

## The Nollywood Diaspora: A Nigerian Video Genre

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THE PRODIGIOUS SPREAD OF NOLLYWOOD FILMS AROUND THE world has been accompanied by the spread of Nollywood filmmaking around the world, as Nigerian actors and directors have traveled abroad to make movies and Nigerian expatriate communities have sought to participate in this most powerful of Nigerian cultural forms. This essay analyzes a number of Nollywood films set partly or entirely overseas. One of my themes is how Nollywood imagines the foreign; mostly, my project is to define the films set abroad as a genre, with a typical story arc, moral and psychological themes, and formal features. It is a distinctly Nollywood genre, directly derived from some of the most fundamental conceptions in Nigerian filmmaking. The distinctiveness is not, however, a matter of melodramatic excess in story or style, or of the prevalence of occult elements – two elements many observers of Nigerian and Ghanaian video films have taken to be defining of this film culture, myself included. I was arguing along those lines in an earlier study of the theme of Africans abroad, contrasting the way the theme has been handled in celluloid African filmmaking with its treatment in the emerging popular video tradition (“Africans Abroad”). The more recent films surveyed here are substantially different on both scores, being generally much more restrained in style and seldom making reference to the supernatural.<sup>1</sup>

The former essay was written just before there was an explosion of videos set abroad, triggered by the phenomenal success of Kingsley Ogoro’s *Osuofia in London* in 2003 and Tade Ogidan’s *Dangerous Twins* the next year. Other frontline Nollywood directors, including Lancelot Imasuen, Zeb Ejiro, and Chico Ejiro, along with too many of the major

stars to mention, went abroad to shoot soon thereafter. This was also a period of large-scale initiatives involving the American and British markets, which involved bringing delegations of Nollywood filmmakers and actors to their fans abroad. These initiatives included the Filmmakers Association of Nigeria, USA, a project intended to organize the American market and encourage crossover projects; the Nigerian National Film and Censors Board–sponsored Road Show in London; and the inauguration of the Nollywood Foundation’s series of annual conventions, beginning in 2005, designed to build long-term connections between Nollywood and Hollywood. Two high-profile coproductions came of networking between Nollywood and Hollywood: *30 Days*, written and directed by the United States–based Mildred Okwo, a film set entirely in Nigeria but reflecting an expatriate sensibility in various ways, including a central character who is visiting home from the United States, where he lives; and Lancelot Imasuen’s *Close Enemies*, a Nollywood-style film shot in Hollywood with Hollywood equipment and support, financed by a United States–based Nigerian producer.

Preceding and more fundamental than these high-profile professional activities is the enduring basis for films about Nigerians abroad: the existence of many communities of expatriate Nigerians in Europe, North America, and elsewhere, which provide both practical succor and inspiration to their compatriots stuck in the morass of the Nigerian economy. These communities are fully integrated into Nollywood, though the distribution system that irrigates them is dominated by pirates to an unusual extent, even by Nigerian standards. The emotional adhesion of the expatriate communities to Nollywood film culture is strengthened by their circumstances: the films answer a longing for home and serve as a vehicle for showing children and non-Nigerian friends what Nigerian culture is.

The desire to make films about Nigerians abroad has been there since the beginning of Nollywood: the sequel to the very first English-language Nigerian video film, Kenneth Nnebue’s *Glamour Girls, 2: The Italian Connection* (1994), is about Nigerian prostitutes in Italy, and half of the film is set in an Italy constructed in Lagos with derisory means.

Soon a system was set up to actually shoot films abroad in collaboration with Nigerian expatriate communities. The basic elements are one or more Nollywood stars brought from home to add glamour and to

make the film salable in Nigeria, and an expatriate host community that provides contributions in kind (actors, props, settings, hospitality), as well as funding by local African-owned businesses in return for having the businesses featured on-screen.<sup>2</sup> These contributions allow the film to be made within a Nollywood-style (that is, very low) budget. This limit on the budget is a strict necessity, as the film will have to make its money back in the market for Nigerian films, although the producer may bank on a bonus from the host community, which can be expected to buy a number of copies of the film in hard currency and pay to attend screenings. In many cases, the story originates with an expatriate. Because of the circumstances of production, individuals often perform more functions in the filmmaking process than is normal in Nollywood, where labor is specialized along industrial lines: in *Man on a Mission*, for instance, Romanus Ike Eze is the main actor, director, producer, story and screenplay writer, unit production manager, music editor, and rerecording mixer.

Within this structure of collaboration between the Lagos-based industry and expatriate communities, there is a spectrum of where the impetus and resources for a particular film come from and of where the film's point of view is located. At one end of the spectrum are films like *Dubai Runs*, which is about Igbo women who make business trips to Dubai. In this case, the foreign location is as much a figment of the Nigerian imagination as it is in *Glamour Girls, 2*, with only a few establishing shots of Dubai (and these only in the second part). It looks like the cast stayed home, filming their scenes in hotels in Abuja, the filmmakers acquiring the establishing shots from a film library or some other source. The same is true of another film also directed by MacCollins Chidebe, *Boys from Holland*, which begins with a sequence of establishing shots of Holland, one of them an aerial shot the filmmakers are unlikely to have paid to make themselves; from then on, everyone is sitting on sofas that look distinctly Nigerian. In short, these films have invested very little indeed in representing the reality of their foreign locations. The Yoruba-language film *Omo Eniyan* is indubitably shot partly in London, but has only a sketchy interest in London as a source of wealth; the film's point of view is solidly rooted with the protagonists' families back home in Lagos.

