



The Nollywood Phenomenon: Innovation, Openness and Technical Opportunism in the Modeling of Successful African Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The Nigerian movie industry, known as Nollywood, has attracted an impressive degree of research interest since its debut in the 1990s, resulting in a dedicated transdisciplinary research niche called Nollywood studies. Nollywood is situated as disruptive of historic and contemporary African movie culture, underscoring Nollywood's significance as a phenomenon "fundamental to Africa's self-representation". In this study, we examine Nollywood in relation to its collaborative model of innovation, its unique form of openness and other factors implicated in its creative diffusion as a phenomenon across Africa and its diaspora. We also explore Nollywood's emergence as an unexpected creative force in the world of entertainment. The study evaluates the evolutionary interface between technology and entrepreneurship as a dynamic process in the progress and transformation of Nollywood. Complementing the issue of technology, as a factor in Nollywood's evolution, the study identifies a complex aggregation of other factors, including culture, ethnicity, marketing and entrepreneurial ingenuity, liberal art infrastructure and Nigeria's abundant social capital and how they have coalesced to put entertainment alongside oil and agriculture as one of the highest employers of labour and as a surprising dispenser of economic oxygen in Africa's most populous country and its largest economy. Our starting premise is that Nollywood owes its evolution to technological innovation and many unexplored contextual contingencies. The study also identifies and examines forms of openness in Nollywood, within and outside of existing paradigms, and how they factor into the industry's success. Nollywood operates in a fluid borderline between formal and informal frameworks. In Nollywood, a pragmatic and evolving approach to intellectual property systems and openness reflects aspects of its unique business model with contextual sensitivity and, in a way, advances its transnationalisation, albeit counterintuitively. Nollywood represents a grassroots indigenous entrepreneurial cultural initiative. Our project provides insights into the scalability potential of the Nollywood phenomenon and its cross-sectoral ramifications for innovation and entrepreneurship on the African continent. The study applies a combination of methodological strategies aimed at eliciting, reifying and drawing substantively on industry practitioners' voices and perspectives. It taps into stakeholders' mastery, institutional history, and knowledge of Nollywood's evolution and its modus operandi.

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Keywords

Nollywood, innovation, openness, collaboration, technology, Africa, entrepreneurship, intellectual property, entertainment, culture, creativity, cinema, movie industry

I. Introduction

The Nigerian movie industry, known as Nollywood, has attracted an impressive degree of research interest since its debut in the 1990s, resulting in a dedicated transdisciplinary research niche called “Nollywood studies” (Krings, 2013). Among the disciplines engaging with this subject, the emphasis in law has been on intellectual property (IP) rights enforcement (Arewa, 2012; Oguamanam, 2011). The focus on anthropology relates to critical and contested cultural agency of Nollywood. In cinematic critique, Nollywood is situated as disruptive in the historic and contemporary African movie culture, underscoring its significance as a phenomenon “fundamental to Africa’s self-representation” (Mahir & Austen, 2010). In intellectual inquiry, Nollywood is positioned at the point where discourse on the elusive single pan-African postcolonial movie culture, and Nollywood’s symbolism and legitimacy of space in that discourse, intersect with discourse on “Nollywood’s *other*, the African auteur cinema” (Krings & Okome, 2013, p. 2), which dominated African cinema pre-

Nollywood. Yet Nollywood is also a testament to technological democratisation (Gates Jr., 2016, p. 15)¹ and empowerment—a celebration of creativity and entertainment (Adesanya, 2014; Hoffman, 2012; Pager, 2012a; Ukata, 2014), albeit in tension with conservative (and to a degree intellectual elite) views or missionary expectations of what purpose art should serve (Arewa, 2012; Pager, 2012b).

There is an opportunity to expand or shift the understanding of Nollywood beyond, but not necessarily excluding, these perspectives. In this study, we examine Nollywood in relation to its collaborative innovation, its unique form of openness, other factors implicated in the creative diffusion of Nollywood as a phenomenon across Africa and its diaspora, and Nollywood's emergence as an unexpected creative force in the world of entertainment (Krings & Okome, 2013).²

Pursuing the Open African Innovation Research (Open AIR) project theme of collaborative dynamic in African innovation (De Beer, Armstrong, Oguamanam, & Schonwetter, 2014), this study considers whether a collaborative dynamic can be found in Nollywood and what form it may take. It also looks at the evolutionary interface between technology and entrepreneurship as a dynamic process in the progress and transformation of Nollywood. Complementing the issue of technology as a factor in Nollywood's evolution, further matters of interest are issues such as culture, ethnicity and social capital. The study also identifies and examines forms of openness in Nollywood, within and outside of existing paradigms, and how they factor into the industry's success. Kinds of openness that we look at are Nollywood's focus on real-life stories, its co-optation of "the agency of ordinary people as both makers and participants in culture" (Bryce, 2010, p. 168), its focus on pop culture, and its fixation on "the social and cultural forces of the local" (Okome, 2010, p. 37) in showcasing the naked realities of everyday existence of ordinary and not-so-ordinary African peoples.

Through these forms of interrogation, we are better able to understand the disruptive effect and disruptive reputation of Nollywood outside the enclosed and elitist intellectual postcolonial political economics of African film history. The collaborative dynamic in Nollywood, its stark-naked openness, and its straddling of the informal and formal knowledge production and entrepreneurial spaces provide a new and wider lens through which we view and attempt to understand Nollywood's conflicted, paradoxical and evolving relationship with the intellectual property system. It is an insight that reinforces the need for context, responsiveness and pragmatism in developing a fit-for-purpose, inclusive intellectual property system, or better still a knowledge governance system, that supports the nuances of African innovation. In line with Open AIR's thematic focus on hi-tech and informal innovation along with grassroots or traditional knowledge-based entrepreneurship, this study combines the strands of inquiry outlined above in seeking fuller understanding of the dynamism of Nollywood.

¹ Gates Jr. (2016, p. 15) argues that "[k]ey to Nollywood's endurance will be, as it has been from its beginnings, democratizing technologies, namely, the adeptness of its filmmakers in adapting to the digital".

² Krings & Okome (2013) dedicate their volume to exploring complex perspectives on the globalisation of Nollywood.

Our starting premise in this study is that Nollywood owes its evolution to technological innovation. It operates in a fluid borderline between formal and informal frameworks where a pragmatic, evolving, intellectual property system shapes its transnationalisation (Jedlowski, 2013). Nollywood represents a grassroots indigenous entrepreneurial cultural enterprise. Our project then is to provide insights on the scalability potential of the Nollywood phenomenon and its cross-sectoral ramifications for innovation and entrepreneurship on the African continent.

Bringing together theories of openness and entrepreneurship enables us to identify, explore, and frame nuanced forms of openness in Nollywood that will expand and develop our evolving understanding of the Nollywood concept. We use the Nollywood experience both to channel and particularise entrepreneurship theory in the African context (Dana & Anderson, 2007; Spring & McDale, 1998). We also use it to recalibrate entrepreneurship theory from the original Schumpeterian focus (Schumpeter, 1983) on economic development and organisation of economic systems, to include wider contexts and often unaccounted factors and circumstances that lie behind Nollywood's entrepreneurial dynamism. In that context, it is possible to see technology, diasporic power, and a hinterland of indigenous Nigerian postcolonial ingenuity coalescing in cultural entrepreneurship that challenges external competition and asserts and inserts itself globally.

II. Methodology and Study Design

A. Desk Research

The study combines different research strategies. First, through extensive desk research, we drew on historical and visual data sets relating to the industry and on biographical information for 101 Nollywood personalities. We refer to these latter as the "Nollywood stakeholders", for convenience. The 101 practitioners were selected at random as a snapshot of the individuals that make up the Nigerian film industry. For the purpose of this study, nothing disqualified anyone from the list: the number was merely capped at 101. The snapshot captured individuals whose names came up in searches for Nollywood practitioners and individuals actively involved in Nollywood. Historical insights from literature and visual documentaries that focus on Nollywood (Addelman & Mallal, 2008; Sacchi & Caputo, 2007; Wenner, 2008) are helpful for situating the industry within multiple narratives of the African movie industry (colonial, postcolonial and contemporary), and in the context of Nollywood's tension with African auteur cinema. Using information across several disciplines and sources, including a celebrity media cluster we constructed a limited but purposeful biographical data set of prominent Nollywood practitioners as a tool to understand how miscellaneous factors such as their education, training, family, and social exposure contributed in their transformative pathways to Nollywood. Nollywood practitioners, for the purpose of this data set, comprise individuals who are involved in diverse capacities, including directors, actors, producers, editors, etc. This approach also enabled us to plot a spread of factors at play in Nigeria: social capital, infrastructure, technology, national history, stardom, culture, ethnicity, and other circumstantial drivers behind the Nollywood phenomenon.

B. Structured Questionnaires

Second, complementing our desk research data, we requested 25 other Nollywood practitioners to provide questionnaire responses. The questionnaires assessed how factors such as education, entrepreneurship, collaboration, technological advancements, and intellectual property policies had influenced the individual's career in the Nigerian movie industry. Two different sets of information were collected respectively from the questionnaires and from the data set of 101 Nollywood practitioners. The questionnaires were geared towards a more substantive gathering of data surrounding each individual's unique involvement in Nollywood and their experiences and opinions. They were tailored to provide more personal insights. However, the individuals' anonymity was sacrosanct.

C. Semi-Structured Interviews

Third, we conducted 20 discursive semi-structured interviews in Lagos (Nollywood's birthplace) opportunistically and in some cases through referrals, targeting various Nollywood stakeholders across genders and age groups. The interviews focussed on factors such as track record, professional reputation, educational attainment, primary professional training, and intensity of the stakeholder's involvement in Nollywood. Stakeholders were drawn from a range of occupations, including actors, directors, producers, critics, guild executives, marketers, performance artists, theatre or motion picture industry practitioners and the like. Our objective was to explore their experiences at an individual level to record their direct opinions on various areas of our research interest—technological transformation and innovation, openness, collaboration, entrepreneurship, history, scalability, transnationalisation or globalisation of Nollywood,³ intellectual property—and to capture their reflections on the present and future challenges of the industry. As we have indicated, Nollywood is a site of celebrity, tabloid media, and intensive multidisciplinary research interests. But dedicated and substantive research initiatives seldom directly capture the voices of industry flag-bearers. Even though it is hard to assemble these voices to any quantitative degree of adequacy in a short span of time, we have deliberately attempted to do so within our limitations. What we lack in quantity, however, we make up in the quality of our interactions and of our interviewees and in their generosity with their time.

At all points in our desk and field studies and within the frame of our questionnaires we were heedful of the value of a historically analytical perspective on Nollywood. Stakeholder testimony, which included often competing but reconcilable interpretive accounts of industry events and characteristics, deepened our understanding of the evolutionary, transformative, and collaborative dynamism in the Nollywood industry.

