

BOOK REVIEW:

THE NIGERIAN FILM/TV INDEX AND THE NIGERIAN LITERARY INDEX

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By undertaking the task of putting together the *The Nigerian Film/T.V. Index (NFTI)* and the *Nigerian Literary Index (NLI)*, Afolabi Adesanya was carrying out a risky adventure, I felt, with potentially great non-financial rewards but laden with inherent land mines and booby traps.

Anyone who has attempted gathering information of this nature would know the pain and sweat that it involves and thus for Adesanya to have actually succeeded in doing as much as he has done requires some form of congratulation.

The *NLI* is full of information on the Nigerian literary 'industry' with various sections dealing with the writers, the creators of the literary works, starting with profiles on some selected writers, followed by a comprehensive 'who is who' of Nigerian writers, and then a section on critical works. The *NLI* also lists various national and international awards given to Nigerian writers. Publishers whom most writers love to hate are equally listed, both Nigerian and Foreign, thus sign-posting useful addresses for aspiring and many times rejected writers newer avenues for them to try out.

The *NLI* is all about information basically, a no-thrills, no-frills reference and this is obvious from the design, printing and aesthetic finish of the book.

Referentially a look at the book immediately indicates the sorry state of affairs in the country and the publishing industry specifically as the book is printed on newsprint giving the book a basic primary school text feel. It is believed that the use of newsprint was an economic decision without which it would not have been possible to publish the index. The typesetting and printing also underlines the undesirable state of publishing in Nigeria whereby such a lofty project as the *NLI* finds it impossible to attract the sort of financial backing that would have allowed

the it to be published with material that measure up to international standards.

As much as the above factors seem to fall outside the publishers/editors' fault, there are certain careless aspects of the publication which are quite disturbing.

A number of pictures of authors are used but practically all of them are not titled, so we have pictures of Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, etc. but no name tags to tell us who they are. It is fine for a Nigerian literary enthusiast who has seen them before but not so for a person who is just hearing of these writers or for foreigners who have not had the chance to see them or see their photographs. There is also an over-reliance on sketches taken from newspaper cuttings, rather than actual photographs. This tends to give the *NLI* an air of informality. Such is usually best reserved for full length profiles in newspapers or magazines.

In the day and age when the most basic of desk-top publishing equipment produces well laid out clean copy, a book like this should not have resorted to cut-and-paste methods of publishing.

The publishers brilliantly disclaim liability '...for any damage caused by errors or omissions whether such errors or omissions result from accident, negligence or any other cause' as it is quite obvious reading through the Index that there are quite a number of omissions especially in terms of categorisation of works into genres. A few authors were left out. Tunde Thompson and his book, *Fractured Jail Sentence* for instance were significantly omitted. Other glaring instances also stand out such as Wole Soyinka's *A shuttle in the Crypt* being classified as drama instead of poetry and *Ake* also being erroneously classified as drama instead of novel. For anyone using this index as research material, these mistakes could have serious consequences. Even though the publishers do not claim the *NLI* to be the definitive resource book on Nigerian literature, care must still be taken

with facts.

The *NLI* is interesting and usefully beefed up with two articles on the book industry in Nigeria by Muritala Sule and Bodunde Bankole, both knowledgeable participants in the book industry. They raise quite interesting thought-provoking though at times contentious points. Bodunde Bankole's article is written mainly from the publishers' profit making perspective thus making him focus solely on textbooks, known to be the most profitable aspect of publishing and therefore does not strike a note for the promotion of enhanced publishing and sales of purely literary works.

In the next edition of the *NLI*, it is hoped the author would tidy up certain layout/design misnomers such as the throwing of a list of notable critics into some obscure corner of the book in-between a list of press contacts and journals. It really beats the imagination to know what that list of notable critics is doing in that position. It gives the impression of being added just to fill up space. If not for the fact that Adesanya is himself a critic, one would have been tempted to conclude that the positioning of the list was an indication of his regard for critics, a feeling many writer will share with him.

The *NLI* as a first edition and probably the first of its kind in Nigeria is important for plugging up a yawning gap in our nation's literary endeavour and it is this role of filling an essentially black hole that the first edition of the Nigerian film/T.V. Index published in 1992 did for the film/T.V. industry in Nigeria and which its second edition published two years later due to the 1993/94 political crises has set out to do.

A foreign filmmaker upon reading the first edition of the *NFTI* said 'you mean all these exist in Nigeria?' The issue being that nobody knows anything is going on in the film/T.V./video business in Nigeria. All foreigners knew about African film was that the Francophone countries produced all the films

of the continent. It is this sort of erroneous impression which the *NFTI* corrects.

In terms of quality of layout, design and print, the *NFTI* has an advantage over the *NLI*. This seeming 'preferential' treatment however may not be as a result of Afolabi Adesanya's being a filmmaker himself?

The *NFTI* is an amazing compendium of information on the film industry as various films and especially adaptation of popular drama and books have been filmed which many people are not aware of.

As part of the package, there is a section on films from West African countries which is quite interesting but sadly suffers from the major oversight of country names not being indicated against the films, neither producers

and directors, such that other than a few recognisable names and a bit of guesswork it is impossible to know which countries produced what.

In some cases when information is seriously in doubt it would seem that the best thing to do is to leave out such information. For instance in the listing of cinema houses in West Africa, only one cinema house is listed for Ghana while several are listed for Liberia and Ivory Coast giving the false impression that the list is comprehensive and thereby implying Ghana has only one film house.

Like the *NLI*, the *NFTI* has one article. It examines the issue of involvement of foreign crews and directors in the production of Nigerian films. The article, written by the author himself, regrettably deals sketchily with the resolution of the conflict of opinions

on the issue of involvement of foreign crews especially directors in the production of Nigerian/ African films. Do they bring something additional or do they subtract from the vision of the stories of the films they deal with? Is 'Tarzanisation' impossible or inevitable with a foreign director? These and some other important questions are left unanswered in the article. But he gives interesting information about the history of Nigerian/foreign collaborations over the years, and the subsequent emergence of practically all-Nigerian crew productions. This adds up to a little *pot-pourri* of information well written but not with an analytical verdict of the issue being pronounced. It is hoped that in the next edition these shortcomings would be addressed such that the indexes, *NLI* and *NFTI* would be elevated to be the benchmark and standard reference points in Nigerian literary and film discourse. **GR**

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13 SEPTEMBER - 10 DECEMBER

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Tate Gallery Liverpool, Albert Dock, Liverpool

Farid Belkahia, **Cyprien Tokoudagba** and **Touhami Ennadre** are based respectively in Marrakech (Morocco), Abomey (Benin) and Paris. This exhibition established connections between these artists who practice in

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Information: 0151 709 0507

14 SEPTEMBER - 14 OCTOBER

SIGNS, TRACES AND CALLIGRAPHY

Concourse Gallery, Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2

This exhibition shows the evolution of calligraphy in the work of several contemporary North African artists. Artists included are **Osman Waqialla** (Sudan), **Ahmed Mustafa** (Egypt), **Ali Omar Emes**, **Rachid Koraichi** (Algeria), **Nja Mahdaoui**.

ADMISSION FREE. Information: 0171 588 9023.

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