On the other end of the spectrum are films like *Missing in America*, written, produced, and directed by Sola Osofisan, long a resident of New

York, where the point of view is clearly that of settled expatriates. Except for a few brief scenes, the whole film was shot in the United States, and much of it has the character of a somewhat irritable letter home on the subject of all the mistakes and misapprehensions Nigerians suffer from when they try to come to America, burdening their expatriate connections in the process. Nevertheless, in spite of its cool, gray wintry tones and slick New York imagery, *Missing in America* is clearly recognizable as a Nollywood film (see also Hoffmann, this volume).

The integrity of Nollywood, both aesthetically and socially, is spectacularly demonstrated in this genre of films. Whatever the difficulties of defining Nollywood in the Nigerian context (are Yoruba and Hausa films part of it?), its external boundaries are sharp and clear.<sup>3</sup> Nollywood diasporan films tend not to interact with the film cultures of their host countries to produce a hybrid Nollywood-British or Nollywood-German or Nollywood-Brazilian aesthetic, though certainly the Nollywood aesthetic itself has been heavily influenced by transnational media forms since its inception. The purpose of Imasuen's *Close Enemies*, the Hollywood-Nollywood coproduction mentioned earlier, is explicitly to take Nollywood to the next level of professional expertise; it does not aim at producing a culturally hybrid art form, and its theme of an infertile marriage is central within the Nollywood tradition. In the general run of films, the credits sometimes show that some technical personnel have been picked up where the film is made, but this seldom means a difference in the style and quality of filmmaking. (An exception, in this as in other respects, is *This America*. In contrast, French crews and postproduction personnel are mandated in so many French-financed African celluloid films in large part to guarantee technical and aesthetic norms.) Invariably, some local foreigners are cast as actors, but they mostly seem to be nonprofessionals recruited out of the Nigerian expatriate communities' social networks. If they do have training as actors, their professional formation is overwhelmed by the Nollywood style of direction. In general, their performances are worse than those of the locally recruited nonprofessional Nigerians, since the Nigerians are steeped in the Nollywood aesthetic and therefore have an instinctive sense for what to do. (There are honorable exceptions, such as Simone McIntyre in *The London Boy*.) The Nigerian expatriates who scout and manage the locations, provide costumes, and so on are all equally attuned to the Nollywood style.

The one film in my sample that does seem to cross over into another film culture is *Crazy Like a Fox*, written, directed, and produced by Tony Abulu. Abulu has been settled in New York for many years; along with Bethels Agomuoh, the director of *This America*, he was a moving spirit behind the Filmmakers Association of Nigeria, USA. *Crazy Like a Fox* might be thought of as part of a trilogy of Abulu's films with transatlantic themes. *Back to Africa*, the story of a beautiful African American looking for her African roots and the Nigerian father who abandoned her, is patently designed to appeal to an African American audience. *American Dream* is about a Nigerian's desperate attempts to get an American visa to visit a beautiful Americanized Nigerian with whom he has fallen in love; the film's concerns and much of its humor would resonate best with Nigerian viewers. *Crazy Like a Fox* is set entirely in New York, in a multicultural and very upscale Harlem, and is shaped by the genre of black American erotica. Instead of an imported Nigerian movie star to headline the production, we have Angel "Lola Luv" Fershgenet, an African American of Ethiopian descent who is a pinup model and figure in the hip-hop world. The crew is non-Nigerian, and while the credits include extras and secondary producers with Nigerian names and the script is discernibly Nigerian in its perspective on life in America, the film features only one African (played by Karibi Fubara), a Nigerian who speaks Americanized English and has little of Nigeria clinging to him. "Tell me about Africa," commands his employer as she seduces him, but she and the film settle for an extremely perfunctory answer. The film is all about New York, apparently made for an African American audience, with a bit of exotic spice.

As with the American genre of westerns, the genre of Nollywood films set abroad cuts across the grand transcultural genres: it includes comedies (*Osuofia in London*), tragedies (*Dangerous Twins*), and romances (*The London Boy*). It frequently incorporates or is continuous with adjacent genres that are normally set entirely in Nigeria. The flourishing Nigerian genre of crime films often involves drug dealing with an international connection (*Columbia [sic] Connection*) or the kind of fraud known as "419" that is often practiced on foreigners whom we see picked up at the airport (*Dollars from Germany*). The "been-to," the African who is recently returned from living abroad, has been a ubiquitous figure in Nigerian culture since colonial times and is extensively represented in





Nollywood films. In the wake of *Osuofia in London, 2*, a subgenre arose of films about Nigerians coming back with foreign wives (*Love from Asia*). *South Connection*, from the venerable video producer OJ Productions, is a concatenation of several of the themes having to do with the foreign that have been central in the Nollywood imagination, with the novel (in 2004) twist that South Africa is the foreign source of exorbitant wealth for those with the stomach to do anything to get it. The film is always located in Nigeria, but it depicts the ardent desire of three ambitious young men to go abroad and the splashy return of the two survivors.

The attached table of themes will I hope do much of the work of establishing the regularities of this genre. Only films at least partly shot abroad are included.<sup>4</sup> Themes are not counted on the table unless they are strongly present: hardship is talked about but not actually shown in *The Other Side of Life*, for example. Some films show up in only a few rows because they concentrate so heavily on a couple of themes. Other films have narrative premises that set them apart from the standard story of a Nigerian struggling to live and make money abroad, obviating some of the typical themes and motifs, though others come roaring in.

The Nollywood diasporan films follow the normal Nollywood pattern of repeating winning formulas, intensified by circumstantial factors: when a director or actor is abroad, he or she is apt to take advantage of the situation to work on several projects. So Jim Iyke and Rita Dominic star in a slew of films set in the United States, and *The London Boy* and *Fateful Love* grew out of *Osuofia in London*.