³ We take inspiration from existing research on this subject. See, for example, Krings & Okome (2013).

III. Openness and Entrepreneurship

The study's theoretical orientation locates Nollywood (the phenomenon and the industry) at the intersection of openness and entrepreneurship as mutually linked pathways to development with potential for cross-sectoral scaling up. Nollywood presents an opportunity to identify, explore, and frame nuanced forms of openness that operate against a backdrop of complex factors, including technology, social capital and entrepreneurship, that have all of a sudden put entertainment alongside oil, agriculture and farming as one of the highest employers of labour and as a surprising dispenser of economic oxygen in Africa's most populous country and its largest economy.

A. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as Catalyst to Openness

Openness as a key factor in innovation, development and entrepreneurship came into the foreground in academic and policy consciousness with the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs). "Open innovation", "open development" and other "open" prefixed concepts are associated with ICTs that have catalysed democratisation of access to information and liberalisation of the drivers for innovation and creativity in collaborative achievement of development goals (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke, & West, 2013; Elder et al., 2013; Smith & Reilly, 2013; Von Hippel, 2005). Spawned in the context of ICTs and subsequently elaborated in the penumbra of law, openness is a fragmented and malleable concept. In technical interpretations and applications of openness, analysts distinguish, for example, between openness in relation to access to and nature of key data, products or artefacts, and openness as a process of participation, or eligibility to participate, in knowledge production (Davies, 2012).

Historically, openness is associated with the way digital technologies enable dispersal or penetration of valuable information with little or no restriction in regard to access, cost, time, distance, diffusion, adaptation, etc. Even though openness is often alluded to in contrast to closed or proprietary forms of knowledge governance (such as the intellectual property system), openness is far from simply being their antithesis. In addition, openness embraces a range of paradigms for sharing knowledge or information as inter-firm strategies that encourage free flow of "ideas and knowledge across firm boundaries" (De Beer, 2015, p. 11). Flagship models and embodiments of openness such as the various forms of open-source, peer or collaborative knowledge production are not necessarily devoid of intellectual property. For example, as de Beer rightly notes, "open source software is not, legally speaking, non-proprietary. It is legally protected by copyright and/or patents but creatively licensed to require instead of restrict sharing" (De Beer, 2015, p. 32).

The foregoing examples of openness, whatever their limitations and contradictions, are linked to ICT and to legal issues associated with ICT, such as limitations and encumbrances in access to the digital technologies that drive the new vision of openness. Similarly, it is wrong to assume that in its legal aspects, openness necessarily stands in opposition to proprietary forms of knowledge governance. For these and other reasons, there is a case to be made—as made, for example, by Smith (2014) and De Beer (2017)—for viewing openness from a more holistic perspective, less confined to technical issues, that gives a clearer indication of the interface between openness and development. Among

its several merits, such an approach would account for a range of contexts—social, cultural and temporal, and especially in developing countries—in which knowledge production happens at the intersection of formal and informal entrepreneurs “where legal rules may be less influential than social norms governing appropriations of and access to knowledge” (De Beer, 2017, p. 7).

B. Inverted Approach to Openness

Here, an inverted, expanded or “cross-cutting” analysis of openness “shows that the starting point for understanding openness is not the legal terms and conditions that govern access to software but social norms that inspired a community to seek out appropriate legal tools to govern co-created knowledge” (De Beer, 2017, p. 7). While this observation is directed at openness in respect of access to artefacts or products (in this case, software) and their legal and technical status, it is perhaps more germane in regard to process-oriented openness, where the focus is on the threshold for participating in the knowledge creation process.

Nollywood is a typology of a community where process, outcomes and culture of knowledge production operate in a social ecosystem of inclusiveness and openness on a scale where the existing theory of openness does not fully capture the critical details. Our research, interactions and observations regarding the industry offer an opportunity for a grounded approach⁴ in which the Nollywood phenomenon is understood in relation to an expanded or inverted perspective of openness that gives a better sense of Nollywood’s ramifications for development.

In addition to Nollywood being a knowledge creation and cultural community, as evident from the field research reported below, entrepreneurship was and remains a critical catalyst in its birth and evolution. As such, Nollywood is unequivocally, and foremost, a species of entrepreneurial community. Any appraisal of the industry from an enlarged or inclusive perspective of openness will therefore be incomplete unless it incorporates grounded or situational observation (Clarke, 2005) of the kind of entrepreneurship that currently services the industry. Such an approach will both illuminate the link between openness and development and provide insight on the potential scalability of the Nollywood experience to cover other areas of creative endeavour with potential to leverage development on the African continent.

C. Entrepreneurship and Development: Nollywood as a Typology

Research investigating entrepreneurship as a key component of economic development is, unsurprisingly, linked to Europe and other Western cultures (Spring & McDale, 1998, p. 1). And leaving aside the extensive body of literature on entrepreneurship, the work of Joseph Schumpeter (1983) is widely acknowledged as having affirmed the critical linkage between entrepreneurship and economic development—although who and what constitutes an entrepreneur and entrepreneurship may still be a matter of debate. Entrepreneurs are agents, creators, exploiters, optimisers of innovation—deeply engaged in introducing new products or adapting or configuring old products,

⁴ By this, we mean that in order to understand how openness is implicated in Nollywood, we need to downgrade technically constrained conceptions of openness and make some impressions of the kind of openness that operates in the industry on the basis of observations and evidence we obtained from the field. See Clarke (2005).

ideas and services, and in finding ways to deliver these. They identify needs and markets and they create new ways to respond to acknowledged needs and demands. Their commitment to innovation occurs in open-ended sites, involving organisational ingenuity and dynamism, mediating between supply and demand, taking risks, discovering how a miscellany of resources—human, material and other—could be endowed with wealth producing capacity (Spring & McDale, 1998, p. 5).

While entrepreneurship is not its exclusive determinant, economic development is unattainable “without entrepreneurial activity” (Spring & McDale, 1998, p. 5, citing Brinks & Dale, 1990). Schumpeter’s linking of economic development with entrepreneurship remains at odds with the neoclassical postulate that economic growth stems from establishment of economic equilibrium between capital and labour. For Schumpeter, economic growth happens when such equilibrium is destroyed or disrupted in what he refers to as “creative destruction”. Conceivably, Nollywood’s entry into the African and global entertainment space marks a creative destruction or disruption of African auteur cinema and also of a state monopoly of entertainment media, giving rise, in Nigeria at least, to a grassroots economic development that horizontally democratises appropriation and distribution of benefits with equitable outcomes. For Schumpeter, one of the hallmarks of entrepreneurship is its innovative ability to trigger creative destruction that results in economic growth or development (Spring & McDale, 1998, p. 4).

In *African Entrepreneurship: Theory and Reality*, Anita Spring and Barbara E. McDale argue that “any useful explanation of entrepreneurial activity must be referenced within its overall socioeconomic environment, because ‘business activity does not take place in a vacuum but is set within a socioeconomic system’” (1998, p. 5, citing Kennedy, 1980). To be of any realistic consequence in Africa, theories of entrepreneurship and its intersection with economic development must, in other words, be context-sensitive. Put differently, Africa presents distinctive sets of socio-economic (and cultural and historical) realities which no credible theory of entrepreneurship can ignore. For example, African experience of entrepreneurship is rooted in the legacies of pre-colonial, colonial, post- or neo-colonial, and recent globalised economic order and transitions. Given the nuances and intricacies of that evolution, the linkage theorists make, or presume, between entrepreneurship and economic development, require closer scrutiny in Africa, particularly when development is linked to freedom and capacitation across holistic social units for optimum social potential (Sen, 1999). Instead, the Nollywood phenomenon forces us to inquire about the circumstances or contexts in which African indigenous entrepreneurship could conceivably be harnessed as a catalyst for development.

Rather than dismissing basic theoretical assumptions about entrepreneurship we need to observe and critically evaluate how far they resonate with Africa’s historically heterogeneous and colonially skewed economic foundation and with its consequent entrepreneurial experience. According to Spring and McDale, African context and experience demand that

the concept of entrepreneurship, in both theory and practice, must be expansive and inclusive enough to account for the multitude of entrepreneurial dimensions. Entrepreneurship finds expression in a variety of contexts that include innovation, but it is not defined by this single

component. What may be new in some situation may be African versions or adaptations of phenomena already established elsewhere. Entrepreneurship in Africa encompasses both innovators and business owners. (Spring & McDale, 1998, p. 28)

Although entrepreneurship discourse in the African context is often framed according to a simplistic binary of formal and informal sectors, the complex and indeed complementary or mutually reinforcing relationship between the formal and the informal sectors is now acknowledged as crucial in policy making. African entrepreneurial experience, in all its heterogeneity, is mapped furthermore onto over-analysed and sometimes overlapping formal classifications such as micro and small enterprises (MSEs), small and medium enterprises (SMEs), small scale enterprises (SSEs), small industries (SIs) and numerous variants besides (Kraemer-Mbula & Wunsch-Vincent, 2016). Though there is no universally agreed benchmark or iron-clad demarcation for determining these entrepreneurial categories along the spectrum between formal and informal, distinctions are often premised on considerations such as size, ease of entry, capital, level or lack of regulatory intervention.

Africa continues to navigate its developmental aspirations within the ever-changing global economic order. Deep-running colonial and neo-colonial relations, post-cold war capitalist formations and their doctrinaire free trade and, recently, technology-driven globalism constitute that order. Africa's uptake of new ICTs since the early 1990s continues to boost creative and entrepreneurial potential on the continent, in some ways helping resistance to external attempts to undermine the informal sector. Nollywood affirms that "[a] rigid binary cannot capture the highly complex nature of the interrelationships between the formal and informal sectors ... in many African contexts" (Kawooya, 2014, p. 61). Entrepreneurial ingenuity in the use of digital technology resources and social capital has enabled Nollywood as an industry to serve as both employment incubator and creative laboratory, turning entertainment into an engine of economic energy in Nigeria.

IV. Nollywood: Where Technology Meets Entrepreneurial Opportunity

A. Nollywood's Evolution in Historic Context

Nollywood is a creature of economic, entrepreneurial and historic circumstances, made possible by technological opportunism. A number of accounts have been written about its history, but for our discussion the point of focus is Nollywood's location in late 21st century African cinema, straddling African movies in the colonial and immediate postcolonial space.

Birthered at the end of colonialism, the African auteur cinema—its postcolonial film tradition—was cast equally in a media and a missionary framework, largely as a cinematic counter-narrative steeped in both the political consciousness of post-coloniality and in elitist appeal to aesthetics and finesse. Although not completely devoid of interest in entertainment, the disconnect with a broad spectrum of African audience for African auteur or first-generation cinema was coupled with another downside

in that it was largely produced on celluloid, making it capital-intensive. It leaned toward colonial capitals for funding and sponsorship.

