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Spatial Ontologies of Globalization

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ABSTRACT *In this paper we offer some criticisms regarding the spatial ontologies that have underwritten theories of globalization. We evaluate different approaches to understanding their working, each of which must grapple with the problem of connecting the local and the global, and contrast these to that of our recent work aimed at elaborating a 'flat ontology.' The central feature of this alternative ontology is the site: a material localization characterized by differential relations through which one site is connected to other sites, out of which emerges a social space that can be understood to extend, however unevenly and temporarily, across distant places. Yet, in light of its focus on practices – on situated sayings and doings – our ontology must refuse the spatial imaginaries that underpins nearly all discussions of globalization. To illustrate our position we examine the practices of popular filmmaking within Lagos, Nigeria (Nollywood). This site is an entry point for comprehending and enlarging upon the political implications of our ontology – one that is meant not only to rethink globalization but to unsettle the abstractions that enable its expanding hegemony.*

Introduction

In this article we examine the intersections between space and globalization. Not the geographies that have been produced by globalization – because for this we have a richly descriptive and detailed atlas of economic, cultural, and political transformations that underwrite a new vocabulary of mobilization, intensification, and hybridization (Appadurai, 1996; Dicken, 2003; Harvey, 1989; Held et al., 2000; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Sassen, 1998; cf. Hirst and Thompson, 1999). We focus instead on the spatial imaginaries (Gregory, 1994) researchers bring to globalization, concepts that enable them to comprehend, explain, and confront it. We take up this task by drawing from and extending two provocative papers dealing with the spaces of globalization. In the first, J.K. Gibson-Graham (2002) offer critical assessments of the local-global binary that is at the heart of academic and popular conceptualizations of globalization. Noting that the global 'appears as a telos in the ongoing process called 'globalization',' they are working to dislodge the opposition from a circumscribed politics in which large scale 'global forces' reign supreme over 'progressive, grassroots, local interventions' (p. 25; also Massey, 1994). In another paper, titled 'Spatialities of Globalization,' Ash Amin (2002) is concerned to theorize how globalization should be thought, geographically speaking. Underlying his work is a fundamental question: How should the local and the global be connected? Contending that 'there is no consensus in social theory about what to say about this spatiality' (p. 385), he goes on to contrast a scalar logic of globalization with a networked one. Both logics are about efforts to find a language for describing how 'territoriality itself is becoming altered by the rise of world-scale processes and transnational connectivity' (p. 387). The Gibson-Graham and Amin papers have prompted us to further consider the conceptual resources available to describe the spatiality of globalization. Here we extend their analyses by asking the following question: What spatial ontologies have been brought to bear on globalization, and how might it appear under an alternative specification? By invoking spatial ontology we signal our attentiveness to the differential relations that drive material compositions and dynamic properties, objects and events, while refusing claims to being or process that rely upon transcendent spatial categories (Marston et al., 2005).

In the next section we look to Gibson-Graham and Amin to assess some of the understandings of space that have been used to grasp the forces of flux and fixity currently defining globalization. Briefly, if we are to refer to globalization, as Roland Robertson has, as 'the relatively

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specific path that the world has taken in the direction of becoming singular' (2004, p. 98), then we need to ask what sort of spatiality has been employed to describe and analyze that path. Because globalization implies mobility, transference, and interconnection – a multiplication of linkages among disparate places and peoples and a widening and deepening of their intensities (Dicken, 2003; Giddens, 1990; Held et al., 2000; King, 1997; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004) – its theorists have little choice but to employ a spatial vocabulary in order to understand it (Brenner, 2004). And within that ambit, there exists the idea that: (a) globalization rests, at base, on the local-global binary (Gibson-Graham, 2002) and (b) there are two primary candidates for linking the disparate parts of space this binary presumes (Amin, 2002). One concentrates on a set of socially produced, overlapping, and intersecting territorial hierarchies (e.g., neighborhood, city, region, nation); the other focuses attention on spatial extensions of interconnecting flows, networks, and dispersed associations. With Gibson-Graham, we register our complaints with both the theoretical formulation of the local-global binary and the hegemonic force of its political calcifications. We go on, however, to question the ontological status of the global on which conceptions of globalization depend. With Amin, we note our affinities for networks, properly conceived, as the basis for interpreting the objects and events of globalization; unlike him, however, we are prepared to jettison any understanding of globalization that might rely upon scalar imaginaries, no matter how fluid or malleable (Marston, et al., 2005). In the third section we elaborate a 'flat' site ontology that, we believe, avoids the shortcomings of globalization's spatial ontologies. The significance of the site ontology turns in part on the fact that, in rejecting the local-global optic through which globalization theory is constructed, globalization itself is diminished as an explanatory term.

This article issues a cautionary note against the hegemony of spatial abstractions that circulate within 'globe talk' (Robertson, 1992). To clarify our position, we offer an empirical section that interprets what might otherwise be viewed as an exemplar of globalization, interpreted here through the flat ontology. The case is the emergence of the film industry known as Nollywood centered in Lagos, Nigeria. Emergent within the past fifteen years, it is now reputed to be the largest such industry in the world in terms of numbers of films produced each year. We selected Nollywood because of the ease with which it has been incorporated into globalization's frame, right alongside Mumbai's Bollywood, in aping Los Angeles's Hollywood. We attempt to show that this imitative positioning is itself the product of the spatialities writers have brought *to* globalization, and that a different reading can be marshaled to produce a more culturally and politically attuned understanding of Nigeria's burgeoning film industry. That reading leads us to address in the conclusion a widespread concern of globalization theorists and anti-globalization activists alike: What political tendencies and possibilities reside in the local? We respond by continuing to refuse the premise of the global on which the question is founded, pointing instead to the necessarily site specific alignment of all politics.

