

Mapping Nollywood's Imaginative Scape in Canada: Understanding Transnational
Nigerian Media, Identity and Belonging.

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ABSTRACT

Mapping Nollywood's Imaginative Scape in Canada: Understanding Transnational Nigerian Media, Identity and Belonging.

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Recent years have seen increasing scholarly recognition of transnational Nigerian cinema (“Nollywood”) as an important tool of cultural representation, and a conduit of diasporic communication. Nollywood plays a central role in shaping understandings of Nigerian culture, identity, and society in transnational spaces. Despite this growing scholarly awareness, there is a paucity of empirical research into how diasporic Nigerians spread across time and space receive and interpret Nollywood media texts. This study addresses the gap by examining the ways in which Nollywood shapes global understandings of Nigerian culture, identity and society, and the sociocultural implications.

This dissertation is a qualitative analysis of the significance of Nollywood through the lens of diasporic Nigerians in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Through participant observation and one-on-one interviews, I map out the ways diasporic Nigerians utilize Nollywood film culture to negotiate and sustain ethnocultural identity and develop a sense of belonging in Canadian society. The goal is to clarify the significance of Nollywood, and thereby deepen understanding of the ways in which Nollywood can be utilized to promote dialogue on critical issues of race and representation in the Canadian and Quebecois contexts, but also within the diasporic world in general.

I draw on Stuart Hall’s encoding and decoding model of communication (Hall 1980), within the broader framework of media uses and gratification theory (Blumer and Katz 1974) and dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur 1976), to interrogate the way participants make meaning with Nollywood media texts in context. The conceptual framework is therefore

communication and media studies, transnational cultural studies, postcolonial studies, migration and diaspora studies, and cultural anthropology.

I use this research to examine the premise that Nollywood is an important phenomenon of representation and a conduit of diasporic communication in contemporary times. I argue that scholarly analyses that tend to focus more on Nollywood's material culture and infrastructure, and less on ethical and ideological frameworks have misrepresented the media's cultural significance. The significance of Nollywood can only be accurately understood by looking beyond its medium specificity to the cultural systems and ideologies involved.

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Dedication

In memory of my late parents, Mr. Jeremiah Ekperuoh and Mrs. Margaret Ekperuoh

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INTRODUCTION

Mapping Nollywood's Imaginative Scape in Canada

Media are increasingly relevant to diaspora as they provide access to images and sounds and expand opportunities for two-way or multiple-way communication between various locations, groups, and individuals. Media are also important when they become alternative/minority media, which present and invite debates, value and interaction often unavailable (if not restricted and self-censored) in mainstream (national and large transnational) media. This powerful and close relation between diaspora and the media needs our attention in order to understand important cultural and political developments in transnational scapes and cosmopolitan times.

Myria Georgiou (2007, 17).

Throughout history, minority media (transnational and diasporic) have played a central role in shaping understandings of periphery cultures, identities, and societies (Anderson 1983; Naficy 1999; Hall 2000; Sinclair and Cunningham 2001; Karim 2003; Georgiou 2006, 2007; Okome 2007, 2013; Ogunyemi 2015). As a result of surges in transnational migration, especially in the last two decades, these cultural phenomena have become more important than ever to spatially dispersed populations. Transnational Nigerian film culture “Nollywood” is a prime example, in the way it reflects the particularities of Nigerian society and cultural specificities with a focus on shaping narratives around Nigerian national, ethnic, and cultural identity. This ethnic medium provides a forum in which Nigerians and Africans living in diaspora can, not only engage in contemporary politics of resistance and representation, but also construct and negotiate identity and develop a sense of belonging against the backdrop of diaspora.

Nollywood film is a major source of entertainment, information, and education for people of African descent (Okome 2007a 2007c, 2010; Adejunmobi 2007, 2010; Haynes 2007, 2013, 2016; Esan 2008; Becker 2013; Jedlowski 2013; Aveh 2014). Media and communication experts predict that Nollywood's impact on diasporic populations will grow in unimaginable ways for the

foreseeable future. This growth is already evidenced in the diasporic world, where more and more ethnic minorities rely on Nollywood to stay connected to events in the homeland. These minoritized communities also draw on Nollywood culture as a framework to maintain shared identity, map their place and space in diaspora, and cope with the outcomes of marginalization. Despite the role of transnational Nollywood as a medium of representation, it remains misrepresented and unexplored in important ways, in both scholarly and media circles.

In recent years, media and communication scholars have mapped with precision the influence of transnational media on diverse audiences. The problem is that most media and audience studies with a few exceptions have focused on mainstream media and majority populations, with little recognition of transnational minority media and minority populations such as diaspora audiences. Consequently, there is currently limited scholarship on the connection between Nollywood and its audiences in diaspora. Much of what is known today about this connection is based on theoretical work rather than empirical evidence (Esan 2011).

This dissertation addresses the lacuna just described by offering a qualitative analysis of the significance of Nollywood as a phenomenon of representation and a conduit of diasporic communication for diasporic Nigerians in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The study maps out the ways diasporic Nigerians receive, interpret, and make meaning of Nollywood culture, and analyzes the implications for how they negotiate and sustain identity and develop a sense of belonging in Canadian society. The goal is to gain an inductive understanding of the reception and interpretation of Nollywood films in the research context and determine what community members make of this media in their everyday lives.

Diaspora, Transnational Flow, and Transnational Media as Alternative Media.

This study deals with three distinct scholarly endeavours and literatures: Diaspora, Transnational Flow, and Transnational Media as Alternative Media. Before moving into the details of Nollywood reception in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, it is important to understand these bodies of scholarly work and how they inform prevailing perspectives on Nollywood.

Theorizing and Conceptualizing Diaspora

Diaspora is a concept that captures human mobility and (re-)settlement not as opposite points, not as cause and effect, but rather as co-existing elements of a world connected through flows and networks.

Myra Georgiou (2010, 1)

The term “diaspora” originated from the Greek word “diasperein” meaning “to disperse” or “to scatter” (Karim 2003). It is historically used to refer to racial groups that have been forcefully displaced from their homelands and resettled across time and space. A case in point is the historical dispersion of the Jewish people and their subsequent resettlement in different parts of the world (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Sinclair 2001). In recent years, scholars have identified other modern diasporas, such as the Greek, Armenian, and African diasporas. But while the notion of diaspora has historically been associated with displacement and resettlement, it has been (re)conceptualized in a variety of ways, with multiple layers of meanings over time (Brah 1996; Naficy 2001; Fazal 2007). Postmodern understandings of this term include diaspora as representing a cultural and geopolitical space (McLuhan 1965; Anderson 1983; Morley and Robins 1995; Naficy 1999; Karim 2003; Zeleza 2009), a social process (Appadurai 1990; Cohen 2008), a state of being and of becoming (Hall 1990; Esman 2009; Benshoff 2016), and a discursive form (Clifford 1994; Butler 2001; Jiwani 2006). Zeleza (2009) defines diaspora as “a process, a condition, a space, and a

discourse: the continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade; the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself; the places where it is molded and imagined; and the contentious ways in which it is studied and discussed” (32).

Cohen’s (1997) taxonomy classifies the concept of diaspora into three different strands: victim diasporas, labour and imperial diasporas, and trade diasporas. Jewish, Armenian, and Africans in the North Atlantic Slave Trade fall within the first category. These racialized groups are victims of forced migration. The indentured Indians of the United Kingdom and Caribbean fall under the labour and imperial diasporas category. Under the Indian indenture system, which was introduced following the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century, over a million Indians were transported to labour in European colonies in the Americas, the Pacific and Indian Ocean (Mohabir 2017). On the other hand, Greek and Persian diasporas are characterized as trade diasporas because the process of diasporization occurred because of international trade, facilitating transnational migration. As Clifford (1994) has observed,

Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population. Systematic border crossings may be part of this interconnection, but multi-locale diaspora cultures are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary (304).

In the modern world, the word diaspora is frequently used in reference to racialized communities that are part of post-industrial migrations. These include persons who migrated voluntarily or involuntarily from their homeland, mostly for social and economic rather than political reasons. Scholars have identified three main distinctions between classical diasporas and contemporary diasporas such as reasons for migration, processes and patterns of migration, and settlement patterns in the host societies (Bretell and Hollified 2008; Butler 2001; Manning 2009).

In light of the recent waves of transnational migration, however, the previous assumptions of diaspora, most of which were associated with involuntary migration, are increasingly being reconceptualized in postcolonial and postmodern discourses in relation to the sociopolitical and economic agency of contemporary diasporas (Safran 1991). While in the case of classical diasporas such as Jewish and Armenian diasporas the reasons for migration were mostly involuntary political factors, contemporary diasporas (and new African diasporas especially) often migrate because of social and economic factors such as education, ethnic tensions, and unemployment in the origin country. Migration literature indicates that new African diasporas in Western and European countries today are comprised of humanitarian migrants, as well as students, skilled workers and professionals seeking better social and economic conditions abroad.

The dynamics of contemporary diasporas' transnational connections compared to classical diasporas merits a mention here. Unlike classical diasporas that lost major ties with their countries of origin upon displacement, with little or no hope of return, contemporary diasporas have the ability not only to maintain strong ties to their countries of origin and the possibility of return to their homelands, but also the ability to maintain transnational engagements from the countries of residence. Esman (2009) notes that,

Diaspora communities are not fixed entities. They move through several stages, depending on the changing preferences of their members and the opportunities or restrictions applied by the host government and its dominant society. Both the diasporas' preferences and the policies of host government may shift over time. With the succession of generations, diasporas become indigenize and may evolve from one category to another. Some members opt out of the diaspora completely, joining the local society. Others evolve hybrid or dual identities, multiple belonging that permits them to evoke the one or the other as situations require (19).

The Nigerian diaspora is one example of a transnational diaspora spread across time and space. One important factor that lends meaning to such diasporas' transnational character is the

capacity to circulate across transnational spaces. As Georgiou and Silverstone (2007) point out,

Diasporas are transnational cultural communities. They are communities of people originating in a geographical location (often a nation-state) and settling in another. Their travel and (re-)settlement are usually plural and include multiple mobilities of people and diverse cultural practices. Diaspora are ultimately transnational as they are forced in some way or another to flee an original homeland and to seek (a better) life somewhere else (34).

Zeleza (2009) sheds further light on the social and cultural dimensions of diasporas this way:

Diasporas are complex social and cultural communities created out of the real and imagined genealogies and geographies (cultural, racial, ethnic, national, continental, transnational) of belonging, displacement, and recreation, constructed and conceived at multiple temporal and spatial scales, at different moments and distances from the putative homeland” (33).

The complex dynamics of these social and cultural communities are evidenced in their historical formation, the processes of diasporization, and the multiple spaces of belonging across time and space. During this process of translocation, many contemporary diasporas engage both home and host countries, in the form of sociocultural, economic, political, and religious events. A case in point is the new Nigerian (African) diaspora that often maintain links with their homeland while in exile, as outlined in the following section on the historical formation of the Nigerian diaspora in Canada.

For the reasons just described, diasporas and their cultural expressions are an influential, creative global force. According to Georgiou (2007), “Diaspora is a key element in cultural exchange and reflects the mobility of ideas, artefacts and people in time and space” (14). Diasporas have historically played a central role in the transmission of diasporic cultures across different geopolitical boundaries (Esman 2009; Manning 2009; Krings and Okome 2013; Falola 2013; Haynes 2013; Feldner 2019). The widespread migration of diverse racial and ethnic groups has helped to increase awareness of their cultures, identities, and societies.

In his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006

[1983]), Anderson maps the sources of nationalism in 18th century Europe, claiming that the nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Drawing on this insight, the phrase “imagined community” is often used to refer to racial and ethnic groups who have a sense of shared, collective identity without necessarily having direct contacts. A case in point is the Nigerian diaspora located in “small and widely scattered” (Karim 2003) “imaginative geographies” (Said 1985), including in this case important diasporic spaces in Canada.

Mapping Transnational Flows: The Nigerian Diaspora in Canada

The Nigerian diaspora in Canada is one of the largest ethnic minority groups from Sub-Saharan Africa today. Nigeria is the most populous country on the continent of Africa. Its population is estimated to be 201 million people. It is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious country. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages. There are three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria: Hausa (27.4%), Yoruba (21%) and Igbo (18%). Christianity and Islam are the dominant faiths, but indigenous religious traditions also persist.

In the early 1970s and 1980s, a significant number of Nigerian citizens emigrated from the country to different parts of the world. The literature indicates that social, economic, and political circumstances, ranging from insecurity to studies and work have influenced these transnational migrations. In recent decades, however, Nigerians have emigrated to European and Western countries for four main reasons: the pursuit of higher education, search for better economic opportunities, escape from persecution, and tourism. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also

known as Nigerian-Biafran War, contributed significantly to the dispersion of Nigerian citizens during that era.

There are approximately 20 million Nigerians living in diaspora today. A significant number of them live in European, North American, and African countries, such as the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and South Africa (UNESCO 2009). Although the US remains the primary destination country for many Nigerian migrants to North America, it is not always their final destination. A considerable number of Nigerian migrants often relocate to neighbouring countries, such as Canada, depending on circumstances upon arrival in the US. An estimated 51,800 Nigerian immigrants live in Canada today (Statistics Canada 2016). Statistics Canada (2016) reports that “over half of all immigrants (61.4%) and recent immigrants (56.0%) in Canada” reside in five provinces, notably Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Quebec. Another important revelation from the 2016 Census is that while “immigrants represented 46.1% of Toronto’s population” and “40.8% of Vancouver’s” population, they make up only “23.4% of Montreal’s” population. Africa ranked second as a source continent for immigrants to Canada in 2019. African-born immigrants represented 8.5% of the foreign-born population. Of this number, Nigeria was one of the top five countries of African-born immigrants. Moreover, CIC News reports that “Nigerian immigration to Canada has tripled in recent years and is poised to further increase post coronavirus” (El-Assal 2020): “In 2019, Nigeria became the fourth-leading source country of new immigrants to Canada, behind India, China, and the Philippines.” In her book, *The African Diaspora*, Toyin Falola (2013) accordingly notes that,

The new African diaspora is transforming the American landscape. Its members are everywhere as migrant workers in diverse professions, including nurses, doctors, and pharmacists in hospitals and clinics; professors in universities; and engineers and researchers. They are everywhere in low-paid labor, including cab drivers, janitors, and

maids. They are part of the commercial landscape as storeowners, hairdressers, and barbers. They are part of the physical landscape in all of the major cities, and can be found in airports, hotels, and other service industries. They are a visible part of the cultural landscape. The majority of them speak English with an accent and use multiple languages that can connect them to their African ethnicities and identities while their occupations, locations, and interactions occur in the context of a globalized world (255-6).

As Myra Georgiou (2006, 2) notes, “[d]iasporic peoples have a significant cultural, social and economic presence in advanced capitalist societies, even though this presence is not always acknowledged for its social significance and cultural and economic contribution,” and although the Nigerian diaspora in Canada accounts for a small size of the population, they have made – and continue to make – major inroads in Canadian society.

Race and Ethnicity in the Media

In Western and European media landscapes, Africa has historically been portrayed as an underdeveloped, corrupt, and poor continent inundated with economic and political instability. In the same light, African people are depicted in these “mediascapes” (Appadurai 1990) as primitive, poor, fraudulent, violent, and homogenous, to mention a few. But the issue is, the images of Africa and its people in the media are, in most part, stereotypical. They do not reflect social realities in the geographical context portrayed. Rather, the negative media coverage of Africa and its people impede public understanding of the region, including the landscape, ethnocultural diversity, rich natural resources, and sociopolitical systems. This situation has caused a lot of people, especially mainstream population to become, not only apprehensive about, but also advance their racist agenda towards people of African ancestry. The case of the African diaspora in Quebec comes readily to mind.

Representations of Black Canadians in Quebecois Context

In Canada and in Quebec especially, Black Canadians are often labelled as outsiders and cultural others. For this reason, they are poorly represented, invisible and excluded in civil society (Smith 2010; Jiwani 2010; Ogbuagu 2012; Henry, Dua, James, Kobayashi, Li, Ramos, and Smith 2017). Black Canadians make significant contributions to social, cultural, and economic developments in Canadian society (Statistics Canada 2016). Yet, members of this racialized community are consistently underrepresented, marginalized, and excluded compared to those from non-racialized communities (Smith 2010; Jiwani 2010; Henry et al. 2017). This is evident in the areas of education, social housing, healthcare, social services, correctional services, and more.

In 2016, the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent reported that, "across Canada many people of African descent continue to live in poverty and poor health, have low educational attainment, and are overrepresented at all levels of the criminal justice system" (see para.13). The report also indicated that, "Members of the African Diaspora face unique forms of discrimination. The educated population struggles to gain recognition for skills and degrees earned overseas, often working below their level of competency and qualification. Those who choose to re-educate themselves in Canada do so at great financial and personal cost" (see para. 25).

Canada's foreign credential recognition system that requires immigrants to meet certain labour conditions is indeed a major pain point for many Black Canadians. Today, an alarming number of foreign-trained Black Canadians in regulated occupations, including medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, accountants, and architects are concentrated in low paying jobs below their position. Those in non-regulated occupations are either employed as nursing home workers or as general workers, janitors, and securities in different companies. Several Nigerian immigrants are also self-

employed. This small group of immigrants either operate grocery stores (“depanneurs”) or taxi business. These revelations confirm that Black Canadians are highly marginalized because of the politics of exclusion, pervasive in Canada and in Quebec today.

Locating the Nigerian Diaspora in Quebecois Context

Tettey and Puplampu (2005) argue that positionality can influence the way individuals and groups negotiate identity and belonging. Positionality can also influence the degree to which individuals and groups participate in society. This insight speaks volumes about the Nigerian immigrant community in Montreal, Quebec, situated at the intersections of several axes of discrimination – as immigrants, as allophones, and as racialized communities. These axes of discrimination have historically fueled systemic discrimination against racialized and minoritized people in Quebec society. As Ogbuagu (2012) argues, “[t]he main fact is that in Canada, the English and French dichotomy appears to agree on one thing, which is the assignment of an outsider status to those “bereft” of the French and Anglo-Saxon lineage” (2). For such reasons, the Nigerian diaspora is often underrepresented or misrepresented in Canada and in Quebec especially, making it difficult to evaluate their level of integration.

In a 2012 study on the Nigerian diaspora in Quebec, Ogbuagu found a gap between the way in which Nigerian immigrants are perceived and the way they view themselves (identity, situatedness, categorization) in Quebec society. He found that “[a]lthough Blacks in Canada are not monolithic, the Canadian and provincial governments have for the purposes of control, assigned them a monolithic, simplistic and highly malleable status due to imposing a single “Black” category or tag on all those with dark skin color” (4). Ogbuagu adds, “[i]n the case of Nigerian or other Black youth, it is impossible to evaluate the extent to which they have integrated,

through the occurrence of healthy family relationships, adaptation to the host country's normative ways of life, as well as the youth's capacity to successfully live and conduct activities of daily living in the new society" (16).

In *The Spectacle of the "Other,"* Stuart Hall (1997) argues that signifying practices such as "othering" can result in stereotypical representation, marginalization, and discrimination against minority populations. In Canada and in Quebec, Nigerian immigrants are indeed disadvantaged in the contexts of Canadian and Quebecois public and private institutions (Tettey and Pupilampu 2005; Ogbuagu 2012). This is evident in the areas of education, social housing, healthcare, social services, correctional services, and more.

Although the othering of Black Canadians is by no means a new development, the realities in which members of this community live and operate in Canada and in Quebec are often overlooked and downplayed in discussions of immigration and diaspora. In the past decade, the public conversation about the lived experiences of Black Canadians and other people of colour has sadly been characterized by absences and silences, and when they are addressed, they are mostly shrouded by "discourses of denial" (Jiwani 2006). As Jiwani also observed,

The stigmatization, exclusion and overall lack of a sense of belonging that result from these strategies of containment contribute to a vulnerability to fictions of assimilation and, more obviously, to a continued marginalized existence where one is constantly attempting to fit in. This process is rendered all the more difficult by the surveillance of racialized groups – as threats to the economic, social, and cultural order (58-9).

The othering of members of this community in Quebec today raises questions about the future of Quebec's immigration policy and the future of racial and ethnic minorities in this society. The exclusion of Black Canadians from public institutions can result in a poor sense of identity and belonging, hindering the integration and full participation of this community. In a 2016 report on

the African diaspora, the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (2016) observed that "[m]embers of the African Diaspora face unique forms of discrimination. The educated population struggles to gain recognition for skills and degrees earned overseas, often working below their level of competency and qualification. Those who choose to re-educate themselves in Canada do so at great financial and personal cost." The use of "language, ethnic origin and practices, or religion" (Jiwani 2006, 91) to construct otherness with respect to Black Canadians and other people of colour has resulted in hate crimes and bigotry in Quebec society in recent years. Unfortunately, a lot of people of African origin are often labelled as outsiders and cultural others. The concern is that these negative appellations have huge implications for the victims' mental health and more.

Today, more than two-thirds of the Nigerian immigrant population are underemployed and struggling in Quebec's labour market. Nigerian immigrants fulfil an important role in Quebec's workplace, from social and health services to law enforcement and correctional services. In a 2005 study on the conditions of African Canadian women in Edmonton, Yesufu found a major gap in terms of access to social resources between these women and their Canadian-Born counterparts. She observed that the women studied do not have gainful employment despite their qualifications, as a result of labour market discrimination.

In a 2010 study of income levels between racialized and non-racialized Canadians, Mikal Skuterud found earnings gap between racialized men and non-racialized men across generations of Canadians. He found that racialized men earn less than non-racialized men. He also found that racialized women earn less than non-racialized women. The data from the 2016 census indicates income disparity that disproportionately benefits non-racialized groups. These revelations correlate with Ogbuagu's findings in his 2012 study of the Nigerian diaspora in Quebec. In his

study, Ogbuagu found that “[w]hen these parents arrived in Canada, a lot of them experienced [and some of them still do] labor related discrimination. This was ostensibly based upon the immigrants’ foreign degrees, which many administrators in government and the labor market have been complicit in and would prefer to call lack of ‘Canadian experience’” (14). Over the years, a significant number of African Canadians have sadly been deprived of gainful employment as a result of this misguided administrative clause requiring new immigrants to have “Canadian experience.” This situation raises an important question: How can someone, born and raised outside Canada, have Canadian experience prior to their immigration to this context? As an African Canadian, my experience of integration and survival was complex on the basis of race, ethnicity, and - skin colour. In what follows, I bring my experience growing up in Nigeria and settlement history to bear on this issue.

Researcher’s Emigration Story

I was born and raised in the southern region of Nigeria. I was the sixth of eight siblings. Dad worked as an elementary school headmaster and mom worked as a day trader. Both were hard workers. They worked hard to make sure my siblings and I get a better quality of life, including education. Both believed that education is key to a successful future. For this reason, they worked hard to cater for our basic needs during our developmental stages. I completed my primary, secondary, and post-secondary education in Nigeria.

During his teaching career, my father was privileged to be transferred, at intervals, to different schools within the region. These relocations provided opportunities for my family to live in different towns and make friends with people of different ethnicities. These encounters also

allowed us to experience different cultural values and lifestyles, some of which I still cherish to this day.

In early 1997, I emigrated on S-1 visa to the United States. My eldest sibling and her spouse had helped me earn admission to university in the US. I felt elated at the news about my admission, and most importantly, the prospect of traveling overseas to pursue my personal and academic dreams. I was also excited at the opportunity to tap from the so-called “American dream” as much as circumstances would permit. When I arrived in the US, I was enthralled with almost everything - the landscape, infrastructure, picturesque, people, and so on. I was also thrilled with my new life in diaspora. With support from my family and friends I integrated into the host context much faster than I had anticipated. During my time in the US, I was privileged to study and work alongside people of different races and ethnicities.

Prior to completing my graduate studies in the US, I got accepted as a permanent resident in Canada. I eventually relocated to Montreal, Quebec in 2002. Like many new immigrants, my experiences of migration and settlement were mixed with excitement and culture shock. It is common for new immigrants to become disoriented when they arrive in unfamiliar terrains. In my case, I took solace in knowing that the US and Canada have a lot in common with my country of origin (Nigeria) – culturally, economically, politically, and more. For example, these countries are melting pots in terms of racial, ethnic, and cultural assemblages. Multiculturalism is therefore integral to these nation states. All three are also capitalist nations. This means the production apparatuses in these countries are privately owned. In addition, they practice democratic system of government. In a democratic system the citizens hold the power to rule through elected representatives. Despite these commonalities, these countries are different in many respects, especially in terms of the values their citizens live by. In the US and Canada, for example, the

literature indicates that people place value on a set of attributes, including individualism, competitiveness, egalitarianism, and independence. The basic assumption is that these values are necessary to ensure fairness, and in so doing, facilitate growth in society. Unlike the US and Canada, a lot of people place more value on collectivism, collaboration and hospitality in Africa. The main emphasis is on group dynamic (community) rather than the self (individual). This dichotomy between Western and African cultural values and practices was a culture shock, so to speak.

A significant body of literature has shown that migrants/immigrants have different experiences of migration and integration. Some integrate easily into the culture and lifestyles in the host society, others find it hard because of the feeling of alienation, loss, and nostalgia post-migration. As a result, a lot of immigrants rely on the community's media to mitigate this feeling of alienation and also bring meaning into their lives. As an insider I am transplanting my experience growing up in Nigeria and settlement history into this setting in unique ways. The objective is to bring my personal insider experience to bear on immigrants' experiences and struggle for survival in the host countries. Transplanting my experience and settlement history also allows me to show how these elements have influenced my interest in understanding, not only the intersection between ethnic media and minority, but also media-audience relationships. The profile of Nigerian immigrants in Canada and Quebecois contexts is rich and complex but often fraught, usually due to issues of representation. My study therefore highlights the way the minority medium of Nollywood acts – and could act – as a useful tool of cultural representation.

Anti-Black Racism in the Neoliberal Era: The Case of Nigerian Immigrants in Quebec

In the past years, researchers have offered ample evidence of anti-black racism in Canadian and Quebec societies, from culture to policies and practices (Smith 2010; Jiwani 2006, 2010; Gagnon and Jiwani 2012; Henry et al. 2017, and more). Anti-black racism can be exclusionary actions, such as racial prejudice, discrimination, marginalization and systemic exclusion of people of African ancestry owing to historical associations with slavery and colonialism. It also involves stereotyping, hate acts and crimes directed at members of the Black community. Recent years have seen a significant increase in hate acts and crimes against people of African ancestry, not only in Canada and Quebec contexts, but in North America in general. This is evident in the recent killings of several Black folks in the US, including Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Rayshard Brooks, and many more across Canada. While the crucial issue of race and racism continues to dominate headlines in US and Canadian mediascapes, black Canadians continue to experience different manifestations of racial discrimination and other exclusionary practices in society. As the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has acknowledged, “Black Canadians live this reality every single day” (see CBC News June 2, 2020), although Quebec’s Premier Francois Legault denies the existence of system racism in Quebec context amid reported cases of hate acts and crimes against racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups in the past months. To a large extent, Premier Legault’s denial of systemic racism in Quebec poses a huge challenge to the ongoing campaign aimed at eradicating systemic racism in Canadian and Quebec contexts, and beyond. One of the underlying assumptions in this study is that ethnic media can be utilized, not only as a medium of representation, but also a tool to confront racial prejudice directed at racialized communities. My study therefore highlights the way the ethnic medium of Nollywood acts – and could act – as a useful tool of decolonization and cultural (re)presentation.

Diasporic Nigerians and their Media

For diasporic communities, films are important for keeping in touch with home cultures. Films offer opportunities for transmitting cultural heritage and social values in regard for others and self-respect; the definition of relationships and priorities of problem-resolution strategies are negotiated through films (2008). But more than this, films are ways of imagining, regimes of representation, which as Nollywood has shown, can empower people to speak for themselves, and insist on being present where access was once denied.

Oluyinka Esan (2011, 143)

Studies of the interactions between contemporary diasporas and transnational minority media, especially in the past decade, have yielded relevant information about the intersecting relationships between diasporas and their media in contemporary times. Scholars (e.g., Naficy 1993, 1999; Georgiou 2002, 2010; Carpenter 2011) have highlighted the role of minority media in the production and reproduction of such minority cultures. In the case of diasporic Nigerians, the Nollywood medium can be utilized to reflect Nigerian history, customs and traditions, cultural values, and popular culture, with a focus on shaping understandings of the particularities of Nigerian society and cultural specificities. Reflection of the realities of Nigerian society through the prism of Nollywood can help build awareness and foster better relationships in the diasporic world, by promoting cultural dialogue around the critical issues of race and ethnicity, culture, identity, and belonging.

As Shehina Fazal (2018) observes, “[m]edia and communication play an important role in the social and cultural aspects of the diaspora communities and facilitate the notion of ‘diasporic spaces’ for communities living away from home” (34). In *Useful Cinema* (2012), Acland and Wasson further remind us that “cinema has long been implicated in a broad range of cultural and institutional functions, from transforming mass education to fortifying suburban domestic ideals” (2). As far as the Nigerian diaspora is concerned, Nollywood is the primary medium of this kind.

Nigerian diaspora communities around the world use this transnational media. Nollywood films are predominantly produced in Nigeria and imported into transnational spaces through a variety of platforms - from satellite and cable to YouTube and Netflix. A few new Nollywood films are being coproduced in Nigeria and the diaspora. As Arthur accordingly notes (2017, 6), “Nollywood is transnational and diasporic,” given such patterns of production.

Today, Nollywood filmmakers and African diasporas alike use a variety of networks facilitated by digital technologies and satellite to transmit, circulate, and access Nollywood productions on a global scale. This shift has made it possible for people in Africa and the global African diaspora to access Nollywood films at a distance. These new global realities make the need to understand the role of media like Nollywood ever more pressing. In the following section, I map the key issues addressed in this research project.

The Nigerian Film Industry: A Retrospective View

Over the years, the Nigerian film industry known as Nollywood has played a significant role in the representation of Nigerian culture, identity, and society in transnational spaces. With recent surges in transnational migrations, Nollywood has become an important tool for cultural representation and diasporic communication. Research suggests that Nollywood has increasing appeal and meaning to people of African ancestry living in diaspora. In spite of the growing body of literature on the circulation of Nollywood films in transnational spaces, few empirical studies have been done to date on the reception of Nollywood films within Nigerian diasporic communities spread across space, using diasporic audiences as a critical lens of inquiry (Detokumbo-Bello 2010; Agba and Ineji 2011; Babson 2013). Understanding of audience

reception and interpretation of Nollywood film within Nigerian diasporic communities can help shed light on the significance of this media for Africans living in diaspora.

David Morley's (1980) study of nationwide audience and Jacqueline Bobo's (1995) study of black cinema and audience reception are critical to this study. In his study of nationwide audience (1980), Morley observes that an audience reads and decodes meaning of media narrative from three distinct positions – dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings. He found that cultural proximity plays a significant role in the way audiences make meaning of the narrative. What he also found is that an audience is more receptive to specific media that can satisfy their needs than others. Bobo's (1995) analysis of black women and audience reception aimed to understand how the audience studied read and interpret a specific black cinema in context. She found that the audience studied read and interpret the narrative the same way as Morley's nationwide audience. Like Morley, Bobo observes the respondents were receptive to the film because of cultural proximity and practices they can relate to.

As many have underscored (Brunsdon and Morley 1978; Hobson 1980; Hall 1980; Morley 1980; Brunsdon 1981; Radway 1984; Fiske 1987, 1992; Moores 1993; Brown 1994; Bobo 1995, Morley and Robins 1995; Gillespie 1995; Ang 1996; Brunsdon and Spigel 1997; Esan 2008, 2011), reception ethnography is a useful method for gaining understanding of how a given community consumes, interprets and negotiates meaning with media texts in different contexts. As Ang (1996) notes, "reception analysis has intensified our interest in the ways in which people actively and creatively make their own meanings and create their own culture, rather than passively absorb pre-given meanings imposed upon them...reception analyses are an important step in the development of a more full-fledged ethnographic understanding of media consumption" (114).

Although the existing literature on transnational Nollywood presents a viable theoretical framework to understand the processes and patterns of transnationalization, as well as circulation of Nollywood contents in transnational spaces, there is a paucity of empirical research exploring how diasporic Nigerians make meaning with Nollywood culture and assessing the ramifications. Discourses around African screen media and especially Nollywood have mainly been concerned with the structural rather than the underlying ideological properties of the films. This is evidenced in the variety of studies in which Nollywood is depicted as an informal, fragmented and disorganized industry. Nollywood's communicative infrastructures and modes of film production have likewise been portrayed as deficient (see Larkin 1997, 2004, 2008; Barrot 2009; Miller 2010, 2012, 2016; Jedlowski 2012; Arthur 2017). As Okome (2010, 260) has argued, though, such negative critique of Nollywood culture has obscured the significance of this media as a popular mode of expression. Nollywood therefore remains largely misrepresented and misunderstood in media and scholarly circles.

Brian Larkin (2004, 2008), in his analyses of Nollywood's infrastructures, focused on the medium's informal nature and the context in which the films are produced. He found that Nollywood's informal character derived from its poor organizational structures and a poor economy. Similarly, Jade Miller (2010), in her analysis of Nollywood, described the medium as a "local sensation" for a national audience whose mission (and vision) are to certain degree ambiguous. I argue that rather than being simply an informal/local medium of entertainment, Nollywood is a fundamental mechanism of diasporic communication that informs global ideas about Nigerian society and culture. Ramon Lobato (2010) concentrated on Nollywood's informal economies and highlighted the implications for the medium's growth. In this study, he identified

several potential factors that can hinder Nollywood's growth, including but not limited to, the media's poor infrastructure and illicit activities such as the pirating of Nollywood films.

In a recent study, anthropologist Jonathan Haynes (2016) observes that,

Nollywood audience prefers Nigerian to American films even though the local products are somewhat more expensive to buy and the American film's budget may be more than a thousand times greater. Part of Nollywood's appeal is that it provides images of specifically African forms of wealth and consumption; embroidered cloth, food served in covered plates, pampered African bodies, walled compounds with gatemen, expensive cars driven through familiar tropical landscape, African languages or African-inflected English spoken into the latest cell phones. This Africanization of the pleasures of vicarious consumption helps drive Nollywood's phenomenal success across African and the African diaspora (45).

Although studies such as these have deepened insight into Nollywood's industrial structure and film culture, they have become obsolete given recent shifts in Nollywood. It has also been observed that many of the findings on Nollywood were based on theoretical reasoning rather than empirical knowledge and evidence. As Andre Cavalcante, Andrea Press, and Kathrine Sender (2017) caution, "Contemporary scholars must be prepared for a new media environment in which our earlier equation of specific media with particular 'spheres' of life such as the public and private no longer makes sense" (5). A case in point is Nollywood's exponential growth in recent decades. Even though recent mappings of Nollywood's topography, including its aesthetic forms and narratives, as well as its production quality reveal that Nollywood has evolved from a local medium to a global phenomenon (Okome 2010, 2011, 2014; Haynes 2014, 2016; Calvacante 2017; Larkin 2019; and more), many scholars remain partial and simplistic in their analysis of Nollywood. As Larkin (2019) has observed:

The aesthetic form and financial infrastructure of African popular film has transformed in recent years leading to a revision of the paradigms for thinking African screen media...In both film production and the scholarly analyses of African screen media there has been a recognition that something has fundamentally changed. The mode of productive forces has shifted, the aesthetic forms they produce are different, and the technical, financial and

institutional infrastructures that organize film production are not reproducing themselves but are in the midst of a deep transformation (105).

The question that must be posed here is this: Why have scholars in this category underestimated these important shifts in African media landscape, including transformations in physical, technological, and financial infrastructure? As Larkin (2019) rightly observes, “The task for scholars has been how to think this change and the split between these new forces and older forms of African popular cinema” (ibid). This task would oblige scholars and researchers to investigate the transformations in this emerging media landscape in more depth. To achieve this task, Larkin (2019) suggests that researchers would need “a new critical language [and vocabulary?] to address this transformation...one that moves away from the older militant manifestoes of African cinema as well as the popular culture that replaced them” (ibid).

As a result of the dynamics described above, scholars (Okome 2010; Uwah 2011; Afolayan 2014) argue that Nollywood has been largely misrepresented in contemporary discourse on minority media with negative consequences. As Afolayan (2014) observes, “The Nigerian cinematic industry has been presented and represented in critical discourse as so many things, often negative” (18). Okome (2010, 260) similarly contends that mainstream critiques of African screen media (especially Nollywood) have contributed to “beclouding” the significance of these popular modes of expression with negative implications: media scholars and critics have more or less “downplayed” the importance of this phenomenon on the continent of Africa and beyond.

A close look at the existing literature on Nollywood reveals that mainstream and non-mainstream scholars alike have been involved in such negative critiques of Nollywood culture. The majority of scholars in this category have tended to interpret the dynamics of Nollywood either through a “glocalized” lens or a rigorously universal lens, rather than from Afro-centric standpoints. This approach to the study of Nollywood is problematic because it prevents

researchers from capturing the subtle nuances of this popular mode of expression. This is one reason scholars (e.g., Okome 2010, Uwah 2011, and more) argue for more “nuanced” research on Nollywood to ensure the findings being reported are valid and credible. This study joins such calls for a new approach to the study of Nollywood - one that can allow researchers to concentrate on the media’s material culture alongside the underlying ethical and ideological frameworks. “Ideology” in the context of this study refers to the core values linked to Nigerian society, including customs and traditions, belief systems, myths, and common understandings of the social world. There is a flow of ideology in Nollywood films, yet a significant number of scholars have overlooked the nuances of Nollywood soft power in contemporary times.

As Jonathan Haynes (2010, 105) has observed, Nollywood has been accorded a minute space in the literature. He also highlighted “a lack of a natural disciplinary home for the study of the videos” in academic departments across the world, resulting in a gap in mainstream understanding of the basic ideas transmitted through this medium. In this study, I argue that understanding the global function of Nollywood requires attention to the ways diasporic audiences engage with such ideological elements. Nico Carpentier (2011) observes that, “[p]articipation in the media deals with participation in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media organizational decision-making (structural participation)” (68). In the case of Nollywood, participation revolves around the audience agency in consumption, reading and negotiating meaning. Any analysis of Nollywood culture is therefore incomplete if diasporic perspectives are excluded. The basic argument underpinning this study is that Nollywood plays a significant role in reflecting Nigerian cultures and identity, but also as a conduit of diasporic communication. The notions of ethnicity and culture encoded in Nollywood films inform understandings of Nigerian cultural values and help define ethnic/cultural identity and belonging.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores the reception and interpretation of Nollywood films within the Nigerian diasporic community in Montreal, to understand why and how this community engages with Nollywood in constructing identity and developing a sense of belonging in diaspora. As noted above, despite the well-known relationships between Nollywood and Nigerians living in diaspora, the ways in which niche audiences read and interpret Nollywood media texts have not been explicitly analyzed. Although there is a huge body of literature on the role of Nollywood in the globalization of Nigerian cultures and the increasing appeal of Nollywood culture to its audiences in the global African diaspora, most of the findings, with a few exceptions, are based on theoretical rather than empirical evidence (see, for ex., Jedlowski 2013; Santanera 2013; Ajibade 2013; Becker 2013; Bryce 2013; Mistry and Ellapen 2013; Samyn 2013). As Angela Keppler (2004) argues, though, “[w]hat matters in empirical studies is how specific products are actually experienced, in other words, what free spaces for reception are used or dispensed, within which contexts and in what ways” (106). For these reasons and to this end, this study addresses the following empirical research question:

1. How does transnational Nigerian media (Nollywood) inform and shape understandings of Nigerian cultural values, identity and society, and to what extent do its cultural representations reflect the normative reality of Nigerian society?

Since this is a broad question, the following sub-questions are explored:

2. How do diasporic Nigerians read and make meaning of the cultural representations of Nollywood films, and what are the implications for how they negotiate and sustain identity, and develop a sense of belonging in Canadian society?

3. How are notions of identity and belonging represented in Nollywood films, and how do people relate to and interpret them within the framework of diaspora?
4. How do Nollywood films engender a sense of a pan-Nigerian/pan-African identity (one that transcends local ethnic, religious, and other affiliations)?
5. How might Nollywood be central to facilitating inter/cultural literacy and sustainability within Nigerian diasporic communities?