Earlier in its post-independence unraveling, Nigeria embarked on an elaborate indigenisation policy (Ogbuagu, 1983) in which foreign-owned industries, including cinema houses, were expropriated, forcing foreigners to divest in favour of Nigerians. According to Nollywood's Zack Orji, Nigerians at that time "lacked the manpower and expertise to keep them [the cinema houses] in business. Some of them were converted into event hosting arenas, churches, warehouses, etc. As a result, the cinema culture died or went into hiatus in Nigeria" (Orji, 2017). But in that same period, Nigeria, especially its Southwestern region, had a vibrant traveling theatre and performing arts industry at institutional and freelancing levels, ready to blend, as it did, with the new-born television in the newly independent country.⁵ Joke Silva, a leading voice in the industry, comments that the historic ability to

transition the pioneering work of Nigerian theatre practitioners into television was crucial. Unlike other parts of the world where film preceded television, in Nigeria it was the converse ... we had the tradition of practicing theatre and the resulting stories were put on television before they were reworked for the cinema. (Silva, 2017)

B. Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Birth of Soap Operas

In the 1970s and 1980s, a critical mass of entertainment content in Nigeria came from a mix of theatre (especially Yoruba performances), television and, less noticeably, private open-market-sourced VHS of bootlegged Chinese, Korean, Japanese or generally Asian martial arts, American wrestling, and other sporting and general entertainment shows for private home viewing. Severe economic downturn in the 1980s, exacerbated by a World Bank imposed Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), contributed to the idea of making movies on celluloid. Even within that period, and through to the 1990s, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and its branches across the federation became involved in soap operas and sitcoms⁶ screened across its vast network, the largest in Africa. As in most of post-independence Africa, NTA is a state-owned enterprise (SOE) or monopoly: in bureaucratic parlance, a parastatal. To the credit of its feature soaps and sitcoms, the whole vast nation was glued to one single media outlet for its impressive and exciting shows. There was an appetite for more, but NTA fell short, leading to a lot of Nollywood forerunners getting independently involved in making soaps to meet a need and satisfy a market.

With the NTA monopoly came state-sponsored and self-interested pseudo-moralist censorship, such as forbidding kissing or any semblance of pornography on television that could ruffle sensitive religious feathers of a perceptive national psyche. In the words of Nollywood's Keppy Ekpeyong Bassey, whose career in entertainment started at NTA, the network "was also a regulatory body of sorts; it restricted staff from participating in production outside of NTA in order to secure its

⁵ Western Nigeria Television (the first television station on the African continent) started transmission on 31 October 1959 in Ibadan, just one year before Nigeria's independence from Britain.

⁶ e.g., *Village Headmaster*, *Masquerade*, *Tales by Moonlight*, *Ripples*, *Checkmate*, *Second Chance*, *Bassy & Company*, *Cockcrow at Dawn*, *Ripples*, *Behind the Clouds*, etc.

monopoly” (Bassey, 2017). These kinds of restrictions did not apply to productions made outside the NTA. Among these were some movies made under what was known as Yoruba traveling theatre. According to Zack Orji (2017), “during the traveling theatre era, the Yoruba did video filming; the traveling theatre genre actually started the video work in Nigeria’s movie industry”. However, both Bassey and Orji agree that the ban on sales and distribution of pornography on VHS, and not-quite-successful previous attempts to produce and market Yoruba movies on VHS, led the highly networked informal or open-market VHS retailers to explore alternative ways to sell their stockpiles of empty VHS cassettes.

C. Wanted: Content for VHS – A Marketing Revolution

This community of ingenious VHS entrepreneurs linked up with sourcing of content as the key driver of the VHS market. According to Bassey,

the content, i.e. movie or film was not the real opportunity. Rather, it represented the means by which these mainly Igbo and highly networked mercantile entrepreneurs could sell the stock of their bootlegged VHS once a viable and legitimate content was dubbed into it. (Bassey, 2017)

In the same vein, Nollywood veteran Olu Jacobs avers that “the coming together of content production and creative marketing ingenuity resulted in putting contents onto VHS instead of selling the latter as an empty vehicle for recording. Content provided the vehicle for pushing trade in VHS” (Jacobs, 2017). It was a combination of factors that opened the opportunity to adapt video technology for democratising and privatising the production and consumption of culture, Nollywood style: a national appetite for soaps, or, as Ifeoma Fafunwa calls it, “a national appetite for jist and gossip” (Fafunwa, 2017), a low-hanging fruit of marketing opportunity through existing informal VHS dealers, severe economic tides that put celluloid out of reach, and a restrictive or censored and underperforming public television monopoly.

D. Living in Bondage: An Entrepreneurial Ingenuity

It is generally recognised that the Nigerian movie industry predates the birth of Nollywood (a name that did not come into use until 2002), and virtually every analyst and Nollywood practitioner agrees that the first independent and most successful Nollywood movie to fully optimise and leverage the technological opportunity of video and the creative ingenuity of Nigeria’s informal content distributors or VHS retailers was the movie *Living in Bondage* (1992).

Here are voices from the industry attesting that *Living in Bondage* was a milestone of entrepreneurial and technological opportunism that gave birth to the Nollywood that we know today.⁷

⁷ A least five stakeholders have starred in *Living in Bondage*, and at least three have made their acting debut in this film.

Ace actor and Nollywood opinion leader, Nobert Young recalls the early days as follows:

I would say the paucity of good drama program on television, which was owned and dominated by the government [the NTA] amidst appetite for more invoked the ingenuity of a smart Igbo man, Ken Nnebuo. He put a soap opera on VHS and marketed it. (Young, 2017)

This, Young goes on to say, “was a huge success in a new media that demystified the television. Add to this, the bandwagon effect that is visible in Nigeria’s entrepreneurial landscape—everyone rushes into any successful venture to saturate it!” (Young, 2017).

Then there is the Nollywood celebrity couple Olu Jacobs and Joke Silva, who note that the trend to put films on VHS began earlier with Yoruba movies, many of which, Jacobs avers, “were funded by Igbo traders using their marketing ingenuity” (Jacobs, 2017). For Silva, “the newfound mutually rewarding synergy and partnership between content providers and traders who funded and marketed the content created an appetite to do movie under this model that is well marketed” (Silva, 2017). Jacobs notes that a high point of that partnership was the “birth of *Living in Bondage*, a movie that was aggressively promoted through incredible forms of then unprecedented multi-media marketing: billboards, advertisements, radio jingles, flyers, etc.” (Jacobs, 2017). As he describes it, “*Living in Bondage* got the attention of everybody and went on to become a phenomenal success that it was. That was the birth of Nollywood, the explosion of incredible creativity in Nigeria” (Jacobs, 2017).

For Bassey, the movie signalled a “radical departure from previous attempts to sell content through VHS. Its executive producer had made earlier attempts to produce over 20 Yoruba movies on VHS, but they were not as successful as *Living in Bondage*” (Bassey, 2017). In *Living in Bondage*, the tide turned.

Noting that “*Living in Bondage* was in Igbo [but] also subtitled in English”, Zack Orji recalls that

it captured the socio-cultural reality and lifestyle that resonated in the country, focusing on the theme and consequences of greed, acquisitive tendency, and get-rich-quick mentality that Nigerians across board could identify with. [...] [T]he issues in the movie were topical and its reception cut across ethnic boundaries. Igbo and non-Igbo speaking Nigerians fell in love with the movie. Its success created a revolution in the industry that refocused all passion and attention on filmmaking; an industry was to be resurrected after the hiatus created by the indigenization policy. (Orji, 2017)

Affirming the role of entrepreneurship as a key driver of Nollywood, “a typical Igbo,” Orji avers, “nay a typical Nigerian, is driven by profit motive. After the success of *Living in Bondage*, we then branched out doing films in English” (Orji, 2017). As he explains,

the idea was if a film in Igbo—a language spoken by only one of Nigeria’s sub-nationalities—was such a huge success, how much more could a film done in English, Nigeria’s official

language. And the Igbo mercantile sponsors could neither buck nor resist the opportunity to bankroll independent VHS home videos in English. (Orji, 2017)

Many highly successful movies followed in the wake of *Living in Bondage*.⁸ New-generation Nollywood actress Ufuoma Ejenobor argues that

the people we call marketers or traders should take the credit for starting the industry on entrepreneurial footing. [...] Nollywood is a show business. You cannot make a movie if you'd produce at a market loss; strong entrepreneurship is the driver of Nollywood as a creative industry. (Ejenobor, 2017)

E. Content Producers and Marketers: Uncommon Partnership

The advent of *Living in Bondage* raises three key issues that are critical to the role of entrepreneurship in Nollywood. The first is in regard to the mutually rewarding partnership through which content producers and marketers put VHS and digital technology to such incredible use. The second key issue is the widely acknowledged historical fact that the NTA spawned an incredible talent pool, in virtually all departments of movie production, which set alight the embers of Nigeria's home video production. Virtually everyone involved in *Living in Bondage* and subsequent home videos that followed in its wake cut their teeth at the NTA.⁹ Human talents and resources hatched in the incubator of the NTA, a state-owned monopoly, migrated to informal collaborations from which an industry arose that demystified the NTA and stripped the NTA of its monopoly. In our study sample, Nollywood practitioners, including actors whose break into the industry was through TV commercials/soap operas, constitute 15% of practitioners, trailing closely behind the largest segment, those with theatre background, at 16%. This underscores the mutually reinforcing relationship between the formal and informal sector via skills transfer and migration at different points along a continuum (as opposed to a duality). The third key issue, explored more fully below as an element of openness, relates to Nollywood's fixation on the theme of human story and lived realities that connect with its audience, which drives its entrepreneurial and market success.

F. Technology-Driven Transition

In relation to technology, Nollywood has since continued to transition to new technologies and marketing strategies associated with producing and creating content for low-budget videos and with mass marketing through informal grassroots networks. Based on the responses from the questionnaire, 88% of those we surveyed indicated that they had witnessed technological advancements. Among the instances they gave of changes in Nollywood that had stemmed from technological advancement were its contribution to the globalisation of Nollywood and the improved viewing experiences and overall industry success that it had provided. From VHS, then super VHS, Nollywood has moved on to VCDs, DVDs, Blu-ray, Black Majic4, Redd, etc., as vehicles for content production, marketing and distribution. Nollywood has also spawned new and dependent technology entrepreneurship such as iROKOTv, Nollywood's Netflix other. The venture has evolved

⁸ e.g. *Circle of Doom* (1993) *Taboo* (circa 1900s), etc.

