THE REIMAGINED PARADISE: AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES, NOLLYWOOD FILM, AND THE DIGITAL REMEDIATION OF 'HOME'

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyzes how African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara become affective citizens of a universal Africa through the consumption of Nigerian cinema, known as Nollywood, in digital spaces. Employing a phenomenological approach to examine lived experience, this study explores: 1) how American media aids African pre-migrants in constructing the United States as a paradise rooted in the American Dream; 2) immigrants’ responses when the ‘imagined paradise’ does not match their American realities; 3) the ways Nigerian films articulate a distinctly African cultural experience that enables immigrants from various nations to identify with the stories reflected on screen; and, 4) how viewing Nollywood films in social media platforms creates a digital sub-diaspora that enables a reconnection with African culture when life in the United States causes intellectual and emotional dissonance.

Using voices of members from the African immigrant communities currently living in the United States and analysis of their online media consumption, this study ultimately argues that the Nigerian film industry, a transnational cinema with consumers across the African diaspora, continuously creates a fantastical affective world that offers immigrants tools to connect with their African cultural values. Nollywood films culturally appose traditional values with both the delights and dilemmas of globalization to reveal a recognizable and relatable fictional realm for many Africans dealing with the vestiges of colonial rule. With hyper-dramatic plots that glorify and critique life on the continent, Nollywood becomes a means to an end for African immigrants residing in the often unfamiliar culture of the United States. Surfing YouTube for Nollywood films or logging into subscription based platforms like IrokoTV and Amazon Prime, which carries Nollywood titles thanks to partnerships with IrokoTV, can foil the incongruity between
the paradise America is supposed to be, the realities of American life, and the immigrant’s desire to preserve an African cultural identity while striving for the American dream. Nollywood viewing online helps solidify the industry as a transnational movement where immigrants in the United States use technology to watch films, connect with their cultural values, and become a part of a global digital community, or sub-diaspora, consisting of other immigrants around the world and individuals on the African continent.
For Curtis and Winston
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

“Ifemelu thought little of Nollywood films, with their exaggerated histrionics and their improbable plots, but she nodded in agreement because to hear “Nigeria” and “good” in the same sentence was a luxury, even coming from this strange Senegalese woman…”

~ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In the mountains of Southeastern Nigeria sits Obudu, a small city of approximately 175,000 residents that is almost 280 miles from the sprawling capitol city of Abuja. After about one week of travel around Nigeria’s southern region, known as the South South and South East, I arrived in the tiny village of Ohong, an enclave of farming families, in the countryside about ten miles outside of Obudu late on a June night in 2011. Going from city to town to city during that week, I had received an informal introduction to Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry. Nollywood films played on flat screens in hotel lobbies. Men in plastic lawn chairs gathered around tiny television sets at the neighborhood watering hole where drinking beer, eating pepper soup, and watching Nollywood is a communal activity. Movie posters lined the facades of buildings in the streets of Lagos, Abuja, Uyo, and Port Harcourt and nearly every street vendor stall in these cities held (often pirated) copies of the latest Nollywood feature. Nollywood was everywhere and I expected to find it in Ohong. What I actually found surprised me and revealed to me my ignorance about global cultural flows.

Thoroughly exhausted from the seven-hour car ride from Abuja, I did my best to greet what felt like the scores of people who had waited until nearly ten o’clock to meet me. I was

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ushered into the sitting room of a modest-on-the-outside village house belonging to my good friend’s parents with marble floors, ornate leather furnishings, and heavily brocaded drapes on the inside. Once seated, I was given a kola nut, a typical sign of peace and welcome in Nigeria. For many of Ohong’s people, I was something of an anomaly, a female professor from America who had come to their village. Though this community and the greater Obudu area had once been home to foreign missionaries from various countries and Christian denominations prior to and after British rule, foreign visitors are rare. I was told to rest and watch a film with the villagers while I waited for dinner. The film? *Dreamgirls.*

As I sat in one of the well-stuffed leather chairs with children playing at my feet and a baby that had been plopped into my lap, I watched in awe at the reactions of the people, ranging in age from nothing to ninety, viewing the film and viewing me. A few questions popped into my mind. *Why did they choose this movie? What do they really know of America?* The answers to these questions were not readily apparent, but the villagers’ expressions offered some clues. *We know America,* were the words behind the nods toward the television and happy smiles of some. For most of the villagers, I was from a place only accessible through the films and television shows shown in that one village home with a television, satellite access, and reliable electricity. Watching *Dreamgirls* was a message: America is everywhere.

