

Processes of Formalising Nollywood Practice: Policy Propositions and Contestations

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Abstract

Since its inception, Nigerian film industry has undergone tortuous production and distribution practices, often fraught with numerous policy propositions and contestations. It has rather been characterised by what seems an informal industry as many scholars have attributed, premised essentially on the grounds of limited life span between production and distribution as well as poor financing, improper record keeping/accountability and lack of efficient distribution structure. Exploring relevant research channels comprising oral interviews, documentary videos, personal experience as a filmmaker-researcher and critical review of significant texts on Nollywood studies, the study undertakes a critical analyses of Nollywood practice often interlocked between policy propositions and oppositions between government agencies and Nollywood practitioners; in addition to a focus-group discussion on MOPICON (Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria) policy with key Nollywood scholars and practitioners, moderated by the researcher, aimed at underpinning how this policy propositions and contestations would aid the formalisation of Nollywood practices. The conclusion is that these policy propositions and contestations have led to the formation and sustenance of the Federation of Registered Nollywood Guilds and Associations (FRENGAN) as has been recognised by Nigerian government. Thus, sustainable policy formulations in Nollywood film practice are strong testaments of the tacit agreement between Nigerian government and the Nigerian film practitioners.

Keywords: *Contestations, Guilds, Nollywood, Policy and Proposition.*

INTRODUCTION

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry has progressively established itself globally through its prolific film production practices. Often described as homegrown film industry (Haynes, 2016) owing to the relentless efforts of its practitioners to establish an industry without much government support, it is presently undergoing serious policy reformations to formalise and sustain its practices. There is no gainsaying that Nollywood needs a functional film policy to foster strategic frameworks towards regulating film practitioners as well as fostering the development of the industry. Presently, the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), a Nigerian government agency which regulates Nigerian films, established in 1979 under decree number 61 of Nigerian constitution, published film policy in 1992. This incidentally coincides within the year *Living in Bondage* (Chris Obi Rapu 1992), a film which believably established Nollywood film industry (due to its commercial success) was produced. However, as Ubong-Abasi Usoroh reveals, NFC film policy does not presently serve the robust nature of film practice in Nollywood (2021, p.14), though Nigeria film policy supports film practitioners' council (1992, p.18).

This study, therefore, examines the efforts of both the Nigerian government and practitioners towards ensuring a proper policy framework that would aid the formalisation of practice in Nigeria. As a film industry, Nollywood has variously been considered as an informal film industry (See Haynes, 2007, 2014, 2016; Okome, 2007; Onuzulike, 2008; Shaka 2011; Labato, 2012 and McCall, 2012; Shaka, Uwah, & Uchendu, 2014, Igwe, 2017). However, unlike most established film cultures, Nollywood developed following the structural logic of a decentralised networks of indigenous production and trade structures. Thus, McCall avers that Nollywood is a film industry with horizontal operational ethos, different from Hollywood studio system with its primary organisational units constituted of detached professional guilds (2012, p. 12). Therefore, Nollywood guild system and the Economic factors surrounding guild politics as well as the politics of film production is one of such components that requires serious policy regulations. Thus, this paper understudies the efforts of the Nigerian Government to enact regulating policies aimed at formalising an industry implicated by the notion of informality.

There have been ongoing efforts by the filmmakers to establish various guilds that will regulate their practices; and at various points, these guilds often unite in a common front to present themselves to Nigeria government. At the protest letter to the minister of information, Alhaji Lai Mohamed, on May 2020, the coalition of Nollywood guide-heads underpinned more than twenty guilds and associations which according to them oversee the affairs of film production in Nollywood (Ajose May 8, 2020). However, in 2022, the National Film and Video Censors Board recognised 22 registered guilds and associations including: (SWGNG)- Screen Writers Guild of Nigeria, (CEAN)- Cinema Exhibitors Association of Nigeria, (CDGN)- Creative Designers Guild of Nigeria, (AGN)- Actors Guild of Nigeria, (DGN)- Directors Guild of Nigeria, (ANMD)-Association of Nigeria Movie Directors, (AMP)- Association of Movie Producers, (AMPMAN)- Active Movie Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria, (ANCOP)- Association of Nollywood Core Producers, (MOPPAN)- Motion Pictures Practitioners Association of Nigeria, (TGMAN)- The Golden Movies Ambassadors of Nigeria, (ITPAN)- Independent Television Producers Association of Nigeria, (FVPMAN)- Film/Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria, (NANTAP)- National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners, (NACO)- Nollywood Association of Camera Equipment Owners, (TAMPAN)- Theatre Arts and Motion Picture Producers Association of Nigeria, (AMCOD)- Association of Movie Content Owners Producers/Distributors, (FDAN)- Film Distributors Association of Nigeria, (AMPRAC)- Association of Movie Practitioners (ANTP)- Association of Theatre Arts Practitioners (CSN)- Cinematographers Association of Nigeria, (FCMA)- Film Creative Minds Association (<https://www.nfvcb.gov.ng/approved-associations/>)