These are the research questions that guided my ethnographic data collection in participant observation and interviews. The contention is that the Nigerian diaspora is an important “interpretive community” whose agency is manifested in the ways they interpret and make meaning of Nollywood “texts.” An interpretive community is a category of people that have a common experience of a specific phenomenon (in this case Nollywood) and can make meaning of that phenomenon through an interpretive lens from different subjective locations (Fish 1980; Radway 1988; McQuail 2010). The Nigerian diaspora also fulfil important roles as coproducers, influencers, and consumers of Nollywood films. These subjective positions put them in a unique position to offer informative perspectives on the significance of this medium that holds such special appeal and meaning to people in Africa and the global African diaspora. Audience agency is demonstrated in three main areas: reception, interpretation and meaning making. As Naila Kabeer (2001) notes:

Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or ‘the power with-in’. While agency often tends to be operationalized as ‘individual decision-making’, particularly in the mainstream economic literature, in reality, it encompasses a much wider range of purposive actions, including bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation,

subversion, resistance and protest as well as the more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. Agency also encompasses collective, as well as individual, reflection and action (21).

As Kabeer further notes,

Agency has both positive and negative meanings in relation to power. In the positive sense of the 'power to', it refers to people's capacity to define their own life-choices and pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others. Agency can also be exercised in the more negative sense of 'power over', in other words, the capacity of an actor or category of actors to over-ride the agency of others, for instance, through the use of violence, coercion and threat (ibid).

Audience agency as a specific mode of media involvement underscores the need for active participation (Eichner 2014, 85). In regard to decoding media texts, Hall (1980) observes that a hierarchy of interpretations with preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings is at work in the process of encoding and decoding media texts. Hall notes that media agency is manifested when the texts are deliberately encoded with visual and non-visual codes that echo the producers' intentions, while audience agency derives from the ability of the audience to actively decode and make meaning of the mediated texts. In this research project, I used the participants' individual and collective agency to analyze the significance of the phenomenon to the community.

The primary audience for this study, in turn, includes academics (e.g., scholars and researchers) and students across different disciplines, including but not limited to media and communication studies and migration and diaspora studies, who will be interested in the topic and the key findings. My secondary audience includes African and non-African diasporas who are avid consumers of Nollywood films, because of their interest in African cultural specificities. This study could also be useful to audiences such as governments and policymakers (in Africa and the wider diasporic world) who are stakeholders in cultural industries.

Original Contribution/Significance of the Study

This study breaks new ground and addresses a scholarly gap by using reception ethnography to investigate the reception of Nollywood films within a Nigerian diasporic community. It thereby makes a significant contribution to the scholarly research and literature of media and communication studies from a marginal/non-mainstream perspective. As Geertz (1973) reminds us, “[s]tudies do build on other studies, not in the sense that they take up where the others leave off, but in the sense that, better informed and better conceptualized, they plunge more deeply into the same things” (25). This study is an attempt to incorporate alternative lenses and voices (i.e., diasporic perspectives) into the conversation around transnational Nollywood as an ethnic medium and its value for Nigerians and Africans living in diaspora.

The target audience of this study includes faculty and students, policy makers, Nollywood insiders (producers and filmmakers), and African and non-African audiences. As Neuman (2014) notes, “[m]uch basic research lacks practical applications in the short term, but it builds a foundation for knowledge and broad understanding that has an impact on many issues, policy areas, or areas of study” (26). The research findings presented here have implications for future scholarly research, practice and policy. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings add to scholarship on African screen media in the domain of media and communication studies. Since the methods and findings are generalizable and transferable, they can also be replicated and applied to future research.

Filmmakers may also benefit from this research: film and media experts argue that film producers who understand their audiences are more likely to produce films that appeal to them (Moore 1993; Okome 2007c; Obiaya 2010; Acland 2011; Schröder 2011). The findings collected here can help to deepen awareness of the changing tastes and needs of Nollywood’s global

audiences, including their consumption habits. This can allow producers to make films that resonate meaningfully with target audiences. A major challenge for Nollywood today is outreach to transnational audiences, including especially the younger demographics that tend to prefer Hollywood. Finally, a better understanding of the Nollywood medium can help racialized communities make informed decisions about how to use Nollywood's cultural resources in negotiating and sustaining identity and a sense of belonging in diaspora.

From a policy perspective, these findings can benefit government and organizations in terms of making policy recommendations that inform better media productions. The Nigerian government can leverage the Nollywood medium to better articulate Nigerian culture, identity, and society on the global stage. Media and communication literature indicates that cultural industries have indeed contributed to shaping the public images and public policies of many countries today, including the US, Canada and the European Union. Research also suggests that an increasing number of nation-states, especially in the developing world, can use their cultural industries as platforms to foster intercultural/international relations and promote their foreign policy interests.

Reflections on Researcher's Positionality in the Research Process

In most studies, the researcher is considered the primary instrument of data collection (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Bourke 2014; Creswell and Creswell 2018). For this reason, scholars emphasize the need for the researcher to map out his/her role and place in the community to be studied from the onset. The assumption is that positionality can influence the research process and its outcomes. Positionality refers to a researcher's position/location in relation to the research subject in the context being studied. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), since "qualitative

research is interpretive research, the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (260).

One important issue that I confronted as an immigrant doing this research in the Quebec context, especially during the research design phase, concerns my positionality as an insider of the community studied as well as my orientation as a researcher. This research was conducted within the Nigerian diasporic community in Montreal of which I am an insider as a Nigerian Canadian. My insider position stems from my nationality, ethnicity, and culture. As an immigrant, I also share migration and settlement experiences with the participants. Aside from my demographic profile, I also live and work in the research community. My position in this community makes me an insider/participant-researcher in the context of this study.

The insider research tradition is rooted in the fields of anthropology and sociology, although it has gained currency in different disciplines (including media and communication studies) in recent years (Sikes and Potts 2008). Insider research is what a researcher conducts in a specific organization or community (e.g., ethnic, cultural, gender, and class) in which the researcher is also an insider. An insider researcher is someone who understands the local culture (e.g., cultural heritage, norms and values, cultural beliefs, and popular lifestyles). As a Nigerian-Canadian and a member of Montreal’s Nigerian diaspora community, I have a strong connection with the community members, and also a firm understanding of the different ethnic groups represented in this study and their local cultures. I have the cultural repertoire and capital to understand what the community members are saying. I am also familiar with some of their lived experiences of migration, settlement, and integration in diaspora. To a large extent, this insider position allowed me to develop personal relationships with the participants, and to engage and interact with them

on an informal level. This relationship was a key factor in terms of my access to privileged information relevant to my study.

Despite my insider position, I also maintained an outsider perspective to certain degree, in order to meet the set objective. My outsider perspective manifested itself in various stages, from the research design to methodology, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, and the interpretation of the findings. More importantly, this position allowed me to set parameters in my relationship with the participants during data collection phase. The outsider perspective enabled me to adopt an outsider lens when appropriate, in exploring the research topic. To a large extent, these dual positions helped to better position me in the research context, to make sure my findings were valuable, valid, and credible. Understanding my unique position in this research enabled me to be reflexive (defined below) and maintain an objective position even as I engaged with participants, to avoid being biased in my role as a researcher. This perspective was important for me in terms of being consistent throughout my research.

Many scholars (e.g., Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Bourke 2014) maintain that positionality awareness is critical because it allows researchers to define their role and place in a study. They observe that a researcher's position in a study can impact the research process and overall outcomes in significant ways, especially when it comes to achieving validity and credibility. This means positionality awareness is critical to achieving validity in qualitative research. Being a diasporic Nigerian and a member of the community being investigated, my emic and etic positions (as both an insider and an outsider) played a key role in the process of data gathering. My insider position allowed me to engage in close interaction with the participants from a more subjective position. On the other hand, my outsider position as theorist and researcher enabled me to distinguish myself from the respondents while maintaining self-reflexivity.

Overall, my insider position played a key role in the research. For example, it enabled me to identify and recruit participants. This may have been more difficult for outsider researchers confronted with the challenges of gaining access to eligible participants and obtaining consent. Aside from the issue of access, my relationship to this community also allowed me to easily acquire insider information about the participants. This strategy was valuable in determining eligibility. My positioning as an insider-researcher thus played a role in various stages of the research, and the careful application of “reflexivity” (further defined below) throughout the course of the study helped me overcome the challenges associated with the insider-research perspective.

Mapping the Context: Montreal, Quebec

This study was conducted in the Greater Montreal area, in the province of Quebec, Canada. Montreal is situated on an island in the Saint Lawrence River - “a landscape that was, in the 16th century, the Iroquoian village of Hochelaga” (Bennet 2018). Montreal as we know it today came into existence in 1642 (Linteau 2007). The population of Montreal is estimated to be about 1.78 million people. The city of Montreal was named after its Mount Royal, a triple-peaked hill located between the Laurentians and Appalachian Mountains. Montreal is the largest city in the French-speaking province of Quebec, and the second-largest municipality in Canada. It is predominantly French speaking. French is the primary language of communication with the secondary language being English. Montreal was purposefully chosen here for several reasons. Most importantly, it is a multicultural society with different racial and ethnic groups. The cultural mosaic includes cultures, languages, music, religion, food, and more. Due to its racial and ethnic diversity, Montreal is widely considered to be Quebec’s cultural metropolis, and immigration has played a central role in creating this multiculturalism.

Participants

The research participants are members of the Nigerian immigrant community in Montreal, Quebec. This community was chosen primarily because their positionality in Canadian and Quebecois contexts. Unlike its corresponding community in Toronto, the Nigerian immigrant community in Montreal is small, but it is also culturally diverse. It is a community connected with a country previously colonized by the British, which makes it an allophone community and therefore a double minority within Quebec where French is dominant. The community is therefore situated at the intersections of several axes of discrimination – as immigrants, as allophones, and as racialized communities.

Methodology

It is important to choose a research method that best suits the research topic and aligns the strategy of data collection with the research objective (Creswell 2013; Creswell and Poth 2017; Creswell and Creswell 2018)). In this study, I used the ethnographic methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews (focus groups/individual interviews) as my primary strategies for data collection. The interviews were then complemented with documentary research, to derive additional data from archival sources - academic, popular, film, and trade publications. This method of data triangulation provided an opportunity to collect empirical data from multiple sources rather than a single source, to improve the quality of the research project.

The purpose of the ethnographic methods is to examine, document, and analyze people, culture or society based on participant-observation (Simpson and Coleman (2017). Although these research methods are rooted in social and cultural Anthropology, they are frequently used in social science research. What is typical about the ethnographic methods is the fact that they are open-

ended, inductive, and self-reflexive (Moore 1993; Gibson 2000; Wolcott 2008; Fetterman 2010; Coleman and Simpson 2017; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). These distinctions set the ethnographic perspective apart from other qualitative methods of inquiry. Given that the focus of this dissertation is to understand the way Nollywood audiences in diaspora engage with and make meaning of media texts, the ethnographic method was appropriate because allowed me to align the process of data collection with the research objective and establish parameters in the research design and data collection.

As previous studies (e.g., Morley and Silverstone 1990; Ang 1991) have shown, reception ethnography is useful for gaining insight into media audiences' consumption habits and cultural practices in a given culture or society. Reception ethnography, in this case, enabled me to directly engage the participants and thereby acquire a more in-depth understanding of how they engage with the research phenomenon in their everyday lives. Research also suggests that the ethnographic perspective can help a researcher to maintain self-reflexivity (Wolcott 2008; Fetterman 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). In this case, my research methodology allowed me to maintain such self-reflexivity, especially during fieldwork.

According to Giddens (1990), "reflexivity is a defining characteristic of all human action. All human beings routinely 'keep in touch' with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it" (36). For this study, the reflexive approach allowed me to reflect on the intersectionality of my identity and positionality in this community. Standpoint theory for example posits that knowledge derives from power positions, and is socially situated in context (see, Harding 2004; Hartsock 2019; Haraway). As positionality/standpoint theorists (Mann 2016; May and Perry 2011; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019) note, reflexivity can impact the way researchers leverage established relationships in research. As Mann (2016) puts it, reflexivity enables a

researcher to reflect on him/herself in relation to the group being studied. This is important for the researcher in successfully mapping out their role in the research. As May and Perry (2011) and then Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) also emphasize, reflexive practice can shape the context and culture in which researchers work, and more importantly the narrative data. Roulston (2010) and May and Beth (2011) similarly underscore the importance of reflexivity in helping researchers to stay true to the research objectives without compromising pertinent data.

My experience of the community under study made it easy for me to situate myself in this research project. My reflexive stance not only allowed me to build stronger relationships with participants, but also helped me gain their trust as they enunciated their experiences with, and perspectives on, the central research phenomenon. This provided me with access to privileged information about the relationship between this community and the object of inquiry.

Alongside the benefits of the reflexive method, studies have shown challenges associated with reflexivity in qualitative research. Specifically, studies have found that reflexivity demands accountability in relation to the researcher's role and location in the research. Research also suggests this approach can lead researchers (especially inexperienced researchers) to compromise the narrative data. As some critics of reflexivity argue, an insider researcher who is a member of the community being studied can be tempted to censor or otherwise falsify information concerning the research participants or be unduly influenced, and this can lead to researcher bias (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 260). Due to these important concerns and my affiliation to the community studied, I was cognizant of my social and intellectual boundaries, which helped me to remain objective in my role (especially during field work), to ensure the reliability of the research findings. Although my cultural background, as well as my personal values and migration experiences have of course informed my motivations and my goals in this study, these cultural and social

topographies did not lead me to compromise the narrative data. Rather, they provided the tools necessary to negotiate the insider/outsider positions necessary to maintain an objective and autonomous standpoint. In a nutshell, awareness of my positionality enabled me to stay true to my research objectives without compromising the pertinent data.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. It begins with an introductory chapter that provides an overview of the research subject, the research site and community involved, the pertinent issues examined, and a description of the underlying theoretical and methodological frameworks. This chapter also provides information about how the community studied is commonly represented in the intercultural landscape (Montreal) where the research is situated, as well as introduce the research statement/problematic and the rationale for this study.

Chapter One is focused on the Nigerian contemporary film industry (Nollywood) and its film culture. Here I examine the evolution of cinema in Nigeria and the external influences that have contributed to its growth. The influence of early European merchants and the British colonial administration from the 1900s to the 1940s is highlighted, as well as that of indigenous theatre groups from the 1940s to the 1980s. Focusing on the kind of medium Nollywood is, I then describe its evolution, the kinds of filmic content it disseminates, and its popularity and reach in the globalized world.

Chapter Two focuses on the evolution of Nollywood film culture across cultural and geopolitical geographies, with an emphasis on the circulation of Nollywood films in transnational spaces and the sociocultural implications. The influence of globalization and new communication technologies – two driving forces of transborder flows – on the transnational evolution of

Nollywood serve as a point of departure. In addition, I examine Nollywood's transnational dimension, focusing on the social, cultural, and contextual elements that inform the media's transnational character. The main thesis of this chapter is that transnational Nollywood plays a central role in shaping understandings of Nigerian cultural values in transnational spaces.

Chapter Three examines the significance of the "third space" co-created by Nollywood diaspora in the imagined space of the global discursive arena. Here I focus on the nuances of this imagined space in terms of how the participants' engagement with Nollywood film shapes the dialectics of culture, identity and belonging. This chapter thereby clarifies the question of how participants' temporal experiences in this discursive space influence the way they negotiate identity and belonging in the hybrid spaces of their everyday diasporic lives.

Chapter Four analyzes Nigerian Nollywood film *The Wedding Party 1*, which was viewed and discussed by my respondents. The aim is to understand the ways in which this Nollywood film orients viewers to aspects of Nigerian culture, and how different audiences read its narratives in context.

Chapters Five and Six examine the significance of Nollywood for local diasporic audiences through the lens of focus groups and interviews. These chapters address the question of what Nollywood means to Nigerian and African immigrants in Canada, with reference to the respondents' interactive engagements. Chapter Five incorporates the findings of the focus groups and the findings from the interviews are presented in the Sixth chapter.

Chapter Seven is the concluding section. It summarizes the key issues and findings of this research, highlighting the potential implications. It also proposes future directions for research on Nollywood and more broadly on transnational ethnic media, focusing on possible areas for future investigation in line with this study.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has outlined the groundwork of my study. This includes details of the research subject, primary motivations, research problematic, research questions, design and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. This chapter also presented an overview of the research subject, and a statement of the problematic, as well as a rationale for the study. Situating the community under study allowed me to historicize and contextualize this community in terms of their social location and their primary consumption media. This outline was followed by an exploration of the Nollywood medium's development trajectories and its influence upon the community. Here I drew on themes such as diaspora, transnational flow, and transnational media as alternative media. I argued that Nollywood and diaspora media are indeed an important subject of inquiry, in this case because Nollywood provides a medium through which diasporic Nigerians engage in contemporary politics/discourses of representation in diaspora. Understanding what diasporic Nigerians make of this medium (and how and why) can therefore usefully inform practice, policy and research. In the following chapter, I turn to the story of the transnational evolution of Nollywood itself, from a "local/ethnic" to a "national/international" and eventually "global/transnational" medium.

CHAPTER 1

Nigerian Cinema: An Historical Perspective

Introduction

Radio, television, film, popular music, the Internet and social networking, and other forms and products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, including our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male and female; our conception of class, ethnicity and race, nationality, sexuality; and division of the world into categories of “us” and “them.” Media helps shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture.

Douglas Kellner (2018, 7)

This chapter focuses on the Nigerian contemporary film industry (Nollywood) and its film culture. I begin by examining the evolution of cinema in Nigeria and the external influences that have contributed to this growth. The influence of early European merchants and the British colonial administration from the 1900s to the 1940s is highlighted, as well as that of indigenous theatre groups from the 1940s to the 1980s. I then describe the evolution of Nollywood, focusing on the kind of medium it is, the kinds of filmic content it disseminates, and its popularity and reach in the globalized world. This allows me to map out the role of Nollywood in representing Nigerian society and culture, with an emphasis on the medium’s distribution patterns. I then look at academic scholarship and critique addressing Nollywood, highlighting relevant gaps in the literature. I conclude by arguing that Nollywood films bring new immediacy to the particularities and cultural specificities of Nigerian society. I also argue that Nollywood’s neoliberal conception of society and culture is a key factor in its strong appeal, particularly to the African diaspora.

The Origin and Evolution of Cinema in Nigeria

Cinema was first introduced to Nigeria in the early 1900s. Scholars have identified three major early influences on its local evolution: European merchants, the British colonial administration, and Christian missionaries. In August 1903, the European firm Balboa and Company exhibited the first film at Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos (Opubor, Nwuneli, and Oreh 1979; Okome 1991; Ekwuazi 1991; Okome and Haynes 1995). Prior to this germinal exhibition, the Nigerian public was mostly acquainted with the Colonial Film Unit's propaganda documentaries and newsreel. The British colonial administration established the CFU in 1939 as a medium to propagate its political agenda. The majority of the CFU's genres had a political orientation and privileged the colonial administration. The colonial administration used the film medium to advance its understanding of British society as a model of modernism (Shaka 2002), and to entice Africans to appreciate and participate in the administration's war projects in WW II (Olayiwola 2011). On the other hand, the Christian missionaries that operated in tandem with the colonizers also used the colonial film medium as a platform for proselytization, with a focus on converting and integrating African converts into the Christian fold (Shaka 2004, 19). In his analysis of the historical and sociocultural context of the Nigerian film industry, Femi Okiremuete Shaka therefore observes that the colonial administration deployed film as a platform to propagate its political ideals, while the Church used it to proselytize African people.

It is also important to acknowledge in this context the contribution of the indigenous theatre groups that emerged between the 1940s and 1980s. There were three dominant groups in this category: Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. These groups were formed and mainly operated along ethnic lines. The contributions of these ethnic groups to the growth of cinema in Nigeria have been widely documented, but the influence of the Yoruba travelling theatre on the evolution of cinema in

Nigeria merits special mention here. The Yoruba travelling theatre emerged from the Church in the late 1940s (Ekwuazi 1991; Adedeji and Ekwuazi 1998). Its members were known to produce folk operas based on the Bible. The group's productions used biblical themes and traditional Yoruba folklore combined with dance and music to promote religious piety (Okome 1991; Olayiwola 2011). Their religious operas were produced in the Yoruba language and exhibitions were mostly held outdoors in natural environments. Chief Hubert Ogunde, Ola Balogun, Kola Ogunmola, and Duro Ladipo were pioneering members of this travelling theatre that contributed significantly to the evolution of cinema in Nigeria. Chief Hubert Ogunde for example was a renowned actor, playwright, folklorist, and musician. In 1945, he founded the African Music Research Party, which he later named Ogunde Theatre Party in 1947. A look at Chief Ogunde's contributions to indigenous cinema will reveal the significant influence his operas had on Nigeria's postcolonial cinema.

Typically, Ogunde's company produced Bible operas that combined folklore, dance, and music to tell stories about the human condition. These productions revolved around the relationship between human beings and the supreme being, in terms of their physical and spiritual ramifications. Others revolved around mundane issues relating to the cultural and sociopolitical circumstances of postcolonial Nigeria. Ogunde's first folk opera was titled *The Garden of Eden and The Throne of God*, and premiered at the Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos, in 1944. A Lagos-based religious sect known as "The Church of the Lord" financed this folk opera. The play dealt with the "metaphorical" downfall of Adam and his subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The success of this first production inspired Ogunde to produce other folk operas in subsequent years. These included *The Black Forest and Journey to Heaven* (1945), *Strike and Hunger* (1946); *Yoruba Ronu* (Yorubas, Think!) (1964), and *King Solomon* (1947). *Strike and Hunger* was inspired

by the labour union's general strike in Lagos and *Yoruba Ronu* (1964) was a satire on the government of the Western region following a two-year ban of Ogunde's theatre company from the region. Ogunde also took advantage of the advent of television in Western Nigeria in the 1950s to produce television dramas. The success of Ogunde's travelling troupe was linked to their transition from stage to television and film. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Ogunde's travelling theatre produced several folk operas, including the film *Aiye* (1979), followed by the film *Jaiyesinmi* (1980) and *Ayanmo* (1989).

As their name indicates, the Yoruba travelling theatre troupes toured Western Nigeria (and some parts of West Africa). Typically, the troupes transported their productions in a van containing a 16mm projector, a reel of 16mm film, and a picture screen (Olayiwola 2011, 18). The fact that their language of communication was Yoruba made the soap operas successful among Yoruba audiences. As the unfolding of events described below shows, these soap operas not only sparked interest in Nigeria's indigenous cinema, but they also encouraged the evolution of contemporary cinema in Nigeria.

The first Nigerian films were produced in the 1960s through the contributions of indigenous filmmakers such as Ola Balogun, Hubert Ogunde, and Adeyemi Afolayan (Adesokan 2012; Endong 2017). Most of these productions explored the historical, traditional, and political situations of post-independence Nigeria through the prism of cinema. Hubert Ogunde's Traveling Cinema productions, which were major sensations during the era, provided an opportunity for the Nigerian public to engage media from an indigenous standpoint. As Foubiri Ayakoroma (2014) observes, "the soap opera tradition provided a good breeding ground for the fertilisation of Nollywood in Nigeria" (48). It provided many people with the opportunity to embark on successful careers in media, from scriptwriting and acting to producing.

As two of the leading Nollywood scholars Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome (1998) emphasize, “The strongest element in the twenty-year span of Nigerian celluloid film production was the work of the artists from the Yoruba traveling theatre tradition, and they still dominate at least numerically, in current video production” (107). Okome (2007, 2) also observes, the social and economic contingencies of the 1980s compelled some directors to resort to more economical means such as recording their theatrical productions on VHS cassettes. He points out that video technology did not only allow these theatre directors to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn, but it also enabled them to track audience patronage in urban areas. The first full-fledged Nigerian feature film *Kongi’s Harvest* was produced in the 1970s. The film adapted a 1965 play written by Nigeria’s Nobel prizewinner for literature Wole Soyinka. *Kongi’s Harvest* caused a sensation in Nigeria’s emerging media landscape as a result of its appeal to national audiences. It aroused a public interest in Afro-centric rather than Euro-centric films. The next section traces the contribution of these trends to the emergence of the Nollywood phenomenon.

The Contemporary Nigerian Film Industry: Nollywood

From being a mere curiosity, Nollywood has become something of the most successful entrepreneurial business in the history of visual arts in Africa, and like its American counterpart (for that is exactly what it actually is), it has defined a new visual culture in Nigeria and indeed in Africa. This visual culture is now part of the cultural beingness in Africa and the African diasporas in Europe and North America.

Onookome Okome (2007, 6)

The emergence of the contemporary Nigerian film industry, popularly known as “Nollywood,” was a milestone in the history of cinema on the continent of Africa. As previous studies have shown, the Nollywood industry emerged without formal structures (Haynes 1995) and “outside of formal global networks” (Miller 2016). The Nigerian actress Uche Jumbo

described Nollywood as “a child of circumstance, because Nigeria at this stage [was] cut across a bridge with Western world and tradition” (Addelman and Mallal 2008). Despite these inauspicious beginnings, Nollywood has evolved from a local/national brand of cinema to an international/transnational phenomenon within a span of three decades. Scholars have identified several factors underlying the medium’s impressive trajectory, including the Nigerian Film Unit that was inaugurated in 1949, the indigenous theatre groups that were popular between the 1940s and the 1970s, and the television drama serials of the 1980s (Ekwuazi 1991; Adedeji and Ekwuazi 1998; Shaka 2002; Okome 2007; Shaka et al. 2014). When it comes to understanding the growth of Nollywood, the Nigerian Film Unit is of particular interest. The British administration created the Nigerian Film Unit as part of an effort to decentralize colonial filmmaking (Obiaya 2011). In his analysis of the development of Nollywood within the framework of colonial filmmaking, Obiaya (2011) points out that the success of Nollywood is a direct result of this decentralization process. The film *Living in Bondage* (1992) provides a key example.

Although Nollywood’s development began in the late 1980s “it was in 1992 that it was defined as an art form with a more serious social meaning and implication for Nigeria” (Okome 2007, 2). What happened in 1992 was the release of a home video film titled *Living in Bondage*, produced by a Nigerian electronics merchant named Kenneth Nnebue. *Living in Bondage* is a melodramatic film consisting of two parts. It tells the story of Igbo man Andy Okeke (Kenneth Okonkwo) who kills his wife Merit (Nnenna Nwabueze) in an occult ritual, in his zeal to become rich. Andy’s affluence is short-lived. His dead wife’s ghost begins to haunt him, and the experience ultimately leads to his downfall. The film was produced in the Igbo language and adapted into English for non-Igbo viewers.

The plot of *Living in Bondage* revolves around a “get-rich-quick” scheme. Andy has a burning desire to become rich and famous by any means. It was this craving that forced him to delve into the occult, which resulted in human sacrifice. Okome (2007) sees this ostensibly apolitical desperation as culturally significant in terms of Nollywood’s evolution: “Living in Bondage defines the pain of the new man in the postcolony outside the framework of the “us” versus “them” narratives of the consciously partisan postcolonial literature of that period” (3). The success of *Living in Bondage 1* and its sequel *Living in Bondage 2* provoked a kind of cinematic revolution that helped to transform the emerging Nigerian media landscape in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. The films encouraged many aspiring filmmakers and media enthusiasts to dabble in filmmaking, although some had little to moderate experience in film at the time. With support of individual stakeholders, these amateur filmmakers succeeded in producing home videos that informed the reality of Nigerian society. Their non-centralized cinematic experiments explored the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical circumstances of Nigeria in the colonial and post-colonial eras (Ebewo 2007).

The term “Nollywood” was coined in imitation of the USA’s “Hollywood” and India’s derivative “Bollywood.” Scholars are divided on the question of who invented the name (Shaka 2011). There are three different reports offered in the literature. In the first report, the American Journalist Matt Steinglass is credited with popularizing the name “Nollywood” in a 2002 article in *The New York Times* (see Onuzulike 2007; Becker 2011; Hayne 2007, 2016). The second report attributes the coinage to *The New York Times* Journalist Nomiritsu Onishi, who allegedly used it in a 2002 study on the processes and practices of filmmaking in Lagos, Nigeria (Igwe 2015). In the third report, the BBC reporter Nick Moran is credited with using the name in his 2002

documentary on the film *Living in Bondage* (see Adenugba 2007, 2). To this day, there is no consensus on the origin of the name.

Wherever its name came from, Nollywood is a remarkable phenomenon. Its films and market presence have experienced explosive growth in recent decades (Haynes and Okome 1998; Haynes 2007). One explanation for the medium's rapid growth is the filmmakers' determination to better position the Nigerian film industry within the global media environment. From a production perspective, Nollywood films also have - with a few exceptions - the advantage of low budgets. The typical budget of new Nollywood film is between "U.S. \$100,000 and \$400,000" (Connor 2015, 66). Scholars have identified the medium's low economic and technological context as the main reason for its low budgets (Larkin 2004, 2008; Lobato 2010; Haynes 2016). The production of such low-budget films has helped, though, to maximize viewership among the Nigerian public, most of whom survive on a low per capita income. One key disadvantage, however, is that majority of the films produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s were underrated due to lack of compliance with the motion picture rating system.

According to UNESCO (2009), Nollywood ranks second behind Bollywood in terms of film production. Despite Nollywood's inauspicious beginnings the filmmakers have succeeded in leveraging their limited resources and technology to improve production quality over time. Some Nollywood films produced in the past decade are high-budget films. Many of them exceeded expectations in terms of production quality, aesthetic form and narrative, and characters, which resulted in box-office hits and revenues from overages. The films in this category include *30 Days in Atlanta* (2014) and *A Trip to Jamaica* (2017), romantic comedy dramas directed by Robert O. Peters; *Fifty* (2015), a historical fiction directed by Biyi Bandele; *The Wedding Party* (2016) and

its sequel *The Wedding Party 2* (2016), both romantic comedies directed by Kemi Adetiba; and Izu Ojukwu's historical fiction drama *'76* (2016).

Whatever the budget, Nollywood films are typically remarkable for the ways in which the producers use the medium to reflect the reality of Nigerian society as authentically as possible. As Okome (2010) aptly observes, "Members of the popular audience patronize Nollywood and respond to it on a daily basis because the social and symbolic metaphors embedded in its narratives provide answers they seek to the many questions of everyday existence in a brutal postcolonial city such as Lagos" (39). As mentioned previously, scholars have long recognized the role of minority media in the representation of culture and society, especially in terms of the articulation and reinforcement of cultural identity and belonging (Morley and Robins 1995; Sinclair and Cunningham 2001), and the expression of cultural orientation in transnational spaces (Adoni, Caspi, and Cohen 2006; Ogunyemi (2012). Moreover, they have stressed the central role of media in general when it comes to providing a forum for the construction and negotiation of identity and belonging (Georgiou 2006; Hirji 2010).

Nollywood exemplifies this phenomenon, as an important medium of representation and a discursive arena for analyzing and discussing questions of identity. As Endong (2017) points out, it has become highly influential in this arena: "Nollywood imperialism is evident in the fact that most, if not all the emerging cinema industries in Black African countries are veritable offshoots or glaring imitations of the Nollywood phenomenon" (131). Ogunyemi (2009) adds, "The movie industry, driven by Nigeria's Nollywood, is the most active and valuable part of the internal knowledge economy in Africa today" (1). The following section clarifies the cultural context and function of Nollywood film with reference to its most popular genres and blockbuster films.

Mapping Nollywood Film Genres and Blockbuster Films

Nigeria's diverse cultural traditions and lifestyles (180 million people, 300 tribes and some 500 languages), offer a wealth of material from which the country's filmmakers skilfully draw to recount simple stories of daily life that resonate with Nigerians, as well as audiences sharing a similar culture and heritage across Africa and the African diaspora. These colorful and entertaining stories capture the imagination of audiences; they echo their life-experiences, feature a strong moral theme and yes, juju (black magic).

Sandra Oyewale and Olajide Oyewale (2014, para. 3)

Nollywood film genres and blockbuster films can inform a critical understanding of Nigerian society and culture. Typically, Nollywood produces melodramatic films, and its most popular genres¹ include satire, comedy, musical, horror, adventure, and historical epic. All are predominantly Afrocentric, i.e., they are rooted in indigenous cultures and reflect African customs and traditions, belief systems, and popular culture. Nollywood films are replete with ethical and ideological elements. These elements act like intellectual maps orienting viewers to Nigerian (and more broadly African) oral histories, customs and tradition, myths, and lifestyles. Unlike popular European and Western films, Nollywood films are quite explicitly didactic in nature: they teach cultural lessons and moral principles seen as integral to African cultures and society.

The main themes and narratives found in Nollywood film revolve around Nigerian oral history, customs and tradition, belief systems, and African popular culture. They often address contemporary urban themes – but are not limited to – society and culture, ethnic and cultural identity, diversity and inclusion, and social justice. These filmic conceptualizations of oral histories, customs and tradition, norms and values, and belief systems that are pertinent to Nigerian society are what sets Nollywood apart from Hollywood. They also give Nollywood film the capacity to influence Nigerian society and culture. As Akudinobi (2015) puts it, “Nollywood’s

¹ There are several benchmarks used in determining a film’s genre. These include the story, plot, characters, mise-en-scene (e.g., setting, costumes, and lightings), and types of action.

penchant for the quotidian and its focus on life lessons inevitably intervene in the social and political imaginaries not just through its narrative premises but also in terms of how its narratives unfold as bearers of meanings” (134). As a cultural phenomenon, Nollywood not only informs understandings of Nigerian cultural heritage (i.e., folktales, myths, dialects, music, signs and symbols, literature, and art). It also shapes the way consumers interpreted these cultural components.

One way people acquire cultural literacy is observation. Observation of one’s cultural surroundings is important to sustaining identity and ensuring cultural continuity. According to Orlando Patterson (2004), “A continuity refers to any object, structural process, or type of event that persists between two or more periods of time” (74). In reflecting the particularities of Nigerian society for consumers, Nollywood filmmakers reinforce a sense of identity and belonging, and thereby work to ensure cultural continuity.

One major distinguishing factor between Nollywood and Hollywood audiences is the local politics of film viewing. Nollywood is grounded in collectivist culture rather than individualistic culture. For this reason, Nollywood films are often consumed in a communal setting. Viewing Nollywood films allows extended families and friends to converge in close cultural and geographic proximity in the process of consumption. By contrast, Hollywood exists in an individualistic culture. Hollywood films are often viewed independently, in private environments. The context in which a medium is situated can impact the media culture, as well as audience behaviours. Questions of cultural, ethnic, and geographical proximity therefore play an important role in the ways in which local and diasporic audiences engage with Nollywood media.

Due to this didactic and collectivist character of Nollywood films, most stories revolve around social and cultural values of Nigerian society. Some focus on the historical developments

and political situations of that society. Films such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Biyi Bandele, 2013) and '76 (Izu Ojukwu, 2016) are centered on historical events such as the Nigerian civil war, for example.² '76 is a historical drama focused on the aborted 1976 coup d'état that led to the assassination of Nigerian military president General Murtala Mohammed. Nollywood films have also explored the complex experiences of Nigerians in diaspora. These include *Osuofia in London* (Kingsley Ogoro, 2003), *Crazy Like a Fox* (Tony Abulu, 2009), *Ijé* (Chineze Anyaene, 2010), *Turning Point* (Niyi Towolawi, 2012), *One night in Vegas* (John Uche, 2013), *Gone Too Far* (Destiny Ekaragha, 2013), *30 Days in Atlanta* (Robert Peters, 2014), *A Trip to Jamaica* (Robert Peters, 2016), *The Price* (Anthony Onah, 2017), and *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* (Ishaya Bako, 2017), to mention a few of the films that have engaged with the crucial issues of migration.³ *Osuofia in London*, for example, tells the story of Osuofia (Nkem Owoh) who travels from his village to inherit his late brother's huge estate in London. Nollywood producers are interested, in short, in showcasing the migratory experiences of African migrants and their untold struggles for space, recognition and survival in settlement societies, most of which remain underexplored and understudied to this day.

Faiza Hirji, in her study of South Asian youths and their interactions with Bollywood films (2010), noted that music and dance sequences are used to convey emotions and also teach moral lessons in Bollywood films. In Nollywood films, the filmmakers use folktales and music to present oral history, traditional beliefs, myths, and moral values passed down for generations. They thereby reflect and reinforce popular cultural practices of Nigerian society. The word "folktale"

² This study does not explore the political dimension of Nollywood films in detail. This study is concerned with the medium's social and cultural dynamics, and how these features can shape understandings of Nigerian society and culture in diaspora.

³ I address these films in more detail in my section on methodology.

deserves attention here: it typically denotes a story that is transmitted through oral tradition. In African traditional societies, folktales are used to commemorate key historical moments.⁴ Nollywood's folktales therefore reflect historical, sociocultural, economic, and political realities, and also have the power to inform them. They thereby exemplify the social function of tradition, which Giddens described in the following words:

In traditional cultures, the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. Tradition is a mode of integrating the reflexive monitoring of action with the time-space organisation of the community. It is a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present, and future, these in turn being structured by recurrent social practices. Tradition is not wholly static, because it has to be reinvented by each new generation as it takes over its cultural inheritance from those preceding it (Giddens 1990, 37).

Nollywood films illustrate Giddens' point about backward-looking connection and forward-looking reinvention. They constitute one powerful medium through which traditions are not only mediated and maintained, but also inflected in ways that resonate with contemporary social and moral issues. The narratives reflect the social and cultural experiences of the Nigerian people, and how these experiences are impacting society today. As Esan (2011) notes, "films are a stock of cultural capital: knowledge of film stars, trends in fashion and music, appreciation of slang and nuances of language. Film also facilitates social interaction both in private and public spaces" (142). The collectivist character of Nollywood films makes them powerful in allowing and shaping social interaction, their traditional and didactic character makes them powerful in reflecting and shaping culture.

⁴ It is important to understand that most of Africa's oral history is based on a collection of folklore. Stories are transmitted from one generation to another with an emphasis on maintaining cultural continuity.

Nollywood Film Distribution Circuits

Distribution of films post-production is a crucial part of media operations. Film distribution refers to the process of making films available for viewing in exhibition sites, such as traditional theatre environments. Lobato (2012) accordingly defines distribution “as the movement of media through time and space” (4). More broadly, Turow (2011) refers to distribution as “the movement of a media product – a magazine, a movie, a radio show, a music recording, a newspaper, a web page – from the site of production to the point where it will be exhibited to the public” (1). Currently, Nollywood films are distributed through a variety of platforms that range from traditional television and Satellite to digital environments like YouTube and Netflix.

Typically, Nollywood producers engage licensed independent distributors to manage the distribution process. The main distributors of Nollywood films include the Silverbird Group, Blue Pictures Film, Genesis Deluxe and FilmOne Distribution. These corporations help to facilitate theatrical screenings of Nollywood films in different parts of the country. Nollywood films are also distributed through iROKOTv, which is the world’s largest streaming platform for Nollywood films (Chibelushi 2017). In 2015, Nollywood signed a multimillion-dollar business partnership with Netflix international, an American media-services provider. This partnership demonstrates the determination of stakeholders and producers to make Nollywood films accessible to a wider audience around the world.

Digital technologies have provided new channels for accessing media content irrespective of time and space. They have also significantly enhanced the ease with which distant audiences can access content. The proliferation of digital media has allowed emerging media like Nollywood to bypass the limits of traditional film distribution and facilitate collective viewing in both private and communal spaces (McCall 2007; Holt and Sanson 2014; Connor 2015). As McCall observes

(2007), “The rise of Nollywood, with its prolific output, its spectacular popularity and its unprecedented ability to reach remote and no-elite audiences, is the most radical development to date in the history of African media” (5). The ability of Nollywood filmmakers to connect with local audiences in remote locations certainly shows the dynamism of this emerging medium as compared to more mainstream counterparts such as Hollywood and Bollywood. The mere fact that early Nollywood films were produced in home video form made the politics of viewing different from that of Hollywood and Bollywood films. As Haynes observes (2011), “Nollywood films are made to fit the small screens on which they are normally seen” (73). Earlier Nollywood films were mostly viewed on small screens in communal settings, usually within family circles. In these shared viewing sessions, groups including family members and friends assemble to watch. As Ugor and Santanera (2012, 13) aptly observe, Nollywood’s decentralized approach to technology has enabled the medium to provide discursive arenas for viewers outside mainstream contexts.

