genres which can be regarded as cutting across the genres Haynes previously maps. The emergence of these films reflects the popularity of Nollywood films around the world and the fragmentation of audiences and filmmakers as commercial filmmaking in Nigeria moves into its third decade and aspires to escape the marketing systems of old. Important structural shifts in the distribution and exhibition of Nigerian films, such as with online video-on-demand platforms and satellite broadcasting, are key to understanding the rapid rise of Nollywood across the globe and their consequential impacts on film production in Nigeria and by Nigerians in the diaspora.

The only criticism I have of *Nollywood* is that it avoids making explicit theoretical interventions into the existing scholarship on film genres. Despite mentioning the influence of Hollywood and soap operas, broader questions such as those relating to how the Nigerian system of genres relates to those of Hollywood, Bollywood or elsewhere remain open for the interested reader to pursue and contemplate independently. A more sustained engagement with mainstream film theories may have made this important contribution more impactful and accessible in that sense but I also understand that this would have detracted from the more personal perspective from which the writing and research emerges and by which it is undoubtedly enriched. In the final analysis, *Nollywood's* primary significance is its deep yet accessible engagement with the industry's structural issues, influential directors, key themes and coverage of over two hundred films – which sets it apart as the definitive work on Nollywood to date, from which future studies will surely take much inspiration.

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