However, other established guilds which are yet to be officially recognised by NFVCB are: (MACDAN) - Media Contents Distributors Association of Nigeria, (AMPEEN) - Association of Motion Picture and Entertainment Editors of Nigeria, (AVOA) - Association of Voiceover Artistes, (EMCOAN) - Electronic Media Content Owners Association of Nigeria, (FPN) - Female Producers of Nigeria, (NSE) - Nigerian Society of Editors, (NSC) - Nigerian Society of cinematographers and others. The process of establishing and registering these guilds and associations and their recognition by Nigerian government agency, NFVCB, is an ongoing effort by both the practitioners and the government towards creating policy, structure and formalisation in the Nigerian film practice.

In examining the activities of Nollywood association and guild-system, the paper aims at underpinning various policy engagements/initiatives of the Nigerian government towards enhancing formalisation in film practice as well as attendant contestations by guild-heads which often seem to hamper the process. To realise this, a focus group interview on MOPICON (Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria) bill with key Nollywood scholars and practitioners was conducted virtually and moderated by the researcher. The critical discourse on various propositions and contestations on Nollywood practice are generated through oral interviews conducted on key industry practitioners. Again, relevant documentary videos and critical review of significant texts on Nollywood studies were also employed to enhance the research.

Efforts of Nigerian Filmmakers towards Developing Structures that will Guide Nollywood Practice

Nollywood, an industry that is valued over US\$2Billion has contributed over 2.3% to Nigerian nation's GDP and has about 2.5 million practitioners who are structured on a seeming parallel associations and guild system (Ajose, 2020). Countless number of times, Nollywood practitioners often engaged in stiff contestations whenever the Nigerian government and corporate organisations engage Nollywood on issues of policies, regulations, sponsorships, palliatives, structuring and other remunerations. Oftentimes, most Nollywood stars masquerade themselves as representatives of the industry to receive largesse meant for the entire Nigerian film industry. These actions are often trailed by petitions and contestations. While AGN is seen as the face of Nollywood industry, DGN and AMP are perceived as the engine rooms that drive the industry.

This contestation scenario unfolded in May 2020 during the Covid 19 era in Nigeria. The minister of information and culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, having underscored Nollywood as a critical sector of the nation's economy which creates the highest number of jobs for the youth after Agriculture, decided to set up a committee of selected practitioners to assess and advise the Nigerian government on the best way to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on the industry (Oyeyemi, 2020). Amongst those selected were: Alli Baba - Comedy, Film and TV (Chairman), Bolanle Austen Peters – Film and Performing Arts (TerraKulture), Charles Novia – Television and Independent Producer (TeenTV), Segun Arinze- Actor and Producer, Ali Jita – Actor and Musician, Baba Agba – Film Director (BCI Studios), Kene Okwuosa – Cinema and Distribution (Filmhouse), Efe Omoregbe – Record label and Collective rights management (Hypertek/Now Muzik), Prince Daniel Aboki – Radio and Film (CoolFM/WaZoBia), Chioma Ude – Streaming (Envivo), Olumade Adesemowo – Television and Platform (FreeTV), Dare Art Alade – Livespot Entertainment, Hajia Sa'a Ibrahim - Broadcasting Organizations of Nigeria (BON), Anita Eboigbe – News Agency of Nigeria (Secretary) (Oyeyemi, 2020).

