

# Pleasures of the Nollywood Familiar and Everyday Life

Moradewun Adejunmobi 

**Abstract:** Sequels, spinoffs, serials, and other kinds of generic works are prevalent in Nollywood filmmaking and popular with fans. These spinoffs and other generic works are characterized by a degree of familiarity, made evident in their repetitive and or affiliative dimensions. According to Adejunmobi, familiarity as a mode of media engagement in Nollywood generates specific pleasures connected to the repetitive dimensions of the films and television shows. These highly repetitive works also sustain a type of leisure activity for viewers without dedicated leisure time who combine Nollywood viewing with everyday work. This form of leisure is identified as a leisure of concomitance.

**Résumé :** Les suites, les spin-offs, les séries et autres œuvres génériques sont répandus dans le cinéma de Nollywood et populaires auprès des supporters. Ces spin-offs et autres œuvres génériques se caractérisent par une familiarité, mise en évidence dans leurs dimensions répétitives et affiliées. Selon Adejunmobi, la compréhension en tant que mode d'engagement médiatique à Nollywood génère des plaisirs spécifiques liés aux dimensions redondantes des films et des émissions de télévision. Ces œuvres très répétitives soutiennent également une activité de loisir pour les téléspectateurs qui combinent le visionnage de Nollywood avec le travail quotidien sans temps de loisir dédié. Ce type de loisir est identifiée comme un loisir de concomitance.

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**Resumo :** As sequelas, os *spinoffs*, as telenovelas e outros tipos de produções genéricas são as mais frequentes na indústria cinematográfica de Nollywood e as mais populares entre os fãs. Estes *spinoffs* e outras produções genéricas caracterizam-se por uma certa dose de familiaridade, que se torna evidente nas suas dimensões repetitivas e/ou de afiliação. Segundo Adejunmobi, a familiaridade enquanto modo de envolvimento mediático em Nollywood gera prazeres de tipo específico relacionados com as dimensões repetitivas das séries televisivas e dos filmes. Estas produções altamente repetitivas proporcionam também m determinado tipo de atividade de entretenimento aos espectadores que não dispõem de tempo livre de qualidade e que conjugam o visionamento das produções de Nollywood com o trabalho quotidiano. Esta forma de entretenimento é identificada como um entretenimento de concomitância.

**Keywords:** Nollywood; everyday life; leisure; pleasure; familiarity

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This article considers the intersections of pleasure, leisure, and everyday life in a specific African context; it aims to contribute to a growing body of work about everyday life in Africa, as well as about pleasure and leisure in African settings.<sup>1</sup> Unlike some other recent research on audiovisual media in Africa, this is not a study of cinema, which is typically watched outside the home and away from work.<sup>2</sup> Nor does it present an analysis of the specific visual elements in audiovisual media that might engender pleasure in the viewer. Rather, it is an examination of the nexus between work, leisure, pleasure, and everyday life. Situating a study of pleasure in Africa alongside current discussions of everyday life on the continent is likely to be especially productive, given the kinds of opportunities and constraints associated with the everyday. Drawing upon the work of David Hecht and Maliqalim Simone, Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome propose that everyday Africa is where “conflicting knowledges and desires can be found” (2014:14). Similarly, for Wale Adebaniwi, “the political economy of everyday life is about a system of adaptation and circumvention through which life, despite the odds, is lived” (2017:5). I take as a point of departure here an understanding that such systems of “adaptation and circumvention” will necessarily provide many openings for experiencing pleasure. In exploring the notion of pleasure in everyday Africa, the following questions are of particular interest: How are expressive works situated in relation to, or apart from, everyday life? How do African subjects find and experience pleasure in relation to everyday life, but also apart from it? What are the different ways in which cultural forms and expressive works are configured in order to elicit pleasure within the context of the everyday? These questions have a scope of application beyond specific African contexts and are not just a matter of asserting that Africans are able to find pleasure under the conditions that scholars associate with “bare life.” They enable us to explore how

the everyday is lived and experienced and the place of the expressive work within everyday life.