Currently, Nollywood’s distribution circuits encompass theatrical exhibition, broadcast (traditional, cable and satellite television), online distribution, and transnational (diasporic) circuits. Nollywood films are also occasionally distributed through national and international film festival circuits, where producers convene to showcase their productions. In their study, Mistry and Ellapen (2013) stress the importance of this decentralization in the area of distribution:

The emergence of Nollywood is the rejoinder to the democratizing effect of the digital evolution in filmmaking, thus creating a revolution in content creation. Moreover, this shift in technology facilitates circuits distribution and exhibition that enable new contexts for the consumption of films. Therefore, Nollywood in its mode of distribution has been able to generate a large local and regional audience as it relies on more informal routes of circulation. Nollywood’s ability to circumvent official channels of distribution and exhibition has been one of its successes, augmenting its popularity (58).

In recent years, the Internet has served as a major repository of Nollywood films. It has also played a key role in the transmission of Nollywood productions across space. The concern for

producers is that the Internet, coupled with inadequate regulations, has provided opportunities for the informal reproduction, transmission, and consumption of Nollywood films in the local/national and international public spheres. Nollywood is currently one of the world's most pirated media institutions in terms of informal reproduction and distribution of films (Larkin 2004; Haynes 2011, 2016; Lobato 2012; Paulson 2012). Although the Nigerian government has established regulatory institutions such as the Nigerian Copyrights Commission and the National Film and Video Censors Board to mitigate the theft of intellectual properties, this issue remains. The question of media piracy in Nollywood is therefore at the forefront of debate in scholarly, media and policy circles to this day (Larkin 2004, Lobato 2010; Paulson 2012).⁵ Unauthorized use is, as Krings and Okome (2013) have emphasized, a double-edged sword for Nollywood producers: "Satellite television, the Internet, and piracy – at once Nollywood's boon and bane – facilitate the spread of its films across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries" (1).

The widespread transmission of Nollywood films confirms their strong appeal to audiences in Africa and the global African diaspora. Research also suggests that Nollywood films are becoming popular among Western and European audiences. Scholars and media analysts have identified several factors that have contributed significantly to Nollywood's strong appeal to local and international audiences. The films make use of the rich sources provided by Nigerian culture, themes, narratives, and ideological orientations. This approach has allowed Nollywood filmmakers to reproduce and reflect contemporary life in Nigeria, including its popular culture, in a way as authentic as possible (Okome 2010, 35). The films address arresting sociocultural, political, and religious circumstances without being explicitly political, by spotlighting narratives of quotidian life and experience in Nigeria. "Nollywood filmmakers," as Okome (2010, 36) points

⁵ The anti-piracy campaign organized by the Filmmakers Association of Nigeria (FAN) in the US is designed to help address the problems of piracy in Nollywood.

out, “are concerned with the everyday and with those things that matter to the man and woman in the street.”

Akinola (2013) argues that Nollywood has contributed to the remaking of modern Nigeria. As a particularistic media, Nollywood provides means for translating local (and global) ethnocultural values from particularistic standpoints. The Nigerian and African specificities of Nollywood provide an identity-affirming appeal, especially in the diasporic world. In their analysis of the social and cultural dimensions of Nollywood, Krings and Okome (2013) found that “the culture of Nollywood films is loved not only for its perceived similarity to local cultural formations but equally for its alterity, so that copying of patterns of behavior, fashion, and speech style from Nigeria video films becomes a playful means for individual viewers to distinguish themselves from the cultural patterns and social norms of their own societies” (4-5). The phenomena involved include cultural norms and values, oral history, customs and tradition, language, music, myths, signs and symbols, literature, and art. The themes and narrative arcs in Nollywood films revolve around questions of society and culture, identity and belonging, cultural diversity and unity in diversity, all of which are highly relevant to African and diasporic audiences.

Nollywood films are not only good at articulating and showcasing identities, though. The films also serve to guard and enforce social identity. As Esan (2011) observes, “Cultural propriety is another factor informing audiences in their choice of films. In certain circles, Nollywood is more appropriate than available options within the mainstream” (131). Nollywood’s appeal to audiences in Africa and the global African diaspora relies on the audiences’ comfortable familiarity with the cultural politics being communicated. As Haynes notes, consumers enjoy Nollywood films for their serious, positive portrayal of African images and values:

The films are a proud example of import substitution of an unprecedented claiming of African screens for African images, of providing images of African culture that can travel and function as a source of identity – images both of rooted traditional culture (as featured in the genre of the “cultural epic,” for example, launched by *The battle of Musanga and Igodo*) and of an attractive African modernity, with businessmen in embroidered robes making big deals on cell phones, nice cars driving past tall buildings and shopping plazas, African-styled mansions with families inside dealing with their problems according to norms that negotiate between the bourgeois nuclear family and indigenous structures and roles. All over the world, African people and people of African descent see themselves in these films, or see things they want, and are grateful for the relief from the usual images of Africa as the land of poverty and catastrophe (Haynes 2011, 76).

Nollywood films facilitate constructive engagements in media and multicultural dialogue in Africa and increasingly the global African diaspora. In terms of engagement, they facilitate participation in media among family members and friends in communities. These civic engagements encourage and enhance intergroup relations. Nollywood films are also useful sources of information. They inform understandings of Nigerian cultural specificities through which people construct cultural identity and develop a sense of belonging. The communication that occurs in these discursive arenas informs, promotes, and reinforces ethnocultural values. In Africa and the global African diaspora, discourses/debates on multiculturalism form the basis of building and nurturing ethnocultural relationships.

As Falola (2013) argues, “Nollywood manifests both the degenerative and regenerative sides of culture, and one can find ample examples to support both notions. Nollywood projects and subverts cultures and power at the same time” (283). The appeal of Nollywood films is therefore related to its representations of key historical, sociocultural, economic, political, and religious circumstances in pre- and post-independence Nigeria. As scholars have observed (Krings 2010; Krings and Okome 2013), such cultural elements resonate with audiences in Africa and the African diaspora. These audiences value the ideologies encoded in the films, including fundamental norms and values, cultural beliefs, attitudes, and social conceptions that are deep-rooted in Nigerian

society. By reason of their ethnicity, a lot of Nollywood audiences in Africa and the global African diaspora are familiar with the worldviews that are expressed in these films, which makes it easier for them to resonate with the medium and its content.

While earlier Nollywood films mainly adopted postcolonial approaches, new Nollywood films also incorporate postmodern approaches that involve adaptations of local and universal art forms. This emancipative approach is believed to be a key factor in the medium's appeal to audiences in the mainstream. On the one hand, Nollywood's aesthetics offer visual references to different historical and sociocultural contexts in Nigeria and beyond. On the other hand, the films' narratives offer ways to understand how such realities may be experienced within these contexts, and what that experience can engender. As Esan (2011) reminds us:

Nollywood provides talking points on various aspects of life. This is a cathartic pleasure where film is used as an aid to structure the audience's world. The success of these films lies in their ability to probe fault lines in contemporary life; to explore details of living that other forms like the news, much overwhelmed by its obsession with personalities and politics, will not acknowledge. Films are spaces to see issues that are relevant, stories that are credible, a source of comfort – offering plausible explanations. Ultimately these appeal to faith systems, justice is transcendental, though there is a cacophony of spiritual voices within Nollywood films. Audiences are invited to behold, consider, and construct order out of the chaos confronting them (142).

For Nollywood audiences in Africa and the diaspora, then, the narrativity of experience is crucial in the process of constructing meaning using the mediated visions of film, including the ways in which audiences understand their own everyday lives. As Desai (2005) and Hirji (2010) emphasize, the media of diasporas, whether transnational or diasporic, do not only allow displaced populations to make sense of identity and community. They also provide the resources required (such as cultural imagery and language) to engage in identity discourses that span time and space.

However, and despite these ‘positive’ aspects, there are substantial critiques of Nollywood, which I address below.

Critique of Nollywood Film Culture

The rise and fall of popular arts in Nigerian and elsewhere in Africa have always generated social debate, much of it beclouding the import of such productions and their place in life of those who live debilities that they inscribe. Even if we have reasons to argue now that such attitudes are beginning to change, it is still true that dominant critiques have played down the social significance of these forms of expression on the continent. This history of abnegation can be attributed to the educational regime that colonialism bequeathed on Africa.

Onookome Okome (2010, 26)

Nollywood’s material and film cultures have not only attracted considerable attention in the arenas of popular culture. They have also attracted a good deal of criticism in scholarly and media circles (Okome 2010; McCall 2007; Geiger 2012). The critique of Nollywood film culture mainly revolves around the plurality of modalities in the medium’s visual and material cultures, including the patterns of production and exhibition. As noted already above, this plurality is evidenced in the themes, the aesthetics, and the narrative styles of Nollywood films.

Nollywood screenwriters and filmmakers are frequently criticized for borrowing plots and storylines from earlier films, to attract viewers. The act of borrowing story ideas, plots, and narrative styles from earlier films makes it easy for audiences to predict the outcomes, which has both advantages and disadvantages. “It is typical for Nollywood audiences,” Esan (2011) asserts “to complain about the predictability of the storylines, but this mode of viewing enables viewers to re-edit the films to their taste” (135). On this issue of predictability, Ayakoroma (2014) adds, “One major criticism of Nigerian films by the average audience is that you can always foreshadow or predict the end of a film from the beginning. It could be argued that this may be from a layman’s

point of view; but the fact remains that the application of genres in Nollywood needs serious critical attention” (86). Some critics have also pointed out that the strategy of generous borrowing from a variety of earlier films can at times lead to inconsistencies and incoherencies in the new productions. As Akudinobi observes:

The emergence in the 1990s of Nollywood, the iconoclastic Nigerian popular film culture, was met with ambivalence, even derision, in normative African cinema circles partly because of its rough-and-ready production practices, stylistic melanges, humdrum soundtracks, stilted dialogue, prevalent technical lapses, chaotic straight-to-video distribution, commerce-driven ethos, and proclivity for melodrama, the supernatural, and occult horror (Akudinobi 2015, 133).

Some proponents of African screen media (see, for example, Okome 2010; Esan 2011; Uwah 2011) acknowledge that Nollywood screenwriters occasionally replicate plots and storylines from successful films for the purpose of commercialism and competitiveness but maintain that this film culture is not peculiar to Nollywood. They point out that filmmakers have long used such strategies to increase the appeal of their films to a target audience.

Another common criticism of Nollywood concerns the question of cultural hybridization. Such hybridization is a growing trend in Nollywood, connected to the medium’s increasing globalization. Such hybridization of media results from the fusion of local and global aesthetics and narratives, casts, crews, and settings with the aim of transcending cultural boundaries. The main criticism of Nollywood is that the films do not adequately articulate Nigeria’s ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. One explanation for this is that Nollywood filmmakers are increasingly engaging in cultural hybridization. As Bhabha explains,

[T]he hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal, but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an ‘interstitial’ agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that

does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture form which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole (Bhabha 1996, 58).

Bhabha posits that hybridity is a mode of cultural transmission through which negotiation between unequal powers say on a specific cultural phenomenon can result in “binary representation” with multiple interpretations. In the case of Nollywood, the filmmakers deploy the hybrid strategy not only to repudiate dominant assumptions about African cultural inferiority, but also represent the cultural specificities with an aim to construct a sense of identity and belonging in more authentic ways.

As Hirji (2010) notes, “[o]ne of the greatest sources of conflict within the industry and its accompanying music sector is the linguistic diversity of India, a pluralism that fails to be reflected in majority of Bollywood films” (23). This suggests that questions of representation and authenticity are normal in media that are established in multicultural societies and focused on portraying the reality of those societies, but do not portray the reality of diversity within these societies.

Today, the majority of Nollywood films are culturally hybridized, resulting in an example of glocalized culture (Robertson 1995), or as Bhabha (1990) has called the phenomenon, a “third” culture – one that consists of different components from local and global cultures. Some critics are concerned about this mixing of local and universal aesthetics and narratives on the grounds that such an approach could result in distortions of reality (Onuzulike 2009). From the perspective of critical film theory, though, filmmakers can create new possibilities and alter common perceptions. Nollywood filmmakers achieve this through the confluence of local and universal artefacts, aesthetics and narratives, contexts, and other material cultures. This is unsurprising, given that globalization has often triggered the blurring of geopolitical and cross-cultural boundaries,

facilitating the flow and counter-flow of media and cultures across spatial geographies (Appadurai 1995; Robertson 1996). Research also suggests that colonization has contributed to altering the sense of identity and belonging among colonized populations. As Kraidy (2005) notes, “[t]here is a growing recognition that hybridity is a prima facie global condition caused by voluntary and forced migration, wars, invasions, slavery, intermarriages, and trade” (46). Cultural hybridity has therefore naturally been connected to the popularity of Nollywood and its cultural production among postcolonial audiences in Africa and the global African diaspora (Klings and Okome 2013; Haynes (2016). One important topic that has not been explicitly analyzed in the debate and discourse on Nollywood is the cultural and political economy of the media’s hybrid media texts.

In analyzing the hybridity in media, scholars have focused on three distinct areas: “production, text/message, and reception” (Kraidy 2005, 5). As some postcolonial theorists have pointed out (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Said 1978; Naficy 1993; Gillespie 1995; Spivak 1999; Tomlinson 1999; Kraidy 2005), cultural hybridity’s intermingling of cultures is a direct response to – and a kind of resistance to – cultural imperialism. The notion of hybridity can be associated with the idea of denial or dismissal (see, Kraidy 2005, 128). It involves “doing away” with any aspect of culture that is considered dated for example and adopting another one that is deemed modern. As Bhabha (1994) argues,

Hybridity reverses the formal process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse. The presence of colonialist authority is no longer immediately visible; it’s discriminatory identifications no longer have their authoritative reference to this culture’s cannibalism or that people’s perfidy. As an articulation of displacement and dislocation, it is now possible to identify ‘the cultural’ as a disposal of power, a negative transparency that-comes to be agonistically constructed on the boundary between frame of reference/frame of mind.” (Bhabha 1994, 114).

The adoption of the hybridity concept to describe the fusion of disparate phenomena in discourses on culture has not however resonated with some postcolonial scholars. For example, Marwan

Kraidy (2005) argues against the use of the word “hybridity” as a conceptual tool to describe culture as that would impede understanding of the underlying elements and their relationships.

“Hybridity is a risky notion. It comes without guarantees. Rather than a single idea or a unitary concept, hybridity is an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other. The varied and sometimes contradictory nature of its use points to the emptiness of employing hybridity as a universal description of culture.” (vi).

Kraidy (2005) argues that the notion of “hybridity is controversial. Multiple and antithetical uses have created a dispute over its meaning, implications, and usefulness” (2). He adds that, “[c]riticism of hybridity reflects conceptual ambiguity, ideological differences, and various levels of tolerance of a ubiquitous and often misused trope....If hybridity is pervasive, as most scholars seem to agree, then we do need to call it as it is and develop conceptual tools to tackle its vexing ambiguity” (70).

In the case of Nollywood, the strategy of cultural hybridization has proven to be a productive approach. For example, it has allowed filmmakers to use global formats, styles, and language from elsewhere to tell their own stories in authentic ways. Authenticity here refers to the recounting of unique experiences in a representative way. The hybrid approach has enabled the filmmakers to adopt some kinds of “universal grammars” and “narrative styles” in answering the politics of “othering” that is widespread in European and Western political rhetoric, policies, and media (Smith 2010; Jiwani 2006, 2009; Bailey et al. 2007). As Kraidy (2005) reminds us, “[h]ybrid media texts reflect the existence of a variety of historical, economic, and cultural forces whose enmeshments with one another are as manifest at the local, national, and regional levels as they are visible globally” (6). This is evidenced in several Nollywood’s hybrid genres, especially films produced in the past decade.

In his study, Fiske (1993) problematized the “othering” involved in social categories such as race, gender, and class, which he considers one of the constitutive elements of representation. “The “other”, he argues, “is always a product of representation and, as such, whatever form it may be given, always applies the discursive and material power of the representing social order upon that part of the world it has made into its other” (150). Many postcolonial scholars and theorists have posited similar arguments about representations of race and ethnicity in mainstream media. Feminist scholar and activist Yasmin Jiwani (2006) argues, for example, “In attempting to situate contemporary representations of racialized people in the mass media, a significant point of departure is the currency and range of representations that were generated during the colonial period” (31). It is therefore not surprising that cultural hybridization is an important factor in the minority medium of Nollywood, given its history and context.

According to Arthur (2017), “Nollywood offers symbiotic representations of the complicated neocolonial and postcolonial African experience rooted in the processes of globalisation and deterritorialization” (5). In the context of postcolonialism, Nollywood presents a tool for engagement in the process of decolonization, with a focus on dismantling certain facets of colonial history and dominant worldviews that privilege settler-colonial societies and their citizens as culturally and ideologically distinct and superior to colonized people. Hybridity can serve creative cultural expression and self-determination as well as cultural loss.

While some media critics oppose cultural hybridity, then, more and more film and media industries draw on this strategy of representing local social realities through a glocalised lens. Cultural hybridity involves intermixing a set of opposites (e.g., local and global cultures). As Hirji (2010) argues, “Hybridity [...] is in its own way a tool of resistance, a way of overcoming a sense of isolation or marginalization while fighting against dominant culture(s)” (55). In his book, An

Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking (2001), Naficy therefore affirmed that “accented films and Third Cinema films [of which Nollywood is an integral part] are historically conscious, politically engaged, critically aware, generically hybridized, and artisanally produced” (124). Given this situation, it can be argued that artistic trends involving hybridization will remain indelible aspects of contemporary minority media culture well into the foreseeable future. As Daniel Boyarin (1997) reminds us, “diasporic cultural identity teaches us that cultures are not preserved from being protected from ‘mixing’ but probably can only continue to exist as a product of such mixing” (243). Moreover, as some postcolonial scholars have observed, every culture contains “borrowed” elements of other cultures. There has never been a *sui generis* culture that is purely original and devoid of cultural adaptation (Bhabha 1990).

As far as Nollywood is concerned, the hybrid approach has clearly been formative in several ways. Perhaps most importantly, it has provided an opportunity for the filmmakers to challenge the conventional modes of production and distribution of films from unique standpoints. Nollywood’s “bottom-up” approach has enabled filmmakers to effectively respond to the phenomena of globalization and digitization by combining the home-grown (e.g., Nigerian cultural art forms) with the imported (language, medium, and style), to tell their stories in more accessible and self-representative ways. This remains true despite the fact that during the hybrid process of mediation, some aspects of local lived reality (e.g., historical and cultural) get distorted and/or exaggerated in various ways as they evolve.

As we move toward closing this part of the discussion, it is a good idea to keep in mind that Nollywood’s complex cultural dynamics have been linked to three main factors: globalization, new communication technologies, and colonization. As the scholarly literature on globalization shows, the phenomenon of globalization has resulted in the blurring of physical boundaries in a

kind of “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990; Appadurai 1990; Robertson 1995; Tomlinson 1999). The literature on communication suggests that new communication technologies, which are widely acknowledged as drivers of globalization, have also facilitated this kind of global interconnectedness, resulting in a vastly networked society (Castells 2000; van Dijk 2006). These phenomena continue to provoke a progressive shift from traditional to technology-based forms of communication.

From the point of view of periphery nations like Nigeria, one major benefit of these paradigmatic shifts is media globalization, in the form of the transnationalization of alternative media. This media context highlights the place of cultural hybridity in Nollywood films. Nigeria is Nollywood’s parent country. It is a country with a long history of colonization and subjection to British imperialism, and as numerous scholars have pointed out, the long decades of European settlement on the continent of Africa brought significant changes to periphery countries and their peoples, from social and economic to political and religious public arenas, forcing them to adopt multiple, hybrid identities. Paul Gilroy (1993) for example has described the “Black Atlantic” as a space of “transnational cultural construction.” Of course, the changes spurred by European colonization did not only transform people’s ways of life and belief systems. They also impacted regional structures and cultures, sometimes forcing the natives to adopt Eurocentric views of culture, including language, music, dance, dress codes, etc. The practical result (as many leading postcolonial scholars and critics including Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, and Paul Gilroy have argued) is that the legacy of the Atlantic Slave Trade, colonization, and imperialism has been cultural hybridity of different kinds in such altered spaces (Bhabha 1994).

Based on all that has been said so far here, a key question arises: Can Nollywood effectively reflect the particularities of periphery societies in the context of globalism? The answer can

perhaps best be understood through the lenses of globalization and new communication technologies. Nollywood's hybrid approach is from the point of view outlined above an integral part of the filmmakers' continued efforts to link the experiences (and narratives) of the past with those of the present, all while invoking imagined futures. As Lobato (2012) points out,

Nollywood emerged from these various debates as an industry which is simultaneously too big and not big enough, a symbolic language which is excessively local and overly westernized, an industry subject to too much and too little regulation. The diversity of viewpoints is unsurprising, given how Nigerian video has permeated so many aspects of everyday life in West Africa. Popularity inevitable brings controversy, and the never-ending debate about the future of the industry is proof of this. Such debates represent an interesting twist in the remarkable Nollywood story (66).

From this point of view, the main challenge for Nollywood filmmakers now is to transform the medium into a global phenomenon in both theory and practice, and to better serve audiences on both local and global stages.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped out the evolution of the Nollywood media industry and the circumstances surrounding its growth. The media's most popular genres and major distribution circuits have been outlined. This was followed by an analysis of the socio-political, cultural, and religious dynamics of Nollywood films. The films are mostly centered on the reality of Nigerian cultures and identity, which makes this medium an important agent of representation. Nollywood reflects and intervenes in the reality of Nigerian society – socioeconomically, politically, and religiously. For this reason, Nollywood is an important agent in the construction and maintenance of social identity, including concrete realities like socialization. Nollywood films provide an opportunity for friends and families to participate in media within a culturally integrated

environment, and under unique community circumstances. The combined hybridity and particularity of the filmmakers' "radical imagination" (Haynes 2011) has enabled them to tell their stories in a way that resonates powerfully with their target audiences. As Okome (2010) has observed,

Nollywood operates outside the ideological bracket of established African intellectual formations. What it offers is a medley of social, political and cultural discourses framed within the discursive regime of the popular, commodified, and commercialized in the informal machines of popular-arts production in Nigeria. In this sense, the social narratives that it churns playfully retell the society it deals with from another perspective, opposed to the one that the cultural mediators acknowledge or prefer. It is a perspective that is not programmatic but inclusive and digressional. The discursive strategy that Nollywood chooses to deal with the narratives of its primary society are nonetheless effective as a way of reaching the popular public, a category I must admit is difficult to pin down, but one that suggests an identity that crosses both class and ethnicity (35).

Clearly, Nollywood has come a long way from its origins as a so-called local sensation or grassroots phenomenon, to become a national – and then transnational – medium. Its success does not only illustrate the filmmakers' vision of mediating the reality of Nigerian society. It also demonstrates their zeal and their ability to reflect an emerging "glocalized" popular culture (Robertson 1995), brought into existence by the phenomena of globalization, new communication technologies, and post-colonization. It is this quest that has compelled Nollywood filmmakers to deploy both local and localized artforms, to be able to reflect the particularities of Nigerian society through a modern lens on screen.

CHAPTER 2

Nollywood in a Transnational Context

A transnational media order is coming into being that is remapping media spaces and involving new media practices, flows and products. An international reach is no longer the preserve of Western-based conglomerates, as an increasing number of smaller media companies from the developing world are expanding overseas.

Jean K. Chalaby (2005, 30)

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I examined the origin of the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) and the medium's development trajectory. I began with an overview of the origin and evolution of cinema in Nigeria, followed by a look at the contemporary Nigerian film industry. I then described Nollywood's popular genres and blockbuster films, as well as its film distribution circuits. This approach allowed me to trace the extraordinary evolution of Nollywood from a "grassroots phenomenon" into a national phenomenon. In this chapter, I focus primarily on the evolution of Nollywood films across cultural and geopolitical geographies, with an emphasis on the circulation of Nollywood films in transnational spaces and their sociocultural implications. Here I look at what happens to Nollywood when it gets to a different territory specifically diasporic context. The influence of globalization and new communication technologies – two driving forces of transborder flows and counterflows – on the transnational evolution of Nollywood serve as a point of departure. I then look at Nollywood's transnational dimension, focusing on the social, cultural, and contextual elements that inform the media's transnational character.

For the purposes of this study, the term "transnational" is used to refer to Nollywood films' production locations, the medium's scope of operation, and also its glocalised aesthetics and narratives. While there is a growing literature on the circulation of Nollywood films in transnational spaces and the way this media is shaping understandings of Nigerian society and

culture in diaspora (Haynes 2013, 2016; Esan 2008; Becker 2013; Jedlowski 2013; Aveh 2014), there is a paucity of studies on the reception of Nollywood films within Nigerian diasporic communities. It is often unclear how Nollywood productions are impacting diasporic lives and the broader sociocultural implications.

Toby Miller, Freya Schiwy, and MarTa Salván, in their study on distribution patterns of media productions (2011), observe that scholarly analyses of transnational cinema have mainly focused on production infrastructures and processes of film production, to the exclusion of distribution and reception patterns. For this reason, they call for new approaches that examine the production, distribution, and reception phases of media productions in tandem, in order to be able to effectively map out “transnational” media and their properties. This chapter contributes to this new phase of scholarship by exploring the transnational dimension of Nollywood in terms of its implications for African diasporic communities.

Media and Transnational Mobility: Nollywood in Transnational Spaces

In media and communication studies, the concept of “transnational” media relates to the circulation of media and cultural productions across international geographies. Although many studies of the Nigerian film industry have failed to deal with Nollywood’s transnational character in detail, as Omega Arthur contends:

Nollywood as a film form borrows film, television, and theater elements from nations around the world and incorporates them with storytelling methods, production models, and consumption practices that are categorically local. Yet, this glocal syncretism does not capture the depth of Nollywood’s transnationality. Nigerian cinema is transnational and glocal for one primary reason: its continuous circulation around the globe (Arthur 2017, 13). To a large extent, academic scholarship on transnational media have overlooked the media’s transnational character.

While the literature on Nollywood treats the medium as transnational, there are certain social and contextual elements of the media's transnational character that are frequently overlooked. These include the media's hybridized aesthetics and narratives, casts and crews, production processes and contexts, financiers, and distribution and consumption.⁶ These constitutive elements relate to three main areas: film production, film culture, and consumer culture. In terms of production, an increasing number of new Nollywood films are partly set on location in Nigeria and partly abroad. This approach has allowed Nollywood filmmakers and their international partners to exploit available resources and market situations in these countries, in order to increase viewership and commercial revenues.

Due to globalization and advancements in communication technologies, an ever-increasing number of filmmakers in periphery and mainstream contexts currently engage in international co-production. Since the 1950s, the literature shows, film makers from different countries have participated in joint production in their efforts to achieve global hits. International co-production is a particular form of collaboration between two or more film industries located in different countries with the aim of producing films (Parc 2020). These collaborative efforts not only allow filmmakers from different countries to access global resources, but also gain exposure to distant audiences. The trend of internationally co-produced Nollywood films testifies to the relevance of this development. Transnationalization has allowed many national media for example to transcend cultural and geopolitical borders (Higson 2000).

In addition to production, the transnational character of Nollywood is connected to promotion and distribution. Transnational media refers to media that operate across transnational

⁶ I will revisit this subject matter in more depth in the next section.

binaries in tandem with other (trans)national media corporations (Ezra and Rowden 2006; Georgiou 2006; Higbee and Lim 2010).⁷ There are different classifications of transnational media, including notably print (newspapers and magazines), broadcast (radio, television, cinema), and Internet. In the case of film and media, one can point to major transnational corporations such as Walt Disney, Sony Pictures, Century Fox, and Paramount Pictures, as well as media corporations such as BBC and CNN. From this point of view, Nollywood can be categorized as a transnational minority medium. Although some media critics argue that Nollywood is better characterized as a national media with a transnational orientation, Nollywood fits the pattern of a transnational medium, given its scope of production and consumption.

Nollywood is also transnational in terms of its contents and cultural functions, which adds to the significance of the categorization. As Will Higbee and Song Lim note, the concept of “transnational media” can at times be applied too widely and quickly:

[W]hile the term ‘transnational cinema’ appears to be used and applied with increasing frequency as both a descriptive and conceptual marker, it also tends, for the most part, to be taken as a given – as shorthand for an international or supranational mode of film production whose impact and reach lies beyond the bounds of the national. The danger here is that the national simply becomes displaced or negated in such analysis, as if it ceases to exist, when in fact the national continues to exert the force of its presence even within transnational film-making practices. Moreover, the term ‘transnational’ is, on occasion, used simply to indicate international co-production or collaboration between technical and artistic personnel from across the world, without any real consideration of what the aesthetic, political or economic implications of such transnational collaboration might mean – employing a difference that, we might say, makes no difference at all (Higbee and Lim 2010, 10).

Nollywood’s transnational character is not limited to any one peripheral element like international co-production. The medium is transnational in terms of production, distribution,

⁷Some scholars have also used the term “crossover cinema” to describe transnational films. This is given their cross-cultural dynamics in terms of production and distribution of the media contents (see Khorana 2013) However, Desai (2004) is opposed to the use of this term because it suggests a kind of disconnect from traditional to non-traditional audiences. Also, Hjort (2009) argues that the notion of “transnational” in and of itself does not offer a comprehensive understanding of its constitutive elements.

exhibition, and reception. The majority of Nollywood films are produced in Nigeria and imported into transnational spaces through a variety of platforms (from YouTube to Netflix), others are – as noted above – internationally co-produced. Kraidy (2005) argues,

Coproduction gives companies several advantages...Joining forces allows companies to share equipment, technical staff and know-how, and shooting locations. These benefits, in turn, expand potential sources of funding, including government subsidies and tax breaks, and also spread the risk, so that different entities share the burden of a potential commercial failure. Reducing risk is also related to the bigger markets reached by companies that enter into coproduction arrangements: if a television program or movie fails in a national or regional market somewhere, commercial success in a different market will make up for the losses. These considerable financial, technical, and market incentives have triggered a significant worldwide increase in coproduction (Kraidy 2005, 101).

The growth of international partnership in media production has caused an increasing number of Nollywood filmmakers to engage in international coproduction. Today, a few Nollywood films are internationally coproduced with foreign media corporations. This situation has resulted in an ongoing debate among media experts and critics as to whether Nollywood films that are partly produced in the diaspora have a diasporic character or are strictly alternative transnational?

Moreover, digital and satellite transmission have not only made minority films more accessible to audiences at a distance – they have also created new kinds of audiences connected over space and time (Carpentier 2011; Miller 2016). Basch, Schiller and Blanc (1994) defined transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (8). This action-oriented definition underlines the agency of displaced communities in facilitating connection between the homeland and the host societies. Mass media are important to this process, in that they play a central role in facilitating the flow of cultural products across transnational geographies. Nollywood is an active partner in this new media paradigm: As Tsika (2015) aptly observed,

“Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have not simply expanded the parameters of Nollywood stardom. They have also inspired new narratives in Nollywood films—even entire subgenres devoted to the theme of connectivity” (115). Today, a lot of African immigrants are using the connectivity of transnational media (including the prism of Nollywood films) to negotiate and sustain cultural identity in diaspora.

These deeply “transnational” dimensions of Nollywood are related to the dynamics and influence of the African diaspora. As Krings and Okome (2013) and Haynes (2013) have observed, the African diaspora has contributed significantly to the flow of Nollywood productions across transnational geographies. The liberalization of mass media has also resulted in the spread of media and culture across transnational geographies. Jedlowski (2013) similarly found that “Nigerian video films travel all over the world, transforming Nollywood into a transnational and global phenomenon” (25). While the paradigm shifts just described has contributed to the transformation of Nollywood into a global phenomenon, it has also facilitated the globalization of Nigerian cultural heritage. As Falola (2013) also points out, “Nollywood films have traveled widely and combine an adept manipulation of African languages with images and scenes that reveal African landscapes and storylines that are grounded in the rich valences of African culture” (282). Today, Nollywood fulfils an important function in terms of shaping an understanding of Nigerian cultural values, identity, and society in the diasporic world, by facilitating wider exposure and increased consumption for Nigerian cultural specificities.

The transnational shift traced here is important for its growing impact on the way media providers work, and also its growing impact on the way audiences are constituted and see themselves. As Nico Carpentier (2011) notes, the dynamics of minority media are very different from those of the traditional mass media:

[T]he aim of community media organizations to serve the community is often translated as enabling and facilitating access and participation by members of the community. A diversity of ordinary people is given the opportunity to have their voices heard and valued. Societal groups who are misrepresented, disadvantaged, stigmatized or even repressed can benefit especially from using the channels of communication opened by community and alternative media, strengthening their internal identity, manifesting this identity to the outside world, and thus supporting social change and/or development (97).

In this context, an increasing number of minority media have begun to address the power gap between mainstream and periphery media, along with its imbalances in terms of global media flows (Higbee and Lim 2010). In the case of Nollywood, it has been noticed that as the medium's films circulate around the world, an increasing number of people within African diasporic communities have become more dependent on such media productions and less dependent on mainstream media. According to Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013), "Spreadable practices are allowing more content to circulate across national borders according to criteria very different from the criteria of those who once managed the distribution of culture: commercial interests, film festival programmers, and government agencies, for instance" (289).

In short, the transnationalization of ethnic media such as Nollywood has helped to offset the power and control of mainstream media (such as Hollywood) in the global media landscape. The increasing inflow of Nollywood productions into the mainstream has also altered the audience base of these media corporations in the global African diaspora. There is growing evidence that Nollywood has an increasing transnational appeal to audiences in Africa and the global African diaspora (Adejunmobi 2010; Krings 2010; Okome 2013; Kings and Okome 2013; Haynes 2013 (Move). For these reasons, Nollywood plays a central role in the transmission of the particularities of Nigerian society and cultural specificities, but also in fostering identity discourses in transnational spaces (Esman 2009; Manning 2009; Krings and Okome 2013; Falola 2013; Haynes 2013; Feldner 2019).

The ideoscapes (Appadurai 1990) that flow through these films are manifested through the blending of local and global cultural art forms (glocalization) and the mobility of media and culture from the periphery to the center (transnationalization). This is evidenced in a number of transnational Nollywood films, including *Osuofia in London* (2003), a story about a Nigerian named Osuofia (Nkem Uwoh) who travels to the UK to claim the inheritance his late brother left for him; *Feathered Dreams* (2012), a tale of a young Nigerian girl named Sade (Omoni Oboli) in the Ukraine, who aspires to become a singer, but is sent to study medicine in a Ukrainian University after her father's death. *Doctor Bello* (2013) is a story about Nigerian immigrant medical doctor, Dr. Bello (Jimmy Jean-Louis), and an African-American cancer specialist, Dr. Michael Durant (Isaiah Washington), in New York. Dr. Durant solicits the assistance of Dr. Bello to help save one of his young patients. Dr. Bello concurs and administers a secret African potion to the patient who later recovers from his illness. However, the hospital authorities got heed of the duo's scheme and Dr. Bello is imprisoned for medical malpractice while the latter is suspended from work. *Half of the Yellow Sun* (2013) is a historical fiction adapted from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2006) acclaimed novel of the same name, which was set in the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970). The film is about two sisters from a wealthy Nigerian family, Olanna (Thandie Newton) and Kainene (Anika Noni Rose), whose lives are characterized by love, betrayal, and reconciliation in the aftermath of the war.⁸ These films, which revolve around the lives and lived experiences of Nigerians cast light on the human condition, but always through representing Nigerian specificity

⁸ Other examples include *One Night in Vegas* (2013), a comedy drama about a couple, James and Gennie Forster (John Dumelo and Yvonne Nelson), who have been experiencing marital problems and decide to travel to Vegas to rekindle their relationship. *30 Days in Atlanta* (2014) is a romantic comedy about two men, Richard and Akpos (Ramsey Nouah and Ay Makun) who win a trip to Atlanta, USA, and while in Atlanta engage in frivolous activities that cause them a lot of trouble. *A Trip to Jamaica* (2016) is a comedy drama about the frantic adventure of a newly engaged couple, Akpos (Ay Makun) and Bola (Funke Akindele), while vacationing with family in Jamaica.

in the context of global connections and far-flung settings. They clearly highlight Nollywood's "transnational" and "glocal" character.

Consumer technology has also played a part in the "transnationalization" process described here. As Athique (2016) observes, digitisation has offered "a newfound capacity to collapse time and distance within a world-spanning technical apparatus" (1). Similarly, Karim (1998) points out that, "[m]arginalized ethnic media are in a number of cases becoming sophisticated in terms of operation and content. They are also in direct competition with mainstream media" (7). The proliferation of streaming devices, such as smartphones, iPads and tablets has made it possible for service providers to transmit a myriad of cultural productions on a global scale, in the form of audio and video files. In the case of Nollywood, these media technologies have allowed Nollywood filmmakers to easily transmit cultural products, and thereby provided an enormous opportunity for Nollywood's transnational audiences to engage in media across time and space. For this reason, Athique points out, "transnational" audiences and viewing practices have evolved to the point that they now "take place across the national boundaries that have structured the discussion of human geography for the past century" (14).

The Transnational Circulation of Nollywood Films

Recent scholarship on the relationship between Nollywood and the Internet shows that the film medium is gaining increasing visibility online, and this shift has enhanced audience participation in transnational spaces, especially among younger demographics (Krings 2010; Shivers 2010; Krings and Okome 2013; Jedlowski 2013). Obiaya (2010) and then Dekie, Meers, Winkel, Van Bauwel, and Smets (2014) have demonstrated how Nollywood's African and non-Africans audiences are engaging with the medium online. They found that new communication

technologies have helped to increase the visibility of Nollywood productions online. They have also helped to enhance the participation of Nollywood audiences in engaging the medium.

There are several benefits of such transnationalism for Nollywood. Most importantly, it has provided an opportunity for filmmakers to engage African and non-African audiences in transnational spaces. Studies have found that the circulation of Nollywood films in transnational spaces has not only contributed to Nollywood's outreach to audiences in Africa and the global African diaspora but has also enabled this minority medium to increase its market share in the global mediascape previously dominated by Western and Asian media productions (Jedlowski 2013). Other benefits include changes in materiality and film culture, aesthetics and narratives arcs, as well as wide circulation of content. This is evidenced in the shift from traditional to modern modes of production, distribution, and exhibition of films. This shift involves the ways the media contents are produced, how they circulate across different networks, and how the audiences eventually receive, appropriate, and make meaning out of them.

Dimensions of Transnationalism in Nollywood Films.

Nollywood aesthetic itself has been heavily influenced by transnational media forms since its inception.

Jonathan Haynes (2013, 76)

Nollywood films are, as we have seen above, increasingly characterized by transnational elements. These features are manifest in the cast and crew, themes, aesthetics and narratives. Of course, international operations and international cultural exchange are by no means a recent development in the global media landscape. Many filmmakers (including those in Hollywood) engage in transnational business and cultural practices, including the adaptation of foreign art

forms (cultural images, themes, and narratives) as a strategy to expand viewership. Shaw (2013) therefore observes:

Transnational exchanges have long been central to film-making in terms of funding and the cast and crews, and an increasing numbers of films in the international market cannot be identified with a single nation, with many films shooting in a number of countries, relying on a multinational cast and crew, and funded by a range of production companies (47).

The adoption of local and universal art forms in filmmaking has significant consequences, though, for minority media and their audiences. The globalisation of ethnic media is itself a result of transnational dynamics, and transnational media (and transnational ethnic media in particular) are becoming important platforms for engaging in racial, ethnic, and national politics (Athique 2016; Bailey, Olga, G., Georgiou, Myria, and Ramaswami Harindranath 2007). Most importantly for the purposes of this study, minority media provide, as Aksoy and Robins (2003) put it, “new means to promote transnational bonding, and thereby sustain (ethnic, national or religious) identities and cultures at-a-distance” (93).

The resulting popularity of transnational media forms has benefited Nollywood, in terms of globalisation and commercialisation, along with the emergence of new transnational dynamics. There are growing communities of African immigrants in many Western and European countries today. This development has made these geographical terrains lucrative markets for Nollywood cinema. With the understanding of the transnational elements of Nollywood films outlined above, the following section focuses on the reception of the medium within such Nigerian diaspora communities.

The Influence of Nollywood in Africa and the Global African Diaspora

Nollywood has become a major source of African identification in post-colonies such as South Africa and Namibia. The consumption of Nigerian video films provides young

highly educated, cosmopolitan men and women in Cape Town and Windhoek with the opportunity to claim, reinvent, and debate their Africanity, thus imagining a contemporary brand of Afromodernity on-screen.