This initiative, noble as it sounds attracted stiff contestation and protest by eighteen guides and associations presidents such as: AMP-Ralph Nwadike, AGN-Emeka Rollas, DGN-Fred Amata, SWGN-Yinka Ogun, ANCOP-Daisy Madu-Chikwendu, MOPPAN-Ahmad Sarari, CDGN-Sele O. Sele, FVPMAN-Emeka Aduah, ITPAN-Yinka Oduniyi, MACDAN-Barr. Izu Osuigwe, CEMP-Chief Peddie Okhao, AMPEEN-Mensah Paul, NANTAP-Israel Eboh, TAMPAN-Otunba Bolaji Amusan, AMCOD-Hon. Sola Awoleye, AVOA-Ngozi Ogbonna, CSN and ANTP. In a protest letter to the minister of information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the guild-heads observed that Nollywood industry has over 20 guilds which employ about 2.5million Nigerian youths, and therefore, urged the ministry to henceforth incorporate guild-heads whenever it proposes rigorous engagements with the Nollywood

industry and indulged him to reconstitute the palliative committee to reflect the guild-heads who are actual agents of the industry (Ajose, 2020).

Again, the aforementioned issue of contestation in Nollywood is better understood following a scenario which played out in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on July 2018. There was stiff contestation by Nollywood practitioners in the South-South with emphasis to the Port Harcourt City. In a personal communication with Mike Ogundu (A film director, the former Vice President, Directors Guild of Nigeria and former Coordinator, Directors Guild of Nigeria South-South region), a group who believably came from Atiku Abubakar (the 2019 Peoples Democratic Party Nigerian presidential candidate) had approached a group of Nollywood practitioners in Port Harcourt (including the veteran Nollywood star, Columbus Irisoanga) to negotiate for a Nollywood rally within the Port Harcourt city in support of Atiku Abubaka's presidential ambition for 2019. In the rally planning process, different guide-heads in Nigerian south-south region scuttled that initiative. This was on the basis that in the past, few Nollywood practitioners (mostly Nollywood Stars) in the same region have received some whooping some of money from Rivers State government in disguise of being representative of the entire south-south region of Nollywood.

However, the scuttled initiative of Port Harcourt rally on behalf of Atiku with the rider AH2H (Atiku House to House) later took another form: Nollywood Rivers State Awareness Rally. In the interview, Mike Ogundu, the organiser observed that the new initiative followed a consensus by Nollywood guild-heads in Port Harcourt (south-south region) who Ogundu had convinced to stage a rally to awaken the perceived dormant Nollywood in Port Harcourt. The rally took place on 10th July 2018 and was reportedly successful (Mike Ogundu, personal communication, Dec. 13, 2018). The reference to this rally herein again underpins the contestation attitudes in Nollywood. This scenario further buttresses that Nollywood is constituted not on the basis of structural edifice or location as many foreigners misconstrue, but on the seeming organisational structure of its professional guilds.

There were no professional associations and guilds at the inception of Nollywood, thus Nollywood progenitors often gather within the premises of the National Theatre Igamu (Lagos) for their meetings and auditions. Conversely, some producers volunteered their offices following the need for comfortable meeting venues and auditions. Alex Eyengho noted that these formative meetings facilitated the formation of various guilds and associations which helped in defining Nollywood today. Notably Mr. Zeb Ejoro offered his office, around *Ijesha* and latter *Surulere* for such foundational meetings for the infantile film industry that would become the second largest industry in the world (in output) and the largest in Africa. Beyond these offices, were various hotels which served as rallying points such as ECOWAS hotel (*Surulere*) Kilo Hotel (*Marsha*) Bookies Hotel (*Aguda*) Uzzis Garden (*Festac*) and Winnis Hotel (*Marsha*) where various film auditions, and engagements were done (Eyengho, 2012). In Enugu, Chimaroke Akubue, a production manager based in Enugu, observed that the first hotel where film producers converged in Enugu was Ekulu Guest house where *Rattle Snake* (Amaka Igwe 1994) was shot. From there production moved to First hotel which hosted a number of films and subsequently to Presidential hotel, Prince Palace hotel, Mackdevos hotel and successively to Nico Hotel which became the centre of film activities in the east part of Nigeria during the early phase of Nollywood. It is noteworthy that the secretariat of AGN, Enugu chapter was housed in Nico hotel at that moment (Chimaroke Akubue, personal communication, May 10, 2020).