Up and Down and Back and Forth with the Local-Global

Given the conceptual separation of the local and the global in globalization discourse, one of the requisite tasks of globalization theorists has been to find a language for reconnecting them. One starting point is to equate 'the global' with universalism and macro-level structures, while tying 'the local' to particularism and everyday experience. When informed by a dialectical vision, this effort often results in a 'both/and' solution, as when Roland Robertson (1997, p. 73) writes that globalization involves a twofold process of 'interpenetration': the 'universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism.' On the one hand is the 'dramatic penetration of global forces' (Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997, p. 3) into everyday life, where the global is understood as 'that matrix of transnational economic, political, and cultural forces that are circulating throughout the globe and producing universal, global conditions, often transversing and even erasing previously formed national and regional boundaries' (Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997, p. 14). On the other are 'those constellations of conditions that are particular and specific according to country, region, tradition, and other determinants, such as the creation and preservation of local subcultures' (Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997, p. 15). In describing their combinations, metaphors of

interconnection and articulation are often deployed (Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997; Giddens, 1990; Mamadouh, et al., 2004; Nederveen Pieterse 1995; Robertson, 1992, 1997). In most accounts, the local and the global connect across a variety of domains – economic, political, cultural, social – through which the former are differentially mediated in terms that range from accommodation to resistance.

Numerous scholars have noted that power is unevenly embedded in the local and the global (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Harvey, 1996; Massey, 1994, 2005), a point that goes directly to the question of how to theorize opposition to globalization. Gibson-Graham summarize these geopolitical alignments thusly:

We are all familiar with the denigration of the local as small and relatively powerless, defined and confined by the global: the global is a force, the local is its field of play; the global is penetrating, the local penetrated and transformed. Globalism is synonymous with abstract space, the frictionless movement of money and commodities, the expansiveness and inventiveness of capitalism and the market. But its Other, localism, is coded as place, community, defensiveness, bounded identity, *in situ* labor, noncapitalism, the traditional (2002, p. 27).

Determined to dislodge the local-global binary from the powerless-powerful one, Gibson-Graham first invoke the commonly acknowledged problems associated with binary oppositions, such as their production within a Western epistemology that substitutes multiplicity, permeability, and hybridity with fixity, and their dependence on one another as negated yet productive moments in the constitutive production of the oppositional term (the ‘Other’). Concerned that critical resources that might be marshaled against globalization are undermined when the subordinate term is stripped of its power, Gibson-Graham go on to posit that the local and the global are not ‘things in themselves’, but interpretive frames, empty of content: ‘This move opposes the tendency to objectify both local and global, to perceive ‘localness’ or ‘globalness’ as essential or real qualities of an object’ (2002, p. 31). But instead of carrying these moments of critique forward in ways that might altogether destabilize the binary (p. 32-33), Gibson-Graham focus their project on reshaping the political ‘effectivity of the local’ (p. 35) by contrasting global capitalism with diverse, often localized, economies, such as: alternative markets (e.g., community supported agriculture, black market), non-market activities (e.g., barter, gifts), unpaid labor, alternative paid labor (e.g., co-operatives, self-employed), alternative capitalist activities (e.g., socially and ecologically responsible capitalism), and non-capitalist enterprises (e.g., communal). Notwithstanding the value of these comparisons – in which, admittedly, the extensiveness and depth of diverse economies is demonstrated – the global is nonetheless untouched by the exercise, a comparison that redoubles the terms that measure global capitalism’s spatial power.

An alternative is to complete Gibson-Graham’s unfinished project of deconstruction (pp. 30-32) by undoing the ‘structurality of structure’ (Derrida, 1966, p. 248) on which the local-global and all other binaries pivot. Proceeding first by questioning the law that governs the desire for an orienting, balancing, and organizing center – logos, essence, presence, origin – we might read ‘the global’ as one more hallmark of Western science that limits what Derrida called the ‘freeplay’ of the structure, the otherwise unraveling elements that any structure is said to systematize. Such a reading becomes possible in that moment of recognition when we can begin to think that there might not be a center ‘... that the center could not be ... a being-present, that the center [has] no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play’ (p., 249). If ‘the global’ in globalization discourse (King, 1997, p. 11) cannot bear the weight of transcendence – if it is in fact not a ‘being-present’ – then in the absence of a locus its only function will be to extend ‘the domain and interplay of signification *ad infinitum*’ (Derrida, 1966, p. 249).

In so destabilizing ‘the global’ we find inspiration from John Tagg, an art historian who noted that ‘concepts of globalism have no status outside of the fields of discourse and practice that constitute them’ (1997, p. 157). As he puts matters, the globe ‘would seem to be caught in precisely

what the Derridians might think of as a ‘metaphysics of presence,’ or the Lacanians as a projection onto the isolated images of the planet of an Imaginary wholeness that represses the multiple and heterogeneous positioning effects of language’ (1997, p. 159). This is not to say, as Deutsche pointedly remarks in defending poststructuralism (1991; also Dixon and Jones, 1998), that the world does not exist, only that it cannot be captured outside of the systems and technologies of representation we bring to bear on it, and that give it its meaning. Thus, that the globe is so large as to be beyond the scope of everyday life while no doubt true, is not the main point, for experience at any ‘level’ is never direct, but always mediated through the language and practices that confer upon it reality effects and that organize its resonances and textures (Scott, 1991). The point instead, is that the globe is a transcendent spatial category, an ‘impossible object’ quite like ‘society’ in Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s famous analysis (1985). The ‘global’ is made possible by the openness and indeterminacy of discourse, qualities enabling it to be stabilized, partially and temporarily, until it is overflowed by a new articulation or representation (Tagg 1997). In these overcodings, the global signifier is interdependent with other holistic epistemes – such as structure, law, God. As Cosgrove (2001) has shown, unraveling these connective tissues requires genealogical attention to the emergence of specific technologies and techniques of representation, such as those of astronomical measurement and cartographic illustration.

Our second and third criticisms of the spatial ontologies of globalization ensue from this analysis. As Amin (2002) suggests, once the global has been separated from the local, there are a limited number of tropes at our disposal to describe the spaces reconnected by globalization. Most common are those that rely on either scales or networks. Both spatial metaphors work to link together distant phenomena and processes; how they conceive of their displacements is, however, quite different. The scalar approach tends to rely on a hierarchical language of vertically conceived levels to describe globalization’s spatial churning; the network approach employs a horizontal optic, relying on a continuous and often relationally conceived extensivity rather than on a priori territorial demarcations. We look at each of these in turn.