Heike Becker (2013, 193)

In his introduction to a collection of essays on Nollywood, Okome (2007, 6) notes that Nollywood has re-invented contemporary cinema culture in Africa. Many other scholars (Krings and Okome 2013; Santanera 2012; Becker 2013; Babson 2013; Bohme 2013; Bryce 2013; Haynes 2016; to mention a few) have also acknowledged the influence of Nollywood in terms of empowering cultural industries on the continent of Africa and increasingly the global African diaspora. They note that Nollywood has an overwhelming influence on media/film culture and popular culture in these arenas. One explanation for Nollywood's strong appeal is its role in the transmission of African cultural values and popular culture, and in fact the modalities of Nollywood have become models for media optimization in the African media environment.

The literature indicates that Nollywood has exerted a remarkable influence on the film culture of many media industries, including Kenya's Riverwood, Ghana's Ghollywood, Cameroun's Collywood and Tanzania's Bongowood, which some media observers consider as "offshoots" of Nigeria's Nollywood industry (Endong 2017). The role of Nollywood in informing film culture in Africa and increasingly the global African diaspora has been widely documented, in studies on the influence of Nollywood on popular culture in Zambia (Muchinba (2004), Botswana (Motiki 2006), Uganda (Dipio 2008), and Congo (Pype 2013), just to mention a few of the countries that have been studied. As Haynes (2007) observes,

The export of Nigerian films has been remarkable, even if most of the profits do not end up in the right hands. They are on television in Namibia and on sale on the streets in Kenya. In Congo, they are broadcast with the soundtrack turned down while an interpreter tells the

story in Lingala or other languages. In New York, their biggest consumers are now immigrants from the Caribbean and African Americans, not Africans, and Chinese people are buying them too. In Holland, Nollywood stars are recognized on the streets of Suriname, and in London they are hailed by Jamaicans (106-107).

Nollywood is a dominant resource not only in Sub-Saharan Africa, but increasingly also in the global African diaspora (Miller 2012, 2). Nollywood's exponential growth in transnational spaces has been attributed to the African diaspora that continue to demonstrate interest in this media's cultural formations. The globalization of Nollywood films has apparently contributed to the popularity of Nigerian popular art forms in these contexts (Tsika 2015).

In analyzing the influence of Nollywood, scholars have found that Nollywood has a strong appeal to local populations in countries like Zambia (Muchinba 2004); Botswana (Motiki 2006); Cameroon (Ajibade 2007), Tanzania (Bohme 2013), Ghana (Aveh 2014), Kenya (Ondego 2008; Waliaula 2014), and Congo (Pype 2013). Two of the major findings by these scholars are that Nollywood's popular aesthetics and styles are occasionally incorporated in local productions and Nollywood audiences in these contexts sometimes emulate Nigerian popular expressions (e.g., dialects, slang, styles) in their everyday conversations. Other scholars analyzing the transnational circulation of Nollywood films have also observed that Nollywood productions are popular in the Caribbean (Cartelli 2007; Bryce 2013), South America (Ewing 2019), and Europe (Ogunyemi 2012; Samyn 2013; Santanera 2013; Ugochukwu 2017). Santanera makes the following point regarding the reception of Nollywood films in Turin, Italy:

Nigerians in Turin watch Nollywood films daily not so much to avoid the hardships of the present and reconnect themselves with an idealized homeland, but more to measure themselves against a familiar, symbolic, and discursive order to cope with feelings of disorientation in a foreign society. On the one hand, confronting the well-known habits, beliefs, and values of the homeland provides anchors and reference points to manage in the confusing new country. On the other hand, it encourages reflections on the homeland and the social experience of migration, thereby enabling immigrants to reassess their own history and identify and master its multiple transformations...Nigerians, who have recently arrived

and are in precarious socioeconomic conditions, tend to cling to Nollywood plots to deal with the feelings of cultural dislocation and personal failure that they often experience in the host society. Watching Nigerian video films offers similar interpretive schemes and structures through which to decipher the alienating new context and give an acceptable meaning to their tough situation (Santanera 2013, 246).

The above findings demonstrate that Nollywood films are, in other words, highly interesting to audiences in Africa and the global African diaspora and tracing their use can be highly informative. As Myra Georgiou (2013) argues “Only if we examine the diverse and complex ways in which minorities use media to make sense of the world around them can we begin to understand the wider significance of media and communications for minorities’ cultural and political representation and belonging” (80). The impressive number of scholars who have shed light on ways in which Nollywood film genres are shaping consumer culture and attitudes among audiences not only on the continent of Africa, but also the global African diaspora confirm the importance of Nollywood as an essential cultural medium. One important conclusion that can be drawn from these studies therefore is that Nollywood films have a strong appeal to people not only in African, but also the global African diaspora.

Nollywood as a Conduit of Diasporic Communication

As Carpentier (2011) observes, “The media sphere serves as a location where citizens can voice their opinions and experiences and interact with other voices” (67). For many ethnic groups, the media of diasporas - transnational and diasporic – present a platform where issues affecting diasporic communities are presented and analyzed. In his study of community media in Poland, for example, Carpentier found that people frequently utilize these media as a platform to engage in identity politics. This finding confirms the insight of Bailey et al. (2007) that minority media “mediate connections among fellow members of diasporas and communication between different

cultural groups and individuals in local, national and transnational spaces” (3). As their analysis adds, minority media offer in the process “symbolic spaces for political expression, senses of inclusion and/or exclusion, and hybrid identity articulations which transcend the binary of ‘homeland’ and ‘new land’” (6).

Issues of representation are of prime importance for our purposes here, if only because misrepresentation and underrepresentation of racialized minorities in the mainstream have significant impact on minoritized communities. These negative phenomena can have far-reaching consequences, as they can result in emotional and psychological trauma (Hall 1990, Naficy 1993; Karim 2003; Jiwani 2006; Tettey and Puplampu 2005). Such experiences can give minorities a deep sense of alienation, loss, and nostalgia (Jiwani 2006; Kelly 2009; Bozdag et al. 2012; Lykke 2015; Miles and Brown 2006; Carl 2006, and more).

For such reasons, studies like those of Bailey et al. (2007) and Bozdag et al. (2012, 96) underscore the role of minority media in the discursive construction of identity and belonging. They note that media can provide a networking space (and a tool) for migrants and immigrants to engage in “self-reflexive discourse” by drawing inspiration from the cultural representations presented to them. On this issue of media discourse, feminist scholar and critic Yasmin Jiwani (2006, 2009) presents classic examples and, at the same time, problematizes how racial and ethnic minorities, such as the diaspora, have been misconstrued in mainstream media, including television and print, over time. These include the portrayal of immigrant populations as inferior, insolvent, and manipulative people. She presents a compelling argument that,

In representing race, the [mainstream] news media racialize particular groups of people, demarcating them as different from the majority and inputting qualities that emphasize their difference, and then, by inferiorizing, trivializing, and exoticizing these qualities, ultimately render such differences deviant (Jiwani 2006, 41).

The power of mass media such as film, television, and radio to inform and shape the perceptions of reality is one fundamental reason these phenomena and their affordances are considered instruments of power and control (Fiske 1993). The power and agency of mass media can be seen in their role as sources of entertainment, information, and education. As noted above, this power is evident in the way media representations inform understandings of society and culture. With respect to the mass media, Georgiou (2006) therefore notes that,

Representations begin in the use of common language, in signs and symbols that allow us to build up shared understandings and common codes for interpreting the world...Media become important as systems of representation, but also as socially relevant cultural references – in their political economy, their content, their symbolic relevance for particular society groups (28).

From a diasporic perspective, such representations are important to ensure sustainability and continuity. Given the fact that globalization has led to the blurring of previous physical and cultural boundaries, facilitating a rise in transnational exchanges and migration, the need for cultural preservation has become more pressing (and more complex) for minorities than ever. According to Hirji (2010),

There is some merit to the notion of cultural preservation given the ongoing loss of languages, artistic production, and rituals by groups around the world. However, even when individuals are determined to hold onto the cultural practices that they associate with their place of ancestry or with their religion, they may -in fact, almost certainly will – confront fragmentation within their own communities regarding the correct practices, particularly given that their culture, religion or place of origin will undergo its own evolution (54).

In short, transnational ethnic media do not only provide the tools of communication. They also provide a unified space for diasporic engagements in discourses of culture, identity and

belonging, and actively shape such public discourse. As Gagnon (2000) argues, these processes of representation are inherently political:

The site of representation has always been integral to the cultural politics of difference. For feminists, this has meant addressing the various modalities of systemic sexism. For queer communities, this has meant tackling the biases of heterosexism and homophobia. And for communities of colour and Native communities of artists and writers, this has meant combatting a systemic racism that is in a continual process of mutation (23).

In her own study, for example, on the conception of “race and racialization” in art productions in Canadian society, Gagnon illuminates how artists of colour and First Nations artists engage with issues of identity and representation in their writing, video and films on art and culture, arguing that these texts provide a medium “to self-explore, celebrate, and validate cultural identities that had been marginalized and devalued” over time (Gagnon 2000, 26). Her study reveals the complex ideologies embedded in still images, used to designate marginalized racial and ethnic categories.

For the purposes of this study, what is also remarkable about Gagnon’s study is that it allowed the scholar to elucidate the subjectivities of marginal groups (e.g., women and people of colour) in a world where the notion of “otherness” reigns supreme. The contemporary world is inundated with issues of identity based on commonality and difference, resulting in the increasing exclusion rather than inclusion of racialized communities. These complex dynamics are problematic, both in theory and practice, in a world that remains indifferent to the politics of otherness that has become pervasive across geopolitical borders. (I will revisit the notion of “otherness” in more depth in a subsequent section).

In terms of the specific context of diaspora, Aksoy and Robin uncover three important themes that are relevant this study: The themes of “exile, loss and longing” (91). These components are shaped by a person’s experience and by the context. People go into exile for both voluntary

and involuntary reasons. The distinction between voluntary and involuntary migrants/immigrants can be viewed in terms of permanent and transitory migration. According to Naficy (1993),

Exile is a process of becoming, involving separation from home, a period of liminality and in-betweenness that can be temporary or permanent, and finally incorporation into the dominant host country. Although separation from home begins with departure from the homeland, the imprint, the influence, of home continues well into the remaining phases and shapes them (xvi).

The reason(s) for migration can, in other words, impact migrants' experiences, as well as their emotional and cognitive dispositions. These factors can also inform the events surrounding migration and/or shape migration experiences in both positive and negative ways. Research also suggests that involuntary migration say from the homeland can cause migrants to feel a sense of detachment and loss toward family and material acquisitions left behind, as well as cultural heritage. Worse still, this negative feeling can make the process of integration and adaptation in the host society to become more complex than anticipated. As many migration/immigration experts have observed, the experiences of migration can provoke emotional and cognitive reaction, leading to nostalgia - a strong longing for the homeland. "Nostalgia, of course, is not just a feature of exile; it is a constituent part of human development, and it serves to repair our discontinuous identities as both individuals and collectivities by appealing to origins and commonalities" (Naficy 1993, 147-8).

It is significant for our purposes here that such experiences of migration and subsequent events in the host countries often compel audiences in the diaspora to rely on community media as a prime source of entertainment, information, and education. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated the situation by confining a lot of people to their homes. Research

suggests that racialized communities are therefore relying on films and television serials more than ever, to relieve themselves of alienation and anxiety.

There is a substantial literature that deals with the production and consumption of ethnic media in diaspora (Naficy 1993, 2001, 2006; Kraidy 1999, 2005; Downing; and more). Some of these studies also explore media practices in diasporic communities and the ramifications. Naficy's studies (2001, 2006) analyze media consumption among Iranian immigrants in Los Angeles and demonstrate the agency of ethnic media in creating imagined spaces where minoritized communities engage in the discursive construction of identity and belonging. As Naficy (1993) argues, diasporic media play a significant role in creating third spaces not only for entertainment, but also to engage in cultural resistance, (re)production and mapping of community through exposure and consumption of mediated cultural imaginaries.

Downing's (1992) study on media production and consumption by Latino audiences in the greater New York region in the 1980s elucidates the agency of minority media in shaping minority population's cultural practices. Downing explored Latin America's television genres - telenovelas and other television drama serials - that are popular among Spanish immigrants in North America. The literature indicates these melodramas, which were produced in the 1950s drew inspiration from older Mexican, Colombian, and Brazilian genres. The media products initially targeted niche audiences such as housewives, although the demographics of viewers have grown in recent years.

By analyzing ethnic minority media, these scholars inform understandings of the dynamics of these phenomena and the cultural imaginaries, as well as how minority communities are using the narratives as a framework to engage in the politics of representation. One important theme that resonate with these studies is that of empowerment. Specifically, the role of ethnic media in empowering minority audiences in imagined spaces. As far as the Nigerian diaspora is concerned,

“Nollywood” is the primary community medium of this type. Many Nigerian diaspora families consider the consumption of Nollywood films as an important family ritual. It provides an escape from the daily rigours of wider local society. Aside from entertainment, these viewing sessions also help in attenuating the audiences’ sense of alienation from the homeland, loss of family and community, and nostalgia caused by the complex process of rehabilitation and integration into the host society. These revelations correlate with Oluyinka Esan’s findings in her 2012 study of Nollywood audiences in London, UK.

In her ethnographic study, Esan (2011) aimed to understand how diasporic audience consumption patterns of Nollywood films provide new meaning about film culture. She found that Nollywood provides agency for its audience and what those values engender. What Esan also found is that viewing of Nollywood provides the audience “a means of escape from host cultures into a sanctuary reminiscent of their ‘home’” (Esan 2011, 130). Drawing on Esan’s study, Laura Hubner (2011) highlighted some of the value Nollywood films provide the audiences, including the capacity “to offer escape or a sense of nostalgia, to endorse appropriate behaviour and values, to transmit cultural heritage and affirm cultural identity and sometimes as a means to express defiance, resistance or political activism” (7).

Esan’s study is foundational and critical to this study many ways. There is an important connection between Esan’s analysis and this study in terms of how the audiences studied appraise Nollywood and its film culture in the third space. This study explores the reception and interpretation of Nollywood and its film culture within Nigerian diasporic community in Quebec. Both analyses are centered on the reception of Nollywood films within Nigerian diasporic communities, although in different contexts (London, UK and Quebec, Canada). The findings from Esan’s study indicate that Nollywood holds a strong appeal to Nigerians living in diaspora. They

also show that Nollywood provides its audience(s) some kinds of cultural experiences that inform everyday practices in the context studied. This study extends Esan's analysis by examining how the audience studied make meaning of Nollywood films in context and what those meanings engender. From a cultural value perspective, Nollywood presents an important discursive arena for diasporic audiences to learn about Nigerian cultural values. This ethnic medium is important for the younger demographics especially, who are uninformed about the home cultures and tend to embrace Western values. Thus, Nollywood becomes an enabling tool and a medium for shaping understandings of Nigerian culture and society.

One major challenge faced by many young immigrants today is the difficulty of articulating and sustaining ethnic/cultural identity in multiethnic diasporic spaces. Knowledge of Nigerian cultural values can play a role in how these demographics make sense of and negotiate identity and belonging in diasporic contexts. As the findings presented below show, adult populations (especially those in diaspora) therefore commonly use the cultural representations portrayed in Nollywood films to instil a sense of identity and belonging in their offspring.

In short, a significant number of immigrants rely on their community's media as a primary source to be informed about changing trends in the homeland, from social to cultural and economic to political. This fundamental role is clear in the case of Nollywood. Aside from the use of Nollywood to articulate the historical, social, and cultural values in Nigerian society, with emphasis on reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging, Nollywood is frequently being used to maintain connections and promote solidarity, as well as "sustain inter-continental alliances" among diasporic Nigerians (Karim 1998).

Conclusion

As Georgiou and Silverstone (2007) remind us, “The debates on the direction of communication flows have long moved away from the original cultural imperialism thesis, which implies linearity and one-way relationships of causality between producer (West) and receiver (and the rest)” (33). This chapter has explored the transnational dimension of Nollywood, focusing on the key elements that inform the media’s transnational character. It also explored the debates surrounding Nollywood’s film culture and its consequences. The main thesis of this chapter was that transnational Nollywood can be essential for shaping understanding of Nigerian cultural norms and values in transnational spaces, with huge implications for how diasporic Nigerians negotiate identity and make sense of belonging in context.

While research on the media’s role in representation of society and culture abound, there is insufficient empirical research on the reception of this media within Nigerian diaspora communities around the world. Understanding of how diasporic audiences receive, use, and make meaning out of the media contents, as well as what the outcomes engender can help to inform research, policy, and practices. Larkin (2008), for instance, observes that “media such as television, cassettes, and cinema provide the infrastructure to facilitate and direct transnational flows of cultural goods and the modes of affect, desire, fantasy, and devotion these goods provoke” (2). Nollywood is an important case in point, given the role of this medium in the globalization of Nigerian cultural imaginaries. Aside from shaping understanding of the reality of Nigerian society, Nollywood films have helped to improve value orientation in relation to mainstream perceptions of Nigerian society and cultures. Nollywood film is shaping public and scholarly discourses on the implications of transnational minority media for people’s sense of identity and belonging in the global African diaspora.

For Nollywood's transnational audiences, the medium addresses the cultural politics of "otherness" widespread in European and Western political rhetoric, policies, and media (Jiwani 2006; Miles and Brown 2006; Fazal 2007). As Fazal points out, "diasporic communities continue to be understood within the context of the 'other' and diasporic spaces enables them to be segregated from the dominant culture which is somewhat tolerant of separate cultural practises as long as they do not encroach upon the conceptualisation of the nation and its identity" (Fazal 2007, 48). For diasporic audiences, Nollywood is a useful tool and model for confronting this situation.

Georgiou and Silverstone (2007) note that, "Media provide frameworks for inclusion, and by the same token, frameworks for exclusion. These frameworks are at once transnational, national, ethnically specific, regional, and local. The culture that sustains and that are sustained by them are differentially placed with respect to each other and to their mainstreams" (36). The representation of immigrant populations as "others", especially in a settlement context coupled with the negative coverage of their migration experiences in mainstream media illustrate the problematic of belonging in a world that tends to favour exclusion rather than inclusion and differences rather than commonalities (Miles 1989; Georgiou and Silverstone 2007; Orgad 2012).

For such reasons, audiences in Africa and the Nigerian diaspora have a complex and intimate relationship with the minority community media known as Nollywood. If, as Ayo Ogunyemi (2009) argues, "The movie industry, driven primarily by Nigeria's Nollywood, is the most active and valuable part of the internal knowledge economy in Africa today" (1), there are important implications for the global public in terms of understanding Nigerian cultural values, identity and society. Nollywood must continue to innovate and serve audiences better, to be able to better position itself in the global media environment.

Kraidy (2005) observes that, “globalization and the commercial imperative to reach large audiences with minimal investment and risk have made hybrid media forms pervasive” (8). In terms of the “hybridity” of transnational media, it seems clear that despite the criticisms aimed at Nollywood film culture regarding its remarkable cultural hybridity, the creative strategy of hybridity has contributed significantly to the success and evolution of the medium in transnational spaces. It has allowed the filmmakers to address the tension between the “center” and the “periphery,” by (re)positioning Nollywood films in a way that aligns closely with modernity. In terms of promotion and commercialization, hybridity has allowed the filmmakers to engage distant audiences, and to increase revenues and competitiveness in a global media landscape that has historically been dominated by Western and Asian media. The cultural and technological hybridity of Nollywood have made it a force to reckon with, within emerging transnational frameworks of globalization and new communication technology. In the following chapter, I look at Nollywood in the imagined third space of media consumption the participants co-created and the potential implications.

CHAPTER 3

Nollywood in the Third Space

[W]e find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion [...]. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative site of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

Homi Bhabha (1994, 1-2)

Introduction

In *Watching Soap Opera in the Diaspora: Cultural Proximity or Critical Proximity?* (2012), Myra Georgiou asks a fundamental question: “Is diaspora contained in the cultural space of its region of origin or is it positioned in a parallel – or even competing – space?” (6). In response to this question, I draw on Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) “Third Space” concept to map the location of diaspora and the dynamics of diaspora existence in imagined spaces, addressing questions of power, agency and control across time and space.

In this chapter, I examine the significance of the “third space” co-created by Nollywood diaspora in the imagined space of the global discursive arena. The aim is to understand the nuances of this imagined space, especially in terms of how participants’ engagement with Nollywood film shapes the dialectics of culture, identity and belonging. This chapter therefore aims to understand how participants’ temporal experiences in this discursive space influence the way they negotiate identity and belonging in the hybrid spaces of their everyday diasporic lives. The chapter is organized around three main concepts: negotiation, identity and belonging, although I also show the intersections of these categories in assessing their dynamics in diasporic third spaces. I argue that the third spaces co-created by Nollywood provide an important platform for diasporic

histories, cultures, and identities to be reimagined, facilitating the (re)construction and enrichment of minority identities.

Locating Diaspora in Third Spaces

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, [...] constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.

Homi Bhabha (1994, 55)

Diaspora involves imagined communities (Anderson 2006 [1983]) spread across different imaginative geographies (Said 1978). These communities are located in in-between spaces (Bhabha 1994) bordering the homeland (first space) and the host land (second space) (Naficy 1994). They are socially constructed spaces of habitation and evolve in unique ways (Anderson (2006 [1983])). Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to such in-between spaces as a “Third Space.” The third space is a hybrid space that encompasses a wide range of identifications – social, cultural, political, and religious (Bhabha 1994; Kraidy 2005). Its hybrid nature derives from the convergence and divergence of racial/ethnic groups and their cultural properties. The conflation of different racial and ethnic categories across geographies (including global, local and hybrid forms) is the reason the third space has been described as a minor glocalized space (Kraidy 1999, 2005).

Bhabha (1994) also explains that “[t]he margin of hybridity, where cultural difference ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and ethnic groups as, [...] homogenous polarized political consciousness” (207). What is typical, then, about this imagined space is the

fact that it connects a set of opposites such as homeland and host land, periphery and center, and more. Compared to mainstream contexts, the third space is non-static in nature. Its fluidity is a result of the constant inflows and outflows of people, media, and cultural products. This is one reason the imagined space is often associated with mobility and transition. It entails moving back and forth (dislocation, relocation and translocation) between parallel spaces (Bhabha 1994, 3). According to Karim (1998) diaspora is situated in “the cultural border between the country of origin and country of residence” (3). It is “[a] zone of intense, cutting-edge creativity born out of the existential angst of the immigrant who is neither here nor there” (4).

The third space is also a space of cultural resistance and reformation (Karim 1998, 2003). Cultural resistance refers to individual and collective efforts at contesting, combatting and decolonizing power in colonial contexts. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha observes that minoritized communities (e.g., diasporas) are constrained to imaginary, hybrid spaces that are marked by competing values and social inequalities, and experiences of migration, radicalization, and marginalization. The ideological and contested nature of the third space points to important implications for minoritized communities. In an increasingly globalizing world, transnational third spaces will continue to serve as both home and hub to deterritorialized nations and/or peoples in the foreseeable future (Karim 2000). Karim (2002) describes “transnational ‘third spaces’ as sites characterized by conflict and creativity: the third space’s “zone of multiple borders is a frontier of modernity, where new ways of addressing the problems of contemporary social relations are sought at local and global levels” (14). In this context, the convergence and divergence of racial/ethnic groups and their racial/ethnic formations (languages, music, foods, artifacts, and more) is important because it enriches diasporic lives in relation to their historical traditions, cultural experiences, and imaginations of identity and belong in this pluralistic and

multicultural context. As Karim (1998) notes, “Diasporic communal networks are sets of planetary linkages that form a third tier of inter-regional connections in addition to those maintained by governments and transnational organizations” (3).

Due to the third space’s hybrid and ideological character, it is a site of contestation and articulation for cultures and identities (Naficy 1993, Bhabha 1994; Georgiou 2010; Carpentier 2011). Bhabha (1994) therefore describes the third space as an important discursive arena where postcolonial issues related to culture and identity and questions of power and agency are frequently debated, analyzed, and discussed, to provide understandings of their implications for minority populations. What is typical about the third space is that global cultures are constantly produced and reproduced in successive sequences with a focus on power and control. As Tettey and Puplampu (2005) emphasize, “Location is a critical determinant of the perspective from which individuals and groups see themselves and others, and how they are seen in return. It also informs the value and power that they wield, or that is accorded to them, in the context of their relationships with others in the polity” (14).

With the contexts and stakes just described in mind, Bhabha’s (1990, 1994, 1996) concepts of third space, cultural hybridity, identity, and difference look very relevant here. They provide theoretical and critical insights that enable postcolonial/globalization researchers to map out the dynamics of diasporic third spaces and the experiences of minoritized communities who are constrained to these spatialities. The concept of third space is therefore very valuable in the way it informs understandings of diasporic communities. According to Bhabha (1994),

Community is the antagonist supplement of modernity: in the metropolitan space it is the territory of the minority, threatening the claims of civility; in the transnational world it becomes the border-problem of the diasporic, the migrant, the refugee. Binary divisions of social space neglect the profound temporal disjunction – the translational time and space –

through which minority communities negotiate their collective identifications (Bhabha 1994, 231).

In short, attending to Bhabha's third space can allow us to understand not only how diaspora members are situated but also how they negotiate community identity – including in this case cultural negotiation with media texts in context. This kind of investigation provides the focus of the following subsections, with reference to the way people in diasporic third spaces relate to Nollywood film.

Nollywood Diaspora: Co-Creating an Imagined Discursive Arena in the “Third Space.”

In diasporic contexts, the spaces of media consumption play a central role in shaping diasporic audiences' experiences and appreciation of ethnic media. These sociocultural spaces also have a huge influence on diaspora's cultural development and well-being. In the first chapter, I mentioned that Nollywood is rooted in a collectivist culture, and Nollywood films are often screened in communal third spaces. These include, but not limited to, community/recreational centers, restaurants and bars, coffee shops and cafes, barber shops and hair salons, beauty shops, grocery stores, private homes, and more. Typically, diasporic audiences congregate in these third spaces to watch Nollywood films in order to stay connected to the realities of Nigerian society. Aside from entertainment, Nollywood film's medium allows the audiences to appreciate Nigerian cultural imaginaries and thus engage in discourses of representation by talking about them (Ajibade 2007).

As John Hill (2000) argues, film not only represents but also shapes understandings of events in society. In the case of Nollywood, the films mediate Nigerian and African cultural narratives, and also provide particular kinds of opportunities for diasporic Nigerians and Africans to converge

in hybridized consumption spaces. Like Nollywood itself, the Nigerian diaspora and their imagined third spaces are constantly hybridizing as a result of the fluidity of this imagined space. (I will revisit this subject matter in more detail below). The confluence of diasporic audiences in these imagined spaces serve important purposes for the community. They facilitate community engagements by providing a platform where community members, extended families, and friends converge to participate in and experience media. The role of community and family in shaping diasporic construction of identity merits mention here. In Ogbuagu's (2012) study on Nigerian immigrants in Quebec, for example, the youth interviewed identified the "Nigerian community as the key to their identity construction" (12).

The interactions that occur in these imagined spaces also play a key role in facilitating cultural literacy. For example, they allow participants to learn about their ethnic/cultural heritage and thereby adopt attitudes and behaviours that align with the standards (norms and values) of Nigerian society. This reality illustrates the point that diasporic third spaces play a key role in the process of cultural translation. As scholars such as Bhabha (1994), Naficy (1994) and Karim (2003) have observed, the interactions that occur in these spaces provide participants with temporal experiences that allow them to (re)imagine critical issues such as culture and identity, diversity and inclusion, and social inclusion and exclusion, and to talk about how these phenomena impact racialized and ethnicized communities. As Georgiou notes:

Mediated and interconnected space becomes a space of contestation, of complex and often conflicting articulations of identity. In having access to various media and to communication technologies that diasporic people can control and manipulate in order to connect to (or disconnect from) individuals and communities in their neighbourhood or in distant places, they provide the ultimate example of the cosmopolitan condition. By being more informed about the politics and the culture of the country of origin, other sections of the diaspora, the country of settlement, or their locality, diasporic individuals and groups can construct a world of critical proximity: they become aware that, either they like it or not, they are not

just reflections of their country of origin, they do not just belong to a single group, they are not just located in a territory; thus and inevitably, diasporic identity is lived as multi-positioned in symbolic and geographical spaces (Georgiou 2010, 31).

One important observation about my study participants' consumption patterns concerns how they use multiple (collective) lenses to dissect the mediated cultural narratives, and multiple voices to analyze them from different standpoints. The temporality of experience in these interconnected spaces allows participants to broaden their knowledge of Nigerian cultures and society, but also to work on inter-ethnic and intergroup relations. Such "cultural socialization" is a communication process that allows cultural heritage, norms and values, and belief systems to be conveyed to the participants regardless of demographics. As postcolonial scholars and critics (e.g., Naficy 1993, 2001; Gagnon 2000; Jiwani 2006; Karim 2007; Mohabir 2017) have observed, the specificity of temporal experience with ethnic/community groups and/or media can influence the way minority populations construct, validate and negotiate identity and belonging. The way people draw on their temporal experiences of culture and identity can play a key role in the process of self-conception. In the following section I examine the intersections of negotiation, identity and belonging, to clarify the way they operate in diasporic third spaces.

Conceptualizing Identity and Belonging in Diasporic Third Spaces.

Ideas of identity and belonging are integral to diasporic lives. They inform individuals' self-conceptions and their positionality in the imagined space of diaspora and the broader context of society. Identity and belonging are also interdependent concepts that operate complementarily. This reciprocity derives from the way in which they simultaneously shape individuals' sense of self, place, and space. The question here is: What do the terms identity and belonging mean in a diasporic context, and how are they negotiated and shared by people within diaspora communities?

In the following section, I explore these conceptual models in more depth, to understand their meaning and manifestations. I also look at negotiation in the third space co-created by participants in an imagined discursive arena. The aim is to understand how participants' exposure to and consumption/reading of Nollywood can impact the way they negotiate identity and belonging in a lived context.

Identity

Identity refers to the process of self-conception. It involves a range of characteristics and qualities, values, beliefs, orientations that inform a person's self-concept in relation to others.⁹ As Hall (1990) notes, “[c]ultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (226). Some primary markers of identity include place of origin, race, nationality, ethnicity, and culture. Other conceptual models include language, music, literature, and related art forms. Hall (1990) maintains that cultural identity encompasses both “being” and also “belonging.” He notes this conceptual model “belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation” (224).¹⁰ He identified three factors that come to play in the process of identity conception: “histories, culture and power” (ibid).

⁹ Research suggests that individuals have two types of identities: primary and secondary identities. A primary identity often involves something like our ethnicity, and a secondary identity is one we acquire in the process of socialization within our immediate social settings.

¹⁰ Stuart Hall conceived of the notion of identity in two ways: identity based on commonality and identity based on difference.

For such reasons, identity is multi-layered and can relate to race, ethnicity, culture, religious, gender, and social class (Ting-Toomey 2013). It can include personal identity, social identity, cultural identity, and ethnic identity (Carpentier 2011). As Ting-Toomey (2015) asserts, “each individual’s composite identity has group membership, relational role, and individual self-reflexive implications. Individuals mostly acquired their composite identity through socio-cultural conditioning process, individual lived experiences, and the repeated intergroup and interpersonal interaction experiences” (1).

Personal identity is a sense of “self” often related to traits such as skin colour, hair, and body marking. Social identity derives from a person’s membership within a particular social group. The process of self-conception thus hinges on the notion of “self” in relation to “others.” On the other hand, cultural identity refers to a person’s belonging to a given ethnocultural group. This sense of identity is associated with a person’s place of birth and ancestry, as well as cultural values (Hall 1990; Ting-Toomey 1999). As Oysterman, Elmore, and Smith (2012) note,

Identity are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is. Identities can be focused on the past – what used to be true, the present-what is true of one now, or the future – the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obliged to try to become, or the person one fears one may become. Identities are orienting, they provide a meaning-making lens and focus one’s attention on some but not other features of the immediate context (69).

This study focuses on the social and cultural aspects of identity. Evidence from the literature suggests that we do not have much control over our ethnic identity, owing to its linkage to our nationality, ethnicity, and cultural values. As Georgiou (2006) has observed, though, individuals develop their sense of identity based on a set of social and cultural values. She adds, “Identity is not only socially constructed; it is also shaped in the intermixing and meeting of the social and the psychological” (44). This fluidity means that identity can be (re)constructed depending on a

person's social disposition across space and time. With regards to self-conception in diaspora, there are several constitutive elements that inform cultural identity. They include ethnicity, culture, language, music, costumes, dress codes, food, symbols, and much more. These cultural dynamics provide important benchmarks against which the boundaries of our identities are "determined and disputed" (Patterson 2004).

Belonging

It is said that belonging is part of human nature. "[T]he need to belong is a basic aspect of being human" (Marsh, Bradley, Love, Alexander & Norham (2007, 8). This is one important reason the term "belonging" is widely considered as a fundamental concept of selective association and differentiation. Studies have found that ideas of identity naturally play a key role in shaping individuals' sense of belonging (Hall 1990; Giddens 1990; Jiwani 1989; March et al. 2007; Oyserman et al. 2012). By the same token, belonging plays a significant role in continuing processes of self-identification. The term "belonging" refers here to a process by which individuals identify with a specific social group or community based on shared values. Belonging is therefore about "identifying" with and "connecting" to a target group whose members have a similar sense of self. As with identity, scholars have identified several spheres and layers of belonging. These include but not limited to conceptual models such as place of birth, race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion. To validate their sense of belonging to a specific sociocultural group, individuals often draw on these identity constructs as points of reference in their everyday lives (Hall 1990, 1992; Marsh et al 2007; Oyserman et al 2012). Human beings belong within such spheres of belonging in varied degrees. In the specific context of diaspora, identity and belonging

are conceptual tools used by people to make sense of themselves and their situatedness in context, complementarily. As Georgiou notes:

Diasporic identities are shaped in these different spaces, which are interconnected and sometimes distinct and competing. The diversity and different levels of intensity of spatial belongings reflect the multidimensionality of identities, that coexist, codepend and which cannot be holistic or framed within a single place anymore. Even a single identity, like the diasporic, is not singular and remains viable only through the multiple interweaving of different spaces and relations of belonging. Additionally, for diasporic identity, spatiality is of particular importance, as processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization shape them through experience and as context (Georgiou 2013, 10).

As Georgiou indicates, belonging has geographical, relational, and situational dimensions. From a geographical perspective, belonging is conceptualized based on a person's place of birth, i.e., a region or country of origin. From a relational perspective, belonging is defined in relation the networks and relationships formed across that physical geography. The situational aspect of belonging involves the way such a person positions him/herself in relation to others in the local social fabric of society. While human society has historically used these dimensions as key markers to create a sense of belonging, globalization and modernism have provoked new ways of thinking about and defining group membership within social, cultural, economic, political and religious groups (Marsh et al. 2007).

In this evolving context, Georgiou (2006) stresses the need to critically explore the notion of belonging in the attempt to define diaspora and its affordances: "Belonging, choosing not to belong, being excluded from belonging are all present conditions that need to be taken into account in defining diaspora and its meanings" (49). Most often, people make sense of their identity based on the way "belonging" is experienced in a given community. This means belonging is fundamental to creating a sense of identity, and vice versa. In diasporic contexts, the extent to

which a particular individual belongs to a specific group depends on the level of inclusion or exclusion from that specific group. My question is how Nollywood culture is understood in the third space the participants co-created, and the implications for how people make sense of identity and belonging in community. In the following section, I look at how identity and belonging are negotiated through the prism of Nollywood culture in imagined discursive spaces.

Negotiating Spaces: Mapping Nigerian Diaspora's Imagined Discursive Arenas.

In the context of diaspora, negotiation is important in every aspect of life. It plays a central role in the formation of identity and belonging, as well as the process of negotiating meaning in transnational spaces (Georgiou 2010; Shivers 2010). Negotiation can be defined as a form of interaction that occurs between two or more people who have different priorities, with a focus on reaching a mutual agreement on a specific issue. It is both process- and action-oriented. As a process, negotiation entails the strategic steps a particular person or social group take(s) to achieve a desired end. Negotiation is thus a process aimed at repositioning the self in relation to others through individual and/or collective bargaining.

For our purposes here, it is significant that the act of negotiation involves interpreting and making meaning of the messages conveyed in the communicative interaction just described. Negotiation requires some degree of purposeful commitment (voluntary or involuntary) from the parties involved. For negotiation to be purposeful, it is imperative for the speakers to compromise – be ready to give and take - to make sure the two sides are fairly served. To do this, the priorities of the participants need to be usefully represented, as do the solutions and steps deemed to be needed for a resolution to be found.

Negotiation is, in short, partly a strategy that human beings use for the purposes of impression management (Goffman 1959; Ting-Toomey 2015; Scott 2015). It involves interactive rituals aimed at altering perceptions of the self. The iconic scholar Erving Goffman (1959) used the symbolic interactionist approach to illustrate these interactive practices and their effects. In diasporic contexts, it is common for people to regularly engage in cultural bargaining and meaning making, whether it involves self-identification, self-affirmation, and self-localization, or simply mapping boundaries. For diasporas, the act of negotiation, whether verbal or non-verbal, is more than a process of self-conception. Most often, diasporas negotiate with others within the community to define, refute or confirm their identity and map their positionality in context. In-group and out-group members (family members, friends, community members, strangers) negotiate to acknowledge commonalities or to reconcile differences, and studies have found that priorities vary when negotiation is used to manage impressions (Goffman 1959; Smith 2006; Ting-Toomey 2013, 2015; Shivers 2010).

Some negotiations are voluntary, and others are involuntary. Negotiation is considered voluntary when it is done consensually. This means the act of negotiation is based on agreements between the people involved. It is involuntary when done without clear consent from either party. Negotiation can also be formal or informal. The key distinctions between these forms of communication derive from the processes, spaces, and times of engagement. Formal negotiations are often pre-planned. This means the speakers need to agree on a specific issue and then choose a date, time and venue that suit all parties to engage in communication. The communication pattern is structured and tactical, with pre-set processes of engagement. It is the kind of communication that occurs in public and private institutions, including governments and organizations, although

formal negotiation can also occur on local levels between communities, ethnocultural groups, and individuals, depending on the issues at stake and the circumstances surrounding them.

On the other hand, informal negotiation, as the name indicates, is an informal process of communication. Unlike the former, informal negotiation occurs sporadically. This means the time and space of engagement is often unannounced. Speakers still need to have a sense of purpose and a goal to accomplish, but these can be unstated or even unconscious. People frequently engage informally in individual or collective bargaining (negotiation) in their search for meaning in lived experience, and it can include both verbal and non-verbal communication (Goffman 1959; Shivers 2010; Ting-Toomy 2015; Scott 2015).

The process of meaning making through face-to-face interaction is a central theme in Erving Goffman's seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). He uses the term "impression management" to conceptualize the interactive rituals (face-works) that occur among people, in the attempt to influence perceptions. Goffman's "dramaturgical framework" is centered on the concept of "face-to-face" interaction. He observed that negotiation is part of daily "ritual" life in society. People use negotiation as a strategy to avoid problems:

When an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be (Goffman 1959, 17).

Goffman's dramaturgical framework is important because it casts light on the way people interface and engage in a tactical process of impression management in society. As Smith (2006) notes, Goffman's "overall trust [...] is to treat interaction as a reality in its own right in which issues concerning self are approached from the point of view of the workings of interactions, relationships

and organizations” (8).

In a diasporic context, the act of negotiating is an important ritual for questions of identity and belonging. Negotiation therefore is part of the realities of life for many Africans living in diaspora. This minoritized community that many consider as fundamentally different occupies disadvantaged positions in the Canadian and Quebecois context. Unfortunately, the diaspora’s negative experiences of otherness oblige them to regularly negotiate their identity, place and space in their everyday lives. “The temporality of negotiation or translation,” as Bhabha writes, “acknowledges the historical connectedness between the subject and object [...] so that there can be no simplistic, essentialist opposition between ideological miscognition and revolutionary truth” (Bhabha 1994, 26).

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the concept of Bhabha’s “third space” as it relates to the media consumption of diasporic Nigerians. It outlined the third space co-created by Nollywood audience in diaspora in the imagined discursive arena by means of their engagement with this “glocal” minority medium. The focus was on the meaning-making and identity-defining interactions that occur in this imagined space. The aim was to understand the form, function and socializing role of the third space in the ways participants’ temporal experiences inform the negotiation of identity and belonging in diaspora.