At this formative period of Nollywood, there were various incidences of sexual abuses and exploitations with particular reference to the dubious activities on the part of the producers who would swindle EP's (Executive Producer) money meant for artiste fees for mundane and personal aggrandizements. Such incidences prompted various conflicts and the need to properly define the nascent industry became vary necessary. Ayakoroma (2014) observes that the need to put the industry on track gave rise to the professional guilds and associations. Thus, notable producers such as Chris Ekejimbe, Zeb Ejiro, Kenneth Nnebue, Eddie Ugbomah, Chief Gab Okoye, Joe Dudun, Amaka Igwe and a few others initiated the Association of Movie Producers (AMP). Similarly, notable actors like Ifeanyi Dike, Sunny Macdon, Ejike Asiegbu, Okey Bakasi and Few others initiated (NAG) Nigerian Actors Guild which was later transformed to Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) (Eyengho, 2012). The path for DGN, Directors Guild of Nigeria, was mapped out by some notable directors popularly referred to as the six angry men such as Fidelis Duker, Sam Azubuike, Amb. Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, Victor Okhai, Madu C. Chikwendu, and Jeff Obahor.

These guilds and associations became formidable following a call for a recess in the industry wherein the practitioners needed to take stock of their activities. Ayakoroma (2014) noted that the recess which the industry experienced from January to March 2002 was orchestrated by concerned marketers, due to the deluge of films being churned out by various producers, such that the market was overwhelmingly saturated with Nollywood films. Again, star artiste fees were on a steady increase and the EPs who fund these productions had to move in to handle productions personally to safeguard their investments (p. 101). Teco Benson, a notable Nollywood film director, observes that the recess was a tacit agreement by the guild-heads who then formed a Central Working Committee (CWC) with the marketers (personal communication, March 17, 2020). This is affirmed by Adim Williams, a Nollywood film director who avowed that in 2002, Nollywood practitioners unanimously shut down the entire industry throughout the country to enable the establishment of proper structures and standard. A Central Working Committee (CWC) was established which comprised of over 20 eminent filmmakers at the time of which he, Adim Williams, functioned as a Secretary and Matthias Obahiagbon functioned as the Chairman. Zik Zulu Okafor, Fred Amata, Kanoyo O. Kanayo, Ekenna Igwe, Inye Obaseki, Emma Oguguo, Emma Isikaku, Cosmos Ndulue, late Chike Brian and others were all members. This led to the strengthening of Nollywood guilds which sought to institutionalise structure in the industry. Accordingly, CWC developed a blueprint for proper structure in Nollywood which according to Adim Williams was sabotaged by various conflicting interests (personal communication, April 11, 2020). This again underpins the issue of contestation in Nollywood.

Again, on July, 2010, the existing twelve Nollywood guides formed Coalition of Nollywood Guilds and Associations christened CONGA. CONGA signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on August 5th 2010, at the Banquet Hall, Eko Hotel, Lagos. The idea of CONGA is that the coalition of guides will serve the common and collective interest of the Nigerian motion picture practitioners and industry. Bond Emeruwa who was at that time, the president of the Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN) as well as the nominated president of CONGA affirmed that the idea of CONGA is to unify the industry and entrench professionalism. Accordingly, twelve guides and associations such as the Directors Guild of Nigeria, Association of Movie Producers, Actors Guild of Nigeria, Nigerian Society of Cinematographers, Screen Writers Guild, Creative Designers Guild of Nigeria, Nigerian Society of Film Editors, Film and Video Producers and Marketers Association, Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners and Motion Pictures Practitioners Association of Nigeria

who are independent governing bodies representing motion picture professionals and practitioners congregated to form the CONGA (Husseini, 2010). However, analogous with Nollywood contestation trends, CONGA ideology was ephemeral following stiff oppositions by some practitioners who believed that CONGA's decision to regulate film practice which is not backed by Nigerian government is against their constitutional rights of (film) business procedure in Nigeria which empowers one to embark on lawful business once a (film) company is registered with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in Nigeria.

