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Patrick Oloko (Lagos / Mainz)

## Enter the Nolly Narrative: Nollywood Culture and Screen Aesthetics in the Emergent Nigerian Novel

Nollywood, the Nigerian home-video film genre that evolved in the 1990s, did not just activate a massive national thirst for cheap visual entertainment; it also heralded many of the new expressions of popular culture that are prevalent in the country today. But an era of the 'big screen' has now emerged and is slowly consolidating. Along with the emergence is the inauguration of what is now being described as the 'New Nollywood', which means upgrading content to suit the needs of a new type of sophisticated 'Netflix' audiences for whom the curios of pristine Nollywood would be a drag. As a result, the lustre of Nollywood as a social event and family entertainment session is understandably waning. However, its approach of softening the story for inclusive consumption and the strong point it made as a significant alterity in a visual world dominated by western films have been well noted. Pristine Nollywood and Nigerian print culture are connected by similar conditions of a glorious past and an uncertain future. On one hand, the emergence of Nollywood significantly buffeted the reading culture in Nigeria and occasioned a decline in the consumption of literature as leisure and entertainment. On the other, rehabilitating literature, especially the novel, seems now to depend on reformatting narratives and storytelling in a tabloid form bequeathed by a declining Nollywood. My thesis is that, if writing was severely constrained in expressing entertainment the way that a majority of consumers wanted it expressed, then writers are constrained by the requirements of survival to reference a popular cultural model in their aesthetic formats in their productions. In the presentation, I argue that pristine Nollywood is seeping into print culture and what seems to be its evolving afterlife is evident in the elaborate visual literality of the 'Nolly Novel'. I define this emerging genre as a cinematographic structure characterised by a patchwork of gripping incidents, predictable twists in plots, fast-paced narration and inexhaustible dramatics that, in the manner of Nollywood films, invite readers to a sequel. While these and other curiosities may challenge our sense of 'appropriate' technical handling of the novel, they no doubt reflect the emergence of the Nollywood moment in literary production. They show how a well-received screen tradition is repurposing print culture to (re)convene a public of the hue attracted to Nollywood video films. Using a selection of novels by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Wale Okediran, Joseph Edoki, Ebi Akpeti and others, I will show how writers are appropriating the cultural prowess of Nollywood to reimagine and plan their narratives. I argue that while these writers build on the old synergy of adaption between literature and film, they are reversing the one directional framework of cooperation by initiating a new procedure whereby the screen, rather than print, is the resource base or infrastructure for co-production of content.

**Patrick Oloko** is an Associate Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies in the Department of English, University of Lagos. His main research interest is African Postcolonial literature. He is the editor of *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Issues & Perspectives* (2008), *In Theory and In Practice: Engaging the Writings of Hope Eghagha* (2015), *Peju Layiwola's Indigo Reimagined: Rethinking Adire in Yoruba Fashion and Textile Modernity* (2021) among other essays published as book chapters and journal articles. He is the recipient or co-recipient of several research grants.

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**Wo?** HS 13

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