The New Nollywood: Professionalization or Gentrification of Cultural Industry

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Abstract

Nollywood is further gaining popularity due to its transformations, which bear resemblances to the processes of gentrification and professionalization. This is formalizing the industry as well as attracting professionals and instigating existing filmmakers to improve on their art. So far, filmmakers have continued to avail themselves for further trainings, aligning themselves with the emerging new and professionalizing Nollywood. This study is interested in finding out whether these changes within the industry are simply a professionalization process or a regeneration that can potentially gentrify the industry. Gentrification, an urban development term which captures the process that alters the structure of a district to suit middle- or upper-class taste, is burdened with the baggage of displacement and so attracts negativity. This study adopts gentrification as a metaphor. Thus, it captures a process where a once-not-so-aesthetic item available exclusively to the general masses becomes fanciful as a result of middle- or upper-class engagement. This study contextualizes the concepts of gentrification and professionalization to put in perspective class separation, formalization of Nollywood, emergence of the new Nollywood, and other transformations reshaping Nollywood and bringing about sectoring within the industry. This study concludes that Nollywood is currently gentrifying as well as professionalizing. Its gradual progression from its old, traditional form into a new quality and aesthetics conscious nature results from availability of resources for production and distribution, and an interaction with corporate bodies and between new film professionals and existing industry players who avail themselves for further trainings.

Keywords

gentrification, professionalization, regeneration, Nollywood, film, formalization

Introduction

The Nigerian film industry has been divided into different identifiable segments—mostly along ethnic, but essentially along regional lines. These divisions, Johnson (2000) and Haynes and Okome (2000) observe, have continued to shape the Nigerian film industry which today has various sectors unified into one. One of such sectors is Nollywood. Before the term Nollywood ever existed, the Nigerian film industry produced mostly on celluloid, but very sparingly as cost of production was overwhelmingly high for individual filmmakers. In an interview, O. Ogunjiofor (personal communication, August 8, 2016) notes that video film was born out of necessity. He was fresh out of school and unemployed; however, he had great story idea but no funds for production. Kenneth Nnebue, a businessman who sold empty videocassettes and also financed and distributed Yoruba video films, provided the required fund and Living in Bondage was produced in 1992. Prior to its production, however, video films were being produced in local indigenous languages with the first being Ade Ajiboye’s Soso Meji (1988) and Moses Olaiya’s Agba Man (1992). Living in Bondage, although produced in Igbo language, but subtitled in English, was the first commercially successful video film. It provided the blueprint for other video films that followed, saturating the industry and attracting the sobriquet, Nollywood. Nollywood is a portmanteau word that combines Nigeria and Hollywood/Bollywood. Although credit is sometimes given to Matt Steinglass (Becker, 2011; Niambi, 2018) for the coinage, Onishi (2002) is the first to actually use the term “Nollywood.” Onishi (2016) writes, “It’s like Hollywood or Bollywood but in Nigeria—Nollywood.” While authors like Haynes (2007) think the name silly and a number of Nigerians believe the sobriquet is unoriginal, unrepresentative, and even neo-colonialist, it has come to stay like “Nigeria,” a name coined by Lord Lugard’s girlfriend. Unlike “Nigeria,” however, the boundaries of Nollywood still remain undefined as it is
unrepresentative of the entirety of the Nigerian national cinema. Divided mostly along ethnic lines, sectors of the cinema have come to be called by different names like Kanywood, Yollywood, Efifwood, among others.

In recent times there have been deliberate attempts to unify the entire Nigerian film industry under the same name—Nollywood. Thus, for inclusionists, Nollywood describes the entire Nigerian film industry and the entire video film industry (Ayehgo, 2012; Krings & Okome, 2013). Different authors have adopted it differently. Barnard and Tuomi (2006), for instance, distinguish the “Nigerian film industry” from the low-budget mass production-oriented Nollywood. Schultz (2012), on the contrary, understands Nollywood as the Nigerian video film industry whose content is made up of the familiar stories that accord with local sensibilities, reflecting and preserving them rather than contributing to global monoculture. Marston et al. (2007) equally describe Nollywood as the popular title for the Nigerian film industry, noting clearly that its videos are “produced in many of the 250 tribal languages in Nigeria, though Yoruba, Igbo and English are numerically dominant” (p. 54). As to content, the authors offer that the disjunctive nature of the storyline and their pattern of development suggest poor scripting rendered in a manner that mimics African oral narrative pattern (Okpewho, 1992). Haynes and Okome (2011) submit that Nollywood film content draws from popular imagination that give it popularity among the masses.