But – again, this is typical of Nollywood – actual remakes are unusual, and I do not attribute the remarkable similarities among my examples to imitation of some particular original, in spite of what has been said about the inspiration provided by *Osuofia in London* and *Dangerous Twins*. Those two films are in fact atypical in their narrative framing. The remarkable similarities are due rather to the persistence and extension of essential thematic complexes of Nollywood culture as a whole. This argument will be developed as we go along. The similarities could be taken as lack of imagination or as evidence of centeredness, strength, and assertion of identity, a flexible, extendable cultural form that works in all sorts of environments. The films each give a sense of being independent and integral conceptions, with different things on their minds, from patriarchal anxieties about women's independent trading (*Dubai Runs*)

to the spiritual direction of the Christian family (*The Broken Pitcher*), scary devouring females (*Crazy Like a Fox*), the triumph of romance over revenge (*Crossing Paths*), the Nigerian personality (*Home & Abroad*), and the question of whether a Netherlands-based drug dealer has sufficient cultural capital to marry a Nollywood star (*Boys from Holland* – he does).

The range of foreign settings is impressive: the United Kingdom and the United States, inevitably; Germany and the Netherlands, not surprisingly; but also South Africa, Dubai, China, the Philippines, and Brazil.<sup>5</sup> But the films generally show a lack of interest in the foreign as such. The far-flung locations are not responsible for the important differences among the films; any of them could easily have been shifted to another continent (with the exception of *This America*, which is centrally about the relationship of Nigerian immigrants to African Americans). There is little interest in the exotic for its own sake; the camera seldom wanders about foreign landscapes with a curious eye.<sup>6</sup> In general, Nollywood has always exhibited a general poverty of intention as well as of means in its representations of the foreign. The “Germans” in *Dollars from Germany*, for example, are played by Nigerians of Lebanese extraction, with Nigerian accents and nothing German about them. The lightness of their complexions is supposed to be an adequate signifier. (Lebanese Nigerians are frequently cast in this way.) This is in line with the tradition established by *Glamour Girls, 2: The Italian Connection*, which contained nothing and no one that looked Italian.

The films’ establishing shots tend, as in Nollywood films generally, to be stereotypical rather than exploratory, moving us quickly to the interior scenes where nearly all the action and the talking take place. *London Forever* obsessively flings the same shots of Big Ben and red double-decker buses in our faces. *Goodbye New York* is careless about the image of New York it builds up, including footage of beaches and marinas that look suspiciously Californian. Much of this footage seems found, not shot by the filmmakers: certainly, for one moment we glimpse the Miramax-logo image of the Manhattan skyline. This lack of integration between the establishing shots and the lived experience of the characters takes on ironic meaning: the solid, noble, sunlit spectacle of Lower Manhattan, shot from and including the image of helicopters, stands against the lives of the Nigerians whom we watch loafing and fretting through unemployment, tending bar, shoplifting, pimping, and

prostituting themselves, mumbling to one another in dimly, muddily lit interior spaces. Shots of an American flag being carried in a parade are spliced into scenes of rape and murder.

For obvious reasons, the United States, Britain, and a generalized continental Europe loom large in the Nigerian imagination, but that imagination tends to be impatient with other kinds of foreignness. Naira, dollars, pounds, and euros are the only currencies ever mentioned, even when the films are set in Brazil or China. (Rand are mentioned in *Coming to South Africa*.) The police in Brazil (*Black Night in South America*) and in South Africa (*Coming to South Africa*) read suspects their Miranda rights as they arrest them, as in American police dramas. American culture overshadows everything: in *Mr. Ibu in London*, Ibu never shakes the idea that somehow getting to London involves going through the United States, and when he is deported back to Lagos, the culture he flaunts to advertise that he is a “been-to” is American hip-hop ghetto style.

The films’ narrative premises also impose tunnel vision. Leaving aside for the moment the comedies, in which the trip abroad tends to tumble into the laps of the central characters, in most other cases the protagonists leave Nigeria because of a more or less desperate need to make money. Sometimes we see a melodramatic crisis that spurs them on; sometimes the films editorialize about the lack of opportunities in Nigeria through opening titles (*Black Night in South America*), voice-over narration (*Europe by Road*), or a montage sequence (*Man on a Mission*); in other cases, casual mention of the desire for a better life, greener pastures, or the golden fleece allude to what the audience understands perfectly well. Wider and softer motives – curiosity about foreign cultures, love of adventure, a rebellious desire to wander, in short, the desire to travel for its own sake – almost never come up, except in the comedies, and the harsh realities of life abroad for those without work permits, which is the situation of most of the protagonists, quickly enforce their undivided attention to the struggle to survive, get established, and if possible send some money home.

Air travel itself reduces the physical traveling to a few unremarkable hours, and the high cost of getting a permit to shoot in Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos (which is a tenth the average budget of a Nigerian film) and the daunting process of applying for permissions abroad make the transition almost invisible apart from some standard-

ized shots of planes taking off and landing and people coming out of terminals.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the mythic narrative structure of the journey and its attendant theme of adventure are rarely exploited in this genre, though both are staples in the Nigerian genre of the cultural epic. Characters are simply dumped suddenly into the foreign environment, a new city, where they have to make or keep social relationships in order to obtain the necessary food, shelter, and employment. The only film I have seen that emphasizes the journey itself, *Europe by Road*, a harrowing tale of crossing the Sahara to Morocco and embarking on a disastrous sea voyage to Spain, is (paradoxically) not included in the table since it fakes the foreign locations – the film crew obviously never got farther north than Sokoto – and since the protagonists never manage to set up residence in Europe. Of necessity this film has no establishing shots of foreign cities, but its blinkered vision corresponds to the experience of the travelers, often traveling at night, confined to the smugglers' route and safe houses, too miserable and terrified to think of anything but survival. They do not have the luxury of being tourists.