If we start with the assumption that routine is one of many dimensions of everyday life, how might we position pleasure with respect to routine?<sup>3</sup> Do we find pleasure in escaping from routine, or in accommodating the routines of everyday life? As illustration for how we might begin to address questions of this kind, I look to one among many possible instances of African popular culture, namely, Nigerian popular films and television, often known as Nollywood. Although depictions of everyday life and pleasure in expressive forms such as Nollywood films represent an immediately relevant subject of investigation for the questions listed above, a consideration of everyday life, pleasure, and cultural forms involves more than a study of the representations of everyday life in the works themselves. Also worthy of attention are the ways in which particular forms of entertainment intersect with both leisure and pleasure. In this respect, and in order to determine whether leisure is present in every instance of pleasure, we will need to distinguish between the two. Film viewing by Africans as a leisure activity has already attracted the attention of some scholars.<sup>4</sup> But while the scholarship on popular culture and diverse forms of entertainment in Africa is expansive, very little of this research is dedicated to reflecting on the specific connections between pleasure, leisure, and work. Indeed, on occasions where pleasure and leisure are both referenced in the same study of African popular culture, the relationship between the two is rarely problematized.

Among scholars of leisure studies, there are debates about how best to define leisure, and the relationship between leisure and freedom of choice.<sup>5</sup> For his part, Robert Stebbins proposes that we define leisure as “uncoerced activity undertaken during free time where such activity is something people want to do and, at a personally satisfying level using their abilities and resources, they succeed in doing” (2005:350). I will highlight for now just two dimensions of Stebbins’ definition, first the description of leisure as activity, and second the reference to free time, which gives us reason to ponder the connection between leisure and everyday life. Furthermore, leisure as activity undertaken under certain kinds of conditions is to be distinguished from the affective or sensorial response of gratification, otherwise known as pleasure. Ideally, leisure should result in pleasure, but pleasure may be present even in the absence of leisure. Leisure as well as pleasure and related terms are not unfamiliar concepts in African societies. For example, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, to name only one ethnic group (given that Nollywood is an instance of Nigerian popular culture), one might refer to such terms as *ìgbádùn* (enjoyment, sweetness), *itùrúka* (relaxation), and *fáàjì* (enjoyment or sensual pleasure), which have attracted discussion by scholars.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the experience of leisure and the organization of everyday life has long been a subject of interest among observers and scholars of everyday life.<sup>7</sup> For the masses in capitalist societies, says Henri Lefebvre, “Leisure must break with the everyday (or at least appear to do so)

...” Lefebvre also sheds light on another dimension of leisure in everyday life, namely its relationship to obligation. In this regard, he observes that leisure is perceived as enabling freedom from obligation (Lefebvre 2002:229). While the political economy of contemporary Africa tends to be more frequently associated with neoliberalism in the twenty-first century, Lefebvre’s observations about leisure in capitalist societies remain pertinent, not just to African contexts, but to any discussion of everyday life, leisure, and pleasure. We should not take for granted, however, that leisure activity always makes for pleasure, or that pleasure cannot be experienced in the absence of specifically designated leisure activity. In other words, the experience of pleasure can occur in inverse relationship to the affordances of leisure.

In light of the foregoing, it already seems unlikely that realistic depictions of everyday life will themselves be experienced as instances of leisure if such depictions do not in fact provide a break from the everyday. Nor is it necessarily the case that depictions of characters whom the viewer may identify with experiencing pleasure will provide the desired break from everyday life. Comparing different types of expressive work and art in what he calls modern capitalist societies, Lefebvre also adds that “the constitutive elements of leisure are more likely to be images and films. And images and films which are (or at least appear to be) as far away from *real life* as possible” (2002:229). For anyone seeking a break from everyday life, this would seem to be common sense. But even when what is depicted can be interpreted as a break from the everyday because of its distance from the everyday, the circumstances under which the expressive work is encountered will not necessarily amount to a break from everyday life. To this end, this article advances the argument that expressive works can be configured in such a way as to provide leisure and pleasure even when the act of viewing and hearing itself does not accompany a break with the everyday or what Stebbins calls “free time” (2005:350). I wish to further suggest that in some African contexts, instances of what I will henceforth describe as the Nollywood familiar make it possible to experience pleasure in the absence of a break with everyday life.

## Familiarity

The types of Nollywood narratives to be discussed here belong to a group of films that almost seem to flaunt their lack of originality, or what I describe as their familiarity. Familiarity is an attribute that can be associated with unoriginal creativity, and it is for this reason that I consider unoriginal works as one of many possible instantiations of familiarity.<sup>8</sup> I would also venture to suggest that under particular conditions, different forms of familiarity, including those related to unoriginal work, have value for particular publics or audiences for expressive work. In order to make sense of the particular varieties of the Nollywood familiar that are most amenable to everyday leisure and pleasure, I will first explore the functions and perceived benefits of repetitive expressive works, especially with respect to media engagement, but also for

producers/composers on the one hand, and audiences/publics on the other. On this matter, we might wish to consult James Snead, who observes that “Culture as a reservoir of inexhaustible novelty is unthinkable,” which is to say that, while cultural novelty is often highly regarded, constant novelty is ultimately draining and unsustainable. Indeed, repetition can be a welcome reprieve from the demands of novelty. In this regard, Snead adds that “One may readily classify cultural forms according to whether they tend to admit or cover up the repeating constituents within them” (1998:63).