A brief exploration of Nollywood in this introduction is necessary as it establishes the premise on which this study is built. Since 2010, there have been changes in what has come to be Nollywood’s modus operandi. Prior to 2010, video films have been made mostly by amateur filmmakers who Ogunsuyi (1999) and Olayiwola (2007) describe as “harebrained boys” whose “hanky-panky ways” have “virtually beaten the genuine filmmakers to the game.” The return of professionalism to the industry has warranted a segmentation that is akin to class separation in a gentrified economy. Segmentation in the wider Nigerian film industry has extended to Nollywood and in recent times, scholars like Jedlowski (2013), Okome (2014), Adejunmobi (2015), among others, have engaged in the discourse of an emerging Nollywood which they have identified in different terms like the New Nigerian cinema, new wave, emerging Nollywood, and Neo-Nollywood.

The New Nigerian Cinema

The New Nigerian Cinema is a category of films, filmmakers, and filmmaking in Nollywood that forms a small-scale economy defined by class and aesthetics, which tests different approach on the film market (Jedlowski, 2013). New Nollywood, contrary to widely held views and according to industry players, is not a creation of the state. In an interview, industry critic Prof. F. Shaka (personal communication, March 22, 2016) and filmmaker T. Benson (personal communication, April 11, 2016) opine that it resulted from criticisms on what is now termed the old Nollywood. Ryan (2015) refers to it as “top-of-the-line” films resulting from sectoring and experimentations aimed at remedying the general fatigue experienced in the industry. New Nollywood developed from newer opportunities available to filmmakers ranging from exposure to other filmmaking standards, to availability of fund and new investors, education, and interactions with corporate organizations.

While there are different perceptions of what it stands for and what films qualify as new Nollywood, there is a consensus over its emanating from the urge to challenge the negative and pessimistic image of Nollywood. Thus, Afolayan (2014) defines the new Nollywood as “a move away from the cinematic ebullience and mushrooming tendency of Nollywood towards a qualitative and aesthetic transformation of the industry” (p. 26). Afolayan (2014), Jedlowski (2013), Okome (2014), Adejunmobi (2015), and Haynes (2014) among other authors, while underscoring the differences between an existent Nollywood film practice and innovations being introduced, separate rather than blend these innovations into the old practice. Hence, rather than conceived as an evolutionary trend, the old and new Nollywood are perceived as separate or distinct creative practices—a distinction that promotes sectoring within the industry.

New Nollywood represents a sector of Nollywood that is becoming increasingly formal in the business of filmmaking, a sector that is slowly detaching itself from the industry’s informal political economy. Filmmakers in this sector produce and distribute their films via the theaters located in shopping malls that attract the middle- and upper-class elites. Such films are sparsely available within the larger popular audience market as they take several months and sometimes years to become available on DVDs. While Kunle Afolayan’s October 1 (2014) took approximately 1 year to get on DVD, Mahmood Ali-Balogun’s Tango with me (2011) took 3 years and Stephanie Okereke-Linus’s Through the glass (2008) is yet to be put on DVD as of March 2020.

This study investigates this emerging Nollywood, querying its separation into a class of its own as evidences of professionalization which is prompted by globalism or a gentrification of the industry. To this end, the concepts of professionalism and gentrification will make up the theoretical frameworks for this study.

The Concept of Professionalism

Professionalism is the act, objective, and standard that defines a profession or a professional person. It is an attribute acquired through specialized knowledge often obtained via long and intensive training or academic preparation. Professionalism is manifested in individuals who abide by the characteristics of a profession. These include knowledge monopoly, trade skill exclusivity, codes, education and training, and professional body membership. These constitute the
ideology that professionals aspire to. Interviews collected for this research indicate that previously in the Nigerian film industry, conceptions of professionalism differ. Filmmaker K. Gyang (personal communication, February 29, 2016) surmises that professionalism in the industry was “highlighted by the ability to work at a breakneck speed because you do not want to be the guy who shoots one scene in one day.” But this understanding is changing as Gyang adds that currently “people are studying and doing research on how they can improve themselves.” Filmmakers like Kenneth Gyang, Teco Benson, Kunle Afolayan, Stephanie Okereke-Linus, Obi Emelonye, among others, have availed themselves to further trainings at film academies across the world. The Federal Government of Nigeria, under the Project Nollywood fund, has equally provided funds to filmmakers for trainings in Nigeria and abroad. The Nigerian Film and Video Censorship Board also plans to drive and promote professionalism to revamp the industry. To achieve professionalism, filmmakers will have to be members of the proposed MOPICON (Motion Picture Council of Nigeria). The MOPICON bill contains the Nigerian film professionals’ codes of conduct and ethics as well as clearly defines “a member” and insists on accredited training for its members. It reserves the right to determine what standards of knowledge and skills requirements to certify a person as professional filmmaker. While sects in the industry are opposed to the adoption of the bill, advocates believe that the document has the potential to groom professionals who can usher Nollywood into a direct competition with Hollywood. Lack of expert skill or professionalism remains the major points of criticism against Nollywood filmmakers.