Amin’s analysis confirms that the scalar imaginary of globalization theory cannot be disentangled from the history of scale theorizing more generally, especially as it developed in human geography. One of the most important early developments in scale theory was provided by Peter Taylor (1982), whose work not only laid the grounds for what is today known as the social construction of scale (Marston, 2000), but which also spatialized world systems theory, an early precursor to contemporary theories of globalization. Typical of a scale-influenced globalization hypothesis is the question of the relative power of the nation-state in comparison to the global forces that operate beyond its confines (Taylor, 1982; Tilly, 1984). Whatever one’s view of its continuing importance as a key unit in territorialization (compare Brenner, 2004 to Ohmae, 1995 and Strange, 1996), from the vantage point of scale, the nation-state sits at a critical juncture between the ‘up’ of transnational corporations, international monetary and trade blocs, and the magnates of the Western culture industry (Held, 1995), and the ‘down’ of sub-national, regional, and otherwise local particularisms. For some theorists, globalization is *all about* these scalar imbrications: ‘globalization ... in both its structural and strategic moments is the creation and/or restructuring of scale as a social relation and as a site of social relations’ (Jessop, 2000, p. 341). As Amin summarizes this view:

Globalisation is seen to multiply and relativise geographical scales of social organization linked to the changing spatial requirements of the latest phase of capitalist development. These are not seen as mutually exclusive or parallel scalar configurations, but as intersecting and overlapping scales, leading to the restructuring of places as territories as they engage in the multiscale processes and politics (2002, p. 387).

Amin goes on to sound a cautionary argument against the scalar imaginary, noting that the distinction ‘between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ as separate scalar fields remains problematic’ (2002, p. 388). His concern is not to argue that the global does not exist, but rather that the local is so

interpenetrated by outside forces that its ontological status as ‘place’ in opposition to a globalized ‘space’ cannot be sustained:

Surely a key aspect of the transnationalisation of local relations is that we can no longer make an easy distinction between local and global geographies? How localized or global, for example, are the associational politics of worker, immigrant, and NGO ... groups campaigning for local recognition but relying on international financial and other support networks? (Amin 2002, p. 388)

In our view, however, the problem is not so much the inseparability of the local and global, but the transcendent imaginary that throws social processes onto higher order spatial registers altogether, whether they are global capitalism *or* global civil society. De-coupling levels of power from this ladder-like imaginary – a project of Amin’s as well as Gibson-Graham’s – will require ancillary work on a number of binaries, including culture-economy, agency-structure, subjectivity-objectivity, parochialism-cosmopolitanism, static-dynamic, authentic-produced, nostalgic-progressive, and concrete-abstract (Marston, et al., 2005, 2005). These are all territorializations of a different sort: the reproduction and circulation of any number of small-large imaginaries and their pre-configured hierarchies. Sorting these binaries through the various levels – what processes and at what scales? (e.g., Brenner, 2004) – informs scores if not hundreds of studies on globalization, all of which, by tautology, rely on the transcendent imaginary of the global. Not lastly, from this elevated optic researchers are unwittingly hoisted into the position of detached surveyor. As Gibson-Graham note, most theorists ‘stand outside globalization and “see it as it is”’; is it possible, they ask, ‘that the power of globalization ... has taken over the bodies of its critics?’ (2002, p. 34-35).

In contrast to the hierarchical approach, some theorists have turned their attention to a different metaphor, one founded on flows and networks (Amin 2002). Consider first the definition in *Global Transformations* – a classic text in the ever-expanding globalization literature: ‘. . . a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions—assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact—generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power’ (Held et al., 2000, p. 16, italics in original). Drawing directly on the work of Manuel Castells (1996) and his conceptualization of globalization as a ‘space of flows’, as well as indirectly on actor-network theory (Law and Hassard, 1999), Held, et al. specify the flows as constituted by ‘the movement of physical artifacts, people, symbols, tokens and information across space and time, while networks refer to regularized or patterned interactions between independent agents, nodes of activity, or sites of power’ (2000, p. 16).

Flows are common spatial metaphors to comprehending globalization, but we would be wise to remember that they are just that. As spatial concepts, they rely on the presumption that objects and bodies can become detached from their moorings or nodes and circulate over space, thereby embedding one site into another (Giddens, 1990). One problem with this conceptual optic is the tendency to see aspects of globalization as reducible to horizontally radiating ‘out theres’ that fly over the materialities of the in-between in order find themselves in the space of the ‘in here’. Even more symptomatic is the view that space itself is abolished in a sea of networks and flows. As Schotle (2000) has claimed:

‘global’ relations are social connections in which territorial location, territorial distance and territorial borders do not have a determining influence. In global space ‘place’ is not territorially fixed, territorial distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial frontiers present no particular impediment (quoted in Amin, 2002, p. 386).

As we have pointed out earlier (Marston et al., 2005), this view of unfettered flows presents nearly as many problems as the rigid scalar imaginary it promises to overturn. More to our liking is Amin’s careful survey of networked space, ‘the geographies constituted through the folds, undulations, and overlaps that natural and social practices normally assume, without any a priori assumption of the geographies of relations nested in territorial or geometric space’ (2002, p. 389). What ‘grounds’ such flows for Amin is a focus on places that are thought in non-bounded terms, ‘as

nodes in relational settings, and as [sites] of situated practices' (p. 391). His analytic emphasis on the 'placement of practices' precludes the 'amorphous and evanescent world geography of incessant fluidity and mobility' (p. 389). Places are, rather, the 'temporary spatiotemporalisation of associational networks of different lengths and duration' (Amin, 2002, p. 391), nodes that embody both actual and virtual forces (Delanda, 2002; Deleuze, 1994; Thrift, 2000). Better than a shifting or reworked territoriality of scales, globalization for Amin is an 'energized network space' marked by 'the intensification of mixture and connectivity as more things become interdependent (in associative links and exclusions)' (2002, p. 395).

And yet, in the end Amin is not willing to jettison wholesale the scalar imaginary, and so we find him affirming the continued existence and relevance of 'scalar practices and institutions' (p. 396-397). Included in his discussion are a number of processes and institutions that borrow heavily from the local-to-global optic that we have been at pains to critique: a 'global regime of capitalist accumulation', 'downwards' and 'upwards' movements of state activities, autonomous actions attributed to governments at national and local levels, etc. In our view, the deployment of these imaginary geo-units is inconsistent with the main elements of Amin's argument, which we otherwise affirm. They constitute one of the major, if still relatively unacknowledged, differences between ontology informed by hierarchical spatiality and the flat ontology informed by Deleuze, Guattari, and others, to which we now turn.

