

Research article

Exploring the Nexus of Film and Tourism in Nigeria: A Decade of Destination Nollywood, 2012–2022

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Exploring the Nexus of Film and Tourism in Nigeria: A Decade of Destination Nollywood, 2012-2022

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, Nollywood, as Nigeria's booming film industry is widely known, has surpassed both Hollywood and Bollywood with regards to production and consumption size. Due to its commercial success and cultural impact, in recent years Nollywood has often been heralded for its tourism potential within Nigeria and across Africa. However, despite much talk about the *potential* impact of Nollywood on Nigerian and African tourism, relatively little is known about Nollywood's *actual* impact on film tourism and the existing connections between Nigeria's film and tourism industries more generally. This article discusses the connections between Nollywood and tourism and reviews the efforts and opportunities related to Nollywood film tourism, as reported in the public domain. Based on a content analysis of over fifty newspaper articles and other online available materials, such as websites, blogs and forums, it explores the practices and discourses surrounding Nollywood's nexus with tourism in Nigeria and across Africa over the past ten years.

Keywords: Nollywood, Nigeria, Media, Tourism

Introduction: Setting the Scene

In November 2022, the first Global Conference on 'Linking Tourism, Culture and Creative Industries' was held in Lagos, Nigeria. The conference was organized by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) with the aim to explore the connections between tourism and culture, and to promote partnerships between the tourism and creative industries in the country and across the African continent. As Lai Mohammed, Nigeria's Minister of Information and



Culture, put it in his address, “today, more than ever, tourism and the creative industry, due to their economic viability, are in the global spotlight and have their place at the forefront of the national and international development agenda” (*The Guardian Nigeria*, 19 November 2022). Inspired by the conference, the Nigerian government announced the start of a new collaboration with the World Tourism Organization to “strengthen Nigeria’s tourism sector” (*Business Insider Africa*, 11 February 2023). According to Mohammed, the UNWTO had decided to team up with the Nigerian government due to the significant strides the country had made in the creative industries in recent years. Apart from plans to build a tourism academy, the minister stated to have “plans to work with Nollywood,” Nigeria’s prolific film industry, to “positively change Africa’s image” (*BIA*, 11 February 2023). This reflected the remarks made on the conference by UNWTO’s Secretary General, Zurab Pololikashvili, who stated that the partnership between Nollywood and UNWTO would serve “the promotion of African culture” and “attract tourists to the continent” (*AVI News*, 17 November 2022).

Over the past three decades, Nigeria’s film industry has become a “global powerhouse” releasing hundreds of films each month (*The Circular*, 15 March 2022). Although Nigerian cinema dates back to the 1960s, when the first post-independence era films were made by pioneering Nigerian filmmakers such as Hubert Ogunde, Eddie Ugbomah and Ola Balogun, Nollywood, a portmanteau of Nigeria and Hollywood as well as Bollywood that was coined by *New York Times* journalist Norimitsu Onishi in 2002, came to mark “the plenitude of filmmaking happening in Lagos” from the early 1990s onwards (*TC*, 15 March 2022). Following the success of the 1992 straight-to-VHS film *Living in Bondage*, the Nigerian film industry experienced a popular “home video boom” (Atilola & Olayiwola, 2011) that gained a huge following in Nigeria, across Africa, and among the global African diaspora. In fact, with “an estimated worth of \$6.4 billion as of 2021” (*TC*, 15 March 2022), Nollywood is nowadays considered the world’s second-largest film industry, and even the largest in terms of output and popularity. Producing about 2,500 films annually and reaching an estimated audience of over 200 million people worldwide, Nollywood has seemingly not only surpassed Hollywood but also Bollywood regarding production and consumption size.

Due to its commercial success and cultural impact, from the early 2010s Nollywood has often been heralded as a “rising star in Africa’s tourism industry” (Abiola, 2016, p. 209). For example, in the *Global Trends Report 2012*, the World Travel Market predicted a GDP growth in Africa as a result of “domestic and regional tourism to Nollywood locations” (Abiola, 2016, p. 209). More generally, it was anticipated that the popularity of Nollywood would become “a major growth driver in the leisure sector,” attracting both “film fans and business travelers fascinated by the growing (...) importance of the Nigerian film industry” (Abiola, 2016, p. 210). In 2014, Nigerian writer Ekenyerengozi Michael Chima, similarly stated that Nollywood had the potential to turn Nigerian tourism – which is currently a relatively small industry facing infrastructure and security issues¹ – into “a billion dollar industry” (*ModernGhana.com*, 2 August 2014).