Professionalism promises Nollywood a new positioning in world cinema discourse. It promises the industry interaction with and integration into global cinema. The internet and new technologies have created virtual spaces where media products are viewed and exchanged, making globalization a new reality. The filmmakers involved in this study agree that globalization or the desire to become internationally accepted constitutes the major reason filmmakers professionalize their art. The urge to appeal to transnational audiences, win international awards, sign international distribution deals and create a durable art, are among the major reasons filmmakers professionalize their art. Some have filmmakers from other industries who inspire them and their art. Nollywood filmmakers interviewed for this research submit that they are professionalizing to globalize. As noted by Jedrowski, narrative change is within the industry as professionalism is on the rise and there appears to be an influx of film professionals into Nollywood. Nollywood’s common traits—low budget, poor film quality, poor sound and picture quality, inexperienced or amateur filmmakers, porous storyline—are witnessing transformations. Film producer, O. Williams (personal communication, April 14, 2016), notes that some Nollywood content producers are beginning to abide by “international best practice” and young professionals are joining the industry too. These transformations in Nollywood are indicative of a formalization process that could either professionalize or gentrify the industry. While professionalization will require existent industry players to engage with the process by professionalizing their practice, gentrification occurs when affluent young professionals from outside the transforming space become associated with the industry. For instance, although Kunle Afolayan descends from a filmmaking family, he was a professional banker before venturing into film production.

The Concept of Gentrification

Gentrification in urban studies means the renovation and transformation of a neighborhood, previously occupied by the working class, to suit the tastes of middle and upper-class (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005; Smith, 1996). Gentrification has been discussed in various fields as close to urban study as real estate and as far from it as the cinema. It has become a “lens through which to examine a variety of intersecting phenomena in a city and/or neighbourhood context” (Lees et al., 2008, p. xvi). One of such phenomena is the cinema, but very little has been done on the study of gentrification in media and cultural studies.

Arguments have arisen as to where is most appropriate to apply gentrification: large postindustrial cities, commercial development, smaller cities or rural areas, urban studies, cultural or media studies. Still acknowledged a neologism (Smith, 2005), redefinitions and extensions of the boundaries of the term to embrace other processes of change have portrayed gentrification in terms of globalization, urban regeneration (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005), and revitalization (Rubino, 2005). As its definition boundaries expand, different situations are identified to which the gentrification process can be applied. There is a turn in categories of investigation involving gentrification. For instance, Anderson (1990) applies it to the study of race, Rothenberg (1995) examines sexuality, Ganti (2012) explores Bollywood cinema and its audiences, and Hassler-Forest (2014) looks at television and audiences. Accordingly, Krase (2005) stresses the permissibility in taking ownership of the word.

The concept is not restricted to urban and regional development or housing (Staley, 2018). This study adopts gentrification as a metaphor for a change in Nollywood’s modus operandi. As a metaphor, gentrification of Nollywood does not speak to an increase in cost of production as a result of the influx of new and wealthy film professionals or to the displacement of filmmakers or audiences. It speaks instead to grandeur, appeal, acceptance of Nollywood among the upper class or elite. It speaks to a loss of dominance among the poor masses, a transformation in the descriptive adjectives that define the industry. This metaphorized gentrification captures or defines the transformation of an old Nollywood into a new one that appeals to Western-films-consuming Nigerian audiences. Thus, this gentrification of Nollywood stripes it of its
negative attributes or characteristics, making it trendy or as Ganti says of Bollywood, cool. When the gentry, elite, or upper class consume Nollywood, they adopt an item of entertainment previously mostly reserved for the masses and strip it of its association with poverty, thereby gentrifying it. This metaphorized gentrification is not focused on class, but on the things or lifestyle choices that signify or define class. Nollywood was originally created to meet the entertainment needs of the working class. O. Ogunjiofor, producer of Nollywood’s first successful video film, opines that the ingenuity which spurred the production of Living in Bondage (1992) was driven by a quest to stall unemployment—to maximize available limited resources for gainful investment. Its small or limited budget size, affordability, popular audience target, small screen distribution (straight to video), and profitability boosted and sustained the format.