In speaking of familiarity, then, I am concerned with cultural forms that make explicit the fact of repeating constituents within the cultural form, as Snead puts it. We know that such cultural forms “work” in the sense that they attract dedicated fans and sell well. But what is it that makes these cultural forms work so well both for producers of content and the publics that consume them? My preliminary answer is that repetitive forms generate a distinct set of pleasures that can be qualified as a subset of the pleasures of familiarity. Following from this answer, I would like to further add that encounters with a certain kind of familiar work allow for the experience of pleasure in relation to everyday life and outside of spaces and times dedicated to leisure.

The Nollywood familiar represents a certain kind of Nollywood narrative, but not all Nollywood films. In other words, there are Nigerian films that do not subscribe to the principles of familiarity.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this article, familiarity is a term that I use to indicate the effect generated and perceived when creative works are arranged on a single media platform and made accessible to diverse publics in a way that highlights their repetitive and/or affiliative properties.<sup>10</sup> Familiarity as an attribute encourages the attachment of an audience to clusters of mediated content instead of to individual works, based on the recognizable features of the works themselves, but also based on their positioning on a media platform. The attachment of an audience to a cluster of mediated content tends to prompt frequent if not necessarily scheduled returns to the media platform on which the content circulates, and tends to facilitate an ongoing rather than occasional interaction with the media platform in question. The particular effects of familiarity on media engagement consumption are essential to the argument that I am advancing here. Familiarity results in a frequent return to particular media, and/or extended time using the same media.

Examples of works that are almost always positioned to generate familiarity include comic strips in newspapers and genre selections and playlists on streaming services as well as on pay television. Serials, series, multi-part stories, sequels, remakes, and adaptations are all potential incarnations of familiarity that are often configured to bind different publics to particular content and trigger somewhat dissimilar rates of return to specific media platforms. In order to produce the effect of familiarity, a work can be positioned as identical to another work, as a copy or variation of another work, as an extension of another work, or as a self-contained unit related to other units of a larger work on the same media platform. In other words, a

work facilitates the effect of familiarity when it circulates on a given media platform as a unit explicitly or potentially related to other units, or as a work closely related to other works, rather than as a singular work detached from any other works circulating on the same media platform.

Familiarity as a result of circulation often signals a form of repetition, but not necessarily the doubling or duplication of a material object, though this is in fact commonplace in Nollywood, courtesy of piracy. Rather, familiarity more often involves a substantial repetition of form, and more importantly, a repetition of function, so that one work is almost exactly like another in the effects produced and the pleasures experienced by the viewers.

## Nollywood

I will now turn to the incidence of familiarity in the Nigerian film industry and in Nollywood. Let me acknowledge before proceeding any further that the term Nollywood is a highly contested one. The film industry in Nigeria includes and extends beyond the English language films most frequently described as Nollywood (Haynes 2016:xxiii). The types of Nigerian films that circulate under the rubric of familiarity as I have defined it here are produced in many languages: English, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Edo, and Efik, among others. Some of them clearly belong within “Nollywood” as understood by professionals in the industry, and others not so much. What the films that interest me all have in common is that they are produced cheaply. “The resulting movies,” says Jonathan Haynes, “are inherently generic: individualizing a film costs time and money, and a film that does not give off strong generic signals will get lost in the market” (2016:xxv).

In the Nigerian films produced at the lowest cost, repetition was, and is, commonplace, leading to the early emergence of genres as detailed by Haynes, but also of cycles within genres as acknowledged by Noah Tsika (2015, 2016). Repetition enabled easy recognition of narratives, actors, and plots, which guaranteed the sales of the films even when profits were minimal. In the early days of Nollywood, the same producer might fund the production of several distinct but similar stories that were advertised as coming attractions on a VCD or DVD. In other instances, producers worked independently of each other to support the production of films capitalizing on an already well-known story. The recycling of plots, narrative arcs, types of characters, and even actors helped to define a horizon of expectations for viewers who were likely to purchase different films featuring the same star playing different but identical roles. This is especially true of stars in comedy films such as Nkem Owoh and Funke Akindele. Nkem Owoh parlayed the success of the film *Osuofia in London* into a string of *Osuofia*-themed films.<sup>11</sup> Funke Akindele has played a variety of roles since the successes of her *Jenífà* films, though in most of these filmed narratives, she remains the outlandish, uncultured young woman in the city.<sup>12</sup> Later still, the role was transferred to a serial, *Jenífa's Diary*, available on streaming platforms, in DVD format, and on pay television.<sup>13</sup> In these mediated narratives, distinctive elements are not

