The Fantastic Subject: A Visio-Cultural Study of Nollywood Video-Film

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By

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Declaration

I declare that this essay is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

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2013/12/12

Abstract

The increasing popularity of Nigerian video-film, defined as the 'Nollywood phenomenon' (Barrot 2008, Haynes 2010, Adesokan 2011), has attracted recent interdisciplinary academic attention, now known as 'Nollywood Studies'. The aesthetics and ideological approach of Nollywood video-film are often differentiated from those of the long-established and illustrious African Cinema. Films of Africa are, however, *generally* characterised by seemingly unique forms of the fantastic – an uneasy theme in scholarship on Nollywood. Although Nollywood video-film is commended by some scholars, its representation of the supernatural and the fantastic is often perceived to be demeaning. Considering the complexity of fantastic themes in creative arts of Africa, this study contributes to this field of study by positioning Nollywood as an interventionist artistic practice that subverts the division between art and popular culture. Further, it considers how this positioning could shift our thinking about what constitutes art and creative practice in Africa. The distinctions between art and popular culture have been inherited from particularly Western disciplines. A critical analysis of the fantastic in Nollywood could expand interpretations of the broader uses of new media and appropriation and develop the discourse on contemporary creative practices of Africa and the parameters of the art history discipline.

I interrogate the visual language of the video-film medium through a discussion of other forms of artistic media such as photography, video art, and performance art. The fantastic themes, such as 'magic', 'fetishism' and violence, conveyed through new media open up a field of questions regarding contemporary social-political dynamics. The cultural value of Nollywood video-film is often based on *who* makes it. As a proletarian product, Nollywood has been underestimated as a 'low' form of culture. Its use of appropriated material connotes the complex dialectics that formulate class difference. I consider how a positioning of video-film as a creative practice could be complicated by the fact that it also operates as a theocentric implement that is used by churches to evangelise. Moreover, I examine how 'epic' films construct idyllic notions of 'ethnicity' based on dialectics of rational/irrational or real/fantastic. Nollywood video-film also creates images of fantastic spaces. In this thesis, I address concepts of space in Nollywood from which fantastic desire is constructed.

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List of Abbreviations

MA	Marketers' Association
AGN	Actors' Guild of Nigeria
AIPA	Association of Itsekiri Performing Artistes
AMP	Association of Movie Producers
AMP	Association of Movie Practitioners
AMPECA	American Motion Picture Exporters and Cinema Association
ANCOP	Association of Nollywood Core Producers
ANTP	Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners
BEKE	Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment
CDGN	Creative Designers' Guild of Nigeria
CEMP	Congress of Edo State Movie Practitioners
CONGA	Coalition of Nollywood Guilds and Associations
DGN	Directors' Guild of Nigeria
ECBS	East Central State Broadcasting Service
ENBC	Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation
FVPMAN	Film/ Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria
ITPAN	Independent Television Producers Association of Nigeria
MOPAN	Motion Picture Association of Nigeria
MOPPAN	Motion Picture Practitioners Association of Nigeria
MOPPCON	Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria
NAG	Nigerian Actors Guild
NANTAP	National Association of Nigerian Theatre Art Practitioners
NEPA	National Electric Power Authority
NFC	National Film Corporation
NFDC	National Film Distribution Company

NFVCB	National Film and Video Censors Board
NGE	Nigerian Guild of Editors
NSC	Nigerian Society of Cinematographers
NSE	Nigerian Society of Editors
NTA	National Television Authority (formerly NTV)
SWGN	Screen Writers' Guild of Nigeria
WNTS	Western Nigeria Television Services

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Introduction

The [spoken] word addresses itself to the imagination, not the ear. Imagination creates the image and the image creates cinema
(Djibril Diop Mambety cited in Frank Ukadike 2002: 129)

Nigeria is a major contributor to film in Africa. The Nigerian video-film[1] industry, Nollywood, took off in the 1990s and is increasingly becoming an important medium. However, it has been widely dismissed as a vulgar misrepresentation of Nigerian society and its everyday life (Onuzulike 2007a: 39, Ukata 2010, Adejunmobi 2011, Alawode 2013). Following recent pioneering work by scholars (Haynes 2007b, Meyer, 2003a and Okome, 2010), this thesis argues that disparaging the importance of the fantastic in Nollywood is not useful and suggests that the fantastic can be used as an heuristic tool to explore the place of video-film as an artistic form. I specifically analyse Nollywood video-film to examine the complex meanings of the fantastic by interrogating (a) the video-film *medium* as the basis of artistic representation, (b) its *situation* or the conditions under which video-films are produced and its cultural classification as popular culture, (c) the economy of politics and religion which produce much of the fantastic themes in video-film, (d) the representation of the fantastic in traditional ethnocentric belief systems as well as (e) the construction of fantastic spaces and negotiation of moral values. I seek to do this in order to contribute to the re-thinking of a particularly 'African' art history.

Based in different parts of Nigeria and outside its borders, Nollywood video-films are produced in many cities including Enugu, Lagos and Kano. The ethno-religious categories of Nollywood are not rigid categories but, in the industry, there are common references to Igbo films, Yorùbá films and Hausa films, or Christian films and Muslim films. Christian films are generally attributed to filmmakers working in the south and south-eastern cities such as Lagos and Enugu while Muslim films are attributed to filmmakers working in Kano – a city that lies in northern Nigeria. The films made in Kano are referred to as Kannywood. The research for this thesis was based mainly in

[1] This denotes the use of video rather than celluloid as a primary medium in Nollywood. The strategy to film directly to video impacts the quality of the film and is differentiated in this thesis from celluloid cinema.

Lagos, which is regarded as the epicentre of Nigeria's filmmaking and film distribution (Haynes 2007a: 134). Lagos, one of the largest cities[2] in the continent, is defined as an "urban 'apocalypse'" (Haynes 2007a: 131). The visual metaphors of Lagos, as I will argue, are manifest in video-film and constitute a mirage that creates intriguing ways of thinking about the visual elements of the fantastic in video-film.

1.1: Why Nollywood – Re-thinking the Limits of Art History

I have, on countless occasions, been asked the question 'why study Nollywood' and what makes it important to the art history discipline. For example, Nicholas Roberts of the Omooba Yemisi Adedoyin Shyllon Art Foundation (OYASAF), which sponsored my initial primary research field trip, pointed out that Nigeria has a wealth of plastic arts (sculpture, painting and printmaking). So why, he asked me, would I, an art historian, be interested in Nollywood? Indeed, I visited galleries, national museums and cultural centres, as well as artist studios and met artists such as Rom Isichei and Olu Amoda. OYASAF houses an incredibly wide art collection including works of respected artists such as Ben Enwonwu, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Lamidi Fakeye, Kunle Filani, Yussuf Grillo, El Anatsui and Dele Jegede. Nollywood seems antithetical to these great forms of art.

Does Nollywood video-film have a place in art and art history? If art history is a particularly Western practice, what are the implications for the artistic and cultural production in Africa? Could a profoundly popular visual form such as Nollywood – intensely significant to a very large number of people – be considered an *art* of Africa[3]? Should the Nollywood phenomenon be limited to Film Studies? Plastic arts (such as traditional wood sculptures and other divination objects), which would be considered 'African art', sometimes do feature in video-film and there have been contemporary artists who appropriate Nollywood imagery in their artworks. For example, Nollywood imagery has been appropriated by artists such as Pieter Hugo, Mickalene Thomas, Andrew Esiebo, Wangechi Mutu and Zina Saro-Wiwa. I conduct visual analyses of these

[2] The estimated 2006 population size is between 7.9 million and 17.5 million www.lagosstate.gov.ng/pagelinks.php?p=6 accessed 23 April 2013

[3] In this thesis, I use arts of Africa to refer to a conglomerate of cultural practices about Africa (inclusive of arts made by Africans in the diaspora). The interest in sculptural objects of Africa by anthropolgists, ethnologists, art historians and collectors contributed to the concept of 'African art' as miscellany of sculptural objects. Mostly, the objects are attributed to specific ethnic groups rather than individual artists. By using the phrase 'art of Africa', I seek to expand the notion of 'African art' to include various media and interventions.

artworks and propose that Nollywood's ubiquity or pervasiveness into 'art' broadens discourses regarding the complex relationship that art history, a discipline with largely Western methodology, has with art and cultural production in Africa.

The traditional tenets of art history were established in the late nineteenth century and regard art mainly as *object*, focus on the object's empirical details, use formalism as its methodology, and attribute the value of such objects on authenticity, provenance and cult of personality (artist). These tenets constructed a history based stylistic and ideological movements but obstruct a nuanced understanding of the arts of Africa (Vogel 1986, Blier 1993, Strother 1998, Ogbechie and Peffer 2007). African art has been a subject of interest for art scholars as well as anthropologists, ethnographers and sociologists. Cornelius Adepegba (2000: 6) points out that the "dichotomy between [the different] approaches of social sciences and art history in their study of African art" has evolved. Art history, according to Adepegba (2000: 5), "focuses on art forms which it may or may not care to see in the light of *other aspects of culture*" (my own emphasis) whereas "anthropology focuses on culture and sees art objects as illustrations of its symbolic and extra-aesthetic aspects", but neither "has adhered strictly to its traditional methodology". The focus on the cultural context seemed "reactionary" and "aimed only to correct the earlier notion that [African] art objects could be viewed purely as art in the same way as Modern Western Art, on the back of which it rode to recognition" (Adepegba 2000: 7). Zoe Strother (1998) and Henry John Drewal (1990) point out that Western art history is inadequate in understanding African artistic practices, which do not only privilege sight, but a multi-sensorial aesthetic experience. For example, Suzanne Blier (2001: 18) observes that most of the sculptural objects referred to as African art are usually "first seen in performance contexts" and that "many groups of people both perform *with* art (such as sculptures, masks, and dance wands) and, in their collectivities, often become art" (original emphasis). Further, she notes that "it may well be that for African peoples, performance, which always implies music and dance, is the primary art form" (Blier 2001: 18). An understanding of African art objects relies on seeing them in their symbolic functions within performances.

The specific question that arises and has not yet been addressed in scholarly literature is whether Nollywood could be regarded as a recording of such performances within contemporary situations (for example, the *Ekpo* mask that was stolen from a shrine to

be sold to an American collector in the Nollywood video-film entitled *Osuofia and the Wisemen*, which I discuss in Chapter 1). The notion of contemporaneity in African art has provoked debates regarding the *historicity* of African art, patrimony and commodification, authenticity, constructed notions of 'fetish' and fantastic 'magic' and geographically-circumscribed identity. Suzanne Blier (2002: 1) called the ushering of contemporary African art into Western galleries and museums a "renaissance" and a "new Golden Age". The Golden Age thesis questions 'traditional' or 'canonical' African Art (Blier 2002: 4). However, Blier's notion of a Golden Age is problematic in that it applies Western forms of thinking to creative practices of Africa. The Golden Age thesis, as enlightenment, seems rather late to dawn on Africa only in the twenty-first century. Moreover, it seems that such a 'renaissance' could only be possible through artists who were educated in America or Europe. The separation of contemporary art as conceptual disregards the conceptualism that has existed in the arts of Africa even in the creation of 'traditional' sculptures.

The concurrence of contemporary African art with postmodernism in the twentieth century subverts the traditions of Western art history and even those governing ethnicised African art. For example, in contemporary arts of Africa, art need not necessarily be an object; it could be a participatory intervention and often engages with cultural politics. Contemporary art sometimes denies the notion of authenticity and authority (participatory art works are collectively 'authored'). It questions history and the valorisation of the past in interpreting African objects that are deemed to be 'distinctively African', and therefore interrogates spatio-temporal situationing of art and cultural production in Africa.

Art history is no longer what it used to be. Visual culture, a postmodernist subject, was introduced in the late 1990s and turned attention to new media and the proliferation of images outside of galleries and museums. Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998: 6) points out that "visual culture has come into a certain prominence now because many artists, critics and scholars have felt that the new urgency of the visual cannot be fully considered in the established visual disciplines". He states that "visual culture is now an increasingly important meeting place for critics, historians and practitioners in all visual media who are impatient with the tired nostrums of their 'home' discipline or medium" (Mirzoeff 1998: 6). For Mirzoeff (1998: 6), "this convergence is above all enabled and mandated

by digital technology". So while my study of Nollywood is located in visual culture as a 'visio-cultural' study due to the audio-visual elements of the video medium, it also interrogates the experience of new technology not just as visual but 'multi-sensorial' (Drewal 1990). New media such as digital video enable an understanding of art as cultural practice. Nollywood video-film, though not yet regarded as an art form, raises questions regarding how this notion of 'art' is based on constructed and often acquired tastes. Art history later integrated the ahistorical, the ephemeral, isolated event: that which cannot be preserved. The appropriation of popular culture by artists questioned the elitism of traditional art history.

It may seem that artists such as Pieter Hugo are appropriating images of 'popular culture' (video-film) through photography. This thesis emphasises the significance of video-film as an artistic medium. During my primary research field trips in Lagos, I carried copies of Pieter Hugo's photographs with me as reference. Pieter Hugo's photographic essay entitled *Nollywood* depicts Nollywood actors and actresses in costume. Many people I met in Lagos found these images distasteful and insulting. Chris Okorondu, a famous Nollywood actor, was angered by these photographs and was determined to report them to the president of the Directors' Guild[4]. Hugo's *Nollywood* has been celebrated elsewhere. After it debuted at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town in 2008, it travelled to Sydney, Terragona, Rome, Amsterdam, New York and Paris. Why was it insulting to Nollywood practitioners and Nigerians in general? These photographs are a documentation of Nollywood practitioners dressed as fantastic creatures. It also seemed important to consider that Nollywood video-film was regarded as distasteful and insulting from the onset, in such a way that scholars initially rejected it because of the predominance of the fantastic ('fetish', 'magic', 'voodoo', 'witchcraft' and 'necromancy').

Suzanne Blier (1993: 140) observes that the language of the discipline of art history uses the terms such as "'fetish', 'magic' and 'custom'" to "construct [the] cultural otherness" of African art. Blier (1993: 140) notes that "all art historians share an interest in truth" and illuminates critical issues regarding the ways in which African art seems embedded in belief systems that are based on 'magic' as "the basis for the

[4] Makhubu, N. Conversation with Chris Okorondu and Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos. This conversation took place when I met Zack Orji, former president of the Directors' Guild and renowned Nollywood practitioner.

separation of Africa and its arts from Europe and the movement of Africa into taxonomic proximity with the Pacific Islands and Native America". Nollywood's fascination with the fantastic is precisely what attracts curious attention but it is also the reason for denouncing it. I propose that, as a visual cultural form that is appropriated in art and appropriates art, Nollywood furthers the uneasy discourse about the fantastic in African art history and new methodological approaches to art, not only as object but as socio-cultural dynamic.

1.2: The Fantastic

The fantastic, "a site for critical debate [emerging as a result of] the increasing disbelief in but continued fascination with the supernatural" (Sandner 2004: 6), could be discussed in relation to film in general (both celluloid cinema and video-film[5]). For example, genres such as science-fiction and horror in American Hollywood are in the realm of the fantastic. The enchanting filmic narratives of Bollywood, defined by Vijay Mishra (2002: 1) as the "temples of desire" and Salman Rushdie (1995: 148–149) as "Epico-Mythico-Tragico-Comico-Super-Sexy-High-Masala art", comprise the fantastic as a key element. Likewise, African celluloid cinema provides provocative images of the supernatural. Sharon Russell (1998: 10) warns, however, that care must be taken when using the notion of the fantastic in relation to African cinema as part of communal oral traditions, because "much of the critical theory relating to the fantastic is based on Western literary theory, which is concerned with the individual in both social and psychological terms". Furthermore, she observes that relations between the real world and the spiritual world in African cinema differ from Western cinema.

The video-film phenomenon of Ghana and Nigeria, however, produces a different visual language of the supernatural. Video-film production started in Nigeria and Ghana around the same time[6] (Meyer 2003b, Ogunleye 2003a), Nigerian films "replayed

[5] In this thesis, the term 'African Cinema' refers to a broad range of artisanal postcolonial celluloid films made in countries such as Senegal, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, etc. It includes esteemed auteurs such as Ousmane Sembene, Gaston Kabore, Djibril Diop Mambety, Souleyman Cisse, Med Hondo, Kwaw Ansah and Jean-Pierre Bekolo. The term 'video-film' refers to films made mostly in Ghana and Nigeria that were made straight to video. I use the term 'film' to refer to films in any form, whether they are recorded on celluloid or video-film.

[6] Ghanaian filmmaker, William Akuffo, produced *Zinabu* in 1987 which "opened the floodgates" for Ghanaian video-film (Ogunleye 2003: 4). Nigeria's video-film historiography begins in 1992 with Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage*, even though there was already a vibrant film industry that existed at the time and had leading filmmakers such as Prince Muyideen Alade Aromire who is (debatably) seen as "the

themes addressed by Ghanaian producers already in the early beginnings of popular cinema with the strong emphasis to occult forces [where] the visualisation of magic is the key trademark" (Meyer 2003b: 201). The fantastic is therefore a crucial element that cannot simply be rejected but must be used discursively.

The notion of the fantastic is often discussed in analyses of Nigerian video-film as a predominant and crucial aspect but rarely used as an heuristic tool. As a literary genre, the fantastic defines relations between the writer, the reader and the text. In his seminal work, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov (1973) emphasises that the fantastic is defined by "hesitation" that is experienced by the character and reader (the latter through the character) while discerning between what is real and what is supernatural. Todorov's (1973: 34) notion of the fantastic is defined in terms of "textual operations" and "modes of reading" (Donald 1989: 11). The application of a literary (textual) principle to a visual medium should take into account the immediacy of the visual image. While text conjures up images, these remain dependent on the reader's imagination. Film, on the other hand, offers images from which imagination can be constructed. In this thesis, Todorov's idea of "hesitation" is adapted to explore the Nollywood video-film. The path paved by James Donald's *Fantasy and the Cinema* (1989), with reference to projected cinema, is important, but critiques Todorov's definition of the fantastic as narrow.

Donald (1989: 11) acknowledges that the insistence of Todorov's structuralist study frames the fantastic as a "genre [that] cannot be logically defined either in terms of a fantasy/ reality opposition or in terms of the texts' supposed psychological effects on the reader – terror, horror, shock", but draws attention to relational principles in modes of reading. For Todorov (1973: 26), the fantastic is characterised by "the brutal intrusion of mystery into the context of real life" where "the fantastic narrative generally describes [people] like ourselves, inhabiting the real world, [who are] suddenly confronted by the inexplicable". Further, he maintains that "the fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality". Todorov (1973: 27, 44) argues that the fantastic constitutes "the dividing line between the uncanny and marvellous" where the uncanny

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father of Nollywood" (Husseini 2010: 2–4). It is important to point out, however, that the pioneering of video-film can be traced back to 1984, when the Nigerian video-film *Ekun* was shot.

is presented by situations that seem strange, supernatural or extraordinary but can be explained rationally (illusions), and the marvellous is defined as narratives in which the supernatural "remains unexplained, unrationalised" and is accepted as such. The oscillation between ways of discerning the real sustains ambiguity and is characterised by Todorov as "hesitation", which is the key element of the fantastic. For Todorov (1973: 33), the three conditions that characterise a work that belongs to the fantastic genre are as follows:

> First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations.

If a person is confronted by an inexplicable event then "either he is the victim of the illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then reality is controlled by laws unknown to us" (Todorov 1973: 29). The uncertainty that constitutes the fantastic is precisely what makes video-film thought-provoking.

While the fantastic refers to the strange, the preposterous and the grotesque, it also denotes the imaginary, the supernatural, the hallucinatory, the unrealistic, etc. In Western art criticism, the term 'fantastic' has been used to describe "the irrational unreality of images" as well as the "expressionistic restlessness of the forms" (Eager 1971: 151). Gerald Eager (1971) draws from Plato's allegory of the cave to explore the uses of the term 'fantastic'. Plato's allegory illustrates the way in which reality is perceived through describing the scenario of prisoners who are chained to a bench in an underground cave "in such a way that all they can see are the shadows of artificial objects thrown by firelight on the wall of the cave" (Eager 1971: 151). The allegory surmises that, if one of the prisoners was freed and shown the objects that created the shadows that he had come to believe to be reality, he would not recognise or acknowledge them as being as real as the shadows he has been acclimatised to. Therefore, the fantastic questions the premises of reality in which it is accepted as it is

presented or constructed, and in which it is imagined. If one considers the allegory of the cave, the fantastic is not antithetical to reality but it is the basis of reality and crucial to understanding how reality is constructed and imagined.

Eager (1971) discusses two different uses of the term 'fantastic' by Alfred Barr and Kenneth Clark. The former use of the term 'fantastic' by Alfred Barr proposes that forms are "fantastic because of the presence of double images and hybrid monsters" and the latter use by Kenneth Clark supposes that they are "fantastic because of the emotive effect of the sharp contrasts of flaming light and the jagged forms of actual flames" (Eager 1971: 151). For Barr, the word 'fantastic' describes "images that are only imagined" and is concerned with the "relationship between the image and external reality" whereas for Clark it describes "forms that inspire imagination" and focuses on the "relationship between image and psychic process" (Eager 1971: 151-2). With regard to the allegory of the cave, the concept of the fantastic does not only explain the images that are projected on the wall of the cave and how they are perceived but it also refers to the construction of different "worlds": that of the cave and the one that exists beyond the cave. The images on the wall "correspond to the reality [that is] represented in the Allegory by the things in the upper world outside the cave, illuminated by the Sun" (Eager 1971: 152). Video-films allude to the collision of the real world and the spiritual world but at the same time they remind us of the ideological machinations that construct these worlds. The images in these definitions serve an ideological function which urges questions regarding *who* creates or orchestrates what is seen and *who* sees them.

The scenario drawn by Eager (1971) also draws attention to shadow play, or things which are made visible but are not *really* there in material form but can be believed to exist in material form. Birgit Meyer (2003a: 219) aptly points out that the use of amateur editing techniques in video-film to show things that are generally invisible to the naked eye grants the camera a "super-vision". This mode of showing (making ghosts and spirits visible within the image) comes across as magical and fabricates reality. Unlike Eager's definition which alludes to different realms, Rose Jackson (1981: 4) argues that fantasy is not to do with "inventing another non-human world", rather "it has to do with inverting elements of this world re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently 'new',

absolutely 'other' and different". Rose Jackson (1981:2) observes that the fantastic "traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which is silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'". For Meyer (2003a), it is the manipulation of concealment and revelation that constitutes magic, enchantment or fantasy. This manipulation is often characterised as deception or as a con. The interface of concealment and revelation can be likened to the bamboozlement and deceptiveness of capitalism[7].

A majority of Nollywood video-films relate to the supernatural, whether these have to do with cults (small religious group based on the worship of an object), the occult (secret supernatural beliefs and practices)[8], witchcraft, deities, the devil or God. These recurring themes have occupied public discourse as real events – often conflated as real events (Smith 2007, Marshall 2009). For example, national newspapers generally feature stories regarding supernatural events[9] (Marshall 2009: 167). Marshall (2009: 172) observes that, during 1998, there "was a rise of stories regarding religion and 'popular rumours' regarding 'occult powers, Mami Wata spirits and other predatory invisible forces' in the [Nigerian] national press" in relation to politicians, which led to the characterisation of the political economy as criminal. Due to the fact that stories such as those described by Marshall pervade the public space as real events rather than fiction, the use of Todorov's notion of "hesitation" is useful.

It is necessary, however, to be careful when using Todorov's notion of "hesitation" in this context, mainly because his thesis is based on the experience of the viewer in response to elements of the fantastic in an image or text. Therefore, the mode of reading implies a particular *kind* of reader (it seems to imply that the literate reader has predetermined distinctions between 'rational' and 'irrational'). The generalised

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[7] The Post-Industrial capitalist age is characterised as an age where everything appears as image and as deception. Jean Baudrillard (1981: 151) posits that capitalism has constructed a world in which simulacra (hyperreality) have become reality and the real has disappeared. For Baudrillard (1981: 151) "the real is produced from miniaturised units, matrices, memory banks" and it "no longer has to be rational".

[8] The occult defines secret religious practices in which "the effectiveness of the rites is considered to be effective only when performed by those who are deeply initiated in the lore of the cult" (Boa 1977: 139)

[9] Examples include *Punch* http://www.punchng.com/news/ilesa-chiefs-tackle-owa-over-alleged-blood-oath/accessed 2013/04/29, *The Nigerian Tribune* http://tribune.com.ng/news2013/index.php/en/component/k2/item/8959-how-i-lost-five-siblings-to-occultism-delta-lawmaker?highlight=YToxOntpOjA7czo2OiJvY2N1bHQiO30= accessed 2013/04/29 and *The Vanguard* newspaper http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/05/search-for-power-led-me-into-occultism-say-rev-adegboye/ accessed 2013/04/29; which have published similar stories about occultism over the years.

associations of superstition and naivety with, primarily, Africa and, secondarily, with its proletariat and the constructs of so-called traditions[10] (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Mudimbe 1988) make it less easy to discuss modes of reading and/or modes of seeing. As Birgit Meyer (2003a: 203) illustrates, the "colonial discourse constructed those beliefs (indigenous) as superstition to be left behind with the gradual increase of education". For her, these popular video-films offer a particular perspective.

Moreover, Frantz Fanon (1963: 211) reminds us that "for colonialism, this vast continent was a haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals". It is no wonder that anything related to superstition, magic and the fantastic in the context of Africa would be rejected. The overwhelming history that has contributed to how Africa is seen or perceived has implications for the way in which images of the fantastic are treated in contemporary artistic and cultural practices in Africa. Since these issues are predominant in Nollywood video-film, the term 'fantastic' becomes awkward to use.The images circulated by video-films are powerful enough to construct *the imagination* of the real, shape perceptions of social relations and action.

Jackson (1981: 4) observes that the fantastic has a "language of subversion" where "the 'value' of fantasy has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition, in its free-floating and escapist qualities". The idea of escapism also characterises the Nollywood craze: it sometimes regarded as 'a way out' and a way 'into' other possibilities besides the present. Nollywood representations of the supernatural are often linked to desires for wealth and idyllic domestic life. Jackson (1981: 4) notes that "in expressing desire, fantasy can operate in two ways: it can tell of, manifest or show desire (portrayal, representation, manifestation . . .) or it can expel desire". She continues to state that "when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens the cultural order, continuity suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests for it opens up, for a brief moment, onto disorder, onto illegality, onto that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems" (Jackson 1981: 4). In Nollywood video-film, the desire for wealth is linked with occultism, criminality and corruption.

[10] In his book, *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe (1988: 1) argues that colonialism which is defined as "organisation, arrangement" tended to "organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs". Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983: 237) unpack "false models of colonial codified African tradition" and argue that tradition was invented "to give rapid and recognisable symbolic form to developing types of authority and submission".

Video-film is an object of the marginal and portrays opposing values as characteristics of the same subject.

Video-film can be seen as subversive because it reunites taboo with what is socially acceptable. It represents the idea of God with a collage of images of evil. In video-film, the impotence of the Nigerian state becomes apparent by virtue of its absence in representation. Forms of the self are other and life is death. Video-film affords these symbolic exchanges where the public and private intersect. James Donald (1989: 3) points out Hortense Powdermaker's observation that fantasy in film enables one to "escape into saccharine sentimentality or into fantasies which exaggerate existing fears", but the question that remains is "whether these are constructive or non-productive, whether the audience is psychologically enriched or impoverished"[11]. Elements of the fantastic in film are argued to give "false consciousness" and are viewed by Frederic Jameson "as purely delusory or repressive" (Jameson cited in Donald 1989: 3). These views allude to the effect of fantasy as something that people see, imagine, comprehend, but do not necessarily enact, if socially unacceptable. Ogbu Kalu (2003) expresses a notion of 'moral performance' in which the dominance and interlinkage of politics and religion in Africa blur boundaries between reality and the imagined, right and wrong, good and bad, etc. The idea of 'moral performance' enables a different reading of the fantastic, not just as a set of imagined occurrences or representations of the strange but also as the forces that regulate moral obligation (such as the fantastic elements of religion or charismatic leadership).

Elizabeth Cowie (1999: 356) finds that the fantastic can be defined as that which is "unearthed" from "products of the unconscious as dreams, symptoms, acting out, repetitive behaviour, etc." The use of modes of performance (repetitive sentences) and forms of presentation (long, repeated scenes) in Nollywood video-film evokes images that seem to suggest that the psychological realisation of the fantastic is caused by phenomena that cannot be controlled by one individual and appear to have supernatural omnipotence (for example, situations caused by economic and political matters). The representation of ghouls, witches, *juju*, cult leaders, etc. in video-film keeps drawing attention to political and economic situations in its direct depiction of corrupt political leaders as members of dangerous money cults and rampant

[11] These were observations that were made regarding Hollywood cinema.

unemployment, among other contemporary problems. The issue that appears to be important when re-thinking the fantastic in Nollywood video-film is not only modes of reading, but also the stylisation of reality.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) observes the impossibility of regarding reality as something that excludes the fictive and imagined. It is rather constructed from imagination and fiction. For Appadurai (1996: 31), “the image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes, *the imagination as social practice*”. The imagination, argues Appadurai (1996: 31) “is now central to all forms of agency, it is itself a social fact and is the key component of the new global order”. This thesis therefore seeks to deploy a nuanced concept of the fantastic in Nollywood video-film.

1.3: Video-film: An Interventionist Medium

Nollywood refers to films made on digital video in Nigeria. Similar forms of films were also shot on video in Ghana. Nollywood is therefore closely related to the video-film practices of Ghana rather than the Islamic Hausa video-film industry in the north of Nigeria, Kano. Nollywood video-film is rejected as inferior mainly because of the low quality of video-film, its representation of the fantastic but also because it seems apolitical in comparison to the postcolonial African cinema of the 1960s that was shot on celluloid. Nollywood denotes particularly Nigerian video-film whereas African Cinema represents a panacea of postcolonial filmmaking practices in Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone African countries. African Cinema is often seen as artisanal whereas Nollywood is industrial (Givanni 2001: 117) but I argue that Nollywood merges artisanal practice with industrial, commercial practice. Recent Nollywood productions, for example, which are known as ‘New Nollywood’ are shot on celluloid and are characterised by their artistic approaches. The distinction between video-film and celluloid is not only based on the quality of the two different mediums but also on modes of showing and styles of story-telling. Celluloid African cinema focused on political issues of post-independence Africa, whereas video-film seems to be characterised by melodramatic representations of the supernatural. These distinctions have changed but have contributed to how video-film is perceived.

The visual language of video-film may be different partly because of the *medium* (the low-quality shooting and editing equipment) as well as the *modes of performing*. Taking its departure from Marshall McLuhan's (1967: 9) hypothesis that "the medium is the message" that "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association", this study examines visual representations of Nollywood video-film and their broader socio-cultural implications (for example, the production of images of the occult have an implication for the public imagination of the occult). This study considers the approach of Nollywood some of the issues it represents. The questions posed by Walter Benjamin (1970: 81): "what is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time, what is its position in them?" remain relevant in understanding how technique informs the processes of visual analyses. African video-film, therefore, presents a unique set of ideological questions relating to representations of the continent and of Nigeria in particular, as well as contemporary issues relating to national and ethnic identities whose construction is in part that of colonialism. How is the reality of the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism to be imagined? How is the appropriation of the fantastic to be accepted within African cultural production without the negative connotations? What are the forms of power that manifest in contemporary Nigeria, and what are the implications for social relations? This thesis is not aimed at giving conclusive answers but, through original visual analysis, seeking new points of departure for debate.

Video-films in Nigeria encompass Igbo, Yorùbá and Hausa video-films predominantly. A majority of the English language films are attributed to the Igbo. However, Jonathan Haynes (2007c: 286) points out that the industry began with artists from the Yorùbá travelling theatre, who produced celluloid films in the 1970s and 1980s which were seen as examples of exotic curiosity rather than artistic expression and focused on inside aspects of Yorùbá tradition. The Yorùbá travelling theatre, also referred to as *Alarinjo*, emerged out of *Egungun*[12] groups which were meant to "cleanse Yorùbá communities from physical and psychological disorders". Performers use exquisite and elaborate masks that represent "physical, psychic and social aberrations [such] as leprosy, goitre, club foot, small-pox, drunkenness, insanity and prostitution" (Kerr 1995:

[12] *Egungun* denotes Yorùbá masquerades or Yorùbá spectacles/festivals, which are defined by Henry John Drewal (1990: 2) as "masquerade performances of ancestral spirits" that exemplify "manifestations of the supernatural". Ensembles of masked and costumed men perform, and women participate through singing, during these festivals.

12). Some of these performances also include hunchbacks, albinism and dwarfism. In the 1990s, an Igbo businessman, Kenneth Nnebue, produced films on cassette with Yorùbá travelling theatre performers (Haynes 2007c: 286). Nnebue's inaugural Igbo-language film that was entitled *Living in Bondage* (1992) explored the "fascination with the forms of extravagant wealth on display in Lagos; a psycho-spiritual analysis of the restless ambition provoked by that display; attribution of such wealth to occult practices, especially money rituals involving human sacrifice; and a resolution provided by Christian exorcism" (Haynes 2007b: 291). Although these are not the only themes in Nollywood productions, they have become a central focus and are linked with petro-capitalism as well as the spread of Pentecostalism in West Africa (Barber 1982, Meyer 1998, 2002b, 2004a, 2006a; McCall 2002; Haynes 2007b; Okome 2007b; Wendl 2007; Marshall 2009).

I argue that video-film is political, even though not always explicitly so. Since film "is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself", every film is political (Easthope 1993: 9). Nollywood has produced a myriad of narratives about the supernatural that have received varied responses. Hope Eghagha (2007: 72) argues that the bulk of Nollywood video-films that emphasise the supernatural can be defined as magic realism and that the supernatural forms an important part of the African imagination. This close association and possible interchangeability of the natural and supernatural becomes complex when there is a conflation of "traditional beliefs" (ancestors as well as divinities) and modern popular fantastical imaginaries (ghosts, ghouls, witches or zombies). Akinwumi Adesokan (2011: 91) observes that whatever differences there may be between the otherworldliness and fantastic-ness are collapsed in the video-film's referencing of a symbolic order which resists actions and explanations that strive to maximise rationality. These different forms of the supernatural are the texture of a *modern* discourse (Meyer and Pels 2003). The perception, aptly described by Ruth Marshall (2009: 5), that "progress and development" are measured "in terms of the emancipation of reason from 'pre-modern' or irrational modes of cognition and action" illustrates this predicament. On one hand, the representation of the supernatural in Nollywood video-film appears 'backward'; while, on the other, it captures the future historical importance of 'traditions'.

Nollywood is expected to carry the responsibility linked to what is seen as the "anxiety of the postcolonial" that has been taken on by filmmakers of African cinema (Armes 2006, Okome 2010: 26). The revival of African cultural heritage and the confrontation with modern political situations characterise postcolonial African cinema. African cinema is lauded for its unique way of portraying postcolonial Africa without demeaning African 'traditions'. Reflecting reality in African cinema also meant critiquing the corruption of post-independence elites, capitalist pursuits and European-influenced conduct (Ukadike 1994: 84). This ideological drive has been and remains important, since the development of film in Africa, generally, has faced exploitation partly due to its dependence on resources provided by colonial European establishments. The British Colonial Film Unit, for instance, had a number of offices in Nigeria (Diawara 1992: 7). This presence has contributed to a concept of Africa that bears little or no African authorship[13] and needs to be critically re-assessed (Ukadike 1994, Diawara 1992). Manthia Diawara (1992: 4) points out that "the British Film Colonial Unit treated everything African as superstitious and backward and valorised Europe at Africa's expense, as if they needed to downgrade traditional African culture in order to demonstrate European efficacy". A majority of post-independence African filmmakers aimed to transform the problematic notions that were cultivated from a tainted iniquitous history. In general terms, postcolonial film or African cinema has played a political role in which it seeks to negate past misrepresentations and re-conscientise its audience within "a political economy of cinematic memory", to use Sara Stubbings' (2003: 65) expression.

In his discussion of postcolonial African cinema, Kenneth Harrow (2007: xi) suggests that it is necessary to question and re-evaluate the postulation that African film (both postcolonial celluloid cinema and contemporary video-film) is wholly responsible for the correction of past distortions of history as "site for truth" that is "essentially African". For Harrow (2007: xi), "there is no history to represent, to correct, in film. There is only authority that represents itself". Similarly, Olivier Barlet's (2000: 34–35) observation that "the cinematic ethos [that] was aimed at studying 'the psychological dimensions of oppression and underdevelopment'" must move away from the "initial

[13] Early Nigerian films were made by British missionaries and not by Nigerian filmmakers. Celluloid films such as *Daybreak in Udi* (1949), for example, depict modernisation and traditions in which 'progressive natives' who embrace Western culture want to build a maternity home in Udi but tradition, which is presented as 'backward', persists.

ideological legitimation (reflecting reality in order to reclaim it) and . . . come, in the end, to assert the primacy of culture in social change”.

Harrow (2007: xi) continues to argue that the avowal “‘it happened this way’ is the *telos* of this filmmaking, as historical narratives are becoming dominant ones in the current effort to correct the ills of the past”. In this argument, he also points out that Chinua Achebe (1973: 44) and Ousmane Sembene (1960: 80) shared the view that

> the worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and respect. The writer’s duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost . . . . After all [his] duty is . . . to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history.

The urgency of regenerating history lies in the sense of loss and disorientation. Georg Simmel (1959: 260) argues that “all the uncertainties of change in time and the tragedy of loss associated with the past, find in the ruin, a coherent and unified expression”. In another text Achebe (2001: 24) observes that “there is such a thing as absolute power over the narrative” and asserts that the one who tells the story or “the writer” “cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done”. In effect, the task is to reconstruct the past. Harrow (2007: 12) argues that

> The historicism that has prevailed in much of African literature and film has gone unexamined; history and time or temporality has been taken for granted. The assumption is that the empirical experience of time, and the rational construction of a linear diachrony, sufficed to evoke the needed category of history so as to provide the obligatory context for any text. That history is automatically there, automatically comprehensible, is grounded in the epistemological assumption that this knowledge of history and of temporality are automatically given. This is a classical ideological construction.

The importance of historicisation of the postcolonial subject is emphasised. Tunde Kelani, a Nigerian film producer who has on occasion lamented the quality of Nollywood video-film, maintains that it is important to draw from traditions when using the film medium to tell stories and to give legitimate historical context (Esonwanne 2008: 24). Nollywood filmmakers, however, do not seem to be burdened by the responsibility to ‘correct’ history. Instead, many video-films appear ahistorical. Nollywood’s ahistoricism *can* be assumed to reflect its apolitical stance but it is important consider that this ahistoricism is precisely what makes Nollywood political and symbolises the

fragmentation of the colonial/postcolonial metanarrative and elitist notions of African histories.

As such, there is an assumption that Nollywood video-film does not quite fit neatly in the revered reformative category of African Cinema due to, amongst numerous reasons, the way that it deals with these issues. It *can* be argued that, since Nollywood seems to lack a primary ideological foundation, it does not conscientize in the same manner. For this reason, it was initially rejected in the academic circles. Wendl (2007: 2) observes that due to this initial rejection, "not much has been written about the fantastic, especially about horror, science fiction and fantasy, which provided other strands of images that have strongly simulated and shaped the emergence of what is now called African video-film". Hope Eghagha (2007: 71) also notes this dismissal, stating that "we may need to state for record purposes that there are many Nigerians who have refused to buy into the culture of watching Nollywood movies because of the strong presence or motif of 'ritual and *juju*'". This research examines the different ways in which Nollywood, as a cultural product, engages with socio-political conditions.

Nollywood is regarded as a working-class cultural product and is generally eschewed by elites for its kitsch-like quality. Although one cannot simply deposit Nollywood into the theoretical framework of kitsch or avant-garde (in Greenbergian[14] terms), this approach might help formulate an understanding of class and cultural politics in Lagos since Nollywood is largely regarded as a popular commercial art that is associated with the protelarian and petit bourgeois in urban and peri-urban spaces. Onookome Okome (2007a: 2) explains that it has been defined as, "a 'fetish art' of the jobless youth of the city of Lagos"; the "people's art", and as "filmed theatres" as opposed to cinematographic state-of-the-art productions. One of the speakers at the 2007 Nollywood Foundation conference states that "we [Nollywood filmmakers] do not tell

[14] In a canonical essay, Clement Greenberg (1939) defines kitsch as the cultural production of "the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe" and argued that "where there is the Avant-garde generally we also find a rear-garde" signified by kitsch. Industrialisation, for Greenberg, meant that people, though literate, had not enough time for profound engagement with cultural activity. Processes of urbanisation and industrialisation in Nigeria have been vastly different to those captured by the Greenbergian notion of kitsch. I use the Greenbergian notion of kitsch, however, to examine the suggestion of cultural decay that is coupled with progress.

good stories"[15]. The seemingly banal, everyday actions and narratives represented in Nollywood urge interrogation and can be seen as interventionist.

Furthermore, since a majority of Nollywood narratives are melodramatic stories about the supernatural (often depicting brutally violent scenes and malevolence), there is a need to revise the 'banalisation' of the image that is typical in Nollywood video-film and to examine how forms of violence appear within the banal (Arendt 1977). Brian Larkin (2007) refers to Nollywood representation as "aesthetics of outrage", not because of the link to violence but because of the impact of video-film to the viewer. For Larkin (2007: 172), video-film organises imagery and melodramatic content "around a series of extravagant shocks designed to outrage the viewer". Nollywood video-film maintains the belief that certain incredibly violent events caused by supernatural forces *do* happen, but overwhelms the viewer by making the supernatural, which appears to be part of everyday life, not only visible but vociferously audible. The banal everyday becomes particularly disturbing. In this thesis I discuss various aspects of the video-film medium as well as elements such as music and text that contribute to the experience of the visual image. The value and importance of the Nollywood video-film medium cannot be overstated. Its popularity in many African countries and abroad (Ogunleye 2003a, Ogbor 2009, Bryce 2010) has carved new ways of thinking about contemporary visual languages of film. Video-film democratises the medium of artistic and cultural production.

1.4: On the Question of Genres and Thematic Categories

The fantastic is on one hand a literary genre and, on the other, an inter-genre element. For example, there are elements of the fantastic in Western genres such as horror films, thrillers and science-fiction. There are many overlapping defining features between genres. As Hamid Naficy (2003: 206) states, "genres are not immutable systems; however, they are processes of systematisation, structuration and variation which function to produce regularised variety". For Haynes (2007d), a genre is an artistic framework for interpreting reality. Naficy (2003: 206), however, maintains that "a one-to-one relationship between genre and reality does not exist [and] as such, genres are

[15] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBIxvCPqGRE accessed 2013/05/12

not reflections of reality; rather, they are a means of *structuring and processing reality* through narrative conventions, industrial practices and authorial decisions [own emphasis]". Naficy (2003: 120) observes that they are "ideological constructs masquerading as neutral categories". They are therefore not neutral, objective categories. The notion of the 'fantastic' is used in this thesis as a method of analysis to subvert and interrogate the limitations of 'genres', particularly those of Nollywood.

The genres that have been identified in Nollywood video-film as genres are particularly intriguing. In his study of Ghanaian and Nigerian video-film (Nollywood), Wendl (2007: 266) identifies three major genres: melodrama, comedy and horror films (which overlap with each other, creating genres such as horror–comedy and art–horror). Art–horror is defined as "a counter-piece of 'natural horror'" and as an emotional state related to seeing particular kinds of created horror (Carroll 1990: 12). For Carroll (1990: 13), art–horror is a combination of fear and disgust at seeing 'monsters' such as zombies. Natural horror, however, is not an emotional response to what is fictional but to what is real. For example, genocide is regarded as horrific. As a key element of Western science fiction, horror destabilises "familiarity [and] unsettle[s] relations about our position in the natural order . . . our sense of being at home in the world" (Benford 1994: 107). The horror film formula affirms that "normality is threatened by the monster" (Wood 1986: 78). The reason Nollywood video-film is remarkable is because the constant presence of the 'monster' in the filmic image blurs the difference between horrors of fiction and horrors of reality. The horror of colonialism or military rule in Nigeria is manifest in popular cultural images. For example, Fela Kuti's song *Zombie* (1976) refers explicitly to the Nigerian military. Nollywood video-film often depicts political leaders as cult followers. Wendl (2007: 266) emphasises that the horror genre and representations of evil are significant to Nollywood.

Nollywood genres that have been identified by Haynes (2007d) and Onookome Okome (2007a) include Occult film, Epic film, Hallelujah film, Campus film[16], among others. Many of these films seem to be governed by very similar formulae. For example, the Hallelujah genre is based on representing the evils of cultism, where Christian agents are the only ones to destroy cultism. This seems to be the same formula in Occult film.

[16] At a conference in Lagos 2011, Jonathan Haynes delivered a paper entitled "Campus Films: A Nigerian Film Genre" and declared that, instead of using Western classifications, Nollywood scholars needed to develop different genres from prevailing themes.

In this study, I use these terms because they are now recognised categories within the video-film discourse. However, I refer to these terms as themes rather than genres and use them flexibly in order to interrogate the 'slippages' and consider if it may be that Nollywood makes it impossible to maintain neat categories and genre-lisation. The discussion about the need to categorise Nollywood into its unique genres is significant. However, it forms part of the rhetoric that Nollywood needs to be 'improved' to be on a par with cinematic practices in other parts of the world. I attended a conference that took place in 2011 entitled *Nollywood in Africa, Africa in Nollywood* at Pan African University in Lagos. At the conference, the issue of constructing distinctive genres for Nollywood was framed as a necessary stage in Nollywood's progress. This progress also meant that Nollywood should focus less on the fantastic (in the Occult, Epic and Hallelujah films). Haynes argues that the depiction of the supernatural has been "going away"[17]. In this way, genres seem to be a way of sanitising Nollywood and placing them within certain constructs of rational and irrational.

The other concern is the set of ethno-religious categories such as Yorùbá film, Igbo film, Hausa film. While these are generally used only to denote the language in which a film is made (if it is not in Pidgin English or English), they also sometimes designate certain conventions of presentation. Nigerian video-films are also divided between Christian video-film made in the south and Islamic video-film made in the north (mostly in the city of Kano). These categories are a reminder of the ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria. Nigeria's turbulent history, plagued by civil war or the Nigerian-Biafran war of the 1960s to 1970s and the recent surge (from 2001 until the present) of bombings by an Islamic sect known as Boko Haram, necessitates a careful approach to the ethno-religious categories that are used in Nollywood video-film. In the thesis, I discuss Christian video-film and, in a different chapter, I focus on the representation of ethnic-based religious practice, such as Yorùbá and Igbo cosmologies, to unpack video-films that have been made about specifically and exclusively Igbo villages or exclusively Yorùbá villages. The idea of an exclusive, homogenous and harmonised socio-linguistic group is questionable. As Peter Ekeh (1975) notes, the so-called primordial ethnic groups are a phenomenon of modern politics. Across these different ethno-religious categories are elements of the fantastic.

[17] Haynes, J. 2011. "Campus Films: A Nigerian Film Genre" – paper presented the SMC conference, Pan African University, Lagos

1.5: Methodology

The primary fieldwork research for this study was conducted during two trips to Lagos as well as Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. Data was collected through formal interviews, informal discussions and participation in recent scholarly meetings, symposia and conferences which focused on the new area of Nollywood studies. I conducted twenty-five interviews but selected ten key interviews for the thesis. In most interviews, interviewees said very similar things and I selected those with prominent interlocutors. The first month-long field trip was in July 2010 and the second was in July 2011. Additionally, I travelled to Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town in order to interview Nollywood video-film vendors. In Pretoria, I interviewed Onookome Okome, who is defined by Haynes (2010: 109) as "the most ubiquitous academic interpreter of the Nigerian video phenomenon". Okome, an English professor at the University of Alberta in Canada, is a Nigerian-born academic whose background is in literature but who has published extensively on Nollywood. I also met with Jonathan Haynes, a major academic in Nollywood studies, in Lagos. It was important, however, to also consult outside of academia. Nollywood conferences are often criticised by practitioners for their emphasis on academics rather than practitioners. Practitioners are usually invited, but generally not to present papers. At a conference I attended, *Nollywood in Africa, Africa in Nollywood*, respected practitioners such as Zack Orji (former president of Directors' Guild), Paul Obazele (current president of Directors' Guild), Emeka Mba (DG of the censorship board) and Stella Damasus (producer) attended and afforded me time to talk to them.

In South Africa, most of the Nollywood video-film that is available for purchase or renting is brought by Nigerian migrants. In Pretoria, Sunnyside, there are shops from which one could buy legal video-film as well as bootlegged[18] Hollywood movies. There are some Nollywood vendors in Cape Town but perhaps not as numerous as in Johannesburg[19]. Areas such as Hillbrow and Yeoville have many (often Nigerian-owned) shops where Nollywood films can be purchased and watched. I travelled to Yeoville and Hillbrow and found that there were also many Nigerian-based Pentecostal charismatic

[18] It is possible that video-film vendors sell bootlegged Nollywood and Hollywood films. In Chapters 1 and 2, I discuss the problematic assumption that criminalises the bootlegging of Hollywood but not of Nollywood. Nollywood is assumed to be 'already' an illegitimate activity where movies found on the market are assumed to be copies of copies. This complicates one of the basic tenets in art, art history and cultural production that have been subverted by postmodernism: originality.

[19] This statement is based on my experience of the different areas and not on actual statistics.

churches. The large Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), for example, has splendid buildings in Troyeville, Kensington and Randburg. The link between Nollywood and Pentecostal Churches, explored in Chapter 3, is not always unilateral. Often churches in Nigeria sponsor Nollywood productions for evangelising, and sometimes celebrity pastors are film producers as well. The South African branches of those churches use video-film brought from Nigeria and other forms of media for evangelising[20]. However, there are many Nollywood video-films that carry a Christian theme mainly because the producer is Christian and not necessarily because of church patronage.

In 2010 while I was based in Anthony Village (a suburb in Lagos) as a beneficiary of the Omooba Yemisi Adedoyin Shyllon Art Foundation (OYASAF) Fellowship I travelled to Ibadan to meet with scholars such as Ohioma Pogoson, and with filmmakers such as Lanre Ogunlola (Fig. 1). During this time, I was also able to meet Nigerian visual artists and gallerists to ascertain the ways in which Nollywood is regarded by cultural practitioners. In 2011, I returned to Anthony Village and made several trips to interview filmmakers such as veterans Zack Orji (Fig. 2) and Fred Amata (Fig 3). I visited the offices of the Actors' Guild (AGN) in Surulere for interviews and attended the Eko International Film Festival (Fig. 4), which exhibits Nollywood as well as independent cinema from other countries. The festival takes place at the Silverbird Theatre (a cinema complex). The Eko film festival is significant because it shows that Nollywood need not remain a film form that is *only* made in video-film and only watched at home, community viewing centres or eateries and hair salons. The cinema was full and there was substantial media coverage. This study therefore takes into consideration the evolving nature of Nollywood. Even though I focus on video-film particularly, I acknowledge recent celluloid Nollywood production that may be of better quality and may have a different aesthetic[21].

In 2011, I travelled to California (USA) to interview Sylvester Ogbechie, the founder of the Nollywood Foundation, which assists Nollywood practitioners to acquire skills that are necessary to 'improve' their practice. This foundation also provides a forum for practitioners based in Nigeria and in the United States to engage with each other and

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[20] Makhubu, N. Interview with Pastor Daniel Awoh (Heavenly Realm Ministries), 2012/08/21, Cape Town

[21] This form of Nollywood is sometimes referred to as 'New Nollywood'. This term is still debated by scholars such as Haynes and Okome.

with scholars, critics and funders. The Nollywood Foundation is aimed at facilitating a network of professionals to ease the process of finding resources for Nollywood filmmaking in Nigeria and in America and in order to improve the quality of Nollywood and legitimise it as an art form. Founded in 2009, The Nollywood Foundation precedes the Nollywood Studies Centre which began operating in 2011 through the School of Media and Communication (SMC) at the Pan African University in Lagos. The Nollywood Studies Centre provides resources for researchers who are interested in Nollywood. It was launched at the *Africa in Nollywood, Nollywood in Africa* conference that was held in July 2011 at the Pan African University and was organised by Onookome Okome and featured renowned Nollywood scholars such as Jonathan Haynes and John McCall who have published extensively on Nollywood. These platforms are significant for Nollywood scholarship.

The qualitative approach to this research seeks an understanding of the unique visual imagery produced by Nollywood and about Nollywood. The latter refers to imagery made by fine artists such as Pieter Hugo[22], Mickalene Thomas, Andrew Esiebo, Wangechi Mutu and Zina Saro-Wiwa. Pieter Hugo is based in South Africa, Andrew Esiebo is based in Nigeria, and (Nigerian-born) Zina Saro-Wiwa, (Kenyan-born) Wangechi Mutu and Mickalene Thomas are based in New York. The transnational response to Nollywood is significant. I conduct original visual analyses of these artworks as part of the production of imagery that responds to Nollywood. In my visual analysis, it is important to consider the ambiguity of the relationship between the narrative and the (moving) image; especially because the fantastic is acknowledged for its textual operations. The interviews I held with actors and producers, as well as the conversations I had with those who play minimal roles in Nollywood production, revealed that for the most part, Nollywood video-film is unscripted. While there are

[22] Although Hugo's images have been criticised, I use them in this study as part and parcel of the visual economy of Nollywood. Carmen McCain suggests that instead, while Hugo's images are "technically quite beautifully composed and lit", they are reminiscent of 19th century freak shows that were "put on display for the 'scientific examination' and titillation of European audiences". McCain continues to state, with regard to the Sharon Stone in Abuja exhibition, that "this is not Nollywood, or Nigeria, but perhaps it is what an outside audience wants to see" (Carmen McCain article Saturday December 11, 2010 "Sharon Stone in Abuja, Nollywood in New York", *The Weekly Trust*). Hugo's series has been lambasted as a "misrepresentation" of Nollywood (Anyaogu 2010). Scriptwriter Isaac Anyaogu's review in *The Nigerian Voice* describes the images as "a re-enactment of Pieter's nightmares".
http://www.thenigerianvoice.com/nvmovie/19894/3/nollywood-through-pieter-hugos-lens.html accessed 28/05/2010

professional filmmakers who work from a script, there are many films which were produced without a script. Actors are told the gist of the story or a basic plot and they must be capable of creating lines that texture that story[23]. The other issue is that sub-titles are often not provided or seem to be 'poorly' used because films must be shipped overseas to get 'proper' subtitling done. This produces interesting uses of language where 'Pidgin' English is written out in subtitles but appears as 'spelling mistakes' to viewers who do not understand Nigerian Pidgin English. My visual analysis therefore takes into consideration *modes of performance*. By this, I mean that the spontaneity in performance involved in constructing visual narratives in Nollywood must be differentiated from that of the carefully-crafted visual narratives of film formats such as African cinema, Bollywood or Hollywood. The lack of scriptwriting and dependence on chance and spontaneity mean that the Nollywood video-film format has multiple authors or even questions the notion of an 'author' or 'auteur'.

The definitions of this research that are stated above allude to the long-established aspects of a work of art; namely form (in terms of articulating the *medium* of video-film) and content (modes of performance). Jameson (1971), a critic of these aspects, notes that the two are inseparable. Terry Eagleton (1976) asserts that it is important to consider the relation between the two, but keeping in mind the Hegelian notion that "content is nothing but the transformation of form into content and form is nothing but the transformation of content into form". I use form and content as dialectical terms, but refer to, for analysis, 'themes of imagery' and 'modes of performance' as techniques of showing. I discuss the video-film 'medium' and techniques of showing as mutually inclusive elements of Nollywood video-film.

1.6: Nollywood Literature Review

When I began this study in 2009, there was very little in-depth scholarly critical study of Nollywood video-film, only a few but important introductory and descriptive articles. The French journalist Pierre Barrot's book entitled *Nollywood: The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria* (2008) provides a guide to Nollywood and its practitioners through its reviews of productions in Yorùbá, Igbo, Hausa, Itsekiri and the increasing English language

[23] Makhubu, N. Interview with Chris Okorondu, 2011/07/18, Lagos

video-film. To date, there have been considerable steps made toward a rich body of literature. Studies that focus on the Ghanaian video-film industry have become essential to the study of Nollywood. Scholars such as Tobias Wendl (2001, 2003a, 2004, 2007) and Birgit Meyer (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b, 2004b, 2005, 2006b, 2007, 2008b) have established bases from which issues that resonate with both Ghanaian and Nigerian video-film can be understood. Wendl's discussion on representation of 'horror' in video-film and Meyer's comprehensive analysis of Pentecostalism, occultism, traditions and neo-liberal capitalism provide key points for the development of studies in Nollywood. The video-film phenomenon has attracted a critical mass of scholars from different disciplines and, as such, the recently established field of Nollywood Studies based at the Nollywood Studies Centre at Pan African University in Lagos is inter-disciplinary. Scholars from fields such as economics, anthropology, sociology, politics, literature, linguistics, theology, etc. have written about the nature of Nollywood and its impact in Nigeria and the diaspora. I concur with Jonathan Haynes (2010b: 105), a key scholar in Nollywood Studies, that, although there are numerous "dispersed" publications about Nollywood, the "delayed scholarly attention" has resulted in repetition of "general descriptions" and a lack of critical debate between scholars. Haynes (2010b: 112) calls for the development of "auterism, film history and genre" as "three standard branches" of video-film studies. To further the debate, I argue that Nollywood video-film necessarily subverts the godly status of the auteur (it has not been artisanal), is ahistorical, and refuses neat genre categorisation.

The rapid growth of the industry prompted quantitative journalistic publications that provide important information about the number of video-films that were produced per year, by comparison to Hollywood and Bollywood, as well as the economic benefits for Nigeria. Nollywood's representation of the urban-rural dynamic, the impact of Structural Adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on urban (and rural) infrastructure, as well as the transnational and global movements and desires has led to observations about spatial politics concerning Nigeria (Haynes 2007a, 2008; Moradewun 2007; Okoye 2007; Larkin 2008; Adesokan 2004, 2006, 2009; Adeyemi 2006; Okome 1997, 2003b; Oha 2001; Krings and Okome (eds.) 2013; Marston, Woodward, Jones 2007). The study of local languages and Pidgin English that

are used in video-film is examined by Moradewun Adejunmobi (2002, 2004, 2008) and suggest that Nollywood is transnational. Indeed, scholars have not only focused on the production and consumption of Nollywood in Nigeria alone but also in other places such as Cameroon (Ajibade 2007), in urban Southern Africa (Becker 2013), the Caribbean (Cartelli 2007), Uganda (Dipio 2008), Congo (Ngoloma 2003, Pype 2013), Kenya (Ondego 2008) and Tanzania (Krings and Okome 2013).

Further, there are studies that focus on Hausa video-film production in Kano, a city in the north of Nigeria, and are known as Kannywood (Adamu 2004, 2006, 2007b, 2008; Barau 2008; Ekwuazi 2007; Furniss 2003; Krings 2005, 2008, 2009; Larkin 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004). Haynes (2010b: 108) argues that Nollywood bears more similarity to the Ghananian video-film industry rather than the Hausa video-film industry in Northern Nigeria. Moreover, he states that, while Hausa video-film practitioners, scholars and audiences are aware of the Nollywood industry in the south, the southerners are less attentive to Kannywood (Haynes 2010b: 108). Nevertheless, these films offer insight about the social space that shapes class and gender roles. The power relations inscribed in spaces of domesticity in Kannywood urge the necessary debate about the representation of women in Nollywood video-film (Okome 2007a, 2007b, 2004, 2005; Ogunleye 2003b; Shaka 2003b). In this thesis, I focus particularly on spaces of domesticity in Nollywood.

The interrogation of the socio-economic effects on the video-film medium and its dissemination are also significant developments within Nollywood studies. Brian Larkin’s (2008) *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Northern Nigeria* paves the way for re-thinking the medium of video-film. Larkin (2008) discusses “aesthetics of outrage” to define not only the medium but the performative aspect in video-film. Similar essays by Adejunmobi (2003), Adesokan (2004, 2007), Adeyemi (2004), Haynes and Okome (1998) and Larkin (2002) inform the direction of this thesis. The study of Nollywood as a cultural product is understood through its roots in (itinerant) theatre (Jeyifo 1984; Barber 2000; Haynes 2000, 2003; Ogundele 2000; Ola-Koyi 2008), and established institutions such as the National Television Authority (Adeleke 2007). The impact of the video-film medium aesthetic is also measured through the numbers of its consumers or audiences and the regard for the spaces in

which it is consumed (Adejunmobi 2002; Ajibade 2007, 2013; Akpabio 2007; Dipio 2008; Esan 2008; Okome 2007b).

There is a large body of literature that exists about representation of religion, witchcraft and occultism in both Ghanaian and Nigerian video-film (these include Adamu 2013; Boehme 2013; Ekwuazi 2000; Eghagha 2007; Haynes 2000; Krings 2004, 2005; McCall 2002, 2004; Meyer 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Ogunleye 2003c; Oha 2000; Okome 2004, Pype 2013; Ukah 2002, 2003; Wendl 2003a, 2007). Due to the copious amount of literature on these themes, they seem central to the study of video-film. However, these subjects are probably the reason why scholars, as Haynes (2010b: 106) aptly points out, find the video-films "embarrassing in terms of quality and mentality"[24]. A scholar for the University of Ibadan, Tunde Awonsanmi, blatantly stated in a conference paper entitled "Re-reading Nollywood: Neo-Primitivism and Tunde Kelani's Quasi-Movie"[25] that he found Nollywood to be a form of neo-primitivism. Nevertheless, books, articles and blogs written by practitioners who are not academics give a positive appraisal of Nollywood, for example, Charles Novia's memoirs in *Nollywood Till November*, and Brendan Shehu's (1992) anthology of speeches and essays, as well as Shaibu Husseini's (2010) *Moviedom: Nollywood Narratives*, which documents pioneers of Nollywood.

Documentary films on Nollywood also provide insight. A selection of titles, such as *Nollywood Babylon* (2008) directed by Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal, Jamie Meltzer's *Welcome to Nollywood* (2007), Franco Sacchi's *This is Nollywood* (2007), Dorothee Wenner's *Nollywood Lady* (2008), Jacques Pauw's *Nollywood Dreams* (2005) and Karen Compton's *Nollywood Convention* (2007), take the viewer into the intriguing working conditions of Nollywood video-film.

[24] This issue surfaces as a general initial scholarly rejection of Nollywood. Nigerian scholars who studied locally and overseas regard Nollywood as a cultural product of illiterate youth. While there were many exceptions, scholars such as Okome and Eghagha have also pointed out that the prevalence of themes of the fantastic and supernatural are the reason Nollywood is generally criticized as backward but very difficult to ignore.

[25] Awonsanmi, T. "Re-reading Nollywood: Neo-Primitivism and Tunde Kelani's Quasi-Movie", conference paper delivered in 2011 at the University of Lagos.

1.7: Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter addresses the ways in which the *experience* of the fantastic is created through the medium of video-film. Readings of the fantastic are framed within the external and internal cultural dynamics that fashion Nollywood video-film. The first two chapters loosely consider *what* Nollywood is and *who* makes it in order to interrogate the complex dialectics that formulate class difference and notions of rational/irrational or real/fantastic. The third and fourth chapters address the fantastic in mostly theocentric Nollywood video-film in, firstly, Christianity and, secondly, ethnic-specific or 'primordial' religious beliefs which create a context in which the fantastic is not just a 'flight of fancy' but can be seen as a matrix of supernatural forces that regulate concrete reality. The final chapter addresses the myth of nationhood from which fantastic desire is constructed.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the visual language of Nollywood video-film. It is arguable that the growing fascination with Nollywood is primarily based on the aesthetic that the video-film medium lends to it. Brian Larkin (2004a) observes that the poor technical quality of video-film symbolises a paradigm shift in Nigeria's political economy. As I have mentioned earlier, Nollywood is evolving and it is possible that this aesthetic is transitory. Nevertheless, it is possibly this aesthetic that makes Nollywood a novelty. Celluloid cinema, on one hand, has the facility to create the 'perfect illusion' of another world that is experienced as if it were real. It is possible to be 'transported' to that realm and feel the emotions that certain scenes arouse and forget about the technical elements that are involved in making the film. The wide angles or long shots appear as the viewer's perception rather than what the camera and its operator offer. Video-film makes one remarkably aware of the technical elements. The quality and format of the film contribute to how it is read. At times, shadows of the technical crew are visible or a microphone held by the boom swinger lurks, reminding us of another reality in an almost Brechtian sense[26]. One single film can last four to six hours and is spread across two to six discs. I interrogate the manner in which the everyday experience of Lagos is ubiquitous in these films, and I unpack the concept of banality as an element of the fantastic that is accompanied by phantasmagoria and the carnivalesque. Rather than

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[26] German playwright, Bertolt Brecht, developed 'epic theatre' and through the 'distancing effect' (for example, actors speak to audience or audible reading stage directions) made the viewer consciously aware of the construction of theatre and aware of the politics that influence their material conditions.

treat these aspects as results of amateur work, I find them rich for analysis because they exist in the image and carry meaning. In this chapter, I also discuss the representation of leitmotifs relating to magic, fetishism, violence and power that exemplify irony in everyday life.

Based on the branding of Nollywood video-film practitioners as “stark illiterates” (see also Haynes 2010b: 106), the second chapter address the cultural logics of value and the various agents of Nollywood. Through original visual analyses, I debate that the notion of Nollywood video-film as ‘low quality’ plays an important function. It represents an ideological assault on notions of high class and high art. This is not to argue that Nollywood should not improve but that the large body of video-films that have created the ‘Nollywood aesthetic’ could be seen as avant-gardist and refuse to conform to standards of filmmaking. Nollywood video-film has been seen as a product of the proletariat. In this chapter, I discuss the streams of practices such as itinerant theatre, cinema and television that provide the context for Nollywood video-film. Using these forms, I interrogate the conception of Nollywood as popular culture (Barber 1982) or proletarian culture as well as the ways in which it alludes to kitsch. Artists such as Mickalene Thomas appropriate the use of kitsch in Nollywood. By doing so, they direct our attention to the ways in which a political economy affects not only the appearance of Nollywood but also its cultural dynamics.

The Nigerian government’s response to Nollywood is late but mostly welcomed[27]. The intervention fund, ‘promised’ by President Goodluck Jonathan, is valued at 3 billion Naira and meant to improve the industry. The sentiment that there is a ‘lack of resources’ often permeates Nollywood video-film narratives. Anxieties about the country’s wealth precipitate into stories that make references to what Karin Barber (1982) sees as the Petro-Naira context. The Petro-Naira creates a public sphere in which there is an elite class that is not trusted by the public and is rumoured to have the capacity to create wealth ‘magically’ or through the occult (Barber 1982). The oil boom of the 1960s in Nigeria shifted its economic base from agriculture to petroleum. Companies, such as Shell, that extracted oil in Nigeria, barely created mass employment for the Nigerian population. Oil wealth created a minority elite class which seemed to

[27] http://tribune.com.ng/news2013/index.php/en/component/k2/item/11100-how-n3bn-nollywood-grant-will-be-spent accessed 2013/04/29. There are similar articles in *Vanguard*, *African Financial News* and *This Day*.

make money not out of ‘hard work’ but mysteriously. This political economy created an aura of fantastic magic that is defined by unspeakable violence, conspicuous consumption and estrangement.

In the third chapter, I discuss religion with a particular focus on English language southern film productions, which are predominantly Christian. The issue of religion in Nollywood is paramount. The thematic categories of the occult and horror are generally films in which a Christian intervention prevails. In this chapter, I argue that video-film operates within a theoconomy in which there are exchanges of symbols in politics and religion based on the belief in the supernatural. Religion and politics in Nigeria are almost inseparable. Furthermore, Pentecostal Christian churches have risen to power in such a way that they seem to create peculiar publics. Many churches use Nollywood video-film to evangelise by demonstrating the ‘war’ between good and evil. They represent a situation in which the nation or the world is in crisis. I reflect on the notion of ‘crisis’ as performed in Nollywood video-film and the possibility that the fantastic in video-film reflects crisis in family structure in constantly modernising traditions in Nigeria. The fantastic in Christian video-film forms part of the shadow play, showing or providing images about ghouls, witches, devils, etc. as a real threat in similar ways that politics and religion utilises images (making things visible and invisible) to create illusions. For this reason, Nollywood cannot be undermined as a fanciful, amateur film practice that has no effect on or reflection of reality.

I also re-assess how these principles apply to so-called indigenous beliefs. In Chapter 4, I examine the symbolism that is derived from Yorùbá and Igbo cosmologies. I have only selected these two because of their predominance. I propose the concept of the rational– fantastic to examine the manner in which the supernatural infiltrates natural life. Nollywood video-film narratives that represent exclusively Igbo or Yorùbá cosmologies also suggest specific sartorial and expressive conventions. In addition, they construct a concept of ‘the village’ that is ‘untouched’ by modernity. This category is generally referred to as the historical epic genre. I examine how Nollywood forms part of a contemporary mythologising and historicising process. The cultural myths that are imbibed manifest in contemporary beliefs about the supernatural and, as such, they invest (to a certain extent) notions of realism that construct perceptions about current social issues.

The Nollywood industry began in a context of the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas as well as in and out of Nigeria. Generally in video-film, those who fantasise about having a better life leave the rural village to go to the city, but also leave the Nigerian city to go to other European or American cities. In this problematic hierarchy, the Nigerian city is cast as village. The flux in Lagos provides a backdrop for most of the narratives and themes that are explored. Wendl (2007: 267) proposes that "the village forms part of the 'uncanny', of what the city has repressed, and what now returns from time to time into the consciousness of the city-dwellers as the 'horror of traditions'". Chapter 5 investigates the spatial configuration of morality in Nollywood. I propose the concept of 'profound spaces' to analyse the representation of domestic spaces, the marketplace and sacred land. I also discuss the spatial construction of nationhood. Often Nollywood films are said to 'misrepresent the nation'. In this chapter, I focus on the complexity of the concept of 'nation' in Nigeria. The success of the Nigerian film industry is also due to various international movements of people. It has been defined by Ogbechie as "the first global pan-African film medium to cut across social, cultural, economic and national boundaries"[28]. As Ogbechie explains, "Nollywood films played a major role in the social and economic recovery of Liberia after its civil war"[29]. The international distribution of Nollywood films incites the various forms of guerrilla film-making[30] in other parts of the continent. This study does not only consider the dynamics of these kinds of cultural exchanges, but also the politics of cultural belonging and notions of the foreign that are represented in Nollywood.

Throughout the thesis, I also provide analysis of the imagery that was produced by South African photographer, Pieter Hugo, between 2008 and 2009 in Enugu. Hugo's photographic series entitled *Nollywood* depicts Nollywood actors in costume as grotesque monsters. Interestingly, Pieter Hugo's photographs present a different perspective on the supernatural and the fantastic. In his work, the supernatural appears as a foreign subject whose threat is muted or which does not seem to destabilise 'normality' in its surroundings but comes across as being 'at home'. There is a sense of 'belonging' or 'familiarity' attributed to the presence of the supernatural amongst the

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[28] Mairi, M. Interview with Sylvester Ogbechie entitled *Nollywood Foundation on Nollywood: Responses to Mackay Mairi, CNN London* *http://aachronym.blogspot.com/2009/06/cnn-story-on-nollywood-problems-of.html* accessed 23/09/2009
[29] Ibid.
[30] Guerilla film-making characterises low-budget independent films rather than mainstream films.

'natural' in Hugo's photographs, which offer an analysis on the dangerous playfulness evoked by the concept of the fantastic. Hugo's photographs include leitmotifs of religion, evil, occult, fetishism and violence. Through the use of images produced through Nollywood and about Nollywood, I aim to develop a comprehensive analysis of the visual currency of Nollywood. Photographs and the moving images of video-film (or stills) draw attention to the need for critical engagement with the multiple meanings imbibed in Nollywood imagery.

In the thesis, I propose concepts such 'Nollywood's theoconomy', the 'rational–fantastic' and 'profound spaces', not as conclusive concepts but as theories for further debate and development in understanding representations of the fantastic and its immersion in a existing history of negative images of Nigeria, and Africa in general. My argument is that art forms in Africa need not conform to those of America and Europe. Therefore, distinctions between popular culture and art or high art and low art that have entered the discourse on Nollywood need not necessarily be strictly applied but can be debated. In this way, the development of African art history means that cultural practices such as Nollywood video-film do not fall on the margins in a category separate from art but are crucial in understanding the participatory, culturally-immersed, spontaneous and inclusive elements of these forms of art. Notions of the fantastic seem to be there in many forms of cultural practice but they seem to present uneasy complexities in cultural practices of Africa. It is there in traditional African art objects. It is there in postcolonial African cinema and contemporary video-film. Rather than rejecting the fantastic, this thesis adopts it as an interrogative tool.