However, this is changing with the influx of professionals, availability of investors, and different distribution channels. This transformation is causing a gradual shift from predominant video and VCD distribution to cinema releases. The return to cinema is disenfranchising Nollywood’s original popular audiences as they are mostly unable to either access the cinemas or are unable to afford cinema tickets. In terms of content, there also appears to be a separation into classes—content for the popular audiences produced by the “old” Nollywood and content for the niche, created by the “new” Nollywood. Class separation in terms of production and distribution following an influx of professionals might suggest a possible gentrification of the industry.

**How Media Industries Gentrify**

Direct discussions on media gentrification may not exist at the time of this research, but authors like Vivant (2009) and Chum (2015) hint on gentrification within the cultural industries and the likely causative factors. The authors note that supporting arts and culture is tantamount to supporting their redevelopment, renewal, or regeneration, which eventually results in an economic growth. In her essay on agricultural gentrification, Sutherland (2012) notes that the gentrification process could occur from both within and outside a given locale. The author therefore defines agricultural gentrification as resulting from both the in-movement of wealthy newcomers and the social upgrading of resident agricultural households. Gentrification in the media industry will therefore respond to both internal and external stimuli. It is an outcome of changes in preferences and/or capital allocation within the media industry. It translates to the amount of productive resource moving into and within the media industry, resulting in a radical transformation of the industrial structure. Media gentrification or gentrification in the media industry is therefore conceptualized as the transformation of media spaces resulting from movement of economic resources. Of all media forms, gentrification has been most readily applied to studies on film industries and perhaps television.

As a purely economic process, gentrification in the film industry requires that the industry be formalized. In Bollywood, Ganti (2012) notes the establishment of film academies and corporatization of the industry as valid steps that transformed Indian cinema. The recognition of filmmaking as an approved industrial activity in India, according to the author, led to structural changes that have helped to reshape the industry. But most important to the gentrification of Bollywood was the presence of investors (high-profile Indian corporations and conglomerates) who established new production and distribution companies, thus prompting a transformation of already existing production, distribution, or exhibition companies. As a result, there was and has continued to be more abundant capital to finance film production.

An essential boost to gentrification is the availability of capital/resources. As earlier stated, starting off as a regenerating process, continuous inflow of capital sustains regeneration, which eventually gives way to gentrification. This explains Bollywood’s gentrification. The financial and organizational reforms in the industry “transformed it from being a very undercapitalised enterprise to one where raising capital is not perceived as the main challenge or constraint” (Ganti, 2012, p. 266). However, once this capital availability leads to gentrification, a shift in audience target becomes inevitable. According to Ganti, prior to the gentrification of Bollywood, films were essentially made for the masses. Once gentrification was in place, Bollywood produced for the masses and classes, or only for the classes. The current shift in audience target, from the masses to niche audiences or the gentry, ought to evoke the same reaction generated by displacement in urban gentrification. However, because audience displacement is often invisible, Ganti observes that filmmakers, journalists, and economic analysts celebrate this shift, considering it a sign of artistic maturation and industrial modernization. Bisschoff (2015) believes as much for the new Nollywood which she says now produces also for non-African as well as African diaspora audiences. Distributing in the diaspora and video-on-demand platforms like IROKOtv and Netflix constitute new sources of revenue for Nollywood. Using Bollywood’s gentrification as a yardstick, the transformations in Nollywood indicate gentrification because first it enjoys greater availability of resources now, second there are registered film schools across the country, and finally, the industry is independent of the state.

**Gentrifying or Professionalizing Nollywood?**

Having conceptualized media gentrification, Nollywood gentrification will imply the transformation of industry and industrial activities as a result of movement of economic capital. A gentrifying Nollywood means an evolving film economy being dispossessed of its informalities and in the process of being incorporated into a formal political economy. It usually culminates in the displacement of some players as well as consumers in the industry. However, gentrification in this
and Okechukwu Ogunjiofor’s relatively commonplace in high budget feature length films which Ajibade and (Ajibade, 2013). The technical expertise and aesthetic ten- cated, and untrained aspiring filmmakers run Nollywood established knowledge on how amateurs, businessmen, unedu- cated, and untrained aspiring filmmakers run Nollywood (Ajibade, 2013). The technical expertise and aesthetic tendency required for making feature films, which Ajibade and Adesokan (2011) note as lacking in the industry, has become relatively commonplace in high budget feature length films like Kunle Afolayan’s The CEO (2016), Izu Ojukwu’s ’76, and Okechukwu Ogunjiofor’s Queen Amina. In addition to this newfound expertise in technical aspects of filmmaking, the content and approach to filmmaking in general are equally witnessing a wave of transformation (Barrot, 2011).