Ontology without Globalization

Let us first be clear in explaining that, by using the term 'flat', we are not following up one critique of spatial imaginaries by the production of yet another. In particular, our sense of flatness shares no commonalities or affinities with the orgiastic capitalocentrism of Thomas Friedman (2006), who would have us believe that socio-political access and mobility have been flattened (read: equalized) for the entirety of the world's population through a singular and pervasive market blanketing the globe. The exemplary imaginary for such Friedmanesque notions of *culturonomic* flatness is that of the Earth image projected onto the shape of a coin, wherein the totality of the world's relations are made indiscernible from those of the market. 'Flat' in this context can only mean 'reduced to' or 'singularized': the classically capitalist desire for reduction of necessity, distance, and – importantly – difference to the crude, abstract equalizer: money.

In contrast, our conception of *ontological* flatness is an articulation of the world and its workings that resists both the production of formal, typological categories and liberalist fantasies about equalized access through the fluidities of capital-driven flattening. We propose a spatial ontology that recognizes a virtually infinite population of mobile and mutable 'sites' and that is *ontologically flat* by virtue of its affirmation of immanence – or self-organization – as the fundamental process of material actualization. Against the deployment of forms or categories that operate by carving up the world into a delimited set of manageable object-types, we look to the unfolding state of affairs within which situations or sites are constituted as singularities – that is, as a collectivity of bodies or things, orders and events, and doings and sayings that hang together so as to lend distinct consistency to assemblages of dynamic relations. Likewise, rather than proceeding by way of a set of pre-established axiomatics for evaluating what processes are unfolding – a reductive strategy that tends to overlook differences from site to site in favor of roping them together under the banner of equivalence – we argue that investigations must be conditioned by the positional and processual composition of the site to better feel out its specificities. Laid out not as a problem that must be force-fed into the matrix of a preordained solution (scalar 'up theres' or horizontal 'over theres'), but instead as a problematic field that in itself produces the analytic material of its own solvability (Deleuze, 1994, p. 179-80), the specificity of the site expresses itself in the variety of differences and singularities that lend themselves to its composition. Approaching the site from this perspective is done in the spirit of retaining the variation and complexity – those elements that scientific reductivism and Friedmanesque capitalocentrism amputate and disregard as noise or accident – that go into making up the deep singularity and specificity of each site. As such, difference – rather than

being something that must be controlled or negated in order to arrive at general or reproducible results – becomes fundamentally productive and positive insofar as, without it, a site is stripped of its material situatedness and reduced to being merely another exemplar of a general condition.

A problematic or differential approach to the site – informed by Gilles Deleuze – articulates ontology as ‘pure difference’. Thus, like our assessment of the site, there is an overlying concern with discovering strategies for thinking and speaking about difference, variation, and complexity that do not at the same time foreclose the possibility of keeping those differences open to further variation and complexity. Deleuze explains that analytics approached from the perspective of discussing and retaining difference must be ‘anexact yet rigorous’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 483), suggesting that such work must be capable of speaking about difference without reframing a series of differences within orders of stasis and similitude. Elsewhere, Deleuze and Guattari frame the specificities of philosophy and science in terms of the ways that each distinctly deals with the question of difference and infinite variation. They explain that philosophy creates concepts that endeavor to describe complexity while at the same time keeping open and operating upon the difference that it describes. By contrast, science tends to select out and isolate variables from complex situations in order to establish footholds within complexity so as to better determine the processes of change and variability (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; p. 202). Our ontological interest in the examination of sites as situated, mutable singularities fosters a theoretical and practical approach to the world that falls somewhere between these accounts of philosophy and science. Specifically, while we take a step back from the abstraction inherent in the creation of concepts, we remain attentive to the need to seek out the articulation of material differences. Likewise, while we resist the scientific tendency to establish still points within a system in order to measure its movements and transformations, we do note the importance of seeking out the consistency-producing orders or strata that are *internal* to sites and that contribute to their frequent hangings-together. In this way, there can be said to be a double-movement to the site: one trajectory toward continuous variation and differentiation, the other toward repetition and moments of relative stability. This double movement is a tendency that generally helps to mark out the horizons of the site. Each, repetition and variation, operates upon the other as a kind of consistency of the site, where the repetitive, interactive affects of bodies condition trajectories toward situated differentiation.

In the following section, we deploy this understanding to examine one of the most recent victims of global overcoding, the Nigerian film industry popularly known as Nollywood. Its rise in importance as a major industry has drawn countless diminutive comparisons to Hollywood, the latter of which is invoked as a model for the marriage of globalization and film. Against an assumption that, given a certain technology or commodity (all other things being equal), any other system is a ‘similar’ if inferior copy of an exemplary (Western) one, we argue instead for attention to the specificity of Nollywood as a complex site, and not simply one more instance of globalization.

Nollywood: A Social Site

Our discussion of Nollywood as an example of a flat ontology rests on a small, but excellent collection of scholarly sources; scores of news articles from Nigeria (and a few other African countries), the US, Europe and the UK and Nigerian; Nollywood websites and blogs; our viewing of a set of recent Nollywood films; and our participation in the June 2006 Nollywood Foundation Convention, “Nollywood, African Cinema and Beyond” – attended by both Nollywood and Hollywood professionals – that occurred in Los Angeles, California.¹ The scholarly sources provide detailed insights into the complexities of the video film industry as it is organized in Lagos; the others have helped us to appreciate how actors, directors and producers make the video films and how audiences engage with them.

Here we explore the empirical implications of our site ontology by way of Nollywood, which includes people operating in Surulere, the film industry district in Lagos, Nigeria, as well as in other parts of southern Nigeria, and journalistic and academic commentaries on the industry both within

and outside of Nigeria. Whether the label ‘Nollywood’ was indigenously generated or applied by a US journalist, as has been suggested (Haynes, 2005), matters little to us. What is relevant to our argument is that it operates as a globalizing force, an ‘order word’ that captures the filmmaking practices occurring there and inescapably ties them to a distant and, under the imaginary of globalization, a superior other: Hollywood, a spectral refrain that haunts its nominal relatives.