Images

Fig. 1: Dr Omooba Yemisi Adedoyin Shyllon (Founder and Director of OYASAF), Lanre Ogunlola (Filmmaker) and Rotimi Forever (Filmmaker), Ibadan. Photograph taken by Nomusa Makhubu

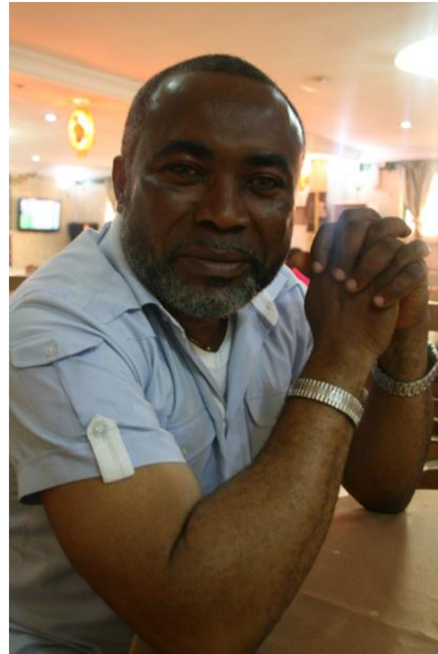

Fig. 2: Zack Orji (Former Director of the Nollywood Actors' Guild (AGN), Actor, Director and Producer), Surulere. Photograph taken by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 3: Fred Amata (Director and Producer), Surulere. Photograph taken by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 4: Nomusa Makhubu at Ekoiff. Photograph by Nollywood actor, Chris Okorondu

Chapter 1
Interrogating the Visual Language of Nollywood

The term 'Nollywood' covers a variety of video-film, and more recently, celluloid film in Nigeria. As such, it is not an homogenous entity constituted of similar practices but rather, it is as if there are various streams of this form of cultural production that necessarily fit neatly and comfortably into one category. Zack Orji[31] points out that Nollywood is named by a foreign correspondent, Matt Steinglass. Defining it as a set of similar, argues Orji[32], practices can have shortfalls. Although it is regarded as a form of film, its aesthetic, Haynes (2011: 72) argues "remains closer to that of television serials than to norms of international cinema". If this is so, then is it film at all? Onookome Okome observes that Nollywood did not start as a "cinematic practice" but as a "*visual practice*" which did not require "sophisticated visual literacy" because its technology is "accessible [and] very present"[33] (own emphasis).

Since film is a visual language or is "language-like" (Canudo 1980; Balasz 2010), it can be regarded "as a particular system of figurative language" (Eichenbaum 1974), I consider the textual within Nollywood imagery as visual and the visual as readable text. A visual language is defined as the use of images in such a way that they seem to produce specific meaning. Furthermore, I interrogate how the use of video-film as an artistic medium and the fantastic content (themes such as magic, occultism and fetishism) are couched within complex visual histories. Primitivism in Western art history, for example leads to a rejection of the terms: 'magic' and 'fetish'. However, embracing an African art history necessitates understanding the worldly and spiritual context of object. As a visual practice, Nollywood video-film represents some of these objects in provocative contemporary dynamics.

It is at this point that it becomes necessary to approach Nollywood as a visual object in order to analyse the medium as well as the key elements of its contents at this stage of its development. This chapter interrogates how the format and *medium* of video-film, as well as the leitmotifs such as magic, power, violence and occultist wealth-acquisition, complicate representation of the fantastic. Christian Metz's (1974) seminal paper draws

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[31] Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos
[32] Ibid.
[33] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria

attention to the analogy of film imagery and "the causal photo-chemical connection between representation and prototype" (Stam 1992: 29). I discuss the video-film format and its configuring of time. Often Nollywood films have long (sometimes unnecessary) scenes of characters doing uneventful, quotidian, banal actions such as walking or dancing. I will argue that although the excessive use of the quotidian in Nollywood, that has formed part of its visual aesthetic, is said to be due to the desire to make more money by selling a single film in two or three separate cassettes or compact discs[34], this banalisation can be extended to conceptualisations of the (super) natural. Horror and gratuitous violence debatably become banal rather than shocking. How does this 'accessible' format influence the visual language of the fantastic in the form of magic, violence, and power within the public space?

1: The Video-Film Medium as Visual Langauge

> *Film is the medium, not of the world but of the mind. Its basis lies not in technology but in mental life* (Andrew 1976: 68)

The observation that the basis of film lies in mental life because it appears as though it is projected by the mind rather than by technical equipment suggests that the presence of the medium of film 'dissolves' or becomes easily overlooked. Video-film, however, constantly reminds the viewer of the mechanical disposition of the medium. To concur with Okome, in Nollywood technology is very present[35]. This presence can be interpreted as the transparency of the video-film visual language. Given that film is visual and multi-sensorial rather than textual, I use the term 'visual language' to interrogate language not only as written inscription but also as performed enunciative act. This understanding of video-film as visual language does not oppose the sensiotics approach that is proposed by John Henry Drewal (2005: 4) but can be closely aligned with it. Drewal (2005: 6) argues that vision-based approaches are "the first step in [an] inclusive project on the bodily, multi-sensorial basis of understanding" where "sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste and motion continually participate". Video-film necessitates a number of these. In Nollywood video-film, certain gestures (such as tugging at one's own earlobe in astonishment) are localised socially embedded forms of communication

[34] Makhubu, N. Interview with Fred Amata 2011/07/15, Lagos. This observation is made by Amata but is also generally mentioned in various conversations with Nollywood practitioners.
[35] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria

that recur in many films as performed enunciative language. Gestures can be seen as symbols through which meaning is made and read as (visual) language.

This is one approach to the concept of video-film as a visual language. The second approach is focussed on the medium itself. The video-film medium can be seen as a regressive medium when compared to the reputation of celluloid cinema to facilitate transcendence from the present 'world' and immersion into another. The use of video for the creation of amateur home video and the perception that the celluloid format is more valuable than video-film are not unique to Nollywood. In his discussion of British and American home video, Stefan Szczelkun (2000: 94) argues, on one hand, that home video or amateur film "stood for the spontaneous, anarchic, whimsical, personal, subjective … daring, mental agility and pioneering invention". On the other hand, it came to signify "poverty of technique, lack of sophisticated aesthetic judgement and intellectual incoherence" (Szczelkun 2000: 94). This statement resonates with Nollywood video-film whose medium is both celebrated for its daring, unapologetic style of showing 'reality' and also criticised for its lack of technical sophistication.

Ramon Lobato (2010: 340) states that, "shot quickly and cheaply on VHS, with minimal scripting and post-production, Nigerian video-films resembled home movies and eschewed established norms of cinematography in favour of a cheap, televisual aesthetic". The assumption that video-film is inferior can be seen as technological determinism (Sturken 1990: 118). Since television "was never seen as an archival medium" because it was fragmented, video, as a consequence, was considered to be "materially a rapidly deteriorating medium" (Sturken 1990: 103). Television did not seem to have the artistic visual coherence of crafted celluloid films but rather seemed to be a reflection of the seemingly everyday and the fragmentation that characterises modernity.

Since the introduction of film in Europe in the 1890s and the standardisation of the 16mm format in 1923, home video was for the most part a pastime for the wealthy within the private domain of the bourgeois family (Szczelkun 2000: 95). The use of cheaper 8mm cameras in the 1950s gave greater access to film-making. In 1980s Nigerian cities, those who could afford it hired people with camcorders for recording

"weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies" (Haynes 2000: 97). American (United States of America) families also found this medium useful in recording events as well as scenes of everyday life (Szczelkun 2000: 95). However, film-writers regarded 8mm home videos as "substandard, worthless and unwatchable" (Szczelkun 2000: 96). These observations were based on the technological quality of video-film as well as the often banal, unedited or poorly edited content.

For artists and activists in the 1960s U.S., this aesthetic was fitting for the anti-establishment, democratic, anti-commercial ideology that they espoused. The grainy, images and muffled sound of home video overlapped an intentional aesthetic with social critique (Sturken 1990: 106). Video art, according to Sturken (1990: 107), coincided with "idealism about cultural change and social pluralism". Media could be used by 'ordinary' people "to define themselves" and the growing use of guerrilla film-making techniques, dubbed "guerrilla television" by Michael Schamberg, had a sense of boundlessness (Sturken 1990: 107). The unregulated practices of Nigerian video-film have a similar kind of boundlessness but are not necessarily regarded as a cultural drive that advocates a specific ideology. However, Zack Orji[36] argues that Nollywood is indeed a medium of the people that decolonises the frame, "gives an identity", "shows the world that we don't live in trees", and as such can be regarded as being political.

Brian Larkin (2008: 241) observes that Nollywood is characterised by "blurred [or pixelated] images and distorted sound". Larkin (2008) argues that because Nollywood is generated within a political economy in which films are bootlegged and reach the market as copies of copies, the images they produce appear to be of low quality but symbolise the historical context of production within which they are made (I address this Chapter 2). This can be used to demonstrate that one of the powers of Nollywood derives from its potential to subvert the hierarchy of the original above the copy (the viewer is aware of the replication) as well as the hierarchy of the auteur above the agents who reproduce it (the notion that it is a 'medium of the people'). Western art historical practice places emphasis on the use of the medium if it shows or proves the originality of the work. Video-film, as medium, denies the possibility of the original. It is already a mirror or copy of staged theatre and spontaneous performance. The notion of copy of copy, appearance upon appearance, gives the medium its fantastic quality. It is

[36] Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos

already produced in superimposition of reality and fiction and entanglement of imaginaries.

Taking this into consideration, Larkin locates the novelty of video-film in its technology and the political economy that produces it. It can be deduced that the reaction of the viewer to the fantastic is created by both the medium (as a mode of presentation) and the daily re-enactments of everyday life as it is lived and as it is imagined. Larkin's (2008: 13) observation that Nollywood relies on "an aesthetics of outrage", which he defines as "a mode of cinematic address that rests on the outrageous abrogation of deep cultural norms to generate shock and anger in the viewer", is apt. This aesthetic is also satirised by the artist Wangechi Mutu who created a video art piece entitled *Shoe Shoe* (2010) [Fig. 5] for the exhibition curated by Zina Saro-Wiwa about Nollywood. The video portrays a woman walking up the street pushing a cart full of old shoes. She hurls a succession of shoes in the direction of the camera as she gets closer to the camera. Each shoe that hits the camera appears as though it is directed at the viewer. This metaphor for the hysteria of Nollywood is performed by Mutu as an 'attack' or visual assault.

Nollywood, characterised by hysteria, not only because of the performances but also because of the limitations of the medium, dovetails with Larkin's thesis on Nollywood's 'aesthetics of outrage'. For example, the loud audio and almost always hysterical hyper-performance can be attributed to the technology and medium of video-film. Mutu's use of distance and proximity symbolises the distanciation of celluloid cinema as escapist or as 'a world out there', whereas the Nollywood visual language seems to present things into proximity such that they are too close for comfort. For Larkin (2008: 13), Nollywood "constitutes a living experience" of "fantastic narratives about Nigerian life". That is, the video-film medium appears as a hyper-reality of everyday life and as such can be argued to overwhelm the senses.

In my interview with Michael Chima, he declares that "Nollywood is a child of circumstance"; it came "when there were austerity measures… in the country [therefore] we resorted our energies to things that we could afford [such as VHS]"[37]. Chima argues against the notion that Nollywood lacks the politically-driven cultural

[37] Makhubu, N. Interview with Michael Chima, Lagos, 2011/07/09

dynamism that characterised amateur video-filmmaking in the American 1960s. For Chima, Nollywood is a "cultural movement more than a commercial movement – because most people have not become any richer out of it" yet they persist because they are led by (various) resilient cultural values. The pixelated imagery and cacophonous sound of Nollywood video-film affects our experience of the medium.

In this section I discuss four aspects which influence the reading of the image; namely, the serial-like format of Nigerian video-film, its configuration of time and the everyday, and its music as a form of visual narration, as well as its textuality in order to analyse Nollywood as an artistic practice that is not only visual but also includes reading constructions of the fantastic through music, text and format and expands traditional art history tenets and reveals modes of understanding the complexity of cultural and artistic production in Nigeria.

1.1: Serial or Film: Regarding Repetition

Nollywood is regarded as "talky, plot-driven but rambling and long" and its "films are normally in at least two parts of two hours each, a form that has been called 'mini-serials'" (Adejunmobi cited in Haynes 2011: 72). Although it can be argued that this aspect of Nollywood compromises its cultural value, it can also be read alternatively as a form of realism. Critics, as mentioned in the introduction to this work, often associate the length of Nollywood video-films as a strategy used by commerce-driven producers to 'spread' a single film over two to four discs that can be sold separately in order to make more money. It is debatable whether this strategy is commercially successful. It is possible to know the plot because there are repeat scenes across the different discs that contain one film. During my interview with Fred Amata, he stated that he has

> heard in studio, for instance where a producer is talking with the directors, they're editing in a scene for instance or party scene and [the producer] say: "Oh Yes, yes, yes… I make you run and they say things like five minutes from here, just the dancing on five minutes". Now why? Because he wants to do Part 1, Part 2, Part 3…[38]

Also, in this way the number of films produced per annum seems inflated. Since a single disc can cost up to 500 Naira (about 3 USD)[39], the argument that this strategy is based

[38] Makhubu, N. Interview with Fred Amata 2011/07/15, Lagos

[39] These prices vary from vendor to vendor. In Cape Town (South Africa), Nigerian video-films cost about R10-R20 which is between 250 Naira and 500 Naira (2012 currency estimate). In 2000, the unit cost of

purely on money seems inapt. Instead, the two-to-four disc strategy is often attributed to poor editing facilities or skills. Nevertheless, this format contributes to the view that the Nollywood visual language is melodramatic.

Repetition is another important element in the visual language of Nollywood. There are various forms of repetition in Nollywood which include the duplication of entire scenes between two parts of the same film as well as repeated words/ phrases in the performance of a scene. Margaret Thompson Drewal's (1992: 2-3) discussion on repetition is useful for an understanding of repetition in video-film in that she regards repetition in performance as intertextual *and* as a common denominator for differentiation. In this way, transformation is fundamental principle of repetition (Drewal 1992: 3). Using Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody which is defined as "repetition with a critical distance" (Hutcheon in Drewal 1992: 3), Drewal (1992: 3-4) points out that this form of repetition indicates "both cultural continuity and change, authority and transgression, involving both creator and partaker in a participatory hermeneutics". Repetition in Nollywood is not just a technical flaw and can be seen, firstly, as a form parody that critiques social stereotypes; and secondly, as a way of critiquing the seemingly seamless portrayal of 'unified' narrative in celluloid cinema (Hollywood cinema, for example).

Repetition is partly the reason that Nollywood video-film is deemed commercial rather than artisanal. Repetition, however, is a significant aesthetic. Umberto Eco (1985: 162) points out that it was only in modern times that a distinction was made between art and craft where "craft was not based on novelty but on the pleasurable repetition of an already known pattern". This was not only an aesthetic differentiation but also an attribution of value. In her discussion of the avant-garde and originality, Rosalind Krauss (1986: 10) observes that the paired terms "originality and repetition… seem bound together in a kind of aesthetic economy, interdependent and mutually sustaining, although the one – originality – is the valorized term and the other – repetition or copy or reduplication – is discredited". According to Krauss (1986:11), the modernist aesthetic represses the "discredited half of the pair": repetition even though it is "the real condition of one of the major vehicles of modernist aesthetic practice".

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one two-hour tape could be between 270 Naira and 280 Naira on the wholesale market in Nigeria from which the producer can claim royalties (Ogunleye 2004: 83).

Postmodernism, however, embraces the discourse of the copy and of repetition .The devaluation of repetition links to the ways in which African art has been perceived as 'craft' or lacking in the originality which is associated with the god-like status of the singular artist.

In *Africa Explores* Susan Vogel (1991: 207) argues that African art is "a rhythmic repetition of themes". James Snead's (1990: 213) essay entitled *Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture* affirms that "transformation is culture's response to its own apprehension of repetition". For Snead (1990: 220) the difference between 'European culture' and 'Black culture'[40] is how repetition is seen. In Western circles, repetition must be seen as "accumulation and growth" whereas in 'Black culture' "repetition means that the thing circulates [and] there is equilibrium" (Snead 1990: 220). Although, these generalised statements may be problematic they do draw attention to one of crucial elements that have influenced the ways in which arts and cultural practices in Africa are viewed. Vogel (1991: 207) argues that

> since all artists reuse existing forms, the distinction between Western and African artists may be more a matter of emphasis than real difference… where repetition in European Art is often directed toward perfecting the model, the African reprise is an end in itself, designed not to develop or improve on the basic theme but to embody it in a given instance and to play off it

Repetition in Nollywood ruptures the distinctions between art/craft or art/popular culture (I will discuss the categorisation of video-film as popular culture in Chapter 2). Eco (1990: 84) does make a distinction between "repetition of the media and repetition of the so-called major arts". Here, Eco (1990: 93) proposes the "aesthetics of seriality" in popular art and mass media that require "a historical and anthropological study of the different ways, in which at different times and in different places, the dialectic between repetition and innovation has been instantiated". Repetition offers modes of interpretation. I propose that repetition in Nollywood video-film can be understood, not only an aesthetic element, but also a mode of reading intricate contemporary cultural dynamics.

One of the ways in which a film is stretched in Nollywood is to repeat scenes or focus on uneventful actions. As a strategy, repetition can be understood in many ways. The

[40] Snead (1990: 218) unpacks the notion of Black culture as a concept developed by Europeans as opposition to 'European Culture'. It is a problematic term that generalises cultural characteristics to a particular race.

duplication of scenes, firstly, can be interpreted as a way of providing continuity. If a buyer acquires a film that is spread over four discs without having seen the first two discs, then they have a sense of what is in the previous discs through repeated scenes and it becomes a 'teaser', supposedly, for the viewer to acquire all four discs to see one film. It is also a form of representing memory or recurring dreams (as is the case in many other kinds of American, European or Asian film).

In Nollywood, for example, the film *Osuofia in London 1 and 2* (2003-4) directed by Kingsley Ogoro, starring Nkem Owoh and Mara Derwent is spread over four discs: two discs for part one and two discs for part two. The narrative of this film is about a villager who goes to London for the first time to collect his inheritance when his brother dies. The film simply cuts from disc one and continues onto disc two without credits separating them as episodes. *Osuofia in London 2* (2004) begins with credits even though it is a continuation of the same story. Much of the viewing time in *Osuofia in London 2* is a repetition of clips from *Osuofia in London 1* (2003) through Osuofia's dreams, thoughts and reminiscence of the time he spent in London. The use of repetition or recursion in *Osuofia in London 2* (2004) happens as fragments, firstly in his dreams, and then as he re-tells the story of his visit to London which happened in *Osuofia in London 1*. The exact clips from the first film are used to depict memory. When Osuofia tells the villagers about his visit, he exaggerates the story and description of London's public and cultural life. For example, he tells his neighbours that

> Oyibo [the white man] is fantastic. When you go to Oyibo's country, you will know that you have arrived. Do you know that these people have house upstair that has tyre? If you go upstair, people will be bringing their head over their window waving you bye bye each one to their room. There is a place they call Trafalgar Square. There you see bird. Bird will just get up, open its wing and begin to shake you. It will shake your hand. The only thing bad about that place – there are young girls there, they walk about naked…[41]

When he says this, we are shown clips from the previous film in which Osuofia is depicted on London's tourist open-topped red double-decker [Fig. 6]. The story that Osuofia tells sounds fantastical but we are provided with images from the previous disc to explain the narrative. The fact that he thought that the bus was a house is not

[41] *Osuofia in London, 1and 2* (2003, 2004) Dir. Kingsley Ogoro. Kingsley Ogoro Productions (Nigeria)

communicated the first time this scene is played. When he discusses the birds in Trafalgar Square, he is referring to an incident where he tried to capture pigeons and was arrested [Fig. 7]. His spoken interpretation of that event is only communicated when the scene is repeated in the second film. When he says that girls walk about naked, he refers to a scene in which he sees a teenage girl seated in public wearing a short skirt. In shock, Osuofia rushes to her in order to pull her legs together and then he covers her with his jacket. She responds by slapping and cursing him. When asked about his new English second wife, Samantha (Mara Derwent), Osuofia brags that his wife "is not small meat" but rather she is part of the royal family because when they are driving in the streets of London they are followed by cars sounding sirens. The final scene from *Osuofia in London 1*, in which the plan between Samantha (the widow of Osuofia's brother and Osuofia's wife) and Mr Okafor (the lawyer who manages the deceased brother's estate) goes sour, is re-played when Osuofia describes his experience in London. In this scene, Samantha flees with Osuofia in possession of the contract from Mr Okafor. On their way to the airport, heading for Nigeria, Osuofia is oblivious to the fast car chase involving Mr Okafor and the police. It is only when the scene is repeated, that we notice Osuofia may not have realised that they were being chased.

The repetition of these scenes in *Osuofia in London 2* can be seen as trite, unimaginative and distasteful. Initially, they appear as exact duplications of scenes in *Osuofia in London 1*. It can be argued, however, that the copies of scenes as a form of remembrance is also an alteration of the same scene. When the scene is repeated, it includes a narration that was not there initially, that gives the character's interpretation of the event. The scene is transformed and re-contextualised in the second or third instance. It provides a contrast between what actually happened to Osuofia in London and how Osuofia *perceived* his visit to London. Although the repetition is intended to be a representation of the remembrance of Osuofia's experience as the viewing subject, it is still a representation of the event from the view of the camera in exactly the same way it was shown in the previous disc.

Another form of repetition in the film is when Samantha is thinking to herself and repeats the words: "I must have that money, what am I going to do, what am I going to

do"[42]. These sentences are said repeatedly by the character and are edited into repetition. In the film, it is easy to discern that the same sound-clip is played over again as if it is a repetition of a repetition. The technological manipulation of repetition is used for emphasis but draws the viewer to the process of producing the film that happens outside of the narrative content of the film. Rather than being immersed in the realm of the film narrative (fictive), the viewer becomes aware of the process of making the film (reality).

Repetition represents a split in which, through remembering his experiences in London, Osuofia is alienated from himself but re-inserts his subjectivity and reclaims the event by narrating it differently. The repetition, in this sense, transforms the event. As James Snead (1990: 213) suggests "apart from revealing or secreting the repetitions of material existence, a third response is possible: to own that repetition has occurred"; however, "given a 'quality of difference' compared to what has come before, it has become not exactly a 'repetition,' but rather a 'progression,' if positive, or a 'regression,' if negative". Osuofia's interpretation of the events, through the use of the repeated image and his seemingly distorted imagination of the events, makes him come across as a simple-minded, ignorant and naïve peasant (even though he is not always easily fooled). It is as if repetition is a form of regression in this case. However, it is also through repetition (of scenes as a process of thinking and remembering) that Osuofia realises that Samantha only followed him to Nigeria in order to steal his inheritance. Therefore, repetition in this form of cultural production can be perceived as a cycle of interactions that, through simulation, regenerates imagined and real circumstances in such a way that the one is a reproduction of the other. The similarity of the 'real' events that reveal Samantha's corruption and Osuofia's imaginary version (the repeated scenes) alludes to the ways in which generalisations and stereotypes oscillate between truth and fiction. For example, the stereotype of a susceptible, well-mannered English woman in Nigeria or a naïve, loud and imprudent African man in England collapses to reveal a corrupt Samantha and a cunning Osuofia. It creates a situation in which nothing can be read at face value.

If, for the sake of discussion, *Osuofia in London* is read as a soap opera then Martha Nochimson's (1997: 28) observation that "soap opera – because of the repetitions

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[42] *Osuofia in London, 1and 2* (2003, 2004) Dir. Kingsley Ogoro. Kingsley Ogoro Productions (Nigeria)

required by its structure – continually reverts to its scenes of recognition in a way that permits popular culture an unexpected kind of introspection" is useful. Nochimson (1997: 28) regards the repetitive narrative structure as a "teleological system of reiterations" by referring to Deleuzes' observation that "our lives are dominated by a mechanical repetition, rooted in industrial/corporate reproduction of identical sameness that thwarts our experience of our own realities". Those repetitions, Nochimson (1997: 28) argues, "most approximating assembly-line mass production fail to reflect the full possibilities of the form, and are genuinely inferior storytelling". Repetition in Nollywood video-film has a mechanical function on one hand and serves an illustrative purpose on the other. It is mechanical in that when it happens, the viewer is aware of the technical process and this awareness removes the viewer from being immersed in a fictive realm. It facilitates self-examination and opens up various interpretations of the same scene.

Repetition is generally regarded as a crucial function in African storytelling or, as Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike (1994: 218) asserts, is "an essential feature of oral storytelling" that is used in film "for emphatic purposes". In his discussion of celluloid films such as those made by Ousmane Sembene and Haile Gerima, Ukadike (1994: 212) suggests that repetition is used to establish a structure of opposites that emphasises "the etiology of neo-colonial decadence". For example, the dualistic properties of modern versus traditional are used to diagnose the greed of neoliberal-capitalism in the context of African communalism. Repetition here could symbolise the mimicry, by those previously colonised, of colonisers or the repetition of authoritarianism. For example, post-independence bereaucratic structures in some African countries seemed to repeat the repressiveness of colonial administration. However, repetition is also a stylistic strategy in African storytelling traditions (Ukadike 1994: 212). To relate this notion as a relevant device for reading Nollywood films as well, the repeated scenes in *Osuofia in London 2* are also placed to contrast Osuofia's recognition of self in London (when he was still poor, pitiable and comically 'out of place') with his recognition of self in Nigeria as a wealthy, 'knowledgeable' and reputable man. The repeated scenes also function to emphasise Samantha's contradictory personality. The clips where she is an amicable and considerate person are juxtaposed with those that reveal her character as a greedy, criminal, contemptuous, devious and duplicitous individual. The second time the clips

are played, Osuofia realises that Samantha's friendly and flirtatious gestures were a way for her to get his inheritance money.

During my interview with Zack Orji he observed that oftentimes films are made without a script[43] (I discuss this in my section on textuality). Producers or directors give the actors the basic storyline but the actors often take the responsibility of creating spoken lines and dialogues. The problem, Orji asserts, is that it becomes difficult to achieve continuity when actors do not remember the exact lines they said in the first take and are therefore unable to repeat them at the second or third take. Some of these aspects are left to chance and spontaneity. One could argue that there is no original to begin with. If there is a formulaic manner in which some Nollywood plots are constructed, then it is through repeated cultural practice, rather than the duplication of concrete form. In such cases, there is no script to copy in its exactness. It is arguable that the general process of rendition in Nollywood films is not always formulaic. Therefore, units of sameness (films that bear similar plot formats) are often the reiteration stereotypes that are drawn from the actor's knowledge and imagination. The medium of film is argued to be without the original. Theodor Adorno (1991: 180) notes that film suggests "the equation of technique and technology since the [film] has no original which is then reproduced on a mass scale: the mass product is the thing in itself". It is a social product in which reiterations of cultural expressions are performed. The use of these techniques in Nollywood films as technological manipulation as well as aesthetic strategy draws our attention to the way in which time is configured in Nollywood; not only in its representation of the past and the present but also in the way that it defines the format and alludes to the organisation of time within social spaces.

1.2: Temporality and the Element of Banality

> *Cinema is the sole experience where time is given to me as a perception (Gilles Deleuze 1985: 35)*
>
> *Perception is the master of space in the measure to which action is the master of time (Henri Bergson 1911: 23)*

As previously mentioned, in Nollywood a single film can be spread over two or more discs by leaving certain quotidian actions, such as walking, unedited. As such, it can be

[43] Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos. To date, there have been many interventions aimed at 'improving' Nollywood. Orji acknowledges that training practitioners in scriptwriting is one of the main objectives.

argued to represent “life as it is”. It can be related to Dudley Andrew’s (1976: 108) interpretation of Kracauer’s realist view that film “exists most profoundly and most essentially when it presents life as it is” and it has the “privilege… to record and reveal and thereby redeem physical reality”. Although it may be argued that the banal, uneventful scenes in Nollywood show lack of creativity, they draw attention to the significance of temporality in reading the fantastic. Defined by Pierre-Georges Castex (1951: 8) as the “the brutal intrusion of mystery into the setting of real life”, the fantastic leads to an enquiry of what seems ‘natural’. The city of Lagos, for example, and the daily interactions predicated on its history may come across as ‘natural’ and ‘normative’. However, video-film leads one to query this state of affairs. When Okome refers to video-film as a medium that is “very present”[44], he alludes to both spatial and temporal modes of thinking about video-film. Video-film is very present in that it is ubiquitous and it is present in its contemporaneity. It does not seem to be concerned with ‘transporting’ the viewer to ‘another world’ but rather illuminates the ‘present-ness’ of myth, history, and speculation in everyday life. As Bliss Cua Lim (2009: 2) observes, “the supernatural is often rationalised as a figure for history or disparaged as an anachronistic vestige of primitive superstitious thought”. The fantastic encroaches upon the present as a force that can meddle with time.

In film generally, the time and space of reality is physically contracted but expanded in our minds. This is the magic of film: it gives the illusion of time (brings the past into the present and provides a visualisation of the future) while it alludes to time as a construct. For instance, the viewer can imagine “long, long ago” without needing the chronological details that lead us to present events. The viewer can imagine that a character has driven for hours or days without having to watch hours of the process of travelling. Generally film differentiates the space and time of the film from that of our own. Dudley Andrew (1976: 18) argues that “at its primary level, the mind animates the sensory world with motion”. The emphasis is on the mind as a “raw material” that produces motion pictures, organises the world and, through images, “creates a meaningful reality” (Andrew 1976: 18). The viewer fills in by imagination the ‘unnecessary’ omitted parts of a narrative. Lengthy uneventful or uninformative human practices are thus avoided in the narration unless if they form part of the core meaning of the film.

[44] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria

By contrast, Nollywood video-films include lengthy uneventful wide-shot[45] activities. The viewer may watch a character walk a distance for over ten minutes even though this activity may not be linked to the core meaning of the film, such that the walking appears banal and meaningless. It is expanded everyday practice. The sense of boundlessness that is characterised by the long scenes is not uncommon in African film. Teshome Gabriel (1995: 83) argues that “Western films manipulate ‘time’ more than ‘space’” whereas “Third World films seem to emphasise ‘space’ over ‘time’. Communication in folk tradition and African cinema, Gabriel (1995: 83) observes, is a “slow-paced phenomenon” that may include ‘non-dramatic’ elements that may be regarded as boring “cinematic excess” in Western cinematic experience but are significant in African cinematic experience. The repetition of images and scenes as well as the long takes functions as the re-evaluation of events that have already taken place in the film and to situate the viewer within the cultural relations of the community in which the narrative is based.

Marita Sturken (1990: 117) argues that this is what gives early video-films their political potency and uniqueness when she points out the two properties of video; namely intimacy and real-time. The real-time quality was a technological property that was exploited for aesthetic intent (Sturken 1990: 117). Nollywood represents the ways in which socio-economic relations in Nigeria configure an economy of excess time and relates internal narratives to external narratives about class-struggle. If one considers this banality not just as that which is commonplace but as a way of normalising the fantastic and surreal visual imagery of dispossession. It can be deduced that, along with its formalist inclinations, most Nollywood video-films include forms of realism. The quotidian in Nollywood can be read as inserts of documentary passages that signify the material conditions of living and working in Lagos. While conducting research in Lagos, I found it unavoidable to see the effects of unemployment[46]. It is not unusual to see young and middle-aged people hawking or ‘idling’ in public spaces [Fig. 8]. Moreover, the logistics that are involved in moving between areas in the city of Lagos are vastly time-consuming. Time, comes across as protracted and not always constructively spent.

[45] This refers to the use of the long-shot. This form of shooting is used to contextualize the subject within its environment and often shows large vistas within the frame.

[46] With an annual population growth of 3-5% and an estimated population density of 4200 people per square kilometre, Lagos has a poverty level of over 50% (Lagos State Government/ UN-Habitat Office in Nigeria (2004)).

There is an ambiguous sense of 'free' time but one in which people do not necessarily have the means to use their time. The word 'free' in this case may not be entirely appropriate but I use it to demonstrate the intricacies of lived time in Lagos as it is represented in Nollywood video-film.

There is an uneasy contrast of images in media of time spent in a 'developed' country, where people are rushing to work and spending time 'constructively', with images of people in a 'developing' country who seem idle and engaged in endless waiting. The same contrast exists for urban and rural dispositions. This contrast makes it seem as though time spent in industry is time better spent than in peasantry and vagrancy, and, therefore, produces a different meaning for 'free' time. It is as if there is a hypothesis that 'free' time in a 'developed' country is regarded as deserved leisure time, whereas in a 'developing' country it illustrates laziness.

In a study of vagrancy in the USA, Anne Lovell (1992: 93) argues that time is a social construction. For the vagrant, time is cyclical and unallocated where maximised delay "reinforces feelings of powerlessness and humiliation" (such as waiting for donations or queuing for welfare). In Nollywood video-films, the 'free' time of the poor is often contrasted with the 'free' time of the wealthy who are able to command the time of others (maids or servants). However, the latter, as leisure time, does not seem as hollow or futile. Amongst many examples, is a film directed by Sam Loco Efe and Chika C. Onu entitled *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008) which depicts a young man slowly walking, waiting and signalling for an *okada*[47] motorcycle to stop [Fig. 9]. The main character, a diviner's assistant named Osuofia (Nkem Owoh), acquires an *okada* motorcycle to make a living. There are long, banal scenes that depict Osuofia picking up people on his new *okada*. These are followed by protracted scenes of a young man trying to sell 'black-market' fuel on the street to passing *okada* motorcycles and cars.

These seemingly everyday activities are represented as futile, not worthwhile or constructive and without adequate benefit or profit, and as such they become indicative

[47] Okadas are commercial motorbikes which are named after (now defunct) Okada Air, a Nigerian private airline that operated in the 1980s. Okada bikes are notorious for the terrible accidents that they have been involved in due to speed and overloading. They are regarded as a risk but people take them because they are faster because of the road congestion and traffic jams known as 'Go Slow' that can last for hours. The time allocation system (that is employed in European cities) permits cars with 'even' number plates in restricted areas on even days and those with 'odd' number plates on 'odd' days. This system has led to most families acquiring two cars and exacerbated the problem.

of detrimental social and political systems. In the film, Osuofia is disappointed when he runs out of fuel and is abandoned by an unsatisfied customer without pay. He walks his bike to street vendors known as Paul and Silas, who make a living through selling fuel [Fig. 10]. The two men are cynically named after the bible characters, Paul and Silas. They tell him of an advertisement that they saw earlier on an African Voodoo Arts website and would like to involve him in 'business' [Fig. 11]. The advertisement is offering up to ten million American dollars for African artefacts or 'nyonyonyo' and '*juju*' as the two men call them. Initially, Osuofia laughs it off as a 419 scam[48] but eventually agrees to assist in stealing an *ekpo* mask[49] from the shrine of the diviner he works for [Fig. 12].

Temporality in video-film and temporality in artistic practice intersect. Traditional Eurocentric art is regarded as a product that takes time to conceptualise and to make. This principle has been applied to Nollywood video-film whose 'low quality' is attributed to the fact that they are made quickly compared to artisanal celluloid films that take time to make. Again, this shows that time is not neutral. Time to create an object is 'bought' by a patron who commissions and therefore buys the time it takes to make such products. I argue that, under harsh economic conditions artistic practice need not be determined by the time it takes to make a product. Nollywood video-film is a demonstration of fantastic spontaneity.

Art history grants fantastic power to (art) objects based on chronology – how old the object is. Its present value is often based on its embeddedness in the past. The *ekpo* mask that is stolen by Paul and Silas is a utilitarian object but it is used as a medium between supernatural forces and the diviner. It is an object of the present that is used in the present. Mr Tapioca, the American who buys the object, treats it as an ancient object: an original that symbolises the indispensable. The fantastic power of art objects is based on their distanciation from the present. In *Osuofia and the Wisemen*, however, the *ekpo* mask and its supernatural power in relation to the Euro-American museum politics of acquisition and cultural patrimony are transposed as contemporary dynamics.

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[48] A 419 scam is the fraudulent use of letters or e-mails to con a victim into paying an advance fee for the release of large sums of inheritance money. Although there are various forms of 419 scams and they are not limited to Nigeria, they are now perceived as common Nigerian internet scams.

[49] *Ekpo* masks are used for ancestral masquerades and are believed to be "possessed by the spirits of ancestors" (Pratten 2008: 197)

Osuofia, Paul and Silas became wealthy from selling the sculpture. As rich men, their futile time is transformed into leisure time or 'free' time. Since they do not have to work or hawk for money, we see them spending their time acquiring material things (luxury cars and mansions [Fig. 13]), lying in Jacuzzi baths and throwing parties. The film has long and drawn-out scenes of dancing. They no longer 'loiter' but appear to occupy space and time 'legitimately'. As the film progresses, they lose their money because the American buyer returns the artefact after it releases supernatural spirits that haunt him [Fig. 14]. All four men are punished by the supernatural power of the stolen artefact. As a result, Paul becomes blind while Silas becomes mute. Towards the end of the film they are depicted as beggars who spend their days on the side of the street without the hope of being able to survive from selling anything since they cannot see or hear customers [Fig. 15].

The long scenes of these characters either at leisure spending money or begging and hawking might be seen as banal. Although the banalisation of the narrative in Nollywood is arguably strategic, there are significant issues which should not be overlooked as commonplace. First, banality in video-film is juxtaposed alongside scenes depicting the shockingly extraordinary. The extended scenes therefore dampen the gravity of violent situations. Second, there is a paradox that what is seen by outsiders as the extra-ordinary urban life in Lagos (such as selling fuel in the streets; the illicit trafficking of traditional sculptures to American museums (as the film suggests), as well as the various acts of violence appear ordinary to insiders. Selling of fuel by street hawkers because Nigeria suffers petrol shortages evokes the paradox that Nigeria is a major oil exporter. International oil companies have helped to reproduce inequalities and astounding political violence. This past is embedded in the present, and at times appears incomprehensible and so overwhelming that it can easily be attributed to supernatural malevolent forces.

At this point, it is tempting to see banality as an aesthetic comportment and to relate it to Hannah Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil". Arendt (1977: 287) related this concept to the phenomenon of evil as superficial, committed by individuals who simply "do not realise what [they] are doing". This concept is based on the Eichmann trial that took place in 1961 in which Arendt described Eichmann as being "not even sinister": Eichmann appeared as far removed psychologically from his deeds during the

Holocaust. While it may seem inaccurate to use Arendt's contested[50] notion of the banality of evil to describe what could be a fictitious representation of Lagos, more and more Nollywood video-films display images of heinous violence without an effective judiciary system. Arguably, this indicates attitudes about how certain crimes become normalised or commonplace. If perpetrators are punished, it is through other violent means. This aspect of violence and criminalisation, amplifies the 'curiosity' in Nollywood video-films but at the same time renders the daily struggles as banal or commonplace so that they come across as fictitious. Arendt (1977: 417) attests that she

> spoke of "the Banality of evil" and meant with this no theory or doctrine but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was a perhaps extraordinary shallowness. However monstrous the deeds were, the doer was neither monstrous nor demonic, and the only specific characteristic one could detect on his part as well as in his behavior during the trial and the proceeding examination was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think.

In Nollywood films, violence appears as a matter of course. The rape, the theft and the abuse in *Osuofia and the Wisemen* appear as commonplace.

Osuofia, a manipulative man, abducts and rapes a young girl. The viewer only hears the girl scream behind the foliage that screens this act. It is not clear if she survives this ordeal. This single scene is bracketed, that is, there is no follow-up regarding what happens to the girl or if Osuofia goes on trial or has to account for his actions. The rape has no repercussions. The viewer is told nothing more about this scene. If anything, this scene does not only work to construct Osuofia's dubious character but also *normalises* the act of rape with impunity and draws attention to the inefficiency of the judicial system in such matters[51]. The rape is 'laughed-off' in an inconsequential conversation

[50] Critics have viewed this conception as an insult to Jews.

[51] Nigeria has a tripartite judiciary system: English Common Law, Customary Law and Islamic Law. English Common Law does not apply in the Customary and Islamic Law courts. The Director of Project Alert on Violence Against Women, Josephine Effa Chukwuma, argues that

> there is no criminal justice for abused women in Nigeria. Where report is supposed to be made is the police station but since these women believe they cannot get justice but will be ridiculed instead, they recoil into their shells instead of letting out their experiences. Our criminal justice system needs to do a lot to build the confidence of people. They keep saying rape victims don't come to report, but why would they come when they know they are unlikely to get justice? Igbinovia, J. (2011) "In Nigeria, there is no criminal justice for women", article in the *Vanguard,* December 2011.

at a bar. There is also a loud and short-tempered woman, Coco, who sells alcohol and has sexual relations with a number of men, including Osuofia. Coco arbitrarily physically and verbally abuses her young female servants. None of these acts are represented as felonious, instead they seem comical. Furthermore, there is the dealer, Mr Polly Tapioca, who represents a 'white foreigner' but appears to be of mixed blood. Tapioca's dealing is representative of the looting of African art objects by collectors from America and Europe. Osuofia and the two fuel vendors, Paul and Silas steal the *ekpo* mask from the diviner's shrine and make six million dollars. However, the two vendors, Paul and Silas, end up blind and mute from the theft because Osuofia deceitfully neglected to tell them that to avoid being haunted by the deity they should not keep the money in their own houses. Paul and Silas lose their money, while Osuofia continues to live in an obscenely large house without retribution for his part in the theft of the *ekpo* mask.

The form of the films draws out the violence so that it comes across as everyday practice that is utterly banal and predictable. With reference to Hollywood's depictions of violence, Henry Giroux (1995: 334) calls this ritualistic violence. It is represented as a way of 'passing time' through 'hustling'. Time in video-film represents the world as an incalculable. It relates to Georg Simmel's (1950: 179) notion of the blasé attitude which is a 'greying out' of sensations due to the intense "accumulation of men and things" that "stimulate the nervous system" making things in the public sphere seem 'the same'. I argue that the notion of "aesthetics of outrage"that is appositely theorised by Brian Larkin is linked to the 'greying out' as a response to overstimulation. The long and repeated scenes complicate the notion of banality (through which obscene violence seems normal). During my primary research trips in Lagos, Johannesburg and Cape Town, I observed that Nollywood video-films are played in hair salons and similar public places, not as immersive but as part of cacophonous everyday life. They can be watched or consumed without isolated and dedicated attention but still form a significant part of communal conversation. This is in contrast to the immersive ritualised spaces of galleries and museums in which time seems frozen. Video-film is not isolated in time but its consumption is simultaneous with other everyday practices. This contemporaneous presence of video-film is manifest in the performance of Nollywood video-film.

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http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/12/%E2%80%98in-nigeria-there%E2%80%99s-no-criminal-justice-for-women%E2%80%99-mrs-effa-chukwuma/ 2012/11/12

1.3: Textuality and Performance

The use of text in Nollywood video-film illustrates the fantastic in two ways: first, the performed enunciative act/ word or what Okome[52] refers to as the "wordedness" of Nollywood, and second, the use of text in subtitles. Okome observes that the "wordedness" of Nollywood gives it the "aesthetics of wording" which is "not [about] the efficacy of the camera but the efficacy of the word"[53]. In her description of Nollywood video-film Federica Angelucci (2009: 1) asserts that "[the] narrative is overdramatic, deprived of happy endings, tragic... the aesthetic is loud, violent, excessive; nothing is said, everything is shouted". While this description could be critiqued, it evokes Brian Larkin's (2007: 172) observation that Nollywood video-film is a "series of shocks designed to outrage the viewer". The seemingly loud performances can be explained away by referring to weak sound technology which can lead to 'over-acting'. The 'over-acted' and animated performance of the word reconfigures the relationship between image and text. In video-film, text is not merely the interpretation of thought and image. Often Nollywood practitioners have to use generators for electricity and this loud noise must be counteracted by actors. There are various conditions that produce this aesthetic and visual language. The limitations in creating filming sets in several locations are also compensated for through words and through repeated and redundant dialogue. The overload or surplus of text, image and performance is significant in understanding the semiotics or systems of signs and symbols in video-film.

Semiotic theory in Western traditional art history is argued by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson (1998: 245) as a challenge to "some fundamental tenets and practices of art history". Bal and Bryson (1998: 245) propose a semiotic turn in art history, where semiotics is "a perspective, raising a set of questions around and within the methodological concerns of art history itself". Semiotics examines the conceptual relations between text and context. Bal and Bryson (1998: 246) point out that semiotics, "the theory of sign and symbols and sign-use, is anti-realist" and is posed as perspective to develop art history. When Bal and Bryson proposed the semiotic turn, it was to further the art history discipline in oder to respond to a fast-changing terrain in the arts. The use of technology and focus on socio-political *context* in the arts in the 1990s

[52] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria
[53] Ibid.

necessitates a different mode of analysis. A format like video-film can be used to interrogate how the system of signs and symbols may be interpreted differently and further the discipline and its response to a variety of visual forms.

The fact that many video-films were made without scripts or with minimal scripting (Lobato 2010: 340) has implications for the performed words. The script in film forms part of the key construction of characters and their interpretation of the plot. In general, actors memorise scripts in order to get "into character". The issue of scriptwriting in Nollywood video-film is often cited as the reason for its low quality and repetitive scenes. The rhetoric of 'improving' Nollywood video-film includes the training of scriptwriters as one of the major concerns[54]. The fact that Nollywood is not scripted means that the authorship of characters and words is spontaneous and depends on actors. This dynamic blurs the distinction between constructed fiction and lived reality.

Although the hyper-performance in Nollywood video-film forms part of its visual language, it is necessary to interrogate the derogatory stereotypes of Africa as a 'noisy' place and Africans as 'loud' people who are "prone to unrestrained physicality" and therefore "lack moral inhibition" (Lawrance 2005: 72). The notion of "noise" or loudness in performance, however, is sometimes associated with the communality in African societies that is characterised by loud singing, drums, rattles, etc. This characterisation, both positive and negative, is also mostly specific to women (Freud 1915). It is common to see, in a video-film, a woman throw herself on to the ground, crying and screaming the same words repeatedly when she hears disappointing news. The spectacularisation of wailing through the loud repetition of words could be seen as comic, but at the same time deeply poignant. The subterranean hysteria relates to "crisis of consciousness" that is linked to estrangement of self in acting out/ performing given secondary characters (Ender 1995: 253).

The New-York based video artist and documentary filmmaker Zina Saro-Wiwa[55] parodies this amplification of worded emotion in Nollywood. In her exhibition entitled *Sharon Stone in Abuja* (2010) which she co-curated with James Lindon at Location One

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[54] Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos
Makhubu, N. Interview with Sylvester Ogbechie, 2011/03/25, Los Angeles, California

[55] Zina Saro-Wiwa is the daughter of Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. Saro-Wiwa was the leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and was hanged by the military government of General Sani Abacha in 1995. Zina Saro-Wiwa was brought up in Britain but is based in New York.

in New York, Saro-Wiwa appropriates this caricature. The video installation entitled *Mourning Class* (2010) is a series of videos depicting women (Nollywood actresses) staring straight into the camera and feigning loud crying episodes [Figs. 17; 18]. Further, Saro-Wiwa captures the amplification, not just in performance, but also in the copious amounts of video-films that have been made in a short time. Introducing her exhibition is an installation of a wall inscribed with Nollywood titles. At first appearing simply as a mass of text, upon closer inspection it is a list of Nollywood titles – many with similar titling formulas (for example, *Osuofia in London* and *Sharon Stone in Abuja*) [Fig. 19]. The numerous titles are not seminal titles or good quality films, but this stresses the overwhelming innumerability of Nigerian video-films. The exhibition, entitled *Sharon Stone in Abuja*, is also named after a Nollywood video-film of the same title directed by Adim Williams and starring Genevieve Nnaji, where a woman called Sharon goes to Abuja to 'make it big' by securing contracts from top government officials, but ends up in harlotry.

The other intriguing aspect of the Nollywood visual image is the text within the image. Subtitles are sometimes included in video-films but are often left out because it used to be too expensive to have them done professionally. Film producer Ahire-Uwaifo Lofty attests that, initially, Nollywood filmmakers would rather use cheaper editing suites than spend money to have the subtitles done in Europe[56]. This resulted in a large number of films that were released without subtitles or whose subtitles run too far ahead or too slowly for the moving image and have many 'grammatical errors'. Moreover, the spoken word, if the film is in Pidgin, would be written out as it is used in daily exchange. This aspect makes the reading of Nollywood imagery intriguing because what appear to be 'grammatical mistakes' could also be interpreted as a reclamation of intricate and innovative language practices.

Written Pidgin and other varieties of English appeared in Onitsha Market Literature of the 1960s. Onitsha Market Literature describes the books and pamphlets that were published by presses in the market of Onitsha and were intended for 'uneducated' people. Often, links are drawn between Onitsha Market Literature and Nollywood video-film (Adejunmobi 2004, Okome 2013). The use of Pidgin in Onitsha Market Literature was initially criticised in an almost similar way as Nollywood video-film. The

[56] Makhubu, N. Interview with Ahire-Uwaifo Lofty, 2011/07/14, Lagos

simplicity of the Onitsha Market Literature made it accessible and as such it was regarded as "literature for the masses" (Obiechina 1971). This literature juxtaposed the fantastic and picturesque with the ordinary/ realistic and formed part of the popular discourse regarding the socio-political climate of Nigeria at the time.

1.4: Music and the Narrative

Music in film generally plays an important role in establishing the mood and communicating the tone of a scene. In almost all Nollywood video-films, music is used to narrate the story directly or to relay moral conclusions relating to the socio-economic and cultural predispositions that are depicted in the film. The use of music lyrics to tell the story can be traced back to traditional theatre. For instance, *alarinjo* performances were structured into songs, drumming, dancing, *oriki* (praise poetry) and drama (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 140). The performances start with opening *oriki* recitals, which are followed by a ceremonial dance to honour divinities and a social dance, then the drama is divided into two parts, namely the spectacle and the *revue* (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 142). The spectacles are "based on Yorùbá myths and spectacles", whereas the *revues* comment on the state of affairs in (Yorùbá) society (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 142). Nollywood films seldom use this format but have retained the use of music as a way of narrating and making social commentary. In many video-films, the lyrics are a significant part of the film narrative.

Often, two or more songs in video-film are about the characters. For example, when *Osuofia in London 2* (disc 3) begins, the following song is sung by the English female character, Samantha:

I'm an English girl in Africa
I don't mind *akwu* or *banga* soup, my dear
But I'd rather have some tea
You can hear it in my accent when I speak – I'm an English girl in Africa
See me pounding yam with my mortar
See me cooking *egusi*
But I carry my teabag in my bag – I'm an English girl in Africa
I'm delighted to be here in Africa . . . .[57]

This song is based on and uses the same tune as the 1988 song by the British musician known as Sting, entitled "Englishman in New York". The song sung by Samantha

[57] *Osuofia in London, 1and 2* (2003, 2004) Dir. Kingsley Ogoro. Kingsley Ogoro Productions (Nigeria)

narrates her travel to Nigeria and her acclimatisation to her new context. Recalling the original song by Sting, the English man that is being referred to is Quentin Crisp, a British gay icon in U.S., about whom a film and a play were created under the same title. The lyrics of the original song state “I’m an alien, I’m a legal alien”. The appropriation of this song establishes one of the central themes in the film. While the main theme is Osuofia’s travel to London, it is also about his strangeness or his otherness and the ease with which his foreignness is criminalised in London. Osuofia gets arrested for hunting birds, in this case pigeons, which he would have normally done in his village. As a village hunter, he is depicted hunting for birds and animals to feed his family. In London, however, the police detain him for “constituting a danger” and “being a nuisance to the public”. At the police station, Osuofia refuses to hand over the pigeon to the police and asks “is the pigeon complaining?” This comic situation alludes to the “criminalisation” of the other. In the original song by Sting, Crisp’s homosexuality would have been perceived as posing a threat or would have been regarded as perversion. In his diaries, Crisp (1999: 34) remarks that he “looked forward to receiving [his] naturalization papers so that [he] could commit a crime and not be deported”. Furthermore, the song in *Osuofia in London* also alludes to Samantha’s otherness in Nigeria. Samantha, however, is disingenuous and only goes to Nigeria for sinister reasons. She marries Osuofia in order to receive the inheritance money. Samantha’s criminal intent is not treated as such in Nigeria. Although Osuofia’s first wife and children ostracise her, they do not regard her presence as criminal, even after she attempts to murder Osuofia by poisoning his food. There is no presence of state police or local law enforcement.

Another theme that is captured in the music is cultural assimilation. In the original song, the lyrics that capture this theme are “And you can hear it in my accent when I talk, modesty, propriety can lead to notoriety; you could end up as the only one, it takes a man to suffer ignorance and smile, be yourself no matter what they say”. Samantha learns to cook traditional Nigerian food as Osuofia’s wife; she learns local folk songs that one of Osuofia’s daughters teaches her, but she does not fully adapt to village life. Osuofia does not assimilate or absorb British culture or mannerisms and is snubbed for it. Nevertheless, the character that plays Ben Okafor, the solicitor who manages Osuofia’s brother’s business and estate, represents a person who has assimilated British

culture and mannerisms. In a flawless British accent, Okafor introduces himself to Osuofia. Osuofia replies:

> Are you talking to me? You are talking like Queen Elizabeth, look at you, my brother come down home and talk to me. Look at a fellow black man like me, my brother I know you are trying to pretend, speak the language that I will understand, open your mouth when you want to talk to me, I am your brother[58].

Ben Okafor continues in a British accent to explain to Osuofia that he has to sign a document before the money can be given to him. Okafor declares to Osuofia that "your currency [Naira] is not recognised in *our* country". Osuofia gets angry, refuses to sign the document and asks to be shown the warehouse where the money is stored. Okafor's frustration at this situation leads him to ask for a minute to freshen up in the bathroom where he delivers a monologue. Staring at his image in the mirror, Okafor breaks into a Nigerian accent and says,

> What kind of stubborn goat is this? Why is he being so difficult? I hate these semi-illiterate foreign clients. They make me so annoyed and give me problems and *wahala*[59] argh! And when I get annoyed I start to lose my British accent hm! Eeeh! My cultivated English . . . [my] natural accent and I start to speak like my father and I don't like it oh. You are laughing at me, you think I have a problem? You think I have a . . . a coconut problem. Okay, calm down, calm down. Okay, deep breath, stiff upper lip, God save the Queen [now in an English accent] Ben Okafor, solicitor. Excellent! How can I help you?[60] [Fig. 20]

This monologue reveals some of the key themes in the narrative which deal with cultural hegemony, migration and foreignness. The song captures these dynamics.

In some examples, the music does not only 'set the stage' or emphasise the main themes but forms part of the entire narrative structure. Tunde Kelani[61], a respected Nollywood filmmaker, uses a format that is quite similar to traditional theatre performance such as *alarinjo*. Kelani's films are almost exclusively in Yorùbá and they focus on issues facing Yorùbá culture and customs. His film, *Agogo Eewo* (2002), uses music as a part of the structural format. *Agogo Eewo* means "gong of taboo". In the film, when this gong is hit in public, all corrupt politicians confess their corrupt ways or fall ill [Fig. 21]. The

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[58] *Osuofia in London, 1and 2* (2003, 2004) Dir. Kingsley Ogoro. Kingsley Ogoro Productions (Nigeria)
[59] Wahala is a Nigerian colloquial term for 'problem'.
[60] *Osuofia in London, 1and 2* (2003, 2004) Dir. Kingsley Ogoro. Kingsley Ogoro Productions (Nigeria)
[61] Kelani's oeuvre comprises of didactic Yorùbá films shot on quality film. Although Kelani's work is distinct from most video-film, it is now categorised under Nollywood.

significance of music and musical instruments is placed centrally. The *agogo* is an iron clapperless bell that is known as the oldest samba instrument [Fig. 22]. It is known as an instrument that counteracts evil, and is an important part of the *osun* tradition in which it represents the beak of a bird. The *agogo*, according to Robert Farris Thompson (1975: 56), is "embedded in the literature of leaves; it is a kind of magically healing leaf iron". The film is about healing Jogbo[62], a place destroyed by greedy corrupt politicians.

The film begins with a scene in which a dancer dressed in a *boubou* or *agbada* (Yorùbá male attire) is dancing to the music of drums. The drum is argued to be "the foundation of Yorùbá instrumental music", which serves a liturgical function (Adegbite 1988: 16). Drums in Yorùbá custom are communicative tools. For example, the *dundun* and *bata* drums, which are used several times in Kelani's films, are also known as the talking drums because they represent the Yorùbá Language. Drums are used to play *orikis* (poetry) (Beier 1954: 29). The drum and dance scene is followed by a spoken poem or oratory prose. An elder delivers this poem:

Jogbo bitter as bitter kola, dangerous as the Oro cult
With two eyes you can cope at the riverside
With two eyes you can survive Kaduna
But you need twelve eyes to survive in Jogbo
With two mouths you get by in Ibadan
With two mouths you get by in Lagos
But you need eighteen mouths to survive in Jogbo
With two hands you can handle Ekiti[63]
With two hands you can handle Egba[64]
But you need twenty-four hands to manipulate Jogbo
Jogbo bitter as bitter kola
This is Jogbo, intimidating as the Oro cult[65]

The poem is then followed by a scene in which an elderly woman sings a song with a group of children. The call-and-response song gives the basis of the film narrative:

Earth and Heaven, killed a rat
Quarrelled over seniority
But Earth took the rat away
Heaven protested, retreating to the skies

[62] Jogbo in the video-film is a fictional place. However, there is a place called Jogbo in Ogun State, South-western Nigeria.
[63] Ekiti,predominantly Yorùbá, was declared a state through the brutal dictatorship of Sani Abacha in 1996
[64] Egba Alake is a traditional state of Egba people, a clan of the Yorùbá.
[65] *Agogo Eewo* (2002) Dir. Tunde Kelani. Mainframe Productions

So rain refused to fall
Plants sprouted and dried up
Maidens suffered stunted growth
Take note of my song
Listen to the song
It is a proverbial song
You form your various parties
Promising to reform Jogbo
But your parties embezzle funds
You became partial
You indulge yourselves
And forget the masses
Let us be watchful
We will be vigilant[66]

The song illustrates how the selfishness of politicians affects ordinary people. Using public funds for self-gain impedes the delivery of basic services to people. Popular discontent in the film leads to protests by the youth, who are divided into two factions. Each faction sings songs that represent its ideals. Throughout the film folk songs, poems and rhymes echo Yorùbá beliefs as well as current socio-political issues. One scene depicts an incantation by a group of women all dressed in white, singing: "Ifá controls the world, Olodumare governs heaven; Man is so stupid yet believes he is wise"[67]. The songs lead the different scenes and function to develop the narrative and provide criticism.

Although Nollywood films use music as a central story-telling tool, they are radically different from musicals. Unlike the American film musical, central characters do not do the singing themselves, and oftentimes the music is in the form of a soundtrack that is played over the long and drawn-out scenes showing actors in uneventful everyday practices such as walking. Although the films use music centrally, they do not use efficiently choreographed song-and-dance scenes (as would be the case with Bollywood). Music as a language in Nollywood functions as an unseen narrator or critic. Music acknowledges the supernatural and establishes the conditions for enchantment and the reading of fantastic imagery. Music, it can be said, is an element that brings sculptural African art to life, and the context within which it has to be understood (Blier 2001: 18).

[66] *Agogo Eewo* (2002) Dir. Tunde Kelani. Mainframe Productions
[67] Ibid.

Having discussed the technical elements of Nollywood video-film, in this next section I focus on its content and its predominant fantastic themes.

2: The Visual Language of Nollywood's Fantastic Themes and Imagery

Themes that shape the fantastic in Nollywood's visual language include religious belief based on magic and magic realism, fetishism, occultism, violence, and vigilantism, as well as power dynamics. Within these themes there is a constant terminological revaluation of tradition, modernity and contemporaneity and their influence on the construction of public moral attitudes. While there has been a dominance of these themes, the Nigerian Film and Video Censorship Board (NFVCB) has worked towards suppressing them. The complexity of these themes (the fascination that is coupled with repulsion) can be read in the context of art history's framing of traditional African art as objects that inherently contain magic and are fetishistic.

In distinguishing itself as civilised, European Modernity constructed African art as primitive. Picasso (1974: 17–19) defined African masks as "magic things" and "not just any other pieces of sculpture". He deemed that African art was not for looking, but rather had a function as a power object (fetish). For Picasso (1974: 19), "the Negro pieces . . . were mediators . . . against threatening spirits". Primitivism was heavily criticised for its racist approach to African, Asian and Oceanic art. In her essay entitled *Truth and Falsehood*, Suzanne Blier (1996: 141) points out that "in both its historic and current use, the term 'fetish' conveys in this way notions of superstition, unreality, falsehood, foreigners and derogation". She also states that most influential thinkers in the modern European period (Hegel, for example) disparage Africa and its objects of worship as 'trifling', 'arbitrary' and 'irrational' (Blier 1996: 144). It is no surprise, therefore, that Africans who have been educated in Western disciplines may reject themes of magic, occultism and fetishism. The question is, should the notion of magic and the fantastic simply be dismissed because of these constructions, or does it necessitate a radical 'shift' in perspective? How should the appearance of traditional African sculptures in Nollywood video-film be interpreted? Before I discuss these issues, I will briefly discuss modes of censorship and suppression in reaction to themes of magic, occultism and violence in Nollywood video-film.

There is a sentiment that this content is demeaning and potentially destructive. The Board states that films which contain "negative stereotyping [are] likely to lead to general anger and resentment or incite disaffection amongst ethnic groups"[68]. Further, it asserts that the display of "graphic rape or torture, sadistic violence or terrorization", as well as "portrayals of children in a sexualised or abusive context", is of concern.[69] One of the main concerns is the representation of local 'traditions' and the creation of 'bad stereotypes'. The NFVCB states that:

> that there are certain customs and traditions, some of which may be animist in origins which are practiced widely in Nigeria and some other African countries. These "rituals or customs" are not necessarily seen in a negative light, but its depiction or portrayal in some movies give the Board cause for concern. Whilst the Board recognizes the right for filmmakers to depict some of these rituals in movies it must be done in good taste, and reflect the context of the story, and not be gratuitous or glamorize such acts.[70]

The extent to which the depiction of "rituals and customs" is "in good taste" is vague and subjective. Nevertheless, these depictions arguably highlight the way in which the fantastic illuminates societal regulations of moral performances through censorship. Todorov (1973: 159) notes that "the fantastic is a means of combat against [. . .] censorship as well as the other: sexual excesses will be more readily accepted by any censor if they are attributed to the devil". Censorship, however, draws attention to certain themes, such as sex, 'ritual murder' and excessive violence, in such a way that it can be argued that it creates interest and curiosity around transgressions and 'perverse' appropriations of 'rituals and customs' in the form of images representing magic, fetishism and violence.

In light of this, criminality and criminalisation are entrenched in the video-film discourse (corruption of government officials, occult murders, etc.). With regards to violence and constructions of criminality, the NFVCB board declares that they will censor the

> portrayal of violence as a normal solution to problems, heroes who inflict pain and injury or callousness towards victims, encouraging aggressive attitudes taking pleasure in pain or humiliation. It is important to note however, that works which tend to glorify, glamorize

[68] http://www.nfvcb.gov.ng/pages.asp?pageid=371 accessed 2012/09/13
[69] Ibid.
[70] http://www.nfvcb.gov.ng/cms/UserFiles/File/Guidelines.pdf accessed 2012/09/13

> or sexualise violence will receive a more restrictive classification and may even be cut or refused classification. No gratuitous violence will be allowed regardless of the category[71]

The regulation of censorship is not always consistent. Examples include the gratuitous violence in the video-film entitled *Issakaba*, in which bodies are decapitated, burnt and mutilated in public, or *Osuofia and the Wisemen*, where the rape of a young girl is normalised and is not followed by any repercussions or judicial processes. Paul Ugor (2007: 297) refers to a "hidden censorship" through which "much of the contents of the video-films are dictated by larger market forces rather than by the government" even "though there exists a statutory film and video censorship board". Ugor (2007) writes that, prior to the establishment of the NFVCB in 1993, there was a censorship board that had been set up and, by the 1970s, had incorporated churches and Christian associations which laid the criteria for censorship. Ugor (2007: 309) notes that these include representations that:

> (a) Undermine national security;
> (b) Induce or reinforce corruption of private and public morality
> (c) Encourage illegal or criminal acts
> (d) Expose people of African descent to ridicule and contempt; and
> (e) Encourage racial religious or ethnic discrimination and conflict.

Ugor (2007: 309) argues that the NFVCB had also remained "ineffectual". When it did seem to be effective, was when it was headed by Roselyn Odeh who was criticised "for subjecting film censorship to what they considered to be narrow Catholic Christian dogmas". Some of the films that were not approved were released in any case (for example Helen Ukbapio's *Rupture*[72]). Regardless of the content regulation in video-films, the frequency of the themes that are mentioned above has established a certain visual language, and as such they have formulated different ways of seeing constructions of morality that are re-enacted.

Film, in general, confronts the viewer with moral values. Through contrasting the good and the bad, the protagonist and the antagonist, the rich and the poor, the ugly and the sublimely beautiful, the just and unjust, film, as Dudley Andrew (1976: 108) argues, is related to the seat of the mind and to experience. When good triumphs over bad, as it

[71] Ibid

[72] Ukpabio's film shows a woman who has a penis and uses it in order to bewitch other women. This imagery will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

commonly does, it conceals the ideological systems in which certain acts and relations between people are legitimised, and values are created. There is a political economy that surfaces in representations of the fantastic that Todorov's theory does not elucidate. A majority of Nollywood narratives reveal a sense of mobocracy. Acts that injure are not regulated by a 'central' judiciary system. While this cannot be said for all Nollywood video-films, the absence of a regulating institution (like government), or the presence of such an institution as irreparably corrupt, seems to be a common attribute. Furthermore, the government is depicted as an organisation of corrupt individuals who use magic for selfish ends. (I will briefly discuss this theme in this section, but I will elaborate on representations of the 'state' as a supernatural force in Chapter 5.) In this section, I discuss imagery in Nollywood video-film, as well as that produced by the photographer, Pieter Hugo, to discuss magic and occultism, fetishism, and criminalisation, as well as power and public intervention, as some of the intonations that complicate the notion of the fantastic in Nollywood video-film.

2.1: Magic, Magic Realism and Occultism

Only magic knows where his body has gone . . . .
(Djibril Diop Mambety cited in Ukadike 2002: 128)

The notion of magic in Nollywood is ubiquitous. It is not only an aspect of horror or science fiction films, but one also finds that comedies and romantic films such as *Paulicap and Perpertua* or even *Osuofia in London* contain some or other form of so-called *juju*. For example, in *Paulicap and Perpertua*, Perpertua (Mercy Johnson) consults a medicine man to obtain charms that will make Paulicap (Nkem Owoh) love her. In order to insert the charm in her body, Perpertua has intercourse with the medicine man. In *Osuofia in London*, Osuofia uses a fetish object to fight off the police at the police station when he is arrested. The aspect of magic is both seductive and repulsive; it is both popular and disliked. The prevalence of what is known as *juju* in Nigeria is associated with traditional beliefs that are depicted as 'irrational'. The medicine man in *Paulicap and Perpertua*, for example, can easily be construed as 'traditional'. However, one could question if his practice with 'magical' medicine is really propagated by tradition or if it is a representation of modern imagination that explains away contemporary psychoses. Similarly, the Ghanaian home video industry has also

produced many films representing occultism and *juju*, which have been initially rejected by the literati as cultural forms that are detrimental to the overall image of African cultures. Onookome Okome (2007b) argues that there is something peculiar about the way in which the occult in African film is viewed as 'ultimate' prime evil, but occultism in Hollywood is accepted as creativity in the genres of fantasy, thriller or horror. The representation of magic, superstition, ritual or excessive violence is not unique to Nollywood. Therefore, the issue with Nollywood film is not that it represents *juju*, occultism or violence, but that it links the horror of gratuitous violence, *juju* and occultism so closely with indigenous beliefs and traditions. By doing so, it undermines the significance of the attempts to preserve African traditions after European colonialism and in the midst of American cultural hegemony.

There are several contradictions surrounding the place of magic in Nollywood video-film. Some scholars see this characteristic as an intrinsic part of African cultural dynamics (Masolo 1994, Kalu 2003), while others perceive it as demeaning. Eghagha (2007: 72) argues that the use of magic in Nollywood can be read as magic realism, and that the "intercourse between the natural and supernatural is part of the African imagination". Magic realism can be defined as the appearance of something strange in a realistic setting. For Eghagha, the natural and supernatural are not estranged, rather they depend on mutual interaction. The danger with this understanding lies in not clarifying the difference between the kinds of subjects that are manifest in a specific cosmography, 'traditions' and subjects that are created freely out of imagination. It is important to make this distinction because such images construct derisive Nigerian or African stereotypes. Eghagha (2007: 74) continues that this kind of magic realism

> explores the deepest fears of the average African, which are rooted in his traditional religion and culture. The return of the dead, the presence of spirits, the power of the marine spirit world and the power of witches and wizards are part of the consciousness of the average Nigerian and the African. This is what Zach Orji means when he says that Nollywood gives to the world what Nigerians want to see.

Eghagha (2007: 73) defines magic realism as a "mode of narration that naturalizes the supernatural; that is to say, a mode in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural, are coherently represented in a state of rigorous equivalence – neither has a greater claim to truth or referentiality". Further, he states that "[it is a] world-view

[that] is predicated on the concatenated nature of the cosmos" (Eghagha 2007: 73). Eghagha's definition of magic realism and its application in Nollywood video-film is pertinent but it does not capture the mischievous playfulness which continuously teases the seriousness that frames 'traditional culture' (I discuss this further in Chapter 4). There are fantastic beings that are created capriciously as well as those that make references to ethno-religious beliefs and knowledge systems.

The term magic realism is notorious for its theoretical problems, making it impossible to find a definition that distinguishes it from categories such as fantasy and surrealism. Nevertheless, a useful characterisation of magic realism stresses co-dependence of the fantastic and the real to create momentous narratives (Bowers 2004). It has also been seen as the tension between the possible and the irrational. Frederic Jameson (1986), however, points out a significant shift in the concept of magic realism. The concept takes on an anthropological perspective that "now comes to be understood as a kind of narrative raw material derived essentially from peasant society, drawing in sophisticated ways on the world of village or even tribal myth" (Jameson 1986: 302). Furthermore, it has now come to be located in the post-colonial cross-culture to "express mythological and cultural tradition" (Bowers 2004: 65). Magic realism can be seen as an antithesis in which social structures render moral principles fluctuant and incalculable – the semiosis of the irrational that modifies concrete realities. There is "conflict and doubling between the real and the imaginary levels of diegesis" that lie in magic realism's "multiplicity of imprecisions and differences" (Colvile 2006). Combinationing various theological beliefs in Nollywood video-films with the secular creates a space where meaning is compounded.

If one takes, for example, Pieter Hugo's photographic essay entitled *Nollywood* (2008)[73] the understanding of magic realism as a component of the fantastic becomes complicated. Hugo documents various Nollywood actors in costume in Enugu, south-eastern Nigeria. While using technology on video-film can produce the 'magical' effects where things disappear instantly or people transform into animals, Hugo's photographs denude the 'magic'. The elements that create the effects are laid bare. It is clear where props and make-up have been used such that the 'magic' is not convincing but the

[73] In this thesis, *Nollywood* in italics refers to Hugo's photographs or any artwork under this name and 'Nollywood' refers to Nigerian video-film.

strangeness of the image remains. The fantastic in Nollywood video-film is interpreted in Hugo's images through the ambiguities that surface. There is the seemingly safe danger of playful work: fiction and reality, form and formlessness, named individuals and generalised anonymity, actors playing themselves, the violence and vulnerability of those who appear as both perpetrators and victims; both dead and alive they become 'supernatural creatures of the dark' wedged in natural light, who gaze at the viewer but are simultaneously blinded. Hugo's images are consonant with Todorov's definition of the fantastic as 'a mode of reading'. It locates magic in the viewer's mind (eye) and not as a feature of the object, thus reinforcing the idea that imagination produces magic where the camera facilitates the illusion.

Photography, Susan Moeller (1989: 16) argues, "masquerades as human sight, its information is visual, but its manner of collecting and imparting that information is radically different from the totality of a human being's sight". While it can be argued that human sight is also partial, it is differentiated from the camera by the subject's perception, which involves the subject's psychological processes. Moeller (1989: 16) views this as incapability that "is partly compensated for by the viewer's insertion of their own sensual experience in the void left by the image's inarticulateness". This inability facilitates estrangement of the viewer. The camera *seems* to draw attention to 'the real thing' while it simultaneously "estrange[s] us from ourselves and from reality, to compel our entrance into the aesthetic world of the image" (Orvell 1989: 77). The documentary character of photography which steers Hugo's oeuvre removes these images from the world of fiction, myth, and fairytale. Even the magico-religious aspect or *juju* in this photographic series (and sometimes in Nollywood video-film) does not appear as a myth in the distant past of a fictional world but as actual, current events in a recognisable geographical location. Hugo's images are, on one hand, a representation or documentation of Nollywood's working conditions and its actors and, on the other, they are constructions of magic realism. They are ambiguously cynical and appear as hyper-real constructions of fiction.