Overall, the third space concept allowed me to (re)emphasize the place of socially constructed imagined spaces in facilitating diasporic cultural engagements. The importance of such spaces is evidenced in the way community members come together in imagined spaces to interact with their peers in the process of media consumption, and also to use the cultural

subjectivities thus defined as a framework to evaluate their diasporic positions, and address issues of representation that are relevant to the community. This chapter provides an important segue into the main findings concerning diasporic engagements with Nollywood documented in chapters 5 and 6.

The act of negotiation is unarguably critical to diasporic lives. It is a matter of necessity, given the complex dynamics surrounding existence in diaspora. The volatile nature of the diasporic third space itself makes it imperative for minority populations (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities, men and women of colour, social minorities) to constantly negotiate place and space in their everyday lives (Said 1978; Naficy 1994; Jiwani 2006). Minoritized communities are often consigned to the margins, to negotiate their identity and develop/nurture their sense of belonging/community in such third spaces. As Edward Said (1978) has observed, this diminutive and marginalized space allows minoritized populations to curate “glocal” culture to effectively adapt to the mainstream cultural imagination that ignores or misrepresents them. The fluidity of the process (and the fluidity of the diasporic third space and diasporic existence themselves) in these out-of-place spatialities means, though, that identity, place and space must be continuously negotiated to ensure sustainability.

Many communities in diaspora rely on community or ethnic media as a framework to negotiate cultural identity and nurture a sense of belonging. The Nigerian diaspora that relies on Nollywood film as a platform to create and negotiate their identity and develop sense of belonging in context is a case in point. As studies have shown (see, chapters 1 and 2) Nollywood plays a significant role in representing Nigerian society and cultural narratives. Its film culture informs understandings of the realities of Nigerian society. It also provides its audiences with tools to effectively negotiate identity and belonging in the third space the participants co-created. It is

therefore important to recognize the pedagogical implications of such interactions in diasporic spaces when it comes to the diasporic construction (and reconstruction) of cultural identity.

Mass media provide tools and platforms with which newly arrived and situated immigrants can achieve the cultural work just described in diasporic third spaces. This reality explains why minority media such as Nollywood are gaining increased recognition as mechanisms of representation and conduits of diasporic communication. The following chapters devote acute attention to the way Nollywood film is used by – and resonates with – local members of its diaspora audience, and the sociocultural implications.

CHAPTER 4

A Review and Analysis of Nigerian Nollywood Movie: *The Wedding Party 1*

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the Nollywood film *The Wedding Party 1*, which was viewed and discussed by my respondents. Released in 2016, *The Wedding Party* is a Nigerian romantic comedy drama directed by award-winning filmmaker Kemi Adetiba. It was produced by the Elfike Film Collective, which is comprised of EbonyLife Films, FilmOne Distribution, Koga Studios, and Inkblot Productions. The film is set in Lagos, Nigeria. On September 8, 2016, it premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in Canada.

This chapter explores the ways in which this Nollywood film orients viewers to aspects of Nigerian culture, and how different audiences read its narratives in context. I begin by providing a synopsis of the film – setting, cast, and plot summary. This is followed by a discussion of the main themes. I explore the cultural ideas, beliefs, and values (cultural ideologies) reflected in the film and their implicit meanings. This approach allows me to discern how the film conveys Nigerian cultural values, and its implications for cultural literacy.

Cast

The Wedding Party has dual protagonists, Adesua Etomi (Dunni Coker) and Banky Wellington (Dozie Onwuka). The narrative revolves around these main characters. Secondary characters include Richard Mofe-Damijo (Felix Onwuka), Iretiola Doyle (Obianuju Onwuka), Atunyota Akpobome (Bamidele Coker), Sola Sobowale (Tinuade Coker), Zainab Balogun (Wonu), Somekele Iyamah (Yemisi Disu), Daniella Down (Deardre Winston), Beverly Naya

(Rosie), Ayo Makun (MC), Ikechukwu Onunaku (Sola Akinyemi), and Emmanuel Egunjobi (Pastor Leke).

Plot Summary

The Wedding Party is a distillation of a typical traditional wedding ceremony in Nigeria. It deals with the nitty-gritty details of the wedding between a Nigerian couple bringing together two different ethnicities. Danni Coker (Adesua Etomi), a 24-year-old art gallery owner, is marrying her fiancé Dozie Onwuka (Banky Wellington), an IT Entrepreneur – a decision of which the groom’s mother disapproves. Danni is the only daughter of Bamidele and Tinuade Coker (Atunyota Akpobome and Sola Sobowale) and Dozie is the second son of Felix and Obianuju Onwuka (Richard Mofe-Damijo and Iretiola Doyle). The Coker and Onwuka families are of different ethnicities: Danni’s family is Yoruba and Dozie’s Igbo. Both families are affluent, but Dozie’s family is wealthier than Danni’s family. This disparity is a major source of pride and prejudice, and intermittent strife between the bride and groom’s mothers.

Obianuju disapproves of her son’s relationship with Danni. Due to the family’s fortune and elite status, she expects her son to marry someone from a wealthier family than Danni’s. On the other hand, Tinuade is obsessed with her daughter marrying into a more affluent family – one that also has elite status. For this reason, she is desperate to have the wedding without further delay as a way to connect her own family with the elite class of society. Coincidentally, Danni and Dozie’s mothers are hardliners when it comes to issues concerning their children’s romantic relationship. This clash of pride and desperation puts the two mothers at loggerheads over their children marrying – a challenge that Danni and Dozie must overcome to make their dream come true.

Thematic Analysis

Nollywood films typically revolve around Nigerian themes, including history, customs and tradition, social and cultural values, and popular culture. They also engage social and political thoughts to deepen understanding of the reality of Nigerian society. In my analysis, three main themes were identified in the film: inter-ethnic wedding, the clash of cultures, and the clash of classes. Important secondary themes include the commodification of women and infidelity in marriage. In the following section, I analyze the ways these themes are portrayed in the film.

Inter-ethnic Wedding

The Wedding Party is about the wedding of two people of different ethnicities. In Nigerian and broadly African culture, such a union involves the bride and groom's families and to some degree their related communities. Due to the nation's vast ethnic diversity, inter-ethnic weddings are common in Nigeria. This reality is reflected in *The Wedding Party*. The bride and groom must cross ethnic/cultural lines to marry. In African traditional society, the concept of inter-ethnic wedding is deeply significant in the cultural consciousness, due to local ethnocultural diversity and increasing cross-cultural migration and mobility. Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups with different cultural norms and values. Inter-ethnic marriages serve a useful purpose in terms of providing connections between different groups. This is one reason inter-ethnic marriage is an important family affair. The principle is evidenced in this conversation between Danni and Yemisi in the opening sequence:

Danni: [referring to her mother] "Like, why won't she just let me have my way for once? It's my wedding day."

Yemisi: [Quickly interjects] “Er, you’re a Nigerian. It’s actually their wedding.”

The above conversation reflects the fact that the union of two people in this context invariably encompasses their extended families. Family members such as the parents of the bride and groom are involved in the union of the couple, though the details of this cultural practice vary from one culture to another. In many societies today, as for example in India, parental authority when it comes to issues of marriage is hardly questioned, as such an action would be considered a shocking challenge to traditional codes. It is believed that such an action can have an adverse impact on the person’s welfare. This is manifest in the 2005 Nollywood film *The Widow 1* directed by Ikechukwu Elijah. In the film, the protagonist, Emeka, decides to marry his fiancée, Nneoma, whose family is not on good terms with Emeka’s family because of previous disputes over a piece of land. Despite his parent’s disapproval Emeka decides to marry Nneoma. This act of disobedience leads Emeka’s parents to disown him as their child. Eventually, Emeka starts experiencing pitfalls in his marriage and business. As Kabeer (2001) points out, “The norms of marriage in South Asia, for instance, invest parents with the authority for choosing their children’s partners, but are unlikely to be experienced as a form of power – unless such authority is questioned” (21).

The dominant ethnic groups represented in *The Wedding Party* are Yoruba and Igbo. They are two of the three most urban ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Yoruba live in the southwestern region, while the Igbo live in the southeastern region. Despite the long and close relationship between these ethnic groups, there still is sometimes a level of distrust between them, culturally and politically speaking. In, *The Wedding Party*, the filmmakers refer to local experience to

illustrate a vivid example of cultural negotiation, with reference to Nigerian customs and traditions related to the institution of marriage.

A Clash of Cultures

In his *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), Huntington predicted that the world would increasingly experience tensions between cultures rather than countries in the future. Culture, he argued, would be the prime source of intergroup/inter-communal conflicts. Numerous studies have indeed found that “culture” is a site of constant struggle, contested across time and space (Geertz 1973; Naficy 1993; Bhabha 1994; Hall 1997; Patterson 2004; Jenkins 2006). Studies of intergroup conflicts, for example, have revealed that culture clashes often result from interactions between people who have different values. In, *The Wedding Party*, we are presented with an event that highlights a system dominated by culture cleavage: the clash between Yoruba and Igbo cultures. The dramatic and comedic tension often comes from references to such prejudices and misunderstandings, as for example in this exchange:

Tinuade [referring to the Efik cultural dancers entertaining the guests, told Obianuju]:

“This is for you.”

Obianuju [replied rather wryly]: “We are Igbo.”

Tinuade: “So?”

Obianuju: “They are Efik.”

Tinuade: “Is there any difference?”

Bamidele [interrupting]: “There is no difference. Efik, Igbo, it’s south-south.”

One important lesson that can be learned from the above exchanges about Nigerian cultural values is unity in diversity. The concept between the Igbos and the Yorubas is uniquely represented to emphasize the need for people to focus more on their commonalities rather than their differences. The conflicts that drive the film are also manifested in the languages of communication used (English, pidgin, Igbo, Yoruba, and Efik), the music (local and universal soundtracks), dress codes (local and universal), and the food (local and continental menu) selected by the would-be mothers-in law. The clash is also evident in the wedding reception event manager, Wonu (Zainab Balogun), who pretends to be non-native by communicating in a British accent at the beginning of the reception, but suddenly switches to broad Yoruba as she struggles to mitigate a conflict with the Yoruba caterer the bride's mother has engaged to prepare the Nigerian food.

Unlike many Western movies, though, where clashes of values are presented as conflicts between forces of good and evil, it is rather a struggle for recognition between people from two dominant ethnic groups that fuels the cultural conflict portrayed in *The Wedding Party*. In this way, the film reflects the politics of representation that is not limited to Nigerian society but is widespread and significant across the developing world.

A Clash of Classes

Another theme that emerges from the film is the clash of classes. This is reflected in the class struggle between the Onwuka and Coker families, i.e., the clash between the elite class and the middle class. In a capitalist and socially stratified society such as Nigeria, individuals operate along class lines. "Stratification" here refers to a system in which individuals are grouped based on their social and economic status. Within this system of layered classes, one can easily distinguish

between the rich and the poor in the community. This is evidenced in *The Wedding Party* in the ways that the families of the bride and groom are presented.

Onwuka's family is portrayed as rich, while Coker's is presented as belonging to the middle class. The Onwuka family shows their bourgeois status in their lavish home and properties, as well as their Western-oriented lifestyle. In the second act, for example, we see Felix playing the piano (classical music) in his living room, which is a regular pastime for many elite families. Likewise, we encounter his wife (Obianuju) and her accomplices, lavishly dressed, relaxing in their family's living room. These scenes are indicative of elitism and a sign of disconnection from a traditional way of life. By contrast, the Coker's family is portrayed as average. While the Onwukas pride themselves in their so-called Western lifestyle, from their lavish lifestyle to their choice of continental food, the Cokers adhere to traditional values, taking pride in eating affordable native food such as Amala (mashed cassava). Ultimately, the class difference between the two families leads to a deep sense of mistrust and arrogance, especially in the case of the bride and the groom's mothers.

Tinuade: [referring to their pictures in the newspaper ad announcing Dumni and Dozie's wedding] "But what happened here? Why are their picture bigger than our own? As if they are the ones paying for the wedding."

Obianuju: [egoistically] "Can you imagine? Me? Cooking?"

In many elite families, especially in Africa, it is common for people to engage help, including cooks, nannies, and cleaners to perform the daily chores. As the above remark shows, Obianuju does not cook because of her elite status. Distrustful of the Coker family, she decides to employ a

caterer to cook her preferred continental food. “I am not about to let the Cokers poison my guests,” she screeches. Obianuju seems in fact to consider their son’s fiancée worthless. “My son brings me a native house girl from Ekiti State,” she sighs. “I just hope that your son, Dozie, understands the kind of family that he is marrying into,” she adds. For this reason, she is prepared to endure anything that would halt the wedding. “A bomb? I would welcome a bomb if that would stop this awful wedding from taking place,” she says wryly. Worse still, she ridicules the bride’s parents for their economic misfortune. “O dear, dear, dear! So, you don’t have any money?” she asks Bamidele and Tinuade, sarcastically. Felix is perplexed by his wife’s callousness and reacts disapprovingly: “Obianuju, Obianuju, that’s enough! Okay? When did you become this cold?” In the final Act, Felix reprimands his wife for her refusal to accept the bride and her family: “If our children manage to get through tonight, you will have no choice. In fact, I will make sure that you will accept her,” he exclaims.

Despite Felix’s reproof of his wife’s unfriendly demeanour, and his efforts to keep up appearances, Obianuju, for the most part avoids close contact with her son’s parents-in-law during the wedding ceremony. In the end, Dozie finally confronts his mother: “Mom, you need to stop, okay? I understand that you may not like Dumni, but you need to understand that I love her and that is never going to change.” Obianuju replies remorsefully: “Darling, I just wanted to say that you be sure and bring our wife back home.” In a twist of fate, she later comforts her son’s parents-in-law when everyone is panicking over the bride’s sudden disappearance when the best man mistakenly plays a video clip of the bachelor’s party at the reception. “Don’t worry, everything will be fine. Our children will be fine,” Obianuju says reassuringly.

As can be inferred from the examples given above, a few scenes get quite chaotic, especially those showing confrontations between the mothers-in-law. However, the problems are quickly

resolved. While the bride and groom are cognizant of the conflict between their parents, especially the mothers-in-law, they do not allow the mayhem to mar the ceremony. The parents too later come to an understanding and decide to carry out the wedding.

The Commodification of Femininity

Another important theme that resonates in the film, albeit implicitly, is the “commodification” or “objectification” of femininity. This is of course especially noticeable with respect to the bride (Dunni Coker). The commodification involved relates to the payment of a dowry (also known as bride price) by the groom’s family to the bride’s family, as a token of thanks for offering their daughter in marriage. The payment of a dowry is a common practice with a long history in African traditional societies. Customarily, a dowry can be paid in the form of money, property, or gifts, depending on the context. In some cultures, the bride’s family can ask for a higher dowry for reasons ranging from her beauty, level of education, or her family status in society. This practice is recalled by the behaviour of Bamidele Coker in the film. Upon seeing his daughter emerging from her dressing room in her wedding dress, he makes the following remarks excitedly: “This girl, you are an angel. We should have even charged them double bride price.”

The dowry theme is also manifested in one piece of music in the film, in which the musician alludes to an African proverb in Nigerian pidgin: “Better soup, na money kill am.” It means in standard English that “if the soup is sweet, the owner must have expended large sums on it.” In the context of *The Wedding Party*, it refers to the fact that the bride’s parents have exhausted substantial time and effort, as well as material resources, to raise a beautiful lady.

Infidelity in Marriage

One final important theme that resonates in the film is infidelity in a relationship. The problem of infidelity, as a matter of fact, is a major issue in the Onwuka family, with respect to Dozie and his father being unfaithful in their relationships. Danni is a virgin, and her perceived virtue is an important asset that she brings to the relationship. Dozie, on the other hand, is sociable and caring, but he has a long history of pre-nuptial relationships. Since meeting Danni, however, he has decided to put his unruly past behind him and settle down. Both have agreed to remain chaste until their wedding day.

On that fateful day, Danni is determined to make the wedding night an exciting and memorable one for her husband-to-be. “There goes my magical night. I just want it to be perfect for him!” Danni says, excitedly. But three incidents happen that almost cause Danni to dissolve the marriage. The first one occurs while the couple are travelling to the reception arena after the church wedding. As they are cuddling in the car Danni finds a woman’s thong in Dozie’s suit pocket. Given her knowledge of Dozie’s past as a playboy, she thinks Dozie has cheated on her before the wedding that very day. “We can just annul this marriage right now,” Danni thinks to herself, irritated.

Danni: “How could you possibly explain a thong in your pocket, Dozie?”

Dozie: You have to believe me when I say this. I don’t know how it got there.

Danni: Try again Dozie. I’m a virgin, not an idiot. And you are forgetting that I know you. Everybody knows you. Everybody knows you.

Dozie: All of that, all of that was before I met you Danni. The only thing you or anyone else needs to know right now is that I love you. Danni, I love you, and I want to spend the

rest of my life with you. Danni, think about it logically, okay, even if I was the worst guy on the face of the earth, would I really put a dirty thong in my pocket on my wedding day? Danni, please think about it. Never!”

Dozie explains that it may be “one of the guys playing a prank.” Danni later forgives her spouse, and they continue their journey to the wedding reception. As it turns out, Dozie’s ex-girlfriend Rosie slipped the thong in his suit pocket when she failed to seduce him the morning before the wedding.

The second incident occurs when the Best Man, who occasionally acts without self-control, mistakenly shows a video clip of Dozie’s bachelor party rather than the one containing a speech prepared by Dozie to the celebrants at the reception. Danni feels humiliated and absconds from the reception. During this interlude Rosie (Dozie’s ex-girlfriend) goes after Danni and starts teasing her about her sexual inexperience, until Danni’s friends Yemisi and Deardre intervene. Like Dozie, his father Felix Onwuka has not been a chaste man. During a private conversation with his father in the guest room, Dozie asks: “How does a man stay with one woman for the rest of his life?” In response to this question, Felix confesses that regrettably he has indeed made some mistakes on this score in the past.

Felix: You know son, I am afraid I haven’t been a very good example to you and your brother. And I know that and I’m sorry. Your mom and I, we haven’t always been like this. Time was when we were good, you know, very good in fact. Then you make a mistake, unforgiveness sets in, bitterness sets in, your ego comes in and then things start going downhill from there. Son, I just want you to promise me that you will fight. That you will

fight for it no matter what happens. There will be bad days, but don't give up. Just fight for it the way your mom and I should have.

Based on his son's suggestion, Felix later apologizes to his wife and is forgiven. These scenes are remarkable and seem designed to teach several lessons about the negative consequences of infidelity and a lack of commitment in marital relationships. They also teach devotion, trust, perseverance, tolerance, and forgiveness. This is evident in the film's denouement where the families are reconciled regarding their differences, including hidden family secrets (e.g., the Coker family's declining financial status owing to economic downturn and the problem of infidelity in the Onwuka family). Such ordeals impact both families in negative ways. In the end, though, they all return to the reception arena to celebrate their children's marital milestone. In his closing remarks, Felix commends the newlyweds for their commitment and resilience, which have not only helped the couple, but also helped their families overcome their respective nightmares.

Felix: "Dunni my daughter, Dozie my son, the two of you are an inspiration to us all and especially to me. Because you have taught us that family is the most important thing. And that life can be a lot better if we all can just follow our hearts.

Dunni and Dozie have complex lived experiences with their families and friends, but these challenges only help to reinforce their determination, resilience, and commitment to make the best of their relationship amid the storms of life. They persist, and as a result succeed in making their dream come true, confirming Robert H. Schuller's popular axiom that "tough times never last, but tough people do!"

Mapping Cultural Ideology in *The Wedding Party*.

Ethnic media are important vehicles for the transmission of cultural ideologies. Cultural ideologies embody sets of cultural ethics and values that characterize the way of life within a given group, culture, or society. Most often, these cultural beliefs and values are created and expressed through different elements of culture, including language, music, dance, clothing, and art, to mention a few. Studies indicate that ideology informs a wide range of actions, experiences, and expectations (Hall 1985; Hill 2000; Giannetti 2007).

In Nollywood films, cultural ideologies are produced and conveyed in a range of ways. *The Wedding Party* uses everything from language to music and dance in articulating certain cultural norms and values as characteristic of Nigerian society. In the following section, I examine how these elements of culture are used to promote ethnic and cultural ideology, and thus inform identity and belonging in the film.

Language of Cinema

Scholars have long recognized the importance of language in communicating, promoting, and reinforcing cultural ideology. According to Brennen (2012), “Language is a basic element of our human interactions, and it is through language that the meanings of our social realities are constructed” (192). Language plays a significant role in the process of communicating reality and making meanings about the world. The agency and power of language derives from its capacity to unite and equally divide people depending on the context and circumstances (Ugochukwu 2017). In, *The Wedding Party*, language serves not only as a tool to communicate Nigeria’s cultural values, but also create meaning about them. It is used to construct and reinforce a sense of identity and belonging, building an emotional sense of connection among people of different ethnicities.

The language used is predominantly English with a mix of local dialects (e.g., pidgin, Igbo, Yoruba and Efik), which is important to its construction of cultural ideology. As Hall (1997) notes, culture is the process of meaning-making, and communication is essential to its construction. The interplay of local and global languages in *The Wedding Party* communicates a vision of local belonging within global relevance. This enhances its attractive hybridity as a diaspora media product. The film also uses simple and common language, which helps a larger audience identify, and makes it easier for more audiences to grasp the narrative.

Music

Another important element used to construct and convey meanings in film is music and sound effects. In Africa, music serves important purposes aside from entertainment. Most often, people use music to tell stories and convey messages about human condition, experience, and expectation. In so doing, they can use music to evoke emotions such as love, gratitude, ecstasy, loss, misery, mourning, empathy, hope, and more. The music of *The Wedding Party* evokes shared values between the different ethnic groups represented. Music is part of their identity. In the film, the producers use both local and global music in the soundtrack to rouse different moods. Indigenous songs (e.g., Efik's) are used to create soothing rhythms. The bride and groom's families take advantage of the music of the moment to engage in dance sequences, which also provides emotional relief after several tense moments among the celebrants during the wedding.

Dance

Like music, dance is an important mode of expression in African traditional societies. It has symbolic meanings, making it an important mode of expression. Most often, it is used to



Figure 1: Excerpt from the film: *The Wedding Party*
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convey different types of human emotions. These include, but are not limited to, emotions such as desire, love, excitement, admiration, satisfaction, adoration, and triumph. It is also used to express emotions such as surprise, grief, anger, horror, lack, and loss, to mention a few. In *The Wedding Party*, the communicative power of dance is strongly highlighted. It is used to express not only joy, excitement, accomplishment, and pride, but also reproach, contempt, and more.

Clothing

In African cultures, clothing has symbolic value. It can reflect cultural beliefs and values that have intrinsic meaning to a group of people within a sociocultural context. Much has been written about the social, cultural, and religious dimensions of clothing among different racial and ethnic groups around the world. *The Wedding Party* allows audiences to experience the cultural



Figure 2: Excerpt from the film: *The Wedding Party*
Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copyright Act, section 29.1)

dimension of traditional apparel (and dress codes) among Nigerian ethnic groups. In the film, this element of culture is used to express Nigerian cultural diversity. As seen above, differences in clothing manifest the different ethnic categories represented in the film (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, and more). As a culture marker, clothing can also be used as a tool of othering. In other words, it can be used to communicate difference rather than commonality. In Nigeria, for example, it is often easy to identify people from different ethnicities by their clothing, dress codes, and other cultural regalia. Such differences are often made visually evident in the different outfits worn by the Onwuka family above and the Coker family below. In this case, clothing is used not only as a tool to communicate and promote a sense of shared culture and collective identity, but also to emphasize and affirm difference.

Analysis of Key Success Factors in *The Wedding Party*.

There are several factors that can contribute to the success of a film. These include storylines, actors, production quality, and aesthetics. The use of humour, tension and catharsis can also play an important role because it makes the event(s) portrayed memorable. All these factors are examined in the following section.

Storylines

One important success factor in *The Wedding Party* is the storyline. The narrative elements are simple, comprehensible, and dramatic. The use of simple plotlines allowed the filmmakers to convey their messages in an accessible manner. This strategy allows target audiences to easily relate to the film, understand the messages conveyed, and in turn construct meanings based on their experiences. In short, one of the benefits of using simple storylines, as the success of this film shows, is a high level of audience engagement.

Actors

Film and media industries have a long history of using star actors to entice audiences and thereby maximize box-office revenue. Many film experts have acknowledged that an actor's persona can influence the way audiences respond to a particular piece of art. The appearance of famous Nollywood actors in *The Wedding Party* accordingly increased its appeal to Nollywood audiences. The film starred several celebrities, including Richard Mofe-Damijo, who is an acclaimed producer, writer, and actor. Other participants brought their own star power. Prior to starring in this film, RMD, as he is popularly known, had made more than 60 appearances in different movies and TV drama series, nationally and internationally. Iretiola Doyle is a renowned

writer, producer, and presenter whose career in Nigerian entertainment industry spans more than two decades. Ali Baba is a veteran comedian, and Sola Sobowale is an accomplished film producer, director, screenwriter, and actress. Banky Wellington is a famous musician, and Adesua Itomi is a famous actress. She won Best Actress, for example, at the African Magic Viewer Choice Award in 2016.

Other celebrities featured in the film include Ayo Makun (MC), a seasoned Nigerian director and presenter, whose 2014 movie *Thirty Days in Atlanta* was a huge success in terms of box office revenue. Hafiz Oyetoro is a Nigerian comic actor, and Somekele Iyamah was recognized as a Rising Star at TIFF in 2016. The film also featured several famous Nigerian musicians, including Banky Wellington, Ikechukwu Onunaku (Sola Akinyemi), and Emmanuel Egunjobi. The use of all-star casts is common in the modern global media environment. Conglomerates such as Hollywood and Bollywood often use this strategy to entice audiences around the globe. It makes sense, therefore, that well-known Nollywood directors and celebrity actors contributed to the success of this blockbuster film.

Production/Aesthetic Quality

In the communications and media industry, “quality” judgments communicate how well a specific production meets industry standards. Production quality has been a major challenge in Nollywood, although the industry has made remarkable improvements in recent years. Earlier Nollywood films were underrated because of their poor production qualities (Larkin 2004, 2008; Haynes 2016). This is one reason a considerable number of earlier Nollywood films were considered unfit for screening in international film festivals. The quality of Nollywood productions has improved over time, though. An increasing number of new Nollywood films

meet international standards and have received positive ratings in the global media environment. As Conner (2015, 55) notes a select few of contemporary Nollywood films are “aesthetically sophisticated.” *The Wedding Party* is a case in point. Money and attention were devoted to the



Figure 3: Excerpt from the film: *The Wedding Party*
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film’s production value, and its ability to meet industry standards was a key factor in its wide audience appeal.

With respect to aesthetic quality, *The Wedding Party* is replete with a wide range of colour schemes and special effects. These include traditional and foreign attire, costume and makeup, and glamorous interior decor. The reception venue itself was especially picturesque. Even the furniture was elaborately decorated. Such combinations of rich visual impressions and cultural materials are common features of Nigerian traditional weddings. Apart from their fashion value, these elements of culture serve important functions as tools of identification, as noted already concerning the traditional attire worn by members of the Coker and Onwuka families in the film. Such aesthetics helped increase the film’s appeal to different audiences.

Discussion

Film can be a significant means of communicating cultural beliefs and ethics that guide behaviours and practices within a given context. They do not only reflect the reality of life in a social and cultural context, but can also teach lessons about the values, lived experiences, and lifestyles in such a community. *The Wedding Party* performs such functions by reflecting aspects of Nigerian culture and society with respect to marital institutions. The film allows viewers to experience Nigerian customs and tradition, cultural beliefs, and values through the prism of an inter-ethnic wedding. It represents Nigeria's cultural diversity as a challenge but also as a resource, highlighting the benefits of diversity, unity in diversity, and the importance of collective identity. In this way, the elements of culture portrayed in the film do not just help enrich its quality and facilitate its appeal to Nollywood audiences. The language of communication, the catchy music, cultural dances, flashy outfits, assorted food, and related cultural insignia also serve as culture markers that help shape understandings of Nigerian cultural heritage and lifestyles. It is also worthy to note that certain representations in the film were used to serve hegemonic power. This is manifest in the conflicts between Onwuka and Coker's families because of their ethnicities. However, these struggles are in the interest of the majority (dominant hegemonic power) rather than the minority.

Having said all this, there is also a satirical aspect of the film that merits mention. The film presents a critique of dominant ideologies in relation to ethnicity and class distinction in Nigerian (and more broadly African) society. The producers have used the romantic comedy drama medium, that is, to problematize the stratification of Nigerian society based on ethnicity and economic status. In Nigeria, people use ethnicity and economic status as tools of differentiation. This is evident in how the concept between the Igbos and the Yorubas is represented. However, this can

lead to alienation and conflict among people of different ethnicities and classes. This problem is made manifest in the scuffles between the Coker and Onwuka families in the film. In the film, too, ethnicity and class are both symbols of differentiation and at the same time the basis of contestation. In Nigeria, the politics of representation based on ethnicity and wealth often result in negative “signifying practices” (Hall 1997) such as the othering, marginalization, and exclusion of minoritized groups (Smith 2010; Jiwani 2006, 2010). These social realities are expressed dramatically in *The Wedding Party*. The concept of cosmopolitanism is represented by stressing the need for people to overcome the negative aspects of difference, and embrace diversity and inclusion within a society that thrives on multiculturalism. As Giddens observes, such concerns are relevant for people navigating the modern world:

The modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from all traditional types of social order in quite unprecedented fashion. In both their extensionality and their intensionality the transformations involved in modernity are more profound than most sorts of change characteristics of prior periods. On the extensional plane they have served to establish forms of interconnection, which span the globe; in intensional terms they have come to alter some of the most intimate and personal features of our day-to-day existence (Giddens 1996, 4).

The context of diaspora is also highly relevant in this context. Many diasporic people today (including millennials in particular) lack in-depth knowledge of the customs and traditions of African traditional societies. Members of the second- and third-generation Nigerian diaspora born in diaspora have limited understanding of their native cultures because “their values and worldviews are shaped by the here and now, rather than the environment from which their parents came” (Tettey and Puplampu 2005, 9). As we will see in analyzing the reflections of my respondents, the desire to preserve cultural continuity is one reason *The Wedding Party* is seen by audiences as attractive and relevant. By foregrounding Nigerian specificity and variety, *The*

Wedding Party is seen as a cultural resource that can contribute to understandings of important aspects of Nigerian cultural heritage.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a description of the film viewed by my respondents, *The Wedding Party 1*. I began by providing a synopsis of the film – the setting, plot, and characters. This was followed by an analysis of the main themes, highlighting the ways they orient viewers to key aspects of Nigerian culture and society. The aim was to discern how the film reflects Nigerian cultural values and the ideological underpinnings of different elements of culture. *The Wedding Party* depicts important aspects of Nigerian customs and tradition. It presents the dilemma of a couple struggling to deal with conflicts resulting from their ethnic differences, and the difference in social status between their families. The film is a story of love and passion, virtue, trust, and dedication. It is also about pride and prejudice, jealousy, intolerance, and infidelity. Through cultural elements like language, music, dance, costumes, and décor, *The Wedding Party* serves to reflect Nigeria's rich cultural diversity, and it also promotes a particular sense of identity, belonging, and community. The various themes identified in the film are used as soft power to promote unity in diversity. As Nye (2005, 31) notes, soft power is the capacity to “attract” and “co-opt” in order to achieve a desired goal.

Adetiba's film reflects the social and cultural dimensions of inter-tribal weddings in Nigeria, and thereby presents a particular vision of the collective heritage of different ethnic groups in Africa. As such, the film does not merely tell a story of mixed marriage driven by unconditional love, tolerance, endurance, patience, and sacrifice amid pride and prejudice. Its representations also have social and cultural ramifications. Having analyzed the ways in which these aspects of

The Wedding Party promote cultural ideals and boost the film's audience appeal, I can now move to tracing the way audiences make meaning using such representations, by reviewing the feedback on these issues collected in my focus group discussions.

CHAPTER 5

Making Sense of Nollywood Films: Focus Groups and Findings.

Evaluation of a film's worth and the disparate systems of assessing a film's success (box office figures, classical appeal, critical acclaim, academic esteem, cult status) form the foundations of cinema – as art, and as attraction.

Laura Hubner (2011, 2)

Introduction

The central question undergirding this investigation is: How does transnational Nigerian media (Nollywood) inform and shape understandings of Nigerian cultural, ethnic, and national identity, and to what extent do its cultural representations reflect the normative reality of Nigerian society? In my research, this question was addressed through ethnographic methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing (focus groups and one-on-one). This layout allowed me to map the boundary of this discursive field and what it entails. The findings from the focus group discussions are presented in this chapter. The findings of the in-depth interviews are presented in the next chapter.

Nigerian Quebeckers Watching Nollywood Film

In the focus group sessions analyzed in this chapter, a group of Nigerian Quebeckers viewed a screening of a blockbuster Nollywood film titled *The Wedding Party* (2016). The aim was to understand what kind of meaning the focus groups would make of the narrative in a natural context. I was particularly interested in understanding where diasporic audiences sit in the debate on the significance of Nollywood as a tool of representation. This idea came through talking to my participants during individual interviews. In my interviews, the participants identified several

Nollywood films that appeal to them, including films that portray particular aspects of Nigerian customs and tradition (e.g., *Living in Bondage*, *Igodo*, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, and *The Wedding Party*) and those that reflect immigrants' journeys and experiences in the host communities (e.g., *Osuofia in London*, *One Night in Vegas*, *30 Days in Atlanta*, and *A Trip to Jamaica*). I chose to analyze *The Wedding Party* for several reasons. Most importantly, the way Nigerian customs and tradition are represented through the prism of inter-ethnic wedding. These include conceptions of ethnicity and culture, diversity and inclusion, and identity and belonging. This film was also chosen for its stunning cinematography and cultural richness, ranging from the aesthetic forms and narrative arcs to language, music, clothing, dress codes, and popular lifestyles. Although Nollywood films that deal with the themes of migration and mobility allow viewers to understand Nigerian immigrants and migration stories in a way that resonates with the diaspora, *The Wedding Party* allows them to gain insights into Nigerian customs and tradition in significant ways. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *The Wedding Party* is about the basics of inter-ethnic wedding between a Nigerian couple of two different ethnicities.

Participants

The research participants were members of the Nigerian diaspora community in Montreal, Canada. They included Canadian citizens and permanent residents. They were recruited through purposeful sampling and snowball methods (Patton 2015). The criteria for the selection of participants included nationality, age, gender, country and place of residence, and knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. These recruitment strategies allowed me to select people who had in-depth knowledge of Nollywood and could best inform understanding of the research problem.

The respondents were therefore homogenous audience members with a shared experience of the phenomenon of research interest.

A total of 29 adult persons between the ages of 18 and 60 were recruited to participate in this study. The focus groups consisted of 6 men and 4 women while individual interviews comprised 14 men and 5 women. Many scholars (e.g., Baker and Edwards 2012; Creswell 2013; Maxwell 2013; Patton 2015; Babbie 2016) have made recommendations in terms of sample size in qualitative research. They propose that the sample size should be based on the scope of the research, as this will help to address the central questions. While scholars remain undecided in terms of an ideal standard sample size, Babbie (2016) notes that a common sample size is between six to eight participants.

Participants were recruited based on specific criteria. The first criterion was that the participants had to be Nigerian by nationality. The second criterion was that the participants had to be of legal age, between 18 and 60. The third criterion focused on gender (that is, to ensure both male and female participation). The fourth criterion was that the participants must be Nigerians currently living in Montreal, Quebec. The fifth criterion was that the participants must have experience and knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated. The potential participants shortlisted were invited through direct solicitation and community colloquia to participate in the study.

Differences in terms of gender and time spent living in Canada were addressed both at the recruiting stage and in the demographic profile collected in the interview stage. The study participants were diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, and knowledge of the phenomenon under consideration. Some of the participants were not married, and others were married with children at the time of participating in this study. Some of the younger participants were enrolled in

Canadian tertiary institutions at the time of participation. The participants all self-identified as Nigerians, and confirmed that they had lived in Montreal, Canada for more than 6 months. As soon as oral consent was obtained, the eligible participants were asked to sign informed consent forms to participate in the study. The adoption of focus group research as a strategy for data collection provided me some degree of flexibility in terms of updating the research plan in the process of data collection. These strategies also allowed me to evaluate the way the research participants were engaging in discourses around Nollywood.

For this phase of the study, two focus groups were conducted. In terms of demographics, the first focus group comprised young adults (three females and two males) who were between the ages of 18 – 30 at the time of organizing the session. The second group consisted of older adults (four males and one female) who were between the ages of 30 – 60 at the time of conducting the session.¹¹ The reason I separated the younger adults from the older participants is that (as noted above) age and gender can play a role in how audiences respond to media texts. It was anticipated that given the age differences, the focus groups might hold different perspectives on the issues being considered. This approach allowed me to uncover variations and similarities in the focus groups' perspectives on the phenomenon studied.

The two focus groups watched the film in different contexts. The first viewing session was organized in the researcher's home while the second viewing session took place in a participant's resident. In the end, the participants were asked to provide their perspectives, through a discussion that focused on the cultural representations portrayed in the film. Each of the focus group discussions lasted between one to two hours. During focus group discussions, participants were

¹¹ I had planned to separate the male participants from the female participants during focus group discussions but decided against it due to questions of gender equality. As a result, I decided to separate the younger participants from the adult participants, to trace the extent to which the generational gap would inform their judgements.

asked open-ended questions. The questions asked included “What are your impressions about the film?”, “What are some of the elements of your own culture that are portrayed in the film?”, “To what extent do these cultural representations reflect the reality of Nigerian society and culture?”, “What did you like or dislike about the film?” “How might Nollywood films be used to inform understanding of Nigerian national, ethnic and cultural identity?” I was interested in tracing the diversity of opinions in terms of what the focus groups thought about the film. I was also interested in understanding their readings of what was implied about Nigerian society and cultural specificities, as well as how the film’s cultural images and narratives resonated with the focus groups. These focus groups provided an opportunity for me to interact with the respondents on a personal level. They also enabled me to get a sense of the respondents’ worldviews, as they related to their emotional responses to a range of thought-provoking issues raised in the film.

Data Collection: Participant Observation and Focus Groups

Data for this study was collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Kruegar and Casey (2009) note that, “Focus groups work when participants feel comfortable, respected and free to give their opinion without being judged. The intent of the focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants” (4). In this study, two focus group sessions were convened to complement the individual interviews.¹² Focus groups comprised first-generation immigrants (5 participants) and their descendants (5 participants). Each of the focus groups consisted of five participants. It is worth noting that majority of the participants (about 80%) were

¹² I had planned to conduct four focus groups, but due to time constraints I was only able to conduct two focus groups. I had also planned to engage an equal number of males and females in the focus groups, but due to ethical issues such as family circumstances, a number of potential female participants could not consent to be interviewed. This shortcoming resulted in gender disparity in the focus groups.

born in Nigeria. Most of the participants had migrated to the community within the past two decades. Many of them (about 35%) mentioned that they had lived in other countries and/or other Canadian provinces before relocating to the province of Quebec.

The main purpose of the focus groups was to create fora where the participants could share their perspectives on the film screened. The group discussions provided an opportunity for participants to respond to semi-structured questions in a way as authentic as possible. This approach allowed me to obtain relevant information on the participants' points of view on the film screened, and their perspectives on a range of issues touching Nigerian cultures and society, including relevant issues that have often been overlooked in the analysis of Nollywood.

Although ethnographic methods are increasingly being used to inform understanding of the interactions between media and audiences, some scholars (e.g., Ang 1996) have expressed reservations about the observational approach. They argue that the ethnographic approach compels researchers to act unilaterally, by focusing attention on the interactions between media and audiences, rather than on consumption practices and the meanings that are derived in that context. This study did not only concentrate, though, on the relationship between the research phenomenon (Nollywood) and the sample (diasporic Nigerians in Montreal). It explicitly addressed the reception of the film screened, and the meanings derived, against a diasporic backdrop.

Focus groups were organized based on different demographic profiles. The first group comprised young adults between the ages of 18 and 30. The second group consisted of older adults between the ages of 30 and 60 at the time of conducting the sessions. The first group comprised 60% female and 40% male participants. The second group consisted of 10% female and 90% male participants. This gender disparity in terms of participants' distribution mainly stems from the problem of availability. In terms of academic profile, about 40% of the participants had advanced

academic degrees, 30% had college degrees, 20% were enrolled in undergraduate programs in Quebec tertiary institutions at the time of participating in the focus groups, and the remaining 10% had some form of formal education. Given the participants' demographic profile, it was anticipated that they would hold informed but differing perspectives on the Nollywood film *The Wedding Party* (2016).