without significance, but they matter less than the familiar details. Critical attention to the distinctive features in individual films misses the point. If fans for such films anticipate and take delight in the films, it is for the well-known personality quirks of the protagonists, for the predictable narrative outcomes, and for the shopworn visual cues of the film, and not for the distinctive features of the individual films.

My interest in this article is in the earlier forms of Nollywood that circulated almost exclusively on VHS, VCD, and later DVD. The specific configuration and positioning of Nollywood stories on VHS and later VCD exemplifies a practice that I describe as one of primary familiarity. In instances of primary familiarity, a variety of self-contained but recognizably identical narratives is made available for screening on mainly small screens. The ad-hoc pattern of production and distribution by small-scale producers and “marketers” working independently of each other contrasts with a deliberately planned and structured succession of connected narratives initially arranged for a specific media platform, as might happen with a series or a serial.<sup>14</sup> However, even in the absence of structuring for a specific platform, recognizably identical narratives tend to be read, viewed, and otherwise consumed in conditions similar to those for mediated narratives that are structured and connected on a given media platform. In other words, although these examples of primary familiarity are not strictly speaking television series and serials, they engender a form of spectatorship that bears considerable similarity to spectatorship for other kinds of television programming. For this reason, it is not surprising that Nollywood has increasingly become a staple of pay television and streaming services targeting Nigerians and other African audiences.

### **Pleasures of Familiarity**

Nollywood primary familiars offer a variety of ideological, visual, and sonic pleasures, depending on the theme of the stories, and these pleasures are not to be dismissed as being inconsequential. Several descriptions of Nollywood audiences point specifically to the question of pleasure.<sup>15</sup> However, instead of focusing on the analysis of a singular Nollywood narrative and the ideological pleasures it provides, I would like to think further about the pleasure of textual repetition itself and the conditions that might make for appreciation of textual repetition. If works exhibiting primary familiarity yield dividends for producers and distributors by encouraging fans to purchase DVD after DVD with similar stories and similar characters played by the same actors, of what use are these works of primary familiarity to viewers and spectators? How can viewers find pleasure in works designed as barely modified variations on works with which they are already familiar? My answer is that these familiar works provide pleasure in at least three ways.

First of all, viewing these works of primary familiarity provides the pleasure of reaffirmation. Narratives configured and positioned for primary familiarity offer a reaffirmation of either desired experiences or of desired



outcomes (or both). I speak of reaffirmation because each VHS tape, and later VCD, presented an extensive though self-contained narrative, which bore a striking resemblance to previous and already well-known narratives. Similar experiences and similar outcomes were re-enacted in story after story and specifically appreciated as re-enactments. What I describe here as the pleasure of reaffirmation is not unlike the response of African moviegoers to predominantly B-grade films in northern Rhodesia during the colonial period, as chronicled by Charles Ambler: “Moviegoers watched the films for the stock scenes that amused and delighted, in one form or another, in film after film: the characteristic stride, the fighting style, the memorable phrase. These elements were observed and appreciated according to well-defined standards of action taste, at least according to young male viewers” (2001:97). In other words, moviegoers found pleasure in the repeated and stock images. Returning to Nollywood primary familiars, variations on the basic story could also be appreciated, not in and of themselves, but specifically because the basic story itself was already known. These variations on the familiar story can be compared to what James Snead calls the “cut” in African American music, “an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break... and a willed return to a prior series” (1998:69).

In the second instance, works configured for primary familiarity feed the satisfaction of foresight and precognition. We are dealing here, however, with a kind of foresight which does not involve a dread and fear associated with unpleasant consequences. Rather, the viewer apprehends the text with the reassurance that ultimately, and no matter how long it takes, expected and thus pleasurable outcomes will be realized. In this respect, Solomon Waliaula speaks of the “bitter-sweet pleasure of recognition” that Nollywood fans in Eldoret Kenya experience (2019:11). This is more than a recognition of characters, scenes, and above all, actors. It is also a recognition of major and minor narrative arcs. Though many films have happy endings, the pleasure here consists in the recognition of the narrative arc itself, and not necessarily in an ending that is always happy, or happy in only one specific way. Familiar narrative arcs will reappear from time to time and in every season, even though a serial might extend the narrative over ten episodes in five seasons. Encountering these narratives through televisual spectatorship further makes for a sense of proximity to and intimacy with the action on the screen, thus enhancing and magnifying the pleasure of precognition.