⁹ See footnote 7 above.

from capturing diaspora subscription to Nollywood-on-demand online, and is now heavily invested in: technology injection for quality improvement; content development; and content acquisition partnerships for outputs (movies and television series). These movies and television series target a discerning and quality-conscious diaspora market with an eye on the continent's highly "mobile" youth whose dominant mode of accessing content is via smartphone streaming (Fick, 2016).

At the moment, through expanding and often transnational collaboration in cinematic productions, the industry is now shooting movies on celluloid, moving from 2mm and 2.5mm to 4K. Recently, the cinema has become the industry's biggest market. Exclusively spurred by Nollywood, the cinema is back in Nigeria and on terms set by Nigerians, not the old colonial structure and its legacies.¹⁰ Movies are shot on film. As Ejenobor puts it, "our movie makers find technologies that work for them. We take advantage of short films/web series that do not break your back" (Ejenobor, 2017). Ejenobor adds, moreover, that

if we shoot to go on cinema, it has to be on 4K. We improvise, we are creative; we are pragmatic. End market determines the technology, and our crewmembers should take the credit for our malleable use of technology; we know what we want to see and operate with linkages across departments: photography, editorial, etc. targeting distribution of content and marketing. (Ejenobor, 2017)

G. Technology for Content Distribution and Value Optimisation

Nollywood continues to exploit technology for both production and marketing. Still forging pragmatic partnerships with the informal marketing stakeholders, the industry has also embraced video-on-demand (VOD), especially for the diaspora market. According to Abubakar Yakubu, "beyond traditional marketing, we can use the internet platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Google to market content. Through internet, people can access our products and pay directly via advertising" (Yakubu, 2017).¹¹ He rightly observes that "the marketing field is now democratised and not limited to single monopolistic medium" (Yakubu, 2017). While there are concerns that uncontrolled content flow—or as Jonathan Haynes puts it, "the weekly flood of new films that washes almost all the previous week's releases into oblivion" (Haynes, 2010, p. 16)—threatens industry sustainability, Yakubu argues that

the lifespan of movies is now longer, unlike in the past when a new movie comes out, the demand for the DVD of the last movie drops. Nowadays, through the internet the contents are always available and can be discovered at any time by the public, and that has positive implication for income. (Yakubu, 2017)

Perhaps one of the greatest marketing revolutions has been through contractual models by which major cable and satellite broadcasting networks acquire rights in Nollywood movies which they market through their networks. South African satellite pay-TV, DStv, is perhaps the most proactive in this medium through its various "African Magic" brand dedicated channels that cater to Nigerian

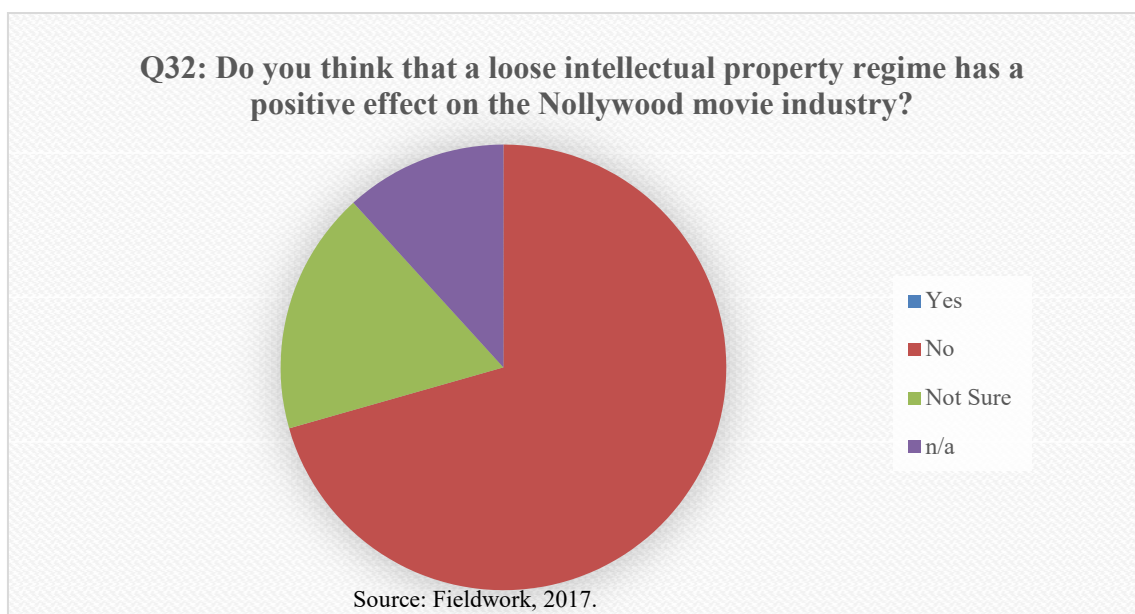
¹⁰ Currently, there are 28-30 cinema houses across Nigeria.

¹¹ Yakubu is the Secretary of the Actors Guild of Nigeria.

movies and other Nollywood-inspired movies from across the African continent. In this model, a substantial section of Africans across the continent have guaranteed access to Nollywood movies. There are also other internet-driven streaming online subscription business models. iROKOTv, mentioned above, is the leading and most popular Nigerian movie content provider on the internet. iROKOTv buys films and streams them and it also acquires streaming rights from other content distributors. For example, iROKO has a channel on DStv called ROK through which it shows its own films in addition to streaming them on the internet. iROKO is investing heavily in its ROK studios as a state-of-art technology partnership poised to achieve quality improvement and creative marketing of Nollywood movies.

Part of the entrepreneurial ingenuity of Nollywood is its ability to capitalise on the technological dynamics in the industry not only in the creation of content but also in its marketing and distribution. Virtually all interviewees agree, as Orji puts it, that “technology has effectively pushed Nollywood to the world audience” (Orji, 2017), even though there is mixed feeling regarding the extent to which the industry and its stakeholders may have benefited from such global exposure. The portability or ease of replication of content through multiple media, for instance, is fertile context for piracy. Through pirates, Orji observes, “our work has gone to all parts of the world, a good thing, but the downside is that the revenue that legitimately belongs to the industry is frittered away” (Orji, 2017). Despite this perceived dilemma, industry practitioners were unequivocal in their perception of IP and its potential to check piracy in Nollywood. A 70% majority of respondents considered that a loose or lax intellectual property regime does not, overall, have a positive effect on the Nollywood movie industry.¹²

Figure 1: Perception of Intellectual Property Regime and its Effect on Nollywood



¹² Here, a “lax” intellectual property regime refers to the situation in Nollywood where there has traditionally been little IP right enforcement and/or protection.

The response is a push back to the suggestion that a loose intellectual property regime helped in making movies more available and providing greater exposure to artistes. The quandary reflects Nollywood's dilemma with the intellectual property system in its apparent openness to a pragmatic approach. In the meantime, aside from Nollywood entrepreneurial ingenuity and technological opportunism, a holistic profile of the industry requires attention to other critical features. We will explore these features in the next section through the prism of an expanded theory of openness as an element of our grounded approach and situational interpretation in this study of the industry.

V. Nollywood's Openness and Socio-Economic Empowerment

In the first section of this paper we noted that ICT is central to the theory of openness. But we then observed that an expanded theory of openness beyond ICT is required to account for other socio-economic factors that could make the connection between openness and development. Already, we found that a key aspect of the entrepreneurial ingenuity of Nollywood is its use of many technological tools, including those of ICTs to produce, market and deliver content.

The socio-economic, cultural and other contexts for making of content in Nollywood are as critical as the role of technology in its production and marketing. Hence the value of an expanded theory of openness for better comprehension of the industry's phenomenal trajectory of success. In this project, we highlight just a few aspects of the openness in Nollywood that derive from the socioeconomic, national and cultural contexts in which the industry was birthed—aspects which a narrow theory of openness fails to account for.

A. Grassroots Embeddedness

The first aspect of Nollywood's openness (and by extension its legitimacy) is its grassroots embeddedness. According to Jonathan Haynes, Nollywood videos are "fundamental to Africa's self-representation" (Haynes, 2010, p. 21), while Onookome Okome observes that "embedded in the texts of Nollywood video films are the cultural and political debates of the day" (Okome, 2010, p. 26). Nollywood is perceived as disruptive of elitist and ideological "African intellectual formulations" (Okome, 2010, p. 35). It is concerned with the everyday, naked, lived realities of an average or not-so-average Nigerian, which, to some degree, has resonance with continental African viewers (Krings & Okome, 2013, p. 4). Aptly interpreted by Appadurai, Nollywood is "a faculty that informs the daily life of ordinary people in myriad ways" (Appadurai, 2000, quoted in Okome, 2010, p. 28). One would hesitate to completely strip Nollywood of any interest in "ideological narrativization", aesthetic agenda or cultural mediation, as Okome seems inclined to do (Okome, 2010, p. 36). Yet one agrees with the analyst that even though Nollywood has transcended its status as "a local cinematic expression", its filmmakers' primary concern is "with the everyday and with those things that matter to the man and woman in the street" (Okome, 2010, p. 36).

All stakeholders interviewed in this study agreed that Nollywood is founded on storytelling, which is a central thread in the inclusive social and cultural weave of Africa. Olu Jacobs insists that Nollywood benefits from the practice of theatre as storytelling and as a way of life in Africa. Responding to a question about the success of Nollywood, Nobert Young argues that part of the reason why the industry thrives is that

it runs on our original real-life stories and experiences unfiltered. It is real, raw, and open in that respect. Nollywood is an exercise in augmented reality [...]. [A]s long as you take materials from the society, you will never be short of ideas. In essence, as living being, the society produces stories every day; all we do is to tell those stories and that way we are one with our people and society, just open! That partly explains Nollywood's domestic and international reception, especially within the African diaspora. (Young, 2017)

In similar vein, Ejenobor agrees that "in Nollywood, we essentially feed on the human story, and for the most part human stories are the same everywhere, especially in Africa". Yakubu insists that "we tell our stories, we are ordinary people telling about ourselves, believing in ourselves and our abilities" (Yakubu, 2017). In reflecting on these sentiments, Orji comments that "Nollywood has provoked a hunger for black people all over the world to tell their own stories themselves in the open. We believe that you are the only one who tells your story yourself" (Orji, 2017). Yet, he continues, "we are not aspiring to be Hollywood, or Bollywood, although the 'wood' suffix may suggest otherwise. We are a grassroots participant movement telling our stories involving viewers and actors as co-participants; no one filmmaking-nation can be the other" (Orji, 2017).