Subsequently, Coalition of Nollywood Guilds and Associations (CONGA) metamorphosised into The Federation of Registered Nollywood Guilds and Associations (FRENGAN) was established in collaboration with the Nigerian government and the National Film and Video Censors Board. It unifies 18 registered guilds and associations, aiming to professionalize Nollywood by advocating for tax holidays, accessible loans, and grants, as well as fostering partnerships locally and internationally. The federation underscores collective strength and vision for Nollywood's growth. In 2022, (late) Peace Anyiam-Osigwe was elected as the Chairperson of FRENGAN, alongside other prominent leaders, signaling a new phase for Nollywood. These leaders pledged to uphold international best practices, address professional standards, and enhance the industry's reputation. (Akande, April 7, 2022). As usual, with issues surrounding Nollywood contestation, the Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) withdrew from the federation in 2023, citing a need to focus on members' welfare and independent development.

However, efforts to promote structure and professionalism within Nollywood continued, with guild leaders emphasising the significance of membership and adherence to guild standards. Issues such as fraud and substandard productions have been highlighted, stemming from a lack of guild participation. Forums like the one organised by the Pan-Atlantic University's Nollywood Study Centre convened leaders to address these challenges and advocate for stricter compliance within guild systems. During the forum, the federation advocated for a comprehensive review of Nigeria's national film policy to reflect modern realities and create a supportive environment for industry growth. The current chairman of FRENGAN, Dr. Victor Okhai who assumed office in October 2023 emphasised fostering authentic storytelling, cultural celebration, and global recognition for Nollywood. He stressed the importance of resolving inter-guild conflicts and uniting practitioners nationwide under a shared vision. He called for a complete review of the national film policy to reflect the present realities and dynamic nature of the industry. At a news conference in October 2024, in Lagos, Dr. Okhai observed that for the industry to be properly structured, policies that would foster a conducive environment for its growth must be implemented. (Udugba, November 6, 2023; Olayemi, October 24th 2024). The federation's ongoing initiatives aim to give structure to Nollywood film practice as well as advocate for favourable policies, and create an industry where every talent thrives, contributing to a sustainable and globally recognized film sector.

Presently, there are twenty-two recognized (registered) guilds and associations in Nollywood as earlier noted; though most of them are duplicated in their aims and objectives, they have all contributed significantly towards creating structure in Nollywood film practice. Apart from these contributions towards Nollywood economy, various activities of these guilds and their attendant contestations always convolute issues in Nollywood as seen in various ethnic-driven *woods* such as *Kannywood*, *Asabawood*, *Edowood*, *Akwacrosswood*, *Yoruwood* representing the various ethnic filmic practices, and the New-Nollywood mantra, representing a new wave movement in Nollywood.

Efforts of Nigerian Government towards Developing Policies that will Guide Film Practice in Nollywood

Since its inception, Nigerian government has regulated Nollywood through various regulatory agencies such as National Video and Film Censors Board (NVFCB) (whose major aim is hinged on film classification and registration) and the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) (whose mandate is to develop film industry in Nigeria). Through these various institutions, Nigerian government has continuously initiated policy-driven programs that aim at improving the Nollywood practice. From the NVFCB proposed distribution framework, to Bank of Industry (BOI) Nollyfund initiative and NFC proposed MOPICON, these policy propositions have always been heavily contested by Nollywood practitioners. Thus, a critical analyses of these propositions and contestations forms the fulcrum of this discourse.

The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) established in 1993, is saddled with the responsibility of screening films and ensuring that films are to promote national unity as well as devoid of contents that could cause national unrest. In 2009, NFVCB Director-General, Emeka Mba, developed a distribution framework which was designed to structure the industry. Citing Obiaya (2011) and Jedlowski (2012), Bud observes that the Mba's NFVCB distribution framework was envisioned to ensure film circulation through corporate firms which will be achieved through the regulation of film distribution networks by the imposition of strict licensing requirements and by reconfiguring other smaller marketing units as a conduit towards circulating the films at the grassroots. This distribution system would consist of national marketers (corporate bodies), with outlets in all districts of Nigeria, regional marketers, who would take delivery of the discs from the national marketers, and local retailers who would sell the discs at the local markets.