An image from Hugo's photographic series portrays a couple, *Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh from Enugu in Nigeria* (2008) [Fig. 23]. Patience, dressed in a striking green dress and extravagant head wrap, crosses her hands and stares intently at the photographer.

She sits between her purse and the baphomet-like devilish Chris. Chris's skin is covered in a dark substance and his eyes are made to look red. We recognise that he is made to appear as the malevolent creature. She is human, he is bestial. Many attributes differentiate the two. They appear strange but familiar to each other, and estranged from Hugo, a foreign national photographer who captures them. While the two characters seem to contrast with each other, they also seem to transmit, as if a magical mirror exists between them, munificence and malevolence between each other. Patience's head wrap begins to appear as a performance of Chris's horns; his calm and non-threatening facial expression seems to emulate and maintain Patience's virtuousness as his eyes become filled with the colour of her purse. It is this relational link that confounds Pieter Hugo's portrayal of Nollywood video-film.

Furthermore, rather than naming the fictional characters or mythical subjects that the actors portray, Hugo uses the subject's real name. The image, according to the caption, is thus not about the Devil/Baphomet and his queen but about Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh, for example. Often, names are the only means to apprehend a body that is not ours. However, there are ambiguous titles in Hugo's photographic series with names such as John Dollar, Thank God, Song, Escort, Princess, and Do Somtin which hint at the comical yet poignant scar of unbecoming colonial names. With particular reference to the Yorùbá in Nigeria, a name is given power to individuate, place a person socially and give him a historical reality; a birth name (*oruko*) comments on the circumstances surrounding his origins, a totem name (*orile*) fixes his lineage and occupation, and praise names (*oriki*) elaborate upon personal attributes and accomplishments (Borgatti 1990:71). Using real names in Hugo's portraits suggests that Chris Nkulo *is* what we see in the photograph (i.e. the Devil/Baphomet; the values associated with the Devil/Baphomet are transferred to the subject). The danger is that this leads to the assumption that portrayed subjects are appearing in these photographs as themselves rather than extraordinarily named fantastic characters in a fictional narrative.

Hugo's images suggest both strangeness and familiarity where the seemingly fantastic 'creatures' are linked to a community and to family structures. They appear to be going about their daily routines, implying that they are not as foreign to the spaces they occupy and insinuating that they are not as foreign to those around them. It can further

be argued that these photographs suggest procreative relations between the (fictional) fantastic beings and the humans. In popular culture, horror films have formed the general concept that fictional anthropomorphic creatures exist without familial lineages; they are nature's miscalculations, a scientist's flawed construction, a child's imagination or a parody of a ruling institution

Another perplexing magic realist aspect in these portraits is prosopopoeia, "the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration" that surfaces (Paul de Man 1984: 75, original emphasis). The *Nollywood* series comprises portraits which somehow evacuate the soul from the seemingly inanimate physical body. In many examples, the characters are defaced, masked, or appear possessed to such an extent that the taciturn faces look synthetic as if the physical bodies host souls that are foreign to them. They lack what has been described by Levinas as

> the focal point of the relationship with the other, it is not only the assemblage of a nose, a forehead, eyes, etc...[it] is all that... but takes on the meaning of a face through a new dimension it opens up in the perception of a being... it is 'the irreducible mode in which a being can present itself in its identity', it is epiphany... the sudden appearance of the other as absolutely other, beyond possession, knowledge, and representation, it establishes an ethical relation; it calls me into question by calling me away from my indifference, from my life, from everything that has been and is 'mine' and ordering me to take responsibility for the other (Levinas in Stamelman 1993:121).

In the three images portraying *Linus Okereke, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008) [Fig. 24], *Patience Umeh, Junior Ofokansi and Chidi Chukwukere* (2009) [Fig. 25] and *Chika Onyejekwe, Junior Ofokansi, and Thomas Okafor* (2009) [Fig. 26] the face is smeared with a substance such that it is not visible: that focal point is denied. Both images are family portraits depicting man, woman, and child. In both photographs, the characters are dressed in soiled and tattered clothing. Furthermore, their bodies are covered in a substance that looks like a mixture of tar and ash. The characters pose as if for a conventional family portrait. In the image portraying Patience Umeh, Junior Ofokansi, and Chidi Chukwukere, the characters are seated on a couch placed on the veranda. However, the image of Chika Onyejekwe, Junior Ofokansi, and Thomas Okafor depicts the characters posed around a set of oil drums, referencing Nigeria's oil economy. In their appearance, the characters are burnt and come across as the "living dead" or, zombies. In both images (and the entire series), the characters look back at the viewer.

However, the smeared faces, or rather the facelessness, of the portrayed emerge on the photographic surface as blind or incapable of really looking (the eyes seem prosthetic). In many instances, the individuals that we are looking at are blocked from seeing, from the activity of looking in which the viewer engages. The muddy tarlike substance in examples such as *Chika Onyejekwe, Junior Ofokansi, Thomas Okafor, Enugu, Nigeria* (2009; Fig. 26), *Linus Okereke, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008; Fig. 27) (who emerges from scrap-metal dump), and *Song Iyke with Onlookers, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008; Fig. 28) (posed with a group of children around him) almost seals their eyelids. In other photographs in this series, masks cut off any real eye contact. For example, the *Fidelis Elenwa* portrait (2009; Fig. 29) demonstrates the illusion that the individuals that are portrayed return the viewer's gaze. Elenwa poses with a whip in his hand in front of two trucks. Looking closely at the image, Elenwa wears faux spectacles, where the eyes are painted on the ocular shape below his feather headdress. Another example is the portrait of *Ngozi Oltiri* (2009; Fig. 30) whose contemplation is mystified by the two coins that seal her eyes. Oltiri, dressed in blue, sits by a window as if in deep meditation. While it may be argued that these depictions represent mystical or spiritual rather than physical sight, there is still an element of impotence with regards to the eye that looks back at the viewer. Considering this, and the fact that the photographer's seeing is also distorted by the apparatus that stands in for his eye, the camera, the process of seeing, is always already mediated.

While photography in relation to film inherently carries a certain silence or inarticulateness, characters in Hugo's photographs seem to function outside of language. In his seminal essay "The Body and the Archive," Allan Sekula (1986: 6) points out an "instrumental potential in photography" as "a silence that silences." Beyond the photograph, those portrayed seem unable to communicate, and exhibit the incommunicable. Consider Hugo's image of *Princess Adaobi* (2008; Fig. 31): a girl's body is splayed across the visual plane and an artificial hand is placed in her mouth. The hand can be a metaphor for the extended tongue. Replacing the tongue with the hand appears less as the 'barbaric' purging of cannibal food but rather as the language she could not contain, constrain, a handful of the horrid silence that kills her as the hand is exiled from her body. When uttered, she becomes perverse, or maybe because the hand appears dry, it is precisely the object that silences and disfigures her. While this image is strange,

it still carries the principle of 'reality' and a 'behind-the-scenes' depiction of characters in Nollywood video-film.

In video-film, the distinction between reality and magic is imprecise. Since video-film is perceived as a medium that represents reality 'as it is', it is also argued to have a "perverse aura around it because of its crude application" (Sturken 1990: 107). It seems to document or capture prevailing popular imagination about existing issues. The representation of maleficent magic in video-film occurred in a context of an already existing discourse in public media. Daniel Jordan Smith (2001) argues that continuing reports and rumours of child kidnappings, as well as televised ritual murders, are intimately linked with popular discontent with real inequality and the awareness of patron–clientelism in Nigeria. Smith (2001: 803) uses televised reports of the Otokoto saga, which showed images of "a man holding the freshly severed head of a child". The man was arrested and died mysteriously. Smith (2001: 803) observes that many Nigerians resent the nouveaux riches or young men who made money out of scams such as the 419, because they suspect them to be perpetrators of ritual murders and feel that the politicians, police and religious leaders "encouraged, protected, legitimized, and consorted with these evildoers". Smith (2001: 804) argues that the beheading of a child must be read within the context of decades of military rule in Nigeria and the way in which totalitarian leaders used violence to maintain power and wealth.

The magico-religious elements of the supernatural are on one hand argued to be regressive neo-primitivism (Awonsanmi 2011[74]) and, on the other hand, are seen as a means to decode social and cultural politics (Meyer 2002a, Haynes 2007b). Magic appears as both ethno-religious ('traditional') and modern (occultism). Fantastic imagery in video-film, however, seems to be associated with ritual murders of occultism. The occult, according to Haynes (2007b: 144-5) "permeates all social environments in the world of the videos, and while one can find examples where it is associated with the primitive or village world, as opposed to urban modernity, more

[74] Referenced from a conference Paper delivered in 2011 at the University of Lagos. In this paper, entitled "Re-reading Nollywood: Neo-Primitivism and Tunde Kelani's Quasi-Movie", Awonsanmi questionably classifies some Nollywood films as "quasi-movies" whose "technological banality and mis-representational neo-primitivism projects Nollywood as an artistic parody of Nigeria's globally distressful crippled-giantness". For Awonsanmi, only a few productions negate "home-video's prevailing anti-aesthetic preoccupation with ideologically misguided esotericism through which a national culture is often derogatively primitivized".

often it is integral to the representation of modernity and modern wealth". It is "a crucial function of the video-films" (Haynes 2007b: 144). The significance of occult representations is widely acknowledged even though they have been solidly rejected as an adulteration of established local cultural production.

Occultism and magic in video-film are generally based on patron-clientelism which arguably characterises many social relations. In this way, magic is a visual language that expresses contemporary political and economic situations. Scholars such as Meyer (2003b), Okafor (2008) and Campbell (2011) argue that kinship and patron-clientelism networks that existed in traditional societies persist. Sandra Barnes (1986: 8) points out that patron - client relationships are reciprocal but they are unequal in that the status of the patron is higher than that of the client, and, further, the things exchanged are not of the same order. However, they frustrate the rich and the poor because the poor feel the rich do not share enough of the wealth and the rich feel there are too many demands (Smith 2001). Smith (2001: 803) refers to Peter Geschiere's notion of "the modernity of witchcraft", which characterises magic as "the antithesis of modernity" and espouses the idea that occultism, witchcraft and magic "are not archaic or exotic phenomenona, somehow isolated or disjointed from historical processes of global political and economic transformation . . . [rather], these are moral discourses alive to the basic coordinates of experience, highly sensitive to contradictions in economy and society" (Auslander in Smith 2001: 805). The argument is that the discourse about occultism or 'black magic'[75] in Africa is the underbelly of modernity.

Magic, Birgit Meyer (2003b: 4) argues, is associated with the Occidental world that is discussed within the "the anthropological 'witchcraft' paradigm". She argues that modern discourses position magic as an antithesis, reinventing it in the process that "distinguishes 'savage' or 'primitive' logic from a modern, Western one" (Meyer 2003b: 4). For Meyer (2003b: 6), "the temporal distancing of magic by classifying it as pre-modern could only take place in the anthropologists' own time and language; anthropologists contributed much to the re-invention of the discourses in which Europeans dealt with the occult". Centrally, the discourses around 'black magic' or witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa are materially developed around colonial politics and

[75] 'Black magic', as counterpart to 'white magic', is characterised by Robert Place (2009) as primitive. The attribution of 'black magic' to Africa, generally, is problematic.

post-colonial neo-liberal capitalism (Smith 2003: 806, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 284, Bayart 1993). Witchcraft and 'black magic' are then used to explain the severity of living conditions and the contradictions (excessive wealth alongside poverty) that exist.

2.2: Fetish(ism) and the Object of Money

The use of certain objects, such as sculptures, staffs, animal-skin bracelets, amulets, tree branches covered with cloth and other contraptions, for magic in Nollywood has establhed an intriguing visual language. It may be understood in the anthropological framework and within Marxist theory. Birgit Meyer (2003b: 8) notes that European Enlightenment intellectuals discussed exotic magic of fetishism as linked to a category of African religion: "a materialism incommensurable with Christian theology, conceived as the worship of haphazardly chosen material objects believed to be endowed with purpose, intention and a direct power over the material life of both human beings and the natural world". Fetishism was relegated to prescience rather than theology. Meyer (2003b: 8) observes that the materialist notion of fetishism became "prominent in Marxist theory, deploying an understanding of exotic magic along European fault lines of intellectual debates". The Marxist concept, in which relations between people are defined through the exchange of commodities, may illuminate dyadic interpretations of the money fantasy as magical or wealth as a result of (maleficent) magic. It is reminiscent of Laura Mulvey's (1999: 392) influential proposition that visual pleasure in film is structured by a patriarchal order and that film has "evolved a particular illusion of reality in which the contradiction between the libido and ego has found a beautifully complementary phantasy world".

The presence of allegiances to abstract power invested in objects associated with pre-modern and contemporary practices evokes Akinwumi Adesokan's (2011) notion of 'double fetishism'. Using Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*[76], Adesokan (2011) argues that the critique of 'double fetishism' refers to animist supernaturalism as well as exported commodities. This 'double fetishism' is also illustrated in Hugo's photograph of *Thompson, Asaba, Nigeria*, (2008), where a man clutches Naira notes to his chest and, with white coloration in his eyes, looks possessed by evil spirits [Fig. 32]. Although

[76] *Xala* (1975) is a renowned film by Senegalese filmmaker, Ousmane Sembene, which critiques the insatiable elite class that emerged after colonialism.

these forms of fetishism seem different, they are represented as mutually inclusive in video-film. For example, the artefact (or *ekpo* mask) in *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008) is invested with both kinds of fetishism. It functions in the shrine of the diviner as a powerful object that enables the diviner to perform magical sacraments on people who come to consult him (animist supernaturalism). When Paul and Silas steal it from the shrine and sell to the American for millions, it 'produces' or represents contemporary wealth which they use to buy expensive consumer goods (commodity fetishism). They also become more sexually active (there is the sexist assumption that women come where there is money, which reduces women to commodities as well). Although the video-film does not explicitly show why the American buys the artefact, it can be assumed that he is a collector who sells to other collectors as well as to museums and galleries in America. The term fetishism came to be associated with ethnographic objects consumed by European and American aficionados (Steiner 1994, Vergo 1989: 38). Its hyper-sexualised meaning is "bound up with European relations with the exotic, and particularly with Africa . . . and with the appropriation of this particular form of 'otherness' by art and by fashionable culture" (Vergo 1989: 38). The flipside of the political economy of 'traditional' objects as fetishes, is the assumption that Africans reject and prostitute these objects in exchange for objects exported from Europe or America.

Achille Mbembe suggests that "leaning upon the existence of a cult of fetishes whose essence was properly materialist and ceremonial (amulets, necklaces, pendants, costumes, charms, ornaments), a mercantilist ideology develops as a power over life (necromancy, invocation of spirits, witchcraft) and the figure of abundance" (Mbembe in Marshall 2009: 170). On one hand, Nollywood video-films represent fetish objects that effect magical happenings and, on the other, they express success in terms of commodities (objects such as cars, expensive attire, cigars, expensive drinks, furniture, etc.). Both forms of fetishism involve accumulation and symbolise power. An example is *Issakaba* (2008), directed by Lancelot Odua Imasuen. The narrative depicts a vigilante group that is co-opted by powerful men in order to root out evil. The success of this group of young men is ensured by magical herbs and various 'fetish' objects which protect them. In *Issakaba*, the use of a sculpture as a 'fetish' object is frequent. Ebube, the commander of the Issakaba vigilante group, visits the medicine man whom his

targets (corrupt men) consult in order to destroy them. The group visits the medicine man, who is believed to 'strengthen' armed robbers, but he fools them by disappearing into various sculptures out of which the medicine man's voice seems to emanate. In *Issakaba 4*, the group goes to the shrine of Ibudu, a powerful medicine man who worships a large sculpture. To destroy him, they pull an object out of that sculpture. The medicine man becomes a rock – an object which they can then destroy. These forms of magical objects, or objects that are 'reified' with mysterious power, are interrelated and obscure relations between people. They are depicted as powerful objects and confer power to the people who use them. In many cases this power is equated to money and interrelated with death.

In Marxist terms, upon entering the capitalist economy people exchange their labour to obtain objects or commodities. In Nollywood video-films, people's lives are sacrificed in order to obtain wealth that is expressed in the form of objects. The occult is always a syndicate of rich and powerful men (some of whom are chiefs), who have sacrificed their wives and children, foetuses or virgin girls and brought their dead bodies to the leader of the cult in order to have infinite wealth. In other cases, children are killed and their body parts are used to make powerful concoctions, or create powerful charms. For example, the head of a young girl, in *Issakaba*, is used to weaken the power of the vigilante group, and the dead bodies of three virgin girls are used to obtain wealth. The use of the dead body or body parts to obtain wealth in Nollywood is a significant aspect. It highlights the persisting rumours about ritual murders but also points to the notion that, instead of the use of the body as commodity in the form of labour, there is the magical transformation of the incapacitated body into money to obtain commodities. Usually, it is bodies of people who own nothing else but their own bodies. Nollywood narratives construct a scenario where death and money are equated.

Marx (1977: 83) observes that there is "a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things . . . similar to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world". In this argument, objects are personified and abstract ideas are objectified. For Marx (1977: 87) "the whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes therefore, so soon as we come to other forms of production". The notion of necromancy, the art of communicating with

the deceased, suggests the process in which objects as the result of labour obscure or eradicate the subject who labours. As Berkely Kaite (1995: 6) argues, the concept of commodity fetish maintains the "the emphasis on the phantom images of ideology [. . .], the processes of exchange whereby objects embody 'dead labour' and are vitalised by the way they are invested with properties beyond their physicality". The high numbers of unemployment discussed earlier, or the gaining of wealth by a few without labour in the Petro-Naira context, accentuate the idea of magic (oblique references to fatal results of oil extraction by international corporations). Furthermore, 'dead labour' is symbolised by the representation of women whose foetuses are extracted for occult purposes.

This fantastical construction of relations that involves magic alludes to the ominous situation which is expressed by the sentiment that, because the state distances itself from civil society and there is an assumption that the politically and economically powerful enrich themselves and neglect public services, most people lose their lives unnecessarily. Often, it is not easy to make these assertions as they are constituted of things that are known and things that are imagined, producing a fantastical version of reality. The notion of the 'fetish' in Nollywood video-film implies criminalisation of the elite or ruling classes, who are rumoured to mete out unspeakable violence through magical forces that are too horrid to imagine.

2.3: Violence and Construction of the Criminal

It can be said that part of the reason that Nollywood video-films have gained popularity is that they capture popular imaginations that relate violence through supernatural practices to political and economic inequality. *Issakaba* begins with a scene depicting a circle of machetes and the crass public decapitation of a disabled beggar by a group of armed young men. The minibus filled with men carrying guns and machetes speeds into the scene. Seconds later, the head of the beggar rolls off and his decapitated body spews blood. The main character, Ebube (played by Sam Dede), assures the public that they have just killed a criminal who was pretending to be a beggar and victoriously announces that "justice has come to town". He then turns around and shoots the fresh corpse. The young men are part of an independent group that believes that mob justice is the only way to root out corruption and criminality in society and amongst the ruling class. There are no trials or processes of redemption. People are simply killed publicly

and in irrevocably cruel ways. Over the four parts (each over an hour long) that make up this video-film, the viewer witnesses images of limbs that are chopped off by the use of machetes, bodies that are burnt and shot, bodies that are turned into stone and urinated on, and eyes that are gouged out of the decapitated head of a girl which is later buried as a charm, amongst other horrific scenes.

When the first son of Chief Odugo is captured and beaten mercilessly by the Issakaba, they use magic *juju* to make him confess that he robbed the corporative bank and murdered four people. He has a gaping scar from a machete blow across his forehead. He is then brutally killed by the Issakaba. All these brutal scenes are portrayed as *right* and *necessary* in the absence of state intervention. For example, there is a scene in which a woman walks into a police station crying that she has been attacked and her car stolen. The police who were leisurely reading soccer match results in a newspaper do not pay her any attention. In desperation she starts condemning them. One of the police officers states "Madam, you want to teach us our job?"[77] They tell her to fill in a statement and leave. She refuses when the station manager walks in and asks her to give the description of her car and details about what was in it. She tells them she had ten thousand Naira and jewellery worth one hundred thousand Naira. The station manager then tells her that they do not have the resources to chase the thieves. He tells her to leave and return in two weeks. As soon as she leaves, the police conspire to look for the car in order to take the money and the valuables that are in it for themselves. In another scene, Chief Mbanefo is depicted consorting with a police officer and offering bribes. The sentiment that the 'law is too slow' surfaces. In the video-film, state law enforcement and criminals are depicted with the same kind of monstrosity. The politicians and police are depicted as criminal.

In *Issakaba*, the vigilante group of young men is formed in order to curb crime. They mete out punishment in public displays of violence. The failure or absence of a judiciary system justifies the inhumane acts that involve people being mutilated and burnt in public spaces which draw large crowds. The film *Issakaba* is a reference to the vigilante group, the Bakassi Boys who operated in the 1990s (Issakaba is Bakassi spelt backwards with an added 'a'). Daniel Jordan Smith (2004: 429), who writes about the

[77] *Issakaba 1-4*, (2000-2001) Dir. Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen. Kas-Vid and Mosco (Nigeria)

Bakassi Boys, argues that crime in Nigeria "is portrayed as both the cause and consequence of the nation's ills" – a conception that legitimises public displays of brutal violence. Smith (2004) suggests that the public acceptance of violent displays by vigilante groups can be explained by the collective memories of military rule. What is disturbing, however, is the brutality of the executions, some of which have been harshly criticised by Human Rights groups. By killing people in public, the Issakaba in the video-film also enforce a warning to other criminals. As mentioned beore in one of the scenes in the film, a body is decapitated and then shot. The excessive violence in public spaces makes an allusion to Mark Seltzer's notion of a "pathological public sphere" through which he argues that "contemporary publics are constituted at the scene of the crime (Seltzer in Comaroff and Comaroff 2004: 804). Rendering the market square as the site of crime and a site of punishment is symbolic of fundamental co-ordinates of shared moral principles and responsibility. The public-ness of the violent vigilante group represents "protection" for traders. Smith (2004: 433) observes that the market is central "in Igbo economic and symbolic life" as well as "associated modes of organizations to protect public and community interests". To elucidate this statement, he argues that the market represents "rhythms of daily life" and that "in contemporary Nigeria, nearly every Igbo person spends a significant portion of his or her productive life in the market as either a buyer or seller" (Smith 2004: 433). The market can be seen as a space of fantastic revelation, where, in the 'rhythms of everyday life', extraordinary and grotesque displays of violence are demonstrated. However, violent displays are welcome as a demonstration of the protection of the market from armed robbers.

There is a perception that the vigilante groups are able to provide this protection successfully because they are protected by supernatural forces. The members of the Issakaba in the video-film are depicted as supernaturally protected. Through the use of *juju*, they become invincible: machetes do not wound them and bullets do not penetrate their bodies. The group uses charms to get people to confess their evil deeds. However, the people that they target also use magic charms to protect themselves during their exploits in ritual murder and armed robbery. In the video-film, it is explained that the Issakaba derives its magical power from a mythical ancient warrior. This warrior pursued justice, killed 'evildoers' and became invincible until he mistakenly killed a young girl. This led to his demise and the loss of his powers. The depiction of this

vigilante group is consonant with perceptions regarding the use of supernatural forces during the rise of vigilantism in Nigeria (Ekeh 2002, McCall 2004, Pratten 2008). In the video-film, there is a co-dependence of the reality of murder and armed robbery with folklore. There is a network of supernatural powers used by those who are 'evil' and those who are 'good'. Some of these powers are represented by objects that are carried around or neckpieces and bangles that are worn.

The mystification of the vigilante group is also similar to the mystification of criminals. Criminals are shown consulting medicine men for protection and drinking dubious concoctions to be 'fortified' so that no weapon can harm them. The form of protection for both criminals and vigilante groups is similar. Towards the end of the film, the members of the Issakaba lose their popularity and people begin seeing them as criminals who consort with corrupt politicians and businessmen. Similarly, the Bakassi Boys began to resemble "a criminal gang rather than a supernaturally sanctioned force… all were dressed in black; several of them had tied red bandanas around their heads; most wore dark glasses, even though it was just after dawn, and necklaces with amulets that signify *juju* (magical charms)" (Smith 2004: 439). Criminals symbolise power in that they threaten existing boundaries of order. Comaroff and Comaroff (2004: 807) state that "the felon personifies an existence beyond the law, an existence at once awesome, at once awful, and sublime". Drawing from Walter Benjamin's assertion that "violence in its archetypal, mythic form was a 'manifestation of the gods'", Comaroff and Comaroff (2004: 807–8) suggest that "great criminals, even when their ends are repellent, arouse a secret admiration of the public". Furthermore, both the criminal and the vigilante instil fear and seem to control the public space.

Representations of public violence in other interpretations of Nollywood, such as Hugo's photographs, allude to the intersection of the private with the public in fantastic imagery. For example, murders that seem to be private affairs, ritual murders conducted in the dark or in private or secret places are represented in daylight and in public. The uneasiness of the public/private dialectic of violence that is conveyed by these images illuminates an important aspect of the fantastic: the notion that the fantastic is constituted of private desires which involve or can be obtained through violence and which, if attained, are played out in public. In one of Hugo's photographs, Hugo is masked in a balaclava (which is associated with criminal intent, corruption and

vice) and wears only his underpants and carries a machete [Fig. 33]. Another photograph that appears to be in direct contrast with that depicting Hugo, is the portrait of Azuka Adindu. Adindu is dressed in nothing more than a Darth Vader[78] mask [Fig. 34]. The strangeness in the stark public nakedness of the man illuminates the sexualisation of violence. By some contortion of a iconological history of the sexualised body, Adindu's penis is framed as a thing of monstrosity (not only by the material limit of the visual medium but also by the tendency of the eye to develop a habit of looking for strange grotesqueries in each portrait because, arguably, the entire series trains it to indulge on the corruption of form). The Darth Vader mask in this photograph complicates the notion of real violence against playful performed violence.

In most of Hugo's photographs, those portrayed (including Hugo) carry weapons. Hugo exchanges the camera for the machete. Noticeably, the weapons in the Nollywood photographic series are carried almost feebly, without particular threat, and at times they even appear as purposeless accessories, physical, limblike extensions of the "Other" who is constructed as inherently violent. The axe in *Escort Kama, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008) [Fig. 35]) hangs loosely in Escort's hand. He wears a pink mask and stands in front of a vacant billboard towering behind him. Song Iyke's gun in *Song Iyke with Onlookers, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008) [Fig. 28) is merely an object for exhibition in the same way that guns furnish the arms of the women dressed and posed like militia in the photograph *Chommy Choko Eli, Florence Owanta, Kelechi Anwuacha, Enugu* (2008; Fig. 36). *Omo Omeonu, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008) [Fig. 37) depicts a dwarf whose toy-like sword seems to mock his physique. While the inclusion of weapons makes those that are portrayed appear initially as 'perpetrators' of violence, it also ambiguously casts them as victims. They appear profoundly wounded [Fig. 38, 39, 40]. Even if the viewer is arguably aware that the blood and scars are not real, (s)he is reminded of deeper psychologically-transmuted, politically-provoked and socially-aggravated wounds. The strangeness of the characters in Hugo's photographs can be seen as what Kristeva (1991: 46) regards as "the political facet of violence". The characters carry weapons as a performance of crime and criminalisation. However, even the performance of violent crime has the effect of horror. Slavoj Žižek (1997: 6) suggests that "the relationship between fantasy and horror of the real is concealed" by a "gentrification of the

[78] Darth Vader is a tragic character in Star Wars, a slave boy who becomes a combination of synthetic and organic. He is a quintessential villain.

catastrophe" that occurs as the "ultimate horrible thing" is obscured by the rationalised image.

Crime and violence in Nigerian cities is said to have led to self-imposed curfews (Smith 2004). It increased consciousness about where and when public space could be occupied, or rather it organised public space and time. In a Foucauldian sense, "the theatricality of pre-modern power gives way to ever more implicit, internalised, capillary kinds of discipline" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004: 804). The immense power that is implied in the ability to organise time and space as it is experienced is also expressed in the imagination of the supernatural in crime. The ability to pass judgement and determine life and death through excessive violence confers power. Comaroff and Comaroff (2004: 808) note that "violence is immensely productive, sometimes horrifyingly so; quite apart from its capacity to redirect the flow of wealth, it usurps representation, reveals the limits of order, and justifies state monopolies over the means of coercion". Violence maintains rectitude insofar as it exhibits publicly the distinction between good and bad, order and disorder or security and vulnerability. When the members of the vigilante group, Issakaba, were suspected to be criminals themselves, the staging of violence became wrong. The dualism disintegrates into chaos and terror.

2.4: Power, Authority and Public Intervention

The hesitation, defined by Todorov (1973) as a key feature of the fantastic, suggests that power plays a key role in formulations of the fantastic. There is, firstly, the power that is lost by the reader/viewer during the moment of hesitation in reading the intrusion of the strange in the ordinary. Then, secondly, since this loss of power is experienced through one of the characters within a fantastic narrative, it suggests an abstract source of power. In this way power appears as something that cannot be achieved without magic: the power of the state, power of money, or power of capitalism seems supernatural and fantastic. It is as though reading the visual language of Nollywood video-film signifies loss of authority on the democratised meaning-making process.

Nollywood video-film often depicts power and the powerless. For example, women whose husbands join occult groups and murder their babies find themselves helpless given patriarchal and masculine power. If women are depicted as powerful, then they

are witches or ghosts, or consort with some or other form of supernatural evil. Power is given values: it is evil (or good in the case of Christian films), masculine and can be displayed through conspicuous consumption.

In her discussion of Achille Mbembe's suggestion that the exercise of power in Africa has a "secret origin", Ruth Marshall (2009: 168) argues that power is "symbolized in the world of the invisible and supernatural". Further, she notes that "control over and conspicuous consumption of scarce [prestigious] goods – Western commodities and knowledge, women, children and allies – are historically at the heart of local modes of domination" (Marshall 2009: 168). Marshall (2009: 168) notes that the investment of Africans "in this hybrid economy was essential to colonial rule". Power in the African context is bifurcated into power in native authority and modern power (Mamdani 1996: 17)

In the video-film, the group of young men called Issakaba is co-opted by chiefs, kings and other statesmen to "cleanse the land" and root out corruption amongst politicians and businessmen and maintain the safety of their property. Yet they viciously kill each individual that they find guilty. The king and chiefs donate Mercedes Benz cars as well as ten-million Naira to co-opt Issakaba. What this film depicts does not stray too far from actual events in Nigeria. The rise of vigilantism during the 1990s in Nigeria was due to the discontent with authorities and the belief that politicians are in alliance with criminals. Daniel Jordan Smith (2004: 429) notes that "there were many violent vigilante groups in 1990s"; a phenomenon which "has to do with inequality and power" as well as the increasing "questioning of the authority of the state". Smith uses the Bakassi Boys as an example. His account of this vigilante group is strikingly similar to the depiction of the Issakaba vigilantes in the Nollywood film.

In the film, Ebube explains that the Issakaba started in Ayaba where they used to trade. People "lived in mortal fear: nights were like hell, every morning there was a corpse in the streets". Since armed robbers targeted people who came to the market, the escalating crime was affecting business. Fewer customers came to the market. Ebube states that they formed the vigilante group when an important customer was killed and three million Naira was taken from her. On that day they killed seventy-two known armed robbers. Following this, they were co-opted and sponsored by chiefs and other

political authorities to kill suspected criminals. They carried out these executions in public, staging these as public spectacles. The Issakaba became very popular but lost that popularity when people began to think that its members were killing wantonly and were colluding with corrupt politicians to make money. Similarly, the Bakassi Boys, as documented by Smith (2004) were “initially made up of young traders and other young men paid with contributions provided by the traders' association”. It is argued that the prevalence of death resulting from armed robbery was a daily occurrence. The Bakassi Boys were based in Aba’s main market, where they publicly executed alleged criminals based on what they called “instant justice” (Smith 2004: 431). These violent displays attracted large crowds and, according to Smith (2004: 431), involved the Bakassi Boys killing “these alleged criminals with machete blows, dismembering their bodies and then burning them at the site of the execution”. The Bakassi Boys also became popular and were provided with support and legitimacy by local politicians in Abia and Anambra states. They were given funding, vehicles, and political cover. They were also glorified with formal names such as “the Abia State Vigilante Services and Anambra Vigilante Services” (Smith 2004: 431). In the same way that the Issakaba in the film lost their popularity, the Bakassi Boys were suspected to have been corrupted through the patronage links with local politicians.

The film *Issakaba* (2008) represents the patron–clientelism, extreme poverty beside the infinite riches possessed by politicians, chiefs and kings, as well as the criminal acts perpetrated by that same class. Furthermore, it depicts the lack of state protection for the average citizen but also the increasing inaccessibility to power networks. When the chiefs decide to co-opt the Issakaba, they argue that they need vigilantes for the safety of the land and their property. Their interests lie in protecting themselves. The Issakaba, however, punishes indiscriminately. Chiefs and their children become targets. The *igwe*’s (king) son, Osita, is captured by the Issakaba and his arm is chopped off with a machete. In the presence of the public, the *igwe* opts to let the Issakaba kill his son to legitimate the work of Issakaba. The *igwe* states that his son has dragged his name through the mud and therefore he will not intervene in the Issakaba’s work.

In *Issakaba 3*, the chiefs decide that there are many among their ranks that have been killed by the Issakaba. In their discussion, they agree that the Issakaba is “a political strategy, a civil coup”. They then decide to patronise a splinter group from the Issakaba,

made up of criminals, to kill and rape innocent people licentiously. In his article, Smith (2004) argues that "vigilantism effectively deflected or obscured the role of politicians and the state in perpetuating the conditions that produced crime, insecurity, and inequality". Although the vigilantes demonstrated power through violence, they still provided a façade or a veil that conceals the matrix of power and control held by politicians and elite patrons. That is, the state was not always perceived to be accountable for the breakdown in the first place.

Vigilantism seemed to provide an alternative to state intervention. Smith (2004: 429-30) explains the authority that vigilantism gained through contextualising civil society as an entity that is modelled on neo-liberal ideals:

> More ethnographic approaches to the study of African civil society recognize the importance of institutions and forms of social organization that neoliberal conceptions assume are inimical to democracy, such as kin groups, ethnic associations, religious organizations, and indeed, vigilante groups. The rise of the Bakassi Boys, the popularity they once enjoyed, and their eventual demise can only be understood in the context of an intertwining of the state and civil society that challenges neoliberal assumption… Popular support for vigilantism [grew], even as the Bakassi Boys appeared to perpetrate violence and injustices that surpassed the deeds of the criminals that vigilantism was designed to combat.

The almost deliberate incoherence of state power becomes apparent. In the film, when people are killed, civilians report to the *igwe* (any traditional Igbo king). It is rare that state policing is represented as the first call. Nollywood video-films make state authority seem inept and corrupt.

Ruth Marshall (2009: 168) observes that "the problem of corruption and the illicit or transgressive also relates to the historical structuring of desire" or what Mbembe calls a "moral economy of corruption" (Mbembe in Marshall 2009: 168). Marshall (2009: 168) explains that "this historical exercise of power (colonial libidinal) has given rise to certain aesthetics of violence and excess". This aesthetic is characterised by magic: disbelief in the kinds of oppression and dispossession exacted by the colonial experience. Marshall (2009: 168) further argues that "in its excess of violence and phantasmagorical projections, what Mbembe terms the 'accursed share' of colonial rule has its logic in sacrificial reason by which the indigene is transformed into an animal, a process that also involves the dehumanisation of the coloniser". It is precisely this

process that makes the notion of the fantastic an important heuristic tool for Nollywood video-film. It illuminates how contemporary dehumanisation is manifest in Nollywood fantastic narratives. Marshall (2009: 169) aptly points out that "through a contradictory process of 'injury' and 'healing', in terms of which the body is at once 'stripped, enchained, forced to work, beaten, deported, put to death' and 'healed, educated, dressed, fed and remunerated'", a hybrid regime "concentrates the attributes of logic (reason), fantasy (the arbitrary) and cruelty". Further, she states that "this administration of terror passes through a certain staging of true and false, a certain rationing of prebends and gratifications, the production of things at once moving, captivating and always spectacular" (Marshall 2009: 169). It creates a "phantasmal apparatus whose cornerstone is the idea that 'there is no limit to wealth and property, and thus desire'" (Marshall 2009: 168). The depiction of violent power in Nollywood video-film can be read against this background, where continued dispossession constructs the semiotics for its visual language.

Since Nollywood video-film is regarded as a 'culture of the masses', it can be argued that it represents the agency and power/ disempowerment of the masses. Its depiction of occultism can be read as a critique of authority or the elite, but ambiguously so. The elite is depicted as a fantastic crowd who have supernatural power and consort with the supernatural to have the things (such as power through wealth) that the 'masses' desire. Given that the construction of desire is the same – it is about having power over other people and over objects (money) – the 'power of the masses' appears ambivalent (both consumerist and anti-consumerist, in that they also generally illustrate how such power can be destructive). I explore this ambivalence in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter treats the 'visual language' of video-film through not only what it seems to 'say' but also how the 'intonations' or accents of that visual language are created through the medium. Video-film as a visual practice incites questions regarding modes of seeing and modes of representation. In the first section, I discuss the 'presence' of the medium in the image. With Nollywood video-film, the viewer is aware of both the outside (production) and inside (narrative) of the film. The viewer is aware of the sometimes cacophonous sound, the pixelation, the repetition and other kinds of "glitches". The serial format produces a temporal structure through which video-film

can be read. Its depiction of 'reality' in its slow, banal pace brings the process of reading video-film reality closer to conceptualisations of the fantastic (hesitation). Further, it recognises the way in which text is not only a vehicle for understanding the narrative but also forms part of the visual image. The 'wordedness' and loudness in video-film reflects the aesthetic of popular imagination and popular storytelling. The use of music in video-film as a narrative form is drawn from long-etablished practices but it also informs the way in which the fantastic is read. In the second section, I examine several themes that formulate the fantastic in Nollywood. Magic and fetishism, violence and power are some of the core leitmotifs that style most Nollywood narratives as fantastic, and generate expressions about dispossession while they operate in the manufacture of desire. As a visual language Nollywood video-film, illuminates dynamics of value. If, for the sake of argument, it is regarded as a low form of art, because of its medium and its themes, and in relation to Western art and art history, then it provokes the necessary questions about constructions of value. This next chapter addresses the inter-media and inter-disciplinary nature of Nollywood and analyses how value is constructed.

Images

Fig. 5: Wangechi Mutu, *Shoe Shoe* (2010), Installation view.

Fig. 6: Osuofia on a double-decker bus, *Osuofia in London* (2003)

Fig. 7: Osuofia arrested in London, *Osuofia in London* (2003)

Fig. 8: Photograph of street life in Lagos, Photogaph taken by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 9: Osuofia on his okada, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

Fig. 10: Selling 'black market' fuel, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

Fig. 11: Advert for ‘African artefact’, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

Fig. 12: Mask in the diviners shrine, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

Fig. 13: Mask emitting ‘magical’ rays during the theft, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

Fig. 14: Paul and Silas browsing for luxury cars, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

Fig. 15: Stolen mask haunts collector in America, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

Fig. 16: Blind and mute Paul and Silas wait selling 'black market' fuel, *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008)

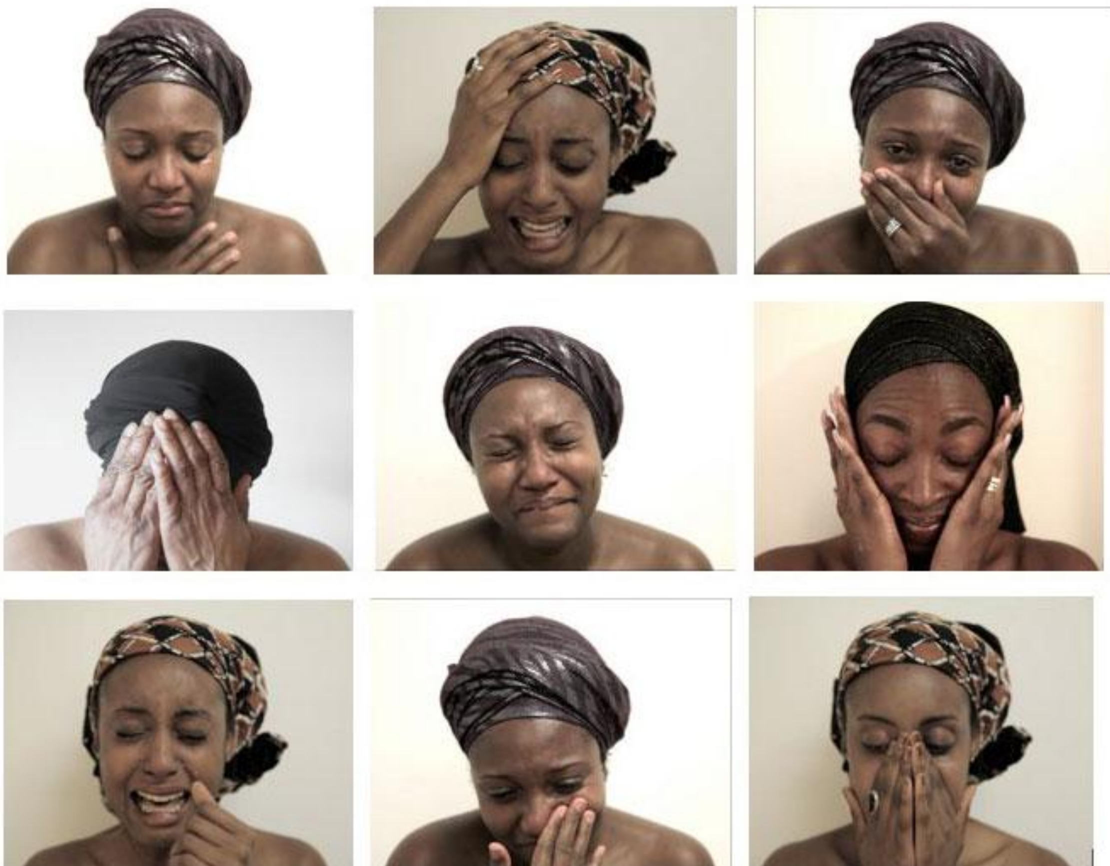

Fig. 17: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *The Mourning Class* (2010)

Fig. 18: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *The Mourning Class* (2010), installation views
http://camerainthesun.com/?p=6617

Fig. 19: Zina Saro-Wiwa, Nollywood Titles for the exhibition *Sharon Stone in Abuja* (2010)

Fig. 20: Okafor soliloquy, *Osuofia in London* (2003)

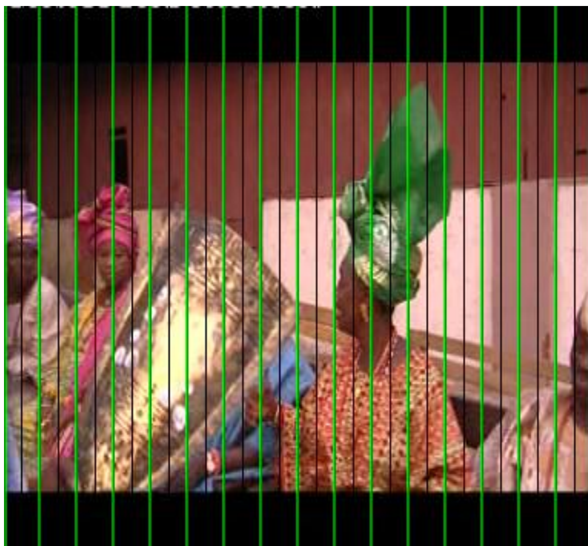

Fig. 21: The clapperless bell in *Agogo Ewo* (2002)

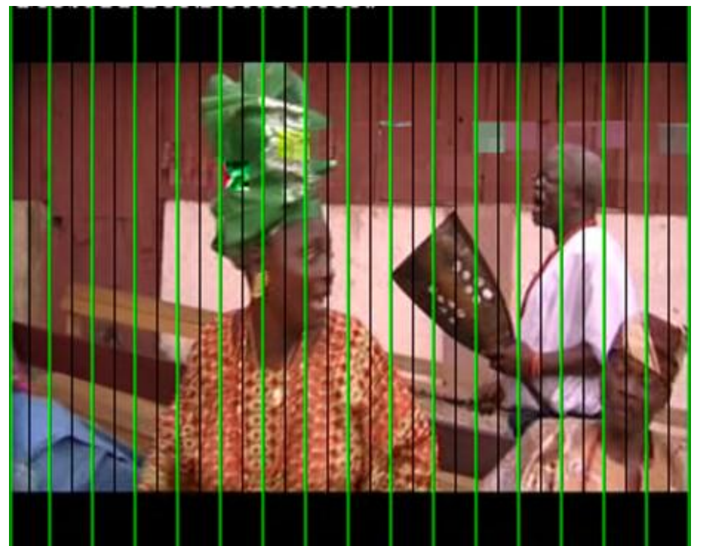

Fig. 22.: The clapperless bell in *Agogo Ewo* (2002)

Fig. 23: Pieter Hugo, *Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh*, Enugu, Nigeria (2008)

Fig. 24: Pieter Hugo, *Linus Okereke, Enugu, Nigeria* (2009)

Fig. 25: Pieter Hugo, *Patience Umeh, Junior Ofokansi, Chidi Chukwukere. Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 26: Pieter Hugo, *Chika Onyejekwe, Junior Ofokansi, Thomas Okafor, Enugu, Nigeria* (2009)

Fig. 27: Pieter Hugo, *Linus Okereke, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 28: Pieter Hugo, *Song Iyke with onlookers, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 29: Pieter Hugo, *Fidelis Elenwa, Enugu, Nigeria* (2009)

Fig. 30: Pieter Hugo, *Ngozi Oltiri, Enugu, Nigeria* (2009)

Fig. 31: Pieter Hugo, *Princess Adaobi, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 32: Pieter Hugo, *Thompson Asaba, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 33: *Pieter Hugo, Enugu, Nigeria* (2009)

Fig. 34: Pieter Hugo, *Azuka Adindu, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 35: Pieter Hugo, *Escort Kama, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 36: Pieter Hugo, *Chommy Choko Eli, Florence Owanta, Kelechi Anwuacha. Enugu* (2008)

Fig. 37: Pieter Hugo, *Omo Omeonu, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 38: Pieter Hugo, *Rose Njoku, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 39: Pieter Hugo, *Tarry King Ibuzo, Enugu, Nigeria* (2008)

Fig. 40: Pieter Hugo, *Kelechi Nwanyeali, Enugu, Nigeria* (2009)

Chapter 2
Nollywood and the Cultural Logics of Value

The escalating interest in Nollywood is driven paradoxically by the recognition of its historical and cultural significance (in its assertion of an alternative to Western culture) on one hand, and the criticism that it is primitivist or regressive 'fake art' on the other (in its emphasis on the fantastic and the supernatural). The fantastic is linked to how it is perceived and given cultural value. Discourses about the low-quality Nollywood video-film are accompanied by perceptions that, because it has a "gaudy visual style that robs the productions of memorable pathos and artistry" (Adesanya 1997: 19), it needs to be 'fixed' or 'improved'. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the bases on which fantastic imagery in Nollywood is created and to argue that rather than seeing the fantastic as a negative element that contributes to the perception of Nollywood as 'low culture', it is necessary to interrogate the imported cultural value systems upon which Nollywood is judged.

The discussions at the *Nollywood in Africa, Africa in Nollywood* conference that was held at the Pan African University in 2011 suggested the start of a 'new' Nollywood that is of better quality and has rational (or without supernatural content), well-styled, if not didactic, content[79]. There has also been a sense of shame among the middle classes about consuming Nollywood. When I interviewed Onookome Okome in Pretoria, he divulged how some colleagues responded to his interest in Nollywood. He was asked: "How can you come all the way from Canada and tell me you are studying this nonsense?"[80]

During my first research trip to Lagos, there was a similar sentiment expressed in informal conversations. Okome mentions that some would say: "Well, I just listen to my kids talk about it"[81]. These perceptions pose the questions: what are ways of valueing culture; is the value of a product determined by stereotypes around *who* makes it and

[79] The idea of a 'new' Nollywood seeks to include a 'new' generation of filmmakers who have studied film and produce professional celluloid films. Scholars such as Jonathan Haynes reject the notion of a 'new' Nollywood.
[80] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria
[81] Ibid.

who consumes it. If it is a ‘product of the masses’, requiring no visual literacy[82], then how do we comprehend its positioning within the socio-economic conditions that have produced it as well as the academic disciplines through which it has been interrogated? In this chapter, I discuss the Nollywood aesthetic in its socio-economic Petro-Naira context. In order to interrogate its ‘place’ within culture, I unpack the cultural practices that preceded it and contributed to how it is fashioned. I also analyse the categorisation of Nollywood as popular culture or as proletarian culture and examine the imposed terms such as kitsch.

The condescension of the arts of Africa in the discipline of art history reflects a hierarchical value system through which *difference* is emphasised. Considering, for example, the controversial exhibition entitled *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* that was shown at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York in 1984, art from Africa was used to endorse or legitimate the creativity of Western artists. Although some of the objects from Africa have gained value within Western museums and galleries, they still seem to be framed as ‘exotic’ objects. James Clifford (1988: 215) observes that there is an “art-culture system through which exotic objects have been contextualised and given a value in the West”. Moreover, this focus on the object seemed to split things that are cultural (popular culture) from things that are artistic. The hierarchical relationship between the two places fine art as a higher and prioritised category. James Clifford (1988: 226) argues that “things of cultural and historical value may be *promoted* to the status of fine art” (own emphasis) but, “conversely, various forms of ‘anti-art’ or art parading its ‘unoriginality’ and ‘inauthenticity’ [such as Andy Warhol’s soup can or Marcel Duchamp’s urinal]” is also valued. While Clifford critiques this system, it is evident that the value structure in question is not consistent. How are ‘promotions’ to fine art determined? Why does fine art have pre-eminence over (popular) culture?

Considering Blier’s (2001: 18) observation, mentioned earlier, that most of the African art objects “were first seen in performance”, then the inseparability of (popular) culture and art means that neither is inferior even in the capitalist emphasis on object as commodity (value) rather than performative/interactive culture. The problem, however, with this inseparability, is that both objects and the cultures where the objects

[82] Ibid.

are deemed to originate are then both regarded by the Western system as 'exotic' and therefore of less value. Nollywood video-film is exoticised or treated as a curiosity (I will elaborate later in this chapter). Consequently, it is not so easy to categorise it as 'popular culture' if the meaning of 'popular culture' is not critically unpacked. I suggest that that if the word 'popular' in culture is understood dialectically, then it should not refer to general but specific practices that fuction within specific value systems. The notion of popular culture should be context-specific.

Nick Enfield (2000: 35) instigates that "the mutual assumption of particular cultural ideas provides human groups with common premises for predictably convergent inferential processes . . . ". The implied process of making meaning and attaching value via stereotypes affects how Nollywood video-film is interpreted as a 'low-value' cultural product. The undertone of 'the masses' must be unpacked because the negotiation of class differences and social mobilisation is context-specific. When discussing 'the masses' or 'popular tastes', it is important to examine what the persisting distinctions or *differences* mean in the contemporary milieu. It is not only class distinction that assume a hierarchy but also the ethno-religious categories in Nollywood. Jonathan Haynes (2007a: 134) asserts that the term 'Nollywood' refers "principally to southern Nigerian, English-language films, whose distribution is largely controlled by Igbo marketers, but which are made by people from the full range of southern Nigerian ethnicities". While I was in Lagos, some colleagues would advise that Yorùbá films are of better quality than Igbo films, whereas some would say that it is the Igbo films that have catapulted the industry into what it is.

The predominance of themes regarding wealth in video-film illuminates processes of globalisation from which utopias are imagined. The emphasis on class differences (which are also emphasised in the urban–rural dynamics in Nollywood representations) can be characterised by a 'fantastic transcendence' towards a world of abundance. The concept of 'the masses' is that it is constituted by people who have "a fantastic conception of [their] own position" made up by "fantastic pictures of future society" and "dream of an experimental realization of their [. . .] utopias" (Cowling 1998: 36). If the 'masses' are understood to be proletarians, then their relations to the elite are significant. At its onset, the production of Nollywood video-film depended on patrons,

business people, traders, and, more recently, churches and banks[83]. The construction and realisation of utopias necessitate the "appeal to the philanthropy of the bourgeois purse" and "eventually become conservative and distinguish themselves by a systematic, pedantry [. . .] fantastic faith in the miraculous effects of their social science" (Marx and Engels 1977: 25). Patronage (of churches, for example) has contributed to making Nollywood video-films come across as propaganda for kitsch, popular tastes.

The Nigerian home video industry has a decentralised structure. This is also interpreted by some scholars (Adesokan 2009) as a 'democratisation' of the medium. It is dissimilar to the vertically-integrated studio system of 1930s Hollywood, where "the cycle of production, distribution and exhibition was centrally managed by the studios"[84], or the National Socialist Film industry of 1930s East Germany, which was centrally managed by government agencies such as *Hauptverwaltung Film* (Berghahn 2005: 22). Nollywood has developed organically without state funding and foreign funding. Nollywood can therefore be seen as entrepreneurial. There are many narratives that surface regarding the genesis of Nollywood. The most accepted account of the origins of Nollywood is that it began in 1992 when an Igbo businessman, Kenneth Nnebue, produced a film directed by Chris Obi Rapu entitled *Living in Bondage* in order to sell the excess imported blank Video Home System (VHS) cassettes. While this account makes it appear as if Nollywood was from the start merely a commercial quest rather than creative practice, some of the practitioners were from the National Television Authority (NTA) and the Yorùbá travelling theatre known as *Alarinjo* who were adept at creating cultural performances. Therefore, the notion that Nollywood video-film is kitschy and low quality directs our attention to the *conditions* within which it is produced. Sylvester Ogbechie[85] regards these conditions as temporary and warns against seeing Nollywood for what can be argued to be an "accidental" or circumstantial rather than an "intentional" aesthetic.

1: The Nollywood Aesthetic in the 'Petro-Naira Context'

The Nollywood video-film visual langauge, as discussed in the previous chapter is characterised by bad-quality images, poor sound and over-dramatic performances. Brian Larkin (2004a: 290) attributes this aesthetic to piracy, which can be regarded as

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[83] Makhubu, N. Interview with Ifanye Ezekwe (Mr Fixit), 2011/07/17, Lagos
[84] This has changed over the years.
[85] Makhubu, N. Interview with Sylvester Ogbechie, 2011/03/25, Los Angeles, California

an infrastructural mode that "is expressive of a paradigmatic shift in Nigerian economy and capital". The chairman of the Performing and Mechanical Rights Society (PMRS), Chief Tony Okoroji, argued that, in fact, one has to regard the Nollywood industry as two separate practices: namely Nollywood and Alaba,[86] in which the latter compromises the former[87]. Okoroji calls this situation "Monkey dey work, Baboon dey chop". The "monkeys", argues Okoroji, are "the incredibly inventive movie producers [based in Surulere, Lagos] who sometimes have to sell the only piece of land in the family to raise between three million Naira and five million Naira, the cost of the average Nigerian home movie". The baboons, on the other hand, pirate and "[feed] fat from the labour of the monkeys [and] are the probably more inventive and devil-may-care traders, a lot of whom have made Alaba market in Lagos their base"[88]. In this paper, Okoroji argues that state agencies and related coalitions have no resources to stop these detrimental practices because they cannot match the violence of the traders.

The video culture arose, argues Adesokan (2011: 84), "where life at the crossroads of capital, being a series of improvisations and recycling of materials, every day economic activities followed the pattern of large scale reconstitution of standards and the undercapitalization of economic practices". The video-film phenomenon, Adesokan (2011: 84) argues, "is best seen in the context of pervasive informal, improvisatory social formation", where an "owner of a video camera visiting a private party could record the event, with or without permission, and then producing videotapes for sale to attendees" or "music videos featuring lip-syncing actors". The economic reforms enforced through the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), based on the neo-liberal free market logic, had devastating economic effects that led to privatisation and the devaluation of currency (Adesokan 2011: 83). SAPs protected "the interests of transnational capital" (Adesokan 2011: 83), and are generally cited as the reason for the decreased capacity of the Nigerian government to fund its cultural programmes and to provide basic services (such as electricity and running water) to its inhabitants (Larkin 2000, Haynes 1995).

[86] Alaba refers to the practices of traders in the market who make quick, cheap films or pirate existing ones. The Alaba international market in Lagos is one of the largest markets and is regarded as a "centre for piracy" (Oladunjoye 2008: 67)

[87] Paper delivered in August 2006 at the National Workshop on Developing an Intellectual Property Strategy that was held in Abuja.

[88] Ibid.

Moreover, the oil boom of the 1970s affected social and economic negotiations within cultural life.

The fantastic Nollywood aesthetic can be understood in the context of a petroleum-based economy and the repressive military politics that pervade Nigeria's history. Writing in 1982, Karin Barber linked the creative production of popular Yorùbá travelling theatre (from which many argue Nollywood is derived) to the Petro-Naira. (Though I will discuss the travelling theatre at a later stage, I find that the observations made by Barber are useful in understanding the context of Nollywood as well.) For Barber (1982: 432), the oil boom shaped the content and ways in which theatrical stories were told and integrated fantastic narratives regarding instant oil wealth. Barber (1982: 432), however, observes that "a work of literature cannot be read as a straight source of sociological information" but can be seen as "the outcome of labour performed on . . . ideological materials" that are available in the (social) position that the author occupies. In this way, the fantastic narratives produced by the author are in part also products of the author's position within her/his socio-political context. Furthermore, she argues that, in order to "smooth over [the] evidence of social conflicts", the author adds "an imaginary resolution" which represents the "silences, the things the text cannot say", or how people talk about the ways in which the Petro-Naira affects them (Barber 1982: 432). Nollywood is also a mode of expression which reflects how people are affected by this political economy.

It is worth recalling that Nigeria has one of the largest oil reserves in the world (Falola 2005: 201), from which the majority of the population does not benefit. A 2006 survey shows that 51.6% of the population lives on $1 a day, with only 57% accessing safe drinking water and only 30% accessing electricity, and major infrastructure (roads, bridges and airports, for example) remains in disrepair (Chowdhury et al. 2008: 5). One of the immediate effects of these conditions on Nollywood productions is the audible noise of generators heard in most video-films. When I visited Lagos in July 2010 and 2011, I observed that regular power outages are one of the main problems faced by film producers. The unreliable government parastatal National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) is therefore often mockingly called "Never Expect Power Always". Petrol-powered generators add to the impediments that face video-film production alongside

poor infrastructure and congested roads which affect mobility. (Some of the interviews for this research had to be repeatedly postponed due to high traffic, risky public transport, and bad roads, or were conducted when film shooting had to be suspended because actors could not get to the venue due to floods [Fig. 41].) During the rainy season, Lagos floods can be devastating because of inadequate drainage systems[89] (Satterthwaite 2007: 18). They are man-made disasters rather than natural disasters and these conditions do affect the production and post-production process in the Nollywood industry.

Nollywood contributes to the livelihood of many people. Government sources indicate the close to 1 million people work in the industry in a country of about 170 million (Chowdhury et al. 2008: 19). The pre-colonial economy in Nigeria, according to Barber (1982: 434), was "characterized by the production of surplus agricultural produce" which increased under colonial rule. Therefore, wealth has always been closely linked with or created by direct labour (Barber 1982: 434). However, oil wealth seems mysterious because it is not apparently produced by labour. Barber (1982: 435) observes that the "Nigerian population has had nothing to do with oil". Subsidiaries of foreign firms carried out the "prospecting, drilling, extracting, refining and distribution", and even when the 1972 Indigenisation Policy[90] enabled Nigerians to be involved in this process it was still in small numbers. Historically, commercial oil in Nigeria was "inserted . . . into a weak federal system" whose break-up was "precipitated by the secession by Biafra[91]" and military coups in 1967 (Watts 2003: 13). In 1973, the oil boom was followed by state-led government development and Structural Adjustment Programmes (Watts 2003: 13).

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[89] See articles: "Flooding: Lagos Pledges to Expand Drainage Channels" http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=90930:flooding-lagos-pledges-to-expand-drainage-channels&catid=1:national&Itemid=559 accessed 14/08/ 2012, "Two Die as Floods Paralyse Lagos" http://www.punchng.com/news/two-die-as-floods-paralyse-lagos/ accessed 14/08/2012 and many others.

[90] The Indigenisation Policy was aimed at removing ownership in most sectors from foreign colonial proprietors to Nigerian citizens.

[91] Biafra refers to the secessionist republic that existed during 1967 until 1970. When Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, it was deeply divided as a nation. The ethno-religious tensions and political instability led to military coups. The secession of the Igbo to form the Republic of Biafra (from Bight of Biafra) was followed by a civil war during which tens of thousands of Igbo people died (Forsyth 2001, Saro-Wiwa 1989)

Oil, Michael Watts (2003: 13) eloquently argues, "harbours fetishistic qualities; it is the bearer of meanings, of hopes, of expectations of unimaginable powers: unprecedented wealth, avarice and power". Barber (1982: 435) maintains that "gigantic sums of cash seem to have appeared as if from nowhere, being appropriated by those who contributed virtually nothing to its production". This fantastic characteristic of oil wealth persists in video-film narratives. This has led to the formation of cliques and cartels as well as fierce competition for power and contracts (Barber 1982: 436). This context produces, in the popular imagination, the mystification of wealth as a pervasive cultural phenomenon.

This context does not only affect the visual quality of Nollywood (what it *looks like*) but also influences its main themes, its narrative structures and its format. In an interview, Fred Amata, a Nollywood producer, states that "quality has never been lost or unavailable to the Nigerian film industry but rather the circumstances of revolving art made it impossible to attain this quality"[92]. For Amata, the Nigerian situation has created "this kind of [business-like] collective mentality kind of attitude" where "you know . . . everybody's going into one business and as soon as you ask anybody they say… let's start to open cybercafés and before you know it every other business man is opening a cybercafé . . . so that mentality also… permeated into Nollywood"[93]. Consequently, Nollywood comes across as a commercial pursuit rather than a creative one. Amata argues that there was a time when people were willing to put a lot of money into making a film but were swayed by what sells. He argues that there was a time when films with the themes about the village or "waka for bush" were selling and many producers wanted to make films with those themes. Then there was a period when it was profitable, and therefore common, to make cheaper films featuring the well-known Osita Iheme and Chinedu Ikidieze[94], who play the comedy characters Akin and Pawpaw.

These circumstances discourage time-consuming creative work which seems to be less financially rewarding than the quick, low-quality films. Amata further recounts that he was:

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[92] Makhubu, N. Interview with Fred Amata 2011/07/15, Lagos

[93] Ibid.

[94] Osita Iheme and Chinedu Ikidieze are male Igbo actors with a genetic condition (congenital growth hormone) that makes them look like children. It is a kind of dwarfism where adults who have it do not look like adults as is the case with dwarfs.

> involved in another film called *The Return*. We were shooting on Super 16. We shot for like four years and *The Return* ended up on video! We couldn't complete it on film and cinema! So, you just, for instance you hear four years ago that "Ahh" he go and shooting a big film, you wait one year all the other people are releasing their little-little films and they are making big money! You wait another year, they have done ten films! And they, let me say, are succeeding because they are making films like 10 million per film. They make a 100 million in four years meanwhile you are struggling with your one film. You end up . . . your film ends up at their quality . . . .[95]

The video-film format promises a quick turnover. However, oftentimes even those who attempt to make good films are disadvantaged, not only by the lack of income, but also by systematic corruption in the industry and lack strong public regulation.

The Petro-Naira context not only influences the product but also affects how people relate to each other. There is a lack of trust or a persistent aura of suspicion about theft of ideas, being conned, tricked and bamboozled. This is the setting within which the much of the fantastic in Nollywood can be read. During my interview with Amata, he asserts: "we are being corrupted and honest practice has become archaic". Amata gives an account of possible deception in the network of video-film practice:

> Fred Amata: The core, this creative heart of Nollywood, we (I use the word boldly) have been corrupted because as I mentioned I was involved in a film it never saw the light of day. I was involved in the *Amazing Grace*.
>
> Nomusa Makhubu: What was the outcome?
>
> F.A.: It came out. The *Amazing Grace* came out. The *Amazing Grace* went to the AMA [African Movie Academy] Awards and for sound . . . *Amazing Grace* has Dolby sound, the only film in the awards with Dolby sound but for some odd reason some other film wins "Best Sound". It is not possible! To anybody who understands film! The awards also support the problems. Okay?
>
> N.M.: They perpetuate them?
>
> F.A.: Unwittingly because they also have done quite a lot to take it up to the standard that we expect to be seeing in the next few years.

The industry is characterised by artifice and sophistry. The discourse of corruption also creates an environment where 'facts' can only be surmised, and constructs an overall imagination of Nollywood video-film as a practice thwarted by chicanery. Ogunleye (2004: 84) argues that "original work is copied and sold clandestinely" and the copies are therefore often of very low quality. Although the negative characterisation of

[95] Makhubu, N. Interview with Fred Amata 2011/07/15, Lagos

Nollywood cannot be generalised for all video-film practitioners in Nigeria (there are many creative and hardworking practitioners), it does lead to the construction of a problematic public imagination about Nollywood practitioners as people who have 'low moral values', who produce a substandard product and have no understanding of the value of cultural production.

However, descriptions of Nollywood video-film as "a 'fetish art' of the jobless youth of the city of Lagos"; the "people's art", and as "filmed theatres" (Okome 2007a: 2) implies a certain commitment to values. The various histories of Nollywood paint different pictures. There is another which suggests that professional and esteemed practitioners in traditional theatre, celluloid cinema and television became part of the process in creating the large video-film oeuvre. In the section below this account is probed.

2: Situating Nollywood – Itinerant Theatre, Cinema and Television

The context discussed above also necessitates a brief discussion on how the Nollywood product began and how it circulates. Cinema in Nigeria is said to have been introduced through colonial structures (Obiaya 2011: 132). The British Colonial Film Unit used cinema as a pragmatic tool to Anglicise people in the colonies. Intersecting with this practice is the itinerant theatre (such as the *apidan* and *egungun alarinjo* folk travelling theatre), a tradition that precedes colonialism, as well as the development of cinematic and television broadcasting during Nigeria's post-independence era. I will briefly discuss these practices because they are defined as the "backplace"[96] (origins) of Nollywood. I will also briefly discuss some of the key organisations and guilds that have formed in Nollywood in order to understand it as a cultural product.

2.1: Itinerant theatre

There are different forms of theatre in Nigeria. Travelling theatre troupes are seen as "the progenitors of the video-film genre" (Ogunleye 2004: 79) and as such analysing itinerant theatre performance may shed light on contemporary video-films. Foluke Ogunleye (2004: 80) argues that "the metamorphosis of the modern Nigerian video-film artist has . . . taken her/him through the following diagrammatic progression: the

[96] Fred Amata's term for "origins".

egugun alarinjo (masked strolling players), then travelling theatre troupes, followed by traditional 'celluloid' filmmakers, and finally video filmmakers". The most notable trace of popular traditional theatre in video-filmmaking is the representation of magic and fantastic subjects. The co-existence of myth and reality is predominant in Nollywood video-films but also has a complex history in popular traditional theatre.

Popular traditional theatre is an umbrella term for a wide array of theatrical practices in Nigeria. Among these are: the Ekpe festival, the Bori mediumship, the Alarinjo, the Gelede as well as the Eizenogbe, which includes the Igbo masquerade play and the Yankamanci Hausa comedy (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 140). These practices, argue Adelugba and Obafemi (2004: 140), have transmuted ritual performance into entertainment. This transformation enabled theatre practitioners to create secularised narratives that oscillate between the sacred and profane. A majority of these theatre performances have a distinguishable format. For instance, *alarinjo* performances start with songs, drumming and acrobatic displays staged at the market square of a town. These were then followed by the recital of *oriki* (praise poetry), dance and then drama (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 140). At this stage, performances were mostly for entertainment rather than for making political or social comments (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 140).

The *alarinjo* theatre began in the fourteenth century when Sango[97] founded *Egungun* festival to honour his father. Two centuries later, the festival was "formalized into a seasonal lineage festival of specialized dance displays [which] were refined into entertainment guilds" (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 140). The six stock characters of these performances: the albino, the leper, the hunchback, the prognathous, the cripple and the dwarf (a favourite feature of Nollywood video-film) are based on the six ghost mummers[98] that were sent by King Alaafin Ogbolu's council-in-chamber in order to scare off the emissaries on their reconnaissance visits to the old city to which King Ogbolu wanted his people to return (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 141). The council aimed at convincing the King that people should stay in Oyo Ighoho. The ghost mummers were captured by hunters and became entertainers at the palace. They

[97] Sango, in Yorùbá cosmology, is a deity (orisa) that founded the *Egungun*. He was the third king of the Oyo kingdom.
[98] Mummers are troupes of performers who travel and perform plays in public spaces. *Alarinjo* theatre pre-dates mummers.

became known as the *egungun apidan* (magic-performing masquerade). These performances became *alarinjo* “when Ologbin Ologbojo’s son, who was born half ape, half human” used costumes and a wooden mask to disguise his features and became a costumed actor and a strolling player (Adelugba and Obafemi 2004: 141).

Led by a dramaturge, travelling theatre troupes earned very little. Foluke Ogunleye (2004: 79) argues that senior members were paid one -hundred-Naira in the 1970s and increases in subsequent years were marginal. Furthermore, the dramaturge maximised profits through a polygamous system “to create an extended [biological] family of actors and workers” (Ogunleye 2004: 79). Compared to the *alarinjo*, however, the income of the travelling theatre troupes was “highly structured”. Rather than relying on gifts offered by the audience, the troupes had a box office system for selling tickets (Ogunleye 2004: 79). Moreover, they made and sold the book format, a magazine-like “photo novel” using photographs from their performances with captions (Ogunleye 2004: 80). Popular theatre attracted large audiences who were “not elite but [were] farmers, workers, petty traders, minor public servants, drivers, school children, etc” (Barber 1982: 433).

In the 1970s, Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and Ade Afolayan, amongst others, began “the transformation of the Yorùbá travelling theatre into the building blocks of a Nigerian movie industry”[99]. Hubert Ogunde, known as the “father of Nigerian Theatre” and founder of the first professional theatrical company, began producing celluloid films such as *Aye* (1979) and *J’ayesinmi* (1980). Most productions dealt with social ills or Biblical stories. Practitioners such as Ogunde slated the video-film phenomenon, but some argue that if Ogunde “was alive today, he would have no choice other than to join the trend” (Ogunleye 2004: 82). Although Ogunde and Adeyemi Afolayan described videographers as “enemies of progress”, the latter eventually produced his films on video cassette before his death in 1996 (Ogunleye 2004: 82). Travelling theatre became too costly to maintain. The move from theatre and celluloid to video-film seemed inevitable.

[99] Paper delivered by Chief Tony Okoroji in August 2006 at the National Workshop on Developing an Intellectual Property Strategy that was held in Abuja

2.2: Cinema

In the 1930s, the British introduced mobile cinema vans and the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE) in Nigeria (Obiaya 2011: 133). Cinema was recommended in a report on the inquiry into the effects of mines in pre-industrial Central Africa, "to help the Africans come to terms with the changes and novelties being introduced as a result of contact with the Western world" (Obiaya 2011: 133). Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, BEKE produced films for "cultural adjustment" and "encouraging the adoption of European forms of . . . lifestyle [and developing] the desire to stimulate native production" rather than entertainment (Obiaya 2011: 133). This scheme was continued by the Colonial Film Unit in the 1940s to produce propaganda films. Towards the 1950s the Colonial Film Unit advised those wanting to set up self-run film units in the colonies in the interest of ensuring "the ties of friendship with the colonies would be extended into the post-colonial period" (Obiaya 2011: 135). The Nigerian Federal Film Unit was then set up in 1950 to publicise government projects and feats.