In the third example, works configured for familiarity are more likely than works that are not similarly positioned to offer a context for a highly accessible and pleasurable sociality based on what I describe as “knowing talk.” Knowing talk refers to a kind of dialogue where all interlocutors are similarly knowledgeable. The kind of knowing talk that accompanies Nollywood viewing consists of conversation dedicated to reviewing the characters, settings, storylines, and other elements which together facilitate recognition of an individual work as a familiar work. Participants in these conversations hold forth as experts with knowledge about these



kinds of works, though they may be dismissed as unqualified for contribution to more prestigious forms of discourse. These conversations enable interested viewers to relive the pleasure of watching specific works, but also to form loose and possibly ongoing attachments with other contributors to knowing talk. As Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler remind us with respect to leisure in Africa, “Leisure is an important sphere of activity and reflexivity, people affirm what is socially valuable: time spent with family and friends, community activities that confirm one’s membership in a social group” (2002:3). Scholars such as Neal Norrick working in discourse analysis have long recognized how the re-telling of familiar stories functions as a strategy for signifying belonging to a group or family. In an article on the subject titled “Twice Told Tales” (1997), Norrick identifies the retelling of familiar stories with social bonding and group rapport. On occasions when members of a family happen to congregate together after a time of separation, individuals reaffirm their membership in the family by telling a story that is already known to all members of the family. Other members of the family contribute to the act of narration and find pleasure in sharing and sometimes arguing over a familiar story.

Similar pleasures have been attributed to soap operas in the Global North. Mary Ellen Brown observes, for example, that “Another aspect of pleasure in soap opera fanship is the mutual strengthening which comes from the power of talk outside of the control of dominant discourses” (1987:3). Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the Nollywood familiar films are themselves, as noted by Haynes, “talky and dialogue driven” (2016:15). The narratives involve a considerable amount of talking within the film, and they generate a considerable quantity of talking outside of the film, among the viewers. Here again, Brown’s comments about Australian and American soap operas would apply just as well to Nollywood and Nollywood-type media in Africa. On this point, Brown writes: “The soaps generate gossip both inside and outside of the programmes themselves. Such gossip is a form of feminine discourse in that it acknowledges woman’s position in the existing cultural system” (1987:3).

### **Spectatorship and Leisure**

The particular pleasures identified with consuming familiar forms of media content matter for a distinctive experience of leisure, especially in relation to work and the workplace. In early theorizing on leisure, there tended to be an oppositional relationship between leisure and work. Recent scholarship has emphasized the overlap between leisure and work, as for example in instances when leisure itself becomes a source of income, and presumably therefore a form of work.<sup>16</sup> For yet other scholars, leisure is not inherently located at the boundary between work and non-work. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Judith LeFevre note that leisure has also been envisioned with reference to “discretionary time left

free from obligations... the pursuit of freely chosen recreational activities... [and] time spent in activities that are intrinsically rewarding" (1989:815). Nonetheless, even when our interests do not specifically pertain to distinctions between leisure and labor, the two can still be related in unexpected ways.

To more accurately apprehend the forms of leisure at stake in spectatorship for Nollywood films exhibiting primary familiarity, I turn again to the work of the sociologist Robert Stebbins, who makes a helpful distinction between what he calls serious leisure and casual leisure. At first glance, the term "serious leisure" might appear to be an oxymoron. Stebbins uses the term to describe leisure activity that functions as a "prime opportunity for personal expression, self-identity enhancement, and self-fulfillment" (1982:253). Serious leisure usually requires time, effort, often training, and intense dedication on the part of an individual. Casual leisure, by contrast, requires no training, and no perseverance. For Stebbins, "Self-gratification and, to a lesser extent, social interaction are usually the sole benefits accruing to those who partake of" casual leisure (1982:257).