These notable filmmakers mentioned above along with others like Emem Isong, Mahmood Ali-Balogun, Stephanie Okereke-Linus, among others, are the artists whose presence in Nollywood incites the transformations that I query as gentrification or professionalization. While gentrification in Nollywood reflects in the overall outlook of the industry, professionalization affects largely on individual filmmakers and reflects on and through their works of art. For example, Nollywood films, originally consumed at home on VHS (Video Home System) cassettes, are now being consumed in gentrified spaces like the cinemas and multiplexes. There are currently more young film professionals in the industry as opposed to marketers and film enthusiasts who produced video films in the 1990s. Although Nollywood audience studies are yet to determine upper-class youths’ interest, middle-class consumers have gone beyond housewives and the unemployed to educated middle-class citizens (Agina, 2019). And the filmmakers are aspiring for more. Jedrowski (2010) posits that they are pushing toward a conventional industry model bereft of informality, a mature industry with global reach. Such gentrification/professionalization is warranting that filmmakers are looking beyond the borders of Nigeria.

Kunle Afolayan’s CEO, for instance, was shot in five different African countries and has thus been described as pan-African, where pan-African means appealing to all Africans. These transformations, both in the content and context of filmmaking in the industry, and the similarities they share of gentrification and professionalization raise the following research question: Research Question 1: Is the industry gentrifying or simply professionalizing?

Professionalization manifests in the urge among filmmakers to avail themselves for professional training. Providing an insight into the caliber of filmmakers who are now transforming into professional filmmakers, filmmaker T. Benson offers,

Yes, we learnt on the field. Most of us did. But most times we didn’t know the reasons behind the application of most things we learnt. We simply did it because we saw others use it as a style. When I started studying, I realized that there were principles guiding every action. (personal communication, April 11, 2016)

L. Imasuen, one of Nollywood’s most prolific filmmakers, once producing 29 titles in 1 year, shares a personal story of his journey to professional filmmaking:

I learnt filmmaking on the streets. My romance with film started with my interest in television. I practice theatre, radio, TV and when Nollywood emerged, I saw only a thin line between television and film. Distinguish yourself from other self taught filmmakers conscious of the fact that I didn’t study film and did not understand film jargon. I was a theatre practitioner. So I decided to be an actor’s director. Then I started studying attending workshops both at home and abroad, go to film festivals and listen to people. Today I am reputed to own one of the biggest private libraries on film books and materials. Thus, I am a self made filmmaker. (personal communication, March 16, 2016)

While individual filmmakers like Imasuen make effort to professionalize their art, collective and corporate effort to professionalize practice within Nollywood is a slow process. During President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, the Project ACT Nollywood Capacity Building Fund was established and 247 practitioners obtained funded professional training either within or outside of Nigeria (Channels TV, 2016). The fund has remained nonexistent since President Jonathan left office. F. Amata, the present president (2016–present) of Directors’ Guild of Nigeria (DGN) tells me that the guild organizes trainings for its members (personal communication, April 14, 2016). The frequency of such trainings, however, is indeterminate as they are dependent upon availability of funding. Professionalism therefore is not currently widespread in the industry. Forecasting the future of the industry, Amata
believes that professionalization will become commonplace. He foresees a future where even the Asaba movies, a subgenre of the old Nollywood films, “would be pursuing the same production values” as the professionally made films. Imasuen shares this optimism, adding, “we’ve been able to build a prolife over the years. We are ready for the change, we’re ready for the time and we still want to maintain the Nigerian way of making film, but globalising it” (Duthiers & Kermeliotis, 2012).

Other filmmakers interviewed for this research readily spoke about the industry’s transformation in terms of context. They shared history of the industry, noting how globalization and changes in technology, knowledge, and capital are affecting how films are made. Opa Williams, however, asserts that creating story content in Nollywood still needs a lot of work. This does not indicate that the industry does not produce great contents. As filmmakers continue to build their kind of audience and explore the opportunities provided by differing distribution channels/options, Nollywood contents have continued to become unique and explore different themes and subjects. For example, Half of a Yellow Sun attempts adaptation in contemporary Nollywood, ’93 Days takes a slice off a national epidemic, Queen Amina borrows from legend to celebrate the girl child, and October 1 offers a metaphoric insight into Nigerian independence. Unlike the old Nollywood films, new Nollywood has improved plotlines which respect time and thus “drag” a lot less. While old Nollywood films still run into parts and sequels, lasting as long as 3 hours, new Nollywood films come in single parts and last half the duration.