¹ In 2019, before the global COVID-19 pandemic emerged, “the travel and tourism industry of Nigeria represented 4% of total GDP” and “employment supported by tourism totaled 3.3 million jobs” (Tourism Economics 2021, p. 12). Although figures vary per source, it seems that Nigeria, with over 220 million people by far the most populous African country, attracted around four million domestic and two million international tourists that year. In the years following



However, despite much talk about the *potential* impact of Nollywood on Nigerian and African tourism in recent years, relatively little is known about Nollywood's *actual* impact on film tourism and the existing connections between Nigeria's film and tourism industries more generally. Already over a decade ago, Heitmann (2010) observed that it "is yet to be researched (...) to what extent film tourism in connection to Nollywood in Africa has created" (p. 31)– and to date this is still largely the case. This article, then, seeks to discuss the connections between Nollywood and tourism and to review the efforts and opportunities related to Nollywood film tourism, as reported in the public domain. Based on a content analysis of over fifty newspaper articles and other online available materials, such as websites, blogs and forums, we explore the practices and discourses surrounding Nollywood connections with tourism in Nigeria and across Africa over the past ten years.

Nollywood Studies: Themes and Trends in Studying Nigeria's Film Industry

Due to its unique development and popularity, Nollywood has garnered significant scholarly interest since its inception in the 1990s.² From the early 2010s, the phrase 'Nollywood Studies' started to be used to refer to the growing "body of work and academic field" examining the Nigerian film industry (Haynes, 2012, p. 3). As "a dedicated transdisciplinary research niche" (Oguamanam, 2020, p. 518), Nollywood Studies consists of a "conglomerate [of] research practices" (Makhubu, 2014, pp. 416-417) looking at the Nigerian film industry. While covering a wide variety of issues and perspectives, research in the field of Nollywood Studies has largely focused on the three traditional branches of the film industry: *production*, *distribution*, and *consumption*. In addition, over the years quite a lot of work has been done on the *history* and *content* of Nollywood films.

While most scholars in the field locate the beginnings of Nollywood in the 1990s, and hence evaluate "the evolutionary interface between technology and entrepreneurship" (Oguamanam, 2020, p. 518) from that decade onwards, others have traced the history of Nollywood back to "the older national cinema which came into existence upon Nigeria's independence in 1960" (Akande, 2021, p. 34) and even to cultural practices during the colonial era, in particular "theatrical practices that have long existed among Nigerian peoples" (Akande, 2020, p. 456). Specifically, many have claimed that Nollywood grew out of "the Yorùbá Travelling Theatre tradition, which was at its most prominent between the 1950s and early 1980s" (Akande, 2020, p. 456). In fact, Yorùbá performers, such as Herbert Ogunde, Ade Afoloyan (Ade Love) and

the pandemic, tourism flows have remained below pre-pandemic levels, in part due to the increased deterioration of the security situation throughout the country since 2022 (resulting in many negative travel advices).

² Following Akande (2021, 34) and others, we acknowledge that "the term 'Nollywood' is problematic in its use as a cinema category." Most researchers in the field see Nollywood as "arising from the confluence of economic and technical conditions in Nigeria in the 1990s, and (...) therefore, [as] an outgrowth of the older national cinema which came into existence upon Nigeria's independence in 1960" (Akande 2021, p. 34-35). However, Nollywood at times has come to refer to the (Igbo and Yoruba) cinemas of Southern Nigeria or the English-language Nollywood films only, excluding the cinemas of Northern Nigeria and the majority of the Nigerian-language industries made and consumed in the country. For the propose of this article, we adhere to the most common use of the term, i.e. "the various regional video industries that together make up the Nigerian video economy" (Lobato 2010, p. 337), while at the same time being "careful to register its distinctive usage" (Akande 2021, p. 35).



Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala), were largely responsible for the rise of Nigerian cinema in the years after independence (Azeez, 2019). Turning to celluloid film production in the 1970s, they produced and inspired a string of films featuring Nigerian actors, settings, and themes, including *Kongi's Harvest* (1970), *Thing Fall Apart* (1971), *Amadi* (1975), *Bisi-Daughter of the River* (1977), *Kanta of Kebbi* (1978) and *The Mask* (1979). The growth of the Nigerian film industry more or less came to a halt in the mid-1980s, when the country plunged into a severe recession. The resulting crisis not only “put an end to celluloid film production” but also “closed the cinema houses” in Nigeria (Haynes, 2014, p. 53). However, the crisis did mark the beginning of the production of home video films that came to characterize early Nollywood. Although they never achieved the success of *Living in Bondage* and the home videos that followed in its wake, films like *Orun Mooru* (1982) and *Aare Agbaiye* (1984) did pave the way for the home video model that revolutionized Nigeria’s film industry in the 1990s.