Although Stebbins avers that regular indulgence in casual leisure tends to have negative effects, there are conditions under which casual leisure is the main form of leisure available to individuals with particular subject positions (1982:267). Casual leisure matters, in particular, for those who do not have leisure time as such and/or who are unable to frequent dedicated sites for leisure. These are persons who may be somewhat inhibited from attending dedicated leisure facilities by virtue of class, gender, religion, age, ethnicity, or other considerations. The absence of structured breaks from the routines of everyday life for those occupying such subject positions is only one among other indices of social subordination. The relative lack of mobility and/or financial resources on the part of such individuals compels them to find alternative sources of leisure in spaces and times that are not specifically dedicated to leisure, and double as sites for labor, if not remunerated activity. In the African context, married women, women with young children, and youth are more likely to face challenges in accessing dedicated sites of leisure. Any time spent involved in activities not prescribed by social obligation might be construed as an indication of idleness or laziness for those who experience relative social subordination. And the forms of diversion with the greatest appeal to such subordinated groups are likely to be considered just as suspect. Youth, especially those enrolled in formal education, may have somewhat more leisure time, but do not always have the resources to patronize dedicated sites of leisure. Let me hasten to add that this is not a zero-sum situation. Those who usually find leisure outside sites dedicated to leisure activities may also on occasion have opportunity to patronize sites dedicated to leisure activities.

At workplaces such as hairdressing salons, hotel lobbies, restaurants, and smaller shops offering a wide variety of goods and/or services in Nigeria and in neighboring countries, it is not uncommon for a Nollywood movie to be playing on a television screen during business hours. In such circumstances,

the exhibition of the film becomes part of the ambient noise of an environment dedicated mainly to work or of a busy home environment. Whether they are workers or clients being served, those who watch Nollywood productions in these environments tend to do so intermittently. Here we have what the television scholar John Ellis calls the regime of the glance rather than the gaze (1992:128). Watching a film under these circumstances is rarely accompanied by the pleasure of immersion. Instead of the darkness of the cinema which might favor a more attentive gaze, there is light, constant movement, and conversation surrounding the screening of a film or television show. The fact that the screening space is not darkened makes the images and sounds on the screen almost a part of the actions and dialogues unfolding outside the screen. Although new cinema theaters and multiplexes are being constructed around Nigeria and in some other African countries, the overwhelming majority of Nigerians and probably Africans still encounter film on the small screen, either at home or in a public work environment. What has been described elsewhere as the televisual turn in African filmmaking remains very much in effect.<sup>17</sup> This has ramifications for the conditions of spectatorship. While many West African cinemas are hardly quiet, televisual spectatorship represents a qualitatively different experience. Here we might refer to Alexia Smit's remarks about the difference between cinema spectatorship and televisual spectatorship: "Where cinema is aligned with the construction of fictionally enclosed narrative worlds, much television content relies upon a feeling of continuity between the world onscreen and everyday life" (2015:893).

Onokome Okome's discussion of early Nollywood spectatorship is also relevant here. Although his article is from 2007, the findings in Okome's article have been backed up by several other scholars. Okome notes that many sites of Nollywood spectatorship are ad hoc and located, as it were, on the street. He identifies two kinds of street audiences: street corner audiences and video-parlor audiences. Both kinds of audiences watch the films in fairly uncomfortable settings. But perhaps more importantly, and in describing audience response to one film in a video parlor located in the southern Nigerian city of Warri, Okome writes, "The audience of the Warri video parlour responded to it as a story it already knows" (2007:14). One can supplement Okome's work with that of authors such as David Kerr (2011), who describes Nollywood spectatorship in a setting where hair braiding is occurring in Botswana. Dominica Dipio's study of Nollywood spectatorship in Uganda focuses on similar conditions. Dipio writes that she "observed women spend long hours watching three to four films a day during the course of their work" (2014:89). The workspace, and especially hairdressing salons where distracted Nollywood viewing occurs alongside hair braiding and conversation, has even made an appearance in African literature. Early in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*, for example, we come across a scene of this kind when the protagonist Ifemelu goes from upper-class Princeton to working-class Trenton, New

Jersey, to get her hair done at an African hair-braiding salon. Adichie writes:

The salon was in the middle, between a Chinese restaurant called Happy Joy and a convenience store that sold lottery tickets. Inside the room was thick with disregard, the paint peeling... Three women, all in T-shirts and knee-length shorts, were working on the hair of seated customers. A small TV mounted on a corner wall, the volume a little too loud, was showing a Nigerian film, man beating his wife, the wife cowering and shouting, the poor audio quality jarring. (Adichie 2013:9–10)

Given the description of the setting—a room thick with disregard—we are none too surprised when a few pages later, the narrator mentions Ifemelu’s aversion to Nollywood films (Adichie 2013:13). But the narrator also remarks that Ifemelu found the setting too hot (and too loud) for reading literature, and she eventually settles for making phone calls and texting. The point here is not that Adichie’s novel provides an accurate depiction of everyday life experiences for particular types of African women, but that the literary text deploys elements associated with that everyday experience (discomfort at hair dressing salons and distracted viewing) to specific effect in constructing an image of the protagonist, as a connoisseur of African American literature who is at ease in some, but not all, African women’s spaces.