This film was screened in two different natural environments: (1) the researcher's residence and (2) a participant's residence. It was presented to the focus groups in the same order, although at different times. Prior to organizing the viewing sessions, I previewed this film at home to identify salient themes, which later fed into my focus group interview questions. Each of the sessions began with a welcome address, a purpose statement, and an overview of the agenda of the meeting. This included informing participants about the purpose of organizing the focus group, the research objective, the duration of the meeting, and the desired research outcomes (i.e., a better understanding of the central phenomenon and the implications for research).¹³ This was followed by introduction of the moderator and the research participants. This "icebreaker" approach was intended to familiarize the participants with each other and to ensure a comfortable atmosphere within the research context. Each of the viewing sessions lasted approximately three hours. Before commencing the focus group discussions, participants were given ground rules to ensure a fair and participatory environment. During focus group discussions, the participants were asked to offer their perspectives on the film, focusing on what they liked or disliked about the aesthetic and narrative elements, and the extent to which the cultural elements reflected in the film aligned with the reality of the society portrayed. Participants were also asked to identify key elements of their

¹³ Each of the viewing sessions and focus group discussions lasted approximately two hours and sixty minutes.

own culture that were portrayed in the film, and the extent to which the images and narrative inform their sense of identity and belonging. The objective was to understand how the film resonated with them in an overall sense.

Social constructivists posit that people often construct meaning using the same phenomenon (in this case film) in different ways. The way we understand a specific media can influence the way we make meaning using media texts, since perception and imagination play an active role in the process of meaning making (Orgad 2012). As Shani Orgad (2012) notes, “global imagination is cultivated by a process of ongoing construction of views, images, understandings, desires and scripts about the world” (51). Athique (2016, 12) has similarly analyzed the ways in which audience experiences help to influence the production of meaning. As he points out, a myriad of representations come to play in the process of meaning making. My study’s focus on representation and reception was developed to take these insights into account. The increasing appeal of Nollywood films among diasporic audiences has raised questions about how the Nigerian diaspora engage with this phenomenon in the discursive construction of identity. Therefore, the main purpose of the focus groups was to understand the participants’ perspectives on Nollywood in terms of its role in cultural preservation.

As Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook (2007) point out, “one use of focus group interviewing is to learn how respondents think and talk about a particular issue, too much editing and cleaning of the transcript is undesirable and counterproductive.” (111). Given this understanding coupled with the fear of losing the respondents’ statements and intended messages, I was conservative in attempting to fill in the gaps in incomplete sentences, correct grammatical errors, and insert punctuation marks whenever necessary, to help maintain the flow of the conversation in my transcripts.

Research on mass media audiences has shown that the process of making meaning out of media texts (in this case film) involves some kinds of negotiation between the producer and the viewers. It is said that the meaning of a text neither resides in the text itself nor the audience, but rather emerges from the interactions between these entities in the context of consumption (Mayne 1993). Focus group interviewing enabled me to uncover not only the place of Nollywood diasporic audience, but also their role in interpretation and making meaning of Nollywood films in diaspora. With these goals and insights in mind, the sections below present and analyze the focus groups' feedback regarding the film screened.

Data Transcription and Analysis

Data from the individual interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative analytical methods. As Patton (2002) explains, data analysis involves “identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data” (463). This study utilized a discourse analysis approach. According to Davis (2017), “Discourse analysis looks at what is said (and what is not said), the manner in which it is said, and the social and cultural context in which it is said – the content, relational and social dimensions of communication” (117). This approach was appropriate and helpful in that it allowed me to account for the respondents' tone, comments, suggestions, and key arguments, permitting a better understanding of the language of communication at both micro and macro levels (cf. Davis 2017, 84).

Discourse analysis as an approach can be useful for tracking and analyzing discourses surrounding different phenomena (Grbich 2007). A major focus of this study was to understand how Nollywood shapes discourses of representation, and how these discursive paradigms (e.g.,

themes, narratives, and imageries) resonate with audiences in diaspora. The adoption of the discourse analysis approach enabled me to identify common themes in the qualitative data. Using pattern-matching techniques, these themes were later analyzed inductively (Patton 2002).

Regarding transcribed interviews and focus groups, Stewart et al. (2007) notes that “the transcript does not reflect the entire character of the discussion. Nonverbal communication, gestured, and behavioural responses are not reflected in a transcript” (111). Based on this insight, I focused on how participants used nonverbal communication patterns to respond to certain issues raised in the film and to questions asked during focus group discussions. These included the use of body language (e.g., nod and shrug) to express emotions, such as doubt and disbelief, approval, disapproval, and opposition, as well as surprise and contempt. Studies have found that nonverbal communication exists across cultures, and African cultures often use gestures, such as facial or hand movements in communication. These observations helped me to understand the respondents’ cognitive and emotional reactions.

Another important benefit of the discourse analysis approach is that it enabled me to address the questions of “how” in terms of the reception of Nollywood, and “what” in terms of the kind of meanings the audience make of the cultural representations. The latter question allowed me to address gaps in the audiences’ expressed opinions about Nollywood, involving topical issues that were omitted or undermined in the narrative discussion regarding the society and cultures being portrayed. As Patton observed, “Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But, no receipt. Direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when – and if – arrived at” (432).

Gibbs (2018) underscores the importance of coding in qualitative analysis. He describes coding as “a way of indexing and categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it” (54).¹⁴ I started the analytical process by organizing and classifying the research data under “pre-set categories” (e.g., themes) using deductive codes, and adding “emergent sub-categories” (e.g., sub-themes) and inductive codes on the basis of each question. Normally, data analysis begins after completing data transcription. Due to time constraints, my qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed in part concurrently. This process allowed me to organize and classify the data into pre-set categories, but also allowed me to identify emergent themes and patterned meanings.

In using the above coding scheme, I also drew from Stuart Hall’s (1980 [1973]) encoding /decoding model of communication. In the encoding and decoding model, Hall posits that audiences construct meanings out of media texts from three distinct positions: dominant, negotiation, and oppositional positions. This approach provided yet another coding pattern that informed the analytical framework of this study. Hall’s model helped to facilitate my understanding of the participants’ readings of the verbal and non-verbal cues in Nollywood films based on their positionality. For example, the participants’ responses were coded as dominant when they appeared to fully accept the intended message, negotiated when they appeared to accept the intended message partially, and oppositional when they rejected the intended message. Examples of dominant positions in the participants’ responses would be “the dress code reminds me of my culture” or “that is our cultural food.” Participants’ responses in the negotiated position

¹⁴ There are several coding schemes for categorizing qualitative data, from simple inductive to descriptive codes to more complex patterns (Reinhard (2016), but in general there are two types of coding methods: deductive (positivist) and inductive (interpretive). Deductive codes refer to codes a researcher constructs prior to beginning the research. Inductive codes, on the other hand, refer to codes which a researcher creates during the analytical process, as he/she continues to form an idea of the issues to be explored.

would be “that is not necessarily true” or “it depends on the circumstances...” Participants’ responses in the oppositional position would include “they present an extravagant image of Nigeria and fail to show other aspects of the society, such as the slums.”

Other secondary coding patterns were also applied to participants’ responses, especially those that demonstrated empathy or alienation in response to the film aesthetics and narratives. These include emotions such as “likes and dislikes”, or “satisfaction and dissatisfaction”, as well as “attachments and detachments.” Another important area of focus was participants’ judgements, in terms of how they reacted to specific questions asked. These judgements were coded as “positive” and “negative” reactions. In this case, a participant’s response would be deemed “positive” when he/she reacted positively to a particular question about Nollywood or their experience with this media. On the other hand, the same reaction would be considered “negative” if the participant appeared to disagree with (or distance him/herself from) the subject matter.

The inductive method was therefore appropriate to this study for several reasons. First, it enabled me to identify common themes in the participants’ responses and investigate what these themes engender. Second, it allowed me to understand how the emergent themes are linked to the phenomenon being studied. Third, it allowed me to capture the audiences’ interpretations of the phenomenon and the factors that influenced those choices more fully. Overall, the qualitative approach provided an important underpinning for this study.

The ethnographic methods rooted in the field of Anthropology are basic techniques for data collection. These methods involve the use of direct observation and in-depth interviewing to collect qualitative data (Moore 1993; Gillespie 1995; Livingston 2013; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). The basic assumption of participant observation is that it enables a researcher to immerse him/herself in the research, and to observe the participants more closely in a natural setting. Given

the purpose of this chapter, which is to investigate how a given community of people read and interpret media texts in a natural environment, I chose reception ethnography as a useful method to examine and analyze people in their natural settings. What is typical about this empirical method is that it allowed participants to express their opinions on the phenomenon studied from multiple standpoints. It was useful in that it allowed me to elicit information concerning the participants' consumption habits and look carefully into the way they interact with and make meaning of Nollywood media texts in context.

Overall, these ethnographic methods enabled me to study participants' behaviours and capture their worldviews as expressed through verbal and non-verbal communication. Audience ethnography provided an opportunity for me to participate in the viewing sessions and experience firsthand how and why the participants read and interpreted the film from their different subjective positions. As Benshoff notes (2016, 221), these principles of data collection help to inform an understanding of the everyday practices of a group of people within a natural environment. In this way, the observatory method was important. It helped me gain an inductive understanding of the participants' reception and interpretation of the film culture in question.

Focus Groups' Perspectives on *The Wedding Party*.

As Ugochukwu (2011) notes, “[t]he viewing of Nigerian films performs an additional and vital function: that of passing on the Nigerian values and culture to the next generation – something that had been considered missing in diasporas” (7). The aim of the focus groups was to understand the respondents' impressions of, responses to, and interpretations of the film's content. These focus groups also allowed me to understand how the cultural contexts of consumption informed the respondents' interpretations. As Hobson (1996) points out, “Different people watch television

programmes for different reasons, and make different ‘readings’ of those programmes, and much of what they say is determined by preconceived ideas and opinions which they bring to a programme” (603). Although this observation was made with reference to television audiences, it is directly applicable to film audiences. In the following subsection, the main findings from the focus group discussions are discussed, with reference to such questions of representation and contextual interpretation: What kind of cultural politics is reflected in the film in relation to intertribal weddings in Nigeria? How do the representations lend meaning to the narratives? What are the perceptions of the focus groups, and how do they resonate with the findings from the individual interviews? The following subsection collects my findings on the answers to these research questions about meaning making in the context of Nollywood film culture.

What do you think about the ways Nigerian ethnic, cultural, and national identities are communicated in “The Wedding Party”?

This question invited respondents to provide their opinions on the ways that Nigerian ethnic, cultural and national identity is communicated in the film. Most of the respondents believed *The Wedding Party* is a good representation of Nigerian traditional values, and more specifically Yoruba and Igbo values. They agreed that the film depicted, although with a few alterations, some aspects of Nigerian culture and identity. As one respondent observed: “[*The Wedding Party*] it portrays the reality of Nigerian culture, although some aspect is westernized in terms of the English culture introduced. Yet, nothing was taken out of context. The Igbo and Yoruba cultures were well represented” (Ife). Many respondents stressed the ways in which African attires (and dress codes), music, traditional dance, and behaviour (code of greeting among Nigerian ethnic groups especially) are mediated in the film to shape understanding of ethnicity, culture, and national

identity. This perspective was in line with the individual interviews, as many of the respondents tended to emphasize these elements of culture as a matter of prime importance. There were variations, though, in the respondents' perspectives on the extent to which the aesthetics and narrative arcs aligned with the reality being portrayed. For instance, a few of the respondents pointed out that some cultural elements were distorted in their cinematic representation, and as a result cannot be considered authentic reflections of reality. The main concern was the potential implications of such shifting film representations for the preservation of Nigerian cultural values.

What kinds of cultural norms and values are presented in “The Wedding Party”, and to what extent do you think they reflect the reality of Nigerian society and culture?

This question asked the respondents to identify the cultural values implied in the film and then comment on the extent to which they reflected the reality of Nigerian society and culture. The focus groups identified several elements of Nigerian culture that resonated with them. These include the dialects of communication (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo, Efik), music, costumes and dress code, food, decor, body markings, and behaviours. As one respondent explained: “The movie is a good representation of the Nigerian society...This is reflected in the food and the language of communication” (Joey).

The focus groups also referred to a variety of environmental and situational markers depicted in the film. These included geographical location (e.g., local landscape), physical structures (e.g., buildings) and other material contexts. Another important cultural value identified was the belief in a supreme being, although not explicitly highlighted. A large majority of the focus groups agreed that the film communicated, to a large degree, the reality of Nigerian society and culture.

What do you find most valuable in *The Wedding Party* and why?

Here the focus groups were asked to identify specific aspects of the film that they found most valuable, and the reasons for their choice. They identified several aspects of the cinematic renditions that appealed to them. These included the ways the different ethnic groups were presented, the way the traditional wedding was organized, the African attire, music, food, and decorations. As one respondent, Vicky, noted: “The Nigerian culture is well portrayed in the movie in the sense that it is about two different ethnicities: Igbo and Yoruba. The cultures are well represented in terms of the attire and dress codes, dialects, and behaviour.” Another respondent, Debra, expressed similar perspective, highlighting “The way it [*The Wedding Party*] represents Nigerian culture in terms of the traditional wedding, African attires, music, and dance.”

The respondents also cited the attitudes and behaviours of the ethnic group members, noting that the representation of these etiquettes can help audiences build their understanding of Nigerian customs and traditions. As one respondent, Orho, explained “it [the film] represents Nigeria society in different ways, including attitudes and behaviours that are hardly talked about” in discourses on society and culture. Several respondents concurred that the elements of culture portrayed in the film spoke to their sense of identity and belonging. As one respondent, Pemi, put it: “The movie embodies different cultures that I can relate to.”

How are the notions of identity and belonging implied in *The Wedding Party*?

This question obliged the focus groups to provide their opinions on the ways the notions of identity and belonging are reflected in the film. The majority of respondents focused on specific markers of identity, including region and country of origin, ethnicity and culture, history, language, music, clothing, and food. As one respondent observed: “There are several things that are very

typical of the Yoruba. The food, dialect, and dance portray people from my region. These elements speak to my identity” (Joey). The respondents described these culture markers as tools to define the boundaries of identity and belonging, including a way to identify and understand the gaps between the different ethnic groups represented in the film.

How might Nollywood films be essential for promoting and reinforcing a sense identity and belonging in your community?

This question required the focus groups to provide suggestions on how Nollywood can promote and reinforce a sense of identity and belonging. The focus groups provided a range of suggestions concerning the ways Nollywood films can be utilized to achieve these goals. For instance, they stressed the role of Nollywood as an instrument to mediate Nigerian customs and tradition, histories, music, literature, and arts. As one respondent argued:

“Nollywood means Nigeria in picture...A picture represents a culture, a movement, or an artistic form...In Nollywood [films], you see different aspects of Nigerian cultures” (Orho).

Another remarked:

“[Nollywood] It presents a window to people like me who were not born in Nigeria. I was not born in Nigeria, but my parents are from there. You get to see and kind of understand the environment where they grew up and lived. By “window” I mean being able to see [things] from a non-western perspective” (Osas).

This respondent, Osas, added: “in the past, a lot of people had difficulty discussing their

ethnicity because of stereotypes, movies like [*The Wedding Party*] can help them negotiate their identity.” The majority of respondents believed that Nollywood films can be used to reflect Nigeria’s cultural diversity, with a focus on reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging among global audiences. As one respondent put it: “Nollywood can be used to promote a sense of identity and belonging by showcasing more of [Nigerian] cultural values” (Pemi). The respondents proposed that the use of this medium to produce and foster cultural ideologies could allow people, including members of the diaspora who have not had a chance to visit the homeland and who are uninformed about Nigerian culture to become better informed about (and better disposed toward) Nigerian collective identity.

Findings on Focus Groups’ Discussions

The focus group discussions on the Nollywood film presented yielded valuable information on the ways in which participants engaged with the film. More importantly, they confirmed and clarified the fact that participants decode messages conveyed from three different stances: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. The findings also revealed variances in participants’ judgements across different age groups, especially in relation to the agency of Nollywood in the mediation of Nigerian cultural values.

Another important finding is that participants’ prior experiences with Nollywood played a role in how they decoded and interpreted the messages intended in this film. Despite the broad consensus concerning the media’s value, there were a few variations related to the process of meaning-making in context. For example, the older demographics noted that they watch Nollywood films several times in a typical week. In contrast, the younger demographics reported that they do not watch Nollywood films regularly. This variation was also evidenced in the way

the participants reacted to certain issues raised. For example, the older demographics that were familiar with earlier Nollywood films showed more empathy towards certain narratives (such as those addressing gender and class issues) than the younger demographics who had minimal exposure to previous films. It was found that the gap in participants' responses was mainly shaped by social and contextual factors, such as age, degree of exposure to earlier Nollywood films, and the context in which consumption occurred.

Other differences were also generational. While the older demographic who had considerable exposure to Nollywood films mostly considered the various subject matters from a traditional standpoint, the younger demographics viewed the same issues from a modern standpoint. Such findings from the focus group discussions are mapped out and analyzed below, question by question.

Representations of Nigerian Culture and Society in Nollywood Films

In response to the question: "To what extent do you think *The Wedding Party* communicated the reality of Nigerian cultures and society?", participants overwhelmingly agreed that the film portrayed the reality of Nigerian society and cultural values. They drew on a variety of environmental, situational, and relational markers depicted in the film to support their arguments. These included location (national and cultural), physical structures, and other material contexts. As one respondent put it:

"Nigerian culture is well presented in the movie. Whoever watches the movie will know that it is about two different tribes: Igbo and Yoruba. Aside from portraying two different tribes, the cultures are well represented. This is reflected in the language, attires and dress codes, as well as attitudes and behaviours" (Vicky).

Another added:

“It portrays the reality of Nigerian culture, although some aspect is westernized in terms of the English culture introduced. Yet, nothing was taken out of context. The Igbo and Yoruba cultures were well represented” (Ife).

Participants referred to social factors such as ethnicity, lifestyles, and belief systems. They identified several cultural markers in the film linked to Nigerian society and cultures. These included the customs and traditions of the different ethnic groups, the language of communication, music, costumes, food, and religion. These traditional features helped to illustrate, the respondents said, the nation’s cultural diversity and map the boundaries between the ethnic groups portrayed.

Nigerian Cultural Values Reflected in Nollywood Films

In response to the question: “What are the elements of culture reflected in *The Wedding Party*?”, participants highlighted several components of culture in the film, including language, music, food, costumes and dress codes, and body markings. Other cultural elements identified include greeting patterns, respect for elders, unconditional love, commitment, and submissiveness.

As one respondent explained:

“Each one of these cultures has a particular set of values. Family values, for instance, were well represented. For example, the man was portrayed as the head of the family. This is evident in the way his wife treated him, although he also acknowledged the role of the

woman. The movie showed how people endeared family because it is important in Nigerian culture” (Pemi).

The respondents agreed that Nollywood plays a key role in the way these components of culture are mediated in global and diasporic contexts. The conversation below between Yemisi and Deardre in the film was cited, for example, in relation to etiquette, greeting patterns, and respect to the elderly.

Yemisi: Kneeling down in that dress is not cute.

Deardre: It’s traditional greeting.

Participants spoke about experiences of Nigerian oral history, customs and tradition, myths, and related cultural practices mediated through the prism of Nollywood. The importance of Nollywood in knowledge creation was an area that the younger participants especially tended to unanimously agree upon. They agreed that the film is didactical because it is designed, not only to inform understandings of Nigerian culture, but also teach moral lessons about particular customs and tradition in Nigerian society. As one respondent put it: “It’s a different picture to a different view of the world” (Osas).

The Concepts of Identity and Belonging in Nollywood Films

In response to the question: “How are the notions of identity and belonging implied in the films?”, participants identified different ways these concepts are inferred in *The Wedding Party* - from environmental, situational, and relational perspectives. They perceived the representation of

situated identity linked to key factors such as ethnicity, religion, lifestyles, and belief systems. Relational identity, on the other hand, was associated with the diverse relationships that are formed through interactions within society. Participants engaged with these subject matters by focusing on areas of commonalities and differences or inclusion and exclusion. They also considered contextual factors, such as the context of homeland and the diasporic context. As one respondent noted:

“The movie reminds me of how things are done in my culture. It also reminds me of how my own wedding was conducted. I have witnessed some of the scenes in the movie in real life, particularly the rejection of a son-in-law by a mother-in-law” (Chris).

Some participants also tended to concentrate on cultural referents such as the relationship between Yoruba and Igbo cultures.¹⁵ In this case, they tended to focus on what they have in common with – and what differentiates them from – other people within and outside the community. These elements included language, music, clothing, and food, and they were used to define boundaries between the different ethnic groups represented (and sometimes between Nigerian and Western cultures).

Impact of Cultural Hybridity in Nollywood Film Culture

In response to the question: “What do you think about the issue of cultural hybridity in this Nollywood film?”, participants were sometimes divided on this issue. For example, the younger

¹⁵ It is worth noting that although the Yoruba and Igbo groups were often discussed in the focus groups, the participants themselves hailed from different ethnic groups.

participants tended to empathize more with the fusion of local and universal art forms, as opposed to the older participants. As one respondent remarked:

“Cultural hybridity is good. It brings variation. Variation is what’s needed everywhere. Immigrants who grew up in North America still need a little touch of both cultures because they are going through both cultures. The branding of the two cultures is needed, although some aspects of both cultures may be distorted. That’s one of the consequences” (Ife).

Another argued:

“I think cultural hybridity is much needed. Everyone looks at Western civilization as a place to be. It shows that even back home we are merging with the western culture. It’s like what [my colleague] said earlier on, culture evolves overtime. Whether we like it or not, due to interaction and socialization, we will continue to imbibe other cultures and give them part of our cultures” (Pemi).

Participants agreed, though, that changing realities of the globalized world like the rise in multiculturalism, cross-cultural migration, and transnational flows of media and culture have influenced the dynamics of global culture. This situation makes it hard for filmmakers to produce media contents that are entirely devoid of “hybrid/global/glocal” elements. The majority of respondents believed that cultural hybridity is characteristic of modernity.

The Role of Nollywood in Cultural Literacy and Sustainability

In response to the question: “How might Nollywood films be essential for facilitating

cultural literacy and sustainability in the Nigerian diasporic community?”, participants agreed that Nollywood might be essential for facilitating cultural literacy among Nigerians in diaspora. The majority of respondents agreed that Nollywood’s aesthetic and narrative arcs can provide reflections of aspects of Nigerian cultural heritage and popular culture. This is important to Africans and non-Africans who are not familiar with Nigerian cultural specificities. One respondent suggested that Nollywood film can be used to facilitate cultural literacy “by showcasing more of Nigerian culture in the productions. For example, the language, which is one of the most essential parts of culture and the modes of dressing that portray different cultures” (Pemi). This respondent believed “[i]f these elements are incorporated in a film, they can give people a sense understanding and a better belonging to their culture.” Another added: “Children who have not had the chance to visit the homeland and do not know what obtains over there, if they watch this kind of movie, I am sure they will learn one or two things pertaining to the cultural practices. This is a good way of portraying Nigerian tradition and cultures” (Vicky). To buttress these assumptions, one respondent recounted her early childhood experience in the following way:

“I was born in Nigeria and lived there for six years before coming to Canada. I was able to learn the culture. I was also able to see how people live their lives over there. When I came here it was completely different like the way people talk, the way they behave; the way they react to things. When you put stuff like that in movies, people who were born outside of the country understand how people act and live over there. It shows them literally what they are missing [...]. Because sometimes parents can explain to you, but you really can’t understand unless you see stuff for yourself” (Osas).

As previous studies have shown, one way to convey a sense of identity and community is through pedagogy. With respect to diasporic populations, this can be achieved by reflecting the customs and tradition, cultural beliefs, and values in the homeland. The majority of respondents agreed that Nollywood is central to the transmission of Nigerian cultural values around the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the aim was to understand what kind of meaning my focus group participants made using the images, themes, and narratives presented in *The Wedding Party*, and the reasons for their choices. Participants used several analogies to describe Nollywood in this respect, including the image of a picture presented, a window, a culture marker, a cultural agent and a cultural medium. These findings demonstrate the relevance of Nollywood films for Africans in diaspora. The focus groups agreed that Nollywood plays a significant role in the representation of Nigerian culture and society. They agreed that *The Wedding Party* speaks volumes about different aspects of Nigerian cultures, for example in relation to the institution of marriage.

For some of the younger members of the focus groups, especially those who were raised in diaspora, watching *The Wedding Party* was an eye-opening experience since it revealed the nitty-gritty details and dynamics of an intertribal wedding ceremony. Given this power to encourage cultural literacy, it is not surprising to see the overwhelming agreement among the participants that Nollywood can play a valuable role in the representation of Nigerian cultural norms and values for diaspora communities. A significant number of the respondents indicated that Nollywood has indeed been instrumental in general, in terms of deepening their understandings of their identity, including their sense of belonging to a larger cultural community.

These respondents believed the imagined space of Nollywood media consumption can facilitate community engagement and participation in media. More importantly, the conversations hosted within this imagined space can result in shared experiences and shape the way participants construct a sense of collective identity and community. For many diasporic communities, the imagined spaces are, in terms of articulating diasporic history and culture, addressing matters relevant to the community's wellbeing. In the case of Nollywood film culture consumption, I will therefore argue that the imagined discursive arena thus created has huge implications for preserving the diaspora's ethnic/cultural heritage, sustaining diasporic identity and sense of belonging, and framing collective action. Diaspora audience engagements with Nollywood film culture can play a significant role in how they make sense of identity and their sense of belonging in ethnocultural, national, regional, and – transnational terms.

This study looked at the meaning-making achieved through community engagement with Nollywood's mediated texts with reference to the concept of negotiation, stressing that Nollywood film culture is itself a tool and a medium of negotiation. Nigerian audiences in the diaspora not only receive, interpret, and make meaning of Nollywood and its culture in transnational spaces, but also use that experience to make sense of their everyday lives. Unfortunately, the liminality of these imagined spaces means the dialectics of culture and identity are often obscured in analyses that focus on Nollywood's forms and contents to the exclusion of consumption patterns and reading of Nollywood on the ground.

The findings of the focus groups confirmed, then, that Nollywood occupies a central place in the community and plays a key role in how members of this community engage with the questions of identity. This is reflected in the participants' emotional and cognitive responses to questions surrounding the utility of Nollywood films for diasporic Nigerians. As one participant,

Pemi, remarked: “the [*The Wedding Party*] film showed the foundation upon which the culture is built. The foundation, that makes the culture unique. It also shows the diversity.” Another participant, Osas, added that “Nollywood films teach life lessons. They portray what is going on in people’s lives. What people experience. I feel like if I weren’t watching Nollywood films while growing up, I’d see stuff differently as a person. It [Nollywood] made me a different person I guess and took me to a different part.” For these audiences, the recreational dramatization of intertribal marriage in *The Wedding Party* provides an opportunity to acquire valuable lessons about the complex dynamics of culture and identity in Nigerian society, including the clashes of cultures and classes that can be involved.

The active character of the reflections collected above confirm the insight that audiences play a key role in the process of meaning making. As some scholars have argued, the result of media interpretation depends upon the level of engagement with a particular media. Scholars have identified two types of involvement in media: low and high levels. As Eichner (2014) points out, “While low involvement results in automated processing, high involvement results in controlled processing, that is, the recognition and adoption of messages” (129). This situation raises questions regarding the parameters for measuring the levels of audiences’ involvement. It also calls attention to the ways in which the context of consumption e.g., social (interactivity), cultural (knowledge of cultural norms and values) and contextual (the audience situation and disposition) play in this process. These questions will be addressed in more depth in subsequent sections.

Although the existing literature has mainly focused on Nollywood’s organizational framework and product quality, the focus group tended to focus more on the media’s ideological and practical properties. The respondents believed that Nollywood is an important mechanism of mediation that can be used to promote and reinforce cultural ideas and ideologies related to

Nigerian society and its people. Given the diversity among the participants, I had expected to see a large degree of variation in their perspectives on Nollywood and its relevance for displaced community. Unlike the participants in Hobson's (1980) research who demonstrated differences in their reading and interpretation of television programs, though, this study population was, to a large degree, unanimous in their appraisal of this medium. They showed minimal disparity in the interpretations and the value they gave to the cultural representations reflected in Nollywood films.

One key similarity that emerged in the respondents' perspectives involved the question of cultural hybridity. As chapter 3 of this study details, cultural hybridization is a fundamental issue in understanding the changing forms and functions of Nollywood films. Nollywood is increasingly adapting foreign aesthetics and narratives in their productions, as a way to increase appeal for global audiences. While the fusion of local and universal art forms has benefited mainstream media, such as Hollywood, critics are concerned about the consequences of the use of this strategy in Nollywood film culture, when it comes to the representation and preservation of Nigerian culture. There was little disparity in the respondents' perspectives on the issue of hybridity in Nollywood. The majority of respondents agreed that hybridization is a key driver of growth for Nollywood, and they also acknowledged that this strategy could result in distortions that would make it hard for the public to grasp the Nigerian reality being portrayed. As the next chapter's presentation of one-on-one interview data further confirms, diaspora audiences are keenly aware of Nollywood's cultural power, and keenly interested in the way Nollywood can represent (or misrepresent) Nigerian specificity on the world stage.

CHAPTER 6

Making Sense of Nollywood Films: Interviews.

The thing about Nollywood that is interesting, especially as a diasporic Nigerian, is the layers of meaning.

Temi (a female respondent)

Introduction

According to Eide, Kunelius and Phillips (2008), “[m]aking sense is always an act of articulation. We make sense of new things by connecting them to old ones. In this sense, any inquiry is not merely an attempt to find but also to control meanings, to keep the polysemy within reasonable (i.e., understandable) limits” (24). In this chapter, I examine the significance of Nollywood through the lens of interactive interviews with diasporic Nigerians in Montreal, Quebec. This method is especially useful when it comes to obtaining a range of respondents’ points of view. It is rare for different audiences to interpret and make meaning out of media texts in the same way. Adrian Athique (2016) found in his study of media reception among transnational audiences, for example, that the “interpretation of media content tended to differ on the basis of differences of class, race, age, gender, education and other salient factors” (173-4). Moreover, people always experience the world and make meaning out of that experience in multiple ways, from different subjective positions (see Hall 1980; Morley 1980; Kellner 2018).

When it comes to understanding how a particular audience interprets the media texts of film culture, Olson (2016) stresses “the need for researchers to employ an assortment of methods when attempting to unravel how audiences make sense of cinema” (298). Such tools are deployed in audience-reception studies to understand how various audiences interact with, read and make meaning of media texts in the context of consumption. Making meaning refers here to the many

ways in which audiences engage and make sense of media texts from their own different subjective positions, during and post consumption (see, for ex., Hall 1980; Morley 1980; Fiske 1987; Bhabha 1990). As Bhabha argues (1990), this is a complex process of representation and interpretation:

Meaning is constructed across the bar of difference and separation between the signifier and the signified. So it follows that no culture is full unto itself, no culture is plainly plenitudinous, not only because there are other cultures which contradict its authority, but also because its own symbol-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification and meaning-making, always underscores the claim to an originary, holistic, organic identity (Bhabha 1990, 210).

This observation is significant because it flags the importance of flows of information and patterns of consumption. The central focus of this chapter is therefore to understand how respondents interact with Nollywood films, including the meanings that are constructed from that experience and the potential social and cultural implications. The goal is to clarify what Nollywood means to members of this community in an overall sense, much in the same way that Hirji's study (2010) explored the influence of Bollywood on South Asian youths' sense of identity.

Research Methods

To contribute to the understanding of diasporic perspectives on Nollywood, this study uses in-depth interviews (face-to-face/one-on-one) to investigate my central question: How does the transnational Nigerian media (Nollywood) inform and shape understandings of Nigeria's cultural, ethnic, and national identity, and to what extent do such cultural understandings and representations reflect the reality of Nigerian society? The purpose of the qualitative interviews is first to examine how diasporic Nigerians "read" Nollywood films, in terms of understanding what the medium means to this community in an overall sense, as well as its implications for the ways in which community members negotiate and sustain identity and a sense of belonging in diaspora.

In the preceding chapter, the findings from two focus groups were presented and discussed. The observational method allowed me to directly engage and interact with participants during the viewing sessions. In this chapter, qualitative interviews are used to supply additional information relevant to the central research question. This task was achieved through face-to-face/one-on-one encounter with the respondents in different natural environments. Qualitative semi-structured interviews involving open-ended questions were used as a primary strategy of data collection. Mann (2016, 9), for example, described interview-based research as a reflective practice because it involves reflecting on past experiences related to specific phenomenon. He maintained that this approach allows researchers to derive qualitative data on a specific topic by engaging key informants or interviewees. The qualitative data thus derived came from in-depth interviews with members of the Nigerian diaspora community in Montreal, Quebec, Canada from September 2018 to April 2019.

Data Collection: Interviews

Overall, a total of 19 participants between the ages of 18 and 60 were interviewed besides the focus groups. The distribution of respondents was 70% male and 30% female. The respondents all had some levels of formal education. Specifically, 30% of the respondents had advanced academic degrees, 60% had undergraduate degrees, and the remaining 10% had some forms of certification. The criteria for the selection of participants included nationality, age, gender, country, and place of residence, as well as knowledge of (and exposure to) Nollywood films. Differences in terms of age, gender, and time spent in Canada were identified both at the recruiting stage and in the demographic profile collected in the interview stage.

I started the fieldwork by conducting individual interviews. The interviews were then supplemented with focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted with participants from September 2018 to April 2019. They were conducted in natural environments, including participants' homes, church, and secluded sections in fast-food restaurants. Due to time constraint, one individual interview was conducted in a participant's vehicle. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted approximately one to two hours per participant. Prior to conducting interviews, the eligible participants were provided with a sample interview guide. The aim was to provide them with background information about the research focus. During the interviews, the participants were asked to respond to questions about Nollywood and its reception in the context under study. This method also provided participants an opportunity to articulate, in their own words, how they consume and make sense of the medium in their everyday lives.

Schensul (2012) argues "the more specific and structured the interview schedule, the less opportunity respondents have to express themselves as they would in a regular conversation" (88). Based on this premise, this study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary research approach. Questions were primarily standardized and open-ended.¹⁶ As Roulston (2010) observes, "open-ended questions are particularly useful in providing a format for the interviewees to answer in their own words" (16). The open-ended approach provided an opportunity for the interviewees to respond to the interview questions in their own words, in as detailed a way as possible. This guided approach allowed me to prepare and ask all interviewees similar questions during the interviewing process, which then enabled me to identify common patterns (e.g., similarities and differences) in their perspectives on the phenomenon being investigated.

¹⁶ I had planned to begin data collection by conducting focus groups first, but I reverted to doing interviews first due to issues of availability on the part of the eligible participants.

Because the focus of the interviews was to get the participants to articulate their perspectives on Nollywood and its cultural productions, the majority of the questions focused on the reception and interpretation of Nollywood films, with an emphasis on how interviewees used the elements of culture reflected in these films as a framework to negotiate and sustain identity. This gamut of questions (knowledge, experience, and implications) allowed me to explore the ways in which audiences interact with Nollywood films, including the way in which those experiences influenced and shaped their sense of identity, belonging, and community in Canadian society.

In-depth interview guide comprised of three parts: opening, body, and closing. Interview consisted of three sections and spanned one to two hours. The first section explored each participant's knowledge of Nollywood. The second section concerned patterns of the reception and interpretation of Nollywood films within the diaspora community. The third section explored more subjective issues like the participant's experience of Nollywood films and the meaning they found in such experience. In particular, I looked at how this experience informed and shaped their sense of identity, belonging, and community in Canadian society.

The opening consisted of an introduction of myself and the interview protocol. Participants were reminded about the purpose of the research. This section was mainly intended to "break the ice." In the second part, which is the body, the participants were asked a combination of exploration, experience, and opinion questions. Exploration questions were intended to examine their knowledge of Nollywood and their viewing habits. Participants were asked questions such as (a) "what do you know about transnational Nigerian media (Nollywood)?", (b) "How often in a typical week do you watch Nollywood films in your family?", (c) "What are your reasons for watching Nollywood films?", (d) "What aspect(s) of Nollywood films do you find most valuable?". Experience questions focused on the participants' level of engagement with

Nollywood films. Questions asked here include (a) “Can you tell me about your experience with Nollywood films and how that experience has influenced your sense of identity and belonging in this community?”, (b) “How have Nollywood films helped you to cope with the effects of displacement from your homeland, and integration into a cultural community such as the one you live in?”.

Opinion questions were also asked, to clarify the respondents’ perspectives on the significance of Nollywood productions for the diaspora. Respondents were asked questions such as: (a) “What aspects of Nollywood films do you find most valuable?”, (b) “In your opinion, what kinds of cultural norms and values are presented in Nollywood films?”, (c) “To what extent do you think the cultural representations in Nollywood films reflect the reality of Nigerian society and cultures?”, (d) “What do you think about the ways the concepts of identity and belonging are presented in Nollywood films?”. These questions served to clarify their opinions on the utility of Nollywood as a platform to represent Nigerian cultural values, identity, and society in diaspora. To complement these questions, the respondents were asked to identify specific cultural elements reflected in Nollywood films, and to comment on the extent to which these cultural formations reflect the reality of Nigerian society. Respondents were then asked to comment on the extent to which these cultural elements resonated with them.

To gain the widest possible perspective, respondents were also asked to respond to more open-ended questions regarding the ways in which Nollywood films have deepened their understanding of Nigerian culture and, more importantly, shaped their sense of identity and belonging within their community. Questions asked here include: (a) “How have Nollywood films allowed you to make sense of your identity and belonging to a large cultural community?” and (b) “In what ways have you used Nollywood films to instil a sense of cultural, ethnic, and national

identity in your children?’. This more reflective series of questions and answers gave me a more global kind of perspective and insight into the respondents’ various answers to questions about the particulars of the subject matter.

Although many researchers have investigated the dynamics of Nollywood, a large proportion of their findings relate to the media’s material culture and aesthetic frameworks, with little reference to ideological, symbolic, and social/functional scaffolding. Only a handful of scholars have engaged in empirical studies into the reception of Nollywood films, for example, within the backdrop of the global African diaspora. As my review of the existing literature revealed, most findings reported by studies of Nollywood (with a few exceptions) offer conceptual rather than empirical information. Scholars such as McQuail (1987) and Ang (1991) argue that such asymmetrical approaches to the analysis of mass media values are problematic: they fail to fully address the reality on the ground and tend to make the analysis more easily manipulated for the purposes of the theorists.

Participants’ Viewing Habits

In her studies, Esan (2011, 131) identified several factors that influence the audience’s appreciation of Nollywood film including, but not limited to, cultural and genre proximity. Cultural proximity theory posits that audiences prefer media productions that either originate from or are associated with their region of origin, as opposed to those considered foreign (Ruggiero 2003; Straubhaar 2007; Berg 2017). Genre proximity is the related question of a given genre’s familiarity and perceived cultural appropriateness. Berg (2017, 3416-17), in a recent study on Turkish television drama serials in Qatar, found that cultural proximity and genre proximity facilitated the medium’s appeal to Arab audiences.

In my interviews, the majority of the respondents (about 98%) identified Nollywood as a primary medium for consumption. Most of them said they would rather watch Nollywood films than Hollywood or Bollywood films. Their choice was related to a belief that Nollywood films were more impactful in terms of conceiving and negotiating their identity than Hollywood and Bollywood films. The respondents produced dominant readings of Nollywood as an ethnic medium. As far as the community studied is concerned, this study found that cultural proximity plays a significant role how an audience interprets and makes sense of Nollywood film.

Age difference was also found to determine viewing habits to a large extent. For example, many of the adult respondents showed a broad knowledge of Nollywood film genres. On the other hand, many of the younger respondents, especially those who were raised in diaspora, admitted to having slight to moderate knowledge of Nollywood productions. Such details confirm that factors such as age and lived experience can impact viewing habits. Despite this disparity, though, the majority of respondents identified and empathize with Nollywood as their own ethnic/cultural media. They reported feeling connected to the context in which the media is situated. In terms of their viewing habits, about 80% of the respondents said they watch Nollywood productions through a variety of networks, including satellite, YouTube, and Netflix several times in a typical week, while others (about 20%) identified themselves as occasional viewers only. The younger demographic also mentioned that they sometimes watch Nollywood films via mobile phones. This local detail confirms the general principle that with the proliferation of digital media, mobile screening has become an important dynamic when it comes to accessing Nollywood productions at a distance.