From the onset, Nollywood films have been examined in terms of their content, particularly regarding cultural representation and identity formation. Over the years, textual analyses of Nigerian video films have scrutinized their stories and styles; portrayals of religion and spirituality; representations of gender and women; narratives of ethnicity and nationalism; discourses of youth, class, and disability; images of Africa and the African diaspora; and discourses of tradition and modernity. While the stereotypical representation of Nigerian and African women has traditionally received quite some attention in content studies of Nollywood films, the depiction of modern (metropolitan and transnational) life, either in Nigeria or abroad, seems to be on the rise in light of the increasingly diasporic and global audience of Nollywood movies. In addition, the (potential) connection between the projection of Nigeria in Nollywood films and the country’s nation image has at times been discussed, with that bringing Nollywood film content into the realm of cultural heritage, nation branding, and cultural diplomacy.

Still, although historical and textual analysis has drawn considerable interest among film scholars over the years, the “budding research field” (Ugochukwu, 2013, p. 4) of Nollywood Studies has focused even more so on the political economy of Nigerian filmmaking due to its distinct production, distribution and consumption methods. Being understood as “unabashedly commercial and apolitical, informal, low-budget, and wildly heterogeneous and syncretic” (Garritano, 2016, p. 280), the operational arrangements of the Nollywood industry have been the subject of ongoing scrutiny since its emergence in the 1990s. Following Nigeria’s “home video revolution” (Evuleocha, 2008, p. 407), Nollywood researchers have focused on the technological determinants, funding structures, production practices, and distribution networks of the country’s film industry. Particularly, the industry’s “distinctive informal system of production and distribution” (McCall, 2012, p. 9), which developed without any state support, has received considerable academic attention in Nollywood’s first twenty years, known as “the video boom era” (Ezepue, 2021, p. 2).

From the mid-2000s, Nollywood entered a new era of filmmaking. According to Haynes (2014), around 2010 “the phrase ‘New Nollywood’ began buzzing in Lagos and other places where people talk about Nollywood,” describing the attempt by Nigerian producers and directors “to ‘take Nollywood to the next level’ by making better films with bigger budgets” that are aimed for projection in cinemas “rather than being released ... for home viewing” (p.53). Apart from the return of movie theaters in Nigeria (various multiplex cinemas were built in the country since



2004), this strategy largely depended on “transnational distribution circuits including both African diasporic audiences and international film festivals” (Haynes, 2014, p. 53). While the transition from “an informal industry” to “the New Nollywood phenomenon” (Ernest-Samuel & Uduma, 2019, p. 45) has been studied in various publications, particularly Nollywood’s “Afrocentric transnational and diasporic mediascape” (Jedlowski, 2013, p. 171) has attracted considerable scholarly interest. Here, the development of Nollywood as a “global cinema” (Agba, 2014), enabled by digital technologies and global networks, both alternative and dominant, and nowadays including Netflix, has been scrutinized, as well as, and increasingly, the “transnational consumerism” (Garritano, 2014, p. 48) of Nollywood video films. Being watched “in many African countries, in African Diasporas and in some Caribbean climes” (Edong, 2018, p. 77), the consumption and reception of Nigerian films by various populations of Nollywood’s “vast global audience” (Ebelebe, 2019, p. 466) has been the subject of a number of academic publications. At the same time, the “audience perception of Nollywood films in Nigeria” (Agba & Inej, 2011, p. 259), where homegrown films have remained hugely popular to this day, has also been studied, including how watching Nollywood films (potentially) influences behaviour change and national security.

In recent years, the connections between Nollywood and tourism have been discussed, or at least mentioned, in several academic publications. However, while there is said to be “evidence of Nollywood’s impact on local tourism” (Abiola, 2016, p. 209), most of these publications highlight the *potential* impact of Nollywood on Nigerian and African tourism, that is, the opportunities of Nigerian films to motivate travel to the country and the continent, “thus *possibly* stimulating indirectly indigenous and foreign tourism” in the future (Chowdhury et al., 2008, p. 24, emphasis added). In other words, these publications tend to bring forward predictions and forecasts of Nollywood’s impact on tourism, and provide insights and advice on how to develop what could eventually become “Nollywood tourism” (Kim & Reijnders, 2018, p. 3). For example, Iwuh (2015, p. 28) discusses the tourism potential of the Nigerian film industry, arguing that Nollywood “contributes to cultural exports and arrivals in various ways.” According to Iwuh (2015, pp. 28-29), “Nollywood films have traversed the world” and are, in turn, inspiring people from these parts of the world to visit Nigeria and particularly “the sites where these products are created.” Similarly, Oguntoyoyinbo and Adesemoye (2019) argue that Nollywood films “should be utilised as a tool for popular movement in promoting tourism,” (p. 156), thereby recommending “the need for a synergy between the Nigerian film industry and the tourism industry.” (p. 164). However, like most others, they mainly point to the “yawning opportunities” (Iwuh, 2015, p. 37) and “gross prospects” (Oguntoyoyinbo & Adesemoye, 2019, p. 164) for Nollywood tourism, while the already existing or attempted connections between Nigeria’s film and tourism industries, either spontaneous and incidental or intentional and structural in nature, remain largely out of the picture. This article, then, offers an exploration of these connections as they were made in the past decade of New Nollywood and shows how practices and discourses of Nollywood film (and) tourism have been increasingly presented in Nigerian (and international) newspapers and magazines throughout this period.