Ayakoroma (2014) asserts that this idea was resisted by the marketers' guilds who have maintained a dominant position in the industry, particularly Film and Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria (FVPMAN) (dominated by the Igbos), Yoruba Video Film Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria (YOVIFPMAN), Hausa film marketers' association and Congress of Edo Movie Practitioners (CEMP). Following this resistance and contestations, the idea was short-lived and could not materialise. This is on the hives that marketers prefer the informal system of distribution which they developed and sustained without government intervention. Accordingly, these marketers maintain that their informal structure which enabled film distribution across different climates in the world is exceptional and attributes government marketing structure as a seeming exploitative ploy.

Again, in a bid to ensure record keeping and accountability as a way of developing Nollywood practice, the Nigerian Bank of Industry dubbed BOI developed a special loan policy for Nollywood known as "BOI NollyFund". This loan scheme is designed to be accessed by practitioners in Nollywood industry, with the target that the emergent Nollywood productions will be of improved quality and thus compete globally with the First World cinemas. The group head of BOI, Nwuka (2020), observes that Nollyfund was established in 2011 to support businesses in creative sector. Before the development of this fund, BOI had embarked on manpower development in Lagos, Abuja and Benin in partnership with British Council wherein they critically assessed the production structure of Nollywood in comparison with other established film cultures and to underpin best film distribution strategies. This led BOI to deploy funds towards the development of the distribution channel and as such cinema houses such as: Film House- Surulere, was facilitated by BOI. Following the timely repayment of the

four years loan within two years, BOI was encouraged to support the production *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Flower Girl* (Nwuka, 2020).

To achieve Nollyfund policy, BOI had set up an Implementation Advisory Group made up of two (2) cinema management experts, one national film distributor, two production and post-production experts, two film critics/reviewers, and two film producers. This advisory group is to analytically review film scripts and associated budgets submitted to BOI by movie producers and make technical recommendations to BOI management for final credit appraisal and subsequent approval in line with the Bank's Credit Policy. The funds are to be accessed upon the provision of viable scripts and a demonstration of a track record in movie productions amidst other requirements which are similar to the internationally accepted loan structures for movie production (Nwuka, 2020).

Accordingly, as at the time of Uche Nwuka interview (as cited), BOI already had eleven projects being liquidated before maturity. Thus, within the Nollyfund product, BOI had supported about twenty-six projects, eleven of which had gone to the Cinema with fifteen others still undergoing other post-production processes. In addition, Bank of Industry had supported Cinema houses such as, Silver Bird, Film House, Ozone, Genesis, Viva, Axari (in Calabra), and developed about Nine different subsectors such as Content Production Sector, Distribution, Infrastructure, Production, infrastructure, Media and Publishing, Hospitality Recreational Parks, Arts and Culture and Sports Infrastructure (Nwuka, 2020). Significantly, BOI has supported various aspects of the industry, from production, post production to distribution. Films like Kunle Afolayan's *The CEO*, (2016), Okey Ogunjiofor's *Queen Amina*, (2021) Enem Isong's *Anyama* (2016) Opa Williams *Three Wise Men* (2016) and many other films were financed by BOI (Teco Benson, personal communication, March 17, 2022).

However, in spite of these conscientious efforts to establish a formalised film sponsorship method, many practitioners have criticised the initiative through various contestations. Though these contestations could not halt the initiative, but the general supposition by these producers buttresses that while BOI loan may favour studio and cinema owners, producers are the endangered species of BOI loan. According to most of these frontline Nollywood producers who preferred anonymity, BOI's Implementation Advisory Group is constituted of selected actors and producers (most of whom have intention in benefiting from BOI loan) to moderate the scripts of other producers. Thus, most producers were not comfortable with this arrangement. Secondly, some producers who have modern film equipment could not see the reason why BOI insisted that a certain amount of money (from BOI loan) must be deducted and credited to a certain studio for the sole purpose of equipment provision and post production for film. While Nollywood distribution is yet to be firmly developed and structured, most producers believe that BOI has overbearing imprint as to who distribute what film and at a specified cost. This discouraged patronage of BOI loan by many film producers for film production.

