and extensive cultural sectors, as can be seen in the example of Bombay cinema (Bollywood) or the Latin American recording industries. Equally, developed countries are home to many creative cultures, from handicraft to hip hop, many of which are not institutionally supported and can thus be described as informal. However, given the comparatively larger scale of informality within the developing world, a global perspective inevitably requires

1.1 Informality, development and the creative economy: the case of Nollywood

The Nigerian movie industry, commonly referred to as Nollywood, operates outside the established channels of screen financing, production and distribution. Since the 1990s, low-budget movie production has boomed in Nigeria, creating a vibrant screen culture that attracts a passionate audience throughout the country and across the whole of Africa. Every year many hundreds of titles, from thrillers to supernatural horror movies, are shot and released. Nobody knows precisely how many, but their massive popularity with audiences around the continent is universally acknowledged. The model of production and distribution is informal, yet it is also becoming increasingly professionalized. Films are scripted and shot quickly, often in a matter of weeks, then distributed on videodisc (VCD) through a network of small stores, markets and itinerant traders; movies are watched at home or in makeshift video clubs, markets, bars, etc. This informality has both advantages and disadvantages. It means that Nollywood has no official institutional presence outside Nigeria, and its existence is not even acknowledged in many surveys of international cinema production. Because it is disengaged from the international festival and sales circuit, its products are difficult to acquire outside Africa (although digital streaming via YouTube and pay-per-view sites is growing).

Nollywood’s informal structure makes it possible for films to be made quickly, cheaply and with minimal red tape, but it also results in instability and a fly-by-night mentality among producers. Weak intellectual-property enforcement in the early years led to widespread piracy but also to deep audience penetration. Research suggests that the industry’s informal financing practices – in which production capital from one film is used to finance the next one, with no bank involvement – has worked well for smaller productions, but is increasingly a problem for more ambitious producers wishing to scale up their movie-making and attract audiences among the diaspora and internationally. At the same time, elements of the industry are increasingly organized. A complex system of guilds and professional associations exists, along with a highly developed star system and reviewing infrastructure. The Government of Nigeria is keen to support Nollywood, which it sees as a driver of employment and a source of potential export earnings and tax revenues. The National Film and Video Censors Board is proactive in industry development and has expanded its role from content regulation to industry advocacy. It is attempting, with mixed results, to regularize distribution and amassed data on industry activity and has experimented with a licensing system for video clubs. As the status of the industry rises, scrutiny of these films grows. While Nollywood is now widely seen as the country’s flagship cultural industry, some figures in government and the cultural establishment are uneasy with the poor production quality of most of these films, as well as their sensationalist stories; they would prefer to project a different image of Nigeria to the world. Many film-makers and intellectuals elsewhere in Africa are critical of what they see as the “dumping” of these rough-and-ready videos in their national markets and the “pollution” of the African cultural space that they see resulting from it.

– Ramon Lobato