The next evening, groups of people from surrounding villages arrived in Ohong. Word had spread quickly that their native son, my good friend and traveling companion, had brought home an American. “These people came to see you,” my friend’s father told me as I sat down outside amongst the group, pulled away from a Nollywood film about an evil witchdoctor trying to gain control of a village with his magical powers. Sitting in the surprisingly cool evening air, particularly difficult.
I did very little talking. Questions about my family and race (white woman? half-caste?) swirled around me. However, the most intense conversations were those about America and what these mostly poorly paid villagers thought of the place from which I had come. A man in his late twenties who had a degree in agriculture from one of Nigeria’s top universities but had struggled to find a job since graduation told me that he would work twenty-three hours each day if he came to America; ten minutes would be reserved for eating and fifty minutes for sleeping. Another equally educated man asked questions about my family farm and if he could live with my parents and work for them to make a lot of money. One spoke of his desire to take his family, including his pregnant wife, to the States so that they could all live like kings. Others talked about coming to the United States to have the American dream and get rich like white people. The message from these individuals was clear: America was a country where they could fulfill the dreams they had for their lives. Their nation was lacking.

After a subsequent trip to Nigeria in 2012, my interest in Nollywood continued in earnest. Again, the films were everywhere. My Ohong family, seeing that I liked the films and understood them, played Nollywood for me during my second stay. By the time I began doctoral studies, what had once been a fascinating source of entertainment became a site of academic inquiry. However, my intellectual curiosity was peaked in August of 2014 at Africa Day in Washington, DC. The city’s Office of the Mayor sponsored the event, which combined art, food, music, hair braiding, and fashion in a relaxed atmosphere of about 5,000 people. I was there

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4 While the term ‘half-caste’ is considered offensive in America, it is not in Nigeria. The term was used as a marker of distinction. One man said to me, “Black and white together is beautiful.” My assertion that both my parents are black was met with disbelief and dismissal; one woman even accused me of lying. I acutely understood that American constructions of blackness would confound the villagers.

working the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art (NMAfA) booth, helping attendees weave small baskets with twine and create kuba designs with sack cloth and felt. One of the attendees, a woman named Margie from Sierra Leone chatted with me about Nollywood after I told her that I was a doctoral student thinking of writing my dissertation on the industry. “I watch Nollywood because it feels like home,” she said. Her statement was an epiphany. Here was a successful professional woman who had ‘made it’ in America speaking of a longing for her African home, a longing that Nollywood films on YouTube assuaged in 90 to 120 minute chunks. I remembered my first trip to Nigeria and the people who talked of their longing for America. I could not help but wonder if they would eventually become like Margie if they had the opportunity to migrate. Would they long for home and try to find ways to stay grounded in their cultural roots in an unfamiliar place? I then knew that I wanted my dissertation to explore the ways African immigrants use Nollywood to maintain contact with the African continent.

As such, this study analyzes how African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara Desert become digital citizens of a universal Africa through the consumption of Nigerian cinema, Nollywood, in online spaces. The study explores the following areas in four substantive chapters: 1) the ways American media aids African pre-migrants in constructing the United States as a paradise for laborers rooted in the American Dream; 2) immigrants’ responses

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6 Kuba textiles made of raffia cloth are indigenous to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and are used in ceremonial skirts, headaddresses, and baskets. During the summer of 2014, I was an education/community outreach intern with NMAfA.

7 All names have been changed in this study to protect the identities of the participants according to Human Subjects Research Board/Institutional Review Board protocols.