The Emerging Discourse on Nollywood Film (and) Tourism in the Early 2010s

The idea that Nollywood could promote Nigerian tourism seems to enter popular discourse in the early 2010s. As early as 2012, two industry reports resulting from the World Travel Market appear to have particularly put forth the potential of the Nigerian film industry in positioning Nigeria as “an emerging destination in Africa for tourism” (*Daily Trust*, 24 November 2012) on the country’s public agenda. According to the first report, the *Global Trends Report* (2012), Nollywood was poised to boost intra-regional tourism in Africa, which was subsequently reprinted in various newspapers in Nigeria and across the African continent. According to the report, arrivals to Nigeria were expected to increase by 3% in the coming years, and this was in part attributed to the success of Nigerian films abroad, particularly in African countries: “The popularity of Nollywood will be a major growth driver with the leisure sector, attracting [both] film fans and business travel” (*How We Made It In Africa*, 4 December 2012). In fact, the report already signaled “a boom in hotel openings in Lagos as well as hotel expansion plans in the country” in the year 2012 due to “increasing tourism flows”, which were linked to the many film productions shot in Lagos, “the heart of Nollywood”, as well as to the several film villages that were being developed across the country (*HWMIIA*, 4 December 2012). According to the *Global Trends Report*, emerging film villages such as the Abuja Film Village, Plateau Film City and Lagos Film City were not only aimed to stimulate Nigeria’s film industry by “providing modern film, TV and audio production facilities”, but also to “encourage tourists to visit” the country (*HWMIIA*, 4 december 2012).

The their second report, the *Industry Report* (2012), the World Travel Market similarly stated that Nollywood was to make Nigeria “the highlight of the African tourist industry with Africans (...) visit[ing] the country made famous in the movies” (*Daily Trust*, 24 November 2012). Although most Nollywood films did not feature tourism settings and themes, but rather aspects of daily and religious life, the report stated that Nollywood could contribute to building the country’s “market for pilgrimage and religious tourism” (*DT*, 24 November 2012). Two Nollywood films from the late 2000s that did reportedly include Nigerian tourism sites were *White Waters* (2007) and *The Figurine: Araromire* (2009), both displaying waterfalls (*Trip & Tours*, 25 May 2013). While it was stressed that Nollywood filmmakers usually did not capitalize on this aspect, and instead mainly used “people’s homes” and “eat, clothes and accessories stores,” it was argued that these two films successfully captured “the beauty of waterfalls” and as such created “the much desired tourism effect” (*T&T*, 25 May 2013). The article ended with the call for Nollywood producers to “take advantage of various tourism spots to shoot their movies”, to partner with government officials to “promote tourism sites within their jurisdiction,” and to unlock “the untapped power of film tourism” (*T&T*, 25 May 2013). Interestingly, not much later, it was reported that the Association of Nollywood Core Producers had pledged to use more tourism sites as film locations. According to Nollywood actor Emeka Ike, the association wanted to “create awareness about the enormous tourism potentials in the country” (*BizWatch Nigeria*, 27 September 2013). Ike continued that showcasing Nigeria’s “rich tourism resources” in Nollywood films would arouse “the interest of both local and foreign tourists” (*BWN*, 27 September 2013). This way, Nollywood would be able to confirm its assumed status as the “leading promotor of Nigeria[n] tourism” (*Vanguard News*, 16 November 2012).



A prominent case in point used at that time was *Streets of Calabar* (2012), an early New Nollywood film that was “produced on a significantly higher budget and took months to shoot” (*Nigeria A-Z.com*, 18 September 2012). This acclaimed comedy thriller featured various “tourist magnets” in Nigeria as well as images of a safe nation due to “its portrayal of strong local law enforcement” (*Chanters Lodge Livingstone Blog*, 23 February 2013). According to Paz Casal, at the time travel and tourism analyst at Euromonitor, *Streets of Calabar* portrayed Nigeria as “a good tourism destination (...) with adequate security” (*CLLB*, 23 February 2013). The film, which was supported by the Cross Rivers State government, was by some considered a “signature for change” in terms of the obvious promotion of Nigerian tourism and the explicit collaboration between the country’s film and tourism industries (*CLLB*, 23 February 2013). Others, however, argued that Nollywood films like *Streets of Calabar* would not increase tourism as long as Nigeria’s public safety would remain a critical issue. According to Peter Tarlow, a specialist in tourism risk management, for tourism to “really grow, you need political security, political security and physical security” – “just filming a film is not going to bring people to Nigeria,” first “get your safety under control” (*CLLB*, 23 February 2013).