Most of the films have what I call an alienation/hardship sequence, in which the protagonists trudge disconsolately, carrying their shoulder bags, through the streets of the foreign city, unable to find a foothold and growing increasingly desperate. It is striking that the protagonists virtually never have any contact with poor people in the host country. They mostly come from the Nigerian middle class – the really poor generally cannot even think of airfare and visas, unless they are provided by the organizers of a prostitution or drug-smuggling ring – and they will collapse of hunger or cold on a fancy shopping avenue or on an upscale New Jersey suburban street, their clothes still immaculate, rather than find their way to Harlem, where accommodation is cheaper and the informal economy might offer work. *Man on a Mission* is unusual in offering us a brief glimpse of working-class life, but even in this film the emphasis is all on the endless, gleaming tall buildings of the new China. *Dark Night in South America*'s São Paulo looks entirely and impeccably First World, with no favelas. For that matter, we see no Brazilians who are not of overwhelmingly European extraction. Such systematic erasures are quite a feat. Doubtless, part of the point is to keep the protagonists in visual relation to the object of desire while emphasizing how difficult it is to attain. Insofar as possible, “abroad” should correspond to certain

stereotypical signifiers, so Brazil should look as much as possible like the United States.

In one way or another, through fair means or foul, eventually the protagonists get established in the foreign land and are free to look around and enjoy themselves. What I am calling the tourist sequence places the protagonists in iconic foreign landscapes at a moment when they have “arrived.” (Carmela Garritano, “New Critical,” calls such sequences moments of “cosmopolitan spectacle”; see also Haynes, “Africans Abroad.”) Formally, these sequences are distinctive: plot movement is suspended, dialogue largely ceases, and the music is turned up as the protagonists enter in their own flesh the world of travelogues and travel advertising. The images are even more heavily stereotyped than the establishing shots, to which they are related. The tourist sequences are formally similar to the hardship/alienation sequences, but reverse the emotional polarity of the relationship between the figure in the foreground and the background from alienation and suffering to ecstatic identification and a sense of triumph.<sup>8</sup>

The tourist sequence often blends into a shopping sequence, in which the traveler is seen in the landscape of consumerism rather than tourism, giddily celebrating disposable income. Such scenes of “enjoying” are also common in films set in Nigeria; here there is an extra relish from being at a center rather than on the periphery of global consumer culture.

In most cases, there is a new lover on the protagonist’s arm in both these kinds of sequences, so both kinds blend into another familiar type, the romance sequence. *A Night in the Philippines*, about a couple on a pre-nuptial honeymoon and worldwide shopping spree, spends an enormous amount of time on all three types. The lover often represents relief from terrible loneliness and the promise of a new home. In many cases, the lover is foreign, and so the relationship takes on additional meanings: a successful relationship with the host country, a cultural and emotional adventure, the (perhaps ambivalent) prestige of consorting with someone with lighter skin. In the films that are most completely domesticated abroad and are most oriented toward expatriate audiences (*Crazy Like a Fox*, *Crossing Paths*, *The Other Side of Life*), romantic sequences take the place of tourist sequences.

Let us return to the narrative arc of these films where we left it, shortly after the protagonists’ arrival. What they do, in their initial

isolated desperation, is try to make contact with the African expatriate community. If they do not already have an address, they look for a neighborhood where there are Africans and then stop black people on the street and ask if they are Nigerian, and if so, whether they will help. Someone eventually will, and from this point on, the film will be principally set in the African immigrant community. It will include scenes shot in that community's shops and restaurants, which will have provided sponsorship for the film. The material circumstances of filmmaking reinforce the social horizon of the diasporic community that supports the film and the interests of the Nigerian audience at home to produce a remarkably Afrocentric world. If a couple gets married, the official in the town hall is apt to have a Nigerian accent; the doctor in a hospital emergency room is apt to be African (*This America*). African American and black British characters are often played by actors with Nigerian accents, or, if they have American or British accents, the actors may have Nigerian names, presumably because they were born to Nigerian immigrants or immigrated long ago. *Crossing Paths* carries this Afrocentrism to the limit: a collaboration of Nigerian and (mostly) Ghanaian U.S. residents, it is set in an unnamed and utterly deterritorialized but clearly American space of McMansions and suburban offices (the credits reveal it to be Dumfries, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C.), which is populated almost exclusively by Africans. This fact is never commented upon: Africa and African identity are never mentioned at all, and there is no talk of anyone immigrating or traveling or telephoning the continent. The African immigrants are just there, leading their melodramatic lives. In *A Night in the Philippines*, the central Nigerian couple, who are in the Philippines on holiday, run into one of the woman's best friends, and then into the man's old flame, who is there as a contestant in the Miss Earth 2004 beauty pageant, chaperoned by the aforesaid best friend, and also run into the man's former colleague, now a waitress in Manila, who five years earlier disrupted the relationship with the old flame out of jealousy. They comment on how small the world is and how Nigerians are everywhere.

The help the protagonists are offered, once they have made contact with the African community, often comes with strings attached. In any case, it is soon made clear that for an African immigrant without a work permit, the options are selling drugs (for men) or prostitution (for

women). (These options lead directly to immersion in the iconography of those professions, already thoroughly developed on Nigerian soil in versions heavily influenced by foreign models, especially gangster films and hip-hop culture. *Man on a Mission* is particularly self-conscious in playing with this culture; a major character is called “Dogfather.”) Sometimes a third option is visible, doing more or less menial jobs under more or less exploitative conditions, but the protagonist is too ambitious (*Man on a Mission*, *The Other Side of Life*), or the need to send money home is too great (*Goodbye New York*, *London Forever*), or both (*Western Union*), so he or she chooses the faster track. This is normally a moment of crisis, discussed and dramatized at some length. The protagonist is shocked and dismayed at these options, having come from a respectable background and having never entertained the idea that life would turn out like this.