From these voices of the industry, we see that openness in Nollywood is a factor of its approach to its subject matter and its deep connectedness with its audience members, who also double as participants in cultural production. In addition to this form of openness and democratisation of knowledge production, Nollywood thrives in the use of video technology, which is an eminently accessible vehicle in furtherance of open and democratic delivery of content. Throughout its history, the industry has shown how it leaves no opportunity unexplored in delivery of content to the grassroots free of discrimination: first through VHS rentals in barber shops and corner stores and subsequently through the other technology-enhanced modes of content distribution that we explored above. The industry is constantly mindful that its legitimacy is tied to its open and inclusive approach to its grassroots fan base. In this regard, Ejenobor notes that any entrepreneurial or technological transition in Nollywood must take "our grassroots fan base into consideration. They are our first fans; they are critical to our coming into existence and even to our continued progress, we must not underrate them" (Ejenobor, 2017).

B. Inclusiveness and Market Segmentation

This observation leads on to another aspect of openness and inclusiveness in the industry. In the recent times, Nollywood has intensified various forms of collaboration and partnerships, leveraging its ability to raise capital for shooting movies on celluloid. As a consequence, the cinema culture has returned to Nigeria's big cities, in what analysts call the advent of the "New Nollywood" (Krings & Okome, 2013, p. 55). Given the intractable piracy in the industry, investors have turned to in-cinema

audiences as their market of choice. Since cinema culture is a big city convenience that targets the elite, this transformation risks de-linking Nollywood from its grassroots fan base. However, grounded observation reveals the emergence of market segmentation in the industry – a development that many stakeholders are equally aware of. Shooting of high-budget movies (by Nollywood standard) on celluloid (35mm +) for cinema has not ended direct-to-video DVD productions or shoestring budget movies as we know them.

Nollywood's interest in high budget movies indicates the industry's progress and could be taken as symbolising a coming of age. An industry that was hitherto content to meet a lower expectation of quality from its doggedly loyal fan base appears able to ratchet up its game. Shooting on celluloid is indicative of Nollywood's rising profile including its ability to attract international collaboration, access bigger capital and mobilise stellar talents from its increasing pool of human resources at home and in the diaspora. Ugezu comments that "it is not the technical depth that has made our films so popular. It is because of our story, we tell African stories" (quoted in Gates Jr., 2016, p. 16), and that may be true. But as the Nollywood effect takes hold across Africa and the African diaspora, staying in the lead requires attention to technical depth. It also requires satisfying the expectations of an expanding and increasingly discriminating fan base without alienating the industry's roots. This is already happening, as is evident in the industry itself and in industry-affiliated entrepreneurialships such as iROKOTv and cable/satellite television partners.

As the DVD/VCD market shrinks, supplanted as the preferred distribution platform by mushrooming new entrepreneurial ventures, Nollywood nonetheless continues to make short films including YouTube movies and web series. More importantly, with high cost of data locally excluding video-on-demand (VOD) as a viable medium for the local grassroots market, the industry continues to support and invest in low budget movies for direct release on DVDs/VCDs. Such movies are produced mostly in Asaba, Enugu and Festac (Lagos). This inclusiveness, pragmatism and flexibility speaks to the openness and entrepreneurial ingenuity that drives the industry. Viability of the low-budget segment of the market is preserved (as will be explained later) through creative contractual experiments and partnerships with informal content retailers in seeking to mitigate perennial concerns with piracy and infringements of intellectual property rights.

In addition to proactive involvement in market segmentation, Nollywood does not rule out expansion to the grassroots of its now biggest market in the cinema. The following suggestion by Ejenobor is indicative of the thinking and commitment to openness and grassroots ties that run deep in the industry:

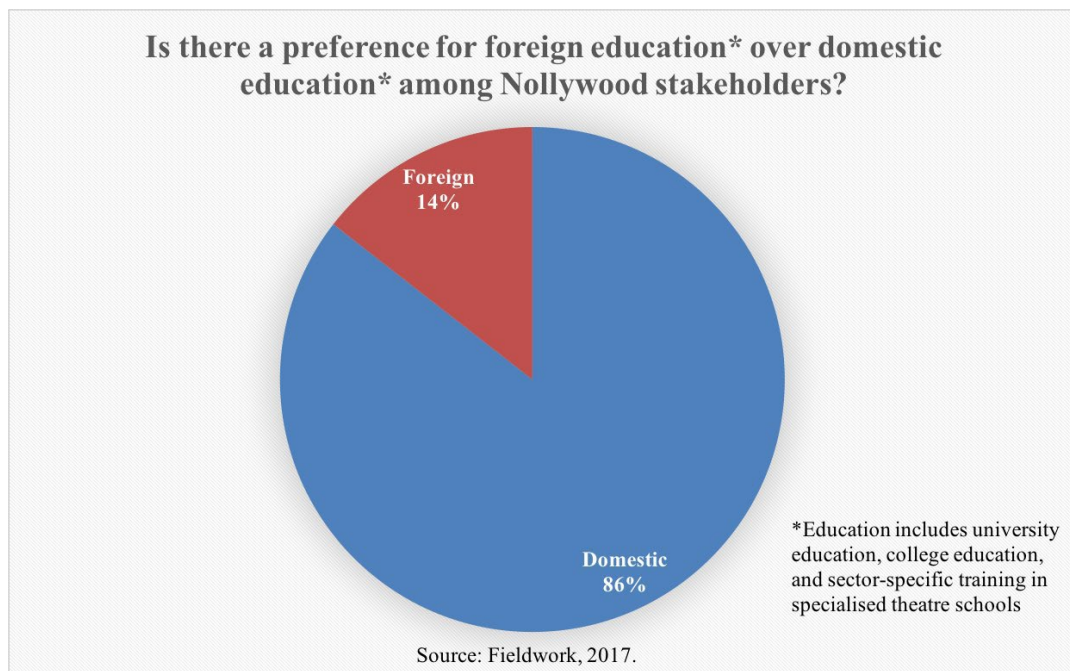
as a matter of opinion, I conjecture that we may have to create small mobile cinemas that can extend the cinema experience to our grassroots. There is a need for an open and inclusive cinema that caters to the grassroots—time out for movies should not be an exclusive of the city elite. (Ejenobor, 2017)

These commitments to openness in virtually all dimensions of interest have seen Nollywood rising to become the largest movie-producing industry on video and the second largest film-producing industry globally, with an estimated value of USD4 billion.

C. Formal and Informal Skill Development and Talent Pool

A third aspect of openness in Nollywood relates to the inclusive combination of skilled manpower and institutional, professional and social capital that sustains the industry in Nigeria. We have already noted how the state-owned NTA provided the pool of skilled human resource from which the industry took off in the 1990s. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and arguably its most resourceful in terms of human and social capital. With deep roots in the humanities and liberal arts, the country's system of tertiary education is linked to its colonial ties to Britain. Some 82% of Nollywood practitioners in our sample had received some form of higher education, including college, university or other tertiary skills training. A number of early or first-generation Nollywood practitioners acquired their education and skills from overseas in various departments relevant to the movie industry, mainly from the United Kingdom and later from the United States. And in the British- and American-trained Nigerian diaspora a new generation continues to enrich Nollywood's pool of human resources (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Location of Higher Education among Nollywood Stakeholders

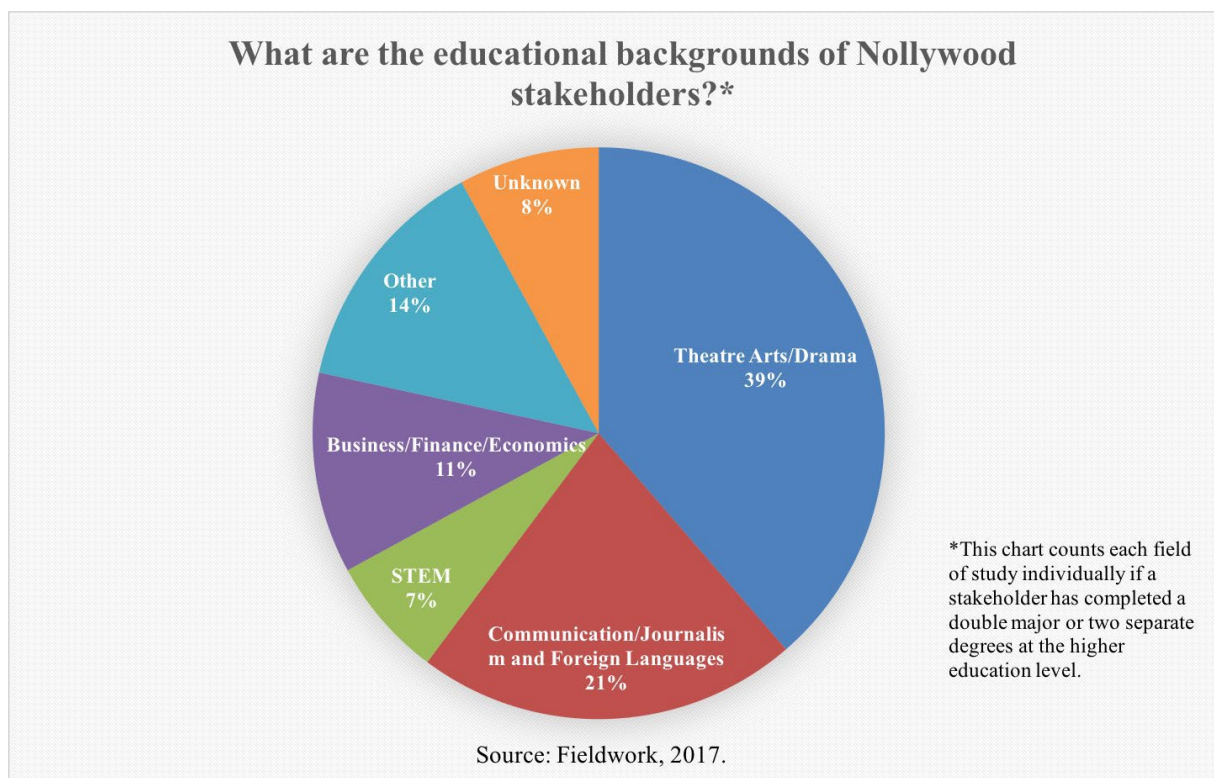


Sequentially, there has been a four-layered progression in Nigeria's tertiary education infrastructure. The first and second-generation tertiary institutions correspond to the pre-independence and immediate post-independence periods from the 1950s to the 1970s. The third generation relates to the 1980s and 1990s when Nigeria's federating state governments became active in establishing tertiary institutions. The fourth generation (1990s to the present) is marked by the entry of the

private sector and continued activism of the federal government in the establishment of new tertiary institutions (Fapohunda, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c).¹³ To date, Nigeria has a total of 344 accredited tertiary institutions, including specialised and conventional universities and skills-oriented colleges.¹⁴

In regard to the entertainment industry, the National Film Institute in the Northcentral city of Jos remains the premier and most exclusive skills-training institution for the film industry. Most other tertiary institutions have robust representation of faculties which provide formal training in the humanities, social sciences and liberal arts, and which continue to supply the pool of talents that service Nollywood. Recently, Nollywood has inspired dedicated formal institutes or centres such as the School of Media and the Nollywood Skill Centre at the Lagos Business School. A biographic survey of 101 Nollywood practitioners shows that a total of 34 (39%) have an industry-relevant degree or training. While almost 82% of the sample have formal tertiary education, 54 (61%) have degrees in other disciplines outside of the industry's direct range of expertise, including STEM and business qualifications (see Figure 3). But they have been able to flourish in the industry through a combination of self-education, on-the-job training and specialist courses in film production and related skills.