In 2014, Ekenyerengo Michael Chima, editor and publisher of the Nollywood Mirror Series, reinforced the call for Nigerian filmmakers to use “exotic tourist attractions in Nigeria for their film locations” (*Modern Ghana*, 2 August 2014). According to Chima, Nollywood should follow Hollywood and Bollywood in using film as “a vehicle for the promotion and appreciation of Nigerian tourism” (*MG*, 2 August 2014). While there “may not be any big film studio” and “no awesome movie sets” in the country, he argued that “the entire Nigeria,” with all its tourist attractions, should be considered “the location of Nollywood” (*MG*, 2 August 2014). More concretely, Chima advised the Nigerian Film Corporation and Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation to synergize with Nollywood filmmakers to “produce movies that will boost the Nigerian film industry and tourism” (*MG*, 2 August 2014).³ In the days after the publication of Chima’s article, the question of Nollywood as a tourism promotion tool was widely discussed on *Nairaland Forum*. Various participants in the discussion challenged the idea that Nollywood would be able to advance Nigerian tourism, thereby stressing the film industry’s quality and piracy issues as well as the lack of tourism infrastructure, organised cities, and safety and security provisions in the country. A few years later, PricewaterhouseCoopers, in their *Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2017–2021* (2017), more or less identified the same challenges on the side of the film industry, notably the level of professional and creative capacity, the lack of formal distribution channels, copyright infringements, and piracy.

Within the Nollywood film industry, the capacity, distribution, and piracy issues were increasingly being acknowledged and addressed, this time with the help of the Nigerian government. In the early 2010s, when Nigeria allegedly “became Africa’s largest economy”, several state-supported efforts were undertaken “to combat piracy and to improve the legitimacy of the film industry” (*The Worldfolio*, 19 March 2015). In 2011, then President, Goodluck Jonathan, “pledged a \$200 million government loan for the film industry” to help “distributors to

³ Two years later, Adeniyi Ogunfowoke gave similar advice on how Nollywood could promote Nigerian tourism. Apart from the familiar recommendation to have Nollywood films shot at tourist sites, Ogunfowoke shared three other ideas on “how Nollywood can promote the hospitality industry,” i.e. write scripts that portray the “culture, unity, and diversity of Nigerians,” have Nollywood stars become “tourism ambassadors”, and showcase “Nigeria’s food and dress culture” (*Business Post*, 8 October 2016).



establish new legitimate distribution channels” (TW, 19 March 2015). In addition, the government invested millions in training to enhance “the quality of scripts, acting and other technical aspects of Nigerian film”, foster “a more business-oriented approach among filmmakers,” and “improve IP awareness within the film industry” (TW, 19 March 2015).⁴ At the same time, the early 2010s witnessed the rise of various “legal online streaming sites” (TW, 19 March 2015) specializing in African content, such as iROKOtv, iBAKA.tv and Pana TV. These and other streaming services were reportedly supported by the “proliferation of the internet in Africa” and “growing popularity of Nollywood movies” across the continent and the rest of the world, and stimulated the making of higher budget, higher quality, and higher profit Nollywood productions (TW, 19 March 2015). However, since the majority of Nollywood movies in the 2010s still went “straight to DVD”, the “illegal distribution of DVDs” remained rampant as well, with pirates “selling boot leg copies for a fraction of retail price[s],” often “within hours of a film’s release” (TW, 19 March 2015).⁵ It was believed that, until a serious “crackdown” by means of regulation and IP laws was initiated by the government, pirates would continue “to thrive and to take the lion’s share of [the] profits” within the Nollywood film industry (TW, 19 March 2015).

The Call to Government Intervention in Nollywood Film and Tourism in the Late 2010s

With the growing production of high-concept and star-led blockbusters for international theatrical or streaming release, in the late 2010s the idea of viewing Nollywood films as tourism promotion tools became increasingly widespread among government, both inside and outside Nigeria. In 2017, allegedly for the first time, the Nigerian government entered into a partnership to “promote tourism in the country through the Nollywood industry” (*The Defender*, 4 May 2017). Apart from the government, the “tripartite partnership” involved the UNWTO and CNN and was intended to exploit the country’s “competitive advantage in film production, through Nollywood, to promote tourism in Nigeria,” as Alhaji Mohammed, Nigeria’s Minister of Information and Culture, announced (TD, 4 May 2017). Although the Nigerian government had supported Nollywood before, boosting the film industry for tourism promotion purposes was, according to Mohammed, “a path we have not trodden before” (TD, 4 May 2017). Two years later, Otunba Segun Runsewe, Director-General of Nigeria’s National Council for Arts and Culture, similarly stressed the need to use Nollywood as a vehicle to promote Nigeria’s cultural heritage to attract tourists. He called on Nollywood filmmakers “to use their works in showcasing Nigeria’s rich cultural tourism” (*Independent*, 11 September 2019).