So far, in spite of the foreign locations, we are on terrain that is familiar from, and central to, the general video film tradition. If one is not especially interested in foreign cultures or landscapes for their own sakes, beyond a set of stereotypical images, the social, moral, and psychological experience of landing in New York, London, or Hamburg is not terribly different from moving to Lagos from elsewhere in Nigeria. There is the same overwhelming first impression and the immediate need to find shelter and employment, which is bound up with the necessity to find a social network. Then one discovers that social networks follow different and treacherous rules in the intensely individualized and brutally competitive urban environment. Existing relationships are stressed to the breaking point. The protagonist moves between extremes of hardship and glamour and suffers tests of endurance and tests of what one is willing to do for wealth. All this is shown in the first English-language Nigerian video, Kenneth Nnebue’s *Glamour Girls*, 1. Most of these issues are also in play if one is shaken out of one’s familiar place in Lagos through loss of employment (as in *Shame*, which has memorable scenes of walking the streets looking for work) or through simple dissatisfaction with one’s position, as in the urtext of the Nigerian video tradition, *Living in Bondage*, also by Kenneth Nnebue. The scenes in which protagonists try to make contact with the African community abroad are genetically related to the scene in *Living in Bondage* (initiating a common motif) where Andy runs into his old friend Paul by accident, which leads to questions about what he is willing to do for money and his introduction

to a cabal engaged in dark and lucrative business. This business is occult money rituals in *Living in Bondage* and many other films, but it may be drug dealing, prostitution, or 419 fraud schemes.

It is striking, given the general context and reputation of Nigerian videos, that with only one major exception (*The Broken Pitcher*) and two minor ones (*The London Boy* and a very brief, jokey moment in *Osuofia in London* featuring a disappearing pigeon), none of the films in the sample contain any occult element. This is quite different from the films set abroad surveyed in my earlier study ("Africans Abroad"). In a reading of *Glamour Girls, 2*, I have argued that the exorbitance identified with the foreign was closely linked with and analogous to occult powers ("Nnebue"). *The Broken Pitcher*, a collaboration between Mike Bamiloye's Mount Zion Productions, the best known of Nigerian Christian video producers (Ogunleye; Oha), and a church in Texas, is also the only film strongly framed by Christianity. In two other films, *Western Union* and *Crossing Paths*, a Christian framework gradually grows in importance, but with no element of the supernatural. A pastor, fervent prayer, and a winning lottery ticket shape the very end of *London Forever*. Muslim faith and culture are deeply important in *Omo Eniyan*, but there is nothing like spiritual combat.

The decline of the occult element in this genre reflects a gradual evolution across the breadth of Nollywood video production. It is remotely possible that we are finally seeing the effect of the campaigns of the Censors Board against occultism in video films. Perhaps the video public has finally gotten tired of *juju* movies, as commentators have been predicting since 1993 or so. Perhaps the expatriate audiences these films target have more "enlightened," or simply more Americanized, tastes, though they avidly consume cultural epics that are full of magic. Perhaps the actual conditions of life abroad – the hardship, the visible wealth, the temptations to turn to drug dealing or prostitution, and, not least, the existence of functioning police forces that are apt to bring erring characters to account without divine intervention – form a sufficient dramatic structure that makes the occult unnecessary.<sup>9</sup>

In any event, the central theme of psychological, moral, or spiritual trial as the protagonist's personality comes under extreme pressure in the foreign environment is regularly put in predominantly secular terms. One can sometimes discern in the discourse on personality at these

moments elements that reflect ultimately religious beliefs shared by the Igbo, Yoruba, and other southern Nigerian ethnic groups that shape the film industry. These beliefs involve the importance of individual destiny, individual spiritual force, and, therefore, individual dynamism and individual achievement as social values. These cultures are of course famous for sending individuals forth to prove themselves and realize themselves, with the result that these cultures are among the most dynamic and far-flung in the world. So the two Igbo protagonists in *Coming to South Africa* are lectured by an Igbo settled in South Africa who offers them a way into drug dealing when they are stranded and desperate: “every man has his own potential. You guys can make it on your own. . . . Are you willing to do whatever it takes to make money? If that’s the case, I’ll assist you.” These values are not overtly ethnicized or traditionalized, however – there is no talk of *ikengas* or *chis* or *ase*.<sup>10</sup> The idiom is more or less that of the self-help books that now crowd the shelves, racks, and tables at the front of Nigerian bookshops, a gauntlet one has to run to get to anything else, except that many of those books have a religious orientation that is remarkably absent in the films.

Sometimes there is a discourse of freedom, as in *Black Night in South America*: “This is not Africa. You’re abroad: you’ve got the freedom to do whatever you want, however you want. The choice is yours.” But this sense of freedom is always framed very tightly as a question of what one is willing to do for money and how much money one wants to have. In this example, a woman is counseling her sister to go into prostitution.

In their loneliness and isolation, the protagonists seldom find solace in making contact with home (see Naficy). Contact with home tends rather to remind them of the harsh necessity to make good in their situation on their own. *The London Boy* has poignant scenes of the protagonist calling Nigeria; he is understandably inarticulate in conveying the reality of London life to his family and is constantly met with urgent pleas for money that he cannot meet. The central character of *Western Union*, complaining to a friend about the pressures on him to send money home, is told: “You are right, this is why you are in Europe; you must live up to expectation. What they need from you is a constant flow of cash. This is Europe; you must make use of the only opportunity you have. . . . Get rich, or die trying.”

Sometimes the protagonist honorably decides life abroad simply is not worth it, like the heroine of *Missing in America*, who, in spite of what everyone assumes, came to New York to find her missing husband, not for a new life as an immigrant. In her final voice-over, she says, "It takes a special hunger to live in America as an illegal alien. I'm not hungry enough to live here like that. I'll go home where I have friends and family to help me raise my baby. America is a dream. For some it becomes a beautiful reality. For others, that dream is just a nightmare."