Figure 3: Areas of Specialisation among Nollywood Stakeholders



¹³ For universities (in 2017): federal universities: 40; state universities: 44; private universities: 68. For polytechnics (in 2017): federal: 25; state: 39; private: 24. For college (in 2017): federal: 24; state: 46; private: 34.

¹⁴ That is federal, state and privately-owned universities, polytechnics and colleges of education.

The advent of Nollywood as a full-scale entertainment powerhouse reveals the need for practical skills training in diverse areas to support a complex and sophisticated industry. Formal educational infrastructure is not capable of meeting the diversity of practical skills training required in Nollywood and there are many open, inclusive and collaborative ways through which the industry exploits the multifaceted pool of talents in Nigeria. While stakeholders often talk about professionalism in the industry, practitioners have an open and practical conception of the idea of professionalism in their trade. For example, Nobert Young observes that “the open and all comers approach in Nollywood integrates a mixed bag of professionals, neophytes, and various untrained categories that affect the quality of outputs in the industry”. For Silva, “one thing that is obvious in Nollywood which we are committed to addressing is the gap in skills acquisition in the industry” (Silva, 2017). Silva and Jacobs argue alike that in those parts of the world that have a flourishing film industry (quoting Silva), “there is a mixture of academic and practical skills development outside the formal academic training. For the most part, practical skills in the field have little to do with academics, school or certification of credentials on paper”. (Silva, 2017)¹⁵

According to Bassey, Nollywood believes in spotting natural talents “from Nigeria’s market place of activities where potentials are then honed and imbued with practical skills and exposed” (Bassey, 2017). Bassey notes that when a director is looking for a character to cast, many considerations are involved such as physical presence and attributes and other characteristics, including even natural mannerisms. Such a character may be recruited from the street, and, as an industry, he notes that Nollywood is striving to be competent in skills acquisition, training and transformation. In his view, there is nowhere else better for the industry to cast its net than in the incredible diversity of Nigeria’s youths and peoples.

Joke Silva notes similarly that the approach in skills training for Nollywood recognises that

the entry level in the business is extremely low. It is sometimes premised on physical fitness and suitability for a role at the discretion of the director. The fitting person is then educated and given practical training. That is what an academy should be doing. (Silva, 2017)

Silva adds that her joint vision with Jacobs is for skills-based academies in the industry that would impart skills in all conceivable departments

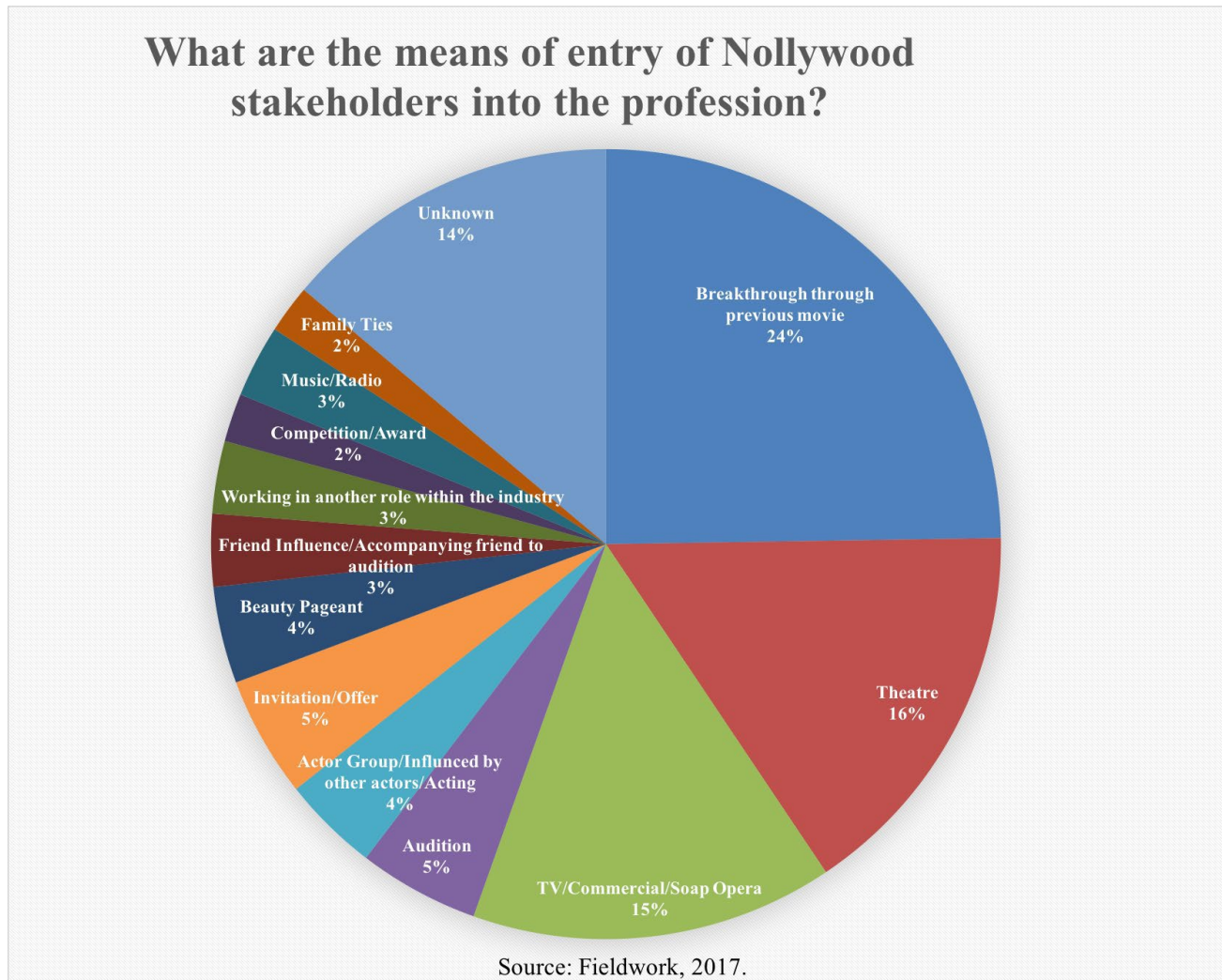
to enable people to function in any space in as much flexibility (e.g., director, actor, producer, sound effect, make-up, costume, etc.) as possible to have sustainable career [...] each should be trained to adapt and improvise as they operate between and across as much roles and departments as may be necessary. (Silva, 2017)

The 101 Nollywood Practitioners profile indicates that entry into the industry follows a complex but fairly open trajectory. Most individuals from this data set got their “breakthrough” into the industry by participating in a significant movie at one level or another. Other commonly cited sites of entry

¹⁵ They qualify the observation by noting that exceptions arise “when actors are supposed to research their character, a particular phenomenon, or assigned role and its associated history in order to perform it”.

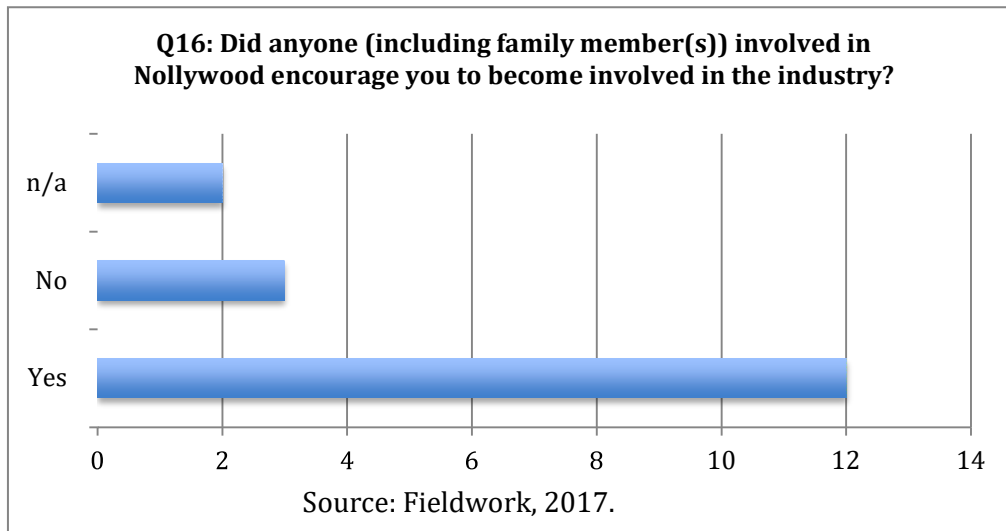
included being involved in theatre, and acting first in TV commercials or soap operas. Less often mentioned catalytic moments included auditions, or by invitation. The full breakdown of entry dynamic is given in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Means of Entering into Nollywood



In addition to these more formal entry points, support from family and friends proved to be significant in assisting individuals to enter the industry. Questionnaire respondents cited mentoring relationships as a driving factor when becoming involved in the industry (see Figure 5). Mentorship could mean being influential individually or within a department group in the industry. It could also mean looking out for talented young actors/actresses (discovering new talents), not only in theatres, school plays and soap operas but also around people who come to auditions. Two of the interviewees entered the industry because they accompanied a friend to an audition. Four were discovered after beauty pageants. Two received awards or prizes in competitions through which doors of entry opened up.

Figure 5: Mentors' Influence on Individual's Entry into Nollywood



D. Public Interest Interventions and Industry-Focused Capacity Building

In addition to fairly large institutional and formal professional training infrastructure in Nigeria, Nollywood is thus deeply invested in the development of informal or semi-formal training in adjunct and diverse areas, including media, acting, make-up, design, costumes, lighting, camera, photography, cinematography, script-writing, film production, vocal development, location, social media, logistics, etc. One creative way the industry has been able to support its skills development faculty, in addition to the support that mentors may offer, is through an admixture of public-interest oriented interventions, especially by its veterans, and forms of industry-focused entrepreneurial initiatives. These possibilities in skills development are delivered to members of the public and younger generation of “Nollywood wannabes” through a robust tradition of mentorship. Many of our respondents indicated that Nollywood stars and personalities provide the bulk of instructors in the industry’s skills acquisition initiatives. Such star power is invaluablely inspirational and transformative for the trainees.