Around the same time, other governments also took notice of Nollywood’s tourism potential as well. In 2017, the Nollywood romantic action comedy *10 Days in Sun City* (2017) not only became the “highest-earning film in Nigeria” that year so far, but also marked “the official

⁴ In addition, in 2012, the Lagos State Government launched the so-called Nollywood Upgrade Project, which was aimed to “improve the production quality and formal distribution of movies” (*The Worldfolio*, 19 March 2015).

⁵ Although investors “spotted an opportunity in producing big-budget blockbusters” following the “growing popularity of Nigerian movies across Africa and throughout the world”, by the mid-2010s most of the Nollywood films were still being “made in as little as 10 days on shoestring budgets of between \$25,000 to \$70,000” (*The Worldfolio*, 19 March 2015).



partnership between South African Tourism and the Nigerian film industry” (*Eyewitness News*, 25 August 2017). Shot on location in and around Lagos and Johannesburg, and specifically at Sun City, a luxury holiday resort in South Africa, the country’s state tourism agency celebrated the Nigerian production as “a shining example of how entertainment and tourism can converge” (*The African Courier*, 21 August 2017). The CEO of South African Tourism, Sisa Ntshona, was “thrilled” that so many of the country’s tourism attractions had “a prime starring role” in the film (*EN*, 25 August 2017). Apart from the fact that *10 Days in Sun City* was being watched all over Nigeria, “one of South Africa’s most important tourist source markets in Africa,” the film was released in “20 cinemas across South Africa” (*EN*, 25 August 2017) and was “slated for distribution” in various countries across Africa, Europe, and North America (*TAC*, 21 August 2017). Such worldwide distribution could, it was believed, potentially stimulate South Africa’s domestic, intra-regional and international tourism. According to Ntshona, the partnership between the Nigerian blockbuster and South Africa Tourism spoke to “the core functions and priorities set by the two countries in future collaborations” in film (*EN*, 25 August 2017).

In a similar vein, Dubai’s Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing (DTCM) entered into a partnership with Nollywood production company EbonyLife to support their new comedy dramas *Wedding Party* (2016) and *Chief Daddy* (2018). Apart from being in line with DTCM’s “mission to help boost the Nigerian film industry,” the agency’s sponsorship was intended to showcase “the beauty of Dubai to Nigerians as one of the leading visitors to the magnificent city in the United Arab Emirates” (*This Day Live*, 23 December 2018). While *Wedding Party* and *Chief Daddy* were both set in Nigeria, their sequels, *Wedding Party 2: Destination Dubai* (2017) and *Chief Daddy 2: Going for Broke* (2018), which were also supported by Dubai Tourism, were both partly shot at “glamorous locations” in UAE’s biggest city (*The Nation Online*, 5 December 2018). The promotion of Dubai tourism through Nollywood films continued with *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* (2020), one of Nigeria’s highest grossing movie of 2020, which became the first Nollywood film to receive a theatrical release in the United Arab Emirates. While being largely set in Lagos, the film contained “a few scenes shot in Dubai” and was therefore deemed to be of “high quality and interest to UAE film distributor Gulf Film” (*The National News*, 21 January 2021).

Not only Nollywood locations, but also Nollywood stars increasingly came to be seen as tourist motivators in the late 2010s. Already in 2013, Penny Biram, a spokeswoman of Nigerian hotel company, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, predicted that Nollywood movie stars would become “another attraction for tourism in the region” (*Chanters Lodge Livingstone Blog*, 23 February 2013). One year later, then President Jonathan even described Nollywood’s actors and actresses as “the greatest ambassadors of Nigeria” (*All Africa*, 24 December 2014). While these statements were made with the idea that tourists from other African countries and beyond would come to visit Nigeria because of their appreciation of Nollywood stars, Nigerian actors and actresses also started to tour abroad to promote their films and having film fans travel to these locations. For example, in 2019, Nollywood film studio, ROK Studio, took “a grand tour across Southern Africa” where “superfans in key locations across South Africa and Zambia” could connect with “their favourite Nollywood stars,” before “proceeding to West African cities” (*Glitz Africa*, 21 May 2019). The so-called ROK ME Tour was joined by various “top stars” from the Nollywood television series *Festac Town* (2014-present), *Husbands in Lagos* (2015-2017) and *Single Ladies* (2017-present), who visited several cities in southern and western Africa to connect with



“Nollywood lovers via exclusive Meet and Greet events and VIP dinners” (GA, 21 May 2019). While the fans who came to see them could be seen as film tourists, the Nollywood stars also became tourists in their own right, experiencing “some of the best tourist destinations in each city” (GA, 21 May 2019). Nollywood had, at least to a certain extent, become a tourist attraction within Nigeria and across Africa, with Nollywood films and stars being increasingly recognized and called upon by industry and government for their potential to encourage “intra-African tourism” (GA, 21 May 2019).