While it is true that some scholars have explored the interpretive context of “where,” “why” and “how” Nollywood audiences consume the film’s genres, many have touched on these subject

matters rather superficially. The issue of “timing” in terms of “when” the act of consumption takes place has not been explicitly explored, either. In terms of “screen time,” for example, this study identified variations in the time periods in which the respondents engage in media consumption. In particular, the female respondents said they watch Nollywood films during their leisure time, whenever the opportunity presents itself. By contrast, the male respondents said they watch the films whenever possible in the evenings and on weekends. Several factors explained this disparity in the respondents’ viewing habits in terms of screen time. There were important differences in terms of gender preferences and the degree of commitment to career and other family responsibilities, including daily chores, as well as children’s academic and sports activities. The “when” factor was also closely related to time spent on paid employment. It was found that these socioeconomic factors played a significant role in how the respondents engage with Nollywood in their everyday lives.

Findings and Discussion

The findings presented in this chapter are organized thematically to help identify themes and the patterns of meaning in the respondents’ perspectives on Nollywood. The respondents offered multiple perspectives on Nollywood and its narratives to help us understand the significance of this media to diasporic lives. These themes are presented sequentially and discussed in more detail in the following section.

Theme 1: *Nollywood and Cultural Representation*

“We have different tribes, and each tribe has a different culture. Nollywood movies depict the different cultures in terms of diversity” (Kim, a male respondent). In my interviews, the

majority of respondents expressed similar perspective. They agreed that Nollywood plays a pivotal role in reflecting particular aspects of Nigerian culture. Hall (1997) asserts that our knowledge of the social world is created through two related systems of representation. The first is the system itself by which objects, people and events are conceptualized in our thoughts. The second involves the ways these concepts are represented based on depictions of similarity and difference: “Representation is the process by which members of a culture use language (broadly defined as any system which deploys signs, any signifying system) to produce meaning” (61). As Hall has added elsewhere (1982), “Representation is a very different notion from reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely the transmitting of an already existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean” (64). This active social dimension of representation is what links questions of mass media representations to questions of agency, power, and identity. With respect to representations of Nigerian culture and society, one respondent explained:

“Nollywood is actually a place where we get to see and experience Nigerian movies and see the culture right here in Canada, although we are not in Nigeria. It is also very important that we get to understand and remind ourselves of our culture and where we come from, which is the major reason I think Nollywood is out there.” (Hector).

As discussed above in Chapter 2, media create a discursive arena where people represent themselves, with a focus on shaping perceptions about them. Nollywood provides diasporic Nigerians a medium to engage in discursive representation of identity. During the viewing sessions, participants often negotiate with the media texts in terms. As one respondent, Joe,

explained about Nollywood, “we've always depended on Western nations to tell our stories. In most instances, our stories are told negatively. But, for the first time, we can tell our own stories.” Another noted: “[Nollywood filmmakers] use the medium of entertainment to convey messages that can be classified into three groups: cultural messages, social messages, and religious messages” (Lucas). The representations of Nigerian cultural values, sociopolitical thoughts, and popular culture are therefore important for people living in diaspora to construct a sense of identity and belonging in context.

In her ethnographic study of the reception of broadcast television and video within South Asian diaspora community in London’s Southhall district, Marie Gillespie (1995) found that television and video play a significant role in shaping a sense of identity and belonging. In a similar study, Adekunle Detokunbo-Bello (2010) showed that when Yoruba-Nigerians watch Nollywood film in South East London, “members of these groups demonstrate compassion and pride each time they individually or commonly experienced viewing their traditional films on television, video or at the cinema” (1). He also found that the experience of watching Nollywood films does not only fill the members of this community with fond memories of the homeland. It also allows them to develop a sense of belonging to a larger cultural community. In my interviews, a vast majority of the respondents expressed similar perspectives on Nollywood. These perspectives suggest that the remarkable global “spreadability” (Jenkins et al. 2013) of Nollywood contents has important consequences for Nigerians in diaspora. Nollywood films can serve, as the next section makes clear, the construction of identity and a sense of belonging.

Theme 2: *Nollywood and Cultural Identity/Belonging*

“With Nollywood you can go to any part of the world so long as you have Internet you are able to watch Nollywood movies. It keeps your identity of who you are as a person or where you are coming from” (Lucas, a male respondent). As Athique (2016) has noted, in a diasporic context, the use of ethnic/community media enables the community in question to maintain symbolic links to the homeland. In my interviews, the majority of respondents noted that Nollywood films helped them to find diasporic commonalities and shared identity. They viewed the transnationalization of Nollywood as a windfall for the Nigerian diaspora, noting that the medium has helped to bridge the cultural divide between different ethnic groups. For these reasons, respondents showed a sense of ownership in relation to Nollywood media. As one respondent, Debbie, noted: “Nollywood is our media.” She added: it is easy to lose sense of one’s identity, given the millions of images the media throw at people daily.” Respondents reported that the cultural markers reflected in Nollywood films speak to their ethnicities, cultures and identities in diaspora. Most respondents underlined the importance of the cultural markers reflected in Nollywood films for cultural preservation.

The role of Nollywood in the discursive construction of identity and belonging is clearly a key factor in the medium’s appeal. As one respondent, Temi, affirmed: “The issue of identity and belonging is one of the more interesting narratives of Nigerian culture in Nollywood films.” To a large extent, the Nigerian elements reflected in Nollywood films played an important part in this active process of representation. As one respondent pointed out:

“The way we dress, the way we speak as Africans. These are all what forms us as Africans and Nigerians, so to speak. So, we need the reinforcement of those things because that is

what identity is. We need to be identified as Nigerians by the way we speak, the way we dress, and the way we handle our own affairs as Nigerians” (Hector).

Karim (1998) has observed that, “[t]he identities of individuals and groups within specific diasporas are formed by complex historical, social, and cultural dynamics within the group and in its relationships with other groups. Retention of ancestral customs, language, and religion, the marriage patterns of its members, and particularly the ease of communication between various parts of the transnational group help determine its characteristics” (3). By helping communities construct identity, Nollywood films help people cultivate belonging. Nollywood films can promote and reinforce a sense of belonging – a feeling that one belongs to a specific social and ethnocultural community. “Nollywood movies,” one respondent explained, “help us understand where we belong and where we don’t belong. They also help us understand what differentiates us from other racial and ethnic groups” (Moe). Within diasporic contexts, race and ethnicity, culture and nationality play an important role in the lives of displaced populations. The respondents identified different modes of belonging linked to Nollywood films. These include family belonging in terms of immediate and extended family circles and also group/community belonging in terms of kinship from the perspective of ethnicity (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Edo, Urhobo, Efik, etc.). As one respondent noted: “Nollywood movies remind [us] of back home [...] that is why they are very important for the diaspora” (Kim). Another added: [Nollywood film] brings me back home that we have culture, and that culture is always good for us (Birgitte).

African traditional societies are centered on the culture of kinship – one that is based on family and community relationships. Many of the respondents similarly valued Nollywood’s cultural markers for the purposes of forging identity and negotiating boundaries within the larger

context of society. Responding to the question on how Nollywood's narratives shape understanding of belonging, one of the respondents, Temi, said: "I think that in the Nollywood movies that speak to me, there is a strong narrative arc around where you come from and what that means and how that's reflected in your life." Others expressed similar views:

"When we watch Nigerian movies, we are sharing a rich part of Nigerian culture here in Canada...watching Nigerian movies reminds us of where we are from; that we are actually from somewhere that is quite different from here [Canadian society]; and the way we should keep that identity to constantly remind us of who we are" (Hector).

The affirmation of diasporic identity is attractive as a way to make sense of one's "otherness" in a new host culture. "Otherness" can result in exclusionary stereotypes, discrimination, and marginalization (Said 1978; Karim 2007; Jiwani 2009a, 2009b). In the diasporic context, people who are marginalized in such ways often withdraw from the mainstream and identify more with a community where they can expect to be accepted - one that can help them to cope with the outcomes of marginalization. As one respondent, Debbie, noted:

"Being part of the diaspora is a challenge in itself. Stereotyping and marginalization have forced many people of colour to recoil from the mainstream into their cultural community" (Debbie).

Another noted:

“Nigerians have actually been unlucky, that is not who we are, that is not what we are. We are very hardworking people. We believe in hard work and getting good results. So, Nollywood can help by constantly showcasing that part of us that will change the way people view Nigeria and its people as opposed to what the media added because of a few [bad] eggs” (Hector).

Another affirmed:

“[Nollywood] It keeps your identity of who you are as a person or where you are coming from. It keeps it constantly in your mind” (Lucas).

Whether the connection with Nigerian culture offered by Nollywood is experienced as an affirmation or a retreat, it can contribute powerfully to diasporic Nigerians’ cultural literacy. This dimension of Nollywood’s character and function is the focus of the next section.

Theme 3: *Nollywood and Cultural Literacy*

Minority media offer minority populations arenas in which to reflect upon their cultural heritage and cultural practices. As such, these media serve an important purpose as sources of cultural literacy. Cultural literacy refers to the process by which a person acquires cultural knowledge of a given culture and is able to participate with ease in that culture (Hirsch 1987), and the representations of the mass media often play an important role. As Orgad (2012) notes, “We rely on media representations to make sense of our lives and our world. They shape, inform and orient the way we see and judge the world, others and ourselves, and how we imagine real and possible lives” (8). It is not surprising, then, that the vast majority of my respondents said that

Nollywood plays a key role in facilitating cultural literacy and sustainability. Most said that they learn about Nigerian cultural heritage and popular culture through the prism of Nollywood. They considered such cultural literacy important for sustaining identity and developing a sense of belonging in diaspora. These findings confirm that Nollywood provides a platform for knowledge transfer, with a focus on reinforcing identity and belonging.

In some cases, the respondents had different priorities on issues relating to cultural literacy. The older respondents were more concerned about cultural reawakening, and how they could use the cultural elements reflected in Nollywood films to achieve this goal. These respondents confirmed that Nollywood films have helped them to cope with different kinds of struggles associated with their migration experiences, including the sense of loss caused by their displacement from the homeland. On the other hand, the younger respondents viewed Nollywood films with a kind of intellectual curiosity about their identity, and only occasionally drew on the media's cultural mappings to negotiate identity and belonging. For most respondents, though, Nollywood was seen as an important medium for cultural literacy. More than three-quarters of respondents mentioned that Nollywood allows them to enhance their knowledge of Nigerian cultural heritage, oral history, customs and tradition, myths and related belief systems, which they saw as valuable in building diasporic lives.

“Nollywood films are very important. As a Nigerian diaspora, you don't want to forget your culture. You want your children to learn from your culture. You want them to know your culture...your true culture. You have to introduce them...you have to let them get used to Nollywood films, especially the ones that can teach your children things about the culture, as well as language and character. I mean positive attitude” (Debbie).

“The benefit of watching Nollywood movies is that of connection with my roots. Nollywood films teach cultural and moral values, which are important to the diaspora” (Lucas).

Although the younger demographic tended to have limited knowledge of Nollywood and be more indifferent to its benefits, the majority maintained its potential importance for younger audiences. As scholars have noted (e.g., Hodge and Tripp 1986; add references), mass media have a significant impact on children’s development. My interview respondents agreed that Nollywood films have great potential of this kind in the diaspora. As one respondent, Joe, observed: ‘It’s very easy to get so assimilated into diasporic life and forget one’s origin.’ Several respondents echoed this perspective with explicit reference to the education of children:

“I definitely don’t want to forget my culture. So, I tend to go back to watch Nollywood movies for cultural purposes and for my children not to forget where I’m from and where they are coming from. Nollywood films teach moral values in terms of how children should treat and respect their parents” (Praise).

Another noted:

“We have children who grew up here and have not had the opportunity to visit the homeland. Yet, they have developed a sense of identity and belonging by watching Nollywood films” (Ayo).

Kellner (2018), in his appraisal of mass media, notes that “[t]he media are a profound and often misperceived source of cultural pedagogy: They contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire – and what not to” (9). In the case of Nollywood, the vast majority of my respondents confirmed that the films have important pedagogical implications for children’s cultural and ethical development. As one respondent, Deon, put it; “Nollywood films, most of the time, are very educative, informative, and entertaining. The films project my ethnic culture, which I also tend to convey to my children.” Deon explained that he frequently uses Nollywood films as a point of reference to educate his children about their cultural heritage. Another respondent, Albert, recounted how he uses Nollywood films to instil a sense of identity in his children who were born in diaspora and have not had a chance to visit the homeland.

For my respondents, then, the Nollywood medium is clearly valuable partly for its contribution to cultural literacy. As one respondent, Lucas, observed, “It [Nollywood] projects Nigerian cultural values to the public. If you want to know Nigerian cultural values, you have to watch Nollywood [films]. I agree it’s not all Nollywood movies that provide an opportunity to acquire cultural values, but I will say more than 80% of Nollywood movies project cultural values.” Another respondent, Ayo, also noted: “Nollywood has been the only means for us [diasporic Nigerians] to update our children about our ethnicity and cultural values.” Like Ayo, Debbie affirmed that Nollywood has made it easy for her to transmit particular aspects of Nigerian culture to her children. These results are in line with the analysis offered by Haynes (2013) on the influence of Nollywood films on expatriate Nigerians separated by geographical boundaries: “The emotional adhesion of the expatriate communities to Nollywood film culture is strengthened by their circumstances: the films answer a longing for home and serve as a vehicle for showing

children and non-Nigerian friends what Nigerian culture is” (74). These observations certainly hold true for my respondents. As one respondent noted:

“Nollywood films play different roles in the lives of many people...not only Nigerians. Westerners have started learning about Nigerian cultures. It is through Nollywood many of them are learning it. The role Nollywood plays is very important. A lot of Nigerians have forgotten their culture. I mean the culture of our ancestors. They have forgotten the culture because many of them are not living in Nigeria. But Nollywood brings knowledge of the culture back to their memory. I appreciate Nollywood for that because of the enlightenment” (Debbie).

When Nollywood audiences like my respondents in the diaspora depend upon the medium for a kind of cultural literacy that can ground and inspire meaningful identity, they demonstrate a belief that Nollywood can be a tool for socio-cultural empowerment. The outlines of Nollywood’s potential for empowerment are explored in the following section.

Theme 4: Nollywood as Instrument of Audience Empowerment.

Film and other mass media have often been identified (Sullivan 2013) as powerful agents of change, given their potential for audience empowerment. In my interviews, the majority of respondents agreed that Nollywood fulfills an important task not only by helping audiences to define identity, but also by helping them to find empowerment. The female respondents, for example, observed that Nollywood films have profound effects on their feelings about gender and identity. And most respondents reported feeling that Nollywood served to empower pan-Nigerian

and/or pan-African community by providing a global platform for positive representation. This section details and contextualizes these findings.

Subtheme 4.1: *Nollywood and Gender*

African culture and society have a patriarchal character, even in the diaspora, so it looks significant from a feminist perspective that most of my female respondents considered female Nollywood figures to be role models in terms of feminist advocacy and mobilisation. As a number of scholars (Azeez 2010; Akudinobi 2015; Tsika 2015, and more) point out, Nollywood creators have shown an active interest in the empowerment of women and young girls by engaging with and depicting gender in a contemporary way, including the promotion of gender equality. Abah (2008) observes that, “Nollywood videos celebrate African women of all shades, shapes, and sizes. They depict women in varying professional roles ranging from prostitutes, lawyers, judges, doctors, CEOs, high-ranking civil servants to domestic roles such as wives, mothers, concubines, girlfriends, and so on” (339). As Azeez (2010, 202) notes, Nollywood male audience tend to empathize with the way women are depicted in Nigerian films because it allows them to maintain their domination over women and young girls. In spite of this, “Nollywood [also] shows women negotiating new subjectivities, identities, roles, positions, and even sexualities” (Akudinobi 2015, 136).

Cultural representations of gender identities and gender roles in Nigerian society are notably foregrounded by Nollywood films such as *The Widow* (Aquila Njamah and Kingsley Ogoro, 2007), *Mr. and Mrs.* (Ikechukwu Onyeka, 2013), *Today's Women* (Chidi Anyanwu Chidox, 2013), *Swagger Mamas* (Ifeyanyi Azodo, 2013), *New Horizons* (Tope Oshin, 2014), *Lagos Cougars* (Desmond Elliot, 2014), *Ladies Secrets* (Donkollins Onuekwusi, 2014), and *Lion Heart*

(Genevieve Nnaji, 2018). More than three-quarters of the female respondents agreed that the female characters and stars of such Nollywood films have helped to shape their self-conceptions, by focusing attention on the marginalization and potentials of women in African society.

Respondents also expected that Nollywood had the potential to contribute more, going forward, as expressed in this comment from Temi: “Nollywood needs to address better the issue of diversity, gender and class that are present but not necessarily remarked upon. There hasn’t been clear cultural reckoning.”

The Widow is one example of a film related to these questions. The film is about the dilemma of a young widow called Nnena from the Igbo tribe of eastern Nigeria, after the death of Chima her husband. Nnena was made to undergo ancient Igbo widowhood rites, including drinking the water used to wash the late man’s corpse, sleeping beside the corpse for a number of nights, shaving off her hair to express grief, and finally being betrothed to a member of the deceased’s family (a rite popularly known as widow inheritance). Nnena found herself in a dilemma when her mother-in-law, addressed in the film as “Mama” attempted to strip off her decision-making power concerning her children’s education and welfare as a way to cut cost, forcing her to elope from her marital home. *Mr. and Mrs.* addresses related questions by depicting the conjugal crises of a married couple. Kenneth decides to keep his wife (Sussan) at home as a full-time housewife despite her status as a lawyer. Sussan complies with her husband’s decision out of humility and remains confined at home, but Kenneth begins to abuse her emotionally and ignore her complaints. This causes Sussan to become defiant, resulting in a serious rift. The couple eventually resolve their differences and ended up reviving their marriage. The film *New Horizons* similarly chronicles the ordeals of four women who experienced domestic abuse and were able to overcome its challenges.

Such representations of gender in media are significant since, as Shaka and Uchendu point

out in their analysis of gendered representations and gender-based practices in Nollywood films (2012), gender disparities (institutionalized or non-institutionalized) are not simply given elements of society. Gender-based behaviours are created and driven by social perceptions (Azeez 2010). For this reason, Nollywood artists can engage in a discourse of resistance to patriarchal norms, by challenging gender inequality and stereotypes in Nigerian society. Genevieve Nnaji's film *Lion Heart* (2016), for example, presents a more positive image of women in Nigeria society. In the film, women are portrayed as evolved, intelligent, articulate, independent, hardworking, confident, thoughtful, caring, and endowed with leadership capabilities. The film chronicles one woman's journey to find a voice, a place, and a space in Nigerian deeply patriarchal and capitalist society. The protagonist (Genevieve Nnaji) engages in a kind of nonviolent "hold-your-ground, resist, and reaffirm" feminist campaign in the context of corporate Nigeria, with a focus on addressing misconceptions about women in Nigerian society. This is expressed through her role as a respectful and ambitious daughter of a business magnate, who eventually inherits her father's company and becomes a successful entrepreneur, a formidable CEO, and a leader of high integrity – all without relinquishing her sense of identity.

Nollywood films and stars like this engage in feminist activism to promote gender identity, (re)map gender roles, and reinforce feminist values. The intent is to motivate women and young girls towards self-identification, self-determination, and self-affirmation. Among the various types of feminism coming through this film (*Lion Heart*) are three that merit a mention. These include liberal feminism, social feminism, and cultural feminism. Liberal feminism advocates for institutional reforms, with a key emphasis on gender equality. This type of feminism discourages male hegemony. Rather, it encourages equal opportunities for both sexes in a patriarchal society. Social feminism contests the subordinate role of women in a patriarchal system where women are

often relegated to supporting positions, especially in social, political, and economic institutions. The focus of social feminism is the empowerment of women. Cultural feminism, on the other hand, underscores the “essence” of women, which is often ignored in patriarchal societies. It posits that women have inherent qualities compared to men, and society would be better served by recognizing their innate values and social locations in society.

What is remarkable about Genevieve Nnaji’s film is its use of an important feminist voice to help us understand not only the stereotypical representations and experiences of Nigerian women, but also their trajectory towards self-identification and self-affirmation in this patriarchal and capitalist society. An appraisal of feminist advocacy scenes in some Nollywood films that advocate women’s rights, for example, revealed that the female artists mobilize feminist ideologies to (re)define and discuss critical issues related to gender identity in Nigerian society. My research found that feminist ideologies play a key role in the way Nollywood female audiences receive (read) and make meaning of Nollywood films. My interview findings confirm the importance of this dimension of Nollywood, in that most of the female respondents reported that they draw on the social, cultural, and biological elements related to gender identity that are depicted by Nollywood female artists to redefine and make sense of their identities, and to find motivation for self-determination and emancipation. This is one reason Nollywood films have a particular kind of appeal for female audiences.

One important aspect of Nollywood and gender is the gendered nature of consumption described above in Chapter 1. As Ang’s (1985) study on viewers of the soap opera *Dallas* stressed, one function of the mass media is escapism. Media consumption is one of the ways audiences can disconnect from the daily realities of life. Ang’s study revealed that soap operas gave female audiences a sense of fulfillment in that the viewing sessions afforded them a flight from their daily

routines. In my interviews, the female respondents shared similar perspectives on the role of Nollywood as domestic leisure. Most of the women explained that viewing sections enabled them to retreat from their daily commitments and enjoy some leisure time. This withdrawal tendency (escapism) was also highlighted in terms of how these women leveraged Nollywood films to enjoy domestic leisure with their children, spouses and friends after spending most of their day apart.

The empowering representation of women was also, however, apparent for my female respondents. In the developing world context (and Africa in particular), women often need to flee or challenge “oppressive circuits of gender essentialism and sexual discrimination” (Tsika 2015, 297). In my interviews, the female respondents noted that Nollywood feminist stars play a key role in terms of enhancing an empowered sense of self. They agreed that the female artists inspire and at the same time empower them by providing new lenses to re-imagine their cultural roles and place in society. For this reason, they no longer see themselves as people who are prone to male domination, but rather as people who have been empowered and have the capacity to resist. They also believed the artists shine a spotlight on the changing trends in Nigerian popular culture, even when they portray values that are outmoded. As one respondent put it,

“Nollywood is very interesting in terms of the representation of somewhat conservative traditional gender roles, which may not necessarily accord to actual reality in terms of the ways in which people are able to live their lives and move through Nigerian society... What I find most valuable is the representation and the diversity of representation” (Temi).

“Nollywood movies that show the light to that can be useful for diasporic communities or for the next generation of diasporic communities where if you are watching people who

are smart and bright and vibrant in doing different things that can showcase the knowledge of who you could be is greater than what is being represented here” (Temi).

In her study of transnational Arabic television success among Arab diaspora, Georgiou (2012) found that “soap opera viewing provides female audiences in the diaspora with opportunities to reflect on their own gender identities” (1). The majority of my female respondents confirmed the relevance of such representation in Nollywood film by reporting that Nollywood female artists such as Rita Dominic, Genevieve Nnaji, Patience Okonkwo, Chioma Chukwuka, Mercy Johnson, Stephanie Okereke, Omotola Jalade Ekeinde, Funke Akindele, to mention a few, help to shine light on critical issues related to their identities and gender biases, and how to overcome them. They agreed that these Nollywood female artists play a crucial role in the understanding of the shifting role of women in the historically patriarchal Nigerian society. One respondent, Debbie, remarked that “Genevieve and others have helped to shape my sense of womanhood in the modern world.”

Subtheme 4.2: Nollywood and Ethno-Cultural Solidarity

Aksoy and Robins (2003) note that transnational media provide “new means to promote transnational bonding, and thereby sustain (ethnic, national or religious) identities and cultures at-a-distance” (93). My findings confirm that Nollywood serves such purposes for audiences. More than 90% of the respondents described Nollywood as a unifying rather than a divisive media. They believed that Nollywood films facilitate a sense of community resulting in transnational bonding among diasporic Nigerians, and unanimously agreed that Nollywood is an important marker of identity (e.g., cultural, ethnic, national, and regional). They identified several elements of culture

within Nollywood films that point to their self and collective identity (described above in Chapter 1): landscape, language, music, food, clothing, signs and symbols, history and the arts, etc. Respondents saw these elements of culture as crucial in informing and shaping understanding of identity, belonging and community:

“Nollywood is a virtual bridge between diasporic Nigerians and the homeland. It bridges that gap” (Lucas).

“Nollywood is the media that unites us. The films compel us to look beyond our ethnicity and focus more on our commonalities” (Hector).

As Hector’s comment shows, ethnic solidarity and cultural solidarity are related but not necessarily identical. Ethnic solidarity is a unifying force that helps to ensure the security and safety of in-group members, as well as preservation of the ways of being within a community. Ethnic solidarity derives much of its meaning, though, from cultural sources like common interests, worldviews and shared values (Naficy 1993, 1999, 2001; Karim 2007; Bailey, Georgiou and Harindranath 2007; Georgiou 2010, 2012). Within the context of diaspora, this collective consciousness often informs migrants/immigrants’ collective actions, leading to inclusiveness, participation and unity in diversity, to mention a few. Collective actions are typically organized around sociopolitical, cultural, economic and religious issues. Most often, these activities involve collaborative dialogue and citizen participation with a focus on social change (Bailey et al. 2007; Carpentier 2011; Arthur 2016). As many postcolonial scholars such as Said 1978; Naficy 1994, 1999; Karim 2003) have observed, culture and context are enablers of diasporas’ collective actions.

In contemporary times, the mass media have also been used as tools and platforms to incite collective actions.

In my interviews, respondents confirmed such insights by arguing that Nollywood films offer new tools to engage in the politics of representation. They described Nollywood films as sites of struggle, including but not limited to the struggle to correct the false narratives about colonized peoples, the struggle for representation and acknowledgement, and the struggle for a place in society. In recent years, Nollywood filmmakers have used the medium to challenge and dismantle deceptive narratives about colonized populations – a potential often investigated by postcolonial scholars whose work revolves around the critical issues of race and representation (see Naficy 2001; Karim 2003; Gagnon 2000; Jiwani 2006; Carpentier 2011). As such scholars have observed, minority media provide an opportunity for racialized and marginalized communities to reimagine issues of race and representation.

Bailey et al. (2007) remind us that, “The media participate in sustaining imagined commonality, but they also advance processes of critical and reflexive engagement with imagined communities – national and transnational ones” (3). This is evidenced in the way Nollywood films reinforce inclusiveness or unity in diversity, reawaken collective conscience and promote solidarity among the divergent ethnic groups, and encourage civic engagement. As far as African diasporas are concerned, ethnicity plays a key role in shaping the community’s collective actions, especially cultural and sociopolitical activities. In my interviews, the majority of participants agreed that Nollywood films foster an environment of solidarity among people of African descent, through reflection of African cultural norms and values. As one respondent (Debbie) remarked, “Nollywood films bring people together...I can say they reunite many people. People that are split.” Nollywood clearly facilitates what Anderson (1983) called the rise of “imagined communities”

through representations of identity and belonging. These findings confirm the insight of Aksoy and Robins (2003) that transnational media can provide a medium for promoting transnational bonding and solidarity.

In her research on Bollywood, Hirji (2010) noted that “media can be powerful conveyors of nationalists and cultural sentiment and partly because media are so crucial to sustaining connections and collective memory for those living in a diaspora” (84). My respondents confirmed these insights by reporting that Nollywood film culture presents a medium not only for the discursive construction of identity but also for belonging in particular. As one respondent, Moe, remarked, “it [Nollywood] brings a kind of unity and togetherness when watching the movies.” For my diaspora respondents, Nollywood films provide an opportunity for audiences in the Nigerian diaspora to develop cross-cultural and trans-national solidarity within diversity, across time and space. The following section discusses the potential of representations in shaping the global image of pan-Nigerian and/or pan-African identity.

Theme 5: Nollywood and Cultural Diplomacy

In recent years, media and communication experts have taken an active interest in the importance of cultural industries (e.g., film, cinema, music, and performing arts) to international diplomacy, including the ways in which nation-states can use their cultural industries as tools of “public diplomacy” and “soft power.” The soft power of public diplomacy involves influencing public points of view to achieve a desired outcome (Nye 2008). One important goal is relationship building – especially the building of mutual relationships with other nation-states and their people for the purposes of peace and stability (Nye 2008). Western and European nations have effectively used their cultural industries to shape their national image, promote their policy interests, and

foster cross-cultural exchanges abroad. Many emerging nation-states today are also using their own cultural industries to project their national images and promote their policy interests.

In, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1997 [1947]), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer remark that the culture industry plays a central role in cultural production with a focus on transforming mass consciousness. In the modern world, the influence of the culture industry is manifest in the ways media forms (film, television, radio, print and Internet) function as mediums of entertainment, information, and education. Given the contributions Hollywood and Bollywood have made to public diplomacy, Nollywood can be used, as soft power diplomacy, to shape the nation's image overseas and build transnational relationships (Ndukwu 2010; Okome 2010; Fafiolu 2013). In my interviews, respondents expressed interest and concern about the way Nollywood film can project particular global images of Nigeria:

“We have movies that are series, if you go to Netflix we have many western movies that are seasonal, people get to watch them. I believe that Nigeria has grown to that level, we have cultures that are not being represented, that is the case. The case is that we have culture that we don't get to see and the things that are happening are not well covered. It will be a booming thing for Nollywood to actually go into this kind of issues of immigration and produce movies that tell the true story through research and through proper quality investigation or whatsoever it is and make sure that they bring to the people and the world entirely what is really going on in Africa and why there is this migration” (Hector).

To Hector's point, a lot of people, especially mainstream populations have limited understanding of Nigerian culture and society. One explanation for this, as Hector argued, is under

representation and misrepresentation of the reality of Nigerian society. Hector believed that Nollywood film medium can be utilized to reflect sociopolitical, cultural, economic, and religious circumstances in the society portrayed and how these developments are impacting the people.

“Nollywood can help by projecting the true information, the true happenings in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Immigration is a big issue. I believe Nollywood can be one of those voices that would convey whatever is going on in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, especially now that we have mass migration issues, and you get to find out why this is happening” (Hector).

The issue of mass migration from the continent comes clearly to mind. Ironically, the poor sociopolitical and economic conditions in Africa often force people to migrate to other parts of the world, especially to North America and Europe. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey, international migration from sub-Saharan Africa has grown exponentially since 2010. The survey found that over a million sub-Saharan Africans have migrated to different parts of the world, especially the US and European countries. But, while news on international migration from sub-Saharan Africa and the factors behind the alarming migrations are often broadcast and analyzed on Western and European media (e.g., BBC and CNN), migrants’ crisis and lived experiences in the diasporic world are hardly reported and largely obscured.

Subtheme 5.1: Nollywood as a pan-Nigerian/pan-African Phenomenon

Nollywood is gaining increasing recognition as a pan-Nigerian/pan-African phenomenon (Okome 2010; Akinola 2013). Okome (2010) accordingly describes Nollywood as “the mirror through which contemporary Africa is presented to the outside world” (26). The concept of mirror

is emblematic because a mirror is typically used to reflect an image. Nollywood as a mirror refers to the role of this media in reflecting the particularities of Nigerian society and cultural specificities. Aside from representation of African popular culture, Nollywood also plays a key role in catalyzing popular discourse around the issues of African identity. The Nigerian film director and producer Lancelot Imasuen has therefore described Nollywood as the “voice of Africa” (Addelman and Mallal 2008). Nollywood has played a significant role not only in representation of African cultural specificities but in provoking popular discourse on the politics of culture and identity across the continent and beyond. As McCall (2007) likewise notes, Nollywood is “a primary catalyst in an emergent continent-wide popular discourse about what it means to be African” (6). Nollywood films are, in the words of Ramon Lobato (2010), “vessels of Nigerian modernity, embodying a kind of glamour articulated in a distinctly African mode” (348).

Most of my respondents agreed that Nollywood has helped shape the image of Africa and its peoples around the world through its portrayal of African history, customs and tradition, cultural values, political thoughts, and social life. Nollywood thereby offers the kind of empowerment discussed in the previous section to Africans, and especially black Africans. In *Nollywood Stars: Media and Migration in West Africa and the Diaspora* (2015) Noah Tsika therefore notes that “Nollywood has been hailed as a popular art form, uniquely responsive to Nigerian national conditions and a possible conduit for black African empowerment” (213). In this way, Nollywood plays a central role in providing black Africans with a space to reflect on and make sense of their shared identity.

In my interviews, respondents confirmed this sense of the power of Nollywood, and described it as suggestive of African renaissance – a sort of rebirth linked to the emancipation of African peoples from slavery and imperial colonialism. As one respondent Temi observed: “There

is an element of African privilege and I think Nollywood is a beautiful representation of that in a way.” Today, Nollywood is widely acknowledged as an important citizen media in the Global South. “Nollywood promotes our culture all over the world,” one respondent Debbie asserted. This sense of pride in Nollywood has helped to enhance interconnectivity among African nations and their peoples, especially when it comes to bridging the dichotomy between periphery media and mainstream media (Onuzilike 2007b; Haynes 2013). One important sign of this burgeoning relationship is that Nollywood insiders (e.g., producers, directors, and star actors) are increasingly being engaged in media industries across the region.

There is a kind of reality presented in Nollywood films that resonate with African audiences. In particular, the themes of “nationalism,” “regionalism,” and/or “Africanity” in Nollywood films have energized audiences in Africa and in the global African diaspora. Aside from reinforcing a sense of national/regional identity, they provide people of African descent a broader framework to nurture their sense of belonging to larger cultural communities. Esan (2011) therefore describes the influence of Nollywood on the African continent with reference to the power of Hollywood in North America and Bollywood in Southeast Asia: “Nollywood is to Africa what Hollywood is to North America and Bollywood to Southeast Asia. Each one carries burdens of representation for their nations of origin; in them are wrapped aesthetic values and other signifiers that mark out people of those nations, if only inadvertently” (Esan 2011, 124).

In this way, Nollywood follows the pattern of Latin America’s television drama serials that were produced in the 1950s and proved popular among Spanish immigrants in North American and European countries. These television serials are in fact also popular among audiences in countries like Uganda, and scholars such as Haynes (2007) and Esan (2008) have traced the influence of these television serials in earlier Nollywood films. As the next subsection explains,

this kind of global cultural “hybridity” is central to Nollywood’s potential in terms of cultural diplomacy.

Subtheme 5.2: *Cultural Hybridization in Nollywood Films*

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed the fundamental issue of cultural hybridity in Nollywood films. The importance of hybridity in considering cultural diplomacy can be seen in the fact that an ever-increasing number of media organizations engage in deliberate cultural hybridization for purposes ranging from politics and commercialization to outreach. The confluence of local and universal aesthetics in film productions has also become a normative practice for emerging media like Nollywood. The desire to attract multinational audiences often compels filmmakers to engage in “cultural borrowing” (Athique 2016). As Siapera (2012) observes, “Convergence is really appealing to most media organizations, because it allows them to extend themselves across different channels, gaining in growth and reaching more publics, while at the same time cutting their costs, something that is indeed necessary if they are to remain competitive” (133). But while the hybridity approach has allowed filmmakers to better contextualize the imagined realities in a way that resonates with the target audiences, critics argue this cinematic practice can have negative consequences for society and culture.

While many proponents of Nollywood support the media’s hybrid film culture, critics are concerned about the kind of *mélange* of African and Western aesthetics found in Nollywood productions. They worry that such an approach distorts the reality of the society and cultures being portrayed. Overall, Nollywood audiences have reacted much more positively. Ogundimu (2009) for example observed, “These types of fusion of the global and local, as well as depictions of African traditional cinematic genres, are, not surprisingly, finding much resonance among diaspora

African communities, especially recent immigrants to the global metropolis” (388). The majority of respondents that I interviewed agreed that hybridization has been a key driver of growth in Nollywood and many other emerging industries. They considered cultural hybridity to be an important resource that has facilitated Nollywood’s transnational evolution. As one respondent observed: “Nigerians in diaspora are viewing Nollywood movies with increasing propensity. Nollywood needs to find a way to satisfy their needs. This is one reason Nollywood is producing hybrid movies to be able to serve distant audiences” (Lucas).

I began this study by noting the assumption that hybridity in Nollywood is not only a response to Western and European cultural imperialism (Bhabha 1994, Gilroy 1993), but also an attempt to exploit the phenomena of globalization (Giddens 1990; Appadurai 1990; Tomlinson 1999) and new communication technologies (Thussu 2007, 2010). In my interviews, I found that the majority of respondents agreed with this perspective, arguing that hybridity has allowed Nollywood to provoke a kind of cultural revival in terms of reproduction of social reality while at the same time providing the audience with what Hamid Naficy calls “strategies of resistance and syncretic acculturation” (Naficy 1993, 188). In addition, the respondents argued that this approach has allowed Nollywood to attract and meet the changing needs of different demographic groups, such as young people and transnational audiences.

The opinions I gathered here were not unanimous. Rather, the respondents produced negotiated readings of Western and European influences on Nollywood and its culture. Some respondents echoed the concern of the critics of hybridity, by expressing concern about cultural distortion, others did not. As one respondent suggested:

“We need to invest more in Nollywood and do some clean-up to ensure the proper cultures are being represented...I think we need to experience more of the African culture and the originality of African identity: the outfits, the food, the dances and not just borrowed cultures.... Nigerian movies are very important and there is need that we get more of the culture through Nollywood and have a better way of seeing it other than just the few bad eggs that are out there that are not showing us the full Nigerian identity that we have missed” (Hector).

Other respondents identified the underlying ideology of Nollywood productions as being the most important feature and saw hybridity as a positive means to an end. The following examples illustrate the way in which respondents saw cultural hybridity as useful in spreading Nollywood’s messages:

“If we want Nollywood to go global those kinds of movies where you have hybrid will be addressed towards Nigerians in diaspora. Hybridity is an emerging trend in Nollywood. The Nigerian diaspora have seen Western culture. They also know the culture back home. Nollywood [filmmakers] want to address their message towards Nigerians in diaspora...that’s why you find these cross-cultural movies becoming an emerging trend in Nollywood industry” (Lucas).

“I don’t see anything wrong in that because we want Nollywood to go international. I don’t think it’s a bad idea to bring foreigners to act in those films...The most important thing is the message” (Deon).

This study found that globalization and modernism play a central role how an audience interprets and makes sense of hybridity in Nollywood film. Some of the older respondents suggested that hybridity has allowed Nollywood filmmakers to better reflect the experiences of colonization and post-colonization, and their ramifications – issues that are not often talked about today. Aside from reflecting these specific epic moments, they also agreed that the strategy of hybridity has in general allowed Nollywood filmmakers to expand their vision of an imagined future through a cross-cultural lens. As one respondent, Temi, argued, “Hybridity is an important strategy to help media industries in the periphery to gain increased appeal to global audiences and, most importantly, keep with post-modernism.” This negotiated reading of hybridity in Nollywood is of particular interest.

As noted above, though, respondents were divided on the fusion of local and universal aesthetics in Nollywood films. A quarter of them emphasized that the hybridity approach could result in distortion of reality. They argued that such approach would make it hard for the public to obtain a firm grasp of the reality being portrayed. As one respondent, Hector, explained, “There is need that we know where we come from and make sure that the movies that we watch show that same lifestyle that we had back in Nigeria and that’s the impact.” This concern for cultural continuity tended to resonate to some degree with the majority of respondents. Chidi, likewise, emphasized the importance of cultural preservation, to ensure continuity.

Questions of accuracy in representation emerged as important in numerous contexts for my respondents. Some of the respondents (about 30%) were concerned, for example, with the inclusion of explicit content in Nollywood films. This reservation also applied to the inclusion of traditional mysticism involving idol worship and black magic in film genres that are rated “General

audiences.” Respondents, especially the younger demographics argued that such sensitive contents are not only culturally inappropriate in contemporary times, but also unsuitable for younger viewers. They maintained that scenes of fetishism (which were prevalent in earlier Nollywood films) represent stereotypes that are “frozen in time,” and no longer suitable for modern audiences. My research also revealed underlying reasons behind the respondents’ ambivalence or disavowal of these aspects of cultural representation. These include, but are not limited to, community members exposure to Western ideals, which can result in changing values over time, the need to adhere to mainstream moral standards, and the quest to build relationships with non-marginalized population. Within Nigerian diasporic communities, this situation often forces community members to frequently re-imagine, contest, and distance themselves from controversial cultural portrayals. This rejection is therefore tied to the politics of respectability. Respectability politics is a strategy of “self-presentation” that marginalized groups use to “uplift” their self-image in society by adhering to mainstream values and morals (Harris 2014). In the context of diaspora, community members often engage in respectability politics in their effort to demonstrate devotion to mainstream values, and thereby narrow the social and political lacuna between them and non-marginalized population.