One such example is the Nollywood celebrity couple, Joke Silva and Olu Jacobs, as proprietors of the Lufodo Academy of Performing Arts. Another star actor, Nobert Young, exercises his passion for skills training and professionalism in his role as Dean of Studies at the Centre for Media Development and Training. Zack Orji and Paul Obazele have partnered with the Nigerian government to develop practical skills training in the entertainment industry for restive Niger Delta youths as an employment generation initiative. Emen Isong, a Nollywood producer runs the Royal Arts Academy, Lagos. In 2016, prominent Nollywood producer/director Lancelot Oduayo Imasuen partnered with Nigeria’s first private university, the Igbinedion University at Okada, to establish the Benin Film Academy. Bassey and Fred Amata’s Nollywood Concepts Partnership is invested in elaborate talent harnessing and conferencing around ideas for building capacity in the industry. Other Nollywood personalities are associated with setting up film villages in various parts of Nigeria. In addition to these specific initiatives in supplementary skills training, various other entrepreneurial short-term skills-training

projects targeting the Nollywood industry continue to spring up in nooks and crannies of Nigeria (Nigeria Galleria, n.d.).

As we indicated earlier, Nollywood's success occurred not because of but in spite of government. However, according to some interviewees, the industry attracted an intervention grant amounting to some NGN3 billion (about USD7.5 million) from the presidency during President Jonathan's administration, pursuant to a program entitled *Project Act*. The initiative identified movie making, skills acquisition (for growing capacity and improving quality) and distribution as priority areas for the industry. After the sunset of the Jonathan presidency it remains to be seen whether the fund will be accessed and the extent to which it could be applied to ultimately advance these objectives without the usual politicisation associated with government funding, especially when there is a change in administration.

In sum, Nollywood has robust, open and collaborative models for developing an inclusive professional and skills cadre. It has a broad and practical conceptualisation of professionalism that includes formal, informal and entry-level skills acquisition. As an industry, Nollywood has leveraged Nigeria's liberal arts education infrastructure and has supplemented it with a combination of mainly private sector entrepreneurial and collaborative skills training initiatives. These initiatives have deliberately and strategically kept the industry open, admitting and mentoring all manner of talents with flexibility that allows them to operate across departments so that they can take a shot at building an enduring career.

E. Celebrating Nigeria's Multicultural, Multi-Ethnic and Linguistic Complexity

The fourth site of openness in Nollywood is one that capitalises on Nigeria's multicultural ethnic and linguistic complexity. The development of linguistic sub-genres (for want of a better term) in Nollywood, with Yoruba, Igbo, English and Hausa movies, might give an impression of internal competition and fragmentation within the industry in a country that can often be charged along ethnic divides. Nigeria is a country of over 371 nationalities (Sowunmi, 2017) and its cultural and human diversity is incredible, but the truth remains that centuries of interaction amongst these ethnic formations have yielded a great cultural mosaic that gives the country a sense, even if sometimes elusive, of national identity. Many respondents insist that the notion of fragmentation in Nollywood is largely speculative, perhaps exaggerated, and entirely misconceived. Respected stakeholders in the industry see these linguistic distinctions as rooted in the industry's historical evolution and its entrepreneurial ability to capitalise, openly and inclusively, on Nigeria's ethnic diversity and cultural heritage.

As we have noted, Yoruba movies can be traced back to the era of traveling theatre and were the earliest local movies to be shot on video. The Nollywood phenomenon as we know it today had origins in *Living in Bondage*, which was a movie in Igbo language that provided a catalyst and appetite for the making of movies in English for a national audience. Although the quest for market expansion resulted in many Igbo artists virtually abandoning Igbo movie-making in preference for English, the Yoruba kept the Yoruba language movie tradition alive. The same is true of the Hausa language

movies (so-called “Kannywood”). As far as the latter is concerned, this study was conducted in Lagos (birthplace of Nollywood) not attempting to include Northern Nigeria, which is the chief domain of the Hausa and other nationalities. The Nollywood phenomenon has nonetheless had its effect in developing the movie culture in that part of Nigeria, and it constitutes an integral part of the industry as filtered through Islamic religious and conservative cultural sensitivities – a development that many analysts have explored.¹⁶ According to Zack Orji, the inclination of mainly Igbo artists to make movies in English after *Living in Bondage*, fed the perception that Nollywood movies done in English are Igbo movies. For this reason, he notes, it was not a surprise that “when cable and satellite media came into Nigeria to partner with Nollywood through DStv, it created ‘Africa Magic Yoruba’ and ‘Africa Magic Hausa’ because of the readiness and availability of content and there was no ‘Africa Magic Igbo’ for lack of ready and sustainable content” (Orji, 2017). Although the void was filled several years later, the production ratio of Igbo and English movies is estimated at 1 to 5.

Most informed industry insiders reject the notion that Nollywood refers to a section of Nigeria’s movie industry that produces in English, seeing in it a misconceived assumption of fragmentation and rivalry. The truth is that Nollywood is a very open film culture that thrives in Nigeria’s incredible socio-cultural and ethnic richness and linguistic diversity. As Orji puts it,

in addition to English, in Nollywood, we make films in Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Efik, and several other Nigerian indigenous languages. [...] what happens is that we just need a reasonable number of certain ethnic extraction in order to realize the idea of making a particular movie in one language or another; we do not need a tower of babel; we need stories that resonate with our peoples. (Orji, 2017)

According to Orji, when Norimitsu Onishi coined the term *Nollywood* in his famous *New York Times* article of 16 September 2002, “Step Aside, L.A. and Bombay for Nollywood” (Onishi, 2002), he used the term “to refer to the diversity of films in Nigeria’s motion picture industry in English and other local languages” (Orji, 2017). In Orji’s opinion, if all practitioners knew this, they would not be fixated on coining subsets that create a sense of confusion and competition.

Other stakeholders weighing in on false distinctions are punchier in their objection. Bassey sees the misperception as premised on ignorance and parochialism. For him, Nollywood is inclusive of the linguistic diversity of Nigerian films and is better understood “as part of the evolution of a whole industry through use of video technologies and flexible channels of content delivery instead of applying misleading and divisive prefixes to balkanise one era into sub-eras that are not well founded in history or logic” (Bassey, 2017).

F. Genre Spin-Offs: (Stand-up) “Nolly Comedy”

An important aspect of Nollywood’s commitment to optimising Nigeria’s cultural repertoire across language and ethnicity is the entrenchment in Nollywood movies of pigeon English along with frequent admixture of multiple linguistic expressions. Nollywood’s inclusiveness and its creative

¹⁶ For example, see Adamu (2013).

tendency to experiment with and mimic Nigeria's social realities have led also to a burgeoning of other entertainment traditions – notably the genre of stand-up comedy. This genre has become a strong growth area in entertainment that feeds on Nigeria's complex ethnic concert and diversity. Reflecting on this, Nobert Young notes that "Nigeria is a cultural melting pot. Despite impressions to the contrary, what unites Nigeria is stronger than what divides us" (Young, 2017). Nollywood has capitalised on this melting pot of "migration and ... corruption of local languages and enrichment of pigeon English, which is an open *lingua franca* in Nigeria that has produced a rich resource and repertoire for Nigeria's vibrant comedy industry". Young invites enthusiasts to imagine the diffusion of Warri, Igbo, and Yoruba comedy in action, noting that

in the context of stand-up comedy, determining who is Yoruba, Igbo or Warri, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, etc. is not necessarily a factor of a performer's real ethnic identity. An Igbo boy raised in Warri is a Warri boy, and his pigeon English accent is unmistakably Warri and it is richer even as a result of his unavoidably Igbo elements. Nollywood is *Naija*¹⁷ to its core. (Young, 2017)

In sum, as aspects of its openness, Nollywood capitalises on Nigeria's rich socio-cultural repertoire in an inclusive and open manner that energises participation of all component ethnic formations. It has also been able to expand into the stand-up comedy genre as a fertile site for harnessing Nigeria's national and grassroots creativity. Reflecting on this, many Nollywood practitioners acknowledge that they are building an industry from scratch and have been able to develop facilities tailored to the particular needs of specialised departments that service the industry in collaboration with other departments. There are now departmental trade unions or guilds for actors, directors, producers, screen-writers, etc., even though memberships in these guilds tend to overlap. Respondents pushed back on the idea that proliferation of these departmental bodies in the industry may be counterproductive. Rather, they insisted that the departments are self-reinforcing in their roles. Bassey comments that specialist departmental membership "enables the practitioners to retreat into their areas of individual strengths and expertise, which has implications for quality and development in the industry" (Bassey, 2017). To illustrate the point, Bassey suggests, "take the guy called Alibaba, he was and still remains an actor. But now, he is Nigeria's #1 stand-up comedian. He had to discover his expertise" (ibid). Bassey notes that as it grew, Nollywood branched out and developed in different areas of strength and expertise "opening them to our members to explore while collaboratively working together to improve the quality of products coming out of our industry" (Bassey, 2017).

G. Pragmatic Approach to Intellectual Property

The fifth and last aspect of openness in Nollywood, reflecting its history, pragmatism and entrepreneurial ingenuity, relates to the issue of intellectual property. In terms of history, we have noted already that from the very beginning Nollywood was forged as partnership between content producers and content marketers. The content marketers were an established constituency through which Nollywood was able to solve the knotty problem of capital that bedevils African entrepreneurship. Not only did the informal grassroots content distributors fund Nollywood movies,

¹⁷ *Naija* is an informal reference to Nigeria, which is a light-hearted nickname for the country by its citizens at informal range of discussions.

they also plugged the VHS cassettes, and later the VCDs/DVDs, into their remarkably penetrating networks for market optimisation. Yet Nollywood's relationship with this critical link to its grassroots fan base has remained problematic. Despite their importance in the birth of Nollywood, informal content sellers are also unabashed pirates, making them a continual thorn in the flesh for the intellectual property system.

Particularly active in the diaspora, the content distributors have turned Nollywood movies into the most pirated products in the world, in a constant running battle with the Nigerian intellectual property regulators, with intellectual property advocates and with creative industry stakeholders in Nigeria and abroad. Yet many in the industry concede that piratical enterprise also gives Nollywood movies, and by extension Nollywood stars, a fast-track chance for global exposure. Through the pirates' international distribution networks, and beginning well before the advent of the Internet, the bootlegged Nollywood movies have travelled the world, boosting the profiles of the stars along with industry and global recognition. As Orji puts the question, "Do we then enter into collaboration with pirates to facilitate the distribution of our work?" (Orji, 2017). In partial answer, he adds that "In the industry, there is a recognition of the need for pragmatism in a country where enforcement of the law, intellectual property law, is a conundrum" (Orji, 2017).