8 I am refraining from using the term ‘sub-Saharan’ in this study because of the colonialist/Eurocentric connotations that situate it and whatever it refers to as beneath, inferior, or subordinate to North African nations and the Western world. This, to me, is a highly oppressive and stereotypical view of this part of the world that discounts the intelligence, creativity, and cultural movements, gains, and human agency of the people living there. While recent news stories and a historical misrepresentation of the African continent contribute to global impressions of African pathology, I prefer not to contribute to the hegemonic institutionalizing of the African continent while still acknowledging and intellectualizing the plethora of problems currently plaguing this important region.
when the ‘imagined paradise’ does not match their American realities; 3) the ways Nigerian films articulate an African cultural experience that enables immigrants from various nations to identify with the stories reflected on screen; and, 4) how viewing Nollywood films in social media platforms like YouTube and IrokoTV creates a distinct digital ‘sub-diaspora’ that enables a reconnection with African culture when life in the United States causes intellectual and emotional dissonance.9

To date, numerous humanistic studies of African immigrants in the United States exist. These studies explore various topics including health care, educational attainment, employment statistics, language barriers, food practices, religious movements, death and grief, and business ownership. However, very few qualitative studies have been conducted where researchers spoke with community members to glean this community's media, particularly film and television, practices.10 This study offers insights on the influence of media on African immigration and acculturation strategies, the transnational nature of American and African cultural products in the African diaspora, and how socioeconomic class and media access impact knowledge construction about the United States. Using the voices of members from the African immigrant

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9 IrokoTV is a subscription based streaming video service for Nollywood films based in London and New York City. Since 2011, IrokoTV has become the largest African streaming video service in the world. I will take an in depth look at the company in chapter five.

communities currently living in America and my analysis of their online media consumption, this study examines the following questions:\textsuperscript{11}

1. What is the ‘imagined paradise,’ how is it constructed, and what problems does it present?
2. How and why does Nigerian cinema appeal to individuals from various nations across the African continent?
3. How does viewing Nollywood cinema in online spaces facilitate the creation of a rhizomatous digital ‘sub-diaspora’ that adapts to the evolution of new media technology?

Ultimately, this study argues that American cultural products, especially film and television, influence the ways future migrants view the United States. These products lead to the epistemological creation of an imagined paradise rooted in the American dream; it is a place where access to educational and occupational advancement, safety and seeming political stability, and access to consumer goods enable individuals to improve their quality of life.\textsuperscript{12}

Belief in achieving the American dream of higher education (should they choose to pursue it), professional success from high paying careers, homes in affluent neighborhoods, and luxury consumer items is predicated upon the images and messages within the media that circulates around the African continent. However, socioeconomic class frames how pre-migrants receive messages about the United States within the media. Members of different classes have different views on how migrating will affect their lives and how they will live upon arrival in America. Those from the African upper classes see the United States as a stepping stone to greater financial, political, and social success upon returning to the continent. Lower or working class Africans consider migrating to America a one-way trip; only the United States can give them the life they desire.

\textsuperscript{11} Throughout this study, I will use the terms United States and America interchangeably to refer to the District of Columbia and the 50 states that make up the United States of America. As such, when I use the descriptor ‘American,’ I am referring to people, places, events, things, etc., that originate from the United States.

\textsuperscript{12} I explore the idea of the American dream more in chapter two and what it means to the individuals who participated in this study.
Yet, the United States can bring about unexpected tensions for African immigrants. When the imagined paradise crafted prior to migration eventually veers away from preconceived ideas, the facts of life in America produce emotional and intellectual dissonance. This dissonance generates what I call a ‘paradox of progress’ for immigrants. While migration is perceived as a positive step toward fulfillment and personal growth, living in the United States brings about unanticipated difficulties that forces immigrants to find methods to ease their struggles when the American dream is not immediately realized. As the individuals who participated in this study articulate, Nollywood is the salve that helps ease the weight of their obstacles. Since its inception in 1992, the Nigerian film industry, a transnational cinema with consumers within and outside the African diaspora, has created a fantastical affective world that offers immigrants tools to connect with their African cultural values. Nollywood films culturally appose traditional values with both the delights and dilemmas of globalization to reveal a recognizable and relatable fictional realm for many Africans dealing with vestiges from colonial rule. With hyper-dramatic plots that glorify and critique life on the continent, Nollywood becomes a means to an end for African immigrants residing in the unfamiliar culture of the United States.