In 2013, former President, Goodluck Jonathan, launched the N3 billion "Project Nollywood" to boost Nigeria's film industry by funding scripts, infrastructure, and capacity building. Despite its promise, many filmmakers criticised the fund's inaccessibility, claiming it benefited only a select few. Akhimien (October 12, 2024) cited Emeka Ike, a veteran Nollywood actor who attributed the poor distribution to the lack of industry unity, formal structures, and accountability. He alleged that funds were misused by few for personal luxuries rather than industry growth. Dr. Victor Okhai, the president of FREGAN, observed that as a

result of lack of structure in Nollywood, over 2000 Nollywood practitioners registered personal guilds and associations in order to access the funds (Personal communication, January 2025).

Furthermore, MOPICON, an acronym for Motion Picture Council of Nigeria, developed by Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) is another proposed policy initiative towards enhancing Nollywood practice. Ever since inception, MOPICON has undergone a convoluted process and critical assessment by various industrial stakeholders which metamorphosed into contestation and petitions in 2016 (Chima Okereke, personal communication, April 17, 2020). Prior to the petition that seemed to scuttle its legislation, Nollywood guilds/associations and critical stakeholders debated the draft bill from the 2006 to 2016 when the bill was reviewed by the mandate of the minister of information, Lai Mohammed, who wanted to present the bill to Federal Executive Council for onward presentation as an executive bill to the house of Assembly. The concept of MOPICON is to structure film practice in the Nollywood industry, regulate film studies in the tertiary institutions, ensure standard in practice, create contract yardstick and institutionalize sanctions for offenders. The bill captures royalty format, and creates enabling environment which will promote (co)productions. MOPICON is a project that is believed to harmonise the debates surrounding the operational ethos of various ethnic wood's such as Asabawood, Kanywood, AkwaCrosswood, Biniwood, Idomawood and equally hoped to harmonize the complicated activities of many replicated guilds in Nollywood.

To understand the MOPICON proposed policy, a review of the 2006 draft which can be accessed online suffices. This is because, the recent version of 2016 seems to be a foreclosed document even for practitioners and researchers. Efforts to get the 2016 revised document by the researcher proved abortive.

In the part 1 of the 2006 draft bill of the Motion Picture Council of Nigeria, article 2 was explicit that the council will be instrumental in:

- (a) Determining who are Motion Picture Practitioners;
- (b) Determining what standards of knowledge and skills are to be attained by persons seeking to become registered as Motion Picture Practitioners and reviewing those standards from time to time;
- (c) Securing in accordance with the provisions of this Act, the establishment and maintenance of a register of persons entitled to practice as professionals in the motion picture industry, and the publication, from time to time, of lists of those persons;
- (d) Securing in accordance with the provisions of this Act, the establishment and maintenance of a register of National guilds of practitioners of the trades and specializations within the profession, as well as associations of Motion Picture Producers, distributors and exhibitors/ marketers;
- (e) Regulating and controlling professional practice in the motion picture industry;
- (f) Ensuring that practitioners maintain the ethics of the profession as contained in the Code of Ethics;
- (g) Fostering the achievement and maintenance of the highest professional and commercial standards in the motion picture industry;
- (h) Ensuring the protection of the rights and privileges of motion picture practitioners in the lawful exercise of their profession;

- (i) Inquiring into complaints about the conduct of any motion picture practitioner and the conduct of any person or organizations towards the practitioner, and exercising powers conferred by this Act in respect of such complaints; and
- (j) Performing such other functions as are conferred on the Council by this Act. (Motion Picture Council of Nigeria [MOPICON], 2006).

In an address by the former Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, at the inauguration of the review committee of the motion picture council of Nigeria, MOPICON in Lagos on 12th April 2016, he expressed his dissatisfaction with various petitions about MOPICON, one of which was that MOPICON is believed to muzzle creativity in the belief that practitioners will be dictated to by the government on the kind of movies to produce. He allays these seeming unfounded fears and asserts his intention to actualise MOPICON which he believes will possibly enable Nollywood to play meaningful role in national development.

According to him, with a formidable representative group that is empowered to lobby for the growth, development and welfare of the industry and its practitioners, Nollywood will be better structured. He acknowledged the 2005 MOPICON review of the 17-member Committee, headed by Chief Tunde Oloyede who according to him, did a comprehensive work and submitted its report to the Federal Government in Nov. 2006.