In 2020, like in most countries around the world, the film and tourism industries in Nigeria were brought to an abrupt halt by the COVID-19 pandemic. Arguably in combination with the rise of “online streaming giant” Netflix, Nollywood entered a “deep-set demise” as a result of the measures introduced to contain the spread of the virus (*Curiosity Shots*, 11 November 2020). Still, despite the nationwide lockdown, behind the scenes the collaboration between Nollywood and tourism remained sought after by the Nigerian government. For example, in June 2020, the Lagos State Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture sought to engage “some key Nollywood personalities” to see how the film industry could work together with the state government to portray “Lagos and Nigeria in a positive light” (*The Culture Newspaper*, 29 June 2020). Uzamat Akinbile-Yusuf, at the time Nigeria’s commissioner for Tourism, Arts and Culture, once again urged Nollywood practitioners to be “deliberate in filmmaking” by having “the strength, values and the resilience of Nigerians” reflected in their films (*TCN*, 29 June 2020). In addition, several directions were proposed to institutionalize Nollywood with the aim to advance the film industry in the post-COVID-19 era. First, Akinbile-Yusuf revealed advanced plans of the Lagos state government to “establish a film village to assuage the challenges faced by the filmmakers during film production” (*TCN*, 29 June 2020). In fact, the commissioner disclosed that “100 hectares of land” were already “earmarked and secured for the village” in Lagos State (*TCN*, 29 June 2020). Second, Bolajo Amusan, President of the Theatre Arts and Motion Pictures Practitioners Association of Nigeria, urged state governments to “revive community cinemas” as a way of “rekindling the interest of residents” and generating “revenue for the government” (*TCN*, 29 June 2020).

One month later, various Nigerian tourism stakeholders called on Nollywood to “showcase Nigeria’s tourists’ sites in movies to attract visitors and grow the [tourism] industry” (*Independent Newspaper Nigeria*, 19 July 2020). According to them, Nollywood had “all it takes to project Nigeria’s cultural heritage and tourism potential beyond the shores of the nation” (*INN*, 19 July 2020). Apart from projecting Nigeria’s tourism sites in Nollywood films, Ngozi Ngoka, Founder of the Tourism Consultant Forum, advised tourism operators to engage renowned Nollywood actors as “influencers to visit tourism sites within the country” (*INN*, 19 July 2020). At the same time, the view was expressed that the Nigerian government needed to “render some level of support” by upgrading the tourism infrastructure, such as “the road network to each site” (*INN*, 19 July 2020). Not much later, Goge Africa, a Nigerian-based, pan-African tourism and cultural TV show “with over a 40 million viewers” (*The Nation Online*, 13 June 2022), brought together tourism stakeholders, Nollywood filmmakers, and government representatives to discuss film as “a vantage point for promoting tourism” (*Goge Africa*, 12 August 2020). Fidelis Ducker, former President of the Directors Guild of Nigeria, argued that Nollywood had indirectly been promoting tourism through featuring “key monuments in films,” but that government intervention was needed to “effectively boost tourism traffic” through



Nollywood (GA, 12 August 2020). According to Ducker, the Nigerian government could, for example, provide subsidies for films featuring tourism destinations, infrastructures to get to these destinations, and legislation making it easier to film on locations that are considered a security risk. These collaborative efforts, according to Rollas, would steer “tourism through films” to “a new phase” (GA, 12 August 2020).

Concluding Remarks: Nigeria’s Unstable Nexus of Film and Tourism

By the early 2020s, most of the recommended government interventions to establish “the nexus between film and tourism” in Nigeria (GA, 12 August 2020) have not (yet) get off the ground. For example, to date, none of the planned film villages across the country, which were to be public-private partnerships, reached full completion.⁶ However, the Lagos State Government (LASG) did recently sign an agreement with Del-York International Group and its US partner Storyland Studios for an “ultra-modern film city in the heart of Lagos” (*News Agency of Nigeria*, 26 October 2022), with the construction of the “\$100m African Film City” being slated for October 2023 (*Vanguard*, October 14, 2023). The film village, which has been named Kebulania, is designed as a 100 hectare “fully-resourced entertainment industry campus and film lot” in the Epe area of Lagos where filmmakers and other industry personnel “can live and work” (*Bloolooop*, 20 October 2022). Upon completion, which will not be before the late 2020s, Kebulania would become the “first-of-its-kind studio city on the African continent”, set to “revolutionise the Nigerian film industry” and further establish the country as “a leading destination for filmmaking and creativity throughout all of Africa” (*Bloolooop*, 20 October 2022). Notably, apart from being an “all-in-one facility” with “multiple sound studios, backlot sets, water tanks, workshops, and production offices,” the film village will also have a tourist district in a “theme park setting” featuring “rides, tourist attractions, movie museums, and a walk of fame” (*Punch*, 26 December 2021). Aiming for “5,000 to 10,000 daily visitors”, Kebulania is predicted to generate significant tourism revenue for Nigeria and, according to Matt Ferguson from Storyland Studios, to become “one of the most popular tourist destinations in Africa” (*Bloolooop*, 20 October 2022). While the realization of the film village remains uncertain, with its construction having already faced multiple delays, it does seem to indicate a growing political will of the Nigerian government, or at least the Lagos State Government, to support the film and tourism industries.