Although only a few ethnographies of Nollywood spectatorship at home or in a work environment have been published, there is little doubt that the viewing of those films exhibiting the attributes of primary familiarity in these spheres often occurs alongside other tasks such as doing housework, cleaning, or eating, that is, in settings that are not unlike those described by Dipio or imagined by Adichie.<sup>18</sup> In general, the accounts of Nollywood spectatorship referenced above would seem to indicate that distraction rather than concentration is the more frequently encountered attribute associated with viewing these films outside of cinema settings. But that is not to say that there is no pleasure in viewing with distraction. Indeed, the television scholar John Corner identifies one of the pleasures of television viewing as the pleasure of “distraction, diversion, and routine” (1999:99). We are dealing in this instance with the pleasure that stems from intense engagement and concentration, but it is an alternative form of pleasure, nonetheless. Even as Ifemelu in *Americanah* finds Nollywood films to be full of “exaggerated histrionics and improbable plots” (Adichie 2013:13) and the ambience to be inconvenient for reading literature, the hairdresser Aisha, who is in a workspace, expresses frequent appreciation for the films, repeatedly describing them as “very good.”

The individuals who watch Nollywood primary familiars in the types of contexts referenced thus far may also have access to other kinds of leisure in settings that constitute a break from everyday life. But the forms of pleasure that they might have in times and spaces dedicated entirely to leisure are

often few and far between. The pleasures associated with participation in such communal festivities as weddings and other celebrations of rites of passage in many African settings are often interspersed with obligation and labor, cleaning, cooking, and involuntary contributions of money and other material resources. As indicated earlier, several scholars of leisure have noted that freedom from obligation, more so than freedom from work itself, might be the crucial factor that makes for leisure and pleasure.<sup>19</sup> For those who occupy socially subordinate subject positions, such as women who are still of childbearing age and young men, the pleasure of communal festivity is almost always in African settings conjoined with obligation and intense physical labor. Even the pleasures of sexual intimacy may be constrained by degrees of access to privacy for many couples if they occupy socially subordinate positions or are economically deprived. It is not surprising, then, that a recent study of students at the University of Ghana found that these students identified sleeping as a form of leisure, since sleeping was one of the activities that they could undertake without having to attend to something else at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

Where strenuous activity takes place in the absence of obligation, and whether or not such strenuous activity is construed as work, there may perhaps be a greater appreciation for expressive forms that convey a sense of novelty on the part of the individuals engaged in such strenuous activity. And while familiarity in expressive forms has the potential to appeal to spectators in a wide variety of circumstances, it is likely that those who cannot readily separate themselves from the obligations of everyday life might not find as much respite in novelty since they must access their pleasure “on the go,” as it were.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the pleasures of familiar televisual works, and for such subjects in Africa, there are many other forms of ambient leisure providing for encounters with familiar expressive works or cultural performances in a space associated with either work or obligation. Think, for example, of the loud music playing in open markets in West Africa as well as the ambient noise of the radio in taxi cabs or the voice of the impromptu preacher on a crowded bus. With respect to Nollywood primary familiars, I would say that these highly repetitive works provide pleasures sustaining a specific kind of casual leisure that can rightly be characterized as a leisure of concomitance. This is leisure that occurs alongside other activities which may or may not be defined as work. But it is also leisure that differs from the leisure of communal festivities because this form of leisure does not come with obligation. In snatching occasional glances from the television screen, the subordinated subject declines to work in the normative manner expected for individuals in that position. Inasmuch as the decision to watch Nollywood productions, or some other kind of relatively predictable fare, on a small screen while engaged in other activities occurs without obligation, and is freely chosen, the viewing act opens up a space for both leisure and pleasure, as well as for a break from everyday life. Allow me to end my suggestive comments on pleasure, familiarity, and everyday life by noting that the Nollywood primary familiar represents only one type of familiar text and

familiar content. There are several other types of repetitive works which generate a different set of pleasures and feed into other kinds of leisure and other kinds of pleasures. These are instances where the leisure of concomitance might not apply. Detailing the functions and pleasures of different types of repetitive works in the African context is a larger subject that awaits additional scholarship.