*Europe by Road* and *Coming to South Africa* develop the theme of struggling to get ahead in a social and (apparently) moral void through a contrastive pairing of Nigerian friends who have come abroad together, one of them stronger, harder, more determined, readier to do anything than the other. In the latter case, they both turn to drug dealing, but one pulls out while the stronger one stays in; it is not always clear where the first's weakness stops and his virtue begins, though the plot rewards him with a (white) girl, a job, and freedom after his brush with drug dealing, while the stronger one gets twenty-five years in prison.

The normal way of narrativizing the meaning of the moral crisis is by showing the consequent strain on kin, marital, or romantic relationships. This is, of course, the normal Nollywood procedure: in *Living in Bondage*, Andy's initiation into the money ritual cult requires him to sacrifice his beloved wife, Merit. Betrayal of or by intimates is the most prevalent of all Nollywood themes. What is special about this genre of films set abroad is that the protagonists are largely shorn of intimate relationships by virtue of their situation. But if they are married, there will be adultery (*Broken Pitcher*, *Dangerous Twins*, *Dubai Runs*, *Black Night in South America*, *Goodbye New York*). If they come looking for a missing spouse (*Missing in America*) or relative (*Black Night*, *Dangerous Twins*), they will find treachery. Some are betrayed by their families in Nigeria, to whom they are sending money that is wasted in reprehensible ways (*London Forever*, *Western Union*). A foreign lover may suddenly prove to be treacherous (*Dapo Junior*, *The Broken Pitcher*, *Crazy Like a Fox*, and *Osuofia in London*, though in the last case she later redeems herself). More often, the Nigerian betrays a good foreign woman because of inordinate greed (*Man on a Mission*, *Western Union*, *Black Night*, *Dangerous Twins*). Betrayals of Nigerian lovers are routine.

It is worth stressing the extent to which these betrayals happen within the Nigerian community. The principal reason for this is the fact, suggested above, that the films are not very much interested in anything beyond the (extended) Nigerian community. But it is striking how little racism appears in these films. It is fairly often alluded to in passing, as a structuring element in the experience of trying to make it abroad, and is sometimes demonstrated by harsh police officers (a recurring theme in *This America*) or those with depraved sexual interests in black bodies (*Black Night*, *Goodbye New York*), but in general it is seldom shown. On the other hand, the films include a number of spontaneously generous white people, who are often betrayed or offended (*Home & Abroad*) for their pains (see Haynes, "Africans Abroad"). Only *Dapo Junior* puts white racism at the narrative and emotional center. *Goodbye New York* is awash in bad feelings about being an African in the United States, concentrated in the relationship between a Nigerian and the African American girlfriend off whom he lives. She makes him do things – fix her coffee, rub her feet – which affront his African masculinity, and he responds with a stream of insults and threats in Igbo, pretending all the while they are endearments. But it is not at all clear he actually has the moral upper hand.

*This America*, by the collaborative team of Oliver Mbamara, Bethels Agomuoh, and Felix Nnorom, is more deeply and systematically about the relationship of Nigerian immigrants and the African American community. Nigerian cousins, one settled in Brooklyn, the other newly arrived, both marry African American women in order to get green cards, and in both cases the relationship goes very wrong. Of all the films in this study, this one is the least structured by Nollywood conventions, though it is rooted in an immigrant community in the standard way, and Agomuoh is closely involved with Nollywood as the owner of the first Internet site selling Nigerian films. But this film is different from the others in many respects and so serves as an important reminder of the openness of the situation of the Nigerian diaspora and its potential to exert a positive influence on Nollywood filmmaking – to make a difference. One of the film's unusual features is that while the others normally contain a very brief and superficial discussion of cultural differences or make them an occasion for simple comedy, *This America* dwells on the subject from beginning to end. (The film is based on an unpublished book Mba-

mará wrote about the cultural differences faced by African immigrants.) Sometimes the situation is played for laughs – the newly arrived cousin cannot satisfy his simplest needs when he shops for food because what he calls “groundnuts” and “minerals” Americans call “peanuts” and “sodas.” Because attention is evenly divided between the cousin who has adapted and the one who doubts he wants to adapt, there is no clear right and wrong as questions arise such as whether a woman should be able to buy a man a drink. The African American society the cousins are faced with is not exactly malevolent toward them, but it is deeply dysfunctional across a range of issues (gun violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, carelessness about women’s sexuality and fertility, child raising) in ways that are shocking and dangerous for the Nigerians. The film simply watches and counts the costs of adapting to this utterly unromanticized environment. The establishing shots are brilliant, but the film is never tempted to indulge in tourism, shopping, or romance sequences.

Observation of the Nigerian national character is at the heart of the comedies set abroad. *Osuofia in London*, *Mr. Ibu in London*, and *Home & Abroad* spend most of their time watching comic Nigerians, who are entertaining masses of low motives and ignorance, goofing around and making fools of themselves in Europe – failing to understand indoor plumbing, waving at themselves in security cameras, and botching relationships with foreign women – but somehow remaining the heroes of their stories. Nkem Owoh’s *Osuofia* is a bushman, a villager, whose long-lost brother has died in England, leaving him an enormous fortune. John Okafor’s *Ibu* is a poor, unsophisticated, and foolish security man working at the Lagos port, who falls asleep in a container and wakes up by the Thames. *Home & Abroad* is about two professional comics (one played by Okafor, the other by Victor Oswuagwu) who are invited to Germany to collect an award and perform. They bring on themselves the hardship/alienation sequence and the need to find Africans in the street because they miss their flight, get distracted by drink and a German lady on their arrival, fail to telephone the promoters who brought them, and do not show up at the awards ceremony. Similarly, *Ibu* doubles his hardship/alienation experience because he forgets the address of the first Nigerian who has taken him in off the street and needs to be rescued again by a second-chance meeting with another Nigerian. *Osuofia* has to leave England in a hurry with his brother’s English wife, now his

fiancée, who was part of a scheme to defraud him but has fallen out with her confederate; part 2 is about their return to his village and her gradual change of heart (see also Okome, this volume). In the other films, the protagonists are deported as manifestly unfit for life in Europe.