American Motion Picture Exporters and Cinema Association (AMPECA) controlled the distribution of films in Anglophone regions. AMPECA ensured that Hollywood films were shown mainly (60%) and was not interested in distributing locally made films (Obiaya 2011: 136, Ogunleye 2004: 80). These conditions counted against local film production. In order to break this imbalance, the Nigerian government declared the Indigenisation Decree in 1972. Post-independence filmmakers faced new resouces challenges as well as lack training (Obiaya 2011: 140). Titles produced on 16mm and 35mm celluloid were targeted at the local market. Although the government backed policies toward developing cinema in Nigeria, it was still not taken seriously or regarded as a useful art form. Economic woes in the 1980s meant that it became too costly to produce films, especially when producers had to go to other countries for post-production facilities (Ogunleye 2004: 81). Ogunleye (2004: 81) states that "in 1991, it cost at least 1 500 000 Naira to make a feature film". Filmmakers resorted to cheaper media. For instance, instead of using 35mm negative colour film, producers used 16mm reversal colour as a cheaper alternative even though it had defects and, because it changed colour as it aged, could not be archived (Ogunleye 2004: 81). Overall, these conditions made it more feasible and attractive to produce video-films.

The rise in crime and armed robbery in the 1980s and 1990s made cinema-going unattractive: it was better to stay at home and watch video-film. The already established audience was boosted by the discouraged theatre-goers. Muyideen Araromire is one of the pioneers of video-film and made a debut video production as early as 1984 titled *Ekun* which was sold successfully (Ogunleye 2004: 82). Video-films were marketed as the "cinema of the living room".

In 1992, an Igbo businessman, Kenneth Nnebue "introduced a businesslike approach to the production of video-films" (Ogunleye 2004: 85). Producers have for a long time relied on individuals as patrons to finance productions. Films were then distributed via theatrical release and video sales. Sales were "entrusted to an established marketer" who paid upfront and paid the producer royalties (Ogunleye 2004: 85). Due to piracy and bootlegging, producers lost some of their profits and tended to make money more from theatrical release which was only later supported by the National Television Authority (Ogunleye 2004: 85). Although filmmakers still work in celluloid, practices of Nollywood have altered the way in which film is experienced in Nigeria.

2.3: The National Television Authority (NTA)

In a personal interview, Fred Amata argued that most Nollywood producers, including himself, used to work for the National Television Authority (NTA). Some producers, directors and actors were trained in Theatre Arts at University level and went on to make drama programmes for television[100]. Therefore, some Nollywood productions use skilled and trained practitioners. Amata argues that most practitioners would have to work for the NTA in order to access facilities but some would make productions independently of the NTA. *Living in Bondage* was made by a National Television Authority (NTA) director (Chris Obi Rapu) under a pseudonym because at the time "private practice or PP was frowned upon"[101]. Practitioners working for the national broadcaster would not disclose independent work on Nollywood films. Michael Chima also underlines that private practice or moonlighting became common even though it was not supported by the NTA[102]. Amata argues that it was Zeb "Sheik" Ejiro who "broke

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[100] Makhubu, N. Interview with Fred Amata 2011/07/15, Lagos

[101] This is Fred Amata's statement. Micheal Chima also affirms this in an interview conducted at the Eko International Film Festival, Lagos, July 2011.

[102] Makhubu, N. Interview with Michael Chima, 2011/07/09, Lagos

the stronghold of NTA producers"[103]. By making notable video-films, Ejiro paved the way for the 'normalisation' of independent filmmaking for those working for the national broadcaster. By the 1980s, there was a considerable number of independent film producers.

Television service started in 1959 in Nigeria with Western Nigeria Television Services (WNTS) and was recognised as "the first television service in Africa" (Bourgault 1995: 132). Part of its success lay in community viewing centres. The different means of communicating that are discussed above, whether for entertainment or social and political commentary, show that Nigeria has a long-standing culture of communal viewing. Oluyinka Esan (2009: 40) observes that "Nigerians were used to gathering to view performance on the streets during festivals, they would also gather to watch the itinerant travelling theatres, the mobile cinema unit was another feature that brought people together for the purpose of viewing". Communal viewing extends from the public sphere to the (private) domestic sphere with "the extended family system and [communal] living arrangements" (Esan 2009: 40). Furthermore, not many people could afford to own television sets and so viewing also included neighbours who did not have sets.

Apart from the educational programmes and foreign programmes, WNTS broadcast ad-libbed drama programmes with performers from the Yorùbá travelling theatre. Practitioners such as Lere Paimo moved from stage to television to Nollywood (Esan 2009: 56). The Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (ENBC) also addressed issues in Eastern Nigeria. The civil war that broke out in 1966 hindered any further advance of the ENBC which suspended television until 1970 (Esan 2009: 71). Nigeria then adopted a 12-state administrative structure after the war. ENBC came to be known as East Central State Broadcasting Service (ECBS), in which television resumed in 1975. Later, ECBS was replaced by NTV Enugu. In 1977, television was brought under one authority, the National Television Authority (NTA). Since it was the "brainchild of the military government", loyalty went from state government to federal government and centralised the broadcasting industry (Esan 2009: 99). Television became a tool of government.

[103] Makhubu, N. Interview with Fred Amata 2011/07/15, Lagos

The growth of technology at the stations fluctuated. Although some NTA productions were made on celluloid, the NTA steered productions towards video because it was more cost-effective. The station went digital, and ended up using home video cameras. The quality of some of these video productions was low. The NTA, however, broadcast a large percentage of foreign programmes and has been judged for not promoting locally made films such as those from Nollywood. Nevertheless, it can be argued that television set the stage for Nollywood.

2.4: Operational Relations in Nollywood

As mentioned earlier, Nollywood began organically and without any formal structures. There has been a development of structures, guilds and associations, most of which provide the infrastructure for quality productions. Nollywood practitioners would meet at hotels to run rehearsals, auditions and recordings as well as to hold meetings[104]. Zeb Ejiro's office in Surulere provided a central meeting point. The Nollywood industry was then structured into guilds such as the Nigerian Actors Guild (NAG) which later became the Actors' Guild of Nigeria (AGN), the Directors' Guild of Nigeria (DGN), the Screen Writers' Guild of Nigeria (SWGN), the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and the Creative Designers' Guild of Nigeria (CDGN), as well as associations like the Association of Movie Producers (AMP), the Marketers' Association and the Nigerian Society of Cinematographers (NSC)[105]. Alex Eyengho argues that there are many guilds and associations, none of which can claim to have broad-spectrum authority since they do not have a Corporate Affairs Commission that confers a legal status to them.

Furthermore, Eyengho notes that structures in Nollywood have been tinged by ethnic differences. For example, the Marketers Association broke into two: the Yorùbá and Igbo. Key stakeholders then resolved to form the Association of Nollywood Core Producers (ANCOP).

> The Yorùbás started the Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners (ANTP), Hausas came with the Motion Picture Association of Nigeria (MOPAN), Igbos have the Association of Movie Practitioners (AMP), Itsekiris have the Association of Itsekiri Performing Artistes (AIPA), Binis have the Congress of Edo State Movie Practitioners (CEMP).

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[104] For example, my interviews with actors and producers such as Jean Paul Nwadike and Ahire-Uwaifo Lofty took place on-set at a hotel in Lagos

[105] Alex Eyengho, 'Structures in Nollywood: Associations and Guilds' http://allafrica.com/stories/201208110308.html accessed 30/09/2012

> It would amount to a criminal lie for any single association to claim to be the umbrella body for Nigerian film producers. Ditto for marketers, directors, actors editors, cinematographers etc. This is the manifest truth. There is a proliferation of associations and guilds in Nollywood today.[106]

Recently, stakeholders have worked toward consolidating Nollywood structures. A bill, presently known as the Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria (MOPPCON) bill, was presented at the National Assembly to consolidate core Nollywood structures, but the process to pass it into law has been delayed. Currently, there is a Coalition of Nollywood Guilds and Associations (CONGA) which consists of the DGN, AGN, CDGN, Nigerian Society of Editors (NSE), SWGN, AMP, Film/Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria (FVPMAN), NSC, Motion Picture Practitioners Association of Nigeria (MOPPAN), ANTP, Independent Television Producers Association of Nigeria (ITPAN) and the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Art Practitioners (NANTAP).

In a personal interview, Zack Orji, actor, filmmaker and former president of the Actors' Guild of Nigeria as well as the Directors' Guild of Nigeria, argues that one challenge that Nollywood faces is that "the market has not been well-networked"[107]. He affirms that "mostly Nollywood has been funded by private initiative"[108]. There are also many productions that are sponsored by churches and through short-term bank loans, which is the reason many productions have to be completed in a short time[109]. Orji asserts that there have been measures to assist film production. For instance, the National Film Corporation tried to develop post-production facilities which will enable filmmakers who want to work in celluloid to be able to do so in a cost-effective way without having to travel abroad for these facilities. Furthermore, the current government, led by President Goodluck Jonathan, has shown support towards the industry by dedicating 200 million of state funds to film[110]. These funds are meant to "enable [filmmakers] to do Hollywood standard films"[111]. The government has delegated two banks, NEXIM Bank and Bank of Industry, to make the funds available to filmmakers. However, Orji adds that the funds not grants but loans charged above commercial interest rates.

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106 Alex Eyengho, 'Structures in Nollywood: Associations and Guilds' http://allafrica.com/stories/201208110308.html accessed 30/09/2012
107 Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos
108 Ibid.
109 Makhubu, N. Interview with Michael Chima, 2011/07/09, Lagos
110 Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos
111 Ibid.

Moreover, there will be chances for tax rebates to draw international practitioners into the Nigerian film industry. Orji compliments the government saying that it is the President's state, Bayelsa State, which funds the African Movie Academy Awards.

Government-related agencies in Nigeria's film industry include the Film Unit, the National Film Corporation (NFC) and the National Film Distribution Company (NFDC). According to Toyin Falola (2001: 147), the Film Unit inherited its practices from the Colonial Film Unit and continued to produce state-related documentaries, while the NFC and the NFDC "were created in the 1970s and were meant to encourage the promotion of a local film industry". The National Film Corporation is a parastatal set up by the Ministry of Communication to promote Nigerian heritage for the purposes of nation-building. The mandate of the NFC and NFDC, to "give exclusive monopoly for distribution and exhibition of feature films to Nigerians", was aligned with the 1972 Indigenisation Act (Diawara 1992: 121). To maximise the effectiveness of the NFC, the NFDC was dissolved (Onuzulike 2007a: 13). The Nigerian government set up the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) in 1993 which, as a regulatory agency, classifies films and is meant to "raise the industry profile of Nollywood" and "reduce the number of objectionable movies" that "often reinforce the negative stereotypes of Nigerians, as 'loud, brash, fetish, corrupt, and violent people'"[112]. The board also licenses distributors and exhibitors. There are higher numbers of approved films between the years 2002 (2046 films) and 2005 (1808 films). In 2011, NFVCB approved 354 films[113]. The Board charges between 10,500 Naira and 100,000 Naira to review, depending on the runtime of the film and whether it is a local language or English language film. It is the responsibility of producers to source these funds.

There are productions that attract foreign investment but this can be limiting. Michael Chima, artist, writer and founder of the Eko International festival in Lagos [Figs. 42, 43], asserts that often foreign funding limits creative freedom. When I interviewed Chima, he stated that he had sent a proposal to the Shell Oil Company for funding so that he could make a film (documentary) regarding peaceful resolutions in the Niger Delta, an oil-producing region that faces environmental crises and human rights violations. Shell agreed to sponsor a documentary, directed by Faruk Lasaki. However, Shell wanted to

[112] http://www.nfvcb.gov.ng/pages.asp?pageid=341 accessed 30/08/2012
[113] Ibid.

impose its own script promoting the oil company rather than showing the effects of oil extraction in the Niger Delta[114]. Filmmakers are pressured to find local sources of funding from local marketers. Marketers play an important role in making resources available. The Idumota Market is seen as the centre of video marketing apart from Aba, Onitsha and Enugu (Ogunleye 2004: 82). Distributors or marketers buy the film from a producer and sell the film. At times, if the producer sells the film outright, he or she may "obtain a 'pre-sales' agreement to finance the film entirely" (Ogunleye 2004: 83). This source, however, is dependent on the marketer's expectation that the film will sell.

To address some of these issues, Sylvester Ogbechie, a professor at the University of California, established the Nollywood Foundation based in Los Angeles. The Nollywood Foundation was established in 2006 to provide a platform for film practitioners to communicate and work towards "raising the standard" of Nollywood, and "to develop its intellectual structure"[115]. It has an advisory board/council consisting of Oliver Mbamara, Egbe Osifo-Dawodu, Lisa Poole, and Dapo Otunla. The Foundation seeks to establish collaborations with American film-makers and broaden distribution and sales. A film was created to resolve these issues and as an educational tool that involves attorneys who teach artists regarding the legalities of the film product and how to protect themselves at home and in America. A classic think-tank was set up to provide solutions to artists for free so that best practices can be applied.

Ogbechie notes that some of the challenges include funding promises that have not been kept and the fact that at times Nollywood personnel resist advice from black practitioners[116]. As an example, Ogbechie states that the "Iron film festival was funded but had to be validated through a white interlocutor". He argues that there needs to be a spirit of activism, and entitlement to the management of ideas. For Ogbechie, there must be knowledge management through which black practitioners "own relations of labour and protect intellectual property" – there needs to be a political stance on knowledge production (from which Africans have been excluded)[117]. Ogbechie states that Nollywood should gain global capital where the 'Nollywood' phase of Nollywood is

[114] Makhubu, N. Interview with Michael Chima, 2011/07/09, Lagos
[115] Makhubu, N. Interview with Sylvester Ogbechie, 2011/03/25, Los Angeles
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

bound to be superseded[118]. In the interview, Ogbechie asserts that Nollywood needs to be critic-driven in order to establish an intellectual basis.

3: Nollywood – Proletarian Culture and Popular Culture

Nollywood video-film is principally a proletarian product. It is an industry that is primarily conceptualised, manufactured, distributed and consumed by the proletariat. (This is by no means to say that it is not consumed by the bourgeois at all, but that it is necessary to note that it is perceived primarily as a form of entertainment aimed at the working class.) Since its inception, Nollywood has been regarded as an illegitimate cultural *objet d'art* insofar as it has been perceived as a product largely for poor and uneducated audiences. This view particularly extends outside Nigeria creating foreign intellectual interest that is sometimes of patronising curiosity. Onookome Okome (2007d: 384) observes that:

> Outside of Nigeria, and indeed Africa, Nollywood is still largely a curiosity. One typical example was the 2004 edition of the Berlinale Film Festival, which was held in Berlin, Germany. Another was the 34th edition of the Montreal Film Festival. Each of them privileged Nollywood as a "curio." In moments of doubt for these organizers, Nollywood became a piece of artefact – a piece of *something* from *somewhere* far away but something that is interesting all the same. In this regard, it is noteworthy to point out the 34th Berlinale Film Festival had a curious title for the Nollywood video-films: "Hollywood in Nigeria or: How to Get Rich Quick." For the organizers, the visual practice of Nollywood cannot exist outside of the cultural and institutional framework of Hollywood even when this Festival program announces at the same time the undisputed difference that Nollywood has made to African cinematic life and discourse . . . . Of course, the second part of the title links Nollywood to the famous Nigerian scam, the advance fee fraud that is now commonly known as "419."

Not only is Nollywood seen as a "curio" but, according to the examples offered by Okome, it is also framed as a criminal practice, as I have discussed in previous sections. Even though Nollywood is seen to "decolonise the cinematic frame"[119], it is also generally regarded as a lowermost cultural practice. Okome (2007d: 384) disagrees suggesting that "one cannot forget its sense of mission, which is to produce culture *from the bottom of the street*, so to speak" (own emphasis). Furthermore, Okome (2007a: 384) states that "Nollywood provides the imaginary for certain marginal sections of the society where it operates . . . [it] is the poorer part of its postcolonial base, which is no

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[118] Ibid.

[119] Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos

longer restricted to Nigeria". For Birgit Meyer (2003a), the video-film practice is a 'popular' practice. These perceptions necessitate further scrutiny of the propositions that situate Nollywood as popular culture or proletarian culture.

3.1: On Culture and Class in Nollywood

Filmmaking as a practice is regarded as popular culture: a form of culture that is associated with the masses as the base. Britain's industrial development led to the consideration of film as "low culture . . . even as late as the 1960s, cinema was still not deemed to be a legitimate art form . . . by the Arts Council of Great Britain" (Obiaya 2011: 140). This attitude influenced the development of film in former British colonies. It is important, however, to particularise the deeper implications of the influences and effects of colonialism on culture in Nigeria. One of the canonical meanings that Achille Mbembe (2002: 241) argues can be attributed to slavery and colonialism (as well as Apartheid) is dispossession, "a process in which juridical and economic procedures have led to material expropriation". Therefore, culture in these contexts is a complex process of alienation of the (colonised) subject from the self and the products of her/his labour.

On this issue, Paul Siegel (1970: 16–17) explains that "behind the word 'culture' there is something that cannot be explained by the 'methods of production'". Culture, he argues, is "the organic sum of knowledge and capacity which characterizes the entire society, or at least its ruling class . . . it embraces and penetrates all fields of human work and unifies them into a system" (Siegel 1970: 17). From this sum of knowledge, the proletarian appropriates bourgeois culture, from which he is excluded, by modifying it (Siegel 1970: 17). For Siegel, this appropriation of culture reveals the "backwardness" of proletarian culture, which can only cease upon the dissolution of classes in general and the assumption of power by the working class in particular. He observes:

> The bourgeois took power and created its own culture; the proletariat, they think, having taken power, will create proletarian culture. But the bourgeoisie is a rich and therefore educated class. Bourgeois culture existed already before the bourgeoisie had formally taken power . . . the proletariat in bourgeois society is a property-less and deprived class, and so it cannot create a culture of its own. Only after taking power does it really become aware of its frightful cultural backwardness (Siegel 1970: 79).

In Nigeria, the bourgeoisie is the political class, top military officers and the local business elite, who constitute a small percentage of the population. According to Akinsanya (1994: 67, 79) "the Nigerian indigenisation policy has inevitably led to the concentration of economic power in the hands of very few Nigerians . . . and [has] marginalised Nigerian working class and peasantry". The production of culture however, is not limited to the bourgeoisie. I argue that Nollywood's appropriation of conspicuous bourgeois practices in Nigeria subverts and critiques them as aspirations of Western class identities and as cultural decay.

The film entitled *The Barons* (2005) can be used as an example. *The Barons* (2005), directed by Michael Jaja and produced by Obinna Okeke, stars Kanayo O. Kanayo, Ejike Aseigbu and Keppy Ekpeyong Bassey. The film is about a group of bourgeois men and women who belong to a cult that produces wealth for them. They have sacrificed their wives and children for wealth. The first scene depicts a young, underprivileged woman, Lillian, having a nightmare about her foetus being torn out of her body. She wakes up and pays her boyfriend, who is also a member of the cult, a visit. Her boyfriend, Chief Ike Ikoko, lives in a mansion with large reception and lounging areas filled with luxurious furniture. He asks her to give him the foetus. When she refuses he scolds her and says "that baby is mine and I decide what to do with my property . . . I give you 48 hours to bring that foetus to me and I'll still be generous enough to give you 500,000 Naira". After she leaves the room, a djinn-like creature called Ahum appears to Chief Ikoko and says "the market is said to disperse" and continues to tell him that if he does not provide a foetus or the body of a beloved one, he will die.

On one hand, it seems sensible to dismiss this story as tasteless, naïve and as a cultural product that perpetuates negative stereotypes as well as the commodification and objectification of women's bodies. On the other, it is troubling, and not coincidental, that wealth in this video-film is represented as something that can only be achieved through death and magic. Fantastic accounts of occultism in the socio-economic sphere in Nigeria are popular discourse. The young, unemployed woman in this film possibly sees her relations with older, wealthy men as the answer to her problems. The young women are easily disposable to the Chief. He kills and rapes them or offers them for sacrifice to the cult in order to stay wealthy. The reference of the film to the feudal system of barons who are loyal to a king functions to refer to the class of the elite and

cartels. The wealthy, portrayed as ruthless and inhumane, are contrasted with the poor. In the film narrative, there are two twin sisters. One of them, Adugu, is about to wed. However, her sister, Adeze, keeps chiding her about marrying "a wretched" man who has no money. Chief Ikoko withholds the loan that Adugu and her fiancé, Raymond, would have used for their wedding in order to court Adugu and eventually offer her as sacrifice to the cult. Adugu's jealous sister, Adeze creates a situation in which Adugu is sent away from home so that she can be with Chief Ikoko. Oblivious to Chief Ikoko's membership to a dangerous cult, Adeze becomes a murder victim. The film refers, even if obliquely, to oil-related cartels as well as to the poverty that leads young men to corruption and young women to prostitution. Even though it can be argued that these stories do not render these issues in a sophisticated manner, they do boldly address them.

Detractors of Nollywood characterise its consumers as mere philistines even though philistinism is seen as "something that is endemic to ruling classes" (Beech and Roberts 2002: 131). It is assumed that taste is the monopoly of the powerful – the bourgeois. In their estimation of philistinism as a relational concept, Dave Beech and John Roberts (2002: 131–2) avoid reducing the philistine to any specific social or political group but choose to see it as a constantly shifting cultural category "produced by internal relations of cultural division". In Marxist terms, the philistine "as the category par excellence of the uncultured" is the "place where the division [of labour] is marked within the sphere of culture" (Beech and Roberts 2002: 262). The Nollywood consumer is made to seem "mindless", or the assumption is that Nollywood does not appeal to cognitive faculty. Beyond the surface of cultural labelling, Nollywood reflects prevailing class struggles.

Okome (2010: 33) highlights that, when asked, the members of the literati, such as the writer, Tsitsi Dangarembga, define Nollywood as a "chewing gum for the brain" and the celluloid filmmaker, Chief Eddie Ugbomah, as "trashy", "poorly put-together contraptions that are inappropriately called films in Nigeria . . . the childishly conceived, amateurishly written, and thoroughly predictable". In these circles, Nollywood video-films are consistently regarded as a 'low form of culture' and enjoyed by 'untrained' masses. Conversely, Okome asserts that "what makes [Nollywood] ground-breaking is that Nollywood remains with the common people" and it can "tell stories loudly…

conspicuously", "stories that people already know"[120]. For Okome, Nollywood is "easily digestible because it is already known" and operates within "popular atmospherics"[121]. Therefore, "the appeal is huge ... because [Nollywood's] filmic language was radically different from anything in the world … so ubiquitous; you cannot avoid it, it is a consciousness of a class position … a satellite class"[122]. What is apparent, however, is that the attribution of Nollywood to the Nigerian proletariat must take into consideration the "gap between peasantry and proletariat" (Adesokan 2011: 69). Also, it is important to note that Nollywood is regarded as a creature of entrepreneurs, traders, marketers, and independent performers rather than the classic industrial working class. It can be characterised as a "precariat" defined by David Harvey (2012: xiv) as part-time, disorganised, non-secure, and low-paid labour. Furthermore, Nollywood video-film arose through the networks (patron–clientelism) between small-scale entrepreneurs and middle-class/bourgeois patrons. These links illuminate the class contradictions of the post-colonial era. Nollywood video-film and the practices associated with it draw attention to the paradoxes in the notion of 'the masses', which implies populism rather than passive mass consumption.

The underbelly of the fantastic paradisiacal utopia(s) created through popular culture to 'titillate' 'the masses' is the brutal violation and reduction of individual and collective identities into components of commercial processes. As Charles Eckert (1974: 17) observes, in melodramatic narratives the "exploited have no exploiter . . . the true exploiters – the capitalist system, sexism, pernicious ideologies – are vaguely immanent . . . but recede like ghosts as quickly as they are glimpsed". Eckert implies that, although cultural forms such as television melodrama or video-film constantly illuminate socio-political issues, they do not necessarily culminate in 'mass action' against the elite. Nevertheless, the involvement of Nollywood actors in the Occupy Nigeria movement, as discussed below, reveals something else, which is that, even though Nollywood video-film seems to offer mythical antidotes to real socio-economic problems, it maintains their presence in public consciousness. Eckert (1974: 17) surmises that there is an "intense confrontation with reality [that] leads only to a stifling semantic cul-de-sac from which . . . we must escape [but] the escape is exhilaratingly easy: we leap into the

[120] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

alternative reality of the melodrama". This leap, argues Eckert (1974: 17), "is typical of what are usually called 'proletarian' films". Nollywood can be seen as an "ideological assault on the aesthetic values of dominant classes" (Barnard 1996: 44). The representation of marginalisation or social alienation, inequity and displacement, in Nollywood mirrors everyday struggles.

The mass movements that took place in Nigeria in 2012, for example, involved leading Nollywood actors and the Performing Musicians Association. They joined the "week-long strike against the withdrawal of the fuel subsidy that paralysed the country", led by televangelist Pastor Tunde Bakare of the Occupy Nigeria Group (ONG) and the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) (Isibor 2012: 13). Civil society organisations and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) backed the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in "the biggest social movement in the country's history" in order to challenge corruption in government and its failure to resolve the "on-going terror campaign" of Boko Haram[123]. Oil wealth and the devastating Boko Haram bombings saturate public discourse. Although the populace feels threatened by Boko Haram, they incidentally concur with one of their key concerns, which is that the ruling elite are greedily keeping the country's oil wealth. There is public sentiment that "leading public figures", many of whom are members of the ruling party (the People's Democratic Party or PDP), are involved in the oil marketers' cartel, which Nigerians refer to as "the Cabal" (Isibor 2012: 16). This perception fuels Boko Haram's extremist antagonism to western education, which they believe is to be blamed for kleptocracy in the country. Damian Ugwu states that "[Nigeria is] a society where the wealth of the country is being cornered by the elite who do not care what happens to the rest of the country . . . as a result you are bound to see a lot of people who are angry with the system" (Ugwu cited in Isibor 2012: 18). The class war that is staged by Boko Haram highlights some the main issues that surface in Nollywood narratives.

3.2: Re-thinking the Nollywood Phenomenon as Popular Culture

Taking the above perceptions into consideration, the question arises whether Nollywood is merely *popular* culture or whether its direct interrogation of class

[123] Boko Haram is a jihadist Islamist movement that was established in 2009.

struggles and material conditions faced by Nigerians everyday make it *populist*. Can it be viewed differently? Ien Ang (1993: 420) defines the popular aesthetic as "an aesthetic which is the exact opposite of the bourgeois aesthetic disposition in which an art object is judged according to extremely formal, universalised criteria which are totally devoid of subjective passions and pleasures". Ang's definition limits the intricacies of varying cultural dynamics in different contexts. Since popular culture was generated as a form of counter-culture that was asserted particularly by young people, its subsequent productions (advertising, music videos, etc.) are seen as capitalist ideological tools that pacify the 'uncultured masses'. Fiske's (2003: 115) suggestion that "popular culture is always part of power relations" complicates the premise that popular culture is antithetical to bourgeois culture. If video-film were to be defined as populist, however, it would be regarded as a cultural practice that appeals to 'ordinary' people but would "dismiss any feeling of guilt or shame" that is associated with consuming popular culture (Ang 1993: 420). Filmmakers such as Zack Orji adopt a populist approach to Nollywood and call it "a production factory for our cultures and values"[124]. In discussing Nollywood video-film, imported concepts such as 'popular culture' must be approached carefully. In this section, I discuss hand-painted posters of both Ghanaian and Nigerian video-film that question the distinction between art and popular culture.

There is an existing dichotomy within the industry that characterises celluloid as good-quality film and video as bad, low-quality film. Complicating this dynamic is the dichotomy between high art forms and popular culture. In European critical theory, this dichotomy is characterised by "a confrontation between the rural and urban working people's tactics, aimed at the production of an autonomous culture (identity), and the institutions' and elites' strategies of dampening their old and odd cultural elements" (de Certeau in Jewsiewicki 1996: 343). The differentiation between art and popular culture is based on legitimation, where art is regarded as singularly produced and intellectually engaging but popular culture is perceived as mass-produced 'easy pleasure'. Popular culture is seen to turn people in industrialised societies into passive subjects. Theorists of the Frankfurt School, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, referred to a homogenising commercialised production of culture for mass

[124] Makhubu, N. Interview with Zack Orji, 2011/07/18, Lagos

consumption. The ‘strict’ distinctions between popular culture and art, or low culture and high culture, were disintegrated before the postmodernist delegitimation of hegemonic cultural structures.

Popular culture in African contexts is placed in contrast to “modern elitist and traditional ‘tribal’ culture” (Falola 2009: 5). Bogumil Jewsiewicki (1996: 343) argues that “[in] the African context, even more than in the West, a non-ethnic popular artifact that is mainly thought of as *lumpenproletarian* (in ethnic as well as elite cultures) disqualifies ideas, practices, and behaviors” (own emphasis). What is apparent is the way in which these contradistinctions allude to economical predisposition and cultural commoditisation. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999: 806) assert that “rather than being projected directly onto the ‘mysterious market’ or power of the postcolonial state, discontent is refracted back onto symbols of traditional social structure”. In this argument, young people perceive the traditional social structure “as inhibiting their own participation in the dramatic appropriation of wealth and power by a privileged few” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 806). The divide between ‘traditional’ arts and popular arts is challenged by the definition of popular art in Africa as a term that refers “to *artisanal forms* of cultural expression” (own emphasis) (Willems 2011: 46). The ‘traditional’ therefore should not refer strictly to objects and static concepts about practices of the past but should also denote the evolving interventions that continue into the present. For Karin Barber (1997), popular art in Africa does not imply passive mass consumption but includes participatory responses where, for example, in cultural practices such as popular theatre, people can “make suggestions, complete proverbs . . . shout warnings”. In this way, popular culture in Africa is an intellectual practice.

Making distinctions between popular culture and art becomes more of a political exercise than an aesthetic one. If one takes, for example, the collection of Nollywood hand-painted posters by gallery owners in America, the exhibition of these posters both as artwork and as curio is intriguing. It can be likened to the fascination with hand-painted barber signs from Cameroon and Senegal. Mary Nooter Roberts (2005: 6) observes that “popular urban arts such as barbershop advertising sign-painting, arts of recycling, painting on public transportation and mural arts have exploded onto the scene”. The exhibition entitled *Hairdresser and Barbershop Signs of Africa* that was exhibited at the Museum of African Art in 2010 defined hand-painted signs popular arts

"made by specialized, self-taught artists". Similarly, hand-painted posters of video-film in Nigeria and Ghana are regarded, within Western cultural systems, as urban cultural forms that are not quite art but as curio.

In 2011, I attended the Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) 15th Triennial Symposium of African Art at the University of California in Los Angeles. During this symposium, the attendees visited the Ernie Wolfe Gallery and the Fowler Museum, which both collect exquisite hand-painted video-film posters from Ghana and Nigeria. Although these differ from Nigerian Nollywood video-film posters, they illuminate the prodigious nature of video-film posters and dust jackets. As a 'sibling' of Nollywood, the Ghanaian video-film industry established the fantastic visual language that characterises Nollywood through a "ubiquitous flow of fantastic images" (Wendl 2007: 1). The hand-painted posters represent folk-lore, occultism, ferocious evil and witchcraft in Ghanaian and Nigerian video-film as well as imported American and Asian film. Contemporary Nollywood posters, however, are depictions of locally-produced video-film and are generally characterised by faces of actors and actresses or "a montage of faces" as Finola Kerrigan (2010: 87) defines it.

The question that arises is whether the re-framing of hand-painted posters within American and European museums and galleries (for example, the Dr. Wolfgang Stäbler Collection from Munich has a large collection these posters) has implications for the value of those posters. The appropriation of artistic and cultural objects by American and European collectors and the re-framing of those objects in museums and galleries are problematic. The issues they raise draw attention to the different ways in which the concept of value can be understood. While it may be said that most of the African objects gained value because they are in American and European galleries and museums, that value is monetary. It may also be said that they lose cultural value because they are de-contextualised, and have no cultural use but function as objects merely to be looked at.

Posters in general are visual but mainly function as modes of communication and ways of informing. The collection of these posters by American and European collectors could be attributed to a) the medium, or that they are paintings rather than printed posters and b) that they are exoticised. The medium complicates the Western distinction

between popular culture and art. Printed posters would probably not have been collected or framed in the same manner. Hand-painted posters are 'once-off' or do not have multiple copies. As discussed earlier, the notion of originality and copy have implications for value within the Western cultural system. Hand-painted posters are usually placed within the public sphere rather than limited to galleries in Nigeria or Ghana. In re-conceptualising value, it is necessary to distinguish between the imperialistic institutions that govern Western artistic and cultural systems and the de-institutionalised post-colonial cultural practices in African contexts. The exhibition of objects in museums in some African contexts does not always mean that an object has been 'promoted' to fine art status. Value lies in the meaning such objects maintain within the dynamics of cultural life.

A hand-painted poster of a film entitled *I Hate My Village* [Fig. 57] shows two Nigerian men eating human flesh; the one on the left holds a bloody foot to his mouth and the other on the right devours an arm. The red caps and large beads they wear identify these men as chiefs and therefore suggest that they are wealthy from being part of an occult. Behind them are human skulls and below them are images of a man shooting hybrid animals. The cannibalism portrayed in this poster reflects the cannibalism suggested by the video-film, *I Hate My Village* (1999), which was the main reason this film was censored by the NFVCB. This film portrays a wealthy urban family which learns about the cannibalistic 'traditions' in a village through watching a video-film about a girl who leaves her village and its cannibalistic practices to go to the city. She falls in love with a wealthy man who is eaten by members of the village when the couple returns to the village to arrange their marriage. These painted posters represent the film and aim to narrate the film. Some of the posters, however, have images that do not exist in the films or are what Wendl (2007: 1) calls "fantastic additions of the artist's own imagination". They emphasise the most shocking and terrifying aspects.

Film posters such as *Poltergeist* [Fig. 58], *Demonic Toys* [Fig. 59], *Eaten Alive* [Fig. 60], *Dolly Dearest* [Fig. 61] portrays decapitated bodies and bloody torn-off limbs. Posters that depict local films illustrate folk-lore, urban legend and the Christian 'battle' with the monstrosities of evil. The poster for *Highway to the Grave* [Fig. 62] represents a woman whose body is half-skeleton and whose hair is a mop of snakes. Next to her is an

image of a Mami Wata[125], the goddess of the sea [Fig. 63]. Between her thighs is a 'traditional' medicine man whose right eye is painted white. Images of snakes and dead bodies are also strewn across the canvas in the poster for the film entitled *Snake Kingdom* [Fig. 64]. In this poster, a Christian cross communicates the triumph over 'evil'. The Christian theme is predominant and is also represented in posters for films such as *The Stolen Bible* [Fig. 65]. In this poster, a skeleton with a snake slithering out of its mouth holds the chin of a man who looks petrified. This theme is also present in the poster for *Monster Evil Protact* [Fig. 66] in which a man dressed in white holds a cross towards a monstrous furry hybrid creature which clutches a wounded child next to a river where a crocodile devours a human being. The *Cover Pot* [Fig. 67] poster shows women who are part animal and breastfeed hybrid creatures. The woman in the *Sleepwalkers* [Fig. 68] poster has bleeding cat scratches all over her naked body. This image is accompanied by the text: "The evil that women do lives after them".

The images of things that are imagined (or exist as rumours, folk-lore, urban legend or are political metaphors) are made visible or turned into physical images. The representation of the horrific and the fantastic in a way that makes them simultaneously horrifying and comical, fascinating and vile, in these posters does not only bring taboo into the public sphere, but brings it into terrifyingly close proximity. The video-films produce a visual existence of abstract things (magic, spirits, deities, ghosts, witches) in the currency of everyday cultural experience. Wendl (2008: 6) points out that films such as *I Hate My Village* differ from Italian and American films that suggest cannibalism and occultism as something that is distant or "located . . . in the deep Amazon". If the fantastic is a mode of reading, it also necessitates distance from which the ambiguity of something strange in the everyday can be taken as fictive narrative. Nollywood, including its posters and dust jackets, seems to represent the fantastic as a concoction of fiction, religious belief, 'traditional' belief and everyday experience. It is as if it depicts things that actually happen or have happened.

[125] In Igbo cosmology, the Mami Wata is the goddess of the sea whose body is represented as part-human and part-fish and appears as a mermaid who carries a snake around her. The Mami Wata is notorious for her cunning trickery. The Mami Wata water spirit is generally regarded as female but can be male. A variety of beliefs in water deities are related to the Mami Wata (Drewal 2008). I will discuss images of the Mami Wata in Chapter 4.

The presence of Nollywood in the public sphere is also visible through the digitally-printed posters that show faces of characters [Fig. 69; Fig. 70; Fig. 71]. These posters infiltrate the public sphere. Nollywood actors have a 'presence' through the bold film posters that advertise the films and become familiar, popular faces. Zina Saro-Wiwa (2008) aptly defines them as a "collision of faces" that "demand attention" and which have become "a new type of street iconography". According to Saro-Wiwa (2008), Nollywood is "writing itself onto the streets" and "into the consciousness of the people of Nigeria" through these posters. They can be seen as a 'new' form of visual culture in Nigeria's public spaces [Figs. 72; 73], but they also work in such public sphere to divulge elements of 'private' or unseen life, which makes Nollywood unavoidable, extraordinary and valuable. In this next section, I discuss the notion that Nollywood is defined as kitsch, a category that defines things of less cultural value, but also as sublime, its opposite.

4: Kitsch and the Sublime in Nollywood

Citing a French journalist, Emmanuel Vincenot, Pierre Barrot (2008: 29) notes that Nigerian video-films have a "kitsch feel". Brian Larkin (2008), however, finds that video-film reveals how the "colonial sublime" operates. For Larkin (2008: 7), whose focus is on the technology of video-film, the "use of technology to represent an overwhelming sense of grandeur and awe in the service of colonial power" plays an important role in the "representation of technology and technology as representation". Colonial power was expressed through the technology that pervades political and cultural life. The construction of massive bridges, dams and monuments by colonial administration in colonies is part of the colonial sublime. Larkin (2008: 35) uses the Kantian and Burkean notions of the sublime as "the individual or collective response to a confrontation with phenomena or events outside of imagination's possibility to comprehend" such that it "performs an outrage on the imagination". It is "about a representation of limitlessness" (Larkin 2008: 35). While Burke locates the sublime as a characteristic of objects, Kant posits that the sublime can only exist "in the apperception of objects by a judging subject" (Larkin 2008: 35).

Therefore, the sublime is an experience that is not only defined as seeing something "absolutely great", but it also describes "the overwhelming physical powerlessness individuals feel in the face of something overpowering and terrible" (Larkin 2008: 36).

For James Donald, the qualities of the sublime and kitsch are converse but can co-exist. Donald (1989: 240) defines kitsch as "the sublime's true antithesis" because it is "collusive with the value-less world of bourgeois modernity in providing a mask of order and value for its real disorder". However, since "terror is a ruling principle of the sublime", the sublime is only differentiated from the fantastic by the manner in which it identifies "the source of terror" (Donald 1989: 109). Donald (1989: 119) argues that "popular forms share with the sublime" the transgression "of beauty, grace and reason . . . [and] of aesthetic boundaries . . . bad taste takes its place alongside the fantastic, the uncanny, and the sublime in a carnival of resistance to the hegemony of the beautiful". It can be argued that the significance of Nollywood lies in its contravention of the 'rational' and 'beautiful' aesthetic of American as well as African celluloid cinematic practice (such as the revered films by Ousmane Sembene). However, it is important at this point to pause and reflect on the meanings of kitsch and the sublime within the specificity of Nollywood. The meanings of these words cannot be imported so easily into contemporary African video-film practices.

Vincenot defines Nollywood as "kitschy" when he compares Hausa films to Bollywood in order to point out that Nollywood "doesn't come near the standards of perfection" and that the performances of "the 'smurf' or the 'moonwalk' from the great era of 'Sydney' and 'Billie Jean'" symbolise kitsch (Vincenot in Barrot 2008: 28–9). Barrot (2008: 28) asserts that, as "the main centre for forgery in Africa", "Nigeria uses the art of counterfeit in its video industry, including recycling the names of films: *Pretty Woman*, *Sharon Stone*, *Die Another Day*". The derisive nature of these descriptions operates on a cultural value system that venerates 'the original' over 'the copy' in a socio-political dynamic where Africans are 'copying' the East and the West. In this sense, the term 'kitsch' seems derogatory. The notion that Africans are copying others can also be found in descriptions of the Nollywood domestic spaces that are filled with 'kitsch' objects including designer leather couches, stuffed animals, green curtains[126], glass topped coffee tables with metallic frames, chandeliers, alcohol bars, and large screen televisions, as well as glass and porcelain sculptures that signify modern wealth.

[126] Green curtains and green paint on walls have become stereotypical of Lagos homes. The colour green refers to the national flag which comprises green and white colours. I will briefly discuss this in Chapter 5.

Zina Saro-Wiwa illustrates the complexity of 'kitsch' in the kind of urban, modern home that is used in Nollywood video-film. Her collaboration with artist, Mickalene Thomas, for the exhibition entitled *Sharon Stone in Abuja* (2010) was an installation of a typical kitsch interior of a living room or parlour with green walls in Lagos, fashioned like the parlours that are used as a setting for most Nollywood video-films [Figs. 44; 45; 46]. In this installation, there is a 'fake' miniature Doric column [Fig. 47], 'fake' or plastic and glass flowers [Fig. 48], 'fake' gold-rimmed drinking glasses [Fig. 49], and a 'fake' gold gilded frame with an image of Christ on the cross [Fig. 50], as well as flower-shaped lamp shades [Fig. 51]. On the walls are large portrait photographs of Nollywood actresses by Mickalene Thomas. The actresses are dressed in batik print fabric outfits and seated on couches that are also covered with batik print fabric [Figs. 52; 53]. The use of batik fabric is very similar to that in Yinka Shonibare's renowned art work [Fig. 54].

Yinka Shonibare is a British-Nigerian artist who constructs installations of mannequins dressed in batik fabric, based on classic European paintings. Shonibare uses batik fabric to appropriate or 'quote', rather than copy, canonical Western art. His use of batik fabric, a material that is now known as 'African print' but is made through a process originating in Indonesia, critiques the notion of authenticity (Shonibare et al. 2004). The discourse of copy and original, based on the premise that the power relationship between the colonised and the coloniser results in the notion that the former copies or mimics the latter who symbolises power, is subverted in Shonibare's artwork. The European subjects are portrayed in Victorian dress made from 'African print' material, so that it appears as though Europe has copied Africa. Shonibare's artwork also interrogates essentialist distinctions that denote 'African' and 'European' or 'First World' and 'Third World', and therefore questions the structure of value based on problematic hierarchical conjectures.

Carmen McCain (2010) sees the use of batik fabric in Saro-Wiwa and Thomas' installations as a 'copy' of the ways in which Nigerian homes are imagined but not how they really are. She states: "the bizarre note in the room were the zebra-striped and leopard print throw pillows, reminding the visitor that this was not a home in Nigeria but a gallery in New York, where animal print is often the easiest visual shorthand for

Africa"[127]. These objects can easily be perceived as kitsch, but why is this? Are these objects kitsch because there are many 'copies' of the same objects in working class and lower middle class homes? Are they kitsch because they recycle or 'copy' images of modern living interiors from American television programmes? It can be said also that Saro-Wiwa and Thomas' installations reveal a particularly Nigerian aesthetic that makes it harder to simply see these objects as 'kitsch'.

Kitsch is regarded as the "offspring" of Romanticism (Kulka 2002: 14), to which it owes its mawkish sentimentality. Clement Greenberg's (1939) definition of kitsch as the cultural production of "the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe" links the emergence of this quality in objects as inherent in a particular socio-economic disposition. Although Greenberg's notion of kitsch has been rejected by late-Marxist critics, its coupling of cultural decay with progress necessitates an examination of the particularity of the post-colonial and contemporary African context. Michael Janis (2008: 22) points out that, "if there is a sense of kitsch in Senghor's philosophy of African emotion, expressiveness and rhythm", it is "from a *moment of polyvalence*, of reflexive imbrication that can only be deemed an ambiguous adventure as it proceeds, paradoxically, at once from a belief in assimilation and an assertion of African difference (own emphasis)". Rather than being an aesthetic quality that emerged from the formation of an industrial working class, cultures that appear as kitsch in Nigeria arose in the negotiation of the affirmation of local cultures as well as appropriation of transnational cultures during economic shifts. It may be for this reason that kitsch in this context should not necessarily denote 'bad taste' or a 'low' form of culture.

Saro-Wiwa and Thomas' living room or parlour in a gallery is echoed by the parlour in the television screen (since video-films are watched on television sets) [Fig. 55], as copies of copies proliferating *ad infinitum* in a matrix where no object claims origin and which frustrates the process of valuing and categorising. There is something 'original' about Nollywood (as well as Ghanaian video-film) as a culture "like no other"[128], but it reproduces and recycles cultural images that circulate in the public sphere, making it both familiar and strange. Nollywood video-film is also characterised by this ambiguity and limitlessness, film upon film, poster upon poster, it is an industry that is difficult to

[127] McCain, C. 2010. "Sharon Stone in Abuja, Nollywood in New York", *The Weekly Trust,* December, Saturday 11
[128] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria

grasp. This is its fantastic nature so aptly defined by Okome as "ubiquitous"[129], as if it were omnipresent. This is also how it can be experienced as sublime. It keeps drawing attention to prevailing and overwhelming power systems that are re-negotiated in everyday life.

Objects are appropriated and collected: the collection of decorating objects (in video-film sets), the collection of cars (a symbol of wealth in Nollywood), and personal collection of video-films. Modes of collection and appropriation are elucidated by James Clifford (1988: 218), who argues that "gathering" or "the assemblage of a material world, the marking off of a subjective domain that is not 'other' is probably universal". It is rather the notion that "this gathering involves the accumulation of possessions, the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience)" that is not universal (Clifford 1988: 218). In his discussion of the appropriation of African objects by Western museums, Clifford (1988: 220) points out that such acquisition and appropriation reveals that "the objective world is given, not produced, and thus historical relations of power in the work of acquisition are occulted".

Nollywood's representation of fantastic wealth, for example, is not similar to Western "possessive individualism" or "the emergence of an ideal self as owner: the individual surrounded by accumulated property and goods" (Clifford 1988: 217). There is a canonical image in Nollywood video-films in which the wealthy throw money at people at the parties they organise. Collecting power is not only about flaunting private property but also ostentatiously giving it away. For example, in *Osuofia and the Wisemen* (2008), when Paul and Silas become rich from selling the *Ekpo* mask to an American, they organise parties at which they literally throw money at guests. In the film entitled *Born-Again Billionaires*, the men who are part of a wealth-creating occult collectively organise parties at which they shower guests with Naira and Dollar paper bills. A Nollywood comic book front page also shows a wealthy woman with paper bills being thrown at her [Fig. 56]. There are countless examples of this practice. It is customary to throw money at the bride in Igbo marriages. The practice of throwing money has also transmuted into spectacular displays of power. In political campaigns politicians throw T-shirts, food parcels and money at masses of people. These 'traditions' are modern phenomena (Meyer 2008a). The structure of patron-clientelism, from which Nollywood

[129] Makhubu, N. Interview with Onookome Okome, 2011/05/23, Pretoria

seems to have been born and which forms one of its key themes, ensures a system of 'give and take'. The collection and display of objects shares with the fantastic the element of fetishism and the organisation of desire. The immensity of that desire, endless collecting and restructuring of identities, is experienced as sublime. The continuum of displays in video-film and its peripheral media, such as posters, saturates the public sphere with endless ideals and constant re-structuring of value.

Conclusion

Nollywood video-film emerges from cultural practices that have cultural value. Its roots in itinerant theatre, celluloid cinema, and television programmes, some of which are respected or valued cultural practices, complicate the assumption that video-film is an illegitimate cultural practice made only for commercial purposes. Nollywood draws attention to the *systems* through which value is determined. A discussion of dichotomous concepts such as popular culture/art, or high and low culture, seems to be based on socio-economic politics rather than on the actual aesthetic characteristics of an object or practice. The significance in the 'bad quality' of low-budget video-films is that it captures a cultural and historical moment that illuminates the mechanisation of fear and desire that impacts contemporary cultures. The context that gave rise to the practices of video-film is central to understanding its significance.

Furthermore, the spatial definitions of 'high' and 'low' culture or popular culture import a vocabulary from Western cultural developments and should be used with caution when discussing what might constitute popular culture in Nigeria. The concept of 'the popular' is a demographic term denoting 'the masses' as a specific class rather than everybody and hence should keep in mind the fragmented societies that colonialism constructed. The impact of colonialism also began special kinds of a vocabulary of violence and magic. While the use of technology and introduction of foreign objects altered relations between people. Video-film gives a glimpse into the ways in which present-day life is fashioned and how commodities are perceived. Moreover, its discourse of the copy subverts the systems of value which place emphasis on 'authenticity' and 'originality'. The terror of colonialism and overwhelming gluttony of capitalism can easily be disguised as the everyday and mundane (kitschy objects in urban homes). By placing images of these effects into proximity, Nollywood renders them as 'shocking', and they can be experienced as sublime. The significance of video-

film, in its emerging form, should not be undervalued. Even though some of the images that Nollywood proliferates seem ‘irrational’ and ‘imagined’, they are indices of an existing belief. That belief is the acceptance of the fantastic as the fabric of the real.

Images

Fig. 41: Flood in Lagos. Photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 42: Hope Obioma Opara (co-founder of the Eko International Film Festival (Ekoiff) in Lagos) with media interviewers. Photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 43: Ekoiff guest with Hope Obioma Opara (co-founder of the Eko International Film Festival in Lagos). Photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 44: Zina Saro-Wiwa and Mickalene Thomas, *Parlour* (2010), installation view

Fig. 45: Zina Saro-Wiwa and Mickalene Thomas, *Parlour* (2010), installation view

Fig. 46: Zina Saro-Wiwa and Mickalene Thomas, *Parlour* (2010), installation view

Fig. 47: Doric column in Zina Saro-Wiwa's and Mickalene Thomas's installation

Fig. 48: Glass flowers on a glass-topped coffee table in Zina Saro-Wiwa's and Mickalene Thomas's installation

Fig. 49: Refreshment stand with gold-rimmed glasses in Zina Saro-Wiwa's and Mickalene Thomas's installation

Fig. 50: Gold gilded frame in Zina Saro-Wiwa's and Mickalene Thomas's installation

Fig. 51: Flower-shaped lampshade in Zina Saro-Wiwa's and Mickalene Thomas's installation

Fig. 52: Mickalene Thomas, *Parlour* (2010)

Fig. 53: Mickalene Thomas, *Parlour* (2010)

Fig. 54: Yinka Shonibare, *Leisure Lady (with ocelots)* (2001), Life-size fiberglass mannequin, three fiberglass ocelots, Dutch wax printed cotton, leather, glass. Vanhaerents Art Collection

Fig. 55: Television set Zina Saro-Wiwa's and Mickalene Thomas's installation

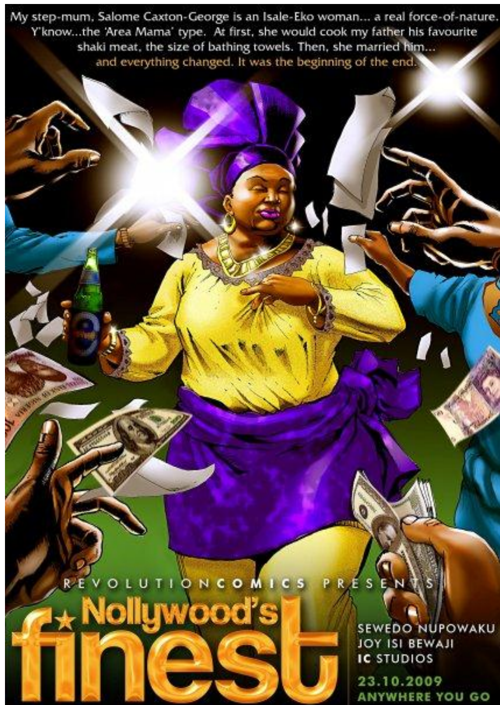

Fig. 56: Image of affluence in Nollywood on the front page of the Nollywood comic book *Nollywood's Finest*

Fig. 57: Hand-painted poster: *I Hate my Village*

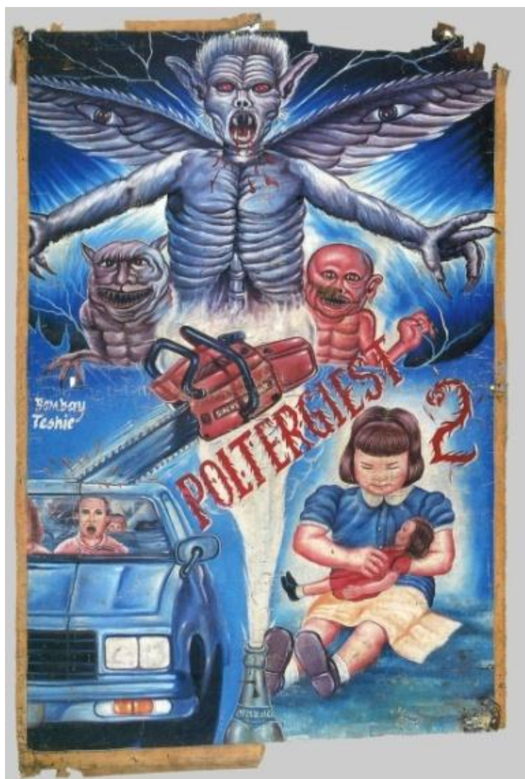

Fig. 58: Hand-painted poster: *Poltergeist*

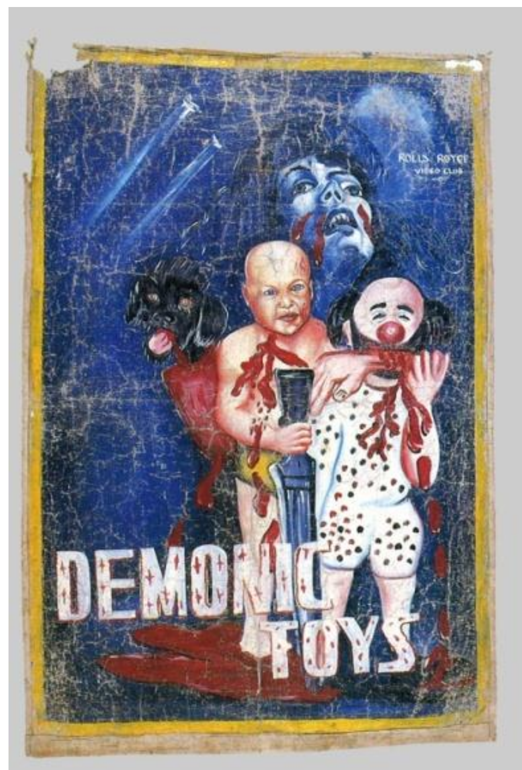

Fig. 59: Hand-painted poster: *Demonic Toys*

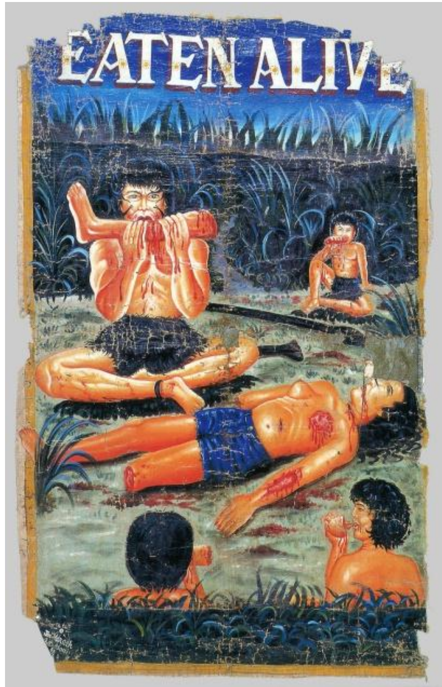

Fig. 60: Hand-painted poster: *Eaten Alive*

Fig. 61: Hand-painted poster: *Dolly Dearest*

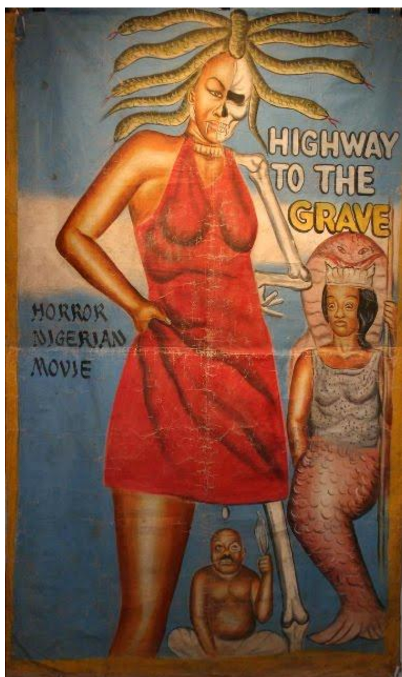

Fig. 62: Hand-painted poster: *Highway to the Grave*

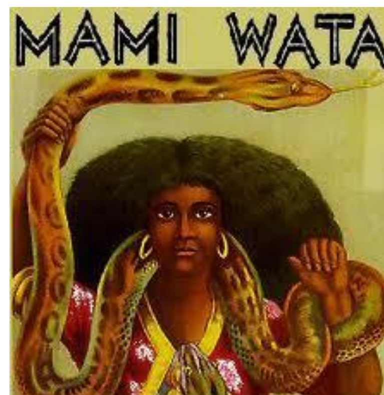

Fig. 63: Images of Mami Wata

Fig. 64: Hand-painted poster: *Snake Kingdom*

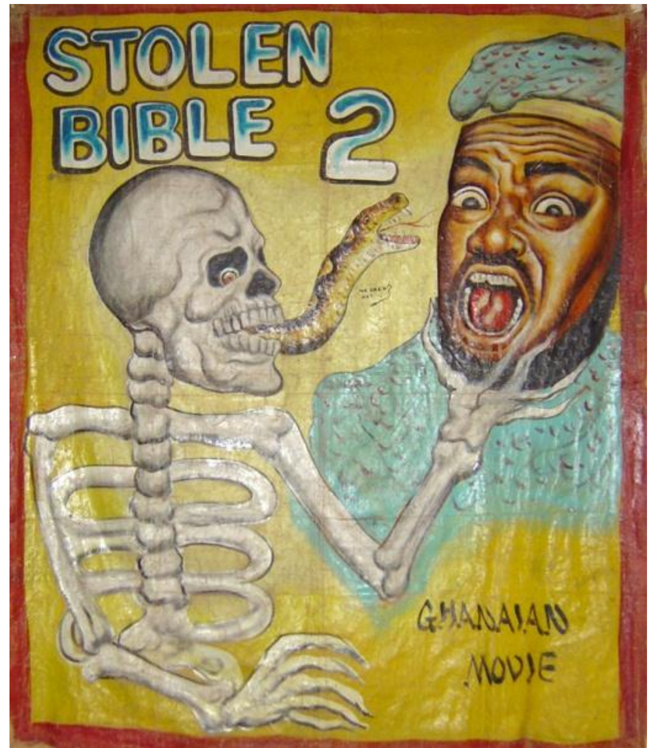

Fig. 65: Hand-painted poster: *Stolen Bible*

Fig. 66: Hand-painted poster: *Monster Evil Protact*

Fig. 67: Hand-painted poster: *Cover Pot*

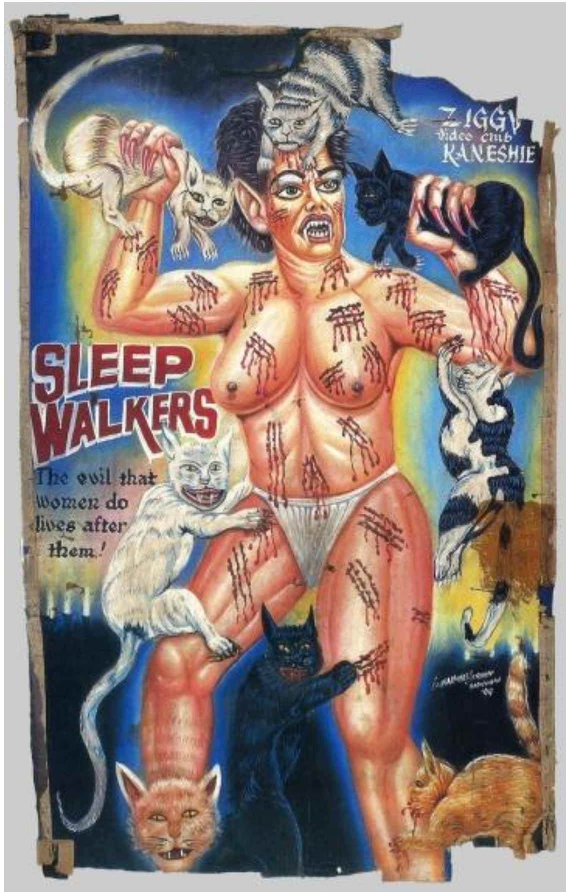

Fig. 68: Hand-painted poster: *Sleepwalkers*

Fig. 69: Nollywood posters in Lagos. Photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 70: Nollywood posters in Lagos. Photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 71: Nollywood Posters in Lagos. Photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 72: Film vending in Lagos, photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Fig. 73: Film vending in Lagos, photograph by Nomusa Makhubu

Chapter 3
Nollywood within a Theoconomy

More than the churches go to Nollywood, Nollywood goes to the churches
(Rotimi Ige Emmanuel)[130]

Religion in Nigeria is a complex issue that operates within political as well as economic spheres (Larkin 2000, Kalu 2003, Ukah 2003) and constitutes a major element of video-film discourse and practice. As Nollywood film director and producer Faruk Lasaki asserts, "Nigeria is a very religious country! In this country . . . we believe in God and as I say it's either you're a Muslim or a Christian"[131]. As such, religion plays an important role in constructing social relations as well as class and gender identities, which are in turn portrayed in video-film. More importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, religion amplifies the fantastic character of socio-cultural politics in Nigeria. The predominance of religion in video-film raises questions about the relationship between the video-film industry and the churches, particularly Christian Pentecostal–Charismatic churches (PCCs). Although there are Hausa Islamic video-films based in Kano which are also categorised under the banner of Nollywood[132], I focus on the Christian films, now referred to as 'Hallelujah films' by scholars (Okome 2007a, Haynes 2007a).

The purpose of this chapter is to interrogate how the complex relations between politics and religion animate the fantastic imagination as well as the imagery which generates fear and desire in the public sphere. In this way, I propose, Nollywood functions within a 'theoconomy' (my own term). By theoconomy, I refer to the intertwining of economy, politics and religion that creates an exchange system of symbols, spectacle, and fantastic imagery which are infused with the mystical characteristics of neo-liberal capitalism and Pentecostalism. Theoconomy does not passively reflect the economy but is also an economy in itself. Churches in Nigeria not only provide a world-view but also jobs, welfare and social networks. I explore and analyse types of symbolic exchanges in Pentecostalism and the ways in which religion presents fantastic imagery as the depiction of real social issues in Nollywood video-films. I use the term theoconomy in this chapter to discuss the symbolic exchanges of icons and meanings in Nollywood through the theory of religious economy (Stark 1963, Ukah 2003), which regards

[130] Makhubu, N. Interview with Rotimi Ige Emmanuel, 2010/07/17, Ibadan
[131] Makhubu, N. Interview with Faruk Lasaki, 2011/07/09, Lagos
[132] These films are called Kanywood and are an important part of Nollywood.

religion as “a commodity” and “sees religious organisations as more or less successful firms operating more or less like other [competing] firms in an economic space regulated by discernible laws and logic” (Ukah 2003: 206). Video-films can be seen as the mechanism that reproduces the fear which drives the millennial capitalism that is defined by Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 2) as “capitalism that presents itself as a gospel of salvation . . . invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalised and disempowered”. Furthermore, the images produced in video-film create *desire(s)* by promising divine/magical or miraculous *transformation* from evil spiritual bondage, physical ailments and poverty to physical and psychological health as well as wealth.

There are three strands of Christian Nollywood video-films as observed by Ukah (2003: 205); these include the (neo-)pentecostalist and non-pentecostalist strands and also those video-films made independently of the church institutions but laden with Christian motifs. Mike Bamiloye (1997: 15), however, argues that there are only two types of Christian video-films, namely Evangelical and Entertainment Christian dramas. There are many examples of church practitioners (pastors and evangelists) who are also producers and directors of Nollywood video-films, or what Ukah calls “Pentecostal video culture” (Ukah 2004: 433, Krings 2008: 52), for example, Chris Okotie, Mike Bamiloye (leader of Mount Zion Faith Ministries), Helen Ukpabio (Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries), and Mike Okonwo (The Redeemed Evangelical Mission), as well as churches such as Winners’ Chapel. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) owns radio and television stations such as The Redemption Television Ministry (RTM).

These films, like many Christian video-films, are evangelistic implements that are constituted mainly of representations of evil, occults, demonism and witchcraft. By producing images on video-film of supernatural evil as an *actual* non-fictional threat, churches can then fashion themselves as a counteractive force. These films are instrumental in the fabrication of fear as well as the impression or simulation of the fantastic and supernatural as ‘real’. Since all forms of problems that affect people’s material lives, such as poverty, unemployment, high mortality rates and health complications such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, are attributed to a “spiritual attack” by evil forces (Oha 2000: 192, Asiegbo 2012: 249), the churches provide subterfuge. The video-films are an effective form of propaganda and, as diversion, they obscure state

accountability to provide goods and services by relegating all matters to supernatural malevolence. Video-films produce a currency of images that is founded on a "worldly and spectacular manipulation of consciences – the evanescence of God in the epiphany of power" (Baudrillard 1981: 5).

In Nigeria, a church-state separation policy was forged in the 1970s by President Yakubu Gowon. However, this partition between religion and politics is also viewed as "a quasi-separation" (Kalu 2003: 6). More recently religion as noted by Kalu "has been given a front seat in the Nigerian public sphere" (Kalu 2003: 13). The God of Africa, Kalu contends, "was a part of the nationalist rhetoric and propaganda". The significant appeal of specifically Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is generally linked to the devastation of the civil war in the 1960s, migration enabled by the post-War oil boom (Kukah 1993, Ukah 2003: 210, Kalu 2003), military rule, the fall of oil prices created an environment of economic recess, unemployment, "decay of social infrastructure (educational system, healthcare facilities and social amenities), high rate of inflation and violent crimes" (Ukah 2003: 210).

Ruth Marshall (2009: 4) observes that if there is a "separation of the domain of the political and the religious at either the imaginary or institutional level, [it] does not lead to the opposition between faith and reason . . . or secularisation". The illusion of such an opposition, Marshall (2009: 4) maintains, "underpins the myth of secularisation and appears as the hallmark of modernity". The moral polarisation that Nollywood illustrates between Christianity (as morally upright) and traditional beliefs (as debauched or as a source of witchcraft) constructs an axis on which the nation-state is perceived as corrupt and the church, its counterpart, as ethical. These dichotomies are superficial but exist to highlight social inequality. Rather than being part of the ideological process in the state, the church can be interpreted as a polity or state which is an alternative "coherent" administrative system, as if a semi-dependent state. Moreover, increasing religious fervour is seen as a result of the "failure of modern institutions, forms of organisation, and political rationality to take hold"; "the more modern Africans become, the more religious institutions or worldviews will recede from the realm of politics" (Marshall 2009: 5). Marshall (2009: 8) argues, however, that the "relationship between 'crisis of governmentality' and religious revival is by no means a causal one". The ethno-religious plurality of Nigeria means that loyalty to the

state does not necessarily precede loyalty to religious organisations. Therefore, the 'failure of the state' is a small part of the reason for religious fervour.

The politicisation of religion fractures Nigeria into the Muslim north and the Christian south amid a multitude of indigenous religions. The recent 'terrorist' bombing by the Islamist sect known as Boko Haram is an example of the contemptuous tensions between Islamic faith and Christianity. Nevertheless, the mosque symbolises protection for some in the same way as the Christian church does, although the strong relationship of patronage between Islamic organisations and the Islamic video-film industry in Kano may not be as strong as that between Christian churches and Christian video-film. Furthermore, politicians recognise religious organisations as a powerful platform to reach Nigerian citizens[133]. In the 70s and 80s "the nation-state's inability to monopolize moral resources of community and command political loyalty" opened new spaces of uncertainty (Marshall 2009). Ruth Marshall (2009: 9) argues that there was a development of "new economies of prestige and a slippage in the categories and social representations of power developed, now oriented towards ruse, the con, the informal, the criminal, and above all, the occult or supernatural". The collusion between religion and politics, and the imagination of the exercise of power as supernatural, resulted in what Marshall (2009: 9) calls the "crisis of representation" which creates:

> a situation of radical uncertainty, where signs and their referents become increasingly unmoored, giving rise to a heightened sense of social insecurity, a fear of fraudulent identities and of strangers, and a growing quest for moral mastery and the ability to control what were seen as untrammelled and dangerous powers.

This trope of corruption evokes a politico-economic meaning that has "an ethical spiritual dimension" and leads to forms of self-governing that can be seen as "political spirituality" (Marshall 2009: 9, 11). In this way, the power of the state and the power of the churches is characterised as supernatural, giving a fantastic character to governance.

[133] President Goodluck Jonathan appealed to church leader in order to ask people to cease violence http://ncronline.org/news/global/nigerian-president-religious-leaders-can-help-end-nations-crises accessed 2013/06/20

1: Liberty Gospel Church and the Use of Video-film

The Liberty Gospel Church, founded by Helen Ukpabio in 1992, has over 50,000 members and 150 churches in Nigeria[134]. It was begun in Cross River State in Calabar, "one of the least urbanized geo-cultural regions in Nigeria" (Ottong, et al. 2010: 39). The Liberty Gospel Church has a film production company called Liberty Films. Ukpabio, who produces all her films, began producing and directing Nollywood video-films in 1998 mainly as a means of spreading the gospel (Okome and Ukpabio 2007: 1). Ukpabio refers to her troubled childhood when she was a member of the Brotherhood of the Star and Cross (BSC), a church organisation led by Olumba Olumba Obu (OOO[135]) that she describes as a Satanist cult. She confides that she was initiated into the "Olumba cult" and was groomed to be "betrothed to Lucifer"[136]. She then attended the spiritual School for the Royals where she was "trained in concepts of Mysticism, Occultism, Spiritism, Satanism, Demonism and general cultism"[137]. Ukpabio, a housekeeper and nursing student in her youth, "would participate in collecting the blood of babies and initiating others into witchcraft" (Kalu 2008: 151). She was "saved" and "born again" at the age of 17 and aimed at "setting captives free by [using] the gospel"[138]. In 1992, she published her book entitled *The Seat of Satan Exposed*, in which she gives insight into 'OOO's church' which she called Satanist proclaiming that Olumba's secret to immortality and divinity was that he "sucked human blood to survive"[139]. Although Ukpabio writes books for her evangelising mission, she finds that video-film has "more impact" because "it is faster, and it reaches so many people at different places . . . [such that she gets] letters from different parts of the world" asking to market her films (Okome and Ukpabio 2007: 2). Ukpabio stars in all her films as a protagonist who can identify witches, exorcise, and redeem subjects from 'spiritual attacks'.

In one of her most criticised films, *End of the Wicked* (1999), directed by Teco Benson, Helen Ukpabio stars as the pastor who liberates Stella and Chris Amadi from the

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[134] This is a 2008 estimate sourced from *Nollywood Babylon* (2008), a documentary film written and directed by Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal and produced by the National Film Board of Canada.

[135] Hailed as the "Conqueror and Vanisher, King of Kings and Sole Spiritual Head of the Universe", Olumba Olumba Obu (OOO) is the "divine" leader of the Brotherhood of the Star and Cross (BSC), an African Independent Church (AIC)

[136] http://www.libertyfoundationgospelministries.org/profile.html accessed 2013/02/03

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid.

[139] http://www.newswatchngr.com/editorial/prime/special/10922185911.htm accessed 2013/02/13

destructive supernatural forces of witchcraft that manifest in children. The Amadi household faces demise when mysterious and life-threatening events take place. The maid dies under strange circumstances. A child spirit summons the spirits of other children at night, to Beelzebub [Fig. 74], for initiation and to be given powers to "torment" their parents and to cause mischief in the community. One of the children brought before Beelzebub is Amadi's daughter. On the night, they are told that they will "operate by picking things from [their] parents, all things that are left carelessly" must be brought to the coven "to torment [their parents]". Amadi's daughter is told that "from today on, your spiritual name is Mistake; I evoke upon you the spirit of stubbornness, stealing, lack of interest in school, waywardness, steadiness, bad company and power of destruction"[140]. She is also instructed to "break plates, glasses and then cause fever to all other children in your home". She leads the other children to her father's bedroom where they gather and eat from his body. The child also brings her father's personal effects, which enable Beelzebub to summon Amadi's spirit to the coven. When Amadi appears, he is told to go down on his knees. "*Firushe, Sherufi*!" shouts one of the Beelzebub's young devotees, "I command your eyes to come out"[141]. In a macabre fashion, Chris Amadi's eyes fall out and, suspended by bloody veins, dangle below his face. In that moment, when the eyes drop into a dish held by Beelzebub's devotee, Amadi wakes up from the chilling nightmare.

