The Nigerian video industry – some data:

the first video film considered as the one that “made” the industry is *Living in Bondage* produced by Kenneth Nnebue in 1992. Produced with an extremely low budget it managed to sell more than 200 thousands copies after the release of this film many directors and producers coming from the experience of television series started releasing their films directly in VHS according to a number of international reports released over the past few years the Nigerian video film industry is today one of three largest film industries in the world (cf. UNESCO reports 2009, and 2013)
Lagos: the heart of Nollywood’s success
“objects are important not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but often precisely because we do not ‘see’ them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behaviour, without being open to challenge” (Daniel Miller, *Materiality*, 2005: 5)
“at times the mirror increases a thing's value, at times denies it. Not everything that seems valuable above the mirror maintains its force when mirrored. The twin cities are not equal, because nothing that exists or happens in Valdrada (Lagos?) is symmetrical: every face and gesture is answered, from the mirror, by a face and a gesture inverted, point by point. The two Valdradas live for each other, their eyes interlocked; but there is no love between them” (Italo Calvino *The Invisible City*, 1974: 54)
this presentation focuses on the early age of Nollywood (1992 - 1998) and mainly, but not exclusively, on the section of the industry producing films in English.

some of the points that I will argue during the presentation are probably appliable also to more recent releases, but the industry evolves very quickly and every generalization must be done carefully.
Collapse of infrastructures and growth of “micro-municipalities”

“look at our collapsing public utilities, our inefficient and wasteful parastatals and state-owned companies. If you want electricity, you buy your own generator; if you want water, you sink your own bore-hole; if you want to travel, you set up your own airline. One day soon, said a friend of mine, you will have to build your own post office to send your letter!” (Chinua Achebe, The trouble with Nigeria, 1984: 20)

“what are not much known, what are barely talked about, are the 'hidden', unquantifiable and epiphenomenal costs of the emergence and proliferation of these private mini-municipalities in the contemporary urban setting [...] One is the extreme fragmentation and privatization of processes, activities and imaginaries that are normally social, public and collective” (Biodun Jeyifo, “Household and Neighborhood Mini-municipalities: the Unquantifiable, Epiphenomenal Costs”, 2010: 83)
Recycled modernity  (Sundaram 1999)

“if production possibilities are limited in African cities, then existent material of all kinds are to be appropriated – sometimes through theft and looting; sometimes through the ‘heretical’ uses made of infrastructures, languages, objects, and spaces; sometimes through social practices that ensure that available materials pass through many hands. The key here is to multiply the uses that can be made of documents, automobiles, houses, wood, or whatever, and this means the ability to put together different kinds of combinations of people with different skills, perspectives, linkages, identities, and aspirations. This multiplexity of social organization constitutes a kind of perceptual system, a way of seeing that then engages the urban environment in such a way that single items, objects, and experiences are put to many otherwise unanticipated uses “(Abdumaliq Simone, “Visible and Invisible: Remaking Cities in Africa”, 2004: 214)
Lagos’ soundscapes/ Nollywood’s soundscapes

"the semiotically unintelligible (noise) and semiotically sensible (signal) may be equally intelligible in terms of a social logic of practice” (James Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*, 1999: 211)

“the role that sound play in your culture is different from the one it plays in our culture. Does your wife wake up in the morning and sing while she is cooking? It's part of the environment. If you are a child your mother will wake you up with some songs... you are surrounded by noises and it's part of you, and if you don't hear them you think that something is missing... when I'm in the West the most painful thing for me is the silence. When I wake up and I don't hear that noise, and the weather is cold and dark, and there is no music and you are supposed to talk to somebody forever, it kills me...” (Jahman Anikulapo, Personal communication, 2010)
The time of the city and Nollywood’s audiences

“The burgeoning scale of unemployed youth in African cities is perhaps making redundant the division between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ time. This is a class with time on their hands. Can they be seen as ‘leisured class’? Leisure time is time consciously set aside for social and recreational activities or even for ‘rest’. Unoccupied time due to unemployment is imposed ‘empty time’, not leisure time purposely set aside for recreation and pleasure. Unemployment puts those without work on a time schedule different from others in the community” (Charles Ambler and Emmanuuel Akyeampong, “Leisure in African History: An Introduction”, 2002: 15 – 16)
Lagos in early Nollywood

not many explicit visual representation, mostly establishing shots emulating Hollywood

anxiety due to the absence of economic stability, to the desire of a better living, of a better job, of a social freedom from the ties imposed, even within the city, by family, gender and religious obligations

this anxiety is expressed through melodramatic stories

thus the locus of anxiety *par excellence* becomes the family. It is within the family, in fact, that the deepest insecurity is manifested and the conflicts that dominate the urban landscape are internalized
The realism of Nollywood videos

The representation of the city and of the urban life that comes out of this process of re-elaboration is both realistic and hallucinatory.

Early Nollywood videos constantly take inspiration from the reality of the urban experience, but at the same time they avoid to explicitly show this experience and the way it is enacted by common people. Thus they tend to draw on dreams and urban legends more than on images of common people's everyday life.

The Lagos of Nollywood is not the Lagos you would see walking around the megacity, but it is the Lagos of the invisible fears and dreams that inhabit the imagination of Lagos city-dwellers, an emotional reality suddenly made visible and palpable by the video technology.
Post-scriptum: **Nollywood** and the reality of **Lagos** today

while ‘New Nollywood’ films seem to be more interested in visually representing Lagos, including its poorer neighbourhoods and its hidden realities, films have become less accessible to people and seem to project the fantasies and aspirations of an elite oriented toward western cultural and economic models.

It is almost as if more reality in the visual representation of the city corresponded to less proximity to real preoccupations, dreams and fears of the majority of lagosians.

*to be continued*...
Thanks for your attention!!
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