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## Filmography

- A Trip to Jamaica*. Robert Peters, dir. 2016  
*Jénifà*. Muhydeen Ayinde, dir. 2008. DVD.  
*The Return of Jénifà*. Muhydeen Ayinde, dir. 2011  
*Jenifa's Diary*. Edmund Eraibe, dir. 2015  
*Osuofia in London*. Kingsley Okoro, dir. 2003  
*Osuofia in London 2*. Kinglsey Okoro, dir. 2004  
*Osuofia and the Wise Men*. Sam Loco Efe, Chika Onu, directors. 2008.  
*Osuofia in Brazil*. Reginald Ebere and Abel Ebere, directors. 2013.  
*Osuofia and Two Sons, Part 1*. Amayo Uzo Phillips, dir. 2017.  
*Osuofia and Two Sons, Part 2*. Amayo Uzo Phillips, dir. 2017.

## Notes

1. For everyday life in Africa in particular, see, for example, Oluwakemi Balogun et al. (2019), Wale Adebawo (2017), Giorgio Blundo and Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2006), Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome (2014), and Daniel Jordan Smith (2007).
2. See, for example, Laura Fair (2018).
3. See, for example, Ben Highmore (2004).
4. See in particular Issahaku Adam (2018), Laura Fair (2018), and Odile Goerg (2020).
5. See Susana Juniu and Karla Henderson (2001), as well as Robert Stebbins (2005).
6. For more on Yoruba popular culture and *igbádùn*, see Bade Omojola (2009) and Christopher Waterman (1994); for *itùràka* see Waterman (1994), and for *fààjì* see Karin Barber and Waterman (1995).
7. See, for example, Michel de Certeau (1998) and Henri Lefebvre (2009), among others.
8. I wish to add here that familiarity can be manifested in several different ways. The lack of originality is just one form among others of familiarity in a mediated expressive work.
9. It should also be noted that even those Nollywood films that reveal the quality of familiarity are not all familiar in the same way.
10. The repetitive properties of some forms of Nollywood have been the subject of earlier analysis pertaining to its "televisual recurrence" (Adejunmobi 2015), and "character of recurrence" (Akande 2021).
11. An incomplete list of such *Osuofia*-themed films would include the following: *Osuofia in London* (2003), *Osuofia in London 2* (2004), *Osuofia in Brazil* (2013), *Osuofia and the Wise Men* (2008), *Osuofia and Two Sons, Part 1* (2017), *Osuofia and Two Sons, Part 2*, (2017).
12. The two initial films were: *Jénifà* (2008) and *The Return of Jénifà* (2011).

13. At the time of this writing, *Jenifa's Diary* was available for streaming and viewing on irokotv and SceneOne tv. DVDs of each season were also available for purchase in open markets in Nigeria. While Nkem Owoh extended his success as Osuofia to a number of films that Tsika describes as a cycle, and which continued to be produced more than 10 years after the release of the initial film, *Osuofia in London* (2003), Funke Akindele achieved the same result by following the more structured pathway of creating a television series reprising her role as Jenifa. Even in the movie *A Trip to Jamaica*, (one of the highest grossing films at the Nigerian box office), where Akindele has a starring role, she is not “Jenifa,” but she basically plays the role of a character who has all the attributes of Jenifa. For Owoh, Tsika (2015) points out that there are many instances of “artificial application of “Osuofia” in film titles and online offerings where Owoh as an actor is present, but the actual character of Osuofia is absent. Tsika’s observations here do not invalidate the larger argument about familiarity and Nollywood, but do indicate the need for a more substantial discussion of this phenomenon than can be undertaken in this article.
14. The distributors of Nollywood films in the informal economy are self-identified as marketers. See, for example, Alexander Bud (2014) and Jade Miller (2016).
15. See, for example, Añulika Agina (2020), Solomon Waliaula (2019), Dominica Dipio (2014), and Oluyinka Esan (2008), among others.
16. See, for example, Joyce Goggin, who uses the term playbour to describe “forms of labour carried out in or around computer games and popular culture more generally” (2011:357).
17. See Moradewun Adejunmobi (2015) for more on this.
18. Examples of partial ethnographies of Nollywood spectatorship include Esan (2008), Dipio (2014), and Waliaula (2019).
19. Please see again Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre (1989:815), referenced earlier.
20. See Aaron Kofi Badu Yankholmes and Shanshan Lin (2012:62).
21. For example, the film viewing conditions described by Charles Ambler (2001) for colonial Rhodesia would seem to constitute a break with everyday life, even though there was a special appreciation for repeated elements in the film narrative.