Accordingly, like APCON, MOPICON will emerge the most important intervention tool that addresses Nollywood's structural deficiencies (Izuzu, 2016). The 2016 review committees comprises of Peace Anyiam Osigwe (Coordinator) Mahmood Ali Balogun Deputy (Coordinator) and the representative of the Nigerian Film Corporation (To serve as Secretary to Review Committee)

The contentious issues by many practitioners on MOPICON seem to have stemmed up from the issue of qualification which is to be determined by MOPICON. Many practitioners who are not schooled in the area of filmmaking have the unfounded fear that MOPICON bill will disenfranchise them from filmmaking. Again, the secrecy seen in concealing the 2016 reviewed MOPICON bill seems to engineer this fear and also promulgate an ethnic sentiment as the Igbos (particularly marketers) who constitute the key production circuit in Nollywood feel that MOPICON is a decoy to disenfranchise them from production.

Therefore, with all these contestations and petitions, the move to pass MOPICON Bill between 2016 and 2018 did not succeed. Again, another criticism which greeted the bill is its restrictive nature on intending filmmakers who are below the ages of eighteen years as age restriction was a clause in the bill. To the critics of the Bill, the industry is better off unregulated.

In a virtual focus group discussion comprising ten astute Nollywood film scholars and filmmakers such as Prof. Ekwuazi (former MD of the Film Corporation), Mahmood Ali Balogun (the assistant coordinator of 2016 MOPICON review committee), Chris Obi-Rapu (Director of *Living in Bondage*), Teco Benson (foremost Nollywood director) professors Dira Adimiju, Innocent Uwah and Osakue Omoera (film scholars), Gab Okoye, (Foremost Nollywood distributor), Chima Okereke and Chyke Chykwes (both film directors), issues bothering on MOPICON policy were adequately discussed. While some think that the bill which was conceived during the DVD distribution era, can no longer carter for the digital distribution outlets of the present Nollywood, others feel that the amended version of the bill has taken care of digital distribution concerns. Some key practitioners also feel that the policy

will stifle creativity because of its proposed regulations. The group argue that art is liberal and cannot be subjected to the strict control being proposed by the MOPICON policy. However, majority of the discussants feel that the regulation in the bill will formalise Nollywood and take care of many irregularities in Nollywood. All the discussants believe that Nollywood activities being not backed by law, require such MOPICON policy to enable formality in practice.

The current Minister of Arts, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy, Hannatu Musawa, is very good with rhetorics but has made few concrete steps towards structuring Nollywood, according to a key Nollywood practitioner who has pleaded anonymity. Contrary to this notion, I strongly believe that she is committed to enacting policies that will eventually give Nollywood lasting structure. My participation as a secretary to sub-committee she constituted in 2024 on drafting “National Cultural policy on Nigerian film industry” is my conviction. Other members of the National Cultural policy on Nigerian Film Industry are Victor Okhai (chairman), Femi Odugbemi, Edmund Peters and Yomi Durojaiye.

CONCLUSION

The formation and sustenance of the Federation of Registered Nollywood Guilds and Associations (FRENGAN) is a strong testament of the tacit agreement between Nigerian government and the film practitioners. While practitioners made efforts towards ensuring its practicability, NFVCB provided enabling environment to enable this. Firstly, NFVCB provided some criteria such as ensuring that the guilds submit their registration documents, and that the member guilds must have existed for a minimum number of three years (post-registration period) and that the guilds should submit their annual reports (thus some guilds who were not able to do this for years were forced to do so). Moreover, in order to censor films, filmmakers must belong to a registered recognised guild.

This movement has institutionalised structure and formalisation in Nollywood to a very large extent. This paper has underpinned the developmental struggles and contestations towards enacting policies that will aid the formalisation of Nollywood practice. Beyond the proliferation of guilds and associations in Nollywood as means of Nollywood formalisation, the institutionalization of The Federation of Registered Nollywood Guilds and Associations (FRENGAN) has brought so much structure in the Nollywood industry.

While there is a great need to review Nigerian Film Policy, I advocate that issues surrounding MOPICON should be submerged into the activities/structure of FRENGAN as will be reflected in the constitution and method of operation. This will ensure strict regulations from the aforementioned disorderliness which has bedeviled Nollywood film practice. It is strongly recommended that a policy on FRENGAN should therefore be enacted forthwith.

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