These transformations suggest or indicate a regeneration and possible gentrification of the industry as they align with Ganti’s (2012) perception of gentrification of Bollywood. She posits that Bollywood has become “cool,” encompassing “aesthetics, affect, social class, identity and subjectivity” (p. 79). Ganti’s study does not include any discourse on displacement, but it notes that films previously made for the masses are now being made for the elite. In Nollywood, however, straight to DVD releases, made essentially for the masses are now being made for the elite. In Nollywood, however, straight to DVD releases, made essentially for the masses with no access to the cinema, is still fashionable. This is due to a number of reasons that include the scarcity and/or inaccessibility of cinema houses across the nation. Kenneth Gyang notes,

There are currently very few cinemas in the country which creates a long queue for filmmakers who want to release their films via the theatres. We cannot wait forever for the cinemas especially when there are other viable alternatives (like the VCD/DVD). But if the entire seven hundred and seventy-four (774) local governments in Nigeria would have at least one cinema, it would go a long way in easing the distribution problems.

This will also mean that DVD distribution would become less fashionable among filmmakers. Filmmaker Lonzo Nzekwe opines that the VCD/DVD medium will be displaced in the nearest future as internet access continues to become affordable for the people. Currently, large budget films, usually involving more planning and professionalism, are distributed via the cinema. The protracted showings in cinemas before an eventual release on DVD deprive the masses access to the films at the same time as the middle and upper classes. While this deprivation can be likened to displacement in urban gentrification, it can be perceived as a professional strategy to maximize profit. The delayed release to DVD/VCD compel audience members to seek alternative distribution/consumption channels like video-on-demand platforms. This can also be said to be regenerating film distribution/consumption in the country.

State/Corporate Financing: Step Toward Sustained Regeneration

State involvement in Nollywood affairs has contributed toward industry transformation. It has encouraged professionalization as much as it could be instigating gentrification of the industry. It has been established that sustained regeneration leads to gentrification (Clark, 1992; Lim et al., 2013; Maloutas, 2012; Slater, 2006), but unsustained regeneration will culminate to incomplete professionalization of an industry. According to Brown-Saracino (2010), only sustained regeneration could lead to gentrification. This section investigates the sustainability of Nollywood’s regeneration to determine the possibilities of gentrification and/or professionalization, and what they entail for the industry.

Corporate sponsorship has been minimal within Nollywood due to its continued existence within Nigeria’s informal political economy. While local corporate sponsorships are currently on the increase, international corporate sponsorships are few. This is as a result of the industry’s disorganization and the uncertainties of investing in an informal economy, hence the recommendation for the adoption of the MOPICON bill. From my research, pro-MOPICON advocates believe that passing the bill into law would bring sanity, order, conformity, regulation, and indeed structure in the industry, which will attract local as well as international corporate investors. Anti-MOPICON advocates, on the contrary, understand it as a lobby for bureaucracy and an opportunity for personal gains while creating with state support, a professional cartel within Nollywood. Arguing its needlessness and no success guarantee, Miller (2016) suggests that had the guilds and associations been better structured and functional, they would have provided the necessary regulation needed to boost professionalism, structure, and standard. This dysfunctionality of associations in Nollywood is demonstrated by the inadequacies of the committee set up to review the bill. The committee was unable to give interviews or make public the result of their deliberations.

Marketers, protected by personal relationships, cartel, and guild systems, are able to invest in the industry its
informality notwithstanding, but corporate organizations are not able to do the same. Requiring a lot of documents ranging from evidence of registration with Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria, tax clearance certificates, audited company account to business plan on proposed film project, obtaining corporate sponsorship is rigorous for the average Nollywood filmmaker. Hence, producing a film of global standards in the emerging Nollywood according to Haynes (2016) is not “a game for the fainthearted” (p. 289). But there is hope for the industry and its players. Nollywood’s popularity is attracting both scholarly and business attention. In July 2019, the French Embassy in Nigeria, in collaboration with stakeholders, held a pitch for 12 Nollywood film projects for co-production with French producers (Annon, 2019). Although the film projects go unnamed and no update has been provided on the pitch and co-production, this indicates that Nollywood is beginning to attract international, transnational, and global interest.