It is not only the children in Amadi's household that bring ill-fortune but also the grandmother of the children, Chris's mother. In the film, she is portrayed as a witch who is the main cause of the fatal problems that Amadi's family faces. Her evil affiliations eventually lead Chris, her son, to his death. Pastor Priscilla, played by Helen Ukpabio, tries to convert Chris into Christianity and accepting Christ as his saviour. Only then, can he be liberated from the evil spirits and witchcraft that are destroying his life. Although Pastor Priscilla does not manage to save Chris's life, she unsettles the evil spirits in Chris's mother, who subsequently goes into hysteria. The community assumes that Chris's wife, Stella, is guilty of killing her husband. Eventually, Pastor Priscilla induces a public confession from Chris's mother at the funeral. When people realise that the old woman, Chris's mother, is a witch and is responsible for his death, they pelt her with stones.

[140] *End of the Wicked* (1999)
[141] Ibid.

The evil effects that occur in the film seem to originate in the liminality of reverie. They occur like dreams but have 'real' material outcomes. For example, when children's spirits attend to Beelzebub, this seems to occur in their dreams – their spirits arise from their bodies and drift as if in a dream. Stella's horrid miscarriage also seems as though it is a dream. While Stella is sleeping, she dreams of her mother-in-law, who has developed a penis, lying on top of her, penetrating her, and grinning. When Stella awakes, her mother-in-law disappears but Stella is bleeding from her vagina. Another conflation of reality, psychological states, dream-states and supernatural manifestations is Chris's movement to Beelzebub's coven, when his eyes are removed. Chris awakes to find himself in bed even though the events that took place at the coven have an actual material effect on him. This ambiguity remains throughout the film. Suspending interpretations of the film between real and unreal, in a twilight zone, is precisely what has made Ukpabio's films notorious.

Ukpabio's position is both inside and outside the narrative. As a pastor in real life, who claims that her films are based on real divine intervention and people's real experiences, she ensures the kind of liminality[142] between real and unreal, or the worldly realm and the supernatural realm that makes it possible to conflate these categories as if they are the same. Okome (2007b: 169) finds that Ukpabio's position can be seen as "self-writing" and notes that this strategy "has some problems" because the viewer is faced with a situation where they could "construe this . . . [as] representing the *actual* in this social drama". The oscillation between two different values – that which is good becomes evil, that which is female becomes male (the mother-in-law who possesses a penis), that which is pure becomes profane/perverse (the children who are not only portrayed as evil but also appear grotesque[143]) [Fig. 75] – draws attention to the transformative space between the two values.

This transformative space can be seen as the moment of hesitation that is defined by Todorov as a crucial feature of the fantastic. In the fantastic narrative, Todorov (1973:

[142] I am using this term in light of Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) and Victor Turner's (1967) theories of the tripartite structure of liminality. Van Gennep argues that there are three phases; namely separation, transition and re-integration. I am using these theories with due criticism of Van Gennep's prejudicial delineation of the people he was studying as "semi-civilised". Rather than dealing with subjects who, through rituals, are being transformed into other states of being, I am dealing with the in-betweenness of place and time, being inside and outside the narrative through performed rituals (rituals at the witches' coven as well as evangelical prayers and exorcisms).

[143] The make-up on the children's faces in the film makes it seem as if their skin has melted and is rotting.

33) explains, the viewer/reader hesitates "between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described". This hesitation is experienced by one of the characters in the narrative as it is experienced by the reader/viewer. The character *represents* this hesitation and the viewer, who identifies with the character and considers "the world of characters as a world of living persons", takes a literal reading of the narrative rather than a poetic or allegorical one (Todorov 1973: 33). Ukpabio's extradiegetic and homodiegetic roles bridge, within the transformative space, the two opposing values. She treats her seemingly fictional films as if they are of a 'factual' documentary nature. Also, she portrays her actual identity and transcends, as would the viewer, the mode of fiction.

Ukpabio's films have faced criticism for their literal construal of the supernatural (Ukah and Echtler 2009). For example, *End of the Wicked* (1999) is blamed by various organisations for the continuing 'witch'-hunting that involves the torture and murder of young children in Nigeria. Stepping Stones Nigeria (SSN) is amongst many of the organisations that have campaigned against Ukpabio's video-films. Conceptualised by Gary Foxcroft in 2003, SSN formed a model school for abandoned children in the Niger Delta, and they take on a variety of issues through partnering with various human rights organisations. They argue that the research that SSN has carried out in the Niger Delta shows that belief in child witches is linked to Nollywood films, particularly *End of the Wicked*, as well as the fear spread by new Pentecostal churches for "economical self-gain"[144]. When approached by American researchers about the impact that her films have on "impoverished and uneducated people"[145], as well as the abuse of children that are accused of 'witchcraft', Ukpabio responds by asserting that her critics are racists. She states, "we have about 150 churches in Nigeria, so I am a voice in this country . . . a white man or white woman cannot just walk into my country and say nonsense about me"[146]. She argues that the Harry Potter films also depict children who practise 'witchcraft' but are not criticised in the same way her films are. In 2012, Jim Wissick drew a petition[147] against Ukpabio denying her entry into the United States:

[144] http://www.steppingstonesnigeria.org/witchcraft.html accessed 2013/02/03
[145] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5klKretrsw accessed 22/02/2013
[146] Ibid.
[147] http://www.change.org/petitions/the-president-of-the-united-states-deny-entry-to-the-usa-for-helen-ukpabio accessed 14/02/2013

To:
The President of the United States
The U.S. Senate
The U.S. House of Representatives
United States Department of State

I just signed the following petition addressed to: United States Department of State.
Deny entry to the USA for Helen Ukpabio

Helen Ukpabio is a "Christian" preacher from Nigeria who has been spreading the fear of child witches in Nigeria. She uses her sermons, teachings and prophetic declarations to incite hatred, intolerance and persecution of alleged witches and wizards, usually children. Thousands of children have been killed, tortured, or maimed by acid, fire, or other acts of senseless violence. The surviving children are usually left homeless and are preyed upon by others.
She has simple diagnostic tools that can detect a witch:
"A child under two years of age that cries at night or deteriorates in health is an agent of Satan."

These condemned children are regularly subjected to: Abandonment, isolation, discrimination, and ostracization from the community. They are often disgraced publicly, usually by being chained and tortured in churches in order to extract confessions. Many are murdered in horribly cruel ways: burned alive, bathed in acid, fatally poisoned (usually with a local toxic berry). Exploiting local superstitious beliefs, particularly those related to spiritual or demonic possession or witchcraft, Helen Ukpabio's organization has grown exponentially throughout Nigeria and West Africa since its foundation.

In March 2012, Helen Ukpabio is scheduled to hold a 12 day "revival" in Houston, Texas at the invitation of Glorious Praise Ministries. The US Department of State needs to be urged to do the right thing and deny Helen Ukpabio's entry into the United States on grounds of her human rights violations.

Sincerely,

The impact that Ukpabio's films (as well as many other Nollywood video-films) *may* have on the horrific violence levelled against children who are suspected to be witches is undeniable. This situation sheds light on the mechanisation of violence within that transformative moment of uncertainty in the slippage between fiction and reality or evil and good. However, one must re-think the concept of the 'impoverished and uneducated' viewer that is referred to and on whom the film has such a devastating impact. It seems plausible to argue that it would be presumptuous and short-sighted to believe that people in the Niger Delta are not only *generally* naïve enough to believe

what they see on video-film but are also so malicious that they would kill children without conscience simply as a result of consuming Nollywood. There is something unsettling about the *real* narratives (actual child witch-hunting) that intersect with the film narrative of *End of the Wicked* (1999) and affect the interpretative process.

It may be worth briefly reflecting on the existing history of narratives that *do* vilify Africa, in general. These narratives have not only created grotesque images projected on real conditions in Africa but also, by doing so, have legitimised violence against its people. In *Home and Exile*, Chinua Achebe (2001: 27) reminds us of Joyce Cary's description of the Africans present at a party held by the central character, Johnson. Through this character, Cary posits: "the demonic appearance of the naked dancers, grinning, shrieking, scowling, or with faces which seemed entirely dislocated, senseless and unhuman, like twisted bags of lard, or burst bladders". Achebe (2001: 27) also refers to John Lok's racist account, *inter alia*, of people in West Africa in 1651:

> a people of beastly living, without a God, law, religion . . . whose women are common for they contract no matrimonie, neither have respect to chastity . . . whose inhabitants dwell in caves and dennes: for these are their houses, and the flesh of serpents their meat as writeth Plinie and Diodorus Siculus. They have no speech but rather a grinning and chattering. There are also people without heads, having their eyes and mouths in their breasts.

This form of bigotry frames mindless malevolence as a *natural* characteristic of people in West Africa. The sweeping gesture, with which the relation between actual deaths of children that are suspected of witchcraft and Ukpabio's suggestive film is handled, necessitates a guarded approach to Ukpabio's video-films. Achebe's (2001: 24) claim that "there is such a thing as absolute power over narrative" draws attention to the process of arranging stories within the moral constructs of certain ideologies. For example, the margins that define what is perverse or profane or how it is framed for presentation. A racist account of people subjected to imperialism portrays them as perverse. How does one make sense of the grotesque images in Ukpabio's film? Do they add to the archive of imagery created by prejudiced colonial narratives? Do they capture something important about contemporary anxieties that arise from overwhelming transnational socio-political conditions? How does this imagery of the sacrosanct and profane relate to the elasticity of domestic and national regulations of specific moral codes?

In an interview with Okome, Ukpabio states that the National Film and Video Censorship Board (NFVCB) denied or withdrew initial approval for the release of *End of the Wicked*. She argues that this was because of the inclusion of a male organ on a female body (Okome and Ukpabio 2007: 10). She states that "the Board does not have the right to do this because it is a message . . . what I am saying with the depiction of this woman in this way is that women do develop male organs to abuse other women spiritually . . . and that was what I was trying to say with this image" (Okome and Ukpabio 2007: 10). Although the board withdrew approval, this film was released regardless of the state resources (police) that were used to discontinue the illegal release. Ukpabio argues that the Board withdrew because they wanted to "collect bribes" (Okome and Ukpabio 2007: 10). These recurrences of contraventions within and around the film narrative[148] allude to what Ogbu Kalu (2003: 1) refers to as a *moral performance* through which politics and religion "in Africa" are interlinked or are of the same dimension. The scenario discussed by Ukpabio regarding *End of the Wicked* illustrates the way in which the dynamics of politics and religion in everyday life are constituted by contraventions that constantly redefine laws through transgression.

The video-films of Liberty Gospel Church transgress by producing taboo imagery in order to re-affirm Christian principles. Also, by breaching the censorship regulations, Ukpabio illuminates the elasticity of state and religious law. It alludes to Elizabeth Cowie's (1999: 356) point that the fantastic highlights distinctions between modes which do not only "involve a difference in the objects of fantasy" (real or unreal, or conscious or unconscious) but "a difference in their relation to repression and censorship". The systemic utilisation of political and religious laws and regulations draws our attention to questions of power that are emphasised by Kalu (2003: 1) who observes that power is not neutral. Power, as power delegated to persons or vested in objects, appears in these video-films as a temporary transferable, removable characteristic that is in continual combat with supernatural power (power of God, gods, deities or evil).

The video-films of Liberty Gospel Church, or Nollywood video-films in general, show the processes in which boundaries are constantly pushed – what is repressed or censored

[148] Ukpabio's observation that the NFVCB wanted to collect bribes is questionable. Nevertheless, there are many accounts of corruption and mistrust of government parastatals.

becomes spectacularly apparent – in performances of morality. They allude to the Pentecostal belief that "individual, social and political misadventures [are linked] to the larger cosmic battle between God and His enemies" (Kalu 2003: 12). This 'battle' is characterised as an invasion in which "demonic forces enter . . . the *doors* of the body and *gates* of communities and nations . . . to possess, control and derail from God's munificent design [original emphasis]" (Kalu 2003: 12). Through spectacular displays of these contentions, Pentecostals appear to be in a *war* with evil forces.

2: The Spectacle of Pentecostalism

The concept of "staging the Word of God" (Oha 2000: 193) by Pentecostal churches ranges from staged theatrical plays to Nollywood video-films. Pentecostals are characterised by spectacular exhibitions (in large stadia or halls) of the conspicuous consumption encouraged by prosperity gospel as well as the miraculous or numinous healing of physical, psychological and spiritual ailments [Figs. 76 and 77]. The photographer, Andrew Esiebo, does not only photograph Nollywood actors but also focusses the lens on the spectacle of Pentecostalism which is a common theme in Nollywood video-film. The series entitled *God is Alive* (2009) portrays multitudes of people in praise led by pastors who deliver dramatic sermons. In another untitled photograph of this series, the theatrical spirituality is contrasted by the copious stacks of money bills on tables. Esiebo's documentary photographs illuminate the contradictions embedded in the spectacular performances of Pentecostal spirituality.

Nollywood video-film, it can be argued, has become another form of staging the spectacle of Pentecostalism. It appeals to the desires of people (wealth/prosperity, sanity, health, etc.) by staging the impossible as that which is attainable only through accepting the ideological constructs that define, in the Althusserian sense, their "real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1971: 153). Hallelujah video-film represents the transformation between the imagined/fantastic and the real/material. The rhetoric and dramatisation of 'the miracle' reminds us of the "role that fantasy plays in supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle" (Walters 2011: 35). Video-film is a platform, not only for the representation of the miraculous transformation from poor to rich, sick to healthy, but also for the creation of desires. As Žižek (1989: 118) affirms, "fantasy

teaches us how to desire". Video-film forms part of the construction of desires within the mass mediation of evangelism.

This is portrayed by Andrew Esiebo in the image of the television screen broadcasting the sermon in the church and on television stations as well as that of the billboard referring to the internet [Fig. 78 and 79]. Television broadcasts, the internet and video-film, as I will discuss later in this section, have become some of the most important platforms for the spread of *international* Pentecostalism. Digital Satelite Television (DSTV) broadcasts channels where Pentecostal pastors deliver sermons. For some, the television screen is not only a remote representation of the sermon but a form of spiritual contact where the screen is touched for receiving 'grace'. Similarly, the internet is an important platform where, for example, large international churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) have websites where resources such as Redemption TV, Radio and a Virtual Learning Centre can be accessed. Members can pay tithes and request prayers online. The RCCG billboard in Andrew Esiebo's photograph [Fig. 79] reads "e-mail, e-banking, e-business: are you thinking of E-TERNITY?" The use of new media is as significant as the 'traditional' modes of 'staging the word of God' such as theatrical plays.

Proselytising through video has its roots in theatrical plays staged in churches. A majority of Nollywood actors that I interviewed and had informal discussions with during this research said that they started acting in plays that were staged in church. For instance, in a personal interview, John Paul Nwadike said that before Nollywood acting, he had acted in plays staged during junior mass in church[149]. These forms of theatre, which Foluke Ogunleye (2007: 25) calls "morality plays", set the tone for *Christian* video-films. They are different from secularised itinerant theatre. Pentecostal dramatic and theatrical activity involved "drumming, clapping, dancing and chanting" as well as plays; for example, "the Cherubim and Seraphim adopted the Corpus Christi processional form" (Ogunleye 2007: 25). These plays enforced the principle: "let no step be taken which revives in any form, the spirit of worship of the old religion" (Ogunleye 2007: 26). Hubert Ogunde (the Father of Nigerian Theatre), who also produced celluloid films towards the end of his career, introduced "dramatic action, authentic dance that demonstrates actions and realism" as the organist of the Church of the Lord which is

[149] Makhubu, N. Interview with John Paul Nwadike, 2011/07/14, Lagos

also known as the *Aladura*[150] movement (Ogunleye 2007: 26). The involvement of church members in the production and performance of church plays or church theatre remains similar in the production and performance of video-films. Often, church members are used as actors in video-films. For example, in her interview with Okome, Helen Ukpabio explains that they sometimes use church members (who also bring their own costumes) to act in her films (Okome and Ukpabio 2007: 19). Asonzeh Ukah (2003: 211) argues that the transnational Christian movement that had always used "media such as books, tracts and pamphlets" gained more popularity "when words were matched with images". The production of imagery and re-enactments of the gospel led to "a shift to video".

For Ukah (2003: 211), the videotapes of American televangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, Robert Schuller and Oral Roberts were influential on the way in which, through video-film, Pentecostalism was fashioned as a modern mode of Christianity. There is a common statement that "Pentecostalism is as American as apple pie" originating from the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles (Kalu 2008: 11, 14). Even though some scholars (such as Kalu 2003: 9-10) argue against the thesis that African Pentecostalism originates from American right-wing Pentecostal groups, their cultural influence had an impact. Televangelist videotapes were imported from America and appealed to "young, university-educated leaders of the post-war campus Christianity in Nigeria who often mimicked much of what was on these tapes" (Ukah 2003: 211). The growth of Scripture Union during 1967-1975 in universities as well as "the Benson Idahosa ministry… linked new Christianity with American televangelists" and consolidated the modern Pentecostal movement (Kalu 2008: 89). Ukah (2003: 211) observes that young neo-Pentecostal pastors were "self-trained or video-trained by listening to and viewing the audio-visual recordings of American televangelists whom they regarded as role models". The video culture that was created by neo-Pentecostals created a footing for video-film. One of the first major video-films, *Living in Bondage*, is an example of the predominance of Pentecostal rhetoric in the majority of video-film genres (Ukah 2003: 212, Haynes 2007c, Okome 2000b).

[150] The *Aladura* Church Movement is one of the most popular African Initiated Churches (AICs) and has the largest number of AIC followers in the continent. It was established in the 1930s. The word *Aladura* is Yorùbá for "those who pray" (Ositelu 2002: 67).

Video-film, therefore, is a "site not just for isolated religious messages and meanings, but for a forest of religious symbols and values" (Ukah 2003: 205). Ukah's argument here suggests that religion is a commodity sold by corporate-like Pentecostal Christian organisations which operate in the "contemporary Nigerian spiritual supermarket" where video-film is a marketing tool to amass supporters. In agreement, Kalu (2008: 109) argues that "religion is intrinsically woven into various forms of media representations" such that "preacher and television star are one, the convert and consumer are one, [and] things like love, joy, life are for sale". For Kalu (2008: 107), "commerce may be deemed to be religiously minded" and vice versa. Video-film, according to Ukah (2003: 205), plays a socio-economic role in fashioning tastes and behaviour based on a "westernised system of commodity consumption" and "a free market situation where these religions are compelled to compete among themselves for adherents and public patronage". Further, he notes that video-film plays a role in a context where there is an "expansion of Pentecostal culture into apparently non-religious spheres such as politics, business (banking and insurance), advertising, mass communication, and the production of material popular culture" (Ukah 2002; Ukah 2003: 207).

Although Ukah's argument does not delve into the inequalities created by monopolies of specific churches and whether video-film is a *result* of those ideological constructs or an *apparatus* that legitimates such constructs. Birgit Meyer (2004a: 92), for instance, sees video-film as a significant contributor to the "emergence of a Pentecostally infused or better: *pentecostalite* public culture". For Meyer (2004a: 92), the media deliberately adopts expressive forms that signify Pentecostalism. The "free market situation" defined by Ukah may not really be "free" under conditions that are seen as the explanation for the rapid growth of Pentecostal churches, such as the way in which Pentecostal churches "fit" into the worldview that "offered a new power in Christ to deliver people from witchcraft and other forces" (Kalu 2003: 10). These explanations also include a "collapse of the economy" as well as the "abuse of human rights [that] made the upper and middle class just as vulnerable" (Kalu 2003: 10). Therefore, the scenario of people choosing a church along with its paraphernalia as if they are products in a market-place does not seem plausible if it does not take into consideration the hostile conditions as well as broader ideological paradigms that seem to coerce subjects into submission. The

spread of Pentecostalism in West Africa is often discussed by scholars (Ukah 2002; Kalu 2003; Meyer 2004a; Marshall 2009) as a political and economic phenomenon.

Alan Anderson (2004: 103) asserts that "Pentecostalism is big business in Africa" and "West Africa is one of the hotspots of the world as far as Pentecostalism is concerned" (see also Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001, Meyer 2004a, Marshall 2009). Garnering from statistical sources[151], Anderson (2004: 122) adds that "11 per cent of Africa's population was Charismatic in 2000". This prevalence is attributed to the perception that Pentecostal and Charismatic churches seemed to fulfil "African aspirations, with roots in a marginalised and underprivileged society struggling to find dignity and identity in the face of brutal colonialism and oppression" (Anderson 2004: 122). Ukah (2003: 209–210) defines Pentecostalism as "a broad, fluid and protean category under which many seemingly incompatible denominations may exist", that is characterised by

> the doctrinal emphasis on the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit made manifest in such activities as speaking in tongues, divine healing, prophecy, post-conversion experience and revelation knowledge, frequent prayer vigils and fasting, evangelical zeal and the use of modern mass media in ritual and religious activities… Other important features of this movement are a type of charismatic leadership structure and laity-driven administration, as well as what is variously called prosperity teaching or theology of abundance.

The promise of economic prosperity and magical transformation of poverty works through the construction of symbols of prosperity. Pentecostalism shows the spectacular successes of its leaders. The ability to build large church communities or to heal is a symbolic transformation of powerlessness to power or poverty to wealth that is enabled through 'divine intervention'. In Pentecostalism, magical transformations are meant to be *seen*. Similarly, video-film uses technical effects to make magical transformations visible.

Pentecostalism projects a public space that is riddled with protracted hostile exchanges with evil, supernatural forces and therefore constantly at war. Video-film as a public platform stages the *mode of crisis* that is arguably created by Pentecostal evangelism. With reference to Andre Corten, Ruth Marshall-Fratani (2001: 95) observes that transversal relations among churches are formed through media and that "the

[151] Anderson acknowledges that the statistical sources he refers to are possibly inaccurate because the rate of Pentecostal growth *appears* higher than the numbers divulged. However, he affirms that various sources agree to the overwhelming growth of Pentecostalism in Africa.

community of the church still exists as a reference but is transformed from a place of praise and cohesion to a 'show place' [*lieu de spectacle*] where deliverance and divine healing are staged". Marshall-Fratani (2001: 95) posits that there is a "change of imaginary [*imaginaire*]" which "involves the ways in which Pentecostalism inserts itself into a situation of urban crisis, where local relationships and social relationships, in the sense of neighbourhoods, are harder and harder to maintain and reproduce". In her book entitled *Political Spiritualities*, Marshall (2009: 2) notes that the Pentecostal rhetoric is characterised by "power and struggle, of revolution, of coming battle, of militancy and strategy, of raising an army to hasten the changes required not only at the level of 'everyday, natural realities of our personal lives' but also the 'political, religious, economic and social systems'". The visualisation of crisis provides theological symbols to explain dispossession.

This mode of crisis or notion of war is captured, for example, in the "Vision" and motto of the Liberty Gospel Church, which seeks "to help liberate mankind from every yoke and bondage of the enemy through teaching of God's word in a clear and direct way and exposing the works of the devil and his deceptions in these last days"[152]. The motto declares: "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage – Heb 2:15"[153]. The open crusades and video-films that Ukpabio performs and shows are a way of representing "the works of the devil", or of making apparent the unseen horrors or constructing a spectacular imaginary of horrors. This imaginary denies its fictionality through religious belief. Although, in the video-films, the viewer is aware that the characters are *playing* supernatural roles and the events are digitally manipulated to appear supernatural, Ukpabio (as do most Pentecostal churches) affirms the *actual* existence of the demons and witches that are represented as well as the urgency of their obliteration. This belief is maintained through ensuring that people *see* the crisis, the war and the forces that are posed against them.

Nollywood video-film, and cinema generally, facilitates scopophilia, or, as observed by Laura Mulvey (1999: 381), the pleasure in looking. In this case, it is the horror of "war" between "God and His enemies" from which the pleasure of looking is derived. It is the decaying bodies, the horror of their mutilation and disfigurement, the magic of

[152] http://libertyfoundationgospelministries.org/history.htm accessed 28/02/2013
[153] Ibid.

witchcraft and the magic 'healing' or 'liberating' bodies from evil possession that are objects of fascination. However, this is a pleasure derived from seeing that is not sexual or libidinal pleasure. Fascination with dismembered bodies or the obscene brutality of evil is coupled with discipline and punishment. Although pleasure in these video-films is derived from *seeing* that supernatural evil forces *do* exist and that God does triumph, seeing is also framed as a duty. Followers *must see* what happens if they 'stray' from the 'path of God'. Ukpabio takes it upon herself to serve God by making people *see* evil. Pentecostal gatherings stage, by 'necessity', the writhing bodies of people who are possessed by evil spirits for all to see.

Andrew Esiebo photographs a moment when church multitudes of followers (women, men, and children) are laying face-down on the floor of the church [Fig. 80], some in trance and others in prayer. It is common to see people 'overpowered by the spirit' on the floor during evangelical broadcasts. This spectacular phenomenon, involving seeing what looks like exorcism, casts the abstract concepts of evil and God's grace as material phenomena that can affect the body physically. In some cases people vomit or appear as though they are experiencing seizures. These demonstrations of evil and good are generally not interpreted as theatrical performances but as *real* demonstrations of the body subjected to supernatural power.

Similarly, the practice of people touching the screen when watching televangelist video to be healed necessitates that they *see* or *foresee* such transference of power (Marshall 2009). The screen, through which video-film or televangelist video is experienced, is more than a mode of showing; it symbolises possibility. Images on the screen, which are indexical of a divine referential, are both seen and felt. Belief in supernatural or the fantastic allows for interpretating screen imagery. It may be this condition that entangles Pentecostalism with 'witchcraft', occultism and sorcery as true or real phenomena. Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 23–26) find that the parallel between religious movements and the occult economy "in the context of millennial capitalism" is "based on the idea of the word, simultaneously of possibility and impossibility". For Akinwumi Adesokan (2011: 92), "Pentecostalism and sorcery are seen as two basic strands of the occult imaginary". Pentecostalism gives a legitimate public life to fears about occultism and sorcery or 'witchcraft'.

3: "To God be the Glory" – A Political Economy of Christianity in Video-Film

There is a double meaning in the common sight of the words "To God be the glory" at the end of a Nollywood video-film for not only does the film serve God but many producers and directors believe that since there are so many challenges facing them in making a film, it is only by divine intervention that a project can be completed. In a personal interview, production manager Ahire-Uwaifo Lofty, mentioned an incident in which a generator fell on an actor's head. The actor survived because there was nothing they could do but to "pray and God will come to [the] rescue"[154]. Had the actor died, the only option would be to "look for a shovel, dig six feet, bury him and continue shooting"[155]. Since security and safety cannot be guaranteed for those making films, shooting sessions are usually accompanied by prayers at the beginning and at the end of a working day.

Another example is the documentary entitled *Nollywood Babylon*, in which the director Lancelot Imasuen leads the cast in prayer and song. The opening scene of the documentary shows Imasuen singing a hymn before shooting starts. It is not only this belief that entangles religious and film practice, but also the fact that some productions are sponsored by churches and give rise to what Akinwumi Adesokan (2011: 92) cynically calls the "Jesus Christ Executive Producer Syndrome". The Christian strands in Nollywood video-film allude to a political economy of religious belief. I use 'the church' intermittently in this section as a unitary overarching concept without the intention to downplay the diverse multiple strands of Christian churches in Nigeria in order to locate its allegorical or symbolic function within the social, economic and political spheres.

3.1.: The Church and Social Infrastructure

The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and foreign oil extraction, military rule and the decimation of factories are often stated as the reason the Nigerian government is unable to provide services (Adesokan 2011). Community-based Organisations (CBOs), Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and churches assist with the provision of basic services (Oruwari 2001). Yomi Oruwari (2001: 84) points out that "non-governmental development efforts took place under the banner of orthodox

[154] Makhubu, N. Interview with Ahire-Uwaifo Lofty, 2011/07/14, Lagos
[155] Ibid.

churches . . . during the colonial period" but the state took them over in the 1970s and, due to mismanagement, "the churches are [now] being asked to take over such establishments again". The churches' welfare activities include the training of women for economic improvement, provision of health facilities (maternity and ante-natal care), education, and funding and facilitating cultural programmes and housing specifically for its members, who pay 10% of their earnings as tithes. Some churches operate through a unitary system of government. According to Oruwari (2001: 86), the government recognises churches as "money-making ventures" and the issue of churches paying tax is controversial. Adesokan (2011: 92) observes that churches are quite powerful. For example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is an international Pentecostal church (it has branches in Africa, Europe, America, Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific) that was founded in 1952 by Pastor Josiah Akindayomi[156]. In Nigeria, it has a monumental church building on the Lagos–Ibadan Expressway known as Redemption City and run by Pastor Enoch Adeboye (also known as Daddy G.O. – General Overseer). It has piped water and 24-hour electricity (amenities which many Nigerians do not get), a bank and a gas station (Adesokan 2011: 92). It has a television station, a radio station and a publishing house. Pastor Enoch Adeboye's published books include *Your Tomorrow Will Be Alright*, *65 keys to Prosperity and Wealth*, *Secret of Winners* and *When You Need a Miracle*.

Apart from the basic services, people believe that the church facilitates a cultural economy which enforces public virtue and moral values. In a personal interview with Michael Chima, he argues that "the church is what prevents Nigeria from exploding into a civil war again"[157]. Chima echoes a general sentiment that the church keeps the crime rates low and is seen as a way for people to get out of poverty: "when you are hungry, you might as well stay at home and watch Christian video"![158] Furthermore, Chima postulates that video-films are debatably the reason that, in light of the lack of services, people do not revolt against the state, but they "watch Nollywood to forget their sorrows"[159]. Christian video-films, whether made through church-patronage or not, seem to create a buffer between the state and citizens (I will address this issue in

[156] http://www.rccg.org/ accessed 2013/06/15
[157] Makhubu, N. Interview with Michael Chima, 2011/07/09, Lagos
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

Chapter 5). Kalu (2003: 4) argues, however, that rather than being a depoliticising phenomenon, religion is an effective "weapon of social mobilisation", providing a platform on which masses can construct a socio-political identity.

Interestingly, the church in Nigeria was also used "by nationalists . . . as the free political space for voicing indigenous protests against white monopoly of decision-making processes" (Kalu 2003: 6). Kalu (2003: 5) asserts that "political theology is about what the people are really saying on the moral quality of the exercise of power among them and not about the pronouncements of the elites . . . ." He continues: "what the people are . . . doing at the level of infra-politics provide[s] clearer guides and these implicate the church because the wide range of the associational life of the church makes it the leader of civil society in most parts of Africa" (Kalu 2003: 5). The metaphor of the church in Nollywood is a deeply political one. Church spaces that are represented in Nigeria do not resemble cathedrals but large city halls. They are community spaces and possibly the prime spaces of mass gathering.

Nollywood video-films form a large part of an intriguing theological economy which alludes to the power of the church but barely that of the state. The church in Nollywood appears to regulate the socio-cultural space and moral principles. Helen Ukpabio's assertion that "in a country like this, if you don't have Jesus, you can't survive because the government does not offer us anything . . . whatever you are, you are self-made"[160] is a reverberation of general sentiment. This view is echoed in Obia Ofeimun's argument that "the evangelicals have taken over the film culture in a way that is very representative of the nature of the Nigerian society today but at the same time a deviation from the more enlightened approach to national building and society building that had become dominant up to the 70s"[161]. Ofeimun continues:

> Between Oregun and Ogba . . . there were twenty-five factories that closed down over the early years of the structural adjustment program. Well now about fifteen of them are churches. The first question you want to ask is: the people who now go to those churches to pay tithes, to pay ten percent of whatever money they have made, were they not the ones who used to work in those factories as

[160] *Nollywood Babylon* (2008), a documentary written and directed by Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal about Nollywood
[161] Ibid.

> labourers, as technicians and what not. The church promises you wealth. If you stay in the church you will have prosperity. The very prosperity already denied you by the fact the factories died. The poorer people get, the less hopeful they are, the more they wish for that extraordinary power that will take them out of the doldrums, out of penury. The churches provide it. You ask yourself, how come? In spite of the grand erection of mosques all over the place, how come there's still so much corruption in the country? It begins to tell you what the churches are for. They are therapeutic agencies. Not religious or moral intent. And since a strong segment of the population is involved in this, if the films do not minister to them, they will be throwing away the source of their income[162]

The popularity of the Christian video-film, described by Okome (2007a: 14) as "a narrative of redemption through the intervention of Jesus Christ whose earthly agent is the thaumaturge", has increased due to the "depleting economic resources of the poor who now seek solace in the promise of a heavenly *polis* of bliss and eternal happiness". In a film such as Pastor Kenneth Okonkwo's *Born Again Billionaires* (2012), for example, young men are forced to submit to occultism and are 'rescued' by churches which deploy them to evangelise, and offer them livelihood. In *Born Again Millionaires*, the main character, Martin, had invested in goods which were lost in a shipwreck. He loses all his money and is unable to find work. He discovers his wife, Tessy, is unable to conceive, and they both seek refuge in a church. A pastor of the church prays for his wife and she falls pregnant. Martin soon realises that his financial circumstance will not enable him to take care of his wife and child. As a result, he joins the Idusaku cult, which instructs him to sacrifice his newborn son to achieve mysterious wealth [Fig. 81]. Soon after his son dies, he joins the upper class. Martin is also shown electioneering at a political rally with members of the wealthy Idusaku cult, who dish out money and food to people to 'buy' votes.

In this video-film, the cult is modelled closely on Christian symbolism. It is based on the so-called 17th commandment[163], which stipulates that a leader shall dedicate a scroll to himself. The members of the cult define themselves as "born-again". The chanting rituals include Latin words from a hymn in Christian liturgy (*Sanctus Angelo*). One of the

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[162] Ibid.

[163] The Christian faith abides by the Ten Commandments; the Jewish faith has a 17th commandment in the 613 commandments based on the King's Torah.

members, Don Oscar, keeps a large poster of Jesus with the inscription "Psalm 23"[164]. There is a fusion of religion, politics and occultism. Religion (Christianity) in this film, however, is depicted as a refuge for victims. Each of the discs (six in total) begins with a message from Pastor Kenneth Okonkwo, who frames the representation of ideas. Symbols such as the poster of Jesus are ideological tools for formulating meaning. Pastor Okonkwo mediates that meaning through the video-film.

3.2.: Ideology and the Correlation of Religion and Culture

When I interviewed Michael Chima, he cynically remarked that "the largest church in Nigeria is the church of hypocrisy . . . church planting [can be seen as] the opium of the Nigerian masses"[165]. Chima argues that the cultural practice of Nollywood performers is heavily influenced by their devotion to the church. For example, actors could refuse certain roles that transgress the moral principles held by the church in video-films which are made independently of the church. Chima asserts: "what are they [the actors] going to tell their pastors? How would they explain themselves?"[166] Many film practitioners feel accountable to the institution of the church. The church reproduces forms of behaviours and identity.

Jack Conrad (2007: 19) points out that religion, as defined by Marxism, is "fantastic reality not in the trite sense that the claims religion makes about existence are verifiably untrue, unreal or baseless, but in the sense that nature and society are reflected in exaggerated form, as leaping shadows, as symbols or inversions". For Conrad (2007: 19), religion should not be taken as "false consciousness", because "religious ideas are not only determined by reality, they can themselves become materially effective". Although it may be perceived to be based on delusions and abstract concepts, religion determines *real relations* between people. As Marshall (2009: 4) argues, "the language of faith is truly performative . . . [it is] the *performativum fidei* . . . literally, an action on the world". Video-film functions to inform and reinforce ideas and ways of being that

[164] In the Bible, Psalm 23 reads: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, and he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."
[165] Makhubu, N. Interview with Michael Chima, 2011/07/09, Lagos
[166] Ibid.

are entrenched through religious faith. Video-film, therefore, plays a significant ideological role.

The arrival of film in Nigeria during colonialism was for ideological purposes and was profoundly connected to religion. Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike (1994: 30) observes that missionaries in West Africa “were armed, not only with copies of the Holy Bible but also with film slides and projectors, to facilitate the understanding of their evangelical crusade”. He also points out that “the first film shows in Africa [shown in Sierra Leone] known as the ‘Magic Lantern’ . . . showed the birth and death of Jesus” (Ukadike 1994: 30). By doing this, the missionaries were able to draw a larger audience and “they were able to infiltrate Africa’s culture in what amounts to a ‘cultural rupture’ with Africa’s past” (Ukadike 1994: 31). The Christian ideology contributed to concepts of evil and construction of Manichean[167] narratives. The anthropologist, Matthew Schoffeleers, however, argues that, rather than creating a rupture, “traditional African religion” was “continuous with Christianity” (quoted in Bourdillon 1987: 21). It is the recent “Black Theology”, rather than African Theology, that is derived “from the experience of poverty and oppression, and sees Christianity as a politically liberating force” (Bourdillon 1987: 21). Implied by both concepts, is white domination. Religion alters the material lives of people in relation to race, ethnicity and class.

Insofar as mechanisms of religion are in and of material life, Christian video-film is not only a cultural or religious product but it also effectively reproduces cultural and religious behaviours and inclinations. This view is debatable because it presumes the naivety of individuals who subscribe to it. In this case, the subjects who subscribe to Christian ideology through various practices (including the consumption of video-films) are an example. The Structuralist-Marxist, Louis Althusser (1971: 158), observes that, although individuals who live according to an ideology (“a representation of the world whose imaginary distortion depends on the imaginary relation to their [real] conditions of existence”) subscribe to spiritual conceptions, they *act* out their beliefs in material practices. Althusser (1971: 158) states that “we observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every ‘subject’ endowed with a ‘consciousness’”. Further, believing in the ‘ideas’ that his ‘consciousness’ inspires in

[167] Manicheanism is a cosmology in which there is a struggle between good and evil or light and darkness.

him and freely accepts, the said individual "must '*act* according to his ideas', must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice… if he does not do so, 'that is wicked'" (Althusser 1971: 158). The enforcement of ideas is through actions and through performance. As a medium, video-film legitimises and normalises actions, behaviours and performances of social structuration.

The coupling of Christian behaviours in video-film with an obsession with the occult or evil should not be surprising. The function of 'evil' is crucial to the existence of Christian 'good'. Slavoj Žižek (2005: 61) makes this significant observation, that we recognise ideology at work "through the denunciation of another ideology". In the same way that fantasy is dualistic (idealistic fantasy is accompanied with "dirty" fantasy, i.e. jealousy) and ideology is double or works on two levels of opposites (Žižek 2005). Žižek uses the examples of the Nazi obsession with Jewish blood that accompanied the fantasy of Nazism as a harmonious, homogenous community of people. Similarly, the homogeneity of Christianity can be maintained through the obsession with the practices of its evil counterparts that should be obliterated. In video-film, the conceptions of God also include those of the devil; the knowing and performance of practices of Christianity include the knowing of practices of evil. Helen Ukpabio, for example, confesses that she worked for the devil and practised as a devotee, which enables her now as a born-again Pastor to counteract the works of the devil because she *knows* them (Ukah 2005: 293). Ukpabio's films not only illustrate these sets of practices but also create public knowledge about them.

Brent Plate (2003: 4) observes that "religions and cultures do not merely use media, but instead are used by media, and created by them". Plate (2003: 4) agrees that this fact poses questions regarding the rise of media technologies and, more importantly, the entities that control them. Since Christian video-film is not entirely controlled by churches but mediates the symbols that affirm and perpetuate attitudes as well as established practices, it necessitates ideological questions. Video-film offers images to the set of ideals that circumscribe how things are and should be; what is wrong and what is right. Film is very similar to religion in the way that it projects a world so similar to the one that we inhabit in such a way that watching events in a film is equated to experiencing those events as if they were real. Plate (2003: 5) points out that "the veil

between [the 'screened world' and the 'real world'] is surprisingly transparent and the 'two worlds' thesis . . . breaks down readily". Video-film achieves this by transferring or circulating ideological symbols. Judith Williamson's observation regarding advertising is applicable to (Christian) video-film. Williamson (1981: 25) argues that adverts, or in this case, video-films, "are constantly translating between systems of meaning, and therefore constitute a vast meta-system where values from different areas of our lives are made interchangeable". The transference of meanings implicates a system produced by subjects and within which the socio-cultural identities of subjects are reproduced.

The six-part film (*Born-Again Billionaires*, *Kingdom of Billionaires*, *Tears of the Billionaires*) by Kenneth Okonkwo (a pastor, Nollywood actor and producer), that I discussed in the previous section, is one among many very similar examples of video-films that illustrate practices within different ideological systems and the use of symbolic discourse. In this unitary set of video-films (one film narrative is in six parts on six discs), the Christian world contends with evil in very hostile conditions. Martin is transformed from being a Christian subject to being an occult member. His actions (killing his only son, denying his wife, Tessy, her "conjugal rights" by "sacrificing his manhood", and eventually killing her as well as causing his brother-in-law's insanity) are seen as a consequence of desperation and not of pure malice. When Martin loses everything and sees no hope in being employed, he suggests to Tessy that they move back to the village. Tessy would rather starve in the city than be ashamed in the village. The couple suffers to make ends meet and Tessy faces scorn for being poor and barren. She suggests that they pray, even though this would require patience. When Tessy falls pregnant, the couple attributes "the miracle" to God's favour. Having run out of money, they use the little money that Tessy had saved for antenatal services at the hospital. When Tessy delivers, Martin cannot afford to pay the hospital fees and scrounges in the city, but is turned down by all his friends. He ends up on a pavement in despair, when an old acquaintance meets him by chance and introduces him into the Idusaku cult.

He refuses to join, but realises that he is isolated from economic participation and that his new-born child will not survive without any money. This harsh situation alludes to the isolating consequences of capitalism. In discussing the effects of mass media and its visual imagery, Jonathan Crary (1999: 73-74) refers to Guy Debord's emphasis on the

development of a technology of separation: “an inevitable consequence of capitalism’s restructuring of society without community” that produces docile subjects. It also alludes to Max Weber’s (1930: 110) “inner isolation of the individual”, in which the Calvinist inclination of the Protestant ethic led to self-isolation, distrust in other people as deterrents from the path of God, and the establishment of an individual relationship with God as His elect. The refusal by Tessy to return to a communal, agrarian village is significant. In the same film, another character, Josiah, is left in the same situation but returns to the village, where his wife verbally abuses him for being in the village. She refuses to farm with the village women and is disappointed that Josiah will no longer bring money from the city. This isolation is necessary for joining the wealth-creating Idusaku cult. However, for salvation, they must isolate themselves again from the occult community – as the song in the film asserts: “in this life, think twice before you decide for yourself”. Josiah is also eventually coerced into joining the cult but fails to carry out the difficult initiation task of seeking mad, pregnant women in the village. He pesters his friends (in pursuit of mad, pregnant women required for his initiation), who then ostracise him as a ‘wicked’ mad man. His failure leads to his death.

In this video-film, there is no communal social space apart from the church. When young workers are dismissed from work, there are no trade unions that act as social coalitions and form socio-political identities. Pentecostal churches seem to act as institutions that offer a social, communal space. Ruth Marshall (1995: 251–252) argues that “the Pentecostal movement not only debates civic virtues, but is attempting to bring it into the civic sphere of the nation” by “attacking corruption, exploitation, illegal practices, and spiritual degeneration in the institutions of what others have called ‘civil society’”. There is also a split in the model civil society being particularly urban and less traditional. Birgit Meyer (1998: 456) notes that African converts were alienated from their own cultures; moreover African evangelists “produced reified notions of indigenous culture, which affirmed cultural difference and the imagination of distinct tribal or ethnic identities”. She also asserts that the “merciless attitude of PCCs towards local cultural traditions and rejection of village culture” has solicited critique (Meyer 1998: 456). Meyer (1998: 456) maintains that many PCCs “devote much room to deliverance from the satanic forces, which possess members and are held to cause material and psychic problems in the sphere of health and wealth” and converge with

"popular narratives (often put into circulation by nineteenth century missionaries and evangelists) about the devil as the head of all demons who were once cast out from heaven and settled in Africa". These popular narratives isolated Africans from each other and contributed to the notion of an estranged sense of self. There is fracturing among Christians. Meyer (1998: 456) notes that "charismatics tend to critique mainline churches for seeking to accommodate local culture through Africanisation" but "they dismiss 'Spiritual Churches' for drawing on occult forces, making use of allegedly idolatric elements such as candles and incense, and thus linking up with the 'powers of darkness'". These symbols: the pregnant woman, the emasculated man, the malevolent child or the red-clad circle of men in a cult, recur in Christian video-film.

In *Born Again Billionaires*, the pregnant or fertile woman is juxtaposed to wealth. When Martin is doing well financially, his wife, Tessy, is barren, but when he becomes poor she is able to conceive. Then, in order for Martin to become wealthy, Tessy's new-born baby is killed and she is no longer able to conceive. The image of men cutting up women's wombs to extract a foetus for sacrifice is common. Its allusion to *futile reproduction* is similar to, for example, more disturbing, imagined practices such as fornicating with a corpse. In the film, an Idusaku cult member, Udodo, is instructed to find a virgin, bury her alive and fornicate with her corpse [Fig. 82]. As a result, he becomes wealthy but haunted. The spectre of the young girl inflicts him with a disease and his body slowly decays. Among the sacrifices that the men make to receive this wealth is the sacrifice of 'manhood'. The Idusaku cult members sacrifice their manhood for wealth. The inability to procreate or produce a future generation symbolises a contemporary predicament characterised by discontinuity and fractured relations between the youth and elders. Futile reproduction is arguably also illustrated in the perverted actions in the film such as the scene in which one of the cult members, Don Oscar, has to eat his own faeces. It is as though, in the video-film, bodily obscenities (such as the dismemberment of bodies) are necessary to usurp wealth and therefore power. Efrat Tseëlon (2001: 105) notes that the "obscene is found at the heart of ideology and is closely bound with it in dialectical relations which conceal the obscene thus rendering power operable". For Tseëlon (2001: 105) "[w]hat is expelled as "Other" returns as the object of . . . fascination [and the] result is that which is socially peripheral is symbolically central". In video-film, the conditions, limits, practices and functions of

the body are central as they are in religious ideology – bodily practices mediate what is sacred and what is profane.

These films seek ways to stretch the imagination of the most obscene, repulsive bodily conditions and functions, which are then represented as embodied sacred practices. When Don Oscar eats his faeces, he does so in a sacred shrine in reverence of Idusaku deities located in his huge mansion. The mansion symbolises his wealth and body. To maintain power over the household, he has to frequently perform the ritual of eating his faeces in a secret basement of the house. As the head of the family, Don Oscar is instructed by the cult never to eat the food made by his wife, but instead must 'debase' himself by eating his own faeces. Since his wife's role and only duty is to take care of her husband, her 'purpose in life' is annulled and the hierarchical metaphor (head of the household) is subverted. The characterisation of the conjugal family that is 'good in the eyes of the Lord' as sacrosanct suddenly becomes profane. Mary Douglas (1966: 42–57) reminds us that the sacred is "at once 'sacred' and 'defiled'" and that "any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins" (such as the orifices of the body or the conceptualisation of the house as the unified body of the family). Don Oscar's wife is sacrificed and replaced through wealth-producing fetishism that is activated in the 'bowels' of the house. That which is meant to be excreted and expelled from the symbolic order of the body/house is brought back for ingestion so that it can reproduce wealth. It is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's (1982: 65) insight that defilement lies outside of the symbolic order and that the cost of becoming a subject is through the sacrifice of the mother. The woman, according to Kristeva, represents defilement to a male structure of ideas. By sacrificing their wives to the all-male cult, the men can produce fantastic wealth. The pregnant, mad or evil women in video-film are a threat whose reproductive facilities must be destroyed because they frustrate the male production of wealth. In *Born Again Billionaires*, Josiah is told that the money that he is promised through joining the cult is steaming because it is "hot" since "there are forces behind money". In order to receive and use this money, he must "purify it" by touching the stomachs of three mad pregnant women with an egg. Josiah fails to achieve this task and is killed by supernatural forces of the cult. Rather than the lives of three women, the cult takes one male life.

Furthermore, there is a recurrence of people whose bodies are markedly different because of disease or other genetic conditions. Dwarfs and people with growth hormone abnormalities or genetic conditions such as progeria (a condition that generates rapid aging in children) feature prominently in video-film as elements of evil. In *Born Again Billionaires*, there is one dwarf and two characters that have progeria who serve as the magical devices for the Idusaku shrine and suitably appear like fantastic creatures such as sprites[168] [Figs. 83 and 84]. These images of physical abnormality, strangeness and otherness characterise the politics of difference, systematically represented as abject, sustaining fear, power relations (dwarfs have no agency but to carry out menial tasks for supernatural powers) and social positioning. Images of the body suffering are frequent.

These representations signify a key element of ideological repression in religion: the suffering body. Images of the body suffering in extreme situations are predominant. Clifford Geertz (1993: 104) notes that "as a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable—something, as we say, sufferable". The image of suffering and bodily pain in the construction of desires in religion as a fantasmatic representation is "inherently an experience of 'psychic pain'" (Bersani 1981: 149). If, Bersani (1981: 149) argues, "we understand fantasy here as the imaginary expression and fulfilment of a desire, then the psychic disturbance produced by fantasy is an experience of pleasure as pain". Religion as a fantastic ideological apparatus systematises pain and fear. John Raines (2002: 8) notes that:

> the essence of religion is its voicing of suffering – its crying out against the realities of exploitation and degradation, the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their real happiness. To call them to give up their illusions about their conditions is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions, the declines of their greatness and power coincides with the decline of their religious culture.

Born Again Billionaires focuses on the suffering of the weak. Tessy, for instance, starves herself throughout their poverty while she is pregnant so that Martin can eat. Even

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[168] The term 'sprite' refers to ghosts or elf-like fantastical creatures such as djinns, gnomes, pixies and fairies.

though she endures this hardship, she becomes a victim of Martin's wealth-fantasies and suffers from the sudden death of her new-born baby. Since the church cannot 'rescue' them immediately, they must go through protracted suffering. Although the church is regarded as a way of getting out of suffering, it must be seen to save those who have suffered greatly. Geertz (1993: 103) points out that the "theology of optimism", that is embodied by Malinowksi's notion that "religion helps one to endure 'situations of emotional stress' by open[ing] up escapes from such situations and such impasses offer no empirical way out except by ritual and belief into the domain of the supernatural", is paradoxical since religion is as troubling as it is redeeming. Images of suffering in Christian video-film are symbolic of the economy of meanings that warrants compliance to religious tenets. In doing so, it must trade fantasies through the juxtaposition, contradistinction and transference of symbols. Media such as video-film trade the fantastic as something that is real and achievable (like heaven).

4: Re-visiting the Symbolic Convergence Theory

Uchenna Onuzulike (2007b: 238) argues that, as a fantasy-theme analysis theory, the Symbolic Convergence Theory can be used "to explore the religious overtones" in Nollywood video-film. The Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) was formulated by Ernest Bormann (1972) and surmises that reality is socially based and symbolically constructed, and is based on an exchange of fantasies between members of a group in order to form cohesion. For Onuzulike (2007b: 239) "repeated exposure to the myths and themes of the movies on Nigerian cultures should influence an individual's perceptions of Nigerians and Africans". The theory holds that symbols in dramatised stories evoke emotions, animates perceptions embedded within personal narratives, and constructs a shared fantasy. Symbols are an effective process of interpellation or converting individuals into subjects of a certain ideology. Ernest Bormann (1972: 213) points out that there is *rhetorical vision* embedded in the act of speaking.

The video-film phenomenon is a significant platform for telling narratives and conscripting identities. Even as a form of evangelising, video-film incorporates telling stories of the subject's past and the common present or future fantasy she/he shares with a group of people. Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001: 8) emphasise that the

mediated Pentecostal movement is characterised by the "imperative to testify and publicise personal information, elevating the private experience of transformation to the level of the public, by the elaboration of a project of transforming the world itself". The acts of testifying, preaching, prophesying and confessions are ways of forming fantastic narratives. Video-film constructs images for an abstract language of the fantastic (in things that may or may not exist).

James Fernandez's (1986) argues that the "imageless concepts" of the West distort the interpretation of images of Africa and what is embedded in them. Western thought privileges text over image and degrades the emphasis on icon, symbol and image in some cultures of Africa. Birgit Meyer (2004b: 447) draws from Fernandez, stating that "the way in which people face deprivation and achieve revitalisation by redeploying 'primary images of body and household, field and forest life" is important in understanding African religious imaginations which comprise a symbolic cosmos. Symbols are powerful because they produce reality and influence interactions. Žižek (2005: 33) points out that "the thing is more present in its symbol than in its immediate reality". Castells suggests that:

> reality, as experienced, has always been virtual because it is always perceived through symbols that frame practice with some meaning that escapes their strict semantic definition . . . . Thus, when critics of electronic media argue that the new symbolic environment does not represent 'reality', they implicitly refer to an absurdly primitive notion of 'uncoded' real experience that never existed. All realities are communicated through symbols. And in human interactive communication, regardless of medium, all symbols are somewhat displaced in relationship to their assigned semantic meaning. In a sense all reality is virtually perceived (Castells in Plate 2003: 4).

Video-film as a form of mediating religion provides such images and the imagination about spatio-political and cultural relations. Jibrin Ibrahim (1991: 128) maintains that "the religious arena provides meaning for a wide group of actors by constituting an ideological space with symbols, morality, aesthetics, historical references, and codes of action, in which dominant and non-dominant classes and groups engage in 'cultural negotiation'". The systems within which symbols are exchanged construct enduring truths.

Film operates similarly to religion in its use of symbolism. Clifford Geertz (1993) sees religion as a cultural system. Geertz (1993: 90) argues that religion is "a system of

symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic". Motivation, in this definition, is seen as a "persisting tendency, a chronic inclination to perform certain sorts of acts and experience", and moods are "certain sorts of feeling in certain sorts of situations" (Geertz 1993: 96). Geertz (1993: 97) observes that "the moods that sacred symbols induce, at different times and in different places, range from exultation to melancholy, from self-confidence to self-pity, from an incorrigible playfulness to a bland listlessness". The narratives in video-film arguably enforce long-established institutions of moral conduct and influence short-term everyday choices.

The church symbolises escape, transformation and emancipation. In *Born Again Billionaires*, Tessy's discovery of Martin's source of wealth results in her death. Due to the fact that Tessy tells her brother, Audrey, about the occult that Martin has joined, the cult causes him to go mad at the same time as his sister dies. Audrey becomes a madman and vagabond, eating scraps and undressing in public. Tessy's spirit, however, leads Audrey to a church. When he walks in, he shouts "ah, this is a stage". This moment in a film reminds us of the *staged* symbolism. It echoes Haynes' (2007a: 136) remark that "theatres in Lagos all closed; many were turned into churches or warehouses". The notion that the church is a space of imagination, story-telling, projecting, fantasising, testifying and production is striking. Churches in Lagos are not solemn places for silent mass gatherings. While conducting research in 2010 in Anthony Village (a town in Maryland, Lagos), I realised that the presence of religion permeates beyond church edifices. On Sundays, sermons are heard from distances through loudspeakers, and streets are teeming with devotees on their way to church. Religion is pervasive.

In *Born Again Billionaires*, the pastor and church members pray for Audrey until he collapses. His body writhes in pain, and red rays of light emanate from it. The church members command evil to "come out" from his body. After this session of prayers and glossolalia (speaking in tongues), Audrey returns to a normal state. He receives a sermon from the pastor regarding the existence of two forms of life. Then the pastor tells him that they must rush to Martin's house because "something terrible is about to

happen". They arrive in time to stop Martin from committing suicide. They convince him that God will forgive the worst of sins. At the end of the second, fourth and sixth videos in the volume, Kenneth Okonkwo speaks about the ways in which the story reveals God's work. The 'miracle' occupies critical importance in the transference of meaning in symbols. The transformation of Martin from being a good man to being a bad man, and back to being a good man, takes place through 'miracles' maintained by the concept of God.

The transfer of meaning is made complex by the use of glossolalia (speaking in tongues). The Symbolic Convergence Theory presumes that the group of people who exchange fantastic narratives also share similar conventions of communicating and narrative construction. The practice of speaking in tongues is regarded, by Pentecostals, as a gift granted miraculously by God, and it is a babel of languages that only God can understand. It also necessitates faith in the belief that what is uttered is 'divine communication'. The act of speaking in tongues is questioned in the video-films entitled *40 Days in the Wilderness* (2005), directed by Ugo Ugbor, in which Pastor Jerry prays daily and speaks in tongues. He is revered for his powerful sermons and is defined as a man 'guided by the Holy Spirit'. Pastor Jerry recruits young men to go through spiritual camps in the forest. When the film climaxes, it turns out that Pastor Jerry worships a fantastic evil creature named Kubala, and each time he speaks in tongues during his sermons he is in fact using an incomprehensible language to harness power from Kubala rather than God. This representation in the film highlights the *uncertainty* of cohesion in the real and the supernatural. It is the act of speaking in tongues that is symbolic rather than the meaning of actual words, and it relies on complete trust that a fantastic world exists, where these words bear meaning.

Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001: 5) regard the act of speaking in tongues as part of "the retreat from 'the world' which characterised early Pentecostalism [as the] the 'new wave'". This retreat is accompanied by "the 'doctrine of prosperity' or 'dominion theology' which is expounded by the new wave of contemporary Pentecostalism" (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 5). They argue that it does not critique a "basic Christian or Pentecostal dogma, but rather appears as a series of lateral interpretations which imply innovation at the level of practice and the relationship of believers to the

world which surrounds them rather than any deep theological revision" (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 5). Communication within the Pentecostal movement relies on a projection of imagined worlds and the belief in magic and miracle that goes beyond figurative or metaphorical language. Dismas Aloys Masolo (1994: 105) argues that "magic in African religion or the significance of attributes of God in relation to natural objects and phenomena is based on the simple criterion of analytical symbolism". The concept of God could be a being that is 'out there' and also in the body of an individual at the same time. This conceptualisation is also what characterises Pentecostals as charismatic.

Ogbu Kalu (2008: 6) identifies the Pentecostal identity as "revivalist, emphasising charisma, conversion, and sanctification". He states that Pentecostals image faith "as a person's way of receiving grace" where "*charis* creates the backdrop for accessing charisma as the power freely given to achieve self-discipline, sobriety, holiness, and righteousness" (Kalu 2008: 6–7). Charisma is understood to be not only a characteristic of Pentecostal churches but also a quality of personality that is not inherent but divinely imparted. Max Weber (1947: 358–9) defines charisma as:

> a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader . . . (363–4) it is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to a be a sign or proof originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship or absolute trust in the leader. But where charisma is genuine, it is not this which is the basis of legitimacy. This basis lies rather in the conception that it is the duty of those who have been called to a charismatic mission to recognize its quality and to act accordingly.

Weber (1947: 359) argues that the way in which charismatic authority "would be ultimately judged from an ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally indifferent for the purpose of definition". Followers of charismatic leaders believe that the leader possesses divine power, even though they have not necessarily witnessed a miraculous imparting of power to such a leader. *40 Days in the Wilderness* depicts a situation where the followers are duped and the charismatic leader represents supernatural evil rather than Godly power.

Another symbolic transformation of the subject is implied in the notion of being 'born again'. Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001: 7) aptly point out that becoming "born again is an event of rupture, with the self as it was, but also with the world as it is". Moreover, it is not a single event but "an on-going existential project". The subject receives the miraculous power of becoming something other than themselves. For Marshall (2009: 3), being born again "reiterates the promise of hope and the possibility of the new that Arendt identifies as inherent in the very fact of natality". Ogbu Kalu (2003: 6) identifies the three stages of charismatic Pentecostalism, namely, "the acceptance of Christ (conversion–regeneration), the experience of new birth (Spirit Baptism), the accession of the charismatic power". Peter Pels (2003: 205) notes in Weberian fashion that charisma is "a residual form of authority that is necessary both to the maintenance of enchanted traditions and to the production of prophets of disenchantment; that is out-of-the-ordinary yet can be routinized in quite a number of ways; and that therefore defies classification in relation to the process of disenchantment and rationalisation". Charisma can be argued to be an *extension of life* and a re-imagination of self that erases the past through being 'saved'.

Meyer (2003b: 205) argues that the use of film in colonial Africa formed part of a discourse of magic through which imaginations about material life could be extended. The miraculous extension of life is not only a personal or private transformation, but also maintains power through public testimony. Similarly, Peter Geschiere (2003: 159) discusses magical imagination in modern life through the use of Georg Simmel's *das Geheimis* (the secret), which produces an "immense enlargement of life" while "numerous contents of life cannot even emerge in the presence of full publicity". Geschiere (2003: 181) argues that, in both African and Western democratic societies, the power of magic lies in a "political language [that] is always double [and] is about things that happen in the daylight world but these must be complemented by interpretations in terms of the secret side of politics". This ability "to reveal what is going on in the realm of the spiritual and how it affects a person's life" is regarded as "a source of power" (Meyer 2003a: 205). The extension or enlargement of life is interrelated with material forms of power and personal accumulation; the "new" life implied is comprised of a sequence of images portraying such accumulation. The

location of commodity at the centre of the charismatic personality relates to the thesis of political economy. In video-film, this is symbolised by material wealth. Geschiere (2003: 23) notes that "the commodity form is phantasmagoric; it is an *Alltagsreligion*" and it "represents the fulfilment of a critique of the religious and secular universalism of Christianity, and Hegelian 'statism' in particular". Money, as a symbol of commodity, is argued by Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001: 8) to function as "a mode of organising churches and as a means of entering into contact with God, it links *par excellence* the struggle within the public space and individual communication with the sacred". The humanity of the "new" (born-again) personality is progression defined by commodity as a form of continuation.

The exchange of fantastic narratives, as defined by the Symbolic Convergence Theory, is meant to facilitate social cohesion. It assumes this by enabling people from diverse backgrounds to establish common ideals. The religious themes in Nollywood video-film, however, present an ambiguous situation in which money is characterised as a supernatural power that ensures miraculous transformation; money symbolises both evil and religious piety (there is a Pentecostal saying that money is 'God's favour'). It also appears as the link between religion and politics as well as the reason both oscillate between being good and being corrupt. Characterised as something that has agency and usurps theomania, money circulates imaginaries within an economy of belief systems.

Conclusion

Christian video-film can be seen as more than just a medium that carries the message; rather, it influences and maintains a theocratic economy through appealing to people who negotiate the socio-political conditions that they find themselves in. It can be said that video-film manipulates 'reality' and facilitates imaginaries that make it possible to believe in the supernatural powers of money, God and *ogas*[169], and the cataclysmic supernatural forces that administer them. That belief sustains the status quo. While it may be seen as a tool in the hands of powerful church leaders and devotees, video-film enables the 'staging' of the ruse and provides the framework through which political and economic matters can be interpreted in everyday life.

[169] *Oga* is a word in Pidgin that is used to describe a leader, a patron, or a boss.

Through spectacles, video-film illuminates the operative power of churches, which is conserved through the provision of testimony about the existence of witchcraft and evil, demonstrations of miracles, staging of crisis, and the promise of renewal (being born again). The church is an important socio-cultural and political space. Okome (2003b: 4) argues that the church is "an important locale . . . because it is here that the drama of the earthly polis is transported in the realm of the heavenly polis and the final resolution of all earthly schism is given meaningful ending after the timely intervention of the spiritual actor". In a way, the church also attenuates the sovereignty of the state. By providing basic services to its devotees, it complicates the presumption that allegiance to the state is primary. The church also regulates moral principles and arbitrates the continual process in which gender and class identities are conceptualised. Its monocratic and charismatic leadership, particularly in Pentecostal churches, is obscured by the ostentatious exhibition of the prosperity promise.

Churches, in video-film, are immense. Video-film provides the imagery that reinforces the abstract concepts of miracle, magic, witchcraft or occultism, and trades on the symbolism that pervades the cultural sphere. Therefore, rather than being an ideological tool, video-film can be understood as the stage upon which various ideologies intersect or clash. Capitalist ideologies collide with communalist paradigms, and Christian ideologies collide with indigenous cosmological beliefs, contributing to the cataclysmic picture that Nollywood shows.

Images

Fig. 74: Beelzebub in *End of the Wicked* (1999)

Fig. 75: Children in coven, *End of the Wicked* (1999)

Fig. 76: Andrew Esiebo, Untitled from *God is Alive Series* (2009)

Fig. 77: Andrew Esiebo, Untitled from *God is Alive* series (2009)

Fig. 78: Andrew Esiebo, Untitled from *God is Alive* series (2009)

Fig. 79: Andrew Esiebo, Untitled from *God is Alive* series (2009)

Fig. 80: Andrew Esiebo, Untitled from *God is Alive* Series (2009)

Figs. 81 a and b: Occult gathering in *Billionnaires Club* (2003)

Fig. 82: Young girl being burried alive, *Billionnaires Club* (2003)

Fig. 83: Two servants with progeria in *Billionnaires Club* (2003)

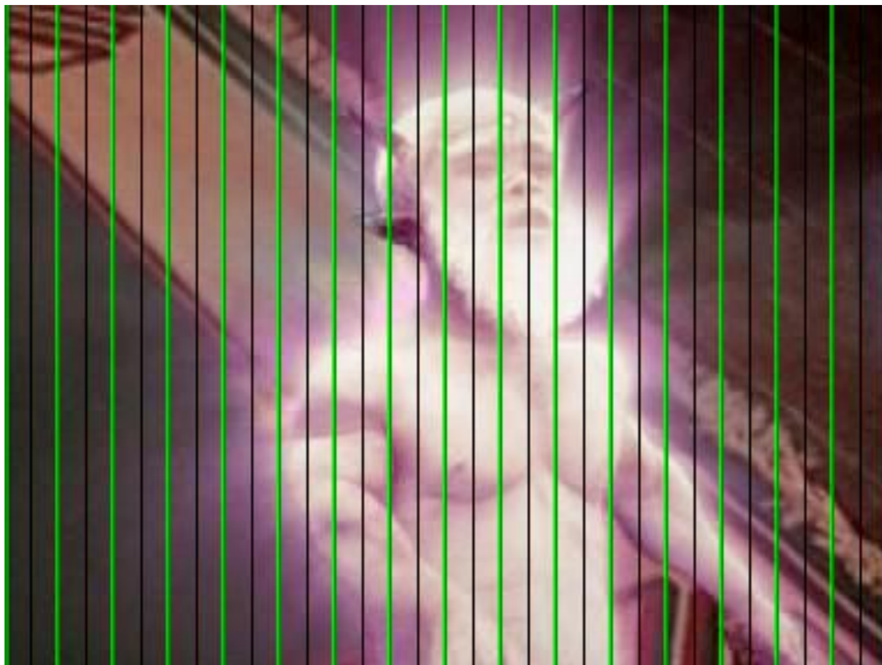

Fig. 84: Dwarf in *Billionaires Club* (2003)

Chapter 4
The Rational-Fantastic in Nollywood Epics: Cosmographies and the Problem of 'Witchcraft' in Nollywood

> *Among African peoples, there is a wide variety of concepts about the world of spiritual beings or divinities, ancestral or otherwise. These spirits, which vary in number from one community to another, are believed to have been created by God and to belong to the ontological mode of existence, occupying some spiritual 'space' between God and humans* (Masolo 1994: 106).

The fantastic, as mentioned earlier, is based on the relationship between rationality and irrationality. It disrupts the 'rational' world through the emphasis of the irrational in the everyday. As Richard Iton (2008: 289) observes, the fantastic "destabilizes, at least momentarily, our understanding of the distinction between the reasonable and the unreasonable and reason itself, the proper and improper, and propriety itself". Video-film represents negotiated 'reason' in the context of contemporary anxieties. Representing fantastic divinities as embedded in 'traditional' practices in Nollywood video-film are colloquially and cynically termed '*waka* for bush' or "take a walk in the bush"[170]. When I interviewed Fred Amata, he observed that there was a time when films that focus on ethnocentric traditionalisms and indigenous religions were popular because "all the intrigue is in the woods or in the village setting . . . and everybody's ready to spend a big buck to get elaborate costumes [and] elaborate ancient locations because that is what was selling"[171]. At the same time, some Nollywood video-films conflate magic in cosmological beliefs with 'witchcraft'. The word '*juju*' for example is used in Nollywood to anything related to the supernatural, superstition and 'witchcraft'. In this chapter, I conceptualise the rational–fantastic to interrogate functions of fantastic representations in constructing concepts of ethnic-specific cosmology and 'witchcraft'. I also assess how representations of past time and future time de-historicise epic video-films.

Epic video-films are based on constructions of pristine homogenous village life. In Epic video-films, characters are dressed exclusively in 'traditional' garments and embellishments. The narratives draw from indigenous bodies of knowledge such as the Yorùbá and Igbo cosmologies. Artistes such as Tunde Kelani for instance, regard film as

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[170] Makhubu, N. Interview with Fred Amata 2011/07/15, Lagos
[171] Ibid.

a medium for teaching a lost history, and he particularly explores *Ifá* (see 1.2) as the "compendium of Yorùbá history, literature, and science" (Kelani in Esonwanne 2008: 25). Kelani professes that the responsibility of film is to re-educate and regenerate a wretchedly lost African and, in this case, Yorùbá history. Many video-films focus on Igbo traditional socio-political structures and offer a view that reveals not only understanding about material life but also its interdependence on fantastic supernatural life (gods and deities).

The word 'epic' that is used in Nollywood discourse to classify these video-films differs from Brechtian uses of the term. 'Epic' includes the "creation of myths, national histories, magical romances, religious scriptures" (Turner 2012: 28). In the Brechtian epic, for example, the audience is aware that they are watching a performance/play rather than being immersed in its illusions: a principle of reality is kept intact. Bertolt Brecht (1995: 84) posits that "straightforward recognition of reality . . . exposes all the veils and deceptions that obscure reality and intervenes in [the] public's real reactions". For Brecht, the epic is based on Karl Marx's notion of historical materialism, in which the narratives that are performed reflect the material conditions of the people watching and "demystify the operation of social, economic and political forces by showing how certain orders of reality had developed historically and were perpetuated" (cited in Bryant-Bertail 2000: 2-3). 'Epic' in video-film, however, is often related to utopian homogenous ethnic spaces which are agrarian rather than industrial and where the principle of reality is made up of layers and layers of lore. In 'epic' video-film, Igbo communities are exclusively Igbo as are Yorùbá communities.

Although epic video-films depict myth, they masquerade as historical narratives containing some form of cultural truth. Geertz (1993: 88) points out that "myths provide charters for social institutions and rationalizations of social privilege". Therefore, myths mask reality which is organised through words and images. Truth, Masolo (1994: 194) asserts, is "dialectical, continually changing, and as elusive as it is real". The representation of utopian pre-colonial contexts and the references to existing indigenous cosmologies are therefore modes of negotiating truth and fiction, rationality and irrationality, in the contemporary public sphere. The prevalence of Igbo and Yorùbá cosmologies in video-film complicates the idea proposed by Kelani that video-film is

responsible for re-constructing African histories. These narratives illuminate the relationship between fact and fiction within formations of power.

The word 'cosmology' is a term that denotes scientific discourse pertaining to the physics of the universe. The two strands of cosmology diverge into rational logic (scientific) and seemingly 'irrational' esotericism (religious). The one strand of cosmology is a science that includes astronomy and physics to rationally explain the origins of man and matter. The other strand, religious cosmology, encompasses a range of belief systems and mythologies. Religious cosmologies are legitimated through oral traditions and story-telling practices (video-film can be seen as an example) whereas physical cosmologies are legitimated through institutional scientific study. Christine Kreamer (2012) links the religious strand of cosmology to the practice of arts in Africa. The intersection between art and cosmology is not only persistent but also casts the religious strand of cosmology as both esoteric *and* scientific.

For Tunde Kelani, Yoruba cosmology is a science and a philosophy that is different from Western physical science, and does not necessitate methodical rational explanation but maintains the principle of cause and effect. For Ogbu Kalu (2008: 175–6) cosmological "reality is divided into two: the human world and the spirit world; three dimensions of space: the sky, the earth and the ancestral or spirit world . . . all realms are sacralised [and] there is no distinction between sacred and profane". I use the term 'cosmography' to refer to the *representations* of the world or universe in Nollywood video-film, which appropriate a variety of cosmologies or *studies* of the nature of the universe.

As I have already mentioned, in Nollywood video-film, cosmologies such as the Yorùbá cosmology or the Igbo cosmology are presented as both scientific and religious. I argue that the fantastic in indigenous cosmologies, even though perceived as irrational, has a *rationalising* function. This is what defines the notion of the rational-fantastic: the paradoxes through which the rational/irrational dialectic is a continuous negotiation in the representation of cosmology and ethno-religious belief. The 'return' to traditions in epic video-film seems as though it is a 'rational' move away from the 'madness' of urban modernity, for example. The term 'rational–fantastic', which I propose, may come across as an oxymoron because the fantastic involves accepting mystery and the impossibility of rational explanation (Todorov 1973: 44). By using the term 'rational–fantastic' in this

chapter, I unpack the differing logics that constitute conceptualisations of tradition or traditional belief and ethnocentrism which are generally treated as rational modes of being in light of a history of European violence, domination and oppression. Folklore in the African context occupies a significant place in historical discourse and in rationalising events.