We are, of course, mindful that Hollywood itself is a complex site with connections to other sites of film production around the United States and the world. And we do not mean to imply that Hollywood is somehow unproblematic either as a representation or a set of practices, in contrast to the complexity and difference of Nollywood. Rather, Hollywood too is constituted through a collection of sites of complexity and difference, incorporating a neighborhood of related practices from the prevailing studio system to independent film making, pornography, government and educational media, amateur video production, and YouTube and other internet self-broadcasting video sites. But as an originative site of film making practices, Hollywood has become a powerful coding mechanism such that the label ‘Nollywood’ makes whatever happens there *like* Hollywood but also *not* Hollywood. Indeed, Nollywood, because of its very name, becomes unavoidably recognized by film professionals as well as non-African audiences as derivative of Hollywood: a less sophisticated, more amateurish rendering of Hollywood comedy, action and thriller movies (Lagos films) or of Bollywood masala movies (Kano films).² Calling the site Nollywood territorializes it by way of a non-relational point that operates from beyond it. In this way, Nollywood (and other supposedly imitative sites of film production like Bollywood) appear anchored in place, while Hollywood is transcendent, the trace that standardizes and normativizes the practice of film production. But when we move away from the ordering impulses that comprise globalizing discourses, the practices, the doings and sayings that actually constitute filmmaking in Nollywood, are distinctly different from those that occur in Hollywood, or Bollywood. Moreover, these video films have very different effects on their audiences. In short, Nollywood is constituted through its own collection differential relations, and though it certainly does have connections both to Los Angeles and Mumbai – as well as Beijing, New York and London – it assembles a distinct arrangement of entities that possess their own meanings and identities (Okwo, 2006; Chikwendu, 2006; Ojewuyi, 2006).³

Practices

Nollywood’s video film genres range from action and adventure to historical epics, horror, and morality tales. But the most common description applied to them is melodrama, a genre that has been taken up all over the world from US and Egyptian soap operas to Latin American telenovelas to Indian masala films.⁴ As melodramas, the video films routinely rely on particular tensions between the modern and traditional, wealth and poverty, and good and evil. As Haynes writes: ‘The videos’ extremes of fortune, emotion, and moral character are classic melodramatic elements; their predominantly domestic settings, multiple interwoven plot lines, and emphasis on dialogue rather than action make them resemble soap operas. . . . [T]he claim here is not for any particular pure indigenous tradition of melodrama [in Nigeria], but rather for layers of influence and adaptation going back a long way, of which contemporary televised forms are only the most recent’ (2000, p. 22-23).

The centrality of ethnicity in Nigerian life also constitutes a frequent structuring principle in Nollywood video films. Nollywood video films are produced in many of the 250 tribal languages of Nigeria, though Yoruba, Igbo and English are numerically dominant; the advantage of English (65% of the export market) is that it allows for a wide international audience of Africans at home and abroad to appreciate them.⁵ As Haynes and Okome note, ‘The degree to which video and film production is organized along ethnic lines is quite unusual in Africa – elsewhere films do not carry their ethnicity on their sleeves because production is organized on a national or international basis’ (2000, p. 85).

Technically speaking, Nollywood video films have been characterized as falling somewhere between television and cinema. Unlike Hollywood, video films in Nollywood are made quickly, recorded on video equipment, and marketed directly to the consumer, initially on videocassettes and more recently in digital format. From the moment the camera begins to produce footage, a very different product is being created that possesses a significantly different visuality from more mainstream cinematic products. In addition, the representations of their content, the action and stories they record, derive from a range of video practices that are particular to Nollywood. For example, with an average of ten sequences being shot in a day, the video film is often completed in about two weeks and edited and packaged for sale within another week (Imasuen, 2006). The result is a narrative that is often disjunct, i.e., not rendered as a set of obviously related scenes. The storyline contains any number of subplots that appear, disappear and occasionally reappear, mimicking African oral narrative patterns (Okpewho, 1992) and occurring across any number of apparently tangentially related scenes. A standard two hour video film is frequently followed by parts two and three released in quick succession—since all three parts are routinely filmed during the same period—so that the full story often sprawls over six hours of viewing. The script is minimal with the story produced organically from the interaction between actors as well as whatever intervening opportunities, obstacles and complications might surface while shooting.⁶

Once they are ready for distribution, there are few flashy premiers to hype the video films as there are very few functioning cinemas in Lagos, most of them having been converted to Christian churches, through the rise of evangelical Protestantism, or warehouses.⁷ In addition to which, the films tend to be targeted to, and are particularly popular among, working class people who could not easily afford multiple tickets to such an event (Haynes, 2000; Adesanya, 2000). There are no national tours where stars hawk their new video films. But there are magazines, billboards, radio and television advertisements, as well as Lagos television shows devoted entirely to publicizing the video films as well as movie posters plastered throughout the city to advertise their upcoming releases. Another method of advertising is through ‘touts’, individuals paid to generate interest in the video films by hanging out in stores singing high praises of them at the same time that they pretend to be ordinary customers. Touts are also used to draw people in off the street to theatrical exhibitions of the video films (Ogunleye, 2004).

While some video films do see theatrical release either in the National Theatre or smaller venues, a much larger percentage are delivered for sale each Monday morning by their production agencies (often a coalition of actors; there are no US-type studios, major or minor) to the Idumota electronics market in the central city (Aina, 1995; Alade, 2006; Dibinga, 2006) or to other sites of video film marketing that include Aba, Onitsha and Enugu markets. When a video film is released into a theatre, it is usually the video film producer(s) who arranges the rental of a venue and the projection equipment as well as the printing, sale, and collection of tickets (Ogunleye, 2004). If the video films are going straight to the market, established marketers are responsible for ‘market research, product design, advertisement, sales promotion, exhibition and distribution’ (Ogunleye, 2004, p. 83). About one thousand titles are released each year, with average sales of about 20,000 to 40,000 per title (less popular video films have estimated sales of about 10,000 per title; the most popular ones sell between 200,000 and 400,000 copies) (Ayorinde, 1997; Adesanya, 2000; Ogunleye, 2004; Nollywood Foundation, 2006).