Europe is there as a manifold object world to be faced and fooled with, but the relationships that matter are, as usual, largely with Nigerians. Osuofia's experience in London is shaped by his late brother and a Nigerian lawyer who conspires with his brother's wife against him (and who feels his facade of assimilation slipping away in Osuofia's maddening presence). In *Home & Abroad*, the lovable but impossible protagonists' exemplary Nigerian fecklessness, childish greed, irresponsibility, quarrelsomeness, endless wheedling, geniality, humor, liveliness, and sheer force of personality are contrasted not with German rationality but with the rationality of the Nigerian promoters, who are based in Germany and operate according to European standards. They have invested ten thousand euros and their reputations on the awards ceremony, to which they had invited the Nigerian ambassador, and they are understandably furious when the comics do not bother to show up. The Nigerian community in Berlin (which seems to have been deeply involved in the production of the film) is also represented by Lady Suru, whose African grocery store is heavily advertised, but who is an ambivalent figure at the center of an expatriate community prone to rumor, gullibility, and erratic swings between generosity, hypocrisy, and anger. In *Mr. Ibu in London*, the key figure representing the film's point of view is Michael, a Nigerian who takes Ibu in for an extended stay and shows him the sights. Michael is motivated partly by sentimental reasons (there is a slight prior acquaintance, but more important, Ibu generally embodies home), partly because he enjoys Ibu's comic reactions to everything from London Bridge to the London Eye, and partly, doubtless, because Ibu's reactions make him feel superior, measuring how far he has come himself. But when Ibu makes unwanted sexual advances toward Michael's British wife, he is not amused.

All three films lavish attention on the theme of the "been-to." *Osuofia in London, 2* is all about the hero's triumphant return to his village, in a bowler hat, with a white wife in tow. In *Home & Abroad*, before their departure for Europe the comics use the prestige of being "international" men, with passports and visas, to face down landlords and a police officer

and to enforce the admiration of their families, and while they are away their families keep at this game in scenes intercut with the men's German misadventures. The general Nigerian population in the film seems uncertain what a visa is, exactly, but is willing to be impressed. Similarly, in *Mr. Ibu in London*, on his return Ibu finds an admiring audience for his implausible lies. The mood is gently satirical – not the kind of satire that is expected to change anything or carry a real message.

The contrast and interplay between a feckless Nigerian personality and the rationality of Nigerians who are used to operating in a foreign environment are at the center of Tade Ogidan's *Dangerous Twins*, the longest (it is in three parts) and richest of the films made abroad, which begins as comedy but quickly turns very dark indeed. Taiye, who lives in London, comes back to Lagos to see his identical twin, Kehinde. They are so much alike even their wives cannot tell them apart (both parts are played by Ramsey Nouah). Taiye tells his brother he has not been able to impregnate his English wife, Judy, and he asks Kehinde to switch places with him to do the job. After some hesitation, Kehinde agrees. In London, Judy is taken aback but pleased by Kehinde's ardent lovemaking and extravagant presents, both so unlike the husband she is used to, and Kehinde makes his brother's business thrive by playing fast and loose with the rules. In Lagos, Taiye is too uptight to touch his brother's wife, Shola, who finds this coldness outweighs the fact that Taiye likes to be a family man at home with the kids, while the husband she is used to was always out chasing other women. Taiye is shocked at the way his brother's business runs and sets out to reform it, firing workers who do not really work, getting rid of equipment he considers unnecessary, and refusing to pay bribes. (Akin Adesokan compares these austerity measures, imported from London, with the structural adjustment program of the 1980s, 410.) Morale suffers, and since Taiye's innovations are so at odds with the local culture, the business declines disastrously. In London, Kehinde succeeds in impregnating Judy, flies her around the world on expensive vacations, and, once the child is born, evades and lies to his brother in order to prolong his new life. In Lagos, Taiye is vexed nearly to madness: he swelters in the dark when the electricity goes off since he refuses on principle to buy a generator, irritated at the neighbors' noisy celebration and furious that no one will listen to his brilliant business ideas. When his home is invaded by armed robbers, he escapes over the

wall to call the police, who do nothing since their vehicle is grounded by lack of fuel and the power outage means they cannot phone their men on patrol. Meanwhile, the robbers kill all of Kehinde's children and make off with all the family's money, leaving Shola hysterical.

This is all in part 1, which ends with a fine balance: Kehinde has stolen Taiye's life, and Taiye has destroyed Kehinde's. Taiye is rationality and morality, which evidently do not reign in Nigeria; it is lamentable that Nigeria is a place where trusting law enforcement gets children killed, but Taiye has forgotten or refuses to know how to live there, and he is dead, a sexual and social failure, and therefore an economic failure and a disaster to the family. In the later parts, he becomes a drug courier to return to England to reclaim the wife he loves, now a man of unshakable purpose, willing to get his hands dirty. Kehinde is full of the life force, sexy and fun, but also deeply irresponsible. In the later parts, he completes his betrayal of his brother and goes on to betray Judy and various other women. Finally, he is beyond unforgivable – he is a shell of a man, a compulsive liar and womanizer, a trickster who begins to be tricked over and over, condemned to systematic punishment.

If Taiye seemed in danger of losing touch with his society, the greater danger turns out to be Kehinde running off the rails into a moral, emotional, and social abyss. There is a danger in overestimating Taiye's alienation, in any case; he, like the Nigerian businessmen in *Home & Abroad*, may stand for rationality, but it would be a serious mistake to simply identify rationality with foreign influence and the opposite with Nigerianness. The point is that Taiye and Kehinde are twins, both Nigerian, representing opposite sides of the national temperament. The film is ambivalent toward both sides and is extraordinarily inventive in turning this ambivalence into narrative.