Still, most of the sporadic film tourism initiatives in Nigeria seem to emerge without state support. For example, Nollywood filmmaker Kunle Afolayan has nearly completed the Kunle

⁶ The Abuja Film Village, a public-private partnership with Abuja’s Federal Capital Territory Administration, has not witnessed significant development since its announcement in 2012. The film village was envisioned as a 50000-hectare one-stop shop for film production featuring, among other things, “a studio for film and television” and “university for film, television and radio” (*Oxford Business Group*, 13 June 2012). However, at present the village is still at the planning stages with the owners seeking investors to take up construction. Similarly, the Plateau Film City, a 100-hectare film village planned in the Miango district of Plateau State featuring “film production facilities, upmarket hotels, residential estates and leisure facilities”, would be facilitated by the Nigeria Film Corporation and the Plateau State Government, but seemingly never moved beyond the “under development” stage (*OBG*, 13 June 2012). In addition, the Lagos Film City, a 100-hectare project located in Lagos’ Epe area at Ejirin City, did not materialize in the remainder of the 2010s and first years of the 2020s.



Afolayan Production (KAP) Film Village Studio and Resort. The objective of this private film village in South West Nigeria is to provide professional support to the Nigerian film industry as well as encouraging tourism, since the facility doubles as a hotel resort. In early 2023, Afolayan stated that KAP Film Village and Resort had attained the two-thirds completion mark – and his latest film, *Anikulapo* (2022), was already entirely shot at the film village. Then, in 2022, Nollywood star and talkshow host Monalisa Chinda-Coker announced “a deal to boost tourism in West Africa” (*The Nation Online*, 13 June 2022). According to Chinda-Coker, her popular TV show *You and I with Monalisa* had partnered with Goge Africa and others to visit tourist attractions in Nigeria and across West Africa “to shine the light on destinations” and “revamp and revitalise tourism” there (*TNO*, 13 June 2022). Finally, in 2023, TripAdvisor, for the first time, made mention of a Nollywood film tour in Lagos. The 2-day tour, called ‘Explore Nigeria’s Nollywood Industry’, reportedly consists of visits to Nollywood film locations, theatres and villages as well as the Idumota Film Market, traditionally one of the major distribution hubs for Nollywood home videos. Although the tour has not received any reviews on TripAdvisor yet, according to the description it affords participants “the opportunity to have a one-on-one and direct assessment of the Nollywood industry”, including a meet-and-greet session with Nollywood filmmakers.

In the past decade and into the 2020s, the idea of using Nollywood as a tool to boost tourism has gained traction in Nigeria’s public domain. From the early 2010s onwards, the potential role of Nollywood in positioning and promoting Nigeria and Africa as a tourist destination has become increasingly commonplace in the country’s news and political discourse. Since most Nollywood films did not focus on tourism settings, Nollywood filmmakers were called upon to utilize tourism spots as film locations. In addition, there have been calls for Nollywood celebrities to become tourism ambassadors and endorse Nigeria’s natural and cultural tourist attractions in their productions and promotions. To-be-built film villages across the country were expected to become tourist attractions in themselves. However, despite these high expectations, which form part of a wider celebratory discourse of the creative industries worldwide (Martens 2023), film tourism related to Nollywood seems to have remained limited. Despite growing government attention and support to Nollywood and its potential for tourism, most state initiatives in this direction did not (yet) materialize. In fact, it seems that other countries, such as South Africa and Dubai, have seized upon more opportunities for collaboration with Nollywood films and stars to attract Nigerian and other African visitors to their destinations.

Within Nigeria, both the film and tourism industries continue to face various challenges that hinder the development of Nollywood tourism. While the Nigerian film industry still suffers from quality and piracy issues, the country’s tourism industry has to deal with so many challenges – notably a lack of tourism infrastructure and security issues – that the promotion of film locations and the creation of film villages alone do not seem to be able to establish Nigeria as a major tourist destination. The current plan of the Kebulania film village sounds promising for the country’s film and tourism industries, but it has to be seen to what extent ‘Destination Nollywood’ is really able to come to fruition as long as the structural issues underlying the development of Nigerian film (and) tourism are not sufficiently addressed.

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