Most of these video films cost about \$US 2.50, but many are immediately available through video clubs or more informal networks ‘run out of someone’s room in a compound with no signboard to advertise their presence’ (Haynes and Okome, 2000, p. 73), where pirated copies rent or sell for about a tenth of the price of legal ones (Ogunleye, 2004). In either case, producers receive none of the royalties on these video film rentals.⁸ The state, as either a supporter or a regulator of these products, is effectively absent from the scene (Nollywood Foundation, 2006; Chikwendu, 2006).⁹ Although regarded by many Nigerian cultural critics as crass (among them, renowned celluloid filmmakers Hubert Ogunde (now deceased) and Adeyemi Afolayan), these video films,

popular commercial creations produced largely in the informal sector, are enthusiastically received by a wide audience of Africans (and others) all over the continent as well as abroad.

When the video films leave the market they are usually watched on the millions of TV sets, by way of VCR and CD players, that are possessed by more than 70 percent of Nigerian urban households. Home viewing is usually preferred to public exhibition attendance for reasons largely due to security, religion, and income. As Foluke Ogunleye and other Nigerian scholars have written, public spaces are not safe at night in Lagos and, rather than risk armed robbery, many Nigerians have invested in video players in order to watch the videos at home (Ogunleye, 2004). Religious prohibitions against unaccompanied females on the streets as well as simple poverty keep others at home where many family members are able to view the video films for a price far lower than the cost of one theatre ticket. Older releases are often broadcast on television throughout Africa (Haynes, 2006). If the newly released video films have been purchased, and after they have been viewed any number of times – they are played on home sets day and night (Boyer, 2006) – they are passed around among friends and frequently packed into the suitcases of visiting family members who take them and others off to Abidjan, Accra, Lomé, and Cape Town, where they circulate – or, better, to use a site specific word, are ‘passed’ – around Africa or travel to London, Paris, New York, Houston and Atlanta. Or they are shipped abroad and made available for purchase by the expatriate African community in video stores and African markets, or through websites. Noting their massive popularity among diasporic Africans, Jonathan Haynes writes:

They are what is on television in Namibia and on sale on the streets in Kenya. In Congo, they are broadcast with the soundtrack turned down while an interpreter tells the story in Lingala or other languages. In New York, Chinese people are buying them. In Holland, Nollywood stars are recognized on the streets by people from Suriname, and in London they are hailed by Jamaicans (2005).

While globalization theorists would argue that the quote above proves the ‘globality’ of Nollywood, we would contend that it points instead to a series of differentially articulated material connections that link Nollywood to other sites in varying and complex ways. What the quote does not reveal is how the video films are viewed and the impact they have on these differently situated viewers. For instance, Congolese people watching a video film through an interpreter have a very different viewing experience from Igbo or Yoruban Lagosians who watch the same video film in their native language or immigrant Chinese who watch it in New York.¹⁰ To take one simple example, there are particular ethnic rituals and popular practices that occur in the video films that are likely to be meaningless to any viewer who is not acquainted with them (Ogundele, 2000; Ekwausi, 2000). And what might seem like a silly and inconsequential filmic interlude to some viewers, is a key moment for others.

Situated Percepts

We regard the processes of production, consumption, and circulation of Nollywood video film as constituting a series of singularities that contribute to the specificity of Nollywood as a site. We note, however, that the emergence of these specificities does not constitute an exhaustive list of what goes into the composition of the site. Rather, they communicate with other dynamic singularities and, through such interactions, accelerate processes of differentiation. This differentiation plays out most clearly in the examination of the video films that Western critics and audiences tend to reductively view through the improper lens of Hollywood film. Treating them as a bad copy of the Hollywood film, these viewers are inclined to isolate a series of specific elements to the video film that they comprehend as flawed or amateurish imitations; for example, a weak image produced through the use of video rather than celluloid, poor lighting and sound, or technologically transparent representations of the occult or supernatural. We recognize in this moment the ways that Western critics and audiences have been conditioned by the aesthetic spectrum of Hollywood film, treating such situated conditioning as commonsensical when they turn their gaze toward different systems of artistic production.¹¹

Against such criticisms, we affirm Flaxman's reading of Deleuze, who suggests that the artistic image inherently concerns the material *production* of sensation:

the artistic image is neither a representation of an object nor even a visual impression, the first of which connotes mere recognition and the second a limited sensory bandwidth. Rather, the image is a collection of sensations – a 'sensible aggregate,' or what Deleuze will ultimately call a 'sign' – that we simply cannot recognize and that we encounter, as such, at the very limit of the sensible. Sensations possess the capacity to derange the everyday, to short-circuit the mechanism of common sense, and thus to catalyze a different kind of thinking; indeed, sensations are encountered at a threshold we might call the 'thinkable' (Flaxman, 2000, p. 12).

In short, there is a positive physical force that lends itself to the opening of thought through the image insofar as it runs differentiation and variation across its surface. With regard to Nollywood video film, it is precisely that it does *not* map easily onto an imaginary of the Hollywood film aesthetic that should be acknowledged as the productive moment of artistic creation. Further, it should be noted that the image itself is the result of the dynamic, situated conditions of production that circulate within the milieu where it is created. That is to say, we cannot read into the Nollywood image, which is the product of the materialities of the site, a bastardized version of the Hollywood image, whose production and consumption processes form an entirely different dynamic system and result in an equally different set of images. Nollywood video films constitute a popularized aesthetic that is uniquely *in itself* by virtue of its specific, situated conditions of production and consumption.

Thus through the specificities and particularities of Nollywood video film production – for example, incorporating fast shooting schedules, small crews, and the use of locations-at-hand – we encounter a *mise-en-scène* unfamiliar to the context of Western cinema. In addition to these production differences, the films contain long sequences with little or no action but extensive, often repetitive dialogue.¹² These sequences can be seen as tedious or mundane. Yet, this visual banality, largely absent from Hollywood films, works to bring lived practice and its representation together in ways that make the films deeply accessible and entirely familiar to their audience (Moran, 2005).