In recent times, corporate organizations have contributed to Nollywood productions, encouraging professionalism in production and distribution. But besides Amstel Malta Box Office (AMBO) sponsored movies such as Sitanda (2006), White waters (2008), Cindy’s notes (2008), all directed by Izu Ojukwu, corporate bodies appear to support rather than completely fund or invest into movies. Mahmood Ali-Balogun’s Tango with me (2011) was supported by MTN, Kunle Afolayan’s Phone swap (2012) was co-financed by Glo, and The Figurine was partly sponsored by MTN, GSK, HiTV, among others. Nollywood’s bigger investors remain individuals and, in recent times, Bank of Industry and other banks. Having co-financed Biyi Bandele’s Half of a yellow sun (2014) and Michelle Bello’s Flower girl (2013), Bank of Industry instituted the NollyFund early 2015 (Abimboye, 2015). Set to make funding easily accessible to producers of commercially viable film projects, the NollyFund, C. Nwuka offers, aims at bypassing issues of tangible collateral and basing loan collateral on the financed film and personal guarantees as well as other forms of nonconventional collateral (personal communication, July 16, 2016). In other words, the basis for releasing funds to a producer will be the sophistication and revenue potential of his script. Everyday, conventional Nollywood style scripts will be outrightly disqualified. As tangible collateral are not required, double measures are taken to ensure that scripts can potentially yield not only investment but also return on investment. The fund promises to be more sustainable compared with the 2007 Project Nollywood intervention fund, envisioned by Charles Novia and launched by Ecobank (Novia, 2012). With a team comprised of Ecobank, Charles Novia, Chico Ejiro, Fidelis Duker, Fred Amata, and Barrister Emeka Utulu, the fund was closed to only the involved filmmakers. Formed on the spur of the moment, with interest based entirely on yield, important aspects of Project Nollywood were taken for granted. The hurriedness with which the project was executed and its eventual failure due to distribution lapses discouraged other corporate bodies from investing into a clearly structureless industry.

In contrast, the Bank of Industry’s NollyFund has a mapped out plan for production and distribution. With selected production and distribution companies registered under the project, the bank is able to monitor fund utilization. Although publicity and advertisement is left to the expertise of the producer, its plan and cost are required by the bank. Zero collateral is therefore backed up by stringent measures to ensure accountability and success. Investing also in distribution sector, the bank has in the past ensured the digitization of selected cinemas (Silverbird, FilmOne, and Genesis) and DVD distribution. G. Okoye (Gabosky) of G-Media was able to set up his DVD distribution chain across 21 states with the help of the bank. Bank of Industry ensures that participating cinemas project sponsored films at prime time and remunerate the right amount for exhibition (G. Okoye, personal communication, July 16, 2016). A collection account is opened with a commercial bank where all proceeds are domiciled and from where loan repayment is charged. Bank of Industry remains the sole signatory. Thus planned, continuity is ascertained as it is expected that films sponsored return both principal and interest. While writing this article, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) announced its readiness to invest in movie-making within Nollywood via its Creative Industry Financing Initiative (CIFI). Although details of CBN’s investment plans are not gathered, it indicates that the regeneration of Nollywood is sustainable.

C. Nwuka believes that the initial fund size of one billion naira could be increased. In the eventuality of that not happening, sustenance is guaranteed from loan repayment and interests accumulated. Unlike private or individual sponsorship, corporate funding such as that provided by the Bank of Industry has the potential to further professionalize the industry. Being accessible only to registered or incorporated businesses, accountability and reliable figures are attainable. Although being sponsored by NollyFund limits choices of production and distribution companies the filmmakers can work with, it guarantees safety of master copy, and professionalism of services rendered. While this fund is sustainable, it is not available to nonprofessional filmmakers or incoming working-class professionals since an applying producer is required to provide at least 3 years’ company audited account. What this does is capture the companies in the state’s tax net, invariably contributing to the formalization and professionalization of the industry. In other words, the Bank of Industry is consciously attempting to reposition Nollywood in the formal political economy of Nigeria.

There is a general consensus within the industry that the presence of corporate funders and the involvement of international corporations in the production and especially distribution of content are affecting the dynamics of Nollywood. The involvement of corporations such as DSTV, Iroko TV, Africa Magic, Canal+, among others, ensures that filmmakers produce quality contents. In an interview, Nollywood
actor and film producer, S. Nze, posits that the choice of a given distribution channel affects the quality, structure, and overall content of the film (personal communication, August 8, 2016). Iroko TV and its subsidiary, ROK, partner with filmmakers as well as producers to create contents aired on various ROK channels on DStv. Corporate funding interacts with technology, film school, and the presence of model industries like Hollywood, Bollywood, British Film Industry to cause Nollywood filmmakers to reconsider and re-evaluate their practice. My ethnographic observation of the industry shows that, although previous descriptions of Nollywood as the provider of poor quality entertainment for the masses can still be justified, the industry evidences signs of regeneration and professionalism that are rewriting the history, activities, content, and potentials of the industry.

President Mohammadu Buhari’s government has not continued with neither the NollyFund nor the Project ACT Nollywood fund which trained some Nollywood filmmakers. With the current government’s disininterest in the growth of the industry, Nollywood will not enjoy further speedy regeneration like the one it enjoyed during President Goodluck’s administration. In the literal sense, if regeneration is slowed or halted, gentrification of the industry cannot be attained and professionalization process will be slow and laborious. However, corporate organizations, both local and international, are investing in the industry. Filmmaker Lorenzo Menakaya asserts that ROK Studios, recently acquired by French Canal +, provides trainings as well as funding to filmmakers who pitch exceptional film projects (personal communication, February 6, 2020). The acquisition of ROK has sparked off the interest in Nollywood from foreign investors like Netflix and Startimes. The potentials of such influx of foreign investments are numerous including continuing the professionalization and maybe the eventual gentrification of the industry.