'Epic' video-films are at times commended for their focus on the 'traditional' and at other times berated for primitivist suppositions and inaccurate or distorted representations of sacrosanct subjects. The ambiguity in these films lies in the way in which they seem to evoke 'African history' but at the same time present narratives which appear to be timeless, ahistorical. I argue that this ahistoricism in Nollywood video-film is important. One could argue that, similarly to the "subversion of chronology and periodisation" that is foundational in the discipline of art history by postmodernism, video-film illuminates "the co-existence of multiple times" (Felski 2000: 14). In epic video-films, the past is presented as events in the present. The 'traditional' in these video-films is a bundle of practices that are imagined and constructed in the present. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar's (2004: 51) observation that "many Africans today who continue to hold beliefs derived from the traditional cosmologies apply these to everyday life even when they live in cities and work in the civil service or business sector" reveal the flawed notion that traditions are ways of the past.

Masolo (1994: 194) contests the view that African "cultural history . . . must be brought into the linear spectrum of time, in which it must constantly renovate itself". African history is regarded as cyclical rather than linear. Masolo (1994: 194) also concurs with Kwasi Wiredu that "anachronism, authoritarianism and supernaturalism" are the "weapons of resistance to change and modernisation" and "can frustrate cultural regeneration". Supernaturalism and anachronism are fundamental to video-film narratives in which mythology and history are entangled. An example is Kelani's use of 'traditions' and cosmology, which he regards as a process of making and reclaiming history. 'Traditions' in epic video-film bear a spatial distinction in that they are shot mostly exclusively in village settings and therefore complicate the conceptualisation of cities or urban spaces as the present or the future and villages as the past. Villages and practices related to village contexts in epic video-films are depicted as current affairs or

matters of the present. Ethnic traditions, for example, are represented as though they are meant to teach people to not lose 'traditional' values in order to approach life in the present. Video-film asserts ethnic-specific identity, but at the same time it is important to be conscious of the ethnic tensions it may provoke.

When I use the term 'tradition' in this chapter, I acknowledge Eric Hobsbawm's (1983) proposition that traditions are invented (through colonial segregationist policies, particularly in Africa), as well as Leroy Vail's (1989) interrogation of the persistence of 'tribalism' in the post-colonial era. Peter Ekeh's (1975: 98) ethnic domain-partition ideology posits that "the emergence of strong primordial ethnic groups . . . gained their significance only within the context of the various African nations in which they are implicated" and argues that "many of them have been created by modern politics". Ekeh (1975: 98) points out that "the African bourgeois class has attempted to justify them as primordial entities that not only antedate African nations in which they are implicated but in fact as corporate groups that have always existed". Further, he argues that "what existed in Nigeria were amorphous polities" which were "organised around city-states, others in kingdoms and quasi-kingdoms, and yet others with the narrowness of villages with no conceptions of wider political entities" (Ekeh 1975: 98). For Ekeh (1975: 98), "even the languages by which some claim to identify the ethnic groups are to a large extent a product of this domain-partition ideology". This is supported by the perception that "everyone recognizes that the notion of 'being a Nigerian' is a new kind of conception . . . but it would seem that the notion of 'being Yorùbá' is not very much older" (Ekeh 1975: 98). The ethnic domain-partition is also accompanied by seeing Western education as a new basis of legitimacy. 'Tradition' is transformative in that colonialism and modern politics did not wholly invent traditions but heightened differences between people, making traditions (which are constantly transforming) ethnic-specific.

While I was in Lagos, I often heard Igbo Nollywood actors saying that the Yorùbá betrayed them during the civil war in the 1960s, whereas Nollywood video-filmmaking is sometimes associated with the 'shrewd' and 'deceptive' business mentality of the Igbo. Ethnic *difference* and hostility is intensified by modern politics. These perceptions complicate utopian depictions in Nollywood video-film imagery.

In my analysis of ethnic-specific cosmography, 'witchcraft' and conceptualisations of time, I discuss representations of Igbo and Yorùbá cosmologies, mainly because these ethnic-specific representations are predominant in video-film among the many ethnic groups in Nigeria. I have chosen these two examples because their distinct approaches to the fantastic and to cosmology (scientific and esoteric) will enable the theorisation of at least two different types of the rational–fantastic. The approach of Yorùbá epics to cosmology is that cosmology is a natural and social science, whereas the approach of Igbo epics to cosmology is that it is mythical and isolated in abstract time. These distinctions are general but not conclusive and remain debatable. In both approaches, elements in the narrative that can be explicated through rational explanations as well as those that are mysterious and simply cannot be explained but depend on the belief in the supernatural.

1: Ethnic Essentialisms in Nollywood Video-Film

Various strands of Nollywood are named in terms of ethnic and religious categories: Igbo films, Yorùbá films and Hausa films (amongst others). Although it would be erroneous to over-emphasise the socio-linguistic classifications, the use of such ethnic categories seems to be the only way in which cultural practices can be seen as 'authentic'. The Western anthropological interest in African art categorised artistic objects according to ethnic groups rather than individual artists. The concept of 'authentic African art' therefore rested on the anonymity of the artists alongside its ethnic and cultural context. Moreover, this 'authenticity' assumes that these objects are invested with supernatural power (for example, information about the use of such objects in traditional ritual practices forms part of the data that legitimates African sculptural objects as 'authentic'). The appearance of such sculptural objects in video-film and the focus on traditional ritual shows a concern for preserving 'authentic' traditions but, is also a way of pandering to the fascination with the fantastic mystical/supernatural characterisation of African ethnic-specific and primordial traditions.

Ethnicity in African contexts does not only denote the language that a person speaks but also connotes that person's obligation to anthropomorphic practices based on the belief

in fantastic and supernatural forces. In this sense, the bond to the supernatural is inevitable but framed by Western thought as 'irrational'. "Ethnic consciousness" is characterised by Vail (1989: 3) as "a form of collective irrationality" because it is a new "ideological construct" that seems to oppose "social and political change". However, post-independence African thinkers embraced the supernatural in ethnic-specific traditions as a 'rational' alternative to Western hegemony. Therefore, the ethnic essentialism in video-film blurs the distinction between rational and irrational.

Ethnic categories in Nollywood video-film are already in a problematic hierarchy of sorts considering the assertion that Yorùbá itinerant theatre is older and has been regarded as "the future of Nigerian cinema" (Diawara 1992: 124–5). Nollywood filmmakers are conscious about ethnic difference and ethnic tension. An interview conducted by Trenton Daniel (2004: 112) with film producers Zeb Ejiro, Ajoke Jacobs, Tunde Kelani and Aquila Njamah alludes to varying power relations and the precariousness of ethnic differentiation in the Nigerian film industry.

> **Ejiro**: The Yorùbá is watching the Hausa, and the Igbo is watching the Hausa. People are very careful. Everything you do, people are looking for their political angle.
>
> **Njamah**: Exactly. That is why we need political censorship. Until things stabilize, "a hungry man is an angry man."
>
> **Kelani**: We can't have movies that say all Muslims are bad. It would tear Nigeria apart. You can't say all Christians are lazy.
>
> **Ejiro**: If you make a movie that abuses the Yorùbá ways, it cannot go. And if you say all Nigerian policemen are corrupt, it cannot go. But you can say this policeman is corrupt. You cannot say the government is corrupt, but you can say a minister in the government is corrupt. It's when you generalize… (Daniel 2004: 112).

Internally, films are made and interpreted in relation to each other: Yorùbá films are read in relation to Hausa films, Hausa films are read in relation to Igbo films, and so on in a process of differentiation. There is also a process of differentiation in which the local film industry is viewed in relation to films made in other countries: externally, Nollywood generates stereotypical images that inform the ways in which Nigeria is imagined.

The slippage between ethnic identities and socio-linguistic classifications has implications for contextualising Nollywood. While the Igbo, Yorùbá, and Hausa

distinction is generally used to define language differences, alongside English and Pidgin films, one has to question if these distinctions go beyond the language in which a film is made. For example, does the Yorùbá film category merely convey that the language spoken in the film is Yorùbá or does it delve deeper into the film's expression or interrogation of Yorùbá socio-cultural identity? Françoise Balogun asserted that "Yorùbá cinema is limited to Yorùbá audiences because it stresses the inside aspects of Yorùbá tradition, instead of universal aspects" (Balogun in Diawara 1996: 124). Hausa films, which are not discussed in this thesis, form part of moralist storytelling traditions fused with "Islamic ethos and aesthetics" (Adamu 2004: 2). In an account by Hyginus Ekwuazi (2007: 132), who argues that "the Igbos have lacked those peculiar advantages that propelled and sustained the Yorùbás and Hausas in filmmaking", Igbo films are also regarded as English films. These distinctions are somewhat troubling. What happens to this specificity in English- and Pidgin-based films?

Pidgin-English in Nollywood appears to be unifying since it can be seen as *practices* of speaking in a localised or specifically 'Nigerian' manner. Moradewun Adejunmobi (1998: 74) points out that it is assumed that cultural products made in European languages (such as English) have less appeal to Nigerian audiences on the whole as they "are considered [to be] intelligible only to elite audiences and operate in African cultural practice mainly as signifiers of colonial experience". Pidgin-English, radically different from European English, is perceived as a medium that represents the syncretism of urban-based African cultures but does not 'authenticate' in the way the indigenous languages seem to. The Pidgin-English format in Nollywood is debatably antithetical to elite practices of English-speaking.

Variations in the command of English construct hierarchical social relations between speakers. In colonial Nigeria, Ali Mazrui argues, "nationalists had the attitude of 'reveling in their own command of English'" (Mazrui cited in Teilanyo 2003: 150). Ali Mazrui claims that "resistance to foreign rule in Africa . . . did not become 'nationalistic' until its leaders became English speakers" (Mazrui cited in Teilanyo 2003: 82). These dynamics resonate with Ade Ajayi's assertion that the national question is "the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have the same rights and privileges" (Ajayi cited in

Momoh 2002: 15). The Nollywood discourse should go beyond ethnic terms to define its industry without denying cultural diversity or cultural specificity. Nollywood narratives embody the concept of "process". Stories of migration, movement through transformation suggest a complex way in which constructions of identity within real, fictional or simulated spaces are circumscribed.

1.1: Representations of Cosmography and Ethnicity in Igbo Epics

Igbo epic video-films often represent Igbo kingdoms and Igbo cosmology through representations of deities and various beings within the cosmos in a typology of spaces such as 'the village', 'the bush' and 'the forest' (which I will discuss in Chapter 5). Nollywood video-film steeped in particularly Igbo practices and beliefs counters the stereotype of Igbo people as frugal businessmen and women. In these films, the Igbo are represented as communal. The use of 'traditional' clothing, body-painting and beadwork form part of the construction of homogenous Igbo identity. If the rational is considered as congruence, *familiarity*, consistency, reason and coherence, then the ethnic homogeneity in Igbo epics opposes the fragmentary, the diverse, and the inconsistency and incoherence of secularised urban life. The fantastic, however, characterises both the rational and the irrational that co-exist in the construction of homogenous ethnic identity as well as urban diverse 'modern' identity. In Igbo epics, the rational–fantastic defines the denial of modern, urban life and the deferment or impossibility of homogeneity. The persistence of ethnic homogeneity constructs counter-narratives to the 'irrationality' of colonialism and subsequent military rule. The representation of the kingdom in video-film as a form of administration denies bureaucratic forms that have been inherited from colonialism by not acknowledging their existence.

1.1.1: 'Traditional' Leadership and Igbo Cosmography

In *A Warrior's Heart* (2007), directed by Ikechukwu Onyeka, the female warrior and ruler Ihuoma (Genevieve Nnaji) of Omuaku village draws her strength from the goddess of the moon [Fig. 85]. As mediator between her subjects and the goddess, she offers "the first fruits of [their] labour as sacrifice". Ihuoma pronounces incantations and lifts her arms and the fruits magically ascend to the sky. She refers to the goddess as "our *chi*"

which is collective rather than individual. There is an image of a crescent moon on Ihuoma's back. In Igbo cosmology, the crescent moon is a symbol of Ala, the goddess of the earth and a significant *Alusi* (deity). The offering that the people of Omuaku make is constituted of agricultural stock: fruits and vegetables, which are the province of the earth goddess. Land, it is believed, is sacred because it is as if it were Ala herself. Ihuoma's mother Adaku, although blind, spends her time engaging in agricultural activities or "looking for roots and weeds for herbs" and is able to "see" her daughter's dreams and "feel" her daughter's response to them. The dream she refers to is one in which Ihuoma is walking in the land of her village and sees the dead bodies of her subjects scattered. Her mother advises her to not ignore this dream because it is a revelation from the goddess and warns that the dream represents entanglement, "which when unravelled could be sweet [as fruit] or bitter as bitter kola nut". The basis of associational life in this village is esoteric. For example, in order for Ihuoma to remain a good leader and enable peaceful life she depends on theocentric belief and regular sacrifice. Traditional leadership is depicted as a form of the rational–fantastic.

The beliefs systems of the Igbo are referred to as *Odinani*. Igbo cosmology is constituted of the fundamental concept that is known as *chi*. Ibe Chukwukere (1983: 520) argues that the *chi* belief system is theological and its "representations suggest 'collective' Igbo 'mentality'". Chukwukere (1983: 520) further argues that an illustration of the manner in which "theories of causation and of the human personality in its manifold variety" are influenced by *chi* lies in the fact that "invisible anthropomorphised beings" play a central role in explanations of the world (Chukwukere 1983: 524). *Chukwu* is God or the Supreme Being and is generally assumed to be synonymous with *chi* (Chukwukere 1983: 524). The latter, however, is the manifestation of God in man. It is also often argued that the root of the word *chukwu* is *chi*. Each individual has a *chi* that is seen as his or her "double or guardian spirit", and the Supreme Being negotiates the individual's destiny with this *chi* before an individual is born (Chukwukere 1983: 524). That *chi* could be born again or reincarnated as a different person. Individuals "establish their own chi symbols"; people could use trees or pots within a shrine, and "every village-group has its own deity", or consult a *dibia* (an Igbo diviner) to know how to appease the *chi* (Chukwukere 1983: 528).

Ihuoma heeds the warning and calls the council of elders (who are all men) to discuss strengthening security and guarding the boundaries that connect their village Omuaku with others (that is, the villages of Achiaru, Obudu and Umwenyi). In this film, kingdoms divide people of the same ethnicity. Some of Ihuoma's subjects who live close to the borders are constantly threatened by the leader of Obudu village, Ikagwe, who burns their property and livestock then declares that the land they live on belongs to him. When Ihuoma is informed about the malice, she goes to Obudu and reminds Ikagwe of a pact signed which placed the disputed land under the jurisprudence of Omuaku. In anger, she produces balls of fire from her hands and throws them at the leader and his homestead. She then declares Obudu a part of Omuaku and its subjects hers. Ihuoma not only sees to the ownership and fertility of the land but also of her people. She offers counsel and prenatal services to women in her village. Furthermore, she grants asylum to many dispossessed people from other villages who seek refuge including denizens from Acharu (a village for which she harbours contempt because of the way they treat their citizens).

In Acharu, a village neighbouring Omuaku, the king, Igwuakwe, is being regaled by a local musician. The musician sings a ballad which illustrates the deceit of the goddess of the sea (also known as Mami Wata):

> One beautiful woman went to a strange land to buy goods. She bought snuff while she is carrying her child on her back. On her way back to her house she gets to a bridge and falls inside the water. The woman asked the goddess of the sea to take her child and give her back her snuff box. The goddess gave her back her snuff box and she threw her child inside the river and left. After inhaling the snuff she started sneezing T!himmm, T!himmm, T!himmm. She congratulated the goddess for giving her the snuff back because since she was born she has never seen a snuff like that one and that she can still give birth to another child. When she got to her husband's house she now realised that she killed her son just because of common snuff and she started crying Iyoolоооо Iyoolоооо, my mother-in-law, come because my child that I travel with has died, the mother in law started begging her husband on her behalf. Long live *igwe*[172].

He then follows this by singing a ballad about Ihuoma which he says he saw in his dreams:

> Ihuoma! Ihuoma! There is one woman in our land her name is Ihuoma, she is from Omuaku village. She is a ruler and she is ruling well. A woman that is better than a man. She is a very nice woman. Once a nice woman enters a

[172] *A Warrior's Heart* (2007), Dir. Ikechukwu Onyeka, Divine Touch Productions

> family, things will go well. If a good woman rule us things will change, a nice woman should rule us her name is princess, zion princess. Good woman should rule us[173].

This angers the *Igwe* (king) of Acharu, who consequently sends spies to Omuaku to find out if the poems, ballads and popular legends about Ihuoma are really true. In pursuit of the land of Omuaku, the *Igwe* of Acharu must ensure the security of the throne for his heir, prince Obiora. The *Igwe* of Acharu won the throne with the help of a local traditional priest when his cousin died. As a reward, the *Igwe* promised the priest that his son, Prince Obiora, will marry the priest's daughter, Urenna. However, Obiora had already made plans to marry his lover, Idioma. The priest warns the *Igwe* that, if the promise is not fulfilled, the throne will be forfeited. The Igwe's appeal to Prince Obiora to cancel his wedding plans and marry the priest's daughter fails. In desperation, the Igwe tries to convince Obiora that Idioma is not suitable because she comes from a long line of promiscuous women who die mysteriously and that he should rather marry Urenna. When this anecdote fails to convince Obiora, the *Igwe* uses the deep-seated jealousy of his other son, Obinna, against Obiora. He instructs Obinna to trick Idioma by sending guards to her homestead to inform her that the prince summons her to the palace. When she arrives, Obinna her tells to go into one of the huts where he captures and rapes her. When he's done, he pushes her out of the hut, where the *Igwe* and her lover, Prince Obiara, are waiting. Prince Obiora is fooled into believing that Idioma really is promiscuous and no extent of begging will convince him otherwise. Idioma's father is called to punish her for having an affair with prince Obiora's brother and remove her from the palace. Prince Obiora declares ""I should have known better than to trust a woman, they are all devils". Urenna, who has been bragging about her planned marriage to Prince Obiara, still has a sexual relationship with Obinna, who begs her to not appear at the dance where the prince Obiora will "choose" a bride.

The spies that were sent to Omuaku to spy on Ihuoma were captured, but one was sent back to inform the *Igwe* about Ihuoma's wrath and to deliver the message that she thinks the *Igwe* is a coward. The *Igwe* mutters that he is not afraid of a mere maiden. The spy maintains that her "capability as a ruler or prowess as a warrior" should not be underestimated. Later, while hunting, Prince Obiora strays into the land of Omuaku where he comes across Ihuoma. Ihuoma orders her guards to flog the prince and take

[173] Ibid.

him off the land of Omuaku. Ihuoma, with her fantastic supernatural power, depicted as rational, is contrasted to the *Igwe* of Acharu, who has no supernatural power and rules through irrational violence.

The use of Igbo proverbs and reference to Igbo cosmology is represented as authentic but comprises of both truthfulness and myth to emphasise moral values (contrasting Ihuoma's good leadership to the *Igwe's* greed for power over other villages and violent leadership. The logic of the film, even though based on myth, is to provide representations of 'rational' thinking, including the use of seemingly 'irrational' or violent means to reach rational solutions. In order to do this, Ihuoma depends on the supernatural, on cosmological forces. She has supernatural or fantastic powers. This fantastic characterisation of a rational but supernaturally-abled protagonist defines the rational–fantastic.

The Igbo in most epic video-films are divided into various polities reflecting the idiom that "the Igbo have no kings" (*Igbo enweghi Eze*). This idiom is usually treated as a general truth. However, some may argue that it refers to a specific period in Igbo history, and is regarded as a political philosophy "derived from proto-Igbo political ideology characterised by egalitarian and republican features of people . . . in central sub culture areas of Igboland" (Onunwa 2010: 43). The depiction of kingdoms is not irrelevant to contemporary politics. In contemporary Nigeria, there are kings, princes, chiefs, and chief diviners, who function within the political and economic sphere alongside the bureaucracies that have been inherited from colonialism. Even though the latter have more political authority and jurisprudence, most of the people within contemporary political structures are also chiefs, princes and so on. Even so, contrasts of the contemporary federal political structure as rational compared to older notions of leadership abound. Democracy, through which all citizens have equal participation, is regarded as a state of affairs that could have only been implemented within post-colonial political structures, whereas kingdoms seem aristocratic. The opposite may be true if one considers that brutal military dictatorship emerged as a structure that was inherited from colonial administration. The ambiguity and complexity of the rational is complicated by the habitual representation of 'traditional' leadership and the absence of contemporary state leadership.

In Igbo epics, people are not just subjects of human administration but also subjects of supernatural gods and goddesses within the cosmology. In video-film, being a subject is demonstrated through clothing. The use of 'traditional' clothing in Igbo epic video-film distinguishes the characters in films as 'rural'.

1.1.2: Wearing 'Tradition' in Igbo Epics: Clothing and Symbolism

Costume is not an ornament; it is the reflection of a situation
(Mambety cited in Ukadike 2002: 127)

For Mambety clothing is "a mask that makes it possible to recognise good or bad" (Ukadike 2002: 127). Therefore, in analysing the rational–fantastic, one is excavating layers of appearances as if they were layers of clothing and as if the naked body would produce some kind of truth. 'Epic' video-films are mockingly called 'bean bag' movies by Charles Novia (2012: 8), who remarks that the use of jute or bean bags as costumes that connote pre-colonial clothing had become predominant. Novia notes that 'traditional' clothing in video-film is more creative practice rather than 'truthful' representation of tradition. Clothing, nevertheless, is significant in the creation of essentialised notions of being Igbo in video-film. The striped beanie, red caps, chequered cloth or large red beads that symbolise various social classes within the construction of Igbo identity form part of the Igbo epic video-film visual language, which also alludes to the political significance of clothing in the construction of Igbo identity [Figs 86, 87, 88].

The red cap, for example, is worn by chiefs in everyday practice. The use of this chieftancy cap in video-film performances is sometimes frowned upon as the degradation of values, because "traditional authority is encoded in Igbo-speaking areas by items of regalia like red felt caps" (Onuzulike 2007b, Bastian 1996: 121). Men who wear the red felt cap and red beads were used to display wealth gained from trade and sale of property (Bastian 1996: 112). Older men who possess the *Ozo* title wear these caps to signify dignity. Those who wear it are seen as those who 'speak the truth' and

are trusted to provide rational judgment[174]. It is often stated that to wear the red cap one must take an oath to 'wash the tongue'[175]. An eagle feather on the cap symbolises the level attained by the chief. The cap also represents generational difference. Misty Bastian (1996: 112) argues that chieftaincy caps were amongst some of the regalia that were re-introduced in the 1980s when young people returned from studying overseas having incorporated European forms of dress and later changed to traditional wear to assert nationalism. Some lament that the otherwise hereditary *Ozo* title can now "be bought" and worn by anyone who can offer a price[176]. The appropriation of clothing items, in Nollywood video-film, that form part of sumptuary laws, is paradoxical in that while it seems to transgress the boundaries and values that are placed on those items, it also seems to provide posterity to the contemporary visibility of 'traditional' dress that competes with international dress styles. Epic video-film therefore plays a role in symbolic representation to counter Western cultural hegemony.

When Mambety (in Ukadike 2002) refers to dress as "the reflection of a situation", he alludes to contemporary circumstance in which 'traditional dress' is an ideological pursuit and a political assertion. The notion of a 'situation' means that dress, if viewed this way, is an element of spatio-temporal specificity. It is more than an inferential practice or an appropriation of traditional dress as a thing of the past but of tradition *situated* in the present (modern traditional dress). Nollywood video-films that depict *homogenous* Igbo society, in which members of the community wear chequered cloth and kings wear animal skin, represent such societies as utopias. The inference and appropriation of these sartorial codes becomes part of a practice of imagining and projecting. Such a homogenous society is a fantasy situation in a fantasy space that, in establishing its spatio-temporal specificity, is not only decontextualised from actual recognisable historical events but must come across as fragments of history. In other words, most of these video-films do not depict particular historical events but rather compose moments of imagined pasts woven into a variety of narratives (Mudimbe

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174 http://www.igbofocus.co.uk/THE_ABUSE_OF_RED_CAPS_AND_CHIE/the_abuse_of_red_caps_and_chieftaincy_titles.html accessed 2013/08/18

175 Ibid.

176 http://www.igbofocus.co.uk/THE_ABUSE_OF_RED_CAPS_AND_CHIE/the_abuse_of_red_caps_and_chieftaincy_titles.html accessed 2013/08/18

1988). It is hard to deny the political significance of constructing these rational–fantastic notions of identity.

In *Unbreakable Pot*, when the king, who is always dressed in animal skin, is forced by the gods to go and find the poor farmer who rescued his life, he searches the forest without wearing his royal attire [Fig. 89]. He is confronted by two assailants who do not recognise who he is. The old woman, Efiok's late mother, helps the king by making him invisible and, through magic, teleports him to his destination instantly. The removal of royal attire is significant to the assistance from the gods that the king receives. In these visual representations, clothing is linked almost directly to the spiritual realm of Igbo cosmology. Diviners are, in most video-film, portrayed wearing red, which links them to a supernatural dimension.

The video-film phenomenon creates a visual currency of the symbolism and iconography of Igbo cosmology in popular rhetoric and transnational contemporary media. Even though the accuracy of that symbolism is contestable, it is possible to regard proverbs such as the one that states: "can the child pretend to see, sitting down, what his forefathers could not see standing" as something particular to Igbo lingo-culture. Symbols such as the python or the crescent moon, that are often shown as paintings on a hessian cloth that hangs in a king's and elders' council or painted on the arms or face of an actor, seem indexical to the crescent moon and python symbols of the goddess known as Ala, who is an important *Alusi* since she encompasses ancestors in her womb. Land is linked to Ala and is therefore considered to be sacred. Another example is the white circular shape that is usually painted around the eye of a priest or a diviner as someone who 'sees' what the human eye cannot see. The bell staff of the priest is generally depicted as a form of communicating with the supernatural. This is common in Nollywood video-film. If one takes, for example, the chief priest in the film entitled *Unbreakable Pot* directed by Evans Orji and Emeka Nwosu, the chief priest, dressed in red, has a circular white shape around the left eye and stomps his bell staff for every step he takes. When he walks into the king's council chambers, he does so facing outwards (as if to "undo" his visit on his way out).

The film *Unbreakable Pot* alludes to the Igbo belief that, before humans were created, Chukwu existed with other divinities. Amongst them was Edo, a female divinity that

Chukwu presented with his sceptre and a small clay pot with water. When Edo came to earth with these gifts, she became "lost and disoriented" and "spread out" the chalk to make it land and placed some of it in the pot (Morvillo 2010: 84). These four pieces were later used by Chukwu to make four people, who became the progenitors (Morvillo 2010: 84). The significance of the pot as the base material for creation and purpose on earth is the key focus of the film. The key character in *Unbreakable Pot*, Efiok, falls in love with a princess, Eme Ebong, of one of "the most powerful kingdoms", named Okot Ifior. Since he is a "poor farmer", the king takes offence and soon Efiok is orphaned and exiled from his village. When the matter is discussed by the council of elders, a fight breaks out between Enyang (who is against Efiok's banishment) and Otok. In response, the *Igwe* (king) eventually decides to expel Enyang and asserts that the farmer must be punished the next market day.

While seeking refuge, Efiok comes across an old woman, who was also banished from Ikoro Akpan (her village) but has settled on fertile land, and tells her that he is orphaned and homeless. She responds by saying that she is childless, and Efiok decides that he will become her adopted son and will assist her with farming on the land. "Thanks to the gods . . . I think you will be cutting palm fruit, get some coco yam and prepare some food", exclaims the old woman. Efiok's departure from the kingdom is followed by the king's illness. As a remedy, the princess is instructed to fetch water using the royal unbreakable pot and administer that to the king. She returns in agony because, by accident, the pot broke. The elders consult a chief priest who tells them that they must get another unbreakable pot. The elders instruct all citizens to bring their pots before the council for the princess to choose. This fruitless exercise leads the elders to march to a disgruntled Enyang who asserts "in this my house, there is no pot called unbreakable pot" then tells them that they must find the banished farmer, Efiok. The old woman who lived with Efiok falls ill and proclaims that "[her] ancestors are calling her", and gives him a pot which is "the only treasure [she] can give [Efiok] for [she has] not enough money or enough land to give". Before she dies the old woman says "my grandmother handed it to my mother before she died . . . this pot is unbreakable; nothing can break the pot, not even the gods of any land or the spirits!" Princess Eme Ebong volunteers to fetch the pot from Efiok and succeeds in healing the king. Efiok must travel to the kingdom and is fetched by the king. While walking to another village

called Ikot Ikoyi, the king encounters the spirit of the old woman. Although the king recognises that the woman is not a human being but a spirit, he holds her hand upon her request and is teleported to where Efiok is. The old woman also expedites their journey back through teleportation. The return of the pot and the "poor farmer", Efiok as the new prince appeases the gods. Enyang is reinstated to the council of elders.

Chieke Ifemesia (1979: 67–8) argues that in the Igbo cosmos "nothing is absolute" and that there is "interdependence, exhibited now as duality or reciprocity, now as ambivalence or complementariness [which] has always been a fundamental principle of the Igbo philosophy of life". The duality of poor (Efiok) and rich (kingdom), blindness and vision, cruelty and kindness, is an interplay in which the one is animated by the other. For Ifemesia (1979: 68), duality is not dualism, which follows "that the bifurcation of things into compartments, duality . . . refers to the complementarity of the entities that comprise nature which occur in a pair . . . *ihe di obuo ofu ka ibeya* (in the duality of things one has primacy over the other)". Duality contributes to the fantastic nature of image and text, where one thing provides depth to that which it is paired to and creates an impression that both are invested with mystical power. Igbo epic video-films are not merely fanciful imaginations but form part of the traffic of representations through which Igbo cosmology is legitimated.

1.2: Representation of Cosmography in Yorùbá Video-film

Yorùbá video-film is often distinct from Igbo 'epic' video-film in that it depicts the complexity of cosmology within contemporary urban politics rather than isolated in village settings. Tunde Kelani, an acclaimed director of Yorùbá celluloid and video-film, distinguishes himself as an artisanal rather than commercial or industrial director. Kelani asserts that film needs to play an ideological role in legitimising indigenous knowledge as "sacrosanct knowledge" (Kelani in Esonwanne 2008: 5). His films draw from the Yorùbá cosmology and the ways in which it is manifest in the present. For Kelani, the Yorùbá cosmology is not just knowledge of the past that is known to and affects only the elderly. In his films, Kelani depicts the Yorùbá cosmology as a way of envisioning life in the contemporary with acknowledgement of spiritual forces that especially the youth should adopt as philosophy. Although Kelani's films also generally represent homogenous Yorùbá societies, he shows such communities and also the

confrontation with contemporary politics (kleptocracy, petro-fetishism, land prospecting, etc.). The Yorùbá cosmology therefore is a way of overcoming the effects of colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, etc in the present. Rather than the representation of a 'return' to a fantastical homogenous utopia, the cosmology in Kelani's films is constituted of beings that have a continual ontological status.

1.2.1: *Ifá* Dynamics and 'Traditional' Leadership

Ifá is a conglomeration of social, religious and cultural practices prone to contestation and consisting of mutable meaning. In some cases, *Ifá* is discussed in such a way that it synonymises 'African religion' with 'African philosophy' (Masolo 1994). *Ifá*, as the sacred text of Yorùbá religion, has a pantheon of 600 +1 (not 601) supernatural powers. Its malleability and changeability is actually its strength. The pantheon is divided into two halves, the 200 malevolent anti-gods (known as *Ajogun*) on the left and the 400 benevolent *Orisa* (Abímbọ́lá 2006). There are forces that straddle between the left–right divide. The "plus 1" is said to "not refer to any particular divinity" and is a principle of elasticity by which the Yorùbá account for a newly deified *Orisa*, and allows integration of new beliefs and new thought systems (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 49). *Ifá* does not use a gendered personal pronoun to refer to High Deity, hence Oludumare, who is at the apex of the Yorùbá pantheon, is neither male nor female (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 49–52). The Yorùbá religion divides the cosmos into two interdependent realms: the spiritual world and the natural world. The former is the abode of Oludumare and the *Orisa*, the *Ajogun* and ancestors; the natural world is the place of humans, animals and plants (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 53).

Tunde Kelani asserts that "*Ifá* was not taught … so now we have to re-educate ourselves" (Kelani in Esonwanne 2008: 25). Kelani's films take on a didactic role, to collate remembered narratives into a recognisable living history of the Yorùbá. Over and above entertainment, film, according to Kelani's views, should serve an archival, historicising purpose. Within contemporary precarious economy and politics as well as intricate social and religious principles, how does Nollywood negotiate the representation of "sacred" intimate knowledges embedded in traditional cosmological philosophies? Kelani's *Arugba* (1993), a film about the chosen virgin who is tasked to

carry the basket of offerings from the King's palace to the river stream during the Osun Osogbo festival in South-West Nigeria, illustrates this didactic style. Traditional leadership in Kelani's films is plagued by contemporary issues of corruption and greed, where chiefs speculate on sacred land.

In the film, *Arugba* (1993), 'traditional' kingdoms can only work if they are led by leaders who deeply understand Yorùbá cosmology. The political leader in Kelani's film is represented as the king (*Oba*), and his chiefs epitomise chaos, corruption and disorder. The introduction to the palace is a hysterical scene of the king's wives in mêlée, screaming at each other about stolen beads. The king is unable to "control" his wives, his critics reprimand. In other words, if he cannot run a home, how is he to run their polity? The king is characterised as a man of folly, whose failures are reflected in his progeny. His children, for example, do not uphold "Yorùbá principles", and his grandchildren do not remember Yorùbá words but they speak coherent English. The king has failed to "transfer" Yorùbá history to younger generations. To resolve the squabble between the king's wives, the *Ifá* priest asks that a virgin take a gaze into the *Ifá* tray (*Opon Ifá*). None of the King's daughters oblige fearing retribution for looking into the *Ifá* tray while they are not virgins. On a visit to the king's palace to confirm her willingness to be the *Arugba*, Adetutu (the main character) offers to read or "take a gaze" into the *Ifá* tray [Fig. 91]. The *Iyere Osun/ Iyerosun*, the camwood powder that is spread on the *Ifá* tray supernaturally moves in circles and disappears when Adetutu gazes into the tray. In response, she says "I cannot fathom anything". By way of interpretation, the *Ifá* priest states that "if she cannot see anything, then we are looking for that which is not lost" – proving that the King's wives are fighting for no reason. Only the fantastic can solve the irrational and chaotic. Adetutu, who takes on supernatural fantastic powers through her devotion to the cosmology, represents the voice of reason. Her character is a form of the rational–fantastic.

The king, who fails to make 'rational' judgments, is guided through supernatural and fantastic methods to get to the truth. In the film, the 'truth' and 'reality' are multidimensional. The representations of daydreams and memory are ambiguous because they seem to be actual events or are linked to actual events in the film. In *Arugba* (1993) the truth value of memory is initially presented archetypally. The

introductory animated scene shows a bleating old wireless radio and beside it a photo album opens to reveal photographs of Kelani and Faleti as well as a building in Osogbo. The viewfinder zooms in to a photograph to show a black-and-white documentary style narrative that details Kelani's experience of the *Osun Osogbo* festival in the South-West of Nigeria and his encounter with the *Arugba*. The story begins with Kelani's actual encounter with the *Arugba*, presented as memory and as event in the film.

The *Osun* festival in Osogbo is a celebration of a female *Orisa* who arrived in *Ile-Ife* (a place between heaven and earth) with the first male-dominated batch of seventeen *Orisa* (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 126-7). This scene shows a series of interviews as well as the documentation of the *Ifá* divination process where the *Arugba* is instructed before an *Ifá* tray and told that *Ifá* wants her "to be cheerful at all times"[177]. The student Adebayo Faleti and the *Ifá* priest Yemi Eluibon demonstrate the process. The camera then zooms back out to the photo album, which closes again. On one hand, using the documentary as prologue frames the film as objective reportage, a truth offering, and it also grants it historicity (this differentiates it from Igbo epic video-film). On the other hand, using the photo album personalises a socio-cultural commemorative event. Including Kelani's own photographic portrait acts as moniker. Photographs possess a documentary character because they are generally assumed to concern themselves with putative fact as traces of the world (Snyder 1984: 18). As such, they have been regarded to be more reliable than the testimony of human sight and mind. The authorial presence (in terms of Kelani's portrait) reminds us that the narrative is subjective. This representation of 'truth' or 'reality' (as rational) is sharply contrasted to madness and chaos (as irrational).

In the subsequent scene, an evangelist paces up and down through the market alleys in fiery fervor, proclaiming the ills of society, asking "why do you prefer darkness to light?"[178] Women at the market mock him, labelling him a madman whose marital woes and compounded trauma thrust him into the irrational intoxication of religion. The madman/evangelist scene punctuates the main narrative showing the mind's inability to retain the truth of experience. Madness, it can be argued, is about dismembering

[177] *Arugba* (1993) Dir. Tunde Kelani, Mainframe Films
[178] Ibid.

knowledge, forgetting and disarticulation, where memory is a process of officiating ways of knowing. “Repent, repent,” he cries. In another corner, Muslim men shake their heads in disapproval. The evangelical surge is interpreted by the market women as a way that this man perceives ethnic-specific traditions as darkness. In their natter, one woman points out that what “the madman” says bears some truth in it, and as such it reflects the failures of their political authorities to address basic social needs. Here, madness and irrationality are the revelation of truth. Kelani, presents beliefs in which the fantastic is operative, such as Christianity, Islam and ethnic-specific cosmology, as complex negotiations between the rational (light) and irrational (darkness). While *Ifá* is depicted as something that has a rationalising effect (it is the rational–fantastic), it contends with other systems which have different organising principles.

The “madman” in this film embodies “a parody of official reason”, to use Olivier Barlet’s (2000: 27) expression. Madness symbolises the irrational. Madness is portrayed by Kelani as Christianity, and the corruption that plagues contemporary leadership. The significance of *Ifá* for Kelani is that he regards it as a rational living science. In his words “most of [its] roots and foundation” are “binary and scientific”[179]. *Ifá*, according to Kola Abímbọ́lá (2006: 47), has six layers of meaning. It refers to the god of knowledge, the divination process, and the literary corpus of 256 books, each containing 600 or 800 poems. It also refers to one specific poem, an herbal mixture or talisman and special incantations that are medicinal. *Ifá* priests, known as Babalawo, must commit these poems to memory. Denoting *Ifá* as a science (aligned to characteristics of truthfulness and provable fact) is intriguing. One would assume that the scientificisation (the giving of equations: if x and y then z) of *Ifá* desacralises it or demystifies it by rationalising it. In the film, however, the mystical aspect of *Ifá* is kept intact, for example, through the magical movement of *Iyere Osun*, or yellow dust, on the tray.

It is argued that the divination process of *Ifá* accesses hidden knowledge (the source of its power): “*Ifá* priests have access to an esoteric form of knowledge on the basis of which day-to-day life in Yorùbá culture is regulated” (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 56). The cosmological structure is perceived also as surveillance. The divination process reveals things unseen as if in the greater scheme they were seen by supernatural forces. *Ifá* is

[179] http://www.nollywood.net/vbee/showthread.php?t=158 viewed 20/08/2011

seen as the mouthpiece of the Orisa, but using sacred palm nuts, divining chain or sixteen cowries and kola nuts, individuals can find out about their past, present and future (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 56). In the film, *Arugba* (1993), Yorùbá cosmology is not a tradition of the past but a way through which the trauma of the past and present can be approached. *Ifá* is, therefore, reparative, according to Kelani.

For example, when Adetutu is kidnapped in a minibus with children held hostage, she finds herself imprisoned in a room from which she can hear children crying. One assailant hurls verbal insults at her when she finally pleads for water to quench her thirst. The water enables her to channel the powers of Yemoja (see below). With a new surge of mystical power she frees herself, beats up the assailants and frees the children. The story about Adetutu's ordeal is published in a local newspaper but it leads to an inquisition by the elders and the community. Since she had been kidnapped, it is assumed that she has been raped and hence she cannot be the *Arugba* during the *Osun Osogbo* festival. To appeal, she would have to withstand a virginity testing in the public arena. She agrees to take the test without complaint and is re-instated as the *Arugba*.

Arguably, there are layers of wounding: the traumatic experience, in being kidnapped and assaulted as well as being publicly interrogated. In the film, the assailants are not punished in any public manner. In order to attain the principles of being the *Arugba,* she carries the wounds without identifying them as such. To be in the likeness of a divinity, wounds are transformed into power. While it can be argued that this maintains the notion of purity and mysticism, it also alludes to the idea of public memory and woundedness. Public or collective memory is distanced from truth or rational thought and represents woundedness in terms of loss of 'self'. In the film, through belief in cosmology, that woundedness can be transformed into something else. In Yorùbá mythology, the cosmological female figure that appears each time Adetutu comes into contact with water, Yemoja, is also doubly wounded. In the mythological narrative, the dispute with her husband leads Yemoja to fall with her child on her back then she disappears to form the Odo Oogun River. Her travails are remembered through naming the river that forms from the clay pot that fell from her head as 'the river that heals' or 'the river of medicine'. Commemorative ceremonies at this river are meant to provide holistic healing.

While the notion of woundedness is not visually emphasised in the film, it carries the currency of the main narrative. From the beginning of the film, we are aware that what we see is more than segments of the author's remembrance, but is weighted with nostalgia (the word *nostos* is Greek for 'return home' and *algia* or *algos* means 'pain'). The principle in most Kelani films is the ethos of life before Westernisation. Traditionalism is presented as the antidote for the corruption and greed in contemporary politics, where colonialism and Westernisation signify wounding and loss. Aspects of the Yorùbá cosmology in Kelani's film are shown as compensating colonial chaos and disorder. His films seek to re-member a dismembered/fragmented (African) history.

This is presented in an almost literal sense in *Arugba* (1993) in the depiction of golden landscapes where Adetutu is able to see Yemoja [Figs. 92]. Here, the mythical world intersects with the real world to re-construct a combined, imagined and material world. Deploying fragments of myth and history can be seen as modes of interrogating the present. Yorùbá Nollywood films are sometimes reproached for 'appropriating tradition' mainly for commercial reasons. Elevating homogenous Yorùbá identity through a magico-religious aesthetic is problematic. Ethnocentrism is faced with this impasse: an assertion of essentialised cultural identity as the antithesis to Western hegemony which also seems to heighten inter-ethnic tensions.

1.2.2: Wearing 'Tradition': The Concept of a New Yorùbá

In one of the introductory scenes in Kelani's *Agogo Eewo* (2002), which I discuss in the first chapter, a man dances in an elaborate agbada or boubou. In the scene, movement is emphasised through the flow of the agabada. While Kelani places emphasis on 'traditional' clothing, he also includes other forms of clothing. In *Agogo Eewo*, for example, the youth that supports the king wears green T-shirts, whereas the youth that supports the corrupt chiefs wears red T-shirts. The businessmen are depicted in pressed suits. In *Arugba* (1993), the king's wife is persuaded by one of the female ministers to use taxes to open a business that sells expensive materials and modern clothing to the elite. Clothing in Kelani's films reflects socio-economic and political circumstance. Understanding the Yorùbá cosmology, however, is not only defined by

clothing. Adetutu wears jeans even though she is the chosen virgin to perform the Osun Osogbo festival. The king's chiefs and ministers wear 'traditional' clothing but consort with modern capital to benefit financially. The representation of 'tradition' as clothing in Kelani's films does not necessarily symbolise rational thought. The enactment of 'tradition' is not only through clothing but also through symbolic taking on or 'putting on' of cosmological personality.

Most characters that illustrate the rationalising function of cosmology alter into cosmological beings or 'take on' the capabilities of cosmological beings. In *Arugba* (1993), the viewer is teleported to a golden landscape with a crimson sky. Stars, light as cotton, rise from land and river into the air. The main character, Adetutu, who is chosen as the *Arugba*, approaches the stream, and as she bends down to scoop up water she hears a voice that chants "Yemoja ooh!" and bursts into a Yorùbá song which is translated into English:

> Yemoja O
> The gorgeous one who extracts no promise of reward for her service
> Unique aquatic being
> Your magic touch turns the river to a flowing herb.

Then, as if produced from thin air, women appear, singing and dancing. As they sing homage to Yemoja, a mist of sparkling stars develops into the figure of a woman in extraordinary gear. Without saying a word, she signals with her hand that Adetutu should approach her. The woman offers Adetutu some herbs. As soon as Adetutu swallows the herbs she wakes from her dream. We realize that Adetutu is in her university residence room, dreaming. Here, Kelani collapses dreaming and myth into reality, imagination and fantasy into remembering a past with immediacy into a present. Adetutu's dream may well be Adetutu's experience in another realm in the same time frame rather than a distant past or mere recollection thereof. Throughout the film, each time Adetutu comes into contact with water, she 'takes on' the personality and power of Yemoja.

The references to Yorùbá cosmology in *Arugba* (1993) are varied. Yemoja, originally known as Omujelewu in the cosmology, is today remembered as the Oogun River (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 128). Yemoja left her husband Okere after a quarrel. She carried her

child on her back and aclay pot on her head which was filled with herbs to feed to the child. While running she fell and disappeared "but water started to gush out of the clay pot, which formed Odo Oogun (river of medicine)" (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 128). Yemoja is generally seen as a mother to many Yorùbá *Orisa*. Kelani's *Arugba* (1993), however, is based on the Osun festival in Osogbo. Osun, who symbolises the power and dignity of women, as mentioned earlier, is an *Orisa*. The male *Orisas* had not initially involved her in their activities but eventually had to beg for her forgiveness and seek her counsel (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 127). The *Arugba* is chosen by the oracle to carry the offerings to the river during the ceremony [Figs. 93, 94, 95, 96]

The *Orisa* are primordial supernatural powers. In representation, the *Orisa* and various divinities are represented as human beings. Mythological or historical supernatural beings in Nollywood video-films are generally cast as human beings to transform the invisible into visible, concrete (and significant) reality. In *Arugba*, for instance, Adetutu is given Kola nut to stuff in her mouth when she performs as the *Arugba* so that she will not be able to talk. Silencing Adetutu's subjectivity symbolises the spiritual persona that she takes on as the *Arugba*. In many scenes, Yemoja manifests in Adetutu's body each time the latter comes into contact with water. Another example is the inter-relation of Makinwa's (a fellow student who falls in love with Adetutu) dance as Sango, the divinity of lightning, thunder and rain. In one scene, Makinwa dances to a friend's bata drum. Intercepting this scene is another, which narrates the story of Sango's love for the bata drum and his fight with Sate his drummer. "The two couldn't be without each – other 'a world of symbiosis'"[180], reads the subtitle.

These two characters metamorphose subtly into divinities. Adetutu's changes occur each time she comes into contact with water [Fig. 97]. The change is not visual, but manifests physically. She becomes physically strong enough to tackle male assailants, and independently rescues kidnapped children. Makinwa's transformation into Sango is not so obvious. The drum that he dances to, however, seems to link the 'distanced past' (in terms of the black-and-white representation of the Sango) and the 'present'. In the last scene of the film, the two characters are 'serenaded' by Yemoja in an idyllic

[180] *Arugba* (1993), Dir. Tunde Kelani, Mainframe Productions

landscape in which magical objects fall from the sky as if their bond is sealed through cosmological forces [Fig. 98].

The representation of *Orisa* longevity or sustenance in history is not merely in the transference of memory on to another corporeal/body, but also as place. It is as if the *Orisa* supersede time by being able to be both subject and place at the same time. The link with Yemoja in the film is linked to river water. The *Orisa* is celebrated at the Osun river because it is believed that "when she finished [her] work on earth, she entered the earth's crust and became the Osun river" (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 127). The *Orisa* and other forces in the Yorùbá cosmological strata can metamorphose into the landscape, rivers, winds, and rains, as represented in *Arugba*. Osun and Yemoja are both represented as water that flows in a specific part of the landscape. It is also said that a gentle breeze is a manifestation of Esu or Orunmila (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 119). The representation of a fictional city is therefore double: specifying place, but also primordial supernatural beings. In this way, current political and socio-economic events that alter the landscape also modify the cosmological strata as well as the ways in which it is communally commemorated. For example, the corruption of political leaders that leads to deforestation, polluted landscapes, and urbanization affects the way that the *Orisa* and other divinities are represented as rivers or trees in specific places.

The in-between realm or *Ile-Ife,* which is structurally located between heaven and earth, is invisible, but becomes visible as earth. In *Ifá*, the *Orisa* arrived in batches at *Ile-Ife*. The paradox contained in the term *Ile-Ife* is that *Ile* means "to house" and *Ife* means "to spread out" (Abímbọ́lá 2006: 119). *Ifá* is also sometimes referred to as a body that can metamorphose into nature. One of the poems reads, "*Ifá* spread out and provide shielding for me, just as a big river spreads out to shield the sands of its bed" (Ebijuwa 2007: 92–3). Showing *Ifá* divinities as parts of the landscape concretises memory through recurring rituals. In this sense, divinities and mythological figures are eternally sentient and timeless in ecological ties. The metamorphosis principle, transformation, malleability in *Ifá* (Yorùbá cosmology) can also be seen as 'new' Yorùbá identities.

Toyin Falola (2013: 283) argues that Nollywood presents "a new Yorùbá". Falola (2013) asserts that Nollywood "unites Yorùbá" in that the "producers and actors are mostly

Yorùbá and the contexts of the stories are Yorùbá". When Falola uses the term Nollywood, he disregards the voluminous video-film of Hausa and Igbo producers and actors. The persistence of homogenous ethnic constructs relies on asserting the theocentric specificity of Yorùbá cosmology. Needless to say, many principles and deities of the Yorùbá cosmology are elementary in religious practice in South America and other parts of the world. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka (1975: 42) states that:

> Yorùbá society is full of individuals who worship the Anglican God on Sundays, sacrifice to Sango every feastday, consult Ifa before any new project and dance with the Cherubims and Seraphims every evening. Chinweizu and Co. may be surprised to learn that they find it natural; no spiritual conflict is created within them and no guilt experienced. Being unwesternised in religious attitudes, that is, not slavishly tied to the western concept of a single form of worship for the attainment of spiritual exaltation or divine protection, they live without any internal contradictions.

Soyinka (1975: 24) bemoans the fact that "the Yorùbá gods in the Brazilian version do not sweat or copulate", whereas the Yorùbá accept the shortcomings of their gods – that they become drunk, violent and destructive, along with their creativity. The co-existence of malevolence and benevolence in a subject is also similar to the Yorùbá gods who can be both good and evil, even though they are categorised as benevolent gods in the cosmology. Yorùbá culture is based on ethno-religious elements that are plural and malleable.

The notion of a 'new Yorùbá' is based on an urban sense of being. The 'new Yorùbá' that is portrayed in Nollywood, according to Falola (2013: 283), "taps into older and newer cultures and into local and global ones". In this way, a 'new Yorùbá' can "travel from the village to Lagos, and, weeks later, be on his or her way to London only to be forced back home soon afterward for the effects of powerful *juju*, or withcraft obtained from a diviner who lives in a nice house and drives a jeep" (Falola 2013: 283). The concept of a *new* Yorùbá implies the existence an old, or 'authentic', Yorùbá. It implies that the old Yorùbá was tied to place. This, however, continues fantastical magic that characterises ethno-religion, in that the 'new' Yorùbá uses, or is affected by, *juju* as though it belongs to the concept of 'old' Yorùbá.

This concept of a 'new Yorùbá' is problematic in many ways. For example, migration (by Africans) is not only a modern or contemporary phenomenon. The display of wealth is

also not just a contemporary phenomenon. Falola's definition of a 'new' Yorùbá conflates cosmology that is often mediated by diviners with witchcraft and *juju* (which I will discuss in the next section). Most importantly, there is a mythical quality to the concept of homogenous culture or homogenous ethnic groups. In this way, ethno-religious culture seems to be artifice. Falola's account, arguably, is not entirely inaccurate. Nollywood video-film, such as Kelani's *Arugba*, intimates that differences in ideological pursuits is based on a generational gap. It is assumed that young people seek to travel the world and to possess material riches and so need to see themselves as particularly different from older generations. Video-films such as *Arugba* seem to be aimed at teaching youth to combine the two ideologies by negotiating a contemporary world through the practice of and belief in Yorùbá cosmology.

The mythical narratives within Yorùbá cosmology are full of ironic stories that allude to issues such as violence, crisis, and banishment/exile, among other issues that persist into the present. For example, smallpox is regarded as a deity known as Shopona. Yemoja, that Kelani refers to in *Arugba*, produced Shopona when she fell dead and her body opened (Ajose 1957: 268). Shopona, who is defined in the myth as "old and lame" and has a "withered leg", joined the other gods at the palace of Obatala for dancing (Ajose 1957: 268). He fell because of his deformity and the other gods and goddesses mocked him (Ajose 1957). In anger, he threatened to infect them. Obatala chased him away and forbade him to associate with other gods (Ajose 1957). Since then, Shopona is regarded as an outcast and inhabits desolate spaces, hence the distancing of temples dedicated to him and isolating those who suffer from smallpox (Ajose 1957: 268). According to Ajose (1957: 268), those who contract smallpox are considered to be marked by the king: *'Oba ti o* ', which means that "the King has marked him".

Another example is the trickster god, Eshu. Eshu has qualities of both good and evil. As a messenger god between humans and gods, Eshu is notorious for causing trouble to humans (Bascom 1969: 105). Eshu is known to be malicious, "to start fights", "killing people by toppling walls and trees on them" (Bascom 1969: 105). Eshu deceives people as well as gods. The conception of a whimsical but dangerous god who uses illusion refers to the impossibility of rigidity, essentialism and centralised dominion. Eshu represents order and disorder, regulation and chaos or reality and artifice. By not delivering sacrifices made to gods by humans, Eshu subverts hierarchy and the

sacrosanct character of the cosmology but at the same time contributes to its malleability and plurality. In this way, Yorùbá cosmology is not ony rational but also has elements of the irrational. The characteristics of Eshu as good but evil, sardonic but kind, playful but fatal, rational but irrational exemplify the rational–fantastic.

These intriguing narratives of Yorùbá cosmology do not seem to espouse a monolithic[181] Yorùbá from which the youth are to model a 'new' Yorùbá identity. Falola's (2013) perception that Nollywood is selling Yorùbá to the world treats Yorùbá culture and cosmography as commodity and as fantasy. It is presented as something to be desired, an ideal to aspire to or something spectacular that can be 'sold' and something that can be 'bought' (in terms of the expensive cars, ability to travel and modern traditional clothing) within an irrational market. While Nollywood video-film validates the cultural practices of Nigerian cities and villages, it can also be divisive. However, there is significance in asserting ethno-religious difference and identity, even though these are seen as construction or inventions, in light of Western cultural hegemony, which is also constructed. As mentioned earlier, the problem lies in the contemporary conflation of the fantastic in cosmology as witchcraft. Nollywood video-film sometimes makes the distinction but often depicts diviners as sorcerers and 'witches'.

2: 'Witchcraft' and Sorcery in Video-film

> *Every African who has grown up in the traditional environment will, no doubt, know something about this mystical power which is often experienced, or manifests itself, in form of magic, divination, witchcraft and mysterious phenomena that seem to defy even immediate scientific explanation* (Mbiti 1969: 189).

[181] The fantastical ethnocentric homogeneity implied in these constructions of identity is reminiscent of an animated short film entitled "For the birds" by Ralph Eggleston. This is a film made at Pixar studios, an American company. In this film, a small bird settles on a telephone wire and soon other similar birds join. The birds begin quarrelling about space, each as an individual fighting for its own comfort. Suddenly a large bird that looks physically different interrupts them and the smaller birds collectively mock the big bird. At this moment, a homogenous group identity that was not there before unites them against the larger bird. The large bird sits in-between them and tries to be amicable but they collectively push it off the line. The weight of the large bird causes the line to sag and, when this bird lets go, the group of small birds is catapulted into the air. I use this example because it rejects the notion of (ethnic) homogenous cultural identity as something that is established in light of the presence of an 'other' that seems different. These differences in Nollywood are manifest.
I hesitated to use an American example because Nollywood provides an alternative to Hollywood or American entertainment in general. It challenges American cultural hegemony through portraying ethnocentric narratives. I use it here for illustrative purposes only.

The prevalence of 'witchcraft' representations in video-film is precisely what has made it fascinating, because it dares to represent what is unseen, and objectionable because it seems to conflate distinct meanings of magic in cosmology with 'witchcraft' and with derogatory dehumanising stereotypes of Africa and its cultural practices. It casts the notion of tradition and cosmology as irrational. The forms of 'witchcraft' and sorcery that are represented in video-film are generally seen as actual supernatural forces – both in Christian and epic video-films. The problem is when some of these constructions of 'witchcraft' are closely related to cosmology and ethnic-specific 'traditions'. In *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti (1969) emphasises the distinction between the pejorative anthropological witchcraft/sorcery paradigm and African philosophical understandings of benevolent and malevolent magic forces. He does so without casting doubt on the existence of the supernatural. The universal "every African" and controversial phraseology such as 'African traditional' are compromised by the colonial history that has constructed Africa as a 'Dark Continent' as well as the subsequent anthropological 'witchcraft' paradigm. Peter Geschiere (2003: 301), however, argues that African 'witchcraft' runs parallel to Western 'witchcraft' in the manipulation of words and images within a careful balance between secrecy and publicity, power and knowledge, to create a fantastic political imaginary.

The 'witchcraft' discourse in the Occident often demonises Africa[182]. Birgit Meyer (2003b: 202) illustrates how "nineteenth century Pietist missionaries affirmed that the local gods, spirits and witchcraft that populated their prospective converts' imaginations were *truly existing realities* yet re-categorised them as 'evil spirits' operating under the auspices of the devil". Further, she argues that, although Christianity appealed that Africans "leave behind" the pre-modern or "traditional" beliefs, they had not succeeded in erasing those beliefs from conscience (Meyer 2003b: 202). In fact, many scholars emphasise that witchcraft is a discourse that is *in* and *of* modernity rather than a pre-modern science (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 2002; Meyer 2003b; Pels 2003; Fisiy and Geschiere 1990; Geschiere 1997; Moore and Sanders 2001; Ashforth 2005). The rise and popularity of African Independent Churches or syncretic churches that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and the

[182] For example, Françoise Secretain, a French woman who was convicted of witchcraft in 1598, confessed that she had "long since given herself to the Devil, who at the time had the likeness of a big black man" (Oldridge 2002: 5, Boguet 1929).

proliferation of the more recent (1970s) Neo-Pentecostal/ Charismatic[183] churches (that I discussed in the previous chapter) over orthodox missionary churches are linked to their recognition of witchcraft and sorcery as current and on-going problems (Turner 1974, Sackey 2006). For example, Helen Ukpabio is renowned for her ability to see 'witches' and remove 'witchcraft' from the body of a victim (Ukah and Echtler 2009: 86). She uses video-films as rational explanations testifying to the existence of 'witchcraft'. The use of documentaries and testimonies to legitimate the 'witchcraft' discourse in Ukpabio's films is another type of the rational–fantastic. In this section on witchcraft, I refer to other thematic categories besides epic video-films.

2.1: Villagers and the 'Witchcraft' Discourse

Liberty Films uses both Nollywood video-film as well as video documentary to testify that evil forces exist. One of the video documentaries depicts a series of testimonies about Helen Ukpabio's divine 'rare gifts' that enable her to counteract 'witchcraft'. Notably, almost all the people who testify are villagers. A woman, Eno Uko, from Eket in the oil-producing Akwa Ibom State, attests that she was "contaminated with witchcraft" and became a "grade one conscious witch" without her knowing. She only realised that she was a 'witch' when her ten children told her so and, as a result, refused to live with her in fear that she might eat them. Uko then started seeking deliverance from 'witchcraft'. Her son gave her olive oil, which would kill her if she consciously or intentionally involved herself in 'witchcraft'. She consulted Christ Army Church for deliverance and was told that, in exchange, she should bring fifty-thousand-Naira. Since she did not have that kind of money, Uko offered herself as a slave in the church instead. She sold her cassava-growing land to raise money in order to see a diviner, who subsequently failed her. Her community ostracised her until her son advised her about Liberty Gospel Church and the miraculous performances of Helen Ukpabio. Ukpabio offered deliverance from 'witchcraft' for free, according to Uko. She declares:

> The God that worked in times of old with the Apostles, passed through Apostle Ukpabio whom I had not met before in my life, just as God told Moses to lift up the serpent whoever shall look upon the serpent shall

[183] AICs are viewed as the bridge to heathendom and its followers are seen as illiterate and 'traditional' whereas Neo-Pentecostal charismatic churches are characterised by an educated, urban, wealth-seeking young following. AICs blended Africanism with Christianity and brought back speaking in tongues and healing, and in Neo-Pentecostal churches a leader is endowed with extraordinary powers (Sackey 2006: 28–35).

> live. He instructed the Apostle to tell us that whoever shall look into her eyes shall be delivered so I looked into her eyes, the Holy Spirit passed through her eyes. I felt a shocking sensation, since then I have been delivered[184].

The second testimony is made by Andrew Ayuk, from Ojok village in Cross River State, who says that her niece confessed to "practicing witchcraft" and "carrying out destruction". The unnamed girl is said to have initiated one of the children in the house who was unaware of her initiation. Ayuk found out about her 'witchcraft' when the girl declared that the ritual morning prayers in the house "disturbed" her. The niece also said that at night her 'witch' friends would come into the house to "beat and scratch the bodies of the other children" while they were sleeping. Ayuk took this girl to Liberty Gospel Church for counselling and she started the School of Deliverance. Since then, the church has instructed him to "receive the girl and feel free with the girl in the house".

Mercy Emmanuel Ekpo, from Iwuo Eto in Akwa Ibom State, also testifies about her nephew, who was implicated in the deaths of his siblings because of 'witchcraft'. She provides an account in which the boy was given groundnuts at school by a stranger. Ekpo states that later "at night, [the stranger] came and called him 'groundnut' then he projects into the spirit realm". Furthermore, the stranger told the boy to sacrifice somebody. Ekpo surmises that her nephew took his sister, Blessing, to be killed as a sacrifice. In these accounts, children who are susceptible to evil forces are easily co-opted into 'witchcraft'.

Ukah (2009: 73) points out that most of these "pentecostally produced confessions" of 'witchcraft' are usually from people in villages which symbolise 'tradition'. Ukah (2009: 77) surmises that many people are coerced into confessing and participating in recorded testimonies. Ukpabio began her career as a pastor through a public confession in which she admitted to practising 'witchcraft' before she was "born again" and granted the gift "to eradicate witchcraft in the world but particularly in Africa where the powers of European Christian missionaries were futile in the face of Africa's stubborn witches and wizards" (Ukah 2009: 77). In Ukah's (2009: 84) interview with Ukpabio, the latter affirms that her film productions are not about fictitious stories but about real occurrences and she states that "after watching her movies, more and more people come to consult her in real life". Having worked for Liberty films, Ukah (2009: 84)

[184] Also available in part at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogQyBpQQqiE accessed 28/02/2013

deduced that the majority of people who watch Christian films are women aged between 26 and 35 years, and that his survey shows that "only 5% watch the movies for entertainment" and the others "seek the truth and Christian values". Consequently, these video-films are seen as 'rational' explanations of the irrational. Religious fanaticism as well as the belief and participation in 'witchcraft' are seen to be in the province of women and children who are then also perceived as the main consumers of video-film.

2.2: Gender, Youth and the Rational–Fantastic

Testimonies such as the ones above are numerous and they infiltrate into video-film narratives, but in many cases they demonise women and children in rural areas. This victimisation is not particular to Nigeria or to representations in Nigerian video-film. The spectacular witchcraft crusades that swept Europe between the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the 18th century targeted mainly women through barbarous torture and killings. Christina Larner (2002: 274) argues that the European witch-hunt could be seen as a "woman-hunt" which victimised assertive, independent, adult women who threatened the existing patriarchal social order by not conforming to 'traditional' subservient roles. However, Larner (2002: 276) insists that witch-hunts were "not sex-specific but sex-related". Witches, stereotyped as women, were accused of infanticide and cannibalism. Furthermore, those who were accused of witchcraft were blamed irrationally for bad weather, failure or destruction of crops, and disease. It was believed that women possessed power through making a pact with the devil and conjuring demons.

Have these gender-biased perceptions filtered into the beliefs in 'witchcraft' in Africa? Ghana, for example, only announced in 2011, through its Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, the planned closure of witch camps in 2012. Witch camps are places of refuge for women and children who have been accused of witchcraft and have fled from their communities in fear of being killed or tortured by anti-witchcraft vigilante groups[185]. The accused are mostly elderly, widowed or unmarried women who are subjected to having to "prove their innocence" by performing purification rituals[186]. The

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[185] http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/ghana_report_single_pages.pdf accessed 01/03/2013
[186] Ibid.

Aristotelian characterisation of women as irrational was based on the assumption that women lack authority and men have natural rule over women (Evans 2004: 46). Women who function outside of the structures of male authority are accused of 'witchcraft'.

In Nigeria, the Yorùbá cosmology posits that witches are "*omo araye*/children of this world". Women are more susceptible to accusation than men (Ukah and Echtler 2009: 74). Ukah and Echtler (2009: 74) point out that there is a Yorùbá saying that states *gbogbo obinrin laje* which, when translated, means "every woman is a witch" and perpetuates the idea that "a witch who intends to increase her viciousness gives birth only to female children". Witches are also described as those "who destroy life by introducing disease, infertility in women and crops, and unexpected deaths in order to enhance their own reproductive and productive powers" (Ukah and Echtler 2009: 74). The notion that structures of male authority and female subservience are 'traditionally' African is opposed by Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997), who argues that gender was not always an organising principle in African contexts. In Ukpabio's video-film, *End of the Wicked*, it is the older woman, Chris Amadi's mother, and the children who practise 'witchcraft' and are eventually accused of patricide. Furthermore, the key antagonist in Ukpabio's film, Amadi's mother, develops a penis which gives her the power to destroy life within a womb.

Ukpabio's preposterous proposition also draws attention to the fragility in gender relations as well as the link between witchcraft accusations and women's sexuality. In the recorded testimonies and most video-films, women are infantilised and children are feminised. Women and children who do not conform to the status quo are seen to consort with the supernatural. James Donald (1989: 138) points out that "what is important about fantasy then is not its fiction or illusory quality – the common-sense opposition between fantasy and reality – but its role in organising and representing sexuality". The convolution of manhood and womanhood is bound within the moral and theological exchange of symbols. To return to the notion of *crisis* that I discuss briefly in the previous section, I propose that the crisis represented by video-film is not just the war between God and His Enemies or good and evil, but also a crisis of the physicality of womanhood and manhood caught in the clash between imaginations of Westernised modernity and the modernising 'traditions' of Igbo, Yorùbá and other socio-linguistic

groups. The definitions of female and male roles in (Christian) video-film are then characterised by fluidity, rather than stability, between African and Western (Christian) paradigms. The notion of *crisis* is also captured in Hallen and Sodipo's (1986) notion of dis-ease. They point out that witchcraft indicates three moments of dis-ease. The first one is "a strong sexual antagonism" between men and women (Hallen and Sodipo 1986: 96). Beliefs about witchcraft that seem to be most representative of Africa characterise women as 'witches' and men as 'witchdoctors' (who are good rather than evil). These are women who "take on the form of an animal" and "meet in secret assemblies" (Hallen and Sodipo 1986: 96). The 'witchdoctor', an enemy of the witch, is generally an "upright man, keeping his hands clean from evil, and wielding his great power solely in the interests of health and the welfare of society (Parrinder 1970: 183 cited in Hallen and Sodipo 1986: 93–4). The second dis-ease is defined by the fact that witchcraft accusations are made against family members. The third dis-ease is defined as a consequence of "the stresses of modernity" (Hallen and Sodipo 1986: 95). Kinds of dis-ease indicated by Hallen and Sodipo allude to the tension of the ideological structure of the conjugal family and the changing attitudes of gender roles and sexual relations.

In her discussion of Reformation Germany in the context of Catholic and Protestant Europe, Lyndal Roper (1994: 37) identifies a crisis in gender relations that may be useful in this discussion. Roper (1994: 37) observes that there is an "inherent complementarity in gender relations which makes it inevitable that changes in the notion of 'woman' should change the meaning of 'man'". She points out that the "tragedy of the body" of sexual difference implies a regulation of sexuality, especially female sexuality (Roper 1994: 37). Roper (1994: 37) observes that most witchcraft accusations were made by women and that the substance of most witchcraft accusations was about relations between mothers occupying maternal roles and children. In a context of high infant mortality rates, women who cared for children (midwives and nannies) were accused of witchcraft by mothers (Roper 1994: 37). It is the women who function outside matrimonial and maternal commitments that are seen as witches. Since proximate male presence to regulate her sexuality is absent, so-called witches are imagined as obscene because of the accounts that they copulate with the Devil and demons. The conceptualisation of women as irrational is linked to the regulation of female sexuality.

According to her testimony, Ukpabio was groomed for matrimony with Lucifer in her nubile age. She is at times referred to, by her critics, as a "born-again witch", which is an appropriation of the Pentecostal term: 'born-again Christian' (Ukah and Echtler 2009). There is a recurring image of an obscene woman whose body is 'corrupted' by relations with the Devil in Ukpabio's films. In some cases, the Devil or the demon is a woman with a mandate to destroy the lives of men. The image of the woman who, with the temporary possession of a penis, 'ruins' the reproductive ability of the younger woman by penetrating her is a case in point. Since 1970s Europe, according to Stephens (2002: 3), "the attention to sexual relations between the devils and women in witchcraft writings had seemed suspiciously like an effort to 'demonize women in particular' . . . [and stems] from the belief that women [are] sexually insatiable and could not be satisfied by mere mortal men". The female body is therefore imagined as incorrigible.

Depicting women and children as 'witches' defines them as mischievous, irrational and unruly. This is illustrated in Andrew Esiebo's portrait photographs of the two male Igbo Nollywood actors with a genetic condition (congenital growth hormone) that makes them look like children, Osita Iheme [Fig. 99] and Chinedu Ikidieze [Fig. 100]. In Nollywood video-films, Iheme and Ikidieze are generally depicted as corrupt children called Aki and Pawpaw who are a menace to their parents and neighbours. In Esiebo's photographs, each of them are lying on a bed, dressed as adults. Both gaze directly at the viewer. The two characters symbolise youth as against 'tradition'.

Another example is the satirical video art by artist Zina Saro-Wiwa entitled *The Deliverance of Comfort* (2010), which was presented in Saro-Wiwa's *Sharon Stone in Abuja* exhibition that focuses on Nollywood video-film. It depicts a young girl who is regarded as a 'witch' and goes to church to get 'deliverance' [Fig. 101]. A group of men dressed as pastors pray for her and eventually kill her, but her spirit returns to cause mischief, steal and trick people in the streets. The film begins with a scene where the young girl is seated in a room and a male voice-over declares:

> Well, they are solitary creatures, strange in appearance, thin, sometimes too small for their age – I have seen when they have a young body but old face. They are quiet and mysterious, untidy and disobedient and you can tell for sure if they convulse with foam at their mouth. You sometimes call it epilepsy, we call it possession by the devil. The child witch is creative and full of initiative, mad and curious. Do not listen to a child witch, they are liars and hypocrites, too open, too wise, too clever and sometimes too

> nice and worst of all, they want to be superior at all times. You see, this is because they inhabit a second world. A world where they are in charge. They steal from this world oh, wreak havoc in our world in order to rule in their world. It is therefore vital to break their spirit.[187]

In subsequent scenes, a wooden broom and magic wand suddenly appear in her hands. Her clothes change and she finds herself in a black costume-party style dress, witch-hat and star-shaped glasses [Fig. 102]. She walks around knocking on people's doors and the first adult gives her a bottle of *Squadron* whiskey and the second adult gives a smoking pipe. She then knocks on the door of a church but a pastor aggressively grabs her by the hand and leads her to a place where a cluster of pastors pray for her and utter invocations [Fig. 103]. They force her to drink bleach, a chlorine household chemical, and drive a nail into her head using a rock [Fig 104]. The male voice continues:

> There are many tried and tested ways to get a child witch to confess. To extract the evil out of them. I command that the devil in you comes out. Devil I cast you out! Get out! Get out! Every backwardness, unemployment, poverty, illness, I break them loose, I cast out this devil. Out in the name of Jesus! Out in the name of Jesus! Get out of there! Devil come out![188]

Having been exorcised, the little girl dies but her spirit awakes with one eye painted black, her face painted red and with red plastic devil horns planted on her head [Fig. 105]. She becomes mischievous; she runs to the market where she steals, destroys food and tricks people. She announces:

> I must thank you gentlemen you have released me back into your cosmos. The bleach you made me drink tasted like rainwater. The ground you buried me in nourished my bones and the nail you drove into my skull gave me my sense of humour. Yes, I must thank you gentlemen for setting me free. But now, I must return to the womb and await my rebirth.[189]

Having said this, she returns to the church.