For example, interior scenes often appear to be simple apartments (perhaps even a crew member's apartment) rather than the elaborate fantasy spaces of escapism that are the characteristic and clichéd spectacle often encountered in Hollywood films (though conspicuous wealth and deplorable poverty are often dialectical structuring components of Nollywood films). While this practice is no doubt a result of the fast movement (no time to build a set) and small budgets (no money to build a set) of Nollywood video films, there are nonetheless fundamental aesthetics that emerge from the conditions of this system. Specifically, while the climate-controlled Hollywood image often loses itself in ideological fantasy through its fetish for liberalist egalitarianism and bootstrapism, the 'found' aesthetic of Nollywood video film constitutes a fold between the moving image and the scenes in which it is viewed – in the homes and other familiar spaces that constitute the visual landscape of everyday life. This resonance enables the thoughts and percepts corresponding to the video image to share material affinities with those percepts generated through the viewer's own situatedness in an entire series of localized, material landscapes.

But even beyond this, the haste that apparently attends the production of these video films aids in the construction of aesthetic sensibilities far removed from those of the sanitized, homogenized, pasteurized, and generally over-produced aesthetics of Hollywood film.¹³ Here, a hallway or a bedroom is converted into an office space through the placement of a desk with a few random books against a wall that remains disconcertingly bare and that fills the screen, becoming the immense key-subject of the shot. Scene after scene is quickly improvised, producing dialogues brimming with awkward stammers and curious pauses, and populated by the uncertain, wild-eyed looks between discussants and eruptions of monologue occasionally diverging into fits of screaming.

The relative speed of production renders such apparently strange moments as productive differentiators within video film by virtue of their frequent recurrence. Whether such moments remain accidents or begin to be incorporated into the intended stylistics of Nollywood aesthetics is incidental. What is not incidental is that thought corresponding to such images – the situated and emergently cultural moment resonant with perception of the image – is in part itself conditioned by these filmic ruptures.

In describing the material practices of Nollywood video film production, consumption and circulation, we have intended to show that even as Nollywood Foundation Convention participants talked ‘globe talk’ in terms of producing a Nollywood ‘global brand’ or recognized acclaimed Nollywood actress Genevieve Nnaji as a ‘global film star’, they were materially connecting with their Hollywood counterparts in an unremarkable conference room in the Omni California Plaza Hotel at 251 South Olive Street in downtown Los Angeles. As a result, it is critically important to appreciate the ontological implications of the news that appeared on 6 August 2006 on the Nollywood.net website that Nigerian director Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen had been awarded a \$200,000 non-union Hollywood-financed budget to shoot a film in California and that a Hollywood/Nollywood production deal had been brokered to finance a film to begin shooting in Nigeria in December 2006 (Ajeluorou, 2006). The news, if taken simply as evidence of globalization, wrongly erases the doings and sayings and the physical and sensuous connections that unfolded in and in relation to that conference room and that helped to ‘create the enabling environment’ (as one of the convention panels was titled) that is behind the headline.

Conclusion

We have provided a discussion of Nollywood as a material critique of how particular spatial imaginaries of globalization significantly limit our understanding of how the world works. Our primary objective, however, is not simply to expose the analytical limitations of the spatial imaginaries that researchers bring to globalization, but more importantly, to draw attention to the political limitations that inhere in those imaginaries and the alternatives that are opened up in a flat ontology. Consider, for example, the perspective of the Zapatista revolutionary army’s Subcommandante Marcos, a globalization theorist in his own right. In his essay, ‘How Big is the World?’ he specifies a politics grounded not in abstract flows or hierarchies but in material practice (Marcos, 2006). In the essay he is describing a conversation between himself and a colleague, Insurgenta Erika, and later between himself and his imaginary interlocutor, ‘Durito’. We quote Marcos at length here because his essay elegantly discloses the underlying politics of our argument. In Erika’s questions and tentative responses is contained a global imaginary – albeit tentative and uncertain – that exists in tension with Marcos’s deliberate unfolding of sites as situated, mutable singularities that produce their own politics founded on the central position that the ‘world abounds in worlds’. He also makes it clear that those sites are deeply, materially connected to other sites through ‘forward’, ‘backward’, and ‘sideways’ linkages.

Sup — as he calls himself — writes:

After a day of preparation meetings for the Other Campaign (it was September, it was dawn, there was rain from a far-off cloud), we were heading towards the hut where our things were when we ran into a citizen who all of a sudden came out with: ‘Listen Sup, what are the Zapatistas proposing?’ Without even stopping, I answered: ‘Changing the world.’ We reached the hut and began getting things ready in order to leave. Insurgenta Erika waited until I was alone. She approached me and said: ‘Listen, Sup, the world is very big,’ as if she were trying to make me realize what nonsense I was proposing and that I didn’t, in reality, know what I was saying when I’d said what I’d said. Following the custom of responding to a question with another question, I came out with: ‘How big?’

She kept looking at me, and she answered almost tenderly: 'Very big.'

I insisted: 'Yes, but how big?'

She thought about it for a minute and said: 'Much bigger than Chiapas.'

.... When we had gotten back ... Erika came over to me, carrying a globe, the kind they use in elementary schools. She put it on the ground and told me: 'Look Sup, here, in this little piece, there is Chiapas, and all this is the world,' almost caressing the globe with her dark hands as she said it.

'Hmm,' I said, lighting my pipe in order to gain some time.

Erika insisted: 'Now you've seen that it's very big?'

'Yes, but we're not going to change it all by ourselves, we're going to change it with many *compañeros* and *compañeras* from everywhere.'

Later that evening, as he sat alone with his thoughts, Marcos wrote a response to Erika, penned through an irreverent and imaginary *compañero*, Dorito. His friend dictates to Marcos what he *should* have said to Erika, had he been able to figure out the question about the size of the world and its politics in advance:

I picked up my pen and notebook. Dorito dictated:

'If you look at it from above, the world is small and the color green of the dollar. It fits perfectly in the price indexes and the valuations of a stock market, in the profits of a transnational, in the election polls of a country which has suffered the hijacking of its dignity, in the cosmopolitan calculator which adds capital and subtracts lives, mountains, rivers, seas, springs, histories, entire civilizations, in the miniscule brain of George W. Bush, in the shortsightedness of savage capitalism badly dressed up in neoliberal attire. Seen from above, the world is very small because it disregards persons and, in their place, there is a bank account number, with no movement other than that of deposits.

