

Paul Ugor, *Nollywood: popular culture and narratives of youth struggles in Nigeria*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press (pb US\$29 – 978 1 61163 777 9). 2016, 188 pp.

Paul Ugor's book is an important contribution to the ever-expanding field of Nollywood studies, which only in 2016 witnessed the publication of two other monographs, Jonathan Haynes's *Nollywood: the creation of Nigerian film genres* (Chicago University Press) and Jade Miller's *Nollywood Central* (BFI/Palgrave Macmillan). While these recent works adopt a historical approach and discuss the development and recent transformations of the Nigerian video film industry in terms of its aesthetics (Haynes) and economics (Miller), Ugor opts for a thematic approach. *Nollywood: popular culture and narratives of youth struggles in Nigeria* takes Nigerian video films as cultural texts produced and consumed by the Nigerian youth, and therefore as documents that can generate deeper understandings of the social and political challenges facing the youth today, in Nigeria and elsewhere in the continent. In developing his analysis, Ugor selects a small number of films and dedicates a chapter to each of them, mobilizing a large and interdisciplinary spectrum of references to explore specific issues such as unemployment, the consequences of accelerated urbanization and gentrification processes, the transformation in the dynamics of class formation in Nigeria, the tensions between migration, politics and changing conceptions of citizenship, and the spread of religious and political violence in sub-Saharan Africa. The choice of the films is relevant and original, as it mixes classic Nollywood films that have already been the focus of significant scholarly analyses, such as *Living in Bondage* (1992), *Glamour Girls I* and *II* (1994 and 1996) and *Issakaba I–IV* (2001–01), and less well known, more recent films such as *Face of Africa I–III* (2005–06) and *Maroko* (2006).

I was particularly pleased by Ugor's decision to include an analysis of Femi Odugbemi's *Maroko*. This important film was made by an influential filmmaker in Nollywood who has not yet received the attention he deserves. In this sense, Ugor's book is an important attempt to bring the discussion on authorship in Nollywood beyond what seems to be an endemic focus on the work of iconic figures such as Tunde Kelani and Kunle Afolayan. The chapter on Odugbemi's work enables Ugor to underline and discuss the complex intermixing between documentary and fiction formats characterizing many Nollywood films, something that *Maroko* does in a particularly conscious way, with the clear intention of drawing the audience's attention to a variety of controversial social and political issues. This aspect is important because it highlights the aesthetic and narrative elements that contributed to the emergence of one of the most interesting new trends in Nigerian cinema: independent documentary film production. This phenomenon is largely the result of the influence of Femi Odugbemi's work and of the impact that the documentary film festival iREP (directed by Odugbemi himself) has had on a new generation of Nigerian filmmakers.

In analysing the selected five films, Ugor engages with academic debates grounded mainly in Western case studies. This choice is made in an attempt at 'de-provincializing' the Nigerian empirical materials by placing them in dialogue with evidence and concepts drawn from different realities. In my view, this approach is highly commendable as it repositions Nigeria and Africa within the landscape of contemporary film studies and sociological theory, the importance of which has been underlined by Jean and John Comaroff and Achille Mbembe, among others, over the past few years. But this approach also has the unintended effect of disconnecting Ugor's analysis from specific local political and intellectual histories, a limitation accentuated by the fact that the author

does not provide a precise timeframe for his analysis or for his use of the term ‘youth’ in relation to Nigerian popular culture production and consumption. As a result, what emerges is a relatively static picture of Nollywood that does not provide analytical insight into the conflicts between different generations of Nigerian producers and directors, or into the varying significance of Nollywood films for different generations of African audiences.

If most analysts of the Nollywood phenomenon would agree that the industry has been created by the entrepreneurial sagacity of youths in their attempt to survive the dire conditions of post-structural adjustment in Nigeria, many would equally want to know what happened to those young people and to their capacity for expressing the dreams, fears and desires of different generations of Nigerians as they grew out of their ‘youth’. Today, many young Nigerian filmmakers perceive the industry’s pioneers as people who (often unsuccessfully) use their power to keep newcomers out of the industry. The ‘older’ generation, for its part, see the ‘youths’ as usurpers attempting to push them out of the business. To make sense of these dynamics and the ongoing power struggle, in the best tradition of Nollywood, Ugor’s analysis would need a ‘Part Two’.

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Richard Fardon and Sènga la Rouge, *Learning from the Curse: Sembène’s Xala*. London: Hurst (hb £17.99 – 978 1 8490 4695 4). 2017, 133 pp.

Ousmane Sembène, the so-called ‘father of African cinema’, was suspicious of ethnography. He famously told Jean Rouch in 1965: ‘What I hold against you and the Africanists is that you look at us as if we were insects.’ Richard Fardon has written a new book on this artist’s classic film and novella *Xala* (1973–74), sharing with the public his long experience of teaching the film as an anthropologist (and an admitted non-specialist). That is to say, Fardon reads Sembène’s ‘socially aware fictions’ as ethnographic accounts (p. 17). As though mindful of the danger of falling into an ‘insect-gazing’ style, the book is written in a fresh, personal tone, and accompanied by sumptuous red and black drawings by Sènga la Rouge. It seeks to be a fun, experimental homage to an important monument of Senegalese and African cultural production.

Divided into ten chapters plus a list of characters, this book essentially consists of a comparative close reading of the novella and film versions of *Xala*. Its opening and closing mirror the narrative’s beginning and ending sequences. A final ‘last word’ situates *Xala* in relation to certain other moments of Sembène’s oeuvre. The primary difference between the two versions, according to Fardon, is that the novella is more concerned with private relationships, while the film emphasizes the symbolism of these family relations at the level of state politics and economy (pp. 39–40). Recurring themes include reproduction (both sexual and economic), commodification of people and things, and the moral challenge posed by symbolic pollution. Fardon’s anthropological emphasis privileges themes such as ‘kinship’ and ‘kleptocracy’, classic issues in the social sciences, at the occasional risk of obscuring the artistic dimensions of Sembène’s work. Nevertheless, the analysis is generally compelling. The reader can only be grateful for Fardon’s discussion of what he calls the ‘neo-colonial haircut’ (pp. 30–2) and his zooming in on the use of a face-down Yoruba mask in the film (pp. 84–5).