The fact that Kehinde is seen as the greater problem reflects the basic thematic pattern that emerges from these films as a whole. To a remarkable extent, the assimilation of Nigerians abroad to their foreign host cultures does not appear as a major threat. A fundamental point about the Nigerian (and Ghanaian) video films is that they have not been based on the discourses of authenticity and nationalism associated with celluloid cinema and with so much other officially sponsored cultural production in Africa (Meyer; Larkin; Garritano, "Contesting"). African popular culture is comfortable with creolization and foreign trappings

used as a marker of African success, and so is apt to react with pride to the sight of a Nigerian living a foreign lifestyle, at least as long as the Nigerian is sending money home, though certainly other reactions may also be in play. The Nigerian diasporic communities, whose points of view loom large in these films, have a sophisticated, lived experience of these issues. Still, it is remarkable how little the inevitable conflicts of assimilation are dramatized. One would think stories about children deserting the values of their parents would be ubiquitous, but there are only two examples in this batch of films: *The Broken Pitcher* briefly turns its attention to a teenage daughter who has begun meeting men in motels and asserts an American independent right to do so, and *The London Boy* is about the conflicts between the claims of a couple's romantic love, situated in London, and the claims on each of them by their families back home. The film conducts a lively and heavily overdetermined debate on the matter without coming anywhere near taking a position. The assimilation theme comes up most frequently in the form of shifting gender roles, either in a relationship with a foreign woman (*London Boy* again) or in a Nigerian marriage where the woman does better than her husband in the foreign economy and he is reduced to domestic labor in the home (*Black Night in South America*, *Goodbye New York*). Other films refer to missing persons, reflecting a concern that Nigerians abroad may get lost to their families, but cultural assimilation is not usually a prominent part of these stories.

The films are much more worried about two other threats. One is simply the human carnage involved in the dangerous transition to life abroad. If there is one thing these films agree on, it is that Nigerians need to be advised that acquiring wealth abroad is not as easy as they imagine. *Europe by Road* has the character of films made to discourage drug use or unsafe sex, luridly demonstrating the dangers of risky behavior to young people who might be tempted. The theme is sometimes directly expressed at the end of a film through a voice-over, a title, or a scene such as the one that ends *Goodbye New York* in which the protagonist, now back in Nigeria with nothing except very bad memories, advises a circle of young female relatives not to make the same mistake she made. But they do not seem to listen. The frequently sobering fortunes of the films' protagonists are balanced by the visible existence of a Nigerian community abroad, full of people who have made it.

The other threat is from within: that greed, fear, and apparent necessity will lead to moral transgressions with devastating consequences. As I have been arguing, this is the central terrain of the video film tradition as a whole; what the videos primarily see in the foreign is not an occasion for adventure travel but the dangers of a moral holiday during which the thoroughly investigated dark impulses of the national personality can flourish. Betrayal of intimates is in the national character, the videos tell us, though so too of course are extraordinary demonstrations of loyalty and selfless suffering. The moral logic of the diasporan films is the same as that of the video tradition in general, with the same need to punish transgression and the same ambivalence about wealth. In the plot denouements, the protagonists are suitably chastened if their strength has expressed itself in unprincipled ways, or they are allowed to go home if life abroad has roughed them up too badly, or they settle into a successful life abroad if they have passed their tests.

#### NOTES

1. The previous study was mostly about Ghanaian films, and all the films were made before 2001; this one is all about Nigerian ones (though one film, *Crossing Paths*, is a Nigerian-Ghanaian coproduction dominated by the Ghanaian components), mostly made between 2003 and 2009. I believe historical evolution rather than nationality is responsible for the change in the character of the films.

2. It is possible to do without one of these elements – *A Night in the Philippines* and *Dubai Runs* do not depend on an expatriate community, and *This America* and *Man on a Mission* have no imported star – but most films have both.

3. There are film professionals from Nigeria or of Nigerian descent making careers in the United States and Europe whose work has nothing to do with Nollywood, such as Ngozi Onwurah, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Vigil Chime, and Newton Aduaka.

4. I have given the benefit of the doubt to *Dubai Runs* and *Boys from Holland*.

Some films set abroad that are mentioned in the text are not included in the table because I have not managed to see them in their entirety.

5. I have excluded from my survey a whole category of films made with imported Nigerian stars in other African countries as those countries attempt to establish their own film industries in imitation of the phenomenally popular Nollywood model. See Haynes, “Nollywood.”

6. I rush to point out that while Hollywood does like to exploit exotic foreign landscapes, its interest in foreign people is also contained within very strict limits – for example, to some Hollywoodian colorful natives in the background while Robert Redford and Meryl Streep kiss in the foreground (*Out of Africa*), or to a noble savage standing around behind Jennifer Connelly and Leonardo DiCaprio as they explore their rich moral lives and do not quite kiss (*Blood Diamond*).

7. But the top-of-the-line production *Dangerous Twins* has shots of both Murtala Muhammed and Heathrow Airports. For some remarks on airport scenes in Ghanaian video films, see Dogbe 237–40.

8. Hamid Naficy writes of exile, “It is a slipzone of anxiety and imperfection, where life hovers between the heights of ecstasy and confidence and the depths of despondency and doubt” (12).

9. My thinking here has been influenced by Carmela Garritano’s careful

argument to the effect that the occult element in the early Ghanaian video films has been overestimated, to the detriment of noticing the fundamental role of economic disparity in those films (*African Video*).

10. An *ikenga* (Igbo) is a small statue representing a man’s individual strength; *chi* (Igbo) is a person’s daimon or spiritual double, and also his or her destiny; *ase* (Yoruba) is the universal life force contained in every individual as well as in objects.

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