But if you look at it from below, the world stretches so far that one look is not enough to encompass it, instead many looks are necessary in order to complete it. Seen from below, the world abounds in worlds, almost all of them painted with the color of dislocation, poverty, despair, death. The world below grows sideways, especially to the left side, and it has many colors, almost as many as persons and histories. And it grows backwards, to the history which the world below made. And it grows towards itself with the struggles that illuminate it, even though the light from above goes out. And it sounds, even though the silence of above crushes it. And it grows forward, divining in every heart the morrow that will be given birth by those who below are who they are. Seen from below, the world is so big that many worlds fit, and, even so, there is space left over, for example, for a jail.

Or, in summary, seen from above, the world shrinks, and nothing fits in it other than injustice. And, seen from below, the world is so spacious that there is room for joy, music, song, dance, dignified work, justice, everyone's opinions and thoughts, no matter how different they are if below they are what they are' (Marcos, 2006).

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Notes

¹ Foluke Ogunleye (2004) provides a concise history of the emergence and present flourishing of the video film industry in Nigeria, detailing issues of financing, marketing, distribution and advertising as well as providing insights into how some of the industry's problems might be addressed. Also see: Haynes and Okome (2000) and Adesanya (2000).

² Attendees at the Nollywood Foundation Convention commented that though they would be grateful for the financing as well as the technical capabilities of Hollywood, they see themselves as making a different product as well as catering to a different audience than Hollywood. Former managing director of the Nigerian Film Corporation, Brendan Shehu, makes the same point in a collection of essays entitled *No... Not Hollywood* (1992, pp. 142-145).

³ C. Kani Omo, a Nollywood Foundation Convention participant and a Nigerian-American director working in the United States, discussed the distinctiveness of Nollywood video films and the opportunities for marketing them as an African 'global brand'.

⁴ In a recent article, Jonathan Haynes (2006) has argued that although the dominant genre of Nollywood films is melodrama, the films are not necessarily apolitical or without a social conscience. Video films, especially those made since the end of military rule in Nigeria in 1999, often address forms of politics and popular moralism, particularly around themes of both traditional and modern rule and individual and state political corruption.

⁵ Video films are also being produced in Kano, in northern Nigeria. There they are made in Hausa, the official language of the north. The Hausa video films are different from those made in Nollywood and there is discussion in the blogosphere about labelling the Kano video film industry 'Kanywood' to distinguish it from Nollywood. For an excellent discussion of Hausa video films see Larkin (1997, 2000) and Johnson (2000).

⁶ Nigerian attendees to the Nollywood Foundation Convention complained of the problems of shooting in Lagos, especially the incessant hum of generators that litter the landscape of the city because of the unreliability of the public electrical supply. They also described how producers, lacking the finances to pay to cordon off public sites for shooting, had to endure the constant noise and interruption of daily commerce and street activity.

⁷ Nollywood Foundation Convention participant and screenwriter and producer Michael Ajakwe talked about the arrival of new cinema venues in Lagos consisting of small viewing spaces located near bars and churches. The cost of the ticket is the same as the cost of a Nollywood DVD, about 250 naira (in 2006, 100 naira were roughly equivalent to 0.80 USD). Articles on Nollywood.net and nigerioplanet also described the recent opening (date not disclosed) of a multiplex in the Lagos Galleria operated by Silverbird Cinemas. The five cinemas in the multiplex were designed to show celluloid films, but the management also installed DVD projectors to encourage indigenous directors to show their video films, should they meet certain quality standards. The first Nollywood videos shown at the new multiplex had a low turnout. Critics of the multiplex ‘expressed fears that it could be another weapon in cultural imperialism’ (<http://nigerioplanet.proboards43.com/index.cgi?board=newsachieve&action=print&thread=1126879123> (accessed 30 September 2006)).

⁸ Said Dibinga, a Nollywood Convention panelist and writer and producer, pointed out that ‘piraters’ – individuals who copy the original video films and sell them at a far cheaper price through video clubs and other outlets – have formed groups to finance new Nollywood video film productions. Madu Chickwendu, a Nollywood Convention panelist and President of the Producers Guild, reiterated the point that all financing for Nollywood films is in small amounts – there are no large institutional sources of funding – though some of the Christian churches have raised money to fund video films (Oha, 2000).

⁹ The Chair of the Federal Inland Revenue Service of Nigeria, Ifueko Omoigui, delivered the opening remarks at the Nollywood Foundation Convention. Though her comments were largely directed at the employment possibilities of Nollywood film production – it is estimated that Nollywood currently employs more than 300,000 individuals – she also made reference to the industry’s tax revenue potential.

¹⁰ It should also be pointed out that even within Nigeria, different ethnic groups view the movies differently. For example, Adesanya (2000) notes that Yorubas watched the video films as a family while Igbo women and children are much more likely to watch them without the *pater familia* present.

¹¹ A public reading of this paper accompanied by the viewing of several film clips at a recent academic conference resulted in the audience first laughing and then uncomfortably recoiling from what became almost instantaneously recognized as a colonialist response to the clips. We read in this complex response a jarring moment when the audience, conditioned by a Hollywood aesthetic, is confronted with the new.

¹² A common complaint made by Nollywood directors and producers at the Convention was the lack of skilled editors and editing equipment (among other technical skills and equipment). They pointed to these deficiencies as well as time constraints as the reasons for long sequences and dialogic repetitions. One of the major objectives of the convention was to promote the transfer of knowledge, skill and capital from Hollywood to Nollywood in order to address these technical problems. The multinational board of California-based Nollywood Foundation works to promote Nollywood by attracting “the right investments to improve quality of talent, production and distribution” and bringing it to the attention of investors from around the world.

¹³ Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, a Convention panelist and one of Nollywood’s most well-known and prolific directors, explained how there are no sets available for shooting in Nigeria so directors use the homes and offices of friends or get permission to use those of the elite. Permission to use these and other spaces such as churches, schools, and other government spaces, has been free until fairly recently when fees have resulted as crew members have damaged property during filming.