The title of this short-film, *The Deliverance of Comfort* (2010), has double meaning: it refers to the exorcism or 'deliverance' of the little girl named Comfort and Christian the process of scapegoating or deliverance from evil. Saro-Wiwa's use of the name, Comfort, parodies the English names used in some Christianised African contexts such as Patience, Innocence, Obvious, Saviour, Simple and Comfort. Christianisation during

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[187] Deliverance of Comfort (2010) Dir. Zina Saro-wiwa, video art
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.

colonisation demoted 'the past'. Due to this, many African parents gave their children 'Christian' names or both African and English names. Saro-Wiwa's video does not only critique the violent witch-hunting by some Christian organisations but also the broader post-colonial conditions that arguably produce psychotic situations in which nothing can be rational.

Saro-Wiwa makes references to Western imports (costume party dress and fantastic visuals of a 'witch') as well as local beliefs (*Abiku*). The Yorùbá word *Abiku* refers to the belief that *Abiku* children die and are born again to torment their parents. When the little girl in Saro-Wiwa's film says she must return to the womb and await her re-birth, she makes references to this belief. The notion that children inhabit a second world where 'they are in charge' but come to earth to 'wreak havoc' is close to the belief that *Abiku* children inhabit two different worlds and possess or abuse power against their parents. In a conversation with Jane Wilkinson, Wole Soyinka (1992: 165–6) states that *Abiku* is:

> not just a metaphor, but a very physical expression of the link between the living, the unborn, the ancestral world and so on. *Abiku* was real, not just a figment of literary analysis. Some of my siblings were *Abiku*, the anxieties involved in their existence, their survival, illnesses and so on, were *Abiku*. And then of course, I keep emphasising the cruelty of the *Abiku* once they realize their own power on their parents, with their elders, and how they use and abuse their power and at the same time the kind of loyalty to their own group, almost like children versus the adult world. So it became a metaphor for some of the diversities of experience and society, it became a symbol for cyclic cruelty, cyclic evil, and also an expression for some, of the enigma of existence, some of the insoluble aspects of existence… a symbol for the unwished but recurring. *Abiku* is not something you totally kill off. You mark it, you scar it – you know how people scar the child, like the *Ogbanje* of the Igbo, it's a theory people swear to (and it's not just a theory, that if you scar the *Abiku*, when the next child is born it will have those scars.

This echoes the way 'child witches' are believed to possess malevolent power and occupy different worlds. Without conflating *Abiku* with the child-witch killings, it is necessary to see how both of these practices and beliefs are consequences of certain political situations, and victimise children and the women who give birth to them. As Soyinka (1992: 166) points out, a longing for "continuity, guarantee, reassurance and consolation" arises if a new child is born with the scars of *Abiku*. He argues that "it's the same way, as for instance, in politics: there's an untenable situation and you're longing for change, you're participating in the process of change, you're looking for a re-born

society, but when it eventually emerges, it's got the same ugly scars on it . . . as the last one" (Soyinka 1992: 166). These phenomena (witch-hunting in which victims are women and children or *Abiku*[190]) operate in a fantastic world ruled by children who bring disorder into this world. The 'break with the past' is also characterised by the notion that the youth are disappointed with adults, who symbolise tradition and the descent of Africans through colonisation, as well as the exclusive appropriation of wealth (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: 179). Witchcraft accusations are not only representative of a crisis in gender roles and sexual relations but also of a crisis in familial roles between adults and youth that is caused by the rupture of colonialism where "continuity, guarantee, reassurance and consolation" were lost (Soyinka 1992: 166). Peter Pels (2003: 13) sees witchcraft as "an expression of a modern social crisis when 'witch finders' responded to the shattering of indigenous institutions by colonial rule". The concept of the rational–fantastic in the imagery of Nollywood comes across as a cycle of fateful scapegoating in which victims of political and socio-economic disposition persecute each other rather than face the sublimely daunting power that creates those situations.

2.3: A Malevolence of Wealth and Demonology

Witchcraft confessions in video-film portray 'witches' as people who are 'possessed' by some kind of fantastic power unconsciously or without their knowing. Ukpabio's mission in video-film, for example, is based on the liberation of people who were tricked into 'witchcraft' or are not aware of their activities. The fact that people are told that they practise witchcraft 'without their knowing' means that anyone who is ostracised can be called a 'witch' and anyone who can manipulate collective and political will can make such judgments. The process of identifying a 'witch' is not methodical or rational. Witches can simply be identified as any "person living in the region whose behaviour is considered odd, out of the ordinary, immoral or unsocial, living alone [or] apart from others, not being fond of greeting people, charging too high a price for something or enjoying adultery" (Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath 2008: 331). The 'witchcraft' discourse in Nigeria is not only limited to women and children or people in rural areas

[190] *Abiku* are not killed, as is the case with child-witches. Rather they die from accidents, illnesses and so on if they agree to leave this world for a fantastic one ruled by children (Soyinka 1992: 167).

but is also directly linked to the wealth of powerful urban men who belong to secret societies or cults. Nevertheless, even these exclusively male cults in video-film are led by women. For example, in *Billionaires' Club* (2003), an old woman sits at the head of an exclusively male cult and grinds infants who are offered as a sacrifice [Fig. 106]. Another example is the film *Across the River* (2004) in which the male cult is led by a woman who has one large breast from which the men suckle [Figs. 107, 108, 109, 110, 111].

While occultism is not synonymous with witchcraft, it forms part of the discourse surrounding maleficent forces, sorcery and political corruption. It circumscribes political corruption as rational–fantastic with its contradictions. For example, the occult espouses seemingly 'rational' traditional forms of leadership (chiefs) and new forms of leadership, conceptualisations of tradition (in terms of clothing) and urban modern forms of expressing wealth (expensive cars and houses), and so on. There is a perception that "witches use jet planes and helicopters", which implies that 'witchcraft' is associated with wealth and powerful or political figures as a contemporary phenomenon (Badstuebner 2003, Ukah and Echtler 2009: 84). 'Witchcraft' is bound with the synthesis of religion and politics in conceptualisations of power. This kind of 'witchcraft' and sorcery[191] is seen as conscious and collective rather than individual liaison with maleficent supernatural forces.

Onyeije Okoro (2008: 215) argues that "today witchcraft is no longer a local native or ethnic issue . . . it is a national affair, a national problem". Okoro (2008: 215) posits that "most people in the elite class belong to one secret society (fraternity) or another" and that "the powerful and influential in Nigeria all have access to the Kingdom of Satan, from where they derive their powers and influences". He asserts that "the leadership class in this country has perpetuated harmful witchcraft" (Okoro 2008: 215). Although Okoro's book (which he defines as "a commission from the Shaddai" and an "answer received for [his] prayers and petitions to the Living Elohim, the Eternal, the I AM, Almighty Father, Yah Vah, the Creator of All Things") is bigoted, it echoes general perceptions regarding witchcraft, power and the state. Nollywood makes similar

[191] Although the terms witchcraft and sorcery mean the same thing, they have gained different meanings in popular culture, where witchcraft is associated with women and mischief but sorcery is masculine and refers to wisdom or control over supernatural powers.

associations. Wealth and power in Nollywood video-film are depicted as irrational – achieved through consorting with malevolent supernatural forces.

It is rumoured that the leadership class utilises supernatural forces for power. The link between governing power and supernatural power is accepted as a reality. Kalu (2003: 9) observes that:

> the proliferation of chieftaincy titles marked the quest for legitimization by the elite; traditional medicine men would imbue them with supernatural powers; reinvention of traditional societies and cult groups followed apace; resurgence of membership in Western secret societies such as Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism; soon the public space was imbued by competing cults.

Kalu uses an example of a newspaper article, which was published in 2003 in *The Guardian Newspaper*, about a member of the State House legislature in the south-west region who was to be "dismissed for indiscipline". When the verdict was announced by the Speaker of the House, that member "strode to the center of the house, brought out an egg from the folds of his *agbada* or long-flowing apparel and broke it on the floor with incantations; a pandemonium ensued as he brought out a pot full of concoctions and broke it on the floor" (Kalu 2003: 2). All who were present had to leave because of the foul smell. Kalu (2003: 2) emphasises that "cultic power is employed freely in the public space and often buttresses political clout". Witchcraft and sorcery, in this sense, seem to be a way of understanding how political power creates the brutal conditions which the powerless are subjected to. Nevertheless, the powerful fantastic symbolism seems tantamount to material reality.

A majority of video-films represent objects such as flashy cars, expensive furniture, etc. as things that are possessed by men who are participitating in sorcery or are a part of an occult. Okoro's (2008: 220) dogmatic text postulates that children are initiated into witchcraft through objects that demons or fallen spirits are attached to. He lists "bewitched food, cartoons on VCD and clothes, mind-altering drugs, occult literature, computer, video games, sports like karate and judo and rock music" as examples (Okoro 2008: 20). These commodities are generally imported products and are regarded by Okoro as pollutants of 'traditional' culture and witchcraft media.

Sasha Newell (2007) argues, however, that it is rather the churches, or, more specifically, Pentecostalism, that are the alternative form of witchcraft for the

accumulation of wealth. For Newell (2007: 462, 464), the study of the relationship between Pentecostalism and witchcraft symbolises the "collision of two totalizing discourses, the internal logic of each claiming to encompass the other" since Pentecostalism cannot separate itself from the witchcraft discourse which also encompasses political discourse. Witchcraft, therefore, pervades the public and private spheres as a psycho-pathological complex borne out in the severity of political conditions created by colonialism, capitalism, the formation of post-colonial nation-states, militarisation of governance and illusive neo-liberal democracies that negate the African subject. Newell's argument distances 'witchcraft' from ethnocentric 'traditions' and couples it with Christianity. The 'break with the past' (where the past is the perceived source of witchcraft, becomes a break with grand historical assertions. The last two sections in this chapter focus on representations of time and the de-historicisation of Nollywood in constructions of the rational–fantastic.

3: Concepts of the Past in Contemporary Video-Film

Video-film that portrays ethno-religious practices represents time not as coherent and chronological but as a mode of framing, perceiving a maze of events, both real and imagined. In this way, history and myth are synonymous. Claude Levi-Strauss (1979: 43) asserts that "in our societies history has replaced mythology and fulfils the same function". Memory, in the service of history, is monumentalised and signified in spectacular objects and rituals. The theatricalisation of cosmological concepts is bound in the preservation and re-enactment of memory, even if it is a memory of things that have not been experienced by those enacting them. In history and in myth, the significance of the past is heightened. The "conscious attention to the past is characterized as an irrational residue of earlier social forms: 'the tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living'" (Olick and Robbins 1998: 107). The concept of dead weight is made meaningful through practices of fantastical storytelling, of remembering, and of concretising narratives into sacred knowledge. Historiography and mythology are a rational–fantastic economy of knowledge.

As I have argued, video-film (particularly Igbo epic) is ahistorical and anachronous. This ahistoricism denies the Eurocentric principle of archiving and ordering things into types and time periods. This refusal makes it a radical African cultural phenomenon. Video-

film is often characterised by moralising narratives that function similarly to mythology and history in the construction of group identity. Kelani's video-films entitled *Arugba* and *Egogo Eewo* invest moralistic ('rationalising') values into certain objects which are indexed to a particular myth. In *Arugba* the drum is indexed to a mythological narrative about Sango, the divinity of lightning, thunder and rain, who fights Sate, the drummer, for the *bata* drum. Eventually the two find a way to complement each other, where Sango dances and Sate drums but both can enjoy the drum without one claiming possession over it. The narrator in the video-film refers to this solution as "a perfect symbiosis". In *Egogo Eewo*, the clapperless bell evokes a mythological narrative that explains why it has the power to punish those who lie and cheat other people. It is extracted from a cave by young people who bring it to the town square to identify corrupt ministers in the king's cabinet. Each time the bell is struck, a corrupt member is mysteriously urged to confess to the public that they have been using the village treasury to secure lucrative deals.

In this way, history and mythology can be seen as the rational–fantastic. They both utilise fragments of reality and fragments of imagination to provide rationalising narrative. I am reminded of Hamid Naficy's (1996: 121) assertion that "memories are fallible, playful, and evasive, and the narratives and iconographies that they produce – in whatever type film – are palimpsestical, inscribing ruptures, fantasies, and embellishments as well as glimpses, elisions, and repressions". The process of storytelling, of historicising, of inscribing memory, of creating the past in the present comes across as a means of inscribing boundaries, assigning specific meaning for what is good and what is evil alongside the rhetoric of fear and the need for security.

Enactments of memory and the ritualisation of time-based narrative seem to constantly explore the fantasy of a rational and harmonious society. Brent Plate (2003: 5) states that "a myth must be transmitted, whether by word of mouth or through technologies of television; a ritual must be enacted, whether involving reading from sacred, printed texts or by processions through architectural space". The Manichean narratives in video-film illustrate the obsession with how history is a series of stories regarding the threat to the security of that fantasy. Frederic Jameson (1981: 115) argues that:

> Evil . . . continues to characterise whatever is radically different . . . , whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to [a subject's] own existence. So from earliest times, the stranger from another tribe, the barbarian who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows outlandish customs, but also the woman, whose biological difference stimulates fantasies of castration and devoration, or in our time, the avenger of accumulated resentment from some oppressed class or race, or else that alien being, Jew or Communist, behind whose apparently human features a malignant and preternatural intelligence is thought to lurk: these are some of the archetypal figures of the Other, about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil because he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar.

The homogeneity of Igbo society in 'epic' video-film and Yorùbá video-film seems to be characterised by this constant need to distinguish differences and inscribe boundaries. However, these distinctions in video-film are made as if such societies exist within a vacuum and rarely come into contact with the 'other'. There is, arguably, a sense that these modes of seeing and understanding illustrate a disoriented perception, in which the fantastic plays upon the insecurities of the boundaries through spectacular displays of difference. It is reminiscent of Guy Debord's (2006: 8) notion of societies "dominated by modern conditions of production", where spectacle is "the very heart of society's real unreality", and arguably the platform upon which everything performs "the social idea of itself". Popular media produces alternatives to what might be regarded as a grand narrative. Its vulgarity presents that which cannot be easily ordered into logical, rationalising narratives. It is almost as if video-film is a platform upon which the trauma of a violent history, a process of remembering and dismembering, rupture, breaking, shattering and tearing, refuses to be aestheticised into neat history.

Frank Ukadike (1994: 306) points out that Africa, its history, emerged from what Clyde Taylor calls "existential distress". A history of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, civil war and economic exploitation is a traumatic history through which myth provides a different and remedial mode of perceiving and constructing events. Time in Igbo and Yorùbá video-films is structured in different ways.

In Igbo cultural practice, time is measured in market days with four days in a week (plus one extra day); namely, *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*. A month consists of seven weeks and a year has thirteen months (Okoh 2012: 19). The four market days are based on cardinal points. The market is central to an Igbo village as a place where people maintain livelihood through exchange (Okoh 2012: 19). Time is dedicated to Igbo cosmology,

Odinani. Months are dedicated to certain deities in the theocentric *Odinani* pantheon and semi-pantheon. The year is structured according to offerings made to the different deities or *alusis*. Yam harvesting, for example, is at a time (month) in the year known as *onwa ifejioku*, the yam deity (Ojukwu 2001).

In this sense, time is based on economic production and exchange. Time is based on a cycle of production: sowing, harvesting, sacrificing, etc. Time is based on labour that is concomitant to the Igbo cosmology. For example, in *Unbreakabe Pot*, Efiok the poor farmer tills the land and cuts firewood for the old lady he meets in the forest after he was banished from his village. This labour is symbolic, not only of his character, but also of his relation to the gods to whom the fruits of such labour are sacrificed. The reference to temporality in Igbo cosmology in this film is that of circular time and the notion that human beings "journey into and beyond life in Igbo cosmology" through birth, death, re-birth/re-incarnation that is assured through the Igbo cosmology (for example, the re-incarnating ancestor or spirit must be recognised when a child is born) (Jell-Bahlsen 2008: 85). Cyclical or circular time in Igbo cosmology is represented by the recurrent motif of the circle. In Nollywood video-film, this motif could be painted in a king's council chambers or around the eye of a diviner as someone who is able to see beyond the present time through forces in the cosmology.

Anachronism in epic video-film, as mentioned earlier, is symbolic of the significance of the village-imaginary that frames the rational–fantastic in the historicisation of contemporary Igbo identity in Nollywood video-film. The representation of the past as present or the presence of technology (teleportation, time compression, telekinesis, etc.) in video-film narratives about primeval rural life can be seen as the development of a visual vocabulary for cultural knowledge about the supernatural forces of the cosmology. Such a visual vocabulary, I propose, presents the past as recurrent, in the present as well as the future, and can be seen as labyrinthine rather than cyclical.

Mbiti attests that mythological figures "are on the whole man's attempts to historicize what is otherwise 'timeless' and what man experiences in another context as divinities" as an attempt to explain phenomena that "are shrouded with mystery" in the present but "sink deeper into the *Zamani* (past) reality" (Mbiti in Masolo 1994: 107). According to Mbiti, the concept of time in African thought is "a composition of those events which

have occurred, those which are taking place now" (Mbiti in Masolo 1994: 107). Moments of time, according to Mbiti, "were kept in memory by relating occurrences to some other, maybe more commonly known and greater events"[192]. The procession led by the *Arugba* to the Osun River is one such event. A poem contained in the *Ogunda Meji* states "*Ifá* is the master of today, *Ifá* is the master of tomorrow, *Ifá* is the master of the day after tomorrow as well". The cosmological stratification is constructed in such a way that time and spaces are infinite.

The notion of re-visiting the past, re-incarnation and the return to ethnocentric values (or a pure state of Igbo identity) can be read in light of Dismas Masolo's (1994: 113) observation that the word 'return', as it was used by Africanist[193] thinkers, represents "consciousness" and "an historical commitment" (Masolo 1994: 2). It denotes "historical repatriation to a geographical or perceptual space", while on the other hand it "depicts the return to or regaining of a conceptual space in which culture is both field and process – first of alienation and domination, but now, most importantly, of rebellion ad self-refinding" (Masolo 1994: 2). Representations of 'pure' Igbo identity are part of processes in which people perform a different time in current time. Masolo refers to a 'conceptual space' which, I argue, implies the spatio-temporal condition of contemporary identity construction. Such a condition is contingent on the ability to navigate labyrinthine time (in performing conceptualisations of past, current and future time simultaneously).

4: Concepts of the Future in Contemporary Video-film: Nollywood Animation

Nollywood has created a popular visual language that is reflected in other forms of popular culture. From 2005, a few comic book style renditions of Nollywood narratives, Nollywood animation explored futuristic notions of contemporary Nigeria. Artists range from local animators to those trained in America and Europe. There has not been enough Nollywood animation to warrant a dedicated study. Furthermore, these

[192] It is necessary to note that Mbiti uses linguistic concepts born in East African cultures yet applies them in the construction of "African" in a general sense
[193] The term 'Africanist' refers to anyone who engages intellectually with issues of Africa and the African diaspora, or specialists in African Studies.

animations have been called Nollywood animations because they are made by Nigerians about Nigerian narratives rather than because of any explicit links to the video-film industry. However, I discuss one of these briefly to unpack the ways in which the rational–fantastic includes futuristic imagery. The concept of futurism implies advanced science. While Nollywood animation refers to cosmological gods and goddesses, it also depicts a time of biological and scientific progression and transformation. It appeals to both strands of cosmology.

In an animated web series of Nollywood animation entitled *Mark of Uru*, Obinna Onwuekwe of Mayhem Productions uses a strategy that is similar to Igbo 'epic' video-film [Fig. 112]. However, Onwuekwe's conception differs methodically, and uses futuristic representations of Igbo cosmology. *Mark of Uru* commences with a utopian, stereotypical fabrication of an imagined pre-colonial African context set in a futuristic landscape. A little girl, Azuka, is running. A horde of warriors chase after her. She reaches a precipice. Terrified, she watches as the army advances towards her. Without mercy, the leader of the pack viciously kicks her off the cliff. Her scream is halted as soon as she lands in the arms of a female protagonist who saves her life and protects her from the army. The army threatens to kill her regardless since the girl is "an abomination" because of a peculiar birthmark. She was born with the mark of an evil sorcerer known as Uru, represented by a symbol imprinted on the palm of her hand. Try as she may, her mother had not succeeded in concealing her inexplicable birthmark, hence her exile into a land that is foreign to her. A masculine hybrid (part man, part leopard) leaps into the scene. Like a character from a gaming console, he attacks the army in order to protect the little girl and the female protagonist. The female protagonist protests and asserts that she could have handled the situation better and explains to Azuka that she will have to remain under their protection [Fig 113, 114].

While it can be said that Onwuekwe employs familiar formulae to weave the narrative, it can also be argued that within this narrative lies the concept of anthropological magic realism which I discuss in Chapter 1. The concept takes on an anthropological perspective that "now comes to be understood as a kind of narrative raw material derived essentially from peasant society, drawing in sophisticated ways on the world of village or even tribal myth" (Jameson 1986: 177). Furthermore, it has now come to be

located in the post-colonial cross-culture to “express mythological and cultural tradition” (Bowers 2004: 98). The re-organisation of myth and reality in animated Nollywood does not make historical claims. Animation allows for composite notions of social structures that render moral principles fluctuant and incalculable – the semiosis of the irrational that modifies concrete realities. Magic realism can be seen as this kind of antithesis. There is a “conflict and doubling between the real and the imaginary levels of diegesis” that lies in magic realism’s “multiplicity of imprecisions and differences” (Colvile 2006: 27). The combination of various theological beliefs with the secular as well as kitsch in Nollywood animation creates a space where meaning is compounded.

Through the use of a fictional space that can be traced to a specific context, *Mark of Uru* presents a point where imagination and reality collide. That is, the names, language and accents locate a particular culture (and because they are not arbitrary, we can situate the linguistic and geographic context of the narrative). The use of the stereotypical African utopia in *Mark of Uru* can, on one hand, be seen as a static mode of signification. On the other hand, it can be read against a variety of formats within which the idea of an “Afro-topia” has been explored. Literary works such as George Schuyler’s *Black Empire* are exemplary. Writing under the pseudonym Samuel I. Brooks initially, Schuyler presented a scenario in which the Black Empire was constituted by an advanced superscience Black American group that created a nation in Africa. This kind of near-future utopia was termed by Henry Louis Gates as the “Afrocentrist dream”, which can be traced in the work of W.E.B. du Bois, Alain Locke and 19th century intellectuals like Alexander Crummell, who dismissed the “land of the Pharaohs” theory in favour of African emigration (Rutledge 1999: 178–9). This inclination arguably generated Afro-futurism, which refers to a cultural aesthetic that involves cosmology, speculative science-fiction, magic realism, historical fiction and the juncture of African diasporic cultures and technology (Juang and Morrissette 2008: 72). Jonah Weiner asserts that “perceptible in this ripple of the [Afro-topia] . . . is the yearning for and fantastical reclamation of an ennobling African history: a trip to space doubles as a return to roots” (Weiner in Juang and Morrissette 2008: 73). Therefore, travelling to the future is the same as travelling to the past. Again, time is represented as labyrinthine.

The concept of Afro-futurism is said to have been pioneered by American composer, Sun Ra, who claimed he had visited Saturn in the 1950s. Afro-futurism refers to a cultural aesthetic that involves cosmology, speculative science fiction, magic realism, historical fiction and the juncture of African diasporic cultures and technology (Juang and Morrissette 2008: 72). It is constructed as fantasy and as a rational return of African people to their origins – not buried in the past but future-dated. It interrogated "transatlantic issues of displacement, home and belonging" (Juang and Morrissette 2008: 72). The seeds of Afro-futurism are evident in the contemporary narratives about film and other forms of popular culture published in the *Chimurenga* volume that is entitled *Dr. Satan's Echo Chamber* (2008). In this volume, filmmaker John Akomfrah (2008: 13) refers to black futurology which combines cyberdata "to form a psychogeography of Afrofuturism . . . [and connects with] astro black mythologies".

Onwuekwe's *Mark of Uru* also explores social and political relations between entities of various 'worlds'. Connotations of foreignness and belonging intersect. The little girl, Azuka, is exiled into a foreign territory as her return home would be fatal. The character of Azuka is the link that correlates at least three 'worlds', if not more: her original home, and the territory of heroines and hybrids, as well as the cosmological levels that encompass netherworld supernatural forces. She represents a transgression to all these spaces while she inextricably links them. The other form of foreignness that Onwuekwe incorporates is that of anthropomorphic alien-like entities, which are generally associated with the science-fiction genre. For example, Isi-Agu is part-human-part leopard, and Idia is reptilian/serpentine, while Agu N'Abo is a Janus-head[194] leopard (he is physically animal yet cognitively aware of intricate social dynamics in the film narrative) [Fig. 115]. The 'alien' entities are, however, not foreign in the spaces constructed in the narrative. Each has a function that positions them socially and politically. Considering this, *Mark of Uru* not only overlaps these definitions but it also draws from various 'traditional' mythologies.

Generally in science-fiction, the foreign, the alien, the taboo is introduced as an agitator or transgressor rather than as an integrated part of the community. This sense of foreignness instigated in science-fiction implies recognising the foreign within. In her

[194] In Roman mythology, Janus has two heads facing in opposite directions; one is able to look into the past and the other looks into the future.

theory of "the economy of the imagination that produces aliens", Octavia Butler (in Kemp 2001: 84) suggests that "we create the ethereal, otherworldly figures of sci-fi and speculative fiction in part as an escape from dealing with local others". *Mark of Uru* illustrates differing scenarios and ambiguous propositions on notions of space, time and belonging. Neither creature nor human is essentially foreign or native.

The characters in *Mark of Uru* combine capricious fantastic imaginations and specific cosmological deities. Apart from *Mark of Uru*, various animations that depict traditional gods (from Yorùbá theology or cosmology to Vodun[195]) as physically human yet not limited by this physical condition. Damballah (Vodun) appears as a serpent. Shango (Yorùbá), Eshu (Yorùbá), Oya (Yorùbá), Legba (Vodun), Ogun (Vodun and Yorùbá), Anansi (Ashanti in Ghana) and Buluku (Yorùbá and Candomble Jeje[196]) are represented in gendered human form. Baron Samedi, who seems to bear resemblance to Onwuekwe's character (Ekong), appears in a stylistic top hat and old suit. Besides the use of the direct names of specific gods from various West-African cosmologies and ethno-religious beliefs, the trickling of traditional symbols is affirmed through mythology. The leopard has potent symbolism in West Africa as representative of royalty, kinship and boldness (all of which are attributed to Isi-Agu). The partially-blind Janus-head of Agu N'Abo can also be seen as proverbial to oversight. Idia's serpentine body can be interpreted as the Mami Wata or water spirits [Fig. 116]. Mami Wata is represented mostly as a mermaid-like female who carries a snake in her hands and inhabits the material world as well as the spirit world (in rivers and oceans). In some parts of Africa, snakes play an important part in the community as messengers of the ancestors, and in other parts they are the creator of all things (Owusu 2000).

A philosophical account by Kola Abímbọ́lá (2005) suggests that in Yorùbá theology the cosmos is populated by gods and anti-gods who are all both good and evil (whether in being or experience). For instance, Esu, the trickster god, has been incorrectly seen as evil, but serves as a means to regulate and affirm moral principles. In Onwuekwe's work, innocence (represented by the little girl, Azuka) bears evil (the sorcerer's symbol) and evil avenges innocence for the sake of good. The action may be evil but the purpose

[195] Vodun refers to a cosmology or religious beliefs in divinities mostly in West Africa and and the diaspora in South America. The word vodun is also spelt 'vodoun', 'voodoo' or 'voudou'.
[196] Candomble Jeje, the cosmological belief, is referred to as Vodum and practiced in Brazil.

is good. The principle is that evil and good co-exist. Afro-topias are therefore not a time in the future when all evil ends but a continuity of contradictions.

The contradictions and, at other times, concord can tolerate flexibility in interpreting the mythology arising from this particular context. The transference of African visual motifs and images to electronic media, what Philip Mallory Jones (1997: 304) calls "emotional progressions and an African sensorium", developing and morphing codes into what can be seen as anthropopathic[197], allows for a cultural interchange between different knowledge systems (Kemp 2001: 90). Although Nollywood animation can be seen as a way in which narrative modes are located in sometimes historically compromising ways, its development can depart into intriguing visual terrains.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used the concept of the rational–fantastic to interrogate the dialectics in Nollywood 'epic' films. The construction of ethnicity alongside ethnic-specific cosmologies in Nollywood video-film is complex. While Igbo epic video-films depict anachronous homogenous utopias, Yorùbá epic video-films depict cosmology as part of current everyday life. Both, however, are approaches to current politics. In Igbo epic video-film, the denial or absence of Western cultural hegemony or influence is symbolic of the struggle of representation in which the image of 'African' is constantly measured against its Western counterpart. In these 'epics', the Igbo are not compared to the Yorùbá or Westerners; they are depicted as though no other ethnicities exist. Yorùbá 'epic' video-film, however, is didactic and depicts how Western influence and contemporary 'global' politics can be approached through a deep understanding of the Yorùbá cosmology. The discussion of ethno-religious specificity is not an easy one. On one hand it is antithetical to Western hegemony, but on the other it threatens to heighten tensions between different group identities. The ethnic-specific categories in Nollywood (Igbo film, Yorùbá film, etc.), as well as the religious classifications (Christian and Muslim film), illustrate the complexity of cultural practice.

[197] Anthropopathy is the attribution of human emotions to supernatural beings such as deities and gods.

The concept of the rational–fantastic is used to unpack the neurotic condition in which cultural identity qua ethno-religious identity is tied to traumatic history and severed relationship with 'the past'. Through the discussion of Nollywood video-film representations of pre-colonial utopias, futuristic vistas and the construction of homogenous societies, I unpack the ambiguity of rationality where the move away from traditions to modernity casts modernity as rational. However, the 'return' to 'traditional' beliefs and practices is also depicted as the rational choice over the madness of urban modernity, which is cast as an acceptance of permanent colonial domination. Time, which I have interpreted as labyrinthine rather that cyclical, frames the narratives of Nollywood 'epic' video-films not as return but as the simultaneous performance of conceived situations. The complexity of an irrational and violent political history seems to necessitate therapeutic, rationalising mythology, where in some cases history seems rational and mythology seems fantastical. For a filmmaker such as Tunde Kelani, such ethnic-specific assertions serve an ideological purpose that addresses loss and dispossession.

Other forms of popular culture appropriate Nollywood imagery and its use of ethno-religious cosmologies. Constructing characters as gods and deities denotes the playfulness involved in forming narratives and creating histories and mythologies. Nollywood animation forms part of the playfulness that alludes to the malleability of culture and historical knowledge. This malleability leads us to pose questions about the place of Nollywood in the construction of group identities beyond ethno-religious specificity; that is, the use of imagination in the manufacture of national identity and the charting of moral geographies.

Images

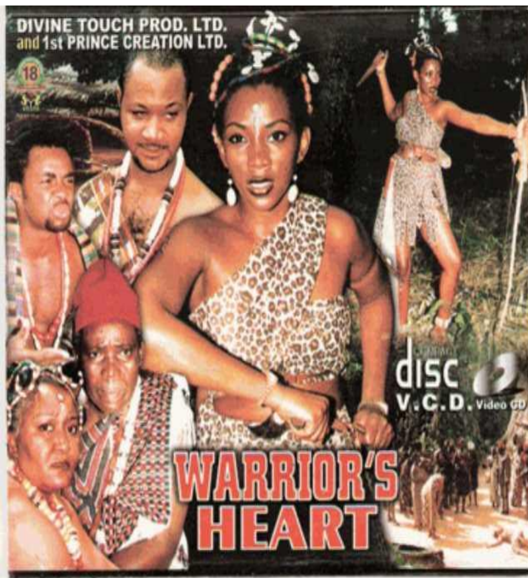

Fig. 85: *Warriors Heart* (2007)

Fig. 86: *Unbreakable Pot*, date unknown

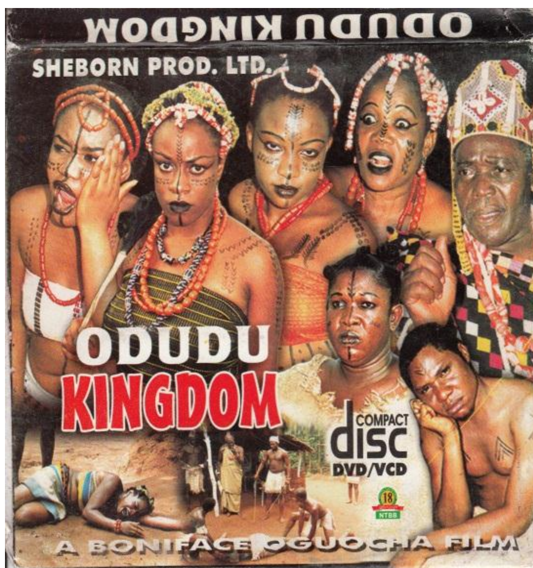

Fig. 87: *Odudu Kingdom* dust-jacket

Fig. 88: *Unbreakable Pot*, date unknown

Fig. 89: *Unbreakable Pot*, date unknown

Fig. 90: Adetutu as the Arugba in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 91: Ifa board in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 92: Yemoja in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 93: The Arugba ceremony in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 94: The Arugba ceremony in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 95: The Arugba ceremony in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 96: The Arugba ceremony in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 97: Adetutu's transformation in *Arugba* (1993)

Fig. 98: Landscape in *Arguba* (1993)

Fig. 99: Andrew Esiebo, *Osita Iheme* (2010)

Fig. 100: Andrew Esiebo, *Chinedu Ikedieze* (2010)

Fig. 101: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *The Deliverance of Comfort* (2010)

Fig. 102: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *The Deliverance of Comfort* (2010)

Fig. 103: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *The Deliverance of Comfort* (2010)

Fig. 104: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *The Deliverance of Comfort* (2010)

Fig. 105: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *The Deliverance of Comfort* (2010)

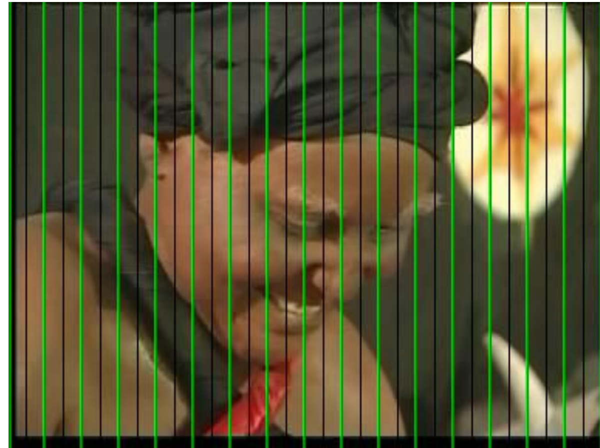

Fig. 106: Woman heading cult and accepting child sacrifice in *Nothing for Nothing* (date unknown)

Fig. 107: *Across the River* (2004)

Fig. 108: *Across the River* (2004)

Fig. 109: *Across the River* (2004)

Fig. 110: *Across the River* (2004)

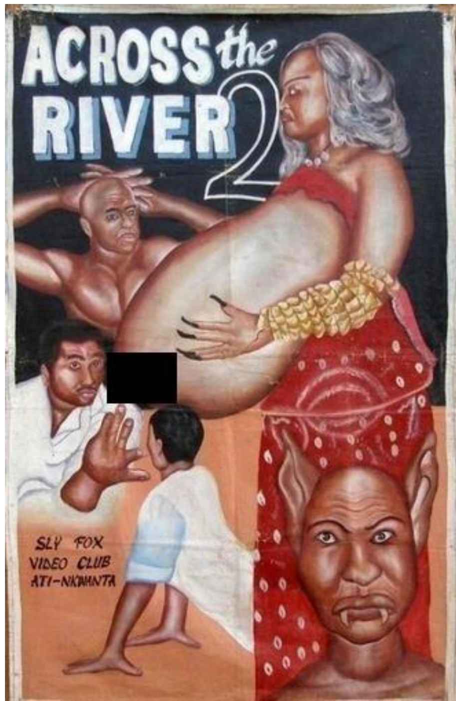

Fig. 111: Across the River (2004), Film still

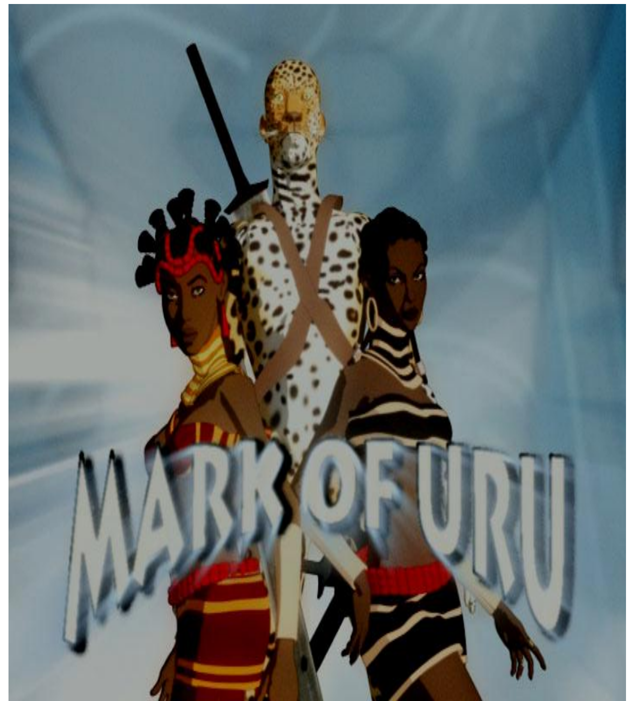

Fig. 112: *Mark of Uru* (2009)

Fig. 113a: Azuka in *Mark of Uru* (2009)

Fig. 113a: Azuka in *Mark of Uru* (2009)

Fig. 114: Symbol *Mark of Uru* (2009)

Fig. 115: Warrior in *Mark of Uru* (2009)

Fig. 116: Utopian landscape in *Mark of Uru* (2009)

Fig. 117: Confrontation in *Mark of Uru* (2009)

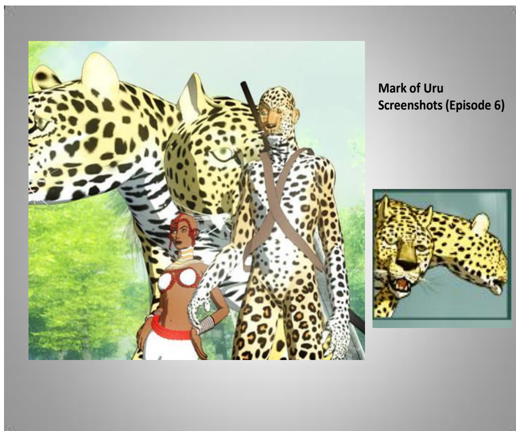

Fig. 118: Isi-Agu in *Mark of Uru* (2009)

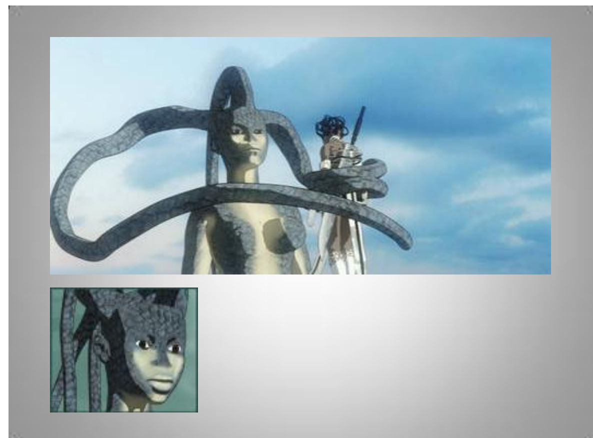

Fig. 119: Idia in *Mark of Uru* (2009)

Chapter 5
'This House Is Not For Sale': Charting Moral Geographies in Fantastic Representations of Space in Nollywood

In Lagos, it is common to come across houses on which the sentence 'this house is not for sale' is painted. This is because there have been many instances in which con-artists have sold houses that do not belong to them to unsuspecting buyers who then pay for a house that belongs to someone else. The con-artist would disappear with the money thereafter. The metaphor of the home or the house and the pervasive notion of deception or the ruse in spatial practices can be used to think about conceptualisations of fantastic space in Nollywood. The notion of a home being 'sold off' through a con is almost similar to the discourse surrounding the flight of the country's oil resources from which the majority of the citizens do not benefit. Discourses of corruption and abuses of power infiltrate the Nigerian public sphere. The 'crisis' of the home is symbolic of the 'crisis' of the nation. Shared memories of violent patriarchal military rule (Smith 2004) and the ever-present aura of corruption frame the persisting dominance of patriarchal bureaucracy as criminal (Bayart, et al. 1999). Conceptions of the patriarchy (as criminal) that 'runs' the nation echo notions of patriarchy within the home. Furthermore, such discourse contributes to the poor global reputation of Nigeria as a nation. The geographic specificity in the characterisation of certain crimes as 'Nigerian' illustrates what I mean by 'moral geographies'. I use the phrase 'moral geographies' to unpack the contradictions, criminalisation and inscriptions of the fantastic within physical geographical sites as well as conceptual spaces. I explore the moralising gaze through which space is perceived in video-film: domestic space, market, and sacred land. I also discuss conceptualisations of the nation and of national *difference* through laughter. Finally, I consider what it means to define Nollywood as transnational within the discourse of globalisation.

Given the fact that studio facilities are barely available for video-film, many film-makers use domestic spaces (borrowed or rented houses) and sometimes hotels for shooting films. During my research, there was a film being shot at AES hotel in Amuwo Odofin, Lagos. When I arrived, this film was stalled due to floods. Haynes (2007a: 138) notes that "Nollywood does not have the capital to construct its own spaces". This has created an iconography of Nigerian domestic spaces in which the classic notion of the conjugal

family is a site of struggle, reflecting the paradoxes of the conflicting ideologies arising from Western imperialism and indigenous traditions. Furthermore, the ideal of a contented patriarchal conjugal family, as a 'unit' of national constituency and of a capitalist mechanism (Mohanty 2003), remains a fantasy or an unfulfilled desire. The domestic space is indexical to both private and public spheres, and as such it illuminates inferences to morality as a form of regulating power and forming identities. It also complicates imaginaries of Nigeria's public sphere as well as the rural–urban spatial complex.

Nollywood video-film expresses cultural anxieties regarding private property and sacred land as well as socio-economic dynamics of the marketplace. Suggestions of a homogenous sense of nationhood are rare in Nollywood and are challenged by the overwhelming notions of the deep religious and ethnic divisions. Although video-films are seen to denote Nigeria as a whole and are often referred to as 'Nigerian films', they operate within carefully negotiated cultural as well as political differences, silences and exchanges.

Another spatial dimension in Nollywood is that it has traversed national borders. It is defined by Sylvester Ogbechie as "the first global pan-African film medium to cut across social, cultural, economic and national boundaries"[198]. Representations of space in Nollywood include interactions with the natural and supernatural worlds that entrench moral values. This chapter utilises various concepts of spatial systems in order to examine constructions of place and social relational values that are embedded in Nollywood's spaces of socio-cultural performance.

1: Regarding the Domestic Space, the Marketplace and Sacred Land

The representation of lived spaces in Nollywood video-film refers to contemporary (re)production of desire (as the basis of fantasy) and discourses on morality. The lack of studio facilities in Nollywood and resultant use of personal homes foregrounds "moral performance(s)" (Ogbu Kalu 2003) that inform roles played by men and women as well as those expected from youth and the elderly generations. In addition, Nollywood video-

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[198] Interview: MacKay Mairi and Sylvester Ogbechie entitled *Nollywood Foundation on Nollywood: Responses to Mackay Mairi, CNN London* http://aachronym.blogspot.com/2009/06/cnn-story-on-nollywood-problems-of.html accessed 23/09/2009

film, referred to as "home video", is generally viewed at home (as well as cafes and barber shops)[199]. The double metaphor of the home as a space of video-film production and consumption, as well as a space within which moral boundaries are negotiated, defines the domestic space as doubly layered or 'profound' space.

My hypothesis of *profound* spaces in this section refers to spaces in which everyday spaces (home, market place, and village) are not neatly bounded. The illusions of the home as a contained and pure unit are contested by the idea of nested spaces and *interspaces*. The television in the home, for example, would constitute an interspace since it provides multiple connections to spaces at various scales (national and global). Often, some films depict living room scenes in which characters are watching other Nollywood video-films. The occult shrine in the basement of a house (as represented in Nollywood video-film), for example, would also constitute an interspace. The relations between material and simulated spaces give depth of space through interspaces. These are discussed in this chapter with reference to the marketplace and the notion of sacred land in Nollywood.

The marketplace, defined by Patricia Levy (1993: 65) as the "focal point of the village or town", can be seen as a greater domestic space of production as well as consumption, manufacture and performance of ideology, and is arguably constituted of infinite interspaces. The notion of sacred land is *profound* in its refusal of material production and consumption but consists of interspaces through which the possibility of a supernatural realm can be imagined as a definite. Sacred land is fantastic: it requires the acceptance of abstract and supernatural beings and forces as a reality. Its interspaces enable contestation, obsession and estrangement, through which *profound* spaces are invested with the power that regulates codes of conduct and moral values.

As a nonvisual metaphor, profundity is possessed by matters of "love, death, human fulfilment, redemption, weakness of will and self-sacrifice" (Harrell 1992: 1). These abstract values texture space as smoothing that is "more abstract than place" (Tuan 1977: 6). For Yi Fu Tuan (1977: 3), "place is security, space is freedom". As Tuan argues,

[199] This is changing. In July 2012, when I was in Lagos, there were Nollywood films being screened at the Silverbird Galeria cinema in Victoria Island, Lagos where American movies are usually screened.

humans yearn for freedom/space and that desire characterises spaces as fantasy. In this section, however, I discuss spaces of confinement such as the domestic space which contains other fantasy spaces/spaces of desire that are symbolised through the television screen. I also analyse representations of the marketplace, sacred and heavenly polis in video-film as both physical place and abstract space.

1.1: The Domestic Space

A video art installation by Zina Saro-Wiwa entitled *Phyllis* (2010) [Fig. 120] depicts a young woman who lives alone in Lagos and spends her days watching Nollywood films in her apartment and hawking colourful wigs in the city. She walks the streets in a bright pink wig, with an enamel tray lined with wigs on heads of manikins in her hands [Fig. 121]. She is depicted in her home staring blankly into the camera. First, she is unable to open her eyes until she puts on a wig. As soon as she takes the wig off, her eyes roll back and become plain white as if she is possessed by a supernatural spirit [Fig. 122]. Without a wig she cannot see. When she puts on a wig, she takes on the personality of the woman who last tried it on. She lies on a bed of wigs, picks one up and her eyes roll back to normal. She then walks over to a Nollywood poster on the wall and brushes her hands against it. There is silent-movie-style text declaring that "Phyllis was not a morning person". She prays, has posters of Jesus in her room, and a bible by her bed. Then she watches Nollywood films that depict clips in which women are crying. We then see her eating okra soup with yam porridge – a characteristically West African dish. She leaves her apartment to roam the streets, hawking wigs. When a woman approaches her to try on a wig, Phyllis helps her put it on, then brushes it with her fingers, and then she suddenly tightens her grip on the woman's head as if she is sucking life out of her. The woman is left looking insensate and lifeless, like a zombie. After demanding money from the woman, Phyllis grabs the wig and sends the woman off. When Phyllis arrives at her apartment she puts on the wig that the woman in the street had on. The music in the background is the 1965 Jackie deShannon song "What the World Needs Now is Love". Phyllis begins crying streams of blood [Fig. 123]. Phyllis, positioned under a statue of a white Jesus, laughs as she cries. The character of Phyllis is portrayed as a lonely, vampire-like woman whose subjectivity is symbolised by the artificial hair.

In Saro-Wiwa's artwork, we are made conscious of the spaces that confine women. It is not only the seemingly small, cramped domestic space of her apartment, but also the space of confinement circumscribed in the television screen, as well as the pictorial space of the posters crowded with celebrities. When Phyllis leaves her apartment, a man blocks her, giving her no space to leave the building, and then harasses her before letting her pass. These spaces of confinement are juxtaposed with the illusion of the seemingly liberating public space of the city. However, even the public space of the city has its limitations. As she walks in the crowded streets, she is confronted by the gaze. It is not only men who look at her but there are also judgmental looks of pious women as well as women wearing the Islamic veil.

The use of the symbol of Islam (the veil) in contradistinction with symbols of Christianity – the bible, the poster depicting Jesus and St Peter's church, where Phyllis sells wigs – are significant as circumscriptions of the fantastic and of moral performance in certain spaces. Phyllis's psychological and economic dependence on wigs is contrasted to the Islamic veil. The veil, worn by the women in the Saro-Wiwa's video in the same way a wig is worn, covers the women's heads and symbolises religious and personal piety. The wig is used by Saro-Wiwa to critique the persistent use of artificial hair in Nollywood video-film to portray stereotypical 'modern', public Pentecostal Christian women. Hair extensions are said to be sourced from temples in India, where women (and men) piously shave off their hair, which is then cleaned and sold as hair extensions[200]. The bright pink or bright blue polymer wigs, however, seem to symbolise a guileful woman and are also associated with prostitutes. In contradistinction, the veil symbolises modesty, devotion and virtue.

The debates regarding the Islamic veil bifurcate into two notions: that the veil empowers women, and the Western feminist perception that the veil symbolises sexist backwardness and confines or oppresses women (Göle 2003). However, Nilüfer Göle (2003) emphasises that the veil is one of the signs of stigma through which Islam is made visible, and constitutes a 'threat' to European ideals. Signs such as the veil are politicised, vilified and used to marginalise Muslims (Göle 2003). Saro-Wiwa's video, it can be argued, uses dialectical critique to interrogate the contradictions of different

[200] http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/oct/28/hair-extension-global-trade-secrets accessed 2013/08/27

value systems that are played out within both public and private spaces. The covering of the head, whether through wigs or veils, in Saro-Wiwa's work is also related to the metaphor of Phyllis' 'blindness' or whitening of her eyes as 'false consciousness'. The Marxist notion of 'false consciousness' can be discussed in light of fantasy and the construction of desires that are based on the domestic space.

The fact that Phyllis is blind without a wig and her eyes only become normal when she has a wig on is curious. Saro-Wiwa critiques the necessity of the wig in the construction of femininity in Nollywood video-film. Without the wig, Phyllis loses womanhood and subjectivity. This is not the only thing that forms part of an otherwise fragmented notion of feminine subjectivity. The home is linked to the feminine body as if the one is an extension of the other. Phyllis' experience in the home, however, is based on her creating opportunities to 'see' possibilities of 'upward mobility'. She *watches* rich women wearing illustrious wigs, who are also mostly confined in domestic spaces. It is within the domestic space, that Phyllis constructs her fantasies. She *looks at* posters of celebrity women; one of these posters has the words: "guilty pleasures". She gazes at an image of Christ on her walls. The metaphor of seeing in this video has contradictions. Phyllis sees the world through fantasy and becomes blind to the material conditions of her world. It is also important to note that Phyllis steals the souls of other women through placing wigs on them and looking straight into their eyes. This 'power', arguably, contributes to a fragmented idea of identity.

The conception that truth is something that can be seen, once the illusions and the veil of (fantastic) desires are removed, implies that a level of profundity and insightfulness is necessary. Melodramatic Nollywood video-films can be seen as opposites of profundity. Phyllis watches melodramatic Nollywood video-films where the characters, both male and female, are shown crying dramatically. Phyllis watches the performance of exaggerated sentiment and touches the television screen, also in a theatrical manner. One of the women on the screen is swaying hysterically as if she is possessed. The exaggerated sentiment and superficiality are highlighted by Saro-Wiwa as significant modes of the fantastic and refer to depth and surface. Profundity defines depth of emotion and insight. The triviality and superficiality of melodramatic performance in the domestic spaces of Nollywood is appropriated by Saro-Wiwa to draw attention to surface and depth. It is not only the surfaces of the images on the surfaces of Phyllis'

walls (posters and the television screen) from which she draws ideas of herself, but also her continuously changing (surface) appearance as she changes wigs (from bright pink, deep blue, tan, etc.). Phyllis' 'depth' of character is negotiated not only through her surface appearance but also through the souls of women that she steals. This fragmentation is also illustrated through the fact that Phyllis is a single woman who is not linked to the home as a wife or mother. The conception of femininity as one that finds profundity in the home and conjugal family (a theme that is predominant in Nollywood video-film) is presented in Saro-Wiwa's video as a problematic surface image.

Saro-Wiwa critiques the fantasy and ideal of a conjugal family by portraying a woman alone in the house, who consumes (and is consumed by) the video-film that she plays from her television screen. She perceives ideas of her 'self' through the screen as it reflects an image of her. In Nollywood video-film, the house is represented as masculine but the home is depicted as feminine. Gender-biased concepts of the 'home' in video-film necessitate the presence of a man as its proprietor and patron even though he is not always visible within it. The man outside Phyllis' apartment, for example, who threatens to stop her from leaving, is positioned not only as if he is the edifice, but also as though he has rights to the space she occupies. In video-films, houses that do not have a male presence are portrayed as hysterical spaces, in which women who are not tied to traditional conjugal families are depicted as evil, wayward or mischievous.

The representation of the dream-like bourgeois home with extensive reception rooms filled with luxurious furnishings is common in video-film. A house with an attendant guard and servants has become a stereotype in Nollywood video-film. In the example of video-films that depict predominantly male occults, such homes become devoid of women who inhabit those spaces as mothers or wives. The house, as represented in video-film about male occult, has a shrine in a secret part of the house or has a corpse hidden in it and any woman who comes into the house is a concubine and, usually, a victim of sacrifice (*Billionaires Club*). Patrick Iroegbu (2010: 24) argues that, within the home, spaces such as the kitchen or the cooking place are a metaphor for the woman's womb: "it is where things are both fermented and cooked". In occult video-film, the womb of the woman is sacrificed to the occult god and the luxurious houses that the male members own have few or no women. They cease to be reproductive spaces.

The sacrifice of reproduction and the sacrifice of the conjugal family constitute the 'crises' that I discuss in Chapter 3. Christine Koggel (2006: 200) argues that the "critical importance of reproduction has prompted governments, colonial and nationalist, to control women and the moral power of domestic space". She argues that there is a cult of domesticity (an "emphasis on good mother and housewife") which is integral to "the cult of modernity" at the core of bourgeois ideology" (Koggel 2006: 200). In Nollywood video-film, the domestic space is a site of ideological struggle where the concept of the 'modern home' is plagued by conceptualisations of the supernatural. The bourgeois home, with its ostentatious commodities, is a fantastical and eclectic space that continually refers to the marketplace. Commodities of the market place construct the idea of the home.

1.2: The Marketplace

Aye l'oja orun ni'le (The world is a market, the otherworld is home)
Yorùbá proverb (Drewal 1992: 26)

This proverb emphasises the co-existence of the material world with the supernatural otherworld. The structuring of this world is based on the otherworld. Video-film often makes references to the market. Nollywood is defined as a product of the marketplace created by merchants who had empty imported VHS tapes to sell (Okome 2013). Adesokan (2011: 6) asserts that "the market is the bedrock of livelihood: it is a complex site of resistance, where the collective unconscious is shaped through traditional schemes of globalization". For Patricia Levy (1993: 65) it is the "focal point of the village or town, often the sole reason for its existence". The market is a space of exchange, of spectacle, and can be regarded as a profound space. People sell what they produce but the marketplace is also a place where cultural performances such as *Alarinjo* and other forms of travelling theatre troupes would perform. Considering Akin Adesokan's (2011: 6) definition of the market as "both system and place" that bears the "distinction between peripheral/primitive economies and western economies", the marketplace can be argued to be a fantastic space *par excellence*. There is a notion of the marketplace as an actual market. There is also an abstract concept of the marketplace as the invisible and mystified exchange and flow of global capitalist trading that is cynically termed 'zombie capitalism'. The negotiation of traditional practices in the West African market

and international capitalist forces (the presence of mass-produced factory commodities as well as individually or communally produced items) complicates the images of the marketplace in Nigerian video-film.

An example is a video-film entitled *Issakaba* (2008) that I discussed in Chapter 1 [Fig. 124]. The images of the criminal who was pretending to be a 'beggar' and was beheaded by the Issakaba vigilantes at the marketplace, and the woman pretending to sell cooked maize cobs to conceal that she sells guns who was captured from the marketplace, echo the notion of corruption and international wealth possessed by politicians. The marketplace is amongst some of the places that are used by politicians to campaign and conspicuously distribute 'gifts' such as food, T-shirts and money to the public. In the video-film, the public displays of 'corrective' vigilante violence in the marketplace are significant. In seeking to publicly portray what is good and what is bad, the violence of the Issakaba uses the marketplace as a place for moral performance. As Ogunyemi (1996: 52) points out, the market in Nigeria is a place where "the sacred and the profane" intersect. The marketplace is the continuous negotiation of values based on what is visible as well as invisible. The layers of realities (the criminal as beggar, the maize cobs concealing guns), where nothing is what it seems, can be seen as metaphors for the illusions produced in the mystified flow of international capital and the 'moral' contradictions it produces.

In a video-film entitled *Burning Market* [Fig. 125], a collective of merchants of 'London Line', a section of the market, organise a small protest against the union leaders who keep raising taxes without ensuring the security of the small shops and who use magic potions to influence the market. The union leaders, in the video-film, offer sacrifices to an occult through which they torment merchants of London by having their doors mysteriously locked, placing juju and fetish objects in front of the shops and creating situations in which blood drops out of the door handles when the shopkeepers try to open them. When the spokesperson for the disgruntled shopkeepers finds a fetish object in front of his shop, he returns it to the union offices and the security guard at the union touches it and dies shortly after. As compensation, the union leaders pay his wife 150,000 Naira. The leaders grow powerful, wealthy and dangerous through the occult. In the film, the marketplace comes across as a place of exploitation and violence meted out by the powerful.

The marketplace is a fantastic space in its complex layering of material realities, imaginaries and abstract or (seemingly) supernatural forces in the practice of everyday life. The aspect of magic and the fantastic is principally operative and does not only relate to traditional markets but also to broader international markets. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 19) observe, the proliferation of "occult economies" has two dimensions; namely, the "material aspect founded on the effort to conjure wealth . . . and an ethical aspect grounded in the moral discourses and (re)actions sparked by the real or imagined production of value through such magical means". In *Burning Market*, the union leaders have acquired wealth despite the refusal of traders and shopkeepers to pay membership fees. Their large houses and ostentatious clothing and imported cars, symbolic of their access to international markets, is contrasted with the poverty of the traders. It is also interesting to note that, in the first part of the film, the traders confront the union leader at the doorstep of their homes. There is barely any interaction between union leaders and traders at the market, apart from a few violent episodes. The interaction between the traders and union leaders at the marketplace is manifested through encounters with 'magic' (bleeding door-knobs and smears of blood, for example). Furthermore, the union leaders kidnap a young girl, the daughter of the traders' representative, as a bargaining chip.

The market is portrayed as a sacred place but also a place rife with evil forces and systemic 'crime'. The market is a profound space in that it is a space where moral values are continuously negotiated. It seems to accommodate and enable vice while at the same time it maintains its patent necessity as a place that enables people's livelihood and associational life. It is a place for all but at the same time it is not a place of belonging. Using Manthia Diawara's proposition, Adesokan (2011: 7) argues that the marketplace is a crossroads and "a complex site of resistance, where the 'collective unconscious' is shaped through traditional schemes of globalization that the bureaucratic state cannot effectively police". Adesokan (2011:7) notes that the West African traditional market and the state, as "an agent of the classic market", are antagonists.

To unpack the market in Adesokan's scholarship as 'a complex site of resistance', I find that there is a dialectic in which the marketplace is a place of spectacle and showing as well as a place of repression. The traditional market resists monopoly and hegemony

but it also shapes the ‘collective unconscious’. This Jungian concept posits that in addition to a personal unconscious whose content is repressed there is a collective unconscious whose content is inherited (Jung 1959). The marketplace is thus a place where social and cultural relationships are shaped and continuously negotiated.

Patron–client relationships within the market are important. Patron–client relationships “normalise” inequality between “the national struggle of the political and economic elites and the material struggle of the majority of the population in the postcolonial context” (Adesokan (2011: 8). The market is metaphor for the nation state. However, Adesokan (2011: 7) argues that on a larger scale “the nation-state, as the agent of the classic market, and the West African market have been antagonists in the contest of power from the outset . . . political power shifted to the state”. The socio-economic relationships that are formulated in the market echo those within larger polities.

Michael Watts (2004: 198), however, emphasises that “markets cannot create social order” and that “indeed they can colonize and ultimately destroy it”. For Watts (2004: 198), the “market destroys the social character of three foundational but ‘fictitious’ commodities (land, labour and money)”. The market as both abstract and material has a fantastic character facilitation of fantastic transformation of money to commodity, labour to money, etc. As a material place, the marketplace gives social character to land, labour and money but as an abstract system, it destroys that social character. The market is both sacred and profane, signifying both power and dispossession.

1.3: Sacred Land and the Heavenly Polis

The depiction of sacred land in video-film is also complex and can be regarded as profound space. The video-film entitled *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (The Earth belongs to the Lord), by Tunde Kelani, depicts the predicament of modern development that speculates on sacred land [Fig. 126]. Sacred land, as land governed ancestrally and occupied by supernatural forces of various cosmologies, seems antithetical to a heavenly polis. A heavenly polis is defined by Okome (2004) as a Christian utopia. Both these spatial concepts function as fantastic spaces. However, they seem oppositional because the heavenly polis is based on the Christian belief that the dystopic ‘fallen’ world will be left

behind and those who believe will be destined for a utopian heavenly city. Both spaces are redemptive spaces and, as such, have a moralising geography, albeit an abstract one.

In Tunde Kelani's *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1995), prospectors who seek to build a petrol station approach a chief in order to convince him to sell a piece of land that is considered to be ancestral land. Members of the community object to this but the powerful political connections of the prospectors present challenges for the community. One by one, the prospectors begin dying mysteriously. One of the remaining prospectors is banished and forced to live elsewhere. The mysterious deaths are portrayed as justice for the members of the community, who find that modern judicial processes do not recognise the significance of sacred land as land that cannot be possessed or owned by any one person. This land is portrayed as inhabited by supernatural forces that can mete out fatal punishment if the sacredness of that particular land is not observed.

Sacred land is particular place and territory that is reserved for burial or used for the performance of festivals. There is a collective use and observance of particular places that are regarded as sacred land. Kelani's *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1995) refers to the brazen acquisition for oil operations of land that is considered to be sacred. When the agricultural economy shifted to an oil economy in Nigeria, land was used for oil pipelines. For example, the Ogoni people, led by writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, campaigned against Shell Oil Company, who were responsible for oil spills in Ogoniland, and the use of land for oil operations. The breach of sacred land symbolises the violation of a collective or community of people.

Sacred land refuses proprietorship and cannot be commodified. It is a place over which no one person could have power. The representation of sacred land in video-film counteracts the rise of capitalism in post-colonial contexts and questions the exercise of power. Power over sacred land is regarded as supernatural power. Edward Said (1999: 7) observes in *Out of Place* that "just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free of the struggle over geography . . . that struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings". The profundity of sacred land lies in this symbolic struggle, where territory represents the basis of people's livelihood.

Marshall (2009: 169) observes that "in modern democracies the site of sovereign exercise of power is represented as an 'empty place', one that cannot be incarnated and that no longer makes a gesture to an 'outside'". She argues that this may not be the case in post-colonial Africa because, as Tonda and Mbembe point out, "the 'secret origin' of sovereignty in Africa is designated as an 'elsewhere' and is symbolised in the world of the invisible and supernatural" (Marshall 2009: 169). Further, she states that "since the colonial period, this world is symbolised by the power of God and by the formidable coalition of demonic forces, fashioned in the encounter between Christ, the witch finder – a pantheon of pagan spirits, merchandise, writing, technology, and violence" (Marshall 2009: 169). The concept that sovereignty in Africa lies 'elsewhere' symbolises both the spiritual realm as well as the fantastic character of international capital, where the latter is a violation of the former. The sacred land and heavenly polis are conceptualisations of fantastic space through which the trauma of land can be reinterpreted.

The heavenly city in Nollywood is not merely an imagined utopia, as it exists to address the real conditions in the lived national space. The heavenly city is abstract space but it can also refer metaphorically to the constructed cities of mega-churches in Nigeria such as Canaanland in Ota or Redemption City on the Lagos–Ibadan Expressway. In abstract terms, the heavenly city is a utopia where humans will be with God and will transcend the difficulties of the earthly city. For Okome, the heavenly polis is a subterfuge for people who "seek solace . . . due to the depleting economic resources of the poor". Okome (2008: 4–5) defines these transitive spaces as spaces of production and reproduction when he argues that, in Nollywood, human agency "[finds] salvation not in the production of goods and services but in the production of heaven and earth". It represents utopian freedom from labour-bound life on earth.

The term utopia is a combination of the Greek terms *outopia*, which means 'no place', and *eutopia*, which means 'good place' (Mumford 1922). In a Foucauldian (1966: 4) sense, utopias:

> afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold: they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they shatter or tangle common names, because they

> destroy "syntax" in advance, and not only that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to "hold together".

If the heavenly city in Nollywood offers moral transformation, or redemption as stated by Okome (2004), then it is constructed not as a fictional, invisible place but as an existing virtual or simulated space. The visible city space in Nollywood is the antithetical dystopia, which is coupled with references to the heavenly polis. The physical denotation of the heavenly polis (Canaanland or Redemption City) can be seen a heterotopia rather than a utopia. Heterotopia, as defined by Foucault (1986: 24), is not abstract, and it counteracts conventional order, in an 'other place'. Places such as clinics or prisons that can also be seen as in-between spaces, are examples. The reference to mega-churches in video-film casts them as heterotopias. Canaanland, for example, is not only a church (an interspace between the earthly and heavenly cities) but also a 'city' that has banks, a university, a library and shops such as bakeries. Its followers pay tithes. In comparison to the chaotic city of Lagos, Canaanland has manicured lawns, paved streets, well-regulated traffic, running water, electricity and planned spatial design. The same can be said for Redemption City. These places *appear* utopian when compared to the cities within which they are located. They are, however, heterotopias where people resolve spiritual crises, or they become 'born again' and are part of the associational life that the churches provide. The *alternative* implied in the concept of heterotopias becomes important in reading spaces that are represented in Nollywood.

These mega-churches propagate the world 'out there' as not just heaven but global reach. Mega-churches emphasise their omnipresence in the world. Meyer (1998: 453) argues that "what is new about PCCs is their propagation of the Prosperity Gospel and their strong global inclination". She notes that their names "often refer to the church's aspired 'international' or 'global' (out)reach" and "deploy notions of identity and belonging that deliberately reach beyond Africa". They are not only interspaces between heaven and earth but also between Lagos and the rest of the world. I will discuss how globalism shapes representations of the fantastic in Nollywood video-film at a later stage. In this next section, I discuss representations of the city and the village.

2: Allegory of the Village in the City

The concept of a city relies on the concept of a village. In order for the city to symbolise progress, the village must symbolise 'backwardness'. This dichotomy persists in Nollywood video-film. For Wendl (2007: 4) the established dichotomy of "traditional" and "modern" or "village" and "city" can be regarded as "a transformation of the older topographic dichotomy between 'wilderness' and 'village'". The wilderness, assumed to be a place where there are many fantastical supernatural forces, is a sublime and overwhelming place. The village, according to Tobias Wendl (2007: 5), "marks the past" and as such "forms part of the 'uncanny', of what the city has repressed, and what now returns from time to time into the consciousness of the city-dwellers as the 'horror of traditions'". In Nollywood video-film the village/city dichotomy also refers to the relation between European cities/American cities and African cities. The narrative of young people leaving the village to prosper in the city is allegorical to the fantasy of leaving African cities for American or European cities. This section is a brief discussion on the ways in which the spatio-temporal hierarchy that locates the city, or the European city, as superior and 'in the future' within the allegory is subverted in Nollywood video-film.

In *40 Days in the Wilderness*, directed by Ugo Ugbor, the demarcation of moral spaces follows the superficial dichotomy between the 'village' and the 'city'. It is a narrative about a pastor who operates in the city performing miracles on people who have various physical ailments [Fig. 127]. Through Pastor Jerry's prayers, those who cannot walk begin to walk, those who cannot hear gain the sense of hearing and so on. Based on the biblical narrative in which Jesus experiences temptations from Satan, the title illustrates the forty-day evangelising mission in a rural village where Pastor Jerry and a group of male disciples embark on a journey for spiritual growth. They leave the city for the village. To get to the village, they must cross a dense forest [Fig. 128]. On their way they are attacked by a monstrous supernatural force and some of the men die [Fig. 129]. When they eventually reach the village, they are welcomed by traditional leaders and elders, who allow them to stay in the village for forty days and forty nights [Fig. 130]. In his instructions, the pastor tells the men to accept the food and drink of the villagers because they must not be "like strangers". The men crusade the village to convert the

villagers to Christianity by performing miracles in public spaces. Here, they learn about the local god worshipped by the villagers, Kubala.

The similarity that this narrative bears to colonial evangelising missions takes a turn when two of the men find out that Pastor Jerry serves Kubala – the source of his healing powers. Two disciples discover that the real reason they have been brought to the village is to receive power from Kubala so that they can perform miracles in the city. This exchange involves human sacrifices. The men that died in the forest were Pastor Jerry's offerings to Kubala. The two disciples survive because one of the villagers advises them not to eat the food offered by villagers since "the more you eat their food, the more you become possessed with Kubala's power". In this narrative, the men from the city who considered themselves "enlightened" and "progressive" were actually "in the dark" about what was really happening. The leader of the Kubala followers is a pastor who resides and works in the city.

While the film takes place in three main spaces: the city, the forest/wilderness and the village, it alludes to a fourth space, which is demonstrated through pointing or waving towards the sky as the 'heavenly polis' which I have discussed earlier. Although it is the place of magic, redemption and transformation, it becomes indexed in the same way as the place of Kubala, who also hovers in a sphere above earth but is visually represented "on earth" as a dark hairy creature. The construction of a theopolitical city is demonstrated by Pastor Jerry's acquisition of a heavenly language of speaking "in tongues". When the film climaxes, Pastor Jerry's deliverance in a foreign 'heavenly' tongue is re-played to show that he was in fact using incantations in an incomprehensible language to harness power from Kubala. Communication between agents that inhabit the invisible (heavenly polis) and the visible (earthly polis) in Nollywood is invariably the illusion of a process of empowerment.

In *40 Days in the Wilderness*, what lies in the forest is manifest in the village and in the city. The lepers, the blind and the mad of the city and of the village are equally punished and delivered by the same supernatural creature that dominates the forest. The pastor who heals the sick in the city does so as a worshipper of Kubala rather than the Christian God. In the forest and in the village, Kubala can appear in the form of lightning

to cause death or illness. In the city, Kubala is an implausible beneficial resource for young men to carry out divine miracles. What becomes apparent in the film is the dearth of *visual* difference between the city and the village. The village is the city, inasmuch as they can both be defined as the wilderness ('concrete jungle'), and both *appear* inhospitable.

The city (Lagos in particular), defined by Onookome Okome as "a huge slum really" in which "the community of people who suffer . . . is huge"[201], is constituted of the village. In *40 Days in the Wilderness*, the village is both a space of identification and a space of otherness. The village is re-cast as an imagined city which is 'contaminated' by the urban Christian visitors. Frank Ukadike (1994: 25) aptly points out that allegory "forms the basis for an indelible register of social concerns: here political, historical, and thus, literary and cinematic teleology coalesce into ideological discourse". Further, he states that "this allegorical positioning is used to subvert the dominant mode of production and is aimed at acquiring a sense of identity and national transformation" (Ukadike 1994: 25). The socio-economic conditions that produce the meanings of the terms 'village' and 'city' also influence cosmological belief (for example, the diviner who lives in the city and drives a Jeep, as defined by Falola (2013). The essentialist notions of place are always already coupled with the sense of threat, 'contamination' and 'dilution', whether in the village or the city. The relationship between the village and the city is dialectical rather than dichotomous.