A grassroots industry the size of Nollywood, one that is in a hurry to grow while operating in a country where there is lax enforcement of laws, thus requires a pragmatic approach to intellectual property. Already, Nollywood is a beneficiary of informal marketers of content who are an integral aspect of its business model and its success. With a range of stakeholders (satellite, cable television, internet content aggregators and streaming platforms, etc.) entrenching themselves in Nollywood, the industry has continued to explore contractual models in relation to intellectual property and associated rights. Many participants in our study, notably represented in the voice of Fred Amata, point out that

the industry needs specialist expertise to assist it in these increasingly complex relationships through which various rights migrate in ways that would support industry commitment to its story telling and its grassroots fan base so as not to compromise its ability to freely tell and re-tell its stories. (Amata, 2017)

Virtually all respondents favour a pragmatic industry approach to intellectual property, given the Nigerian context. For Fred Amata, President of the Directors Guild of Nigeria, there is no reason why the industry should not embrace progressive and pragmatic approaches to intellectual property. He wants the industry to explore open-tendency concepts like Copyleft which can create a market far larger than that offered by conventional intellectual property (Amata, 2017). For Mathias Obahiagbon, the Nollywood DVD/VCD market segment is now interested in the creative intellectual property approach practised by Nigerian's vibrant music industry and should be exploring it more fully (Obahiagbon, 2017). As part of the creative approach to intellectual property, the music industry has developed a partnership with the Alaba (Lagos suburb) cluster of music marketers whereby the marketers pre-register their members to collect an allotted or fixed consignment of copyright music DVDs to sell in their open CD market cluster. The traders are responsible for self-policing against

piracy. Knowing the stock allotted to each participant, it becomes easy to pre-empt anyone attempting to print pirate copies to dilute the market (Obahiagbon, 2017). Respondents confirmed that Nollywood has embraced various creative and contractual arrangements that demonstrate the industry's deep-running affiliation with informal content markers. One example is pre-sale arrangements, which is a form of advance market commitment whereby the producer or copyright owner agrees to produce a fixed number of copies of DVDs for the buyer or marketer at an agreed premium price. The marketer is then at liberty to sell the product, which may even include reproduction without further intervention of the copyright owner.

VI. Conclusion – Nollywood: Lesson for African Entrepreneurship

Nollywood is a clear manifestation of the link between entrepreneurship and economic development. It also shows how openness, technology and innovation reinforce that connection. Furthermore, Nollywood's success reveals a constellation of factors not often considered as elements of openness and shows their ramifications for economic growth. In Nollywood, we see how historical, circumstantial and context-specific factors at national level coalesce to trigger local entrepreneurial ingenuity and are in turn leveraged to yield positive economic outcomes. This happens in ways that indicate potential scalability and adaptability of the Nollywood phenomenon to other entrepreneurial sectors in the rest of Africa. Already, the globalisation of Nollywood across the African continent and in the African diaspora is a fascinating development that has been the subject of many studies. Catapulted way beyond its Nigerian origins, Nollywood is a yet-to-be-fully-unravelling cinematic phenomenon that analysts regard as fundamental to Africa's self-expression. In the long-running quest for a single, pan-African, postcolonial movie culture, Nollywood has boldly inserted itself as perhaps the most prominent "candidate" of interest.

The conventional alignment of entrepreneurship with economic development is, on the surface, a self-vindicating proposition. Neither the proposition itself nor the various renditions of entrepreneurship could be understood to suggest that Africa is bereft of entrepreneurship. But they do not quite explain why African economic development and economic renaissance remains a mirage despite African entrepreneurship. At the very least, the proposition implies that the various forms of entrepreneurship in Africa have been unable to deliver on the continent's economic development. That is why Nollywood as a phenomenon provides an important lesson for African entrepreneurship.

The dominant forms of entrepreneurship in Africa are located on the fringes of classical economic conceptualisation and are rooted in colonial, post- or neo-colonial, and new global power relations that seek economic growth through equilibrium of capital and labour. Impoverished and underdeveloped Africa being a historical supplier of labour, and bereft of capital, the classic equilibrium is mostly no better than a mirage. Culturally, Africa remains a consumer of foreign culture funnelled to the continent all in one direction through a vast array of western and global entertainment media. Africa's colonial film culture was, like most things colonial, a media strategy to aid colonial exploitation of the continent, undermine its cultural identity, and justify its colonial

subjugation. Birthed at the end of colonialism, the African auteur cinema did not reflect a departure from that missionary agenda.

In other respects, as a historic supplier of raw materials both in resources and labour, Africa operates at the receiving end of consumerism as a global dumping ground. Consequently, African entrepreneurs are captured in stereotypic small-scale, informal, grassroots, capital-starved, “underground” ventures, traditionally juxtaposed with the so-called “formal” economic models in which African entrepreneurs remain perennial low-scale players with no visible impact on the continent’s economic development and transformation. But in apparent accordance with Schumpeter’s theory of disruption, the Nollywood experience is plainly disruptive. It designates a specific pathway in which an entrepreneurial-driven technological democratisation disrupts the capital–labour equilibrium thesis of economic growth through open and grassroots empowerment of talents and harnessing of social capital. Modern technologies are freely leveraged in Nollywood by dint of open entrepreneurial ingenuity, yielding an outcome in which Africans are both producers and consumers of their culture and also exporters and global players in the entertainment industry on their own terms.

Nollywood shows that for African entrepreneurship to support economic development, it must heed the power and the loyalty of the grassroots and recognise that the legitimacy of African entrepreneurship derives from grassroots, as does the legitimacy of creative ideas that give birth to sustainable entrepreneurs. As evident from this study, given the right opportunity (e.g., in regard to sectoral sensitivity, etc.), African grassroots inspired, bottom-up entrepreneurship can rapidly advance in a broadly conceived model of openness or inclusiveness. Openness may also call for pragmatism and opportunism if entrepreneurial initiatives are to be reactive, responsive, and indeed proactive, in engaging with the multitudinous transformations in Nigeria’s entertainment industry and its professional formations and dynamic skills development and devolution.

Nollywood shatters the distinction between formal and informal sectors in a practical continuum and interrelatedness “where activities with varying degrees of informality are situated at different points along the continuum” (Kawooya, 2014, p. 61). With Nollywood, we see the spontaneity of the growth that happens in informal sectors in spite of (and not because of) government involvement (Spring & McDale 1998, p. 12). Nollywood represents a kind of indigenous African entrepreneurship that springs from peoples’ renditions, adaptations and interpretations of their lived cultural experience and of local knowledge in space and time. It symbolises and adumbrates the contexts in which it is possible for indigenous entrepreneurial initiative to catalyse or contribute to sustainable economic growth and development (Spring & McDale, 1998, p. 10)

Nollywood also demonstrates the value of exploiting comparative advantage as a base point for entrepreneurship in Africa. In Nollywood, Nigeria is typecast as representative of African realities. Entertainment is part of the social fabric and the cultural DNA of Nigeria and of Africa. According to Ifeoma Fafunwa, Nigerians have a penchant for “jist consumption and jist production”. Furthermore, the tech-savvy millennial age group (35 years and under) accounts for 75% of Nigeria’s 182 million population; this makes technological competence a positive asset and incentive instead of the

customary excuse for lagging African entrepreneurship. Nigerians also constitute the largest contingent in Africa's diaspora dispersal and the continent's most diverse cultural and ethnic formation. Added to that is Nigeria's strong infrastructure in liberal arts education and its highly acclaimed grassroots marketing network driven, for the most part, by missionary heritage and legendary Igbo mercantile ingenuity. All of these discernible features of Nollywood distinguish it as an African-inspired and African-driven entrepreneurship that has leveraged the grassroots and earned a space for itself on the global stage.

Nollywood is an object lesson in the various ways that pragmatism and creative ingenuity can be harnessed to positively change the narrative of African entrepreneurship. Through calculated alliances and collaborations Nollywood has, for example, maintained strategic partnerships with informal movie marketers, integrating them as stakeholders in the mainstream of the entertainment industry and thereby ingeniously tackling the perennial African problem of finding capital. Likewise, as a creative industry, Nollywood struggles with the dynamics and dilemma of intellectual property. But through expediency and openness to contractual and technological options it has been able to re-imagine and re-conceive intellectual property issues outside the box, circumventing conventional copyright assumptions by embracing collaborative production of knowledge in a national reality where lax law enforcement is the norm.

Nigeria's experience with Nollywood shows that infrastructure, market and youth power, and social capital are critical elements for successful African entrepreneurship. In addition, interaction between the so-called formal and informal sectors helps to create an organic entrepreneurial chemistry, as evident in the role played by NTA in the birth of Nollywood. Nollywood is a constellation of formal and informal mutually dependent enterprises across multiple sectors that engage in a collaborative continuum. This seamless operational framework is how Nollywood democratises the entrepreneurial landscape, harnesses the potential of the willing, and curates Nigeria's talents, both raw and refined, to make Africa a direct actor and voice in global entertainment.

But inside Nollywood's success, existential threats to the industry continue. The prolific character of the industry, which has transformed it into the largest movie producing industry on video, raises concerns about sustainability. Also, Nollywood's ambivalent approach to intellectual property rights may not be sustainable in the long run; as the industry continues to advance, its most aggressive and highly capitalised segments may create content monopolies that stifle creativity and prevent ordinary people from sharing and re-telling the stories of their collective cultural heritage. And storytelling is a key feature of Nollywood. A related issue is increasing global concern with protection of intangible cultural heritage, which may require industries that exploit a peoples' collective heritage to evolve ethical standards and be held to account; Nollywood scenes are notorious for co-opting sacred cultural symbols and expressions. With the industry continuing to attract external partners bent on content acquisition and proprietary exclusion, Nollywood could all too easily become a conduit for illegitimate appropriation of traditional cultural heritage.

Despite Nollywood's handling of funding and capital, the exponential growth of the industry requires stronger capitalisation, perhaps more than the original stakeholders could sustain. In this regard, we

have noted the move to market segmentation. However, market segmentation does not provide ironclad assurance against potential delinking of the industry from the grassroots which are its central nervous system. One of the critical challenges for Nollywood is the industry's ability to negotiate increased capitalisation as an inevitable corollary of its sophistication and success. This requires specialist expertise in legal resources and guaranteed local availability of technology and other forms of infrastructure, boosting the industry's negotiating capacity to match external investors who might wrestle for control. Already, other high-tech-resourced entities within and outside of Africa, in asymmetrical power relations with local Nollywood stakeholders, maintain growing interest in Nollywood content acquisitions.

Finally, Nollywood's popularity among Africa's millennials is a key index of its growth pathway. High cost of data in Africa (the digital divide) continues to hinder streaming of data-on-the-go. As a consequence, Nollywood, like many industries, is hamstrung by the continental ICT infrastructural deficit. But all things considered, the incredible resilience, passion, energy and palpable enthusiasm among industry players suggest that having built something from virtually nothing, Nollywood's dynamism will enable it to weather present and future storms as it consolidates Africa's claim on the global entertainment stage.

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