The issue of sensitive content was therefore related to hybridity’s questions of cultural accuracy and fidelity:

“I am very careful of what my children watch because I want them to watch the real stuff, the things that will remind them of who they are - the true Nigerian culture and identity, that is my target, that is what we should be looking out for and make sure the ones that are

different from Nigerian culture are not being pushed out there the way it is today, online especially” (Hector).

As one respondent (Tuni) argued, this kind of sensitive content can put parents in a position of needing to continually contest, defend or explain the negative representations portrayed in these films during family viewing sessions. My respondents were also keenly aware of Western influences (e.g., from Hollywood films) on Nollywood’s aesthetics and narratives. Many of them saw this expression of hybridity approach as a form of Americanisation or Westernisation. “They try to Americanise or westernise our way of life, which is not really correct”, exclaimed Lucas. Another respondent, Ayo, adds that Western cultural hybridity in Nollywood is problematic because it “devalues” the genuine Nigerian cultural elements being portrayed. This was in fact an area of great concern for many respondents, who worried that Hollywood norms and values were increasingly permeating Nollywood films and undermining the media’s function of presenting Nigerian cultural values. Nollywood films are generally rated as family friendly. For this reason, the respondents were concerned that such overbearing influences could have a negative impact on younger audiences, including especially children. Despite the respondents’ oppositional readings of Nollywood’s film culture involving traditional mysticism, the disagreement was relatively harmonious.

To deal with the question of cross-cultural adaptation, some respondents proposed the establishment of a regulatory institution for the purposes of censorship. This body would be responsible for vetting explicit content to ensure its suitability prior to film’s release. “We need to have filtration system where things that we consume are filtered...the government needs to reach out and help sanitize Nollywood system,” declared Hector. Another respondent, Lucas, proposed

the enactment of legislations that “would make it possible for law enforcement officials to intervene and seek accountability.” Lucas underscored the need to establish regulatory bodies to monitor the inclusion of hybrid contents in Nollywood productions: “If a movie with this kind of cross-cultural built is shot and the Nigerian film industry’s regulatory body sees that it’s too explicit and too violent and does not reflect our culture, they will not allow it to be released.”

Overall, the respondents acknowledged the fact that Nollywood’s hybridity has both pros and cons in terms of cultural diplomacy and representation. For the vast majority of them, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. They argued that global cultural hybridity has more positive than negative consequences for this medium and its target audiences. Presumably, the debate on cultural hybridity in Nollywood will remain open for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to present and analyze the data collected from semi-structured interviews with members of the Nigerian diaspora community. The main focus of the interviews was to understand the ways in which audience members within the Nigerian diaspora community use and make sense of Nollywood films. In light of this, many of the interviews focused on the reception and interpretation of this media, focusing on “how” the audiences engage with this media, “why” they make this choice, and “what” they do with the information acquired post consumption. One key focus was understanding what the respondents think of Nollywood as a tool and a medium of representation and diasporic communication. The respondents provided several interpretations of this medium and how it impacts their lives as members of the Nigerian diaspora. Some of the respondents were more vehement and assertive and others were polite. Some of the key words the respondents used to describe Nollywood included “regional icon”, “national

icon”, “culture marker”, “cultural agent”, “cultural medium”, and “cultural phenomenon” to mention a few. These conceptions valorized Nollywood as an important marker of identity, showing that Nollywood is highly relevant as a mechanism of representation and a conduit of diasporic communication.

There were other important commonalities among the respondents’ perspectives on Nollywood. A majority of them considered Nollywood films to be more than merely a source of entertainment. They also considered the medium to be a valuable source of information and cultural pedagogy. These respondents agreed that Nollywood films fill a void caused by their displacement from the homeland, informing the complex process of rehabilitation and integration into their host society. Nollywood provides in their eyes a valuable tool for shaping shared identity. “It’s just more about the expansion of imagination of what it means to be Nigerian”, as Temi put it. The majority of respondents explicitly agreed that Nollywood has been instrumental in shaping their sense of identity and belonging in the multicultural context of diaspora.

While all respondents accorded great importance to Nollywood, they were critical of some aspects of Nollywood’s hybrid culture. When asked to indicate an aspect of Nollywood films that least appeals to them, most of the respondents pointed to the overrepresentation of supernatural themes and narratives related to indigenous African religion. These include the depictions of traditional practices such as idol worship and spirit invocation, occultism, black magic, and money rituals that are pervasive in Nollywood films such as Nnebue’s *Living in Bondage* (1992), Ejiro’s *Blood Money* (1997), Amenechi’s *Igodo* (2016 [1999]), or Onyeka’s *The Duplex* (2015). Many of the respondents argued that these traditional practices are grotesque and no longer suitable for modern audiences. They fear that these adaptations could misrepresent Nigerian society to the mainstream. Another concern expressed by the respondents was the depiction of explicit content

such as nudity, sexism, and violence in the films. Nollywood films are often rated General for family consumption, and they argued that these scenes are not suitable for younger audiences. As one respondent (Hector) put it, “Nollywood has a lot of roles to play... Nigeria needs to invest in it and ensure the talents can help to showcase Nigeria’s identity and cultures.”

Larkin (2008) described early Nollywood films as a collection of disorganized cinematic renditions. He stressed the medium’s lack of sophistication in terms of production. Miller (2010) saw Nollywood as a local sensation limited by “localized contents.” However, the majority of respondents agreed that Nollywood serves an invaluable function in the mediation of Nigerian cultural values – more so than it gets credit for in the literature. As a case in point, they noted that aside from reflecting the realities of Nigerian society, Nollywood’s creative talents, as cultural ambassadors, serve a useful purpose in the area of international relations and diplomacy. These include (a) building bridges across racial and cultural geographies, (b) fostering mutual relationships between Nigeria and other nation-states and their peoples within and beyond the continent of Africa, (c) re-shaping Nigeria’s public image and addressing misconceptions about Nigerian citizens abroad, and (d) promoting the nation’s foreign policy interests around the world.

The findings suggest that Nollywood films are entertaining but, most importantly, very informative and educative in nature. They also show that Nollywood has important consequences for people in the global African diaspora in terms of providing diasporic Nigerians a medium to negotiate and sustain their identity in transnational spaces. One key idea that tended to resonate with respondents, for example, is the need to explore the ideas and ideologies of Nollywood films rather than simply focusing on the medium’s material culture. The majority of respondents agreed that a critical understanding of these foundational scaffolds could yield better insights into the media’s core values and its relevance in the contemporary world.

“Participation,” writes Nico Carpentier (2011), is “the exercise of the inalienable and indivisible rights of citizens, which results in the generation of societal happiness and respect for the position of all citizens” (25). My respondents agreed that Nollywood facilitates a culture of participation: Nollywood films encourage audience members to engage in media within an integrated space. This social dimension of Nollywood goes hand in hand with the pedagogical implications of the films. My study confirmed that Nollywood films facilitate cultural literacy, which is integral to diasporic lives. A vast majority of the respondents agreed that Nollywood films have helped to shape and sometimes reinforce their sense of identity and belonging.

Respondents also believed that Nollywood is an important discursive arena where issues of representation can be critically analyzed and discussed. In recent years, Nollywood filmmakers have used the medium to spur debates around the crucial issue of representation. In doing so they have provided a platform for racialized minorities to respond to and contest dominant misconceptions promoted in the mainstream. They have provided these marginalized group with a voice to represent themselves with reference to their own stories and their experiences.

What do these findings tell us about the importance of Nollywood and its cultural representations? What kinds of values do the respondents attach to this media and its content? In chapter 5, I showed that my focus groups highlighted the role of Nollywood in the representation of ethno-cultural identity and belonging. They agreed that Nollywood offers a discursive arena for negotiating and contesting meanings in relation to Nigerian cultures and society, with a focus on reinforcing identity and belonging in transnational spaces. These findings provide empirical evidence of the utility of Nollywood as a viable medium for cultural literacy. More sustained evidence for this significance was accumulated in the in-depth interviews (one-on-one and focus group discussions) with the study population.

The focus groups described Nollywood as a “window” to Nigerian society and culture, and a “bridge” to the globalized world. Nollywood as a window refers to the media’s role in creating a portal (the film’s medium) through which audiences gaze into Nigerian society. Scholars such as Krings and Okome (2013) and Haynes (2016) have observed, Nollywood has increasing appeal to people in Africa and the global African diaspora. These observations support the argument that Nollywood can play a central role in shaping understanding of the particularities of Nigerian society and cultural specificities in the global landscape.

One important finding from the focus groups and in-depth interviews is that cultural affinity plays a key role in how the Nigerian diaspora engage with the Nollywood medium in their everyday lives. Social factors such the audience’s affiliations with the Nigerian diaspora motivate them to watch Nollywood films. This study also found that the context in which consumption occurs (including the diasporic space in particular) plays a key role in how audiences read, interpret and make meaning out of the media texts in context. In my interviews, it was found that the diaspora’s lived experience within their constraining diasporic space is a key motivational factor influencing their consumption of Nollywood films.

What these findings suggest is that the audiences’ consumption practices are not only motivated by interest in cultural content, as the existing literature suggests. They are also motivated by social and contextual factors such as the craving for entertainment, the desire to use the cultural elements portrayed in the films for the purpose of reflexivity or representation of self, and the need to make sense of identity and belonging. Many respondents agreed that Nollywood represents their core values and interests in ways that resonate with them and acknowledged that Nollywood’s mediated texts have helped to shape their sense of their identity. As one respondent (Deon) explained, “Nollywood films ... are very educative, informative, and entertaining. They project

our culture and identity. They also tell us what is happening back home.” He added: “The films that Nollywood produce can help in shaping or projecting or rebranding our country’s image.” What the findings mean considering the existing literature is that Nollywood can be essential not only for shaping understandings of Nigerian culture and identity, but also for rebranding the Nigerian state’s image around the world. Therefore, Nollywood’s projection of the particularities of Nigerian society and cultural specificities onscreen can have huge implications for African and non-African audiences (Endong 2018). Such findings are indicative of the relevance of Nollywood for the contemporary world.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion and Future Directions

I believe Nollywood deserves credit for its role as a chronicler of social history, as an organ of cultural and moral response to the extreme provocations and dislocations of contemporary Nigeria, and as the bearer of a true nationalism.

Jonathan Haynes (2016, xxviii)

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the issues and key findings of this research. The purpose of this study was to understand what audiences in the Nigerian diaspora make of Nollywood films, including the sociocultural implications of such understandings. This investigative task was achieved through reception ethnography, with a primary focus on the reception of Nollywood films in the Nigerian diasporic community in Montreal.

The reception-ethnography perspective allowed me to understand how this community engages with Nollywood films, including most importantly the ways in which their consumption and readings of Nollywood shape their ideas of culture, identity, and community. My approach thereby addressed one important issue that had not been explicitly explored prior to this study, i.e., the way diasporic Nigerians that are spread across space read and interpret Nollywood films in global/glocal “third spaces,” and what they make of that experience in their everyday lives. The use of ethnographic methods provided an opportunity to interact with one of Nollywood’s niche audiences (the Nigerian diaspora in Montreal, Canada) on both personal and intellectual levels. Here the term “niche” is employed to refer to this community not by virtue of their historically constrained status, but rather with reference to the fact that their voices have not been heard in the conversations around “Nollywood central” – despite the reality that such audiences also play an active role in the globalization of Nollywood films.

The findings show that Nollywood is apparently misrepresented in discourses on transnational media, impeding understanding of its significance for the African diaspora especially. One of the main findings of this study is that Nollywood plays a significant role in shaping understandings of Nigerian ethnocultural values and identity in transnational spaces. My study confirmed that Nollywood films have important social and cultural implications for people in the global African diaspora, in terms of how they negotiate and sustain identity, and develop a sense of belonging in multicultural diasporic spaces. Despite the limitations in Nollywood film culture (e.g., the inclusion of explicit content and its borrowed influences, this study found this media provides an important discursive arena for people of African descent to engage in the politics of representation and resistance, which is integral to diasporic lives. Through participant observation and in-depth interviewing, this study supported the argument that Nollywood plays a significant role in reflecting Nigerian culture and society, making it an important medium of representation and a viable conduit of diasporic communication.

One of the core strengths of this study is its use of empirical methods. This positivist approach allowed me to systematically collect narrative data, and to ensure the consistency of research findings based on empirical evidence. This integrative, syncretistic approach was suitable for this study, given the fact that I was dealing with members of diaspora that in themselves are quite syncretistic. My audience-centered approach was therefore appropriate and useful in that it allowed me to gain comprehensive insights into what Nollywood means to my study population, in terms of the meaning they make of the media culture in their everyday lives.

Significant parallel patterns emerged from the opinions collected in the focus groups and the individual interviews. Most importantly, the respondents explained how Nollywood has impacted their lives in terms of their cultural self-understanding, including their real and imagined

communities. Considering this new evidence drawn from the qualitative dataset, it can be said that Nollywood holds a special significance for audiences in the global African diaspora. Respondents valorized the medium because of its contribution to wider understanding of the reality of Nigerian society. Many stressed that Nollywood films can be used to celebrate the Nigerian cultural mosaic, with an emphasis on promoting and reinforcing identity and belonging, as well as unity in diversity.

The majority of the respondents reported that Nollywood offers a discursive arena for people to learn about different aspects of Nigerian society – from ethnicity and culture to language and music to food and clothing to literature and arts, all of which make up the collective Nigerian cultural heritage. They explained that these aspects of Nigerian culture can help to inform a sense of identity and belonging. On this point, one key theme that emerged from the conversations and interviews was the theme of “home.” The respondents noted that Nollywood films were valuable partly for reminding them of the Nigerian homeland and Nigerian society. Nollywood thereby plays an important role in informing their sense of identity and belonging, by shaping shared conceptions of “home.” These results underline the importance of Nollywood as a cultural mechanism of mediation. It also indicates that Nollywood has significant implications for diasporic Nigerians in terms of how they negotiate and maintain, as well as sustain their sense of identity (“Nigerian-ness”) in a transnational and cross-cultural context.

Another important result of this study is the light it sheds on how Nollywood films might be useful in developing and nurturing intercultural alliances among diverse ethno-cultural groups living in third spaces away from home. In this age of mass migration and anxiety, mass media are increasingly used to frame, incite, and address racial and ethnic conflicts/violence around the world. One way the media can have such an influence is by promoting the politics of “us” versus

“them,” focusing people’s attention on their differences rather than their commonalities. Tensions between racial and ethnic communities can therefore be one of the consequences of contemporary media productions and their influential representations. This phenomenon is evident in many settler societies today, where racial and ethnic minorities (including especially people of African descent) are often categorized as “Others” and “Outsiders” in the mainstream media. As a result, racialized and stereotyped communities are pushed into the cultural margins where they are compelled to create what Homi Bhabha (1990) calls a “third space.”

In this study, I have argued that increased knowledge about the cultural heritage of minorities is essential to (re)shaping prevailing (mis)conceptions about such minoritized communities. This potential is important in the global era, in which societies continue to embrace new forms of cultural pluralism. In my interviews, the respondents concurred that Nollywood can be utilized to reflect and represent Nigerian society and promote unity in diversity among Africans in diaspora. They also suggested Nollywood can be implicated in pre- and post-conflict relationship building among spatially dispersed populations, especially among audience groups from countries that have a long history of ethnic tensions and mass violence.

Due to the diversity of my respondents’ backgrounds, including methods and locations of media consumption, I had expected to see a broad variation in their perspectives on Nollywood and its cultural representations. However, my findings showed that, although the act of media consumption was done in different locations, at different times of the day and week, etc., respondents had markedly similar perspectives on the ways the media and its cultural representations resonated with them, and the kinds of meanings these phenomena can hold for them. Their own perspectives thus support their sense that Nollywood culture can be a unifying phenomenon.

This study also sheds light on the importance of the imagined spaces co-created by participants in the imagined discursive arena. In the third chapter, I have argued that the imagined spaces of Nollywood consumption are indispensable, in terms of articulating diasporic history and culture, and addressing matters relevant to the community's wellbeing. The conversations hosted within these imagined spaces provide shared experiences important to collective identity and collective action. In the case of Nollywood film culture consumption (see chapter 5), the discursive arena thus created has huge implications for preserving the diaspora's ethnic/cultural heritage, sustaining diasporic identity and sense of belonging in ethnocultural, national, regional and – transnational terms, and framing collective action.

The meaning-making thus achieved through community engagement with Nollywood's mediated texts was examined with reference to the concept of negotiation, stressing that Nollywood film culture is itself a tool and a medium of negotiation. Nigerian audiences in the diaspora receive, interpret and make meaning of Nollywood and its culture in transnational spaces, and use that experience to make sense of their everyday lives. Unfortunately, the liminality of these imagined spaces means the dialectics of culture and identity are often obscured in analyses that focus on Nollywood's forms and contents to the exclusion of consumption patterns and reading of Nollywood on the ground.

Over the past few years, an unprecedented number of developed nations have used their cultural industries as instruments/platforms to exert hegemonic influences on the developing world (Chalaby 2005; Thussu 2007). These include the use of media to promote cultural values, identity, and policy interests, especially in the developing world. This task has been achieved through the transmission of films, music, sports, literature and arts, to mention just a few global cultural products. What this suggests, though, for nation-states in the developing world is that they can also

utilize their cultural industries to mediate their cultural values, encourage mutual relationships, and promote their policy interests around the world. A vast majority of my respondents resonated strongly with this picture of Nollywood. They considered Nollywood to be both a “window” onto Nigerian society and culture, and a “bridge” to the rest of the world.

How does this research inform the existing debate on Nollywood, and previous research in the field of communication and its related fields? And what new kinds of knowledge must be produced to better understand the social and cultural implications of Nollywood from a communication perspective? These findings confirm that Nollywood plays an even more significant role in shaping understandings of the social and cultural realities of Nigerian society than the existing literature indicates. They also show that diasporic Nigerians are not mere consumers: they are active participants in the transnational dynamic of Nollywood media. This is evidenced in the way consumers/audiences shape the modes of production, distribution, and consumption of Nollywood content in transnational spaces. My findings also revealed an agency on the part of the community when it comes to negotiating meaning using the media texts in question. Nollywood consumers are not merely passive recipients of cultural messages. The findings of this study do not only allow us to understand diasporic perspectives on the value of Nollywood. They also provide benchmarks useful in validating previous claims concerning the prospects and challenges of Nollywood when it comes to shaping understandings of Nigerian culture, identity, and society.

Aside from such contributions to better understanding the way Nollywood can shape ideas about Nigerian society and identity, my findings provide important information concerning the role of Nollywood, not only in shaping understandings of the reality of Nigerian society, but also facilitating diasporic participation in media. This important role of Nollywood film culture has

been largely overlooked in analyses of the dynamics of the medium. In analyzing the social dimension of Nollywood, researchers have mainly focused on the medium's material culture and content rather than its practical and ethical frameworks. Earlier literature on Nollywood also depicted the medium as an informal, disjointed, and fragmented site of viewing. Such assumptions have hampered our critical understanding of Nollywood's media value. As my research data indicates, Nollywood film culture has important ideological and symbolic socio-cultural underpinnings. These social conditions inform and are informed by the customs and tradition, myths, and popular lifestyles depicted in the film as characteristic of Nigerian society. It is important to examine these foundational properties if one wants to better understand the significance of Nollywood for creators and consumers around the world. While I may appear to have embraced dominant reading, this study does to a large extent assume a negotiating stance. As Okome observes,

[Nollywood is] a compelling testimony of the production of localities that have been coalesced into the regional production of a popular cultural practice. As a regional social act, the West African video film is also a cultural reminder that points to the argument that global capital is far from taking over the narrative lives of those who are imagined to live at the "periphery" (Okome 2007, 16).

Okome's observation highlights the fact that Nollywood is much more than a local/national medium of entertainment. It is also a crucial mechanism for the transmission of popular regional cultural practices that are hardly mentioned and unknown in the mainstream western media. As previous studies have also shown, Nollywood embodies a sense of pan-African identity,¹⁷ as part

¹⁷ I examine the notion of Nollywood as a pan-African phenomenon in depth in the sixth chapter.

of a kind of renaissance of African popular cultural practices that energizes both domestic and international audiences.

Nollywood's increasing appeal to both African and non-African audiences in the global African diaspora draws attention to the intersecting relationship between the Nigerian diaspora and the transnational ethnic media. Unfortunately, not many empirical studies have been attempted on the reception and interpretation of Nollywood content among displaced communities in transnational spaces, especially in the broader fields of communication and media studies. As Athique (2016) reminds us, "the ongoing enquiry into transnational media reception within the academy necessarily rests upon our capacity to interrogate the dynamics of the social imaginaries by which audiences situate themselves within a world of media flows" (172). Given this imperative, a few questions come immediately to mind for our purposes here: How can this study contribute to the advancement of research on transnational Nollywood and transnational media in general? Where might my findings lead us in terms of reception analysis? What are the future prospects of this research? The central finding of this study is that Nollywood films can indeed be essential in informing an understanding of Nigerian society and cultural values in transnational spaces. It was found that Nollywood films have implications for how diasporic Nigerians negotiate identity and belonging. These results underline the need for more empirical research on the intersections between Nollywood and its audiences in the global African diaspora, to better understand how such niche audiences negotiate and sustain identity and develop a sense of belonging in transnational spaces.

Theoretical and empirical forms of research are like two sides of the same coin. Each of these methods can be tailored to serve different ends in qualitative research. Unfortunately, the way Nollywood has been theorized since inception has left a huge gap in both scholarly and media

understandings. For this reason, this study gave more attention to reception ethnography. My study thereby offered a critical lens to reimagine Nollywood's capabilities and cultural productivity in terms of how Nigerian culture and society are conceptualized and communicated to audiences in the global African diaspora and beyond. The Nollywood film medium has huge implications for people in the global African diaspora. The discursive arena created by this media does not only inform understandings of culture and society, but it also provides an active opportunity for participants to explore and address important questions concerning ethnicity and culture, identity and belonging, and community.

Limitations

Like any study, this dissertation has constraints. These include limitations in terms of the research site, participants, data sources, research methodology, financial resources, and time factors. My study was conducted in one research site only: Montreal, Quebec. Given the size of the geographical location in which my research was conducted, the study was limited to an analysis of one particular diasporic community in a specific location. Therefore, this study is by no means an exhaustive analysis of the ways in which the Nigerian diaspora (the niche audience that has fundamentally influenced Nollywood's development trajectory and continues to play a prominent role in shaping the medium's productions) engages with the medium. The viewpoints expressed in this study are not necessarily representative of all diasporic Nigerians around the globe. They reflect the perspectives of a particular Nigerian diaspora community. While limited in this way, the findings and conclusions are nevertheless useful when it comes to shedding light on issues pertaining to minority audience reception of ethnic and community media.

Another constraint of this study was the difficulty of finding eligible participants who were

willing and ready to participate. Although a considerable number of individuals within the community indicated interest in participating in this study, a few of them could not follow through due to family and career circumstances. Furthermore, I had initially planned to conduct two sustained interviews with each of the respondents, but due to time constraints on the side of the interviewees, only one individual interview was conducted with each of them. As discussed above, therefore, more qualitative data collection would be helpful going forward.

Future Directions for Research on Nollywood

The future is regarded as essentially open, yet as counterfactually conditional upon courses of action undertaken with future possibilities in mind. This is a fundamental aspect of the time-space “stretch” which conditions of modernity make both possible and necessary.

Anthony Giddens (1990, 50-51)

As Neuman (2014) observes, “Much basic research lacks practical applications in the short term, but it builds a foundation for knowledge and broad understanding that has an impact on many issues, policy areas, or areas of study” (26). My study is by no means an exhaustive analysis of the entirety of Nollywood and its relationship to the Nigerian diaspora. Rather, it contributes to the growing literature focused on the ways in which transnational Nollywood shapes the global African diaspora. The future of Nollywood is unknown, but it can be usefully imagined based on the medium’s current development trajectory and global flow patterns. My study has confirmed the need expressed for further studies of the importance of Nollywood, including in particular, its implications for how Nigerians abroad make sense of their shared values and identity. In this section, I map out some key areas for future research into transnational Nollywood.

Most of the discussion surrounding transnational ethnic media, especially in the past two decades, has explored the flow of media content across transnational spaces, with an emphasis on the factors that constitute their transnational character (see, for example, Aksoy and Robins 2000; Jedlowski 2013). Others have explored the patterns of media consumption within natural environments. Given the increasing expansion of the World Wide Web and the growth of social media, though, further research is needed into the reception of Nollywood and its cultural affordances online. In the past decade especially, Nollywood has gained increased recognition in the social media arena, mainly because of its younger audiences who have a strong presence in the virtual world. Research suggests that an increasing number of younger people are using social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and blogs, to share their consumption experiences with their peers and at the same time to critique the medium's productions (Obiaya 2010; Dekie et al. 2014).¹⁸ The Internet therefore presents new kinds of access, and also a new platform for audiences to engage in informed debate. Unfortunately, there have been very few studies undertaken to date that have explored the import of social media for Nollywood, let alone the discussions of the medium happening for virtual audiences. These dimensions of the Nollywood phenomenon need to be studied in greater depth, if scholars want to understand how audiences experience the medium.

One important topic that has received attention is the way feminism is framed in Nollywood's cinematic productions. It is important to recognize the role of famous female Nollywood artists, such as Genevieve Nnaji, Rita Dominic, Mercy Johnson, Omotola Jalade Ekeinde, Ini Edo, and Funke Akindele, just to mention a few, in promoting feminist values through

¹⁸ Research indicates that more and more Nollywood audiences also use this platform (nollywoodforever.com) to share their consumption experiences.

this medium.¹⁹ In my interviews and focus group discussions, respondents were divided on how well social issues like gender and class are portrayed in Nollywood films. More in-depth examination is needed to understand how Nollywood portrays the changing roles of women and girls, both in terms of representation and in terms of consumption. Researchers could usefully invest in a more detailed and long-term project, for example, publishing monthly or quarterly reports on the ways in which women, children and other vulnerable persons are represented in Nollywood films.

Another fruitful path forward involves the issue of generational differences with respect to reception of Nollywood productions by younger audience members compared to older ones. Data from the focus groups and interviews shows considerable variation in terms of the respondents' viewing habits. For example, it shows that younger viewers do not have the same connection to Nollywood productions compared to older viewers. Several reasons have been identified for younger viewers' lack of connection to these productions. Most importantly, the younger demographics were more inclined to watching international productions, whereas the older demographics were more inclined to watching Nollywood productions. Additionally, the younger demographics have more media consumption options than the older demographics. For these reasons, they demonstrate a more liberal outlook toward global media productions in general. These findings highlight an important area for future research, in terms of the factors that influence such audience media choices. Researchers could usefully examine the potential implications of how consumers make sense of their media choices and their lived reality under such circumstances.

The reception studies of past decades have mainly focused on adult demographics between the ages of 18 and 60. It would be worthwhile to investigate and analyze the perceptions and

¹⁹ In 2013, Time magazine listed Omotola Jalade Ekeinde as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

experiences of the younger demographics – including especially those who were born in diaspora – to understand their engagements with alternative media and the ways in which they process the information thus gathered in their everyday lives. These findings also present Nollywood filmmakers with an opportunity, by the way, to produce more “hybrid” film content appealing to the taste of the younger demographics who tend to prefer in Karim’s (1998) words “a broader variety.” A final important subject relating to youth that is often overlooked concerns the place of children artists in Nollywood films. Previous conversations about Nollywood stars have mainly focused on older artists, which means that the contributions of child actors in Nollywood films are frequently ignored. As Tshika (2015) put it, “Nollywood adult stars are made, not born, but the children are rarely even credited” (215). He also observes that scholars have grossly failed to consider “the political economy of child stardom in Nollywood” (217).

One of the principal findings of this study concerns the issue of ideology in Nollywood films. As my introductory chapter explains, the values and beliefs presented in Nollywood film culture have not been explicitly analyzed to any meaningful degree in the relevant communication and media research. Rather, the focus has rested on the media’s material culture. Studies focused on Nollywood and ideology would be challenging, as they would require in-depth knowledge of both the medium and Nigerian culture. Such studies of the historical and sociocultural contexts in which Nollywood is situated – including the ways in which ideologies are produced and transmitted – would be of great help in helping critics, creators, and consumers understand the way reality is conceived and conveyed using this important global platform.

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A Trip to Jamaica. 2016. Dir. Robert Peters & Prod. Ayo Makun. Nigeria: Corporate World Pictures.

The Wedding Party. 2016. Dir. Kemi Adetiba. Nigeria: Elfike Film Collective.

Appendix A
List of Focus Group Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Approx. age at time of Interview	Ethnicity	Occupation
Nosa	Male	41	Edo	Quality control technician
Ife	Male	35	Yoruba	Civil Engineer
Vicky	Female	33	Urhobo	Economist
Chris	Male	49	Igbo	Electrical Engineer
Joey	Male	44	Yoruba	Accountant
Orho	Male	23	Urhobo	Student
Derby	Female	21	Esan	Student
Osas	Female	18	Edo	Student
Ese	Female	20	Urhobo	Student
Pemi	Male	23	Yoruba	Student

*Pseudonyms used to protect participants identity.

Appendix B
List of In-depth Interview Respondents

Pseudonym	Gender	Approx. Age at time of Interview	Ethnicity	Occupation
Lucas	Male	57	Ishan	Dredging Project Manager
Bola	Female	37	Yoruba	Customer Service
Birgitte	Female	58	Aniocha	Nursing Assistant
Deon	Male	47	Yoruba	Accountant
Praise	Female	36	Yoruba	Data Entry Assistant
Debbie	Female	36	Yoruba	Quality Control
Chuks	Male	38	Igbo	Banking and Finance
Ayo	Male	39	Yoruba	Actor
Chidi	Female	35	Igbo	Customer Service
Charles	Male	46	Itsekiri	Customer Service
Liz	Female	52	Efik	Medical Doctor
Joe	Male	55	Tiv	Pilot
Kim	Male	49	Edo	Warehousing
Hector	Mae	44	Aniocha	Student
Albert	Male	50	Igbo	Businessman
Moe	Male	55	Igbo	Security Agent
Temi	Female	37	Efik	Administrator
Timi	Male	41	Yoruba	Sales Agent
Tayo	Male	40	Yoruba	Mechanical Engineer

*Pseudonyms used to protect participants identity.

Appendix C
In-depth Interview Guide for Project

Part I: Opening

Thank you for participating in this study. My name is Theophilus Ekperuoh and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University. I have a list of questions that I would like to ask you about your perspective on Nollywood cinema. The interview will span about 1 to 2 hours. I would like to record this session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Please feel free to tell me about anything that you think I need to know about this topic. If I ask you a question you don't understand, please tell me and I will rephrase it in a better way. Do you have any question or is there anything I need to know before we start?

Part II: Body

1. Introductory Question (Demographic profiling)

Can you please tell me your name, nationality and how long you have lived in Montreal, Canada?

2. Exploration Questions (Knowledge of Nollywood)

- a. What do you know about the transnational Nigerian media (Nollywood)?
- b. How often in a typical week do you watch Nollywood films in your family?
- c. Probe: Can you tell me more about where, when and how you watch Nollywood films?
- d. Do you watch the films alone or in company of your family and friends?
- e. Probe: What are your reasons for watching Nollywood films?
- f. Generally, what matters most to you in deciding the kind of film to watch?
- g. As a diasporic Nigerian, what does Nollywood mean to you?
- h. What interests you most about Nollywood films?
- i. What is your favourite Nollywood film and why?
- j. What do you like or dislike about Nollywood films?
- k. What aspects of Nollywood films do you find most valuable?
- l. What do you think about the way Nigerian society and cultures are represented in Nollywood films?

- m. Which other films do you watch besides Nollywood films and why?
- n. How do your ethnic and cultural backgrounds influence your interest in Nollywood films?

3. Experience Questions (Experience with Nollywood films)

- a. Research has shown that migrants/immigrants often experience identity struggles in the host societies as a result of alienation from the homeland, as well as loss of family ties and cultural heritage. For this reason, they rely on communication networks, such as the community's media, as a platform to maintain connection with their homeland and, most importantly, to negotiate and sustain identity in diaspora. A good example is the Nigerian ethnic media (Nollywood) that is consumed by diasporic Nigerians around the world.

As a diasporic Nigerian and a member of a visible minority group in Canadian society, can you please tell me how your experience with Nollywood films has influenced your behaviour in this community?

- b. How have Nollywood films helped you to cope with the effects of displacement from your homeland and integration into a multicultural society such as the one you live in?
- c. What kinds of cultural norms and values are presented in Nollywood films, and to what extent do you think they reflect the reality of Nigerian society?
- d. Probe: How important is the mediation of Nigerian cultural norms and values to the Nigerian diaspora community?
- e. In your opinion, how can Nollywood films be utilized to inform and shape global understandings of Nigerian cultures and society?
- f. Some film critics argue that Nollywood cinemas are unsophisticated and unoriginal compared to Hollywood movies. How would you respond to such criticism?
- g. What do you think about the ways the notions of identity and belonging are presented in Nollywood films? To what extent have they allowed you to learn about and/or validate your identity?
- h. Probe: What do you think about the ways gender and class differences are portrayed in Nollywood films?

4. Implications Questions (Implications of Nollywood films for diasporic Nigerians)

- a. In your opinion, why is Nollywood important to the Nigerian diaspora community?

- b. What are some of the benefits of watching Nollywood films in your family?
- c. In what ways have Nollywood productions contributed to your sense of self and collective identity, as well as belongingness to a larger cultural community?
- d. How has watching Nollywood films allowed you to instil a sense of cultural identity in your children?

Part III: Closing

5. Closing Questions

- a. In your opinion, how can Nollywood films be used to promote and reinforce a sense of solidarity and community among diasporic Nigerians?
- b. What is the one important thing you want the public to know about Nollywood?
- c. We've covered quite a bit in this conversation. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you consider important on this topic that I have not covered?

I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Thank you!

Appendix D Focus Group Discussion Guide

Part I: Opening

Thank you for participating in this study. My name is Theophilus Ekperuoh and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University. This focus group is being conducted for an academic project. I invited you to participate in the viewing of Nollywood's blockbuster film (title of film) after which I will ask you to analyze it. Your perspectives on the film are very important for me. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to express your thoughts and/or build on someone's thoughts during the discussion. If I ask you a question you don't understand, please tell me and I will ask it in a better way. This session will be recorded on tape and will take approximately 3 hours. Do you have any questions before we start?

Part II: Demographic profiling Questions:

- a) Could each of you please tell me your name, nationality and how long have you lived in Montreal, Canada?
- b) Are you a Canadian citizen or permanent residence?

Transition (Since we have all introduced ourselves, I would like us to begin the viewing session)

Part III: Viewing session of Nollywood blockbuster film: The Wedding Party.

Part IV: Focus Group Questions

- a) What do you think about the ways Nigerian ethnic, cultural and national identity is communicated in the film?
- b) What do you find most valuable in the film and why?
- c) Probe: What do you like or dislike about the film?
- d) In your opinion, how are the notions of identity and belonging presented in the film?
- e) Could you please describe the key elements that constitute identity and belonging in the films?
- f) Probe: What do the notions of identity and belonging mean to you in practice?
- g) What kinds of cultural norms and values are presented in the film, and to what extent do you think they reflect the reality of Nigerian society?
- h) Would you recommend Nollywood films, especially to younger members of your community who are looking to understand Nigerian cultural norms and values? Why (not)?

- i) What issues have Nollywood filmmakers raised in the film that are important to your community?
- j) What is the most significant concern you have about the film?
- k) What aspects of the film, if any, do you think should be discontinued?
- l) Based on your experience with the film, what are the key areas for improvement?
- m) Probe: What is your opinion on the ways gender and class differences are presented in the film?
- n) What is one important lesson you have learned from the film, and why is it important to you?

Part III: Closing

1. Closing Questions

- a. Based on your experience with this film, how can Nollywood films be essential for promoting and reinforcing a sense identity and belonging in your community?
- b. What is the one important thing you want the public to know about Nollywood?

2. Closing Remarks

I appreciate the time you took for this study. I will analyze the important information you gave me, and the results will be included in the project. Thanks again for your time.

Appendix E
Invitation to Participate in Research



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Tel: (514) 699-7413/(450) 699-7413
Email: tekperuoh@gmail.com
April 18, 2018

Dear Madam/Sir,

Invitation to Participate in Research

My name is Theophilus Ekperuoh and I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Communication Studies at Concordia University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and I would like to invite you to participate in the research project. The title of the research is Mapping Nollywood's Imaginative Scape in Canada: Understanding Transnational Nigerian Media, Identity and Belonging.

The purpose of the study is to explore and understand the significance of transnational Nigerian media (Nollywood) from the points of view of diasporic Nigerians in Canada. The study is concerned with the ways members of this community receive, use and make meanings of Nollywood and its cultural representations, as well as the implications for how they negotiate identity and belonging in Canadian society.

As a diasporic Nigerian you are in a unique position to provide us valuable information based on your experiences with this media. If you are interested in participating in this research, please suggest a day and time that suits you and I will be available to meet with you for an interview. The expected duration of the interview is 1 to 2 hours. The session will be recorded on tape because I don't want to miss any of your comments. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences with Nollywood films. You will also be asked to describe how you watch those films, what you like or dislike about the films and why, as well as how you make sense of the cultural representations in your everyday life.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will not be identified by name and your personal information will be anonymised to protect confidentiality. You will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed.

The benefit of participation is that you will have the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing intellectual debates on the significance of Nollywood cinema for displaced populations. In addition, participation will allow you to learn about the implications of this media for how diasporic Nigerians negotiate identity and belonging in transnational spaces. Through your contribution, the public, including members of the Nigerian diaspora community, as well as scholars and researchers will have a better understanding of the significance of the media being investigated in the globalized world.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information). I will also appreciate if you could recommend others who are willing to participate in this research study.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

Yours sincerely,

Theophilus A. Ekperuoh, PhD Candidate
Principal Investigator
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Appendix F
Sample Consent Form for Participants



INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Mapping Nollywood's Imaginative Scape in Canada: Understanding Transnational Nigerian Media, Identity and Belonging.

Researcher: Theophilus A. Ekperuoh

Researcher's Contact Information: Concordia University/Communication Studies/7141
Sherbrooke Street West, CJ 3.230, 3rd Floor/Montreal, Quebec Canada H4B 1R6 / (514) 699-7413
/ tekperuoh@gmail.com

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Yasmin Jiwani

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: Concordia University/Communication Studies/7141
Sherbrooke Street West, L-CJ 4411/Montreal, Quebec Canada H4B 1R6 / (514) 848-2424 ext.
258 / yasmin.jiwani@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study: Self-funded

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to gather information about the ways diasporic Nigerians in Montreal receive, use and make meanings of Nollywood and its cultural representations, as well as the implications for how they negotiate identity and belonging in Canadian society.

B. PROCEDURES

The research will be conducted with members of the Nigerian diasporic community in Montreal. I have been informed that I will be asked to respond to specific questions focused on my experiences and interpretations of the media under study.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 2 to 3 hours.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I have been informed that no risks are anticipated. On the contrary, the research will allow participants to reflect on their lived experiences with the phenomenon under study and provide their perspectives on its significance to the sample population. I understand that the benefit of participation is that I will be able to contribute to the ongoing debates on the significance of transnational Nigerian media (Nollywood) against a backdrop of the diaspora.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: your experiences with Nollywood films and your perspective on the significance of this phenomenon for diasporic Nigerians.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name.

We will protect the information by concealing participants' identities. In addition, research data containing identifiable personal information will be anonymised and given unique identifiers.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results. We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher prior to conducting the interview.

As a compensatory indemnity for participating in this research, you will receive a \$20 Tim Horton's gift card. If you withdraw before the end of the research, you will still be allowed to keep the gift card as a token of appreciation.

To make sure that research money is being spent properly, auditors from Concordia or outside will have access to a coded list of participants. It will not be possible to identify you from this list.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.