Conclusion

Sustainable funding is a major regenerating factor in Nollywood. F. Amata recalls how much transformation the industry has witnessed since state and corporate funding became accessible. Between 2009 and 2015, corporate investors and state support remain the major drivers of professionalism in Nollywood. From providing film fund to training filmmakers and supporting film distribution via Project ACT Nollywood, the involvement of the state, although sporadic, motivated local and international corporations to invest in the industry. As recently as April 2019, the CBN created a credit window for creative artists including moviemakers at a single interest rate (Channels News). International and multinational corporations like ROK, Africa Magic, DStv, MTN, airlines, among others, contribute to film funding, production, and distribution. Besides sustainable funding, the presence of young professionals is another major contributor to Nollywood’s regeneration. Sustained funding, the new media, influx of professionals and young talent, and, most importantly, the determination of individual filmmakers in Nollywood are restructuring the business of filmmaking. Support for the arts, especially the creative industry, has witnessed a new turn since the re-evaluation in 2016 of its contribution to national gross domestic product. Having thus established that Nollywood is regenerating and that this regeneration is sustainable via individual and corporate effort, there is a potential for gentrification, in its literal form, occurring within Nollywood. However, because several factors are militating against the process, the possibilities of gentrification eventually occurring within the industry are limited. These factors include sporadic and unreliable state involvement and support, ineffective implementation of policies, informality, and lack of structure, among others. President of the director’s guild, Amata (2020) believes funding and policy constitute the industry’s biggest setback. The idea of a gentrifying Nollywood has been criticized on the grounds that Nollywood is too young to be subjected to a gentrification study. Recall, however, that gentrification in this study is adopted as a metaphor. As a metaphor, gentrification is already in process because this industry that was cheaply created to serve the entertainment needs of the poor masses has now attracted elite attention. Besides now creating content that serves the classes, Nollywood engages the interest of national and international corporations. This interaction with class has gentrified Nollywood into a “cool” industry that currently appeals to the middle- and upper-class elites as much as it appeals to the working class and general mass audiences. A gentrified Nollywood is no longer that industry saturated with amateur filmmakers and uneducated businessmen looking for profitable investments. A gentrified Nollywood is the new Nollywood that has sparked elite interest within and outside the borders of Nigeria. What this means is that Nollywood will continue to shed its informalities as films and filmmakers interact with one another. It equally means that a metaphoric displacement will occur. This displacement will occur when industry begins to sift great films/filmmakers from poorly made ones. Displacement can already be observed in terms of distribution and consumption of films. Previously, films produced in Nollywood saturated the markets across the country within a few days of production before the pirates took over. Currently, the situation is changing. Professional filmmakers take their films on a tour to film festivals and international premieres before they are premiered and released to the cinemas. In other words, they take very long time before they are put on the VCD/DVD medium accessible to consumers in the rural areas who have no access to cinemas/viewing centers, VOD channel subscriptions, or cable TV. As observed in the “Introduction” section, some films take as long as 1 to 3 or more years to be put on this poor-masses-accessible medium. In terms of production, some filmmakers are equally being displaced, especially the marketers-turned-producers of the early Nollywood. Gab
Okeye opines that such “filmmakers” who fail to meet up with the current demand to “upgrade” their practice are “giving up.” They are being displaced because the industry is gentrifying and they are not professionalizing their practice to meet up with the transformation.

This study thus concludes that both processes go hand in hand. A professionalization of practice within the industry, although not entire and complete, warranted the metaphoric gentrification of Nollywood, making a once-not-so-appealing industry to become very-sought-after by all social classes. Professionalization of Nollywood, just like the gentrification process, is still in progress. As noted in the section above, the process of professionalization is slow and laborious because although corporate organizations are involved, individual filmmakers are essentially the advancers of the process. In other words, Nollywood is currently professionalizing its practice and at the same time gentrifying itself. While young professionals are making their entry into Nollywood, already existing filmmakers are attempting to improve on their art to remain relevant and efficient.

This study does not engage fully with the impact of professionalization and gentrification on the industry, its filmmaking culture, content, and consumers. Further studies in this area will make these processes relevant to the continued growth of the industry.

Author’s Note
I respect the views and positions of my interviewees and have honestly reproduced their views and ideas.

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