Surfing YouTube for Nollywood films or logging into platforms like IrokoTV, and even Netflix and Amazon Prime which now carry Nollywood titles thanks to partnerships with IrokoTV, can foil the incongruity between the paradise America is supposed to be, the realities of American life, and the immigrant’s desire to preserve an African cultural identity while striving for the American dream. Nollywood viewing online helps solidify the industry as a transnational movement where immigrants in the United States use technology to watch films, connect with their cultural values, and become a part of a global digital community consisting of other immigrants around the world and individuals on the African continent. Social media usage
lessens the impact of the paradox of progress. The original home is remediated as a new paradise for immigrants who become part of a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora, a cultural space that illuminates the plurality the digital diaspora immigrants negotiate when they leave the continent.

**Conceptualizing Media, Migration, and Diaspora**

As stated, this study analyzes four primary areas and three questions that consider the African immigrant’s relationships with media, migration, and diaspora. In order to explore the relationships, multiple theoretical approaches are employed including postcolonial, media, film, affect, globalization, migration, critical race, and psychoanalytic theory. Also, cursory glances at African and immigration history are taken to comprehend the basic facets of life in many postcolonial African nations and the motivating factors behind migration. However, concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization provide the connective tissue that attaches the concepts and theories embedded within the analysis and examinations of the four areas and questions in each chapter.

In her work on transnational African communities, Kamari Maxine Clarke interprets ideas about deterritorialization to illuminate the intersections of capitalism, class, and ethnicity and the reorienting of cultural space and social systems. By focusing on black cultural networks in the African diaspora, particularly Yoruba networks, Clarke ‘Africanizes’ Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s original concepts to show how the descendants of enslaved Africans who are a part of the overall African diaspora deterritorialize American social practices to create and maintain cultural power and agency in a nation with a complicated history of institutional and systemic erasure of black people and values.13 For Clarke, deterritorialization occurs as the

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power structures created when a once fixed territory’s cultural, political, and spatial bonds are loosened. While she does not specifically discuss capitalism as an underlying factor of deterritorialization as Deleuze and Guattari do, she does acknowledge the possibilities of displacement that transcends national borders and precipitates trans-territorial contact.\textsuperscript{14} However, deterritorialization is not an entirely disruptive and destabilizing process, but instead is a mechanism with the power to bridge the gulf between cultures and flows of information.

Clarke states,

\textit{Deterritorialization reflects shifts in geography, wherein territorial spaces, borders, and distances that were previously central to national state affairs are becoming increasingly significant outside physical territories. It provides us with an analytic for understanding people’s practices in space and highlights the ways that new self-conceptions and self-fashionings are made, and remade, outside the structures of territorially based place alone.}\textsuperscript{15}

In this context, deterritorialization describes the affective and social interconnectivity of nation-states and peoples and the decreasing importance of fixed territories on sociality. Clarke’s interpretation of deterritorialization, especially her analysis of the new self-conceptions and self-fashionings that dispersed African communities can make for themselves, are particularly relevant to this study and its focus on how African immigrants in the United States use mass media to refashion their existences in a new space.

Clarke acknowledges that networked communication systems work to disperse cultural products from the world’s major production centers (particularly in the West) to the far reaches of the globe. Culture, technology, and ideologies spread with little regard to territorial, socioeconomic, or sociopolitical boundaries. She states that “the consumption of mass mediation

\textsuperscript{14} Clarke, Mapping Yoruba Networks, 34 – 36. See also, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia} (New York: Penguin, 1977), 184.
\textsuperscript{15} Clarke, Mapping Yoruba Networks, 34.
is one of the modalities that contribute to the production of new imaginaries.” Thus, as global cultural products circulate a nation’s indigenous cultural fabric is reimagined to incorporate social systems, ideas, and values in a process of glocalization where both global and local elements are woven together in a cultural space to create new sociocultural designs. Often within deterritorialization, distinct mediascapes are framed from the transnational flows of technology and cultural products and the shifting of geopolitical ideologies.