Tobias Wendl (2005: 4) interprets this conceptual separation as 'horror'. Arguably, the city – its large architecture and the fast-paced ephemerality that makes things seem magical – could equally symbolise a fantastical place. In response to Wendl's argument, it can be argued that the horror that surfaces is about loss and dispossession, where the concept of the 'village' symbolises origin and the city is a representation of the loss of origin. The city, as a place where no-one belongs and everyone is a migrant, is an allegory of alienation and social fragmentation. As Greenblatt (1981: viii) points out, allegory "arises in periods of loss, periods in which a once powerful theological, political, or familial authority is threatened with effacement". Allegory "arises then from

[201] *Nollywood Babylon*. 2008. Dir. Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal. English. AM Pictures. Canada.

the painful absence of that which it claims to recover . . . the paradox of an order built upon its own undoing cannot be restricted to this one discursive mode" (Greenblatt 1981: viii). The allegory of the fantastic city (particularly Lagos) is that it is not a place that an average individual can 'own' or 'belong to', in the idealistic sense. It is always already a place of victimisation, which is at times remedied by the construction of the village as a territory that has a self-defined judicial system or a governing body of sorts. Generally, Nollywood films portray traditional leaders congregating over communal/social matters; seldom does one see this demonstration of leadership (though conservative and paternalistic) in national administrative bodies represented in Nollywood. The city, as a totality, is almost incomprehensible or unfathomable. It is also a place of unfathomable crime: it represents the theft of land, and the theft of identity, and is characterised by the ruse or the con. It can be said that there are forms of crime that are specific to urban situations (Internet scams, ATM cons, etc.). The city is allegorical to the wilderness that Wendl refers to. It is portrayed as a place full of illusions and deceptions.

The construction of pre-colonial village utopias in Igbo 'epic' video-film, which I focused on in Chapter 4, can be read against this situation or moral geography. The significance of *chi*, as a signifier of identity, in Igbo cosmology is tied to place. For example, the word Igbo is used to refer to people leaving in the east but it also denotes people who live in the forest, "people of low status and even slaves" (Awde 1999: 12). The forest in (Christian) video-films is often depicted as the domicile of 'evil' spirits. In *40 days in the Wilderness*, the forest is teeming with evil spirits, including Kubala whose power is fuelled by the killing of young Christians who are brought to the forest under the guise of a 'spiritual retreat' or 'camp'. The forest is therefore represented as an intermediary place of malevolence and abjection. The centring of Christianity illustrates moral complexity in this film. For example, the *Osu* caste system, through which some Igbo are regarded as unclean or as slaves and therefore not human, is seen to be 'counteracted' through Christianity. This class of people would then be ostracised as they are believed to have been sacrificed by the gods[202]. Christianity is often cited as a way in which such practices can be renounced. The denotation of the term Igbo as 'forest people' carries negative weight. In Lagos, Igbo people are stereotyped as cunning, urban but fraudulent,

[202] Chinua Achebe also refers to the *Osu* caste system in his book *No Longer at Ease* (1960)

mercantile people. For example, the cheap low-quality Nollywood films are attributed to Igbo businessmen who 'just want to make a quick buck'. These negative stereotypes echo the divisive ethno-religious tensions that culminated in the civil war in 1960 in which the Igbo seceded from Nigeria to form the Republic of Biafra. The hierarchy within the city/village allegory is complex and problematic.

Jonathan Haynes (2007a: 131) asserts that Nollywood concurs with "a new *visibility* . . . of the Lagos metropolis – or 'megacity'" (own emphasis). Haynes defines the city of Lagos as 'apocalyptic', where notions of progress are ambiguous. The allegory of movement between village and city refers to the movement between Lagos and cities in Europe and America. In the video-film entitled *White Hunters*, directed by Chico Ejiro, young women dream of marrying European men so that they can travel abroad and regard themselves as superior to women who are unable to travel outside Lagos. I will discuss this film at a later stage but it is one of many video-films that depict the relation between Lagos and cities in Europe and America. *Osuofia in London*, which I discussed in Chapter 1, is another example where Osuofia is content to return to Nigeria. The city as a place of moral decadence embodies experiences of inequality, displacement and alienation. The significance of a heterogeneous and politically-diverse city and the parochial, homogenous village is posed as an ideological question that instigates that the village produces the kind of wealth that the city cannot produce. Furthermore, it instigates that that kind of segregationist thinking complicates spatial conceptions of the nation and nationhood.

3: "'Us' as Nation" – Nollywood and the 'Nationhood' Rhetoric

Although a majority of Nollywood video-films focus on a few cities, such as Lagos or Kano, and a few rural settings, they connote Nigeria in general. It may be for this reason that academic discourse queries the place of Nollywood within the political imaginary of the nation-state. For example, the brief of the 2010 International Workshop, that was themed "Nollywood: A National Cinema?" and was held at Kwara State University in Ilorin, declares that "if Nollywood is so ubiquitous in the global marketplace of cultural commodities, [then] there is a need to discipline it so that it does not misrepresent 'us'

as a ‘nation’ . . . its sloppy narrative regimes must be disciplined”[203]. At a different symposium, Tunde Awosanmi argues that Nollywood video-films are “quasi-movies” whose “technological banality and mis-representational neo-primitivism projects Nollywood as an artistic parody of Nigeria’s globally distressful crippled-giantness”[204]. The “ideologically misguided esotericism” of video-film, Awosanmi continues, “primitivizes national culture”[205]. The concept of ‘national culture’ is more complex than it seems. The implied essentialist Nigerian character (the ‘us’ that is ‘misrepresented’) is coupled with the overwhelming critique that Nigeria is a tragedy, a country that has “fallen” (Maier 2000), and a fractured state (Amuwo 2010), which ranked fourteenth on the Failed State Index published annually by *Foreign Policy* magazine and Fund for Peace (Campbell 2011)[206].

Nollywood video-films generally represent local administrations (ethnic-specific kingdoms and chiefdoms, for example) rather than national sovereignty. Abubakar Momoh (2002: 2) reminds us that “the national question [in Nigeria] ultimately requires to be posed as an ideological question” as it is “the (un) evenness in the distribution of or access to power . . . in the context of *deliverables* and what advantage co-ethnics or a fraction of them take of one another in the process”. The national question for Momoh is “basically a problem of the realization of human essence”. What becomes important to debate are the ways in which Nollywood reflects constructions of complex identities which aptly question and problematise the implication of the national question as a “lived essentialism”. Much divides Nigeria, but among the main concerns is the struggle over Nigeria’s economic resources, or what has come to be known as the ‘national cake’. Jibrin Ibrahim (1991: 127) argues that the scepticism about state control over even distribution has intensified due to financial centralisation of Nigeria’s financial resources precipitated by the shift of the economic base from agriculture to petroleum. This situation is often cited as the catalyst for widespread corruption and characterises Nigeria’s politics as a theatre of bamboozlement.

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[203] From the International Workshop held at the Kwara State University in Ilorin during 2010 under the theme “Nollywood: A National Cinema?” See http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-West-Africa&month=1006&week=d&msg=8q%2B955k6UQ2BqMGWNhLEUw accessed 2012/12/01

[204] Awonsanmi, T. “Re-reading Nollywood: Neo-Primitivism and Tunde Kelani’s Quasi-Movie”, paper delivered at the *Reading and Producing Nollywood: An International Symposium* at the University of Lagos in 2011. See http://readingnollywood.wordpress.com/abstracts/ accessed 2012/12/01

[205] Ibid.

[206] At the top of the list is Somalia and Sudan, which are perceived to be the worst states (Campbell 2011: 137).

This dynamic is captured in Michael Taussig's (1997: 144) observation that "politics is played out in the shadows, affecting economic growth in ways which can only be surmised" and constitutes the "magic of the state". Nollywood imagery forms part of layers upon layers of the chimerical composition of the state. The nation, as Benedict Anderson (1983: 6–7) suggests, is "an imagined political community", and it is imagined as limited and sovereign. Furthermore, it is imagined as a bifurcation into one stratum of those who take part in the production of illusions ('bourgeois'/charismatic leadership) and another composed of those who are subject to bamboozlement (the 'masses'). Michael Watts (2006: 133), however, termed Nigeria's situation as "nationalist 'unimagining'" rather than an "imagined community". Watts (2006: 115) maintains that Nigeria's "oil complex" "generates different sorts of governable spaces in which identity, territory and rule are in play". For Watts (2006: 115), "oil is a constant reference point in the popular Nigerian imagination" which "has become a centralizing force in national community imagining" but has also led to a fragmentation of, and perhaps made impossible, a unified Nigerian state. With reference to Chief Obafemi Awolowo's remark that Nigeria is "not a nation but a 'mere geographical expression'", Watts (2005: 115) posits that petro-capitalism has made the notion of nationhood in Nigeria "increasingly *unimaginable*" and has "[withered] a particular sense of national community". Nollywood in general represents effects (or failures) of the state, but the state in itself (or those who operate it) remains *invisible* but, nevertheless, *there*.

There is an undeniable discourse in which the state is characterised as an enigma, a fantastic or supernatural being that is *there* but is invisible, and suffers a pathological condition, but has the capability to malevolently dupe its subjects. For example, Nigeria is often referred to as a "crippled giant" (Osaghae 1998). On the national question, Wole Soyinka (1996: 109, 119) denotes the nation as a prison that "provides for or deprives the inmates of the means to life, self-worth, and productive existence" and shuns "the apprehension of the nation as a continuous living organism, as one that shares the same basic human component as other near or distant . . . claimants to that definition". Further, Soyinka (1996: 11) denounces nationalism as a "farcical illusion" after the assertion that nationalism is a "dangerous illusion". Wale Adebanwi and Ebenezer Obadare (2010: 379) regard Nigeria as "a magnificent template for examining the

chronic schizophrenia that characterises African postcolonial states and the resulting social (de)formations that (re)compose and are in turn (re)composed by the state". The spatial conceptualisations of Nigeria are negative but they are part of the pessimism towards the national boundaries that were designed through colonialism, at the Berlin conference of 1885. These topographical demarcations are regarded as sutures that indicate the division, wounding and impoverishment of Africa.

Anderson (1983: 4) argues that "nationalism" is:

> the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable.

The implied notion of 'malady' is perceived by Ruth Marshall (2009: 21) as "the erosion of the territorial nation-state's monopoly over the moral resources of community formation", which has in turn produced "the rise of identity politics". The 'loss' of juridical power of the nation-state over people's moral behaviour (the regulation of right and wrong) can be likened to a derangement caused by the tension in the ahistoricism that pervades the contemporary (modernity as "break with the past"). Anti-colonial nationalism, Adesokan (2011: 75) argues, is grounded in abstract historicism, where on one hand there is "historical materialism: critique of political economy" and on the other "dialectical materialism: critique of social alienation and commodity fetishism".. According to Adesokan (2011: 75), there is both a national struggle and a social struggle in which violence is manifest.

Nigeria has been characterised by violence during the civil war and ensuing dictatorships, and also that perpetrated by the Islamic insurgents known as Zakzaky, the Maitatsine and the Boko Haram, and further by local vigilante groups who use violence in the name of justice. The Weberian (1978) concept of the nation-state as "a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence" crumbles where members of 'the nation' take over this monopoly. In this section, I use video-film narratives to examine notions of of citizenship, as well as the ways in which humour uses nation-identity rhetoric in processes of othering.

3.1: Citizenship and the Public Sphere

Zombie o, zombie (Zombie o, zombie)
Zombie no go go, unless you tell am to go (Zombie)
Zombie no go stop, unless you tell am to stop (Zombie)
Zombie no go turn, unless you tell am to turn (Zombie)
Zombie no go think, unless you tell am to think (Zombie)
[. . .]
Go and kill! (Joro, jaro, joro)
Go and die! (Joro, jaro, joro)
Go and quench! (Joro, jaro, joro)
Put am for reverse! (Joro, jaro, joro)

(Fela Kuti 1977)

Descriptions of Nigeria seem to make up a morbid anthology of tragedy. Zombie, in Fela Kuti's 1977 song, refers to the irrational violence of the military government, the legacy of colonialism, by describing soldiers as zombies. For Kuti, politics is littered by leaders who pompously call themselves "general" or "admiral", whom he regards as "a handful of *unnatural* and unbalanced people" (own emphasis) (Moore 2009: 150). The sentiment in Kuti's work is that the military are zombies of a state that was never meant to provide for its citizens but that stayed in place to ensure an international traffic of resources. Nollywood video-film does not always make the reference to rulers of the state explicit but its narratives constantly depict the elite as corrupt and as people who consort with malevolent supernatural forces. These depictions are accompanied by images of young people who resolve to leave the country. Video-film, however, does not glorify leaving the country but critiques concepts of superfluous, international wealth.

In the video-film entitled *White Hunters*, directed by Chico Ejiro, for example, there are representations of young disenfranchised Nigerian women who victimise each other in search of wealthy white male expatriates. The film begins with a conversation between the main character, Tabitha, played by Ini Edo, and her husband in which she questions his modest lifestyle and lack of ambition to work abroad. "We all don't have to travel out because things appear to be moving slowly here . . . who then will stay back and salvage things?" he argues. In response to her husband, she asserts disapprovingly that she does not need a "'messiah' for a husband . . . a Jesus-come-and-save-the-world kind of husband . . . all [she] is interested in is [her] financial security". With that, she deceives him into leaving so that she can consort with a white man. This would be her ticket out of the country and to a bourgeois cosmopolitan lifestyle. She is to wed this new man in

Paris, and share in the wealth that is represented through the purchase of obscenely large houses in Nigeria – a kind of prostitution. In the film, women from poor families are propelled by socio-economic circumstances into flirting with the harlotry of "white hunting". Tabitha is alienated from the elite and "well educated, accomplished professionals" in Lagos because she is an "illiterate" young woman who comes from the village and, because of this, she opts for wealthy, white, foreign men. Tabitha does not view herself as the citizen of a country whose leaders she can hold accountable.

Since the country's elite are perceived to be organs or affiliates of the state and collaborate to defraud its treasury, they are held in contempt by citizens who have no access to the country's wealth. This situation is reminiscent of the declaration that "the state is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another (Hallas 1985: 23). While the film does not explicitly 'blame the state', it does lead to the argument that the young seek to leave the country because there is nothing in it for them. Citizenship implies equal rights of access and shared ownership within the democratic model of the public square. It alludes to David Harvey's (2005: 145) "accumulation by dispossession" where the state promotes neo-colonial process in Nigeria by supporting privatisation. The discourse of corruption that characterises the Nigerian nation-state is often regarded as an embedded practice where a holder of office "has to run a system so corrupt that anyone who is not corrupt is technically abnormal" (Ekoriko 2012: 5). There is a sentiment that citizens feel cheated by the state, and characterise its powers as supernatural and occultic, in order to come to terms with the effects of 'the unholy trinity' constituted by the "military rulers of Nigeria, multinational oil industry and geostrategic players including the US, British, French and Italian governments" (Ekoriko 2012: 5). The characterisation of the elite as fantastically powerful makes the possibility of equal public citizenship and participation hard to conceive.

Peter Ekeh (1975: 91) argues that Nigeria consists of two public realms that are created by African bourgeois ideologies and are linked differently to the private realm: the primordial realm/grouping and its sentiments (it is moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm) and the civic public realm, which is historically associated with colonial administration, based on civil structures such as the military, police, etc. (it is amoral). This bifurcation perhaps weakens the power of the citizenry

where public is used for private interests. For Ekeh (1975: 91) "the privatisation of the public realm is the sublimation of politics". Ekeh (1975: 92) observes that in Western perspective, public realm and private realm "have a common moral foundation – generalised morality informs the public and private realm". However, in African contexts, "the private realm is differentially associated with the public realm in terms of morality" and the two public realms have "different types of moral linkages" (Ekeh 1975: 92). Tabitha is a protagonist who is able to be cosmopolitan through any means but at the same time she is an antagonist in that she presents the opposite of the concept of a woman who embraces 'traditional' gender roles. In one realm, she is morally wrong and in the other realm she is right to freely explore the world.

Ogbu Kalu (2008: xi) argues that there are three publics, which comprise "the indigenous 'village' public, the emergent and urban culture, and the intruding Western public". This multiplicity of the public sphere makes up civic virtue (Marshall-Fratani 2001: 96). This complicates the understanding of Nollywood video-film, which illuminates the complexity of 'moral value' within the overlap of the different publics. 'Epic' film, for example, aims at providing examples of good moral values based on ethnic-specific cosmologies. Hallelujah or Christian video-film is a concoction of gratuitous displays of constructions of fetishistic desire and intense fear between the different publics. What video-film does is that it makes visible the contradictions arising from the overlap of the different public realms. Rather than seeming coherent, familiar or logical, the spatial concept of the nation appears incoherent and illogical. Nevertheless, national identities remain amongst some of the key markers of identity. In this next section, I discuss the ways in which morality that is circumscribed within certain spaces is ruptured by arguably derisive expressions such as laughter. Further, I explore how this laughter becomes a kind of xenophobic expression based on the difference emphasised through national identity.

3.2: Humour and the Alienating Power of Laughter

> *[The] process of the fantastic inherently creates an uncanny zone of contact in which laughter and supernaturalism meet to affirm their common stake in human prejudice and violence* (Siebers 1984: 103)

A television set and a DVD player showing a Nollywood video-film titled *Mr. Ibu* (2004) is stationed on the street next to a vendor who is selling Nollywood video-films in Grahamstown, South Africa[207]. Crowds gather around the set, pointing and giggling. Mr. Ibu, played by John Okafor, is an illiterate, plump alcoholic man whose ineptitude and roguish sexual appetite is central to the narrative's humorous content. There is laughter that is sparked by humour[208], fascination and ridicule. It could be said that the Mr Ibu films, directed by Andy Chukwu, perpetuate stereotypes of cultural *inferiority* through which derogatory things could be said about Nigeria in general. I am reminded of similar comedies in South Africa that belittle people who come to the city from rural areas, or from Africa to Europe, as stupid and superstitious people. *Mr Ibu in London* and *Mr Ibu in Jo'burg* are reminiscent of *Mr Bean* (a mute, childish, British social outcast); *Emzini Wezinsizwa* is a South African serial about migrant workers from rural areas who are gullible and struggle to 'fit in' in their new urban socio-linguistic circumstances; and *Jim comes to Jo'burg* is a film about an awkward agrarian naiveté. Mr Ibu is presented as a character whose stupidity is without redemption. Although these films are centred on this individual, Mr Ibu has become a general referent for the African, particularly Nigerian, proletariat as crude, irrational, deluded, libidinous, illiterate, child-like and irresponsible. Since these characteristics are the source of humour, it is important to discuss the derisive laughter in Nollywood video-film as a form of distancing and as xenophobic expression.

While this form of humour can be condescending, Olivier Barlet (2000: 129) warns that, rather than "developing cynicism and projection" as Western humour does, humour in African film is potentially restorative/therapeutic and redeeming. He describes African humour as "redemptive tragicomic self-derisiveness" that, through detachment and self-sacrifice, is "meant to restore wounds, disinfect the local by expelling social ills" (Barlet 2000: 129). Tchicaya U Tam'si (cited in Barlet 2000: 129) observes that "humour preserves . . . it calms you down . . . humour is our weapon, the weapon of the weak . . . the weak laugh at themselves to unsettle their opponents . . . humour is a weapon".

[207] For the sake of *positionality*, I include in this section observations of situations in the reception of Nollywood in South Africa. As a South African who stood in crowd of other South Africans watching Nollywood video-film, I felt that that laughter seemed to be genuine reaction to humour but also it seemed to be derisive laughter.

[208] In this section it might seem as if I use laughter and humour interchangeably; the difference is that humour is an intersubjective social construct and laughter is a subjective reaction to that construct.

Conversely, I discuss laughter in video-film as a subtle form of othering and violence which, through projections of the *imagined* identity of the proletarian Nigerian subject, dehumanises. This dehumanisation is part of the process of constructing moral geographies where people from specific places are unfairly perceived as 'criminal', 'child-like', 'crude', and so on. It is the *familiar* culture- and language-specific gestures garnered from general social interactions that produce humour. Humour in video-film can be understood via the three classic theories of laughter; namely, the superiority theory, the relief theory and the incongruity theory.

3.2.1: Laughter as a Language of Dissonance

Nigerian video-films are made in Igbo, Yorùbá, Hausa, English and Pidgin (those made in English and Pidgin have reached diverse audiences in the diaspora). The transnational cultural mobility of Nollywood implies language as one of the significant aspects that facilitate wide circulation. Moradewun Adejunmobi (2002: 74) points out that there is an assumption that, by comparison, cultural products made in European languages (such as English) have less appeal to Nigerian audiences, "are considered [to be] intelligible only to elite audiences and operate in African cultural practice mainly as signifiers of colonial experience". However, the syncretism of urban-based African popular culture, which operates under appropriated separatist frameworks, marks *practices* of speaking and performing English as local (Adejunmobi 2002). Pidgin, therefore, is a validated and sometimes celebrated mode of communication. I am drawn to the ways in which the variations of this linguistic medium mediate between speakers of different indigenous languages on one hand, and construct hierarchical relations based on morality on the other.

The English language has a social and political history of alienating and distancing second- and third-language speakers from 'mainstream' cultural practices. Laughter, or derisive constructions of humour, sets up relations in which the speaker who does not get it 'right' is situated in a position of intellectual (and cultural) inferiority. The proliferation of visual stereotypes that correlate African-ness to inanity based on the use of the English linguistic medium bears implications on relations between Africans, creating seemingly light-hearted yet potentially violent mechanisms of estrangement.

For example, the reception of Nollywood films by South African audiences is generally characterised by a kind of derision.

Mostly, Nigerian video-films that are distributed in South Africa are English language and Pidgin films (or have English subtitles). The South African colonial and Apartheid experience has led to a cultural situation where English second-language (ESL) speakers who are not able to speak English fluently are seen as socially inferior and are systematically circumscribed as naive or foolish. ESL speakers are laughed at (and laugh at each other) for various grammatical 'mistakes', direct indigenous language translations and even noticeable indigenous language accents that texture the pronunciation of English words. Although it can be argued that contemporary cultural practices in South Africa have shifted towards embracing local and international African indigenous languages as well as the deliberate misuse/reconfiguration of English, this change of perceptions is also still subject to class differentiation[209]. The popularisation of Nollywood in English and Pidgin in South African social dynamics creates sites where difference is acknowledged but it also divulges (existing) moments of dissonance (and sometimes arrogance).

Here, Plato's superiority theory and incongruity theory can be applied. John Morreall (1983: 13) draws from Plato's work, and explains that "we laugh at, that is ridicule, persons in the superiority theory when we feel superior to them in physical prowess, intelligence or some other human feature, and prompted by this feeling show a contemptuous lack of respect for them in our actions". He points out that "what makes a person laughable is self-ignorance but the proper object of laughter is human evil and folly" (Morreall 1983: 13). This theory maintains that laughter involves malice. Humour that is based on variant uses of English and Pidgin in Nollywood means that the misapprehension that confounds it in specific contexts undermines the film's intentions. For instance, Nollywood films that are marketed as thrillers or horror can sometimes be received as farcical or comic because of Pidgin or English appropriation. An example is the solemn film featuring Osita Iheme and Chinedu Ikidieze as "Village Destroyers". The narrative is a grave account about a series of deaths that result from the acts of two

[209] There is a sense that formally educated, urban-based English second-language speakers can 'switch' between accents (for humorous exchange) whereas there are stereotypes of working class, formally uneducated ESL speakers who remain in a socially inferior position of being laughed at.

disobedient boys whose malicious father consults a dubious *Babalawo*[210] to destroy a man who reprimanded them. These dialogues, taken from serious scenes in the film, become comical:

a) In a scene Mr Ibu scolds his son, shouting "don't come and torment me for my workshop, O! I will eliminate you, I will kill you", and his son responds: "but Papa, it's good now, It's good, it will bring more money".
b) In a different scene Mr Ibu's son, Mo, scolds his father: "Papa! I don't like the way you embarrass my wife and I yesterday". Mr Ibu responds: "You are very stupid. Can you go and carry a woman six times your size and say you are going to marry her. Do you want to kill yourself?"
c) Another conversation that proceeds from *Village Destroyers* between two village men: an elder enquires "what is the problem?" The man responds "my eyes have seen my nose . . . I sent my daughter to fetch me water, our stream has turned to blood, she came back to tell me, I didn't believe her. I was almost cutting off my neck until I went there and saw with my two eyes".[211]

Given that humour is culture specific, it can be said that in other contexts humour in response to these dialogues arises primarily from the use of language (direct translations of proverbs and expressions) and secondarily from the content. The initial urge to 'correct' the speaker is indicative of the way in which English usage creates a chasm (a spatial metaphor) between classes and between cultures.

The incongruous use of words such as 'torment' and 'eliminate' in these situations may incite laughter in a different context. A history of using pompous, over-elaborate words is, according to Odumosu (1990: 46) related to post-colonial social stratification of Nigerian socio-economic life. This use of words can be linked to uses of bombast in Nigeria. Diri Teilanyo (2003: 86) argues that the English language was needed by nationalists who fought for independence "to negotiate self-government" but they "had the attitude of 'revelling in their own command of English'". Drawing from Ali Mazrui, Teilanyo (2003: 86) further notes that:

> in the initial stages of the Western impact, an African in British Africa was regarded as 'an intellectual' if he had acquired some fluency in the English language . . . . It was the status of having acquired the master

[210] A *babalawo* is a priest of Ifa
[211] *Village Destroyers* (2001) Dir.

> language itself. Command of the English language was often used as a criterion of one's level of education.

The exhibitionist use of the English language in the post-colonial context meant that "English gained [the] status as the main factor in 'social stratification'" (Teilanyo 2003: 86). Bombast is now considered, in literary texts and in popular media, to be a comical feature.

A film directed by Ernest Obi entitled *Military Command* begins with a scene in which a man is being beaten by his wife, saying "I will kill you today". The main character, a military officer called Obodu, arrives in a village. In order to prove that he is coming from a different place rather than the village and that his 'moral values' differ from those of the villagers, he speaks pompous English. He addresses one of the villagers as follows: "are you by any chance insinuating dialogue with me?", "you bloody civilian, you dare challenge my authority within this vicinity", and "how dare you contaminate my apparel with your stigmatised stump of a hand". Desperate to show to the villagers that he has been 'out of the country', Obudu asserts "advance to enemy territory, by the orders conferred on me by the queen". In this scene, humour functions divisively and differentiates between Obudu and the villagers where the villagers are cast as naïve and imprudent people. Since Obudu is saying absurd and incoherent statements, the joke is not only on the villagers but also on Africans who 'imitate' Western mannerisms and get them 'wrong'.

Obudu continues, stating that he is "looking for weapons of mass destruction in your vicinity [and] charging both of [the attendants] for insubordination and lack of coordination in dispatching your authority". Obodu shouts that there is "no excuse for insubordination" in the army but soon realises the villager he is talking to is his brother. His brother speaks Pidgin English and says "Did not return when mama and papa died and married a woman who used juju to tie you down, we thought you were in the Congo where they used you for pepper soup". His brother is usually beaten by his wife and so Obudu asserts that "nobody will terrorise [his] brother in this vicinity . . . if [he] can deal with Osama single-handedly who is Dorcas. I am in your territory now". Obudu stages a fantastic performance of difference as he pretends to have been part of the British military as well as the U.S. military. His lies come across as an acerbic attack on the anecdote that most Africans who leave for Europe or America come back to tell fantastic

stories about their experiences abroad rather than negative stories of marginalisation or enmity against foreigners.

The English language medium also instigates a kind of self-estrangement (the practice or performance of speaking English is described above as a vanity exercise because it is seen as a language of superiority or performing difference), and a proactive means of distancing or differentiating oneself from those in the likeness of self. An 'expert' in the English language came to be defined as one who is familiar with the least familiar words of the language (Mazrui 1975: 150, Teilanyo 2003: 6). Speaking bombast produces an inflated sense of self as superior to others. What complicates the superiority theory is that the bombaster is, in this case, seen as a buffoon – an object of mockery. The buffoon in Nollywood, like Mr Ibu, is positioned as a subject who lacks linguistic fluency, unlike the jester who is able to manipulate language for clever political humour. Robbed of real subjectivity, contracted as a pacifier and as a distraction from the specificity of the real (socio-political issues are often generalised/depoliticised), the buffoon speaks a foreign language in the local and foreign space. While this distance licenses, to a certain extent, freedoms to speak the unspeakable, it also rids the buffoon of reputable agency. The political potency of the buffoon is compromised through linguistic limitations which reduce him or her to a reproducible, hollow entity. Since the buffoon in Nollywood is incapable of logical communication, she/he becomes easily disregarded (far-removed) even if the (immersed) social role seeks to excavate deep-seated politically-defined prejudices.

While language connects individuals, it also configures a distancing difference, an abyss of misapprehension. The buffoon, generally a social outcast, is foreign. For the foreigner, the language of the host incapacitates her/him because it blurs points of reference. Kristeva (1991: 31) observes that "the foreigner stumbles over the language of the host" and that:

> lacking the reigns of the maternal tongue, the foreigner who learns a new language is capable of the most unforeseen audacities when using it . . . for often the loquacious and "liberated" foreigner (in spite of his accent and grammatical lapses he does not hear) stocks a ghostly world with his second and secondary discourse. As in hallucination, his verbal constructs – learned or shocking – are centred in a void, dissociated from both body and passions . . . the foreigner can utter all sorts of indecencies without being shaken by any repugnance . . . since his unconscious shelters itself on the other side of the border.

I borrow Mikhael Bakhtin's notion of extralocality as a means to map outsideness within and to analyse how humour and mockery function within the politically complex contexts of African nations. The potency of political subjectivity for the buffoon is trivialised by this (linguistic) 'outsideness'. For Bakhtin (1981: 99) "the contingency that governs events is inseparably tied up with space, measured primarily by distance on the one hand and by proximity on the other". Humour within this milieu can then be seen as a way to bring what would otherwise be rejected closer but without real mutual confrontation. Language becomes the cage that distinguishes between the performer who is protected by it and the viewer who is restricted or bound by it.

3.2.2: Dehumanising the Buffoon

The factor that locates the buffoon at a distance from social cohesion is both linguistic and visual. The physical appearance of the characters casts them visually as fantastic characters. Mr Ibu's awkwardly plump body, Mo's dwarfish size, the girlfriend's large posterior and the overbite that betrays her large teeth present them as marginal or as grotesque. Mr Ibu is child-like in his understanding of the world. Mo's mischief is adult-like. The merging of naivete and adult accountability affords mobility across moral boundaries. This mobility is also a retreat from social functionality and represents the buffoon as grotesque.

In an interview, John Okafor (Mr Ibu) is asked if his performance or playing the role of the fool involves "elements of [his] natural idiocy". Okafor responds:

> But I am stupid, or am I not? Do you know why I chose to be an idiot? Idiocy is a very quiet animal. It doesn't look for trouble and it doesn't have enemies. The animal has very unique characters. Idiocy is always on its own, and it paves the way for other smaller animals[212].

Although seemingly a nonchalant, puerile response, this statement could be interpreted as sarcasm and as parody of the buffoon stereotype. The statement that idiocy is "a very quiet animal" alludes to the buffoon as less human. Morreall (1983: 4) notes that one of the oldest theories of laughter espouses the concept that "in heavy laughter . . . we lose rational control of ourselves, and so become less than fully human". Loud laughter and loud crying are seen as forms of hysteria that differentiate between classes and between

[212] http://www.nigeriamovies.net/news/news201.php accessed 16/03/11

'rational' and 'irrational' people who enjoy 'toilet' humour. The transformation of the buffoon into a grotesque being entails systematically repressive ways of alienating that which resides within. This idea is reminiscent of Bakhtin's discussion on Rabelaisian performances in which he describes the "disowning" of the contents of the carnivalesque as a lower culture: "it encoded all that which the proper bourgeois must strive not to be in order to preserve a stable and 'correct' sense of self" (Stallybrass and White 1993: 290). In an almost ghostly dimension, these dynamics manifest in the renunciation of, in very general terms and inaptly so, the idea of the 'rural' African. Buffoons that otherwise seem mindless or not worthy of scrutiny easily become indices of specific group identities. They become a repository of social ills, some of which can only be confronted if they are disowned and isolated. Buffoons mirror the negative aspects of the local; they may represent what the bourgeois should strive not to be, but they also reflect what the bourgeois are (what is repressed)[213]. Though contestable, these sentiments urge the question regarding constructed hierarchies amongst proletarians under national confines.

The position of the fool, though compromised, seems to represent certain liberties. The jester/fool is defined as "irreverent, libertine, self-indulgent, witty, clever, roguish, he is the fool as court jester, the fool as companion, the fool as goad to the wise and challenge to the virtuous, the fool as critic of the world". The ambiguities of this kind of comic yet political power within Nollywood are diluted with a history of battling the stereotype of inferiority, which, in cultural representation, seems to not be just a separated event or a playfully performed role but also comes across as deeply entrenched in everyday practices.

Nollywood humour always implies a certain level of contempt directed at the buffoon. This process suggests subtle kinds of violence. In *Village Destroyers*, laughter is always an assault. The key character, Nwabueze, is distanced from the immediate community through laughter. Laughter is the primary assault on him. The dwarfish mischievous 'children' initially mock Nwabueze, who reports them to their father. Instead of reprimanding them, their father retaliates by creating bases upon which Nwabueze can

[213] Xenophobic attacks in South Africa seemed to be catharsis related to the inability to be politically competent in processes of socio-economic assertion. The illusory superiority formed through negative stereotyping became threatened as it seemed those who are the spectacle at the margins, those who could be easily laughed at, had now been seen as economically competent.

be turned into the village's laughing stock. Nwabueze is isolated from village elders, since he is not an 'able-bodied man'. The source of humour and ridicule dissolves when the childless Nwabueze finally fathers a child. Laughter becomes the first step that leads Nwabueze to madness. His madness makes him blissfully ignorant of the brutal violence that is waged against his family. Surpassing this trauma necessitates the detachment/suspension of the conscious from this reality. During his madness, his wife is unfairly sentenced to death by hanging and his newborn baby is left in a forest to die. Nwabueze is incapable of mourning, incapable of lamentation; he only laughs in the ecstasy of his own soliloquies. He is the unintentional source of amusement for children. At a point where he is confronted with the boys and the Babalawo, he laughs at them as they walk away. His laughter is followed by their slow decomposition. The two boys begin to rot. Their limbs swell as their bodies decay. The spectacle and hysteria of laughter as a form of coercing the fantastic constructs a theatre of cruelty that treats madness with madness.

In this narrative, laughter is amongst descriptors of bodily life (eating, drinking, copulation and defecation). Laughter is profane, subversive and immodest, inferring certain dangers, and is meant to produce a counter-discourse. Film gives one permission to laugh at what the collective conscious does not allow to be unveiled (Barlet 2000). Humour in Nollywood video-film operates alongside tragedy and the supernatural. Barlet (2000: 130) illustrates this notion by stating that "there is a sense that comedy in the African context is one side of the coin. Tragedy is the other". This realisation alludes to the sentiment by Tobin Siebers (1984: 103) that "we begin by laughing at the fools only to realise, ultimately, that we are of their number". It is this sense of the uncanny that makes humour in Nollywood video-film peculiar.

Okafor's (Mr Ibu) refrain: "but I am stupid", is self-critical but suggests that the actor becomes immersed in the performed role in such a way that the distinction between the fictional and real personage becomes blurred[214]. Buffoons in films such as *Mr. Ibu* set up situations which initially appear to appeal to African audiences as a way of laughing at the local other but are also constructed as a way of laughing at ourselves. Morreall (1983: 12) notes that in this situation "a person learns to regard himself as though he

[214] The jester in most traditional performances bears a sacrosanct status such as the Yorùbá Eshu (trickster god)

were someone else . . . he then proceeds to smile amiably at the antics and predicaments which accrue to his alter ego". Laughter is Nollywood video-film is fantastic in that it is hybrid: it seems to be constituted of the same emotions as crying and weeping. Laughter at the effects of colonialism or military rule as well as class-differentiating and xenophobic derisive laughter in Nollywood video-film comes across as a form of mourning.

The notion that Africans have experienced great loss forms part of the rhetoric suggesting that Nollywood video-film needs to be cleared of themes of buffoonery such as the ones described above in order to be regarded a 'national cinema'. This demonstrates the power of representation. Nollywood video-film seems to define the geographic place of Nigeria as a nation, and themes of buffoonery and the supernatural are assumed to represent its moral values. In this next section, I discuss the complexity of defining Nollywood as a 'national cinema'.

4: Parameters of 'National Cinema' and the Surfeit of Nollywood

It seems inappropriate to define Nollywood as a national cinema because the industry has been independent of ideological nationalising cultural forms. Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike (1994: 141) asserts that "in the 1960s the conservative, bureaucratic and 'traditionalist' class blocked the establishment of the cultural policy needed to expand and strengthen creative potential . . . and [concretize] the nation's cultural identity". State participation in Nigeria's film industry through the three governmental agencies, namely, the Film Unit, the National Film Corporation (NFC) and the National Film Distribution Company (NFDC), seems to have been evident during the 1970s and 1980s (Diawara 1996: 121). However, it was compromised by the nation's economic contingencies in the 1980s during which the increasing crime rates, the low output and the decreasing oil prices led to a decline in the total market value of goods and services. It can be argued that Nollywood carved the industry almost independently of national cultural programmes. The seemingly egalitarian structure in Nollywood, however, operates under otherwise repressive systems.

Given this, how would one conceptualise Nollywood as a national cinema? In his four-tier discourse on the concept of a national cinema, Andrew Higson (1989: 36–37)

suggests an economic approach, a text-based approach, an exhibition-led or consumption-based approach and a criticism-led approach. The economic approach looks at questions such as the ownership and control of the industry, whereas the text-based approach is concerned with the construction of 'nationhood' in the film narratives. The consumption-based approach analyses audiences by comparison to foreign films (such as American films), and the criticism-led approach reduces "national cinema to the terms of a quality art cinema . . . or modernist heritage of a particular nation state" (Higson 1989: 36–37). For Higson (1989: 37), "to identify a national cinema is first of all to specify a coherence and a unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and stable set of meanings". Using these prescriptive approaches, Nollywood appears to be, at least at the moment, anything but a national cinema. Arguably, that distance from the 'state' is what lends Nollywood a vaguely political character as the people's expression about socio-political circumstances. Although Nollywood is perceived as apolitical, its use of populist ideology dissolves the cynicism of paternalistic distinctions.

While the national question is the process (of differentiation) of constructing autonomous moral values, Nollywood might best be characterised as a form of film that deconstructs the concept of nation or national space. Hollywood, by comparison, makes its viewers conscious of the U.S. nationality, its government, and its military 'triumphs' over other nations, and distinguishes itself in film as a nation of democratic and liberal moral good. Representation of the nation to *other* countries is significant. My final section in this chapter focuses on the definition of Nollywood as transnational and the concept of 'global Nollywood'.

5: Nollywood: Representations of Global and Local Space

Globalisation is an occult of marvellous fictions (Gabeba Baderoon)[215]

Nollywood is produced and consumed globally. Its production is no longer logistically dependent on the geographical specificity of Nigeria or of Africa, for that matter (that is, there are producers who reside and make Nollywood films in South Africa, Gambia, Ghana, the U.S. and the U.K. amongst other places which are filming and distribution

[215] Baderoon, G. 2013. Discussion at Roundtable entitled 'Trash Fows, Trashy Tropes, and New Ways of Reading African Cinema" at the African Studies Association meeting, 23/11/2013, Baltimore, U.S.A

locations). Nonetheless, it draws largely from social and cultural practices that are specific to the Nigerian context. Nollywood has also been described by Moradewun Adejunmobi (2007) as a "minor transnational product" which African diasporas recognise as a product from "home". It can be argued that Nollywood is an exploration of the inequitable material conditions that people find themselves in across boundaries. It is not only produced, distributed and consumed abroad but also deals with themes of international travel. Representations of the 'world out there' and 'home' in Nollywood video-film are characterised by the fantasy of travelling abroad from home, and for those in the diaspora there is a desire to return home.

The hair salons, small cafés, and international Pentecostal churches through which Nollywood is disseminated internationally are intriguing and localising spaces. Okome (2007: 388) also refers to local "sites of consumption" on the street or "video parlour" and points out that these are "*ad hoc* spaces of seeing". Okome (2003b: 389) distinguishes between "the 'street corner' and the 'video parlour' audiences" in public male-dominated urban spaces. Street corner audiences stand throughout the screening or watch part of it and walk by. Video parlours are set up for seated watching (Okome 2003b: 389). These local spaces screen Nollywood video-films from television screens. The television set, both in the private home and in public spaces, is a way of seeing 'the world out there'. As Oluyinka Esan (2009: 323) points out, "television has facilitated excursions to distant countries". The television, therefore, is a medium that represents the world as fantasy and constructs desire.

In the video-film entitled *Dubai Runs* (2007) by MacCollins, Chidebe young women are lured into joining a Nigerian businesswoman who travels to Dubai regularly and makes a fortune from her travels. The young women are not told what kind of business it is, but they fantasise about travelling and making money. When they reach Dubai, they are kept in a hotel room until the businesswoman tells them that they have to 'earn their keep'. They discover that she is a sex-worker and in order for them to 'earn their keep' they would have to prostitute themselves. In this film, associations of international travel are associated with wealth, but also with exploitation. Travelling abroad in Nollywood is sometimes cast in a negative light, where characters are faced with moral decisions in order to survive. My discussion in Chapter 1 about Osuofia's return in *Osuofia in London* is a case in point.

In his analysis of the representations of “Africans abroad” or, more specifically, Nigerians abroad, Jonathan Haynes (2013: 74) points out that there are initiatives in the U.S.A and the U.K. through whch Nollywood filmmakers can produce films abroad using Hollywood facilities (in the case of the U.S.A). However, he also observes that, in most of these films, the representation of foreign countries is “a figment of the Nigerian imagination” (Haynes 2013: 75) where filmmakers produce most of the scenes of Dubai, for example, in Nigeria, but will show a few establishing shots of Dubai. I find that this element draws attention to the flattening or universalising principle in film. Interiors of hotels, motels and modern apartments in Nigeria could look similar to those in Dubai or other cities in America and Europe. In representation, it need not matter if the interior spaces of the film are *actually* filmed in foreign locations. Public spaces in some cities where there are iconic buildings or statues act as narrative reference. The representation of the effects of globalisation in Nollywood is complex. The compression of space, integration and capital flows caused by globalisation imply increasing homogeneity, dispossession, unemployment and unequal distribution of wealth. In this way, similarity (international hotel brands) is coupled with difference. The monopolies of international trade lead to unequal economic development.

The fact that Nollywood began through the import of empty VHS cassettes on to Nigerian markets or that Nollywood uses or ‘imports’ Hollywood movie titles (*Warrior’s Heart*, *Waiting to Exhale*, etc.) is appropriation with difference. Nollywood is fascinating because it represents the difference that unequal economic development produces: it presents two versions of a film under the same title but executed under different conditions.

Brian Larkin (2000: 218) asserts that “video culture is constituted by a simultaneous burgeoning of cultural production at the global and local levels”. For Larkin (2000: 218), “what has been eroded in this moment of the global and the local is the position of the national”. What makes the representation of space in Nollywood video-film fantastic is its representation of the national or local space as space constituted of other spaces abroad or global space. Whether these spaces are fabricated, constructed or represented by imported products and cultures, they nevertheless represent the fantastic nature of contemporary socio-economic situations. The dream of a better life

in the U.S.A or in the U.K. in video-film is juxtaposed with realities of the marginalisation of migrants, the difficulty of surviving economically abroad and cultural alienation.

Video-film often depicts the movement of proletarians who aspire to be wealthy and find that their economic situation cannot change within the confines of the nation. Nollywood is an indirect representation of the failure of the state. Andre Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani (2001: 2) argue that "with the crisis of old mechanisms of identification, as nation-states seem to be losing their monopoly over the moral resources of community formation, new forms of transnational 'fix' emerge from this flux, escaping or defying their control". Corten and Marshal-Fratani (2001: 2) emphasise that:

> in the developing world, the failed promises of the nation-state concerning modernisation have resulted in the de-legitimisation of their 'mega-rhetoric of development' and have opened the field to the work of imagination of everyday individuals, fuelled by images, ideas, resources from elsewhere, to re-script their lives, both individually and collectively, finding new ways to appropriate and inscribe themselves within global modernity.

The connections forged by key players in the Nollywood industry worldwide has resulted in upward mobility and increased transnationalism. It is reminiscent of the statement made by Marx and Engels (1977) that "since the proletariat . . . must constitute itself as the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word". Video-film is an example of how the proletarians in Nigeria are mobilising and are also producing images regarding the complexity of everyday struggles.

Conclusion

Karl Maier (2000) opines that Nigeria "drift[s] across our television screens and into the world's public consciousness, only to fade back out again". It may be argued that the conceptualisation of Nigeria is complicated by the traffic of negative images. Through its representation of domestic/local and international spaces, Nollywood can be seen as a significant medium through which contemporary issues of migration and diasporic identity are negotiated. Furthermore, it depicts the ways in which the reinforcement of moral values through local socio-cultural practices is made complex through the 'screening' of other worlds on the television.

Profound spaces, as proposed in this chapter, are fantastic spaces. Particular places such as homes, the market, or sacred land facilitate the shaping of 'a way of life' and are constituted by simultaneous imaginaries of other places. The domestic house, for example, is represented in Nollywood video-film as a place where the desire of things that are 'out there' is constructed. The depiction of these places shows how negotiations of so-called moral values in video-film are dependent on places that symbolise the complexity of modernisation and contemporary cultures.

This complexity also surfaces in the representation of places such as the village and the city as dichotomous concepts. In Nollywood video-film they are dialectical. I argue that the one is an anecdote of the other. Moreover, the movement from the village to the city is an extended metaphor of the movement between African cities ad American and European cities. The rhetoric of a 'better life' in the cities is transformed into the nightmare of the city as symbol of cultural decay, alienation and social fragmentation.

This kind of social fragmentation is also represented in Nollywood video-film as the failure of the state to create inclusive public spaces, equal distribution of wealth and social cohesiveness. Video-film therefore represents the nation-state as absent but represented through various 'chiefs' and leaders who achieve power through cults. The criminalisation of the leaders of the state characterises the nation-state as grotesque. Some of the issues in Nollywood video-film include the way in which its use of humour may be seen to perpetuate negative stereotypes. I have discussed how xenophobic sentiments in South Africa sometimes contribute to how Nollywood is read. Humour, therefore, can be seen as violent and derisive, as it emphasises difference in imagined national identities.

Nollywood video-film also depicts spaces outside of Nigeria's borders. Nollywood is not only produced, distributed and consumed in Nigeria but also globally. The transnational movement of Nollywood practitioners enables access to various facilities to make quality films. The representation of places abroad in Nollywood, however, is merged with local space. This compression or collage of places can be seen as metaphor for the difficulties faced by migrants and diasporic communities abroad.

This chapter instigates debate in the process of re-conceptualising the interception of moral values and spatiality in Nollywood. Themes of Nollywood draw out narratives of

domination and marginalisation, alienation and displacement, where people seek to move from one place to another (from the village to the city, from being local urbanites to being cosmopolitans, from poverty to riches, from earth or hell to heaven). Nollywood films deal with taboos and moral principles. They are stories that contend the margin, the border or the boundary to break up conventional sets of meaning, and to provoke and re-create the way Nigeria’s geography and demography are perceived.

Images

Fig. 120: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Phyllis* (2010), video-still

Fig. 121: Zina Saro-Wiwa, Phyllis (2010), video-still

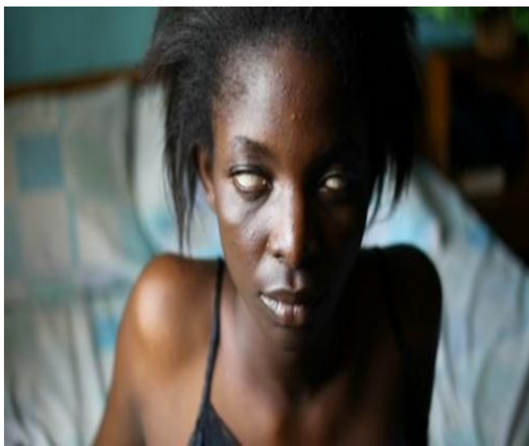

Fig. 122: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Phyllis* (2010), video-still

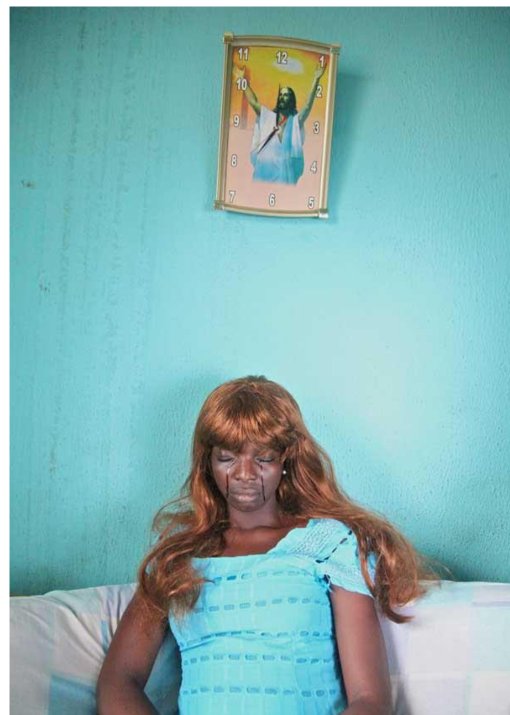

Fig. 123: Zina Saro-Wiwa, *Phyllis* (2010), video-still

Fig. 124: *Issakaba* poster

Fig. 125: *Burning Market* (2007)

Fig. 126: Soil from sacred land in *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1995)

Fig. 127: Church in the city in *40 days in the Wilderness* (2005)

Fig. 128: Disciples in the forest in *40 days in the Wilderness* (2005)

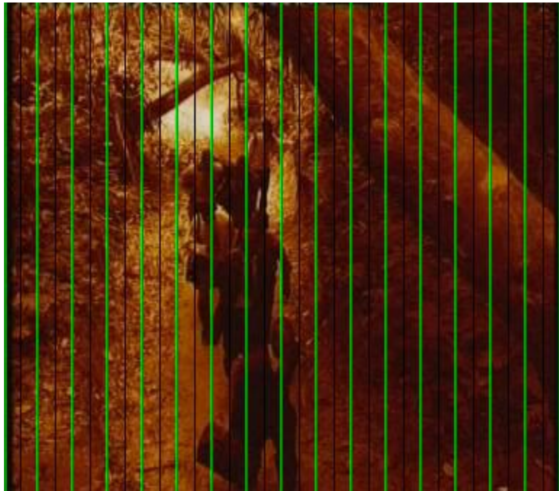

Fig. 129: Disciples through Kubala's eyes in in *40 days in the Wilderness* (2005)

Fig. 130: Villagers welcome city to disciples to village in *40 days in the Wilderness* (2005)

Conclusion

Although video-film is generally not regarded as an artistic medium in conventional art history, video and performance have become important media in contemporary art. In this thesis, I approach the fantastic in Nollywood through considering conventional art media such as the wooden sculptures that are depicted in Nollywood video-film and painting in the form of hand-painted posters. I also consider contemporary artistic media and interventionist strategies such as photography (Pieter Hugo), video (Zina Saro-Wiwa), performance and installation (Zina Saro-Wiwa) through which Nollywood images are appropriated and sometimes interpreted. Video-film has been regarded as a medium/ instrument that only records performance such as itinerant theatre and church theatre but consequently came to be accepted as a filmic medium in its own right. Video-film, therefore, blurs distinctions between film/ video art or popular culture/ art and questions the very basis on which such distinctions are made. Furthermore, the embeddedness of video-film in theocentric symbolism means that the video-film medium is not only regarded simply as a medium of representation but also a medium that has supernatural potency or one that plays a role in changing social attitudes towards issues such as 'witchcraft'. This also shows how constructions of space and time in Nollywood video-film symbolise the profundity of the fantastic in the arts of Africa.

1: Nollywood's Fantastic in an Art History of African Creative Practice

The fantastic in Nollywood video-film is multifarious. Its conspicuous presence necessitates a critical theoretical approach to the limitations of terms and distinctions that were inherited from traditional Western art history and theory such as art/visual culture or art/popular culture. Within the art history disiclipline new media, such as video art and performance art have received attention as intervetions that subvert the traditional tenets of art history and address emergent socio-economic issues. Nollywood reveals how the fantastic is operative in everyday life and, defies the categorisation of art as something that is exclusive. An art history of African arts should not only be bound with institutionalisation processes of creative practices (museums, galleries, collections, professionalisation, etc.) but should consider art as lived,

momentary and interventionist. Through its production of intriguing imagery and performances, Nollywood video-film shifts the focus to creativity that is not monopolised by a few and does not only create a novel visual language but a multi-sensory experience.

In discussing the visual language of Nollywood, I have identified four aspects of the video-film medium that influence interpretations of the fantastic. These aspects, namely repetition, temporality, textuality and music, are not exhaustive. Rather than being seen in video-film as a technical flaw or poor artistic imagination, repetition in Nollywood can rather be read in the context of repetition in art, generally. Repetition is significant in the way that it symbolises the on-going, open-ended transformation in the process of meaning-making. In this way, its use and portrayal of time is important.

The representation of limitless time in Nollywood can also be read within the context of art. Time in Nollywood is continuous and denotes social class. That is, time spent by the middle class is depicted differently from time spent by proletarians and vagrants. Moreover, Nollywood subverts the elitist notion that 'art' takes time to produce. Its contradictions, the fact that it portrays endless time but is regarded as 'low' form of culture because most productions are made quickly, illuminate the inconsistency of the principles that govern what is to be regarded as art. Rather than regarding the way in which time is used in Nollywood as uneconomic and banal, I argue that, because Nollywood is received as part of everyday life rather than as an isolated cultural ritual (such as going to a gallery or going to the cinema), it becomes contemporaneous with everyday life. Banality is more an aspect of contemporary life and a symptom of urban socio-economic dynamics rather than an inherent characteristic of the video-film medium.

The other aspects (text and music) characterise video-film as a practice that not only emphasises sight but other senses as well. Nollywood is often played loudly in places such as barber shops, and is therefore sometimes experienced as audio. Brian Larkin (2008) finds the 'shocking' loudness of Nollywood audio significant. The fantastic in Nollywood is not merely a collage of images but also an audio-visual socio-cultural experience.

Text and music are important aspects of the Nollywood visual language. For example, the text on the screen is not only interpretive but visually intriguing. Given that sub-titling in some films often does not reflect the exact situation, sub-titles fail to function as interpretive and are thus not only supplementary to the image but form part of the image. Music is significant in that it serves an interpretive function for the visual narrative. The lyrics explain the 'moral of the story'. As a basis for art historical writing, visual analysis must be supplemented with analyses of audio and other compositional aspects, if not re-configured, in reading representations of the fantastic in Nollywood.

Imagery of recurring fantastic themes such as 'magic', 'fetishism', violence and power are not only crucial to understanding the popularity of Nollywood but also in comprehending the contemporary complexity in which international economic and cultural situations contribute to the seemingly localised fantastic everyday. The consistent depiction of magic, 'witchcraft', occultism, fetishism and gratuitous violence in Nollywood is therefore seen as regressive. As terms that have been appropriated in European modernity to connote inferiority and primitiveness, the use of 'magic' and 'fetish' to describe African, Asian and Oceanic arts has made it difficult to accept the fantastic as part of rational thought in contemporary Africa.

The economy created out of the fetishisation of traditional African art in Western museums reflects the fetishisation of art generally. Concepts of 'magic' and 'fetish' cannot easily be divorced from the arts. Art objects and art practices are given excessive value, constituted of desire and fantasy, and attributed with power. Therefore, Nollywood's fascination with these themes should not necessarily mean that video-film is not artistic or that it is regressive. Rather than rejecting the fantastic as primitivist in the process of 'decolonising' African culture, there is a need for a shift in perspective. The fantastic in Western creative practices is acceptable because it does not carry such historical weight. The condescending association of the fantastic themes in African creative practices with primitivism should not necessitate the rejection of such themes but a critical analysis of how they form part of belief systems *and* interpretations of current affairs.

2: Politics of Quality

Given that the kind of social value that is granted to art is based on concepts of authenticity, originality and provenance, contemporary cultural practice questions the manufacture of value within the context of unequal economic development. Nollywood video-film is plagued by piracy and discs that are generally regarded to be copies rather than originals. The economy of the copy in Nollywood subverts the hierarchy/ cult of the original. The postmodernist discourse of the copy surmises that in the post-industrial, post-Fordist age there is a loss of an original. Contemporary art and cultural practice criticises the notion or possibility of originality and authenticity. In African art, repetitive reproduction is a significant aesthetic element but it is also the reason that traditional Western art history regards African art practice as craft that is inferior to 'original art'. The discourse of the copy and representation of 'kitsch' in Nollywood video-film should shift from a criminalising discourse (bootlegging, theft of ideas, etc.) to one that recognises interventionist appropriation. The Nollywood phenomenon subverts notions of private property, authenticity and cult of personality (artists). The perception that video-film is of 'low-quality' is interpred in this study as a political class-based classification rather than a neutral characteristic.

Nollywood video-film is judged against other forms of film-making that are 'aesthetically pleasing'. Video-film, however, forces us to not look for the 'aesthetically pleasing' but the 'aesthetically intriguing'. The issue of quality in Nollywood is often blamed on the use of the video-film medium and, as I have shown, there is a sentiment that if films were shot on celluloid they would be of better quality. However, the video-film medium with its 'low-quality' images is precisely the reason why Nollywood gained the type of popularity that it has. It may be seen as anti-aesthetic or anti-art, but video-film urges one to question the normalisation of certain types of representation against which it is judged.

If one considers other media such as video art, the principles of differentiation are inconsistent. Although I do not make a strict comparison between video-film and video art in the thesis, I do discuss Zina Saro-Wiwa's use of video art to interpret video-film. Video-art often adopts an anti-aesthetic approach and is usually looped and repetitive. Therefore, in some ways it does share a few similarities with video-film. Through video

art, artists can capitalise on the technical 'glitches'. The differentiation between high and low forms of culture, it would seem, is not based on different elements of representation or even an issue of quality but on *who* produces. The arts are, arguably, governed by the fantastic in the sense that the concept of 'artist' conventionally means that an artist is someone who is given a supernatural gift in order to produce transcendental artwork through the use of illusion.

The acceptance of video and performance as artistic media seems limited to types of video art and performance art made in certain circumstances. Video art is generally consumed by (mostly middle class art followers) whereas video-film is regarded as something that is produced and consumed by proletarians or unemployed youth. Video-film – the use of video and performance – may be categorised differently because it seems to belong to cinematic practice (as an inferior form thereof) and because it is not made by *artists*. Nollywood video-film draws attention to collectively constructed creative public interventions that respond directly to volatile political and economic situations.

The rapid shift in the Nigerian economy from agriculture to oil created fertile ground for the conspicuous display of oil wealth in a manner suggestive of the Western fetishism of commodities and concepts of money as magical and self-reproducing. Oil wealth seemed 'magical' in that it seemed to appear from nowhere or from no labour. But national debts deepened by the Structural Adjustment Programmes created dire situations in which many were dispossessed of wealth. For this and many other reasons, the display of wealth in Nigeria appears fantastic. In this thesis, I discuss how the video-film phenomenon captures the simultaneous manufacture of desire and fear in the public sphere that results from fragile socio-economic situations. Video-film materialised from other art forms that were also dealing with similar issues. The travelling theatre troupes, or *Alarinjo*, used to perform plays with fantastic themes. Practitioners of the travelling theatre and those of the National Television Association (NTA) were amongst the pioneers of Nollywood video-film.

Although many pioneer Nollywood practitioners were from the travelling theatre and television, the view that video-film is a product made by businessmen who had no

intention to produce video-film as an art form has contributed to the devaluation of Nollywood. The ease with which video-film is categorised as popular culture, maintaining the same hierarchy where art is high culture and popular art is low culture, is interrogated. I suggest that, even though Nollywood video-film is defined as a 'culture of the masses', it should not be devalued. The valuing of art, based on the notion of a single artist, does not adequately explain experimental, interactive, collective and ephemeral artistic interventions. If contemporary performative and interactive art depends on people's spontaneous reactions in order for that art to come to life, be perceivable and have an ontological status, then does it belong to one artist or is it 'a people's art'? The notion of value, taste and quality cannot be accepted as neutral but necessitates consciousness of continual power shifts through which taste and value are constructed. The hierarchy in which artists are god-like as opposed to 'the masses' is subverted through the exploration of process-based, interventionist and collective creation of visual and performative artistic practices.

3: Theocentricity

The public sphere in Nigeria is infused with religious fanaticism. The long-standing tension between Christianity and Islamism is exacerbated by recent insurrectionist bombings. The Christian video-films that are made mostly in south and the Islamic video-films that are made in the north have existed alongside each other. I have focussed on the Christian films of south Nigeria to discuss their representations of the fantastic and construction of the supernatural. In the third chapter, I show how Nollywood is entrenched in theocentric symbolism. As I have argued, there is a theoconomy in which religion and politics are entangled in capitalist notions of progress. The notion of 'magical' money and commodity fetishism is present in the spectacularisation of religion.

Nollywood video-film is closely associated with Pentecostalism because Pentecostal pastors use them to evangelise and some productions are funded by churches. This relationship has contributed greatly to the Nollywood 'Halleluyah' thematic category. Moreover, it has established the Manichean narratives that dialectically link Christianity to 'witchcraft' and occultism. Christian video-films depend on images of evil and

occultism and function to 'show' symbolic transformation from good to evil through 'magic' or divine miracles. Pentecostalism is characterised by spectacle and the display of miracles where the poor are 'turned' rich or the evil are 'turned' good. The theoconomy within which Nollywood exists consists of exchanges of symbols that are facilitated by constructions of public fear and desire. Furthermore, these exchanges capitalise on failures of the state where the church creates livelihoods and associational life.

Churches, as depicted in Nollywood video-film, provide subterfuge. The rhetoric of war (between good and evil) and crisis necessitates the display of 'miracles' which are framed as a way to deal with contemporary predicaments. Dispossession, social instability and security, and changing concepts of gender are some of the contemporary problems that seem to have no resolution or can only be resolved through magic or miracles that churches provide. Nollywood video-film compares the magical transformations facilitated through occults with those facilitated by the church. These are depicted in such a way that joining occults seems inevitable for people who want to be wealthy and powerful but become trapped in the occult. Those who leave the occult or stop sacrificing members of their families are destined to die. In Nollywood video-film, the church is sometimes fashioned as the only way out. Moreover, occultism creates a crisis in which men who join must sacrifice their wives and children. In video-film, occultism threatens the notion of 'traditional' family and the church is represented as a way of rectifying that.

The fast-modernising ethnocentric traditions seem to be 'contaminated' by Western Christian modernism. Nollywood video-films represent Christianity as an antithesis to 'traditions' often conflated with 'witchcraft' and occultism. Nollywood epic video-films depicting exclusive, ethnic-specific, rural or semi-rural life can be interpreted as the rational-fantastic. As I propose in the thesis, the concept of the 'rational–fantastic' can be used to analyse representations of cosmologies and ethnocentrism in Nollywood video-film. The rational–fantastic defines the way in which the fantastic in indigenous cosmologies has a rationalising function. The representation of pristine traditional or pre-colonial utopias in epic video-films alludes to unique forms of the rational–fantastic which diverge into ethnicised categories. The ethnocentric categories of Nollywood,

namely, Igbo film, Yorùbá film and Hausa film, among others, denote the language that a film is made in as well as the issues pertaining to the 'traditions' and customs of that ethnicity.

Igbo epic film constructs pre-colonial utopias that are not necessarily based on actual historical fact but to be concerned with historicism. The construction of these utopias within the ambit of the present day is aimed at addressing present-day moral values by contrasting them with ideas of Igbo identity and values. The Yorùbá films, however, (Kelani's films in particular) present the need to preserve the religious principles of the Yorùbá cosmology and history without remaining in the past. In Kelani's films, contemporary predicaments that are created by urbanisation and capitalism can be addressed through Yorùbá belief systems and customs. These two different representations of cosmologies have a rationalising function in which modernity and urban life are deemed 'irrational'. The rational/irrational and urban/rural concepts are dialectically paired.

The depiction of kingdoms and chiefdoms, as I show, is prevalent in both Igbo and Yorùbá epics. In Igbo epics, Igbo kingdoms are contrasted with other Igbo kingdoms. In the Yorùbá epics, Yorùbá kingdoms and chiefdoms are contrasted with contemporary local-level leadership structures that are set up through national governance. Corruption, however, plagues both forms of leadership and a majority of leaders are depicted as power-hungry people who use 'witchcraft' to achieve wealth.

'Witchcraft' is also paired with born-again Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism fuels the concept of 'witchcraft'. Those who practice 'witchcraft', sorcery and occultism are usually 'saved' to be 'born again'. Once they are 'born again' they become pastors and church leaders. The apparent dichotomy between good and evil/Christianity and 'witchcraft' is destabilised. It further complicates the dichotomy between Christianity and indigenous religious beliefs/ cosmology where the latter is conflated with 'witchcraft' and regarded as primordial.

There are varying ways in which 'witchcraft' is depicted. One is the depiction of men who join occults to become wealthy or consult sorcerers to have power over their

enemies. The second is the portrayal of old or unmarried women and children as 'witches'. The issue of 'witchcraft' is problematic when conflated with cosmology and divination. Moreover, it is dangerous when it victimises children. I discuss video-films of the Liberty gospel church which are presented as truth or as testimony and documentaries of existing 'witchcraft'. They are also presented as 'rational' truth agaist 'irrational' supernatural powers. Zina Saro-Wiwa parodies this issue in her video art. My original analysis of Saro-Wiwa's video interrogates 'witchcraft' accusation of children against beliefs that children inhabit another realm in which they have power and come to earth to 'torment' adults. The overlap blurs distinctions between rational and irrational.

Nollywood video-film constructs the past and presents it as a fabrication or artefact, similar to the practices of the art history discipline. The past has social value through idealisation. The entanglement of historiography and mythology in Igbo and Yorùbá epics produce narratives that are presented as rational ways of thinking that have been inherited from the past to inform the present. I argue that time, as past, present, and future, is not just cyclical but labyrinthine. The appropriation of tropes of the past and the future can be powerful in interrogating political issues that persist into the present. I argue that Nollywood is ahistorical and this ahistoricism is significant because Nollywood interprets time as a maze through which the past, present and future can be simultaneously represented and experienced. Rather than presenting historical, linear, chronological facts, Nollywood video-film seems to be concerned with constructing socio-cultural values through the appropriation of tropes. Futuristic Nollywood animation also presents past as future and as present. Time, as interpreted in Nollywood video-film and animation, becomes 'rationalised' through the imagination and validation of narratives about the past and future.

4: Depth of Space in Nollywood

Nollywood video-film is everywhere in West Africa and common in Africa. This means that the images that Nollywood produces are not confined to certain specialised spaces (galleries and cinemas) but saturate the public and quasi-public places. Nollywood posters turn the urban space into a 'gallery'. The fantastic visual images construct the

urban space as a fantastic space. The final chapter interrogates spatial practices in Nollywood as ways of inscribing desire and fantasy. Nollywood carves a psycho-geography in which issues of class and gender are negotiated. Through my proposed concept of profound spaces, I argue that Nollywood circumscribes spaces which are critical in the construction of other concepts such as 'nation'. Profound spaces have depth through interspaces that symbolise fantastic spaces (spaces in which an ancestral, supernatural realm could be realised, for example). I use three examples, domestic spaces, the marketplace and ancestral land/heavenly polis.

Nollywood is called home video because at its beginning it was produced to be watched at home rather than screened in cinemas. The metaphor of the home in Nollywood is doubly layered. As mentioned in the thesis, the lack of studio facilities meant that most films were produced in borrowed homes. Domestic spaces are therefore significant in Nollywood representations. My analysis of Zina Saro-Wiwa's video art, *Phyllis*, interrogates representations of domestic spaces in Nollywood and pictorial space or projections of space through the television screen and posters in the walls.

I also define the marketplace as profound space that connotes globalisation and how it is re-interpreted within the local. The West African market is not just a place of exchange but also a place of showing. Itinerary theatre troupes usually perform in marketplaces. The marketplace is therefore a place where 'traditional' practices and international capitalist forces (the presence of mass-produced factory commodities from other countries as well as individually or communally produced items) intersect and value is negotiated. The 'magic' of the market makes the marketplace a fantastic space. An example is the discussion of a Nollywood video-film in which 'magic' is used between competitors and union members at the market to illustrate the varying meanings of 'magic'.

The heavenly city and sacred land are also fantastic spaces. The heavenly city is imagined and sacred land is invested with supernatural power. Both are spaces of redemption, sacred land is usually a burial site and the heavenly city is regarded a place where individuals go after they die. Furthermore, both cannot be owned as private property. The heavenly city is an imagined utopia and sacred land connotes interspaces

between the material world and supernatural realms. This depth of space, I argue, makes the heavenly city and sacred land seem similar but antithetical. The contradictions herein are important in my hypothesis of profound spaces.

The allegory of the village and the city is key in understanding representations of space in Nollywood video-film. In my findings, it is not so much that Nollywood video-film creates a dichotomy between the village and the city where people migrate from the village to the city for better life. Rather, Nollywood subverts notions of the city as a better place. In Nollywood, the city is constituted of village tropes and characteristics. Furthermore, it is characterised as chaotic and fateful. The assumption of progress implied in the movement from the village to the city or from the African city to a European or Western city is represented negatively in Nollywood. In most narratives, the utopian vision of the city is soon erased by brutal experiences that individuals face. In Nollywood, the village, led by elders, chiefs or kings, are usually more representative of coherent governance than the city.

I analyse the notion of nationhood in Nollywood. Nollywood has been lambasted for its 'misrepresentation' of the country. The criminalisation of male bureaucracy through the depiction of male occults has implications for the modern notion of the domestic space and national space. This also includes the representations of the nation and citizenship in Nollywood depicted in the 'dreams' of the youth who leave the country for Europe and America. Here, the Pan-Africanism and globalism of Nollywood video-film is regarded as significant medium that is part and parcel of continual recopnstructions of identity and forms of self-determinism. The delineation of art according to nation (Italian art/ Italian film, Nigerian art/ Nigerian film) is opened up in Nollywood because the video-film phenomenon has spread from Nigeria into other African countries and other parts of the world.

At a socio-cultural level, the differentiation between nations and ethnic-differences is expressed through gestures. I suggest that laughter in Nollywood video-film is estranging in its fabrication of ethnic-specific and nation-specific stereotypes. Laughter, used in certain ways, is xenophobic and heightens spatial difference. Nollywood illuminates the ways in which humour is hierarchical: separating classes (middle class

intelligent humour compared to proletarian 'toilet' humour) and differentiates between nationalities through stereotypes. The hystericism in Nollywood video-film paints a fantastic image in which Christianisation and colonisation created an imprisoning neurosis where the stereotype of the buffoon is associated with Africans who have not assimilated into Western modes of behaving. Nollywood video-film explores this dilemma where loud and conspicuous laughing and crying alludes to spatial metaphors of class.

5: Future Research

As a theoretical concept, the fantastic in Nollywood video-film facilitates a critical approach to the imagery in video-film. It also questions the principles and definitions that have been inherited with Western academic disciplines. I have illustrated why the fantastic in Nollywood video-film should not be regarded as 'regressive' but a crucial to its process of meaning-making. I use the fantastic to subvert the boundaries between art and popular culture and to frame Nollywood video-film as part of contemporary, collective and interactive cultural interventions. Artistic practices in Africa should not necessarily be defined similarly to those in America and Europe. The spontaneous and interactive performances/ interventions are crucial in understanding contemporary arts of Africa.

The original analyses in this research are not conclusive and establish bases for further study. For example, concepts such as the rational–fantastic and profound spaces could be extended to research other forms of the rational–fantastic and other types of profound spaces. In this thesis, I base the interpretation of these concepts on specific thematic categories. For example, the rational-fantastic is based on epic video-films. In the introduction, I mention that a majority of video-films make it difficult to neatly categorise films into genres. For this reason, the rational-fantastic concept could be used to unpack 'halleluyah' or 'occult' video-films. The notion of a theoconomy could also be expanded to interrogate the dynamics of Islamic video-film that is produced in Kano. A theoconomy would also include belief systems such as cosmology. In furthering this research, one could assess the ways in which ethno-centric religious systems form part of a theoconomy through which symbols are exchanged.

In this thesis, I establish grounds for further and new debates regarding the ways in which Nollywood video-film could be read in light of photography, performance art and video art. I maintain that the video-film medium is not just a 'bad' initial phase that Nollywood must pass but that it is important to Nollywood and to contemporary art (as is evident in Hugo's, Thomas's and Saro-Wiwa's artwork). Moreover, I hope to initiate debates regarding art in contemporary Africa as not only the practices initiated by artists who have been taught in art schools but also as public intervention. The fantastic is a key element in video-film and a fundamental part of contemporary reality.

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