For example, the processes of deterritorialization that arose out of one African country’s postcolonial economic and political environment (Nigeria) led to an industrious businessman using a bundle of videocassette tapes that had been imported into the nation to produce a film that sparked one of the world’s largest film industries. Prior to this, British colonial rule in Nigeria established points of contact between the nation’s citizens and the information technology and cultural productions in the West. These points of contact ushered in a deterritorialized Nigeria that incorporated technology (mainly from the West) and culture into the nation’s colonial and postcolonial climate. In 1992, Nollywood was born. Since the industry’s birth, movies, scripted and reality television programs, music, visual art, videogames, comedy, social media, and other global popular culture have informed the glocalized art and cultural productions Nigeria (and other African nations) regularly produce. Incumbent within these glocal formations is reterritorialization, a movement defined as the “reconstitution of territorialities” in order to rebalance capitalism’s movements of displacement.

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16 Ibid.
18 I will discuss this phenomenon a bit more in chapter two as I unpack and analyze the methods of global media dispersal on the African continent and its impact of the production of glocalized African popular culture.
19 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 315.
There is no deterritorialization without global or local reterritorialization; reterritorialization always reestablish modes of representation. The processes take place simultaneously. As Lyombe Eko asserts about African systems of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, “for every presentation of reality, there is a re-presentation of reality.” Reterritorialization is a way for individuals within a deterritorialized space or culture to restructure that space or culture. However, reterritorialization does not replace the old model with the new. Instead, elements of the old model are transformed and symbiotically attached to new elements to develop a new aspect of culture that resonates with the people within a territory. This is particularly true of the communities of African American descendants of enslaved Africans that Clark describes; they merge what they believe to be traditional African practices with African American tradition to create a reterritorialized transnational culture. It is also true of the African immigrants living in the United States who view Nollywood films in online spaces like YouTube and Amazon; they meld a distinctly African art form with glocal practices to create new transnational digital communities. Information technology and mass media expedite the movements and practices of reterritorialization, allowing individuals to assemble novel methods of representation, ideologies, and social arrangements.

Nollywood is an acute example of reterritorialization and its inherent new methods of representation. This study will reveal the means by which Nigerian films combine different facets of global culture (Anglophone and Latin American soap operas, film aesthetics from India) with local artistic and cultural forms (oral storytelling/theater and music) to craft filmic

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representations of Nigerian and overall African life. A Nollywood film is representative of Nigerian filmmakers’ reterritorialization of a cinema tradition in a nation where movie consumption and production was once limited to British colonial projects. Many Nollywood pictures are shot mostly indoors and possess the same interior ambience of the daytime soaps from the United States that aired on Nigerian television. Like the Indian Bollywood masala films imported into the country and shown on television, Nollywood plots often mix comedy, action, and melodrama. Oral storytelling is present in the frequent and sometimes (hyper) long monologues of major characters and indigenous music often acts as a connector between scenes or intersecting storylines. These films are Nigerian (local) while simultaneously African and global. Nollywood is glocal and it is reterritorialization epitomized.

While Nollywood is the major site for canvassing and excavating the meanings and methods of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, it is one site amongst several present in this study. As each chapter reveals, deterritorialization and reterritorialization is a complex and multifaceted enterprise that can take place in many ways and in many places. Each chapter endeavors to expose how these transformative channels operate and inform movements and understandings of media, migration, and diaspora. The theories of deterritorialization and reterritorialization ultimately connect with several congruous theoretical models working within the analysis framed in each chapter. Here, I provide an overview of the conceptual frameworks and some of the literature at play in the areas and questions of analysis.

American Media and the Construction of Paradise

In Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, Benedict Anderson uses the concept of the imagined community to define a nation as a political community where members of a nation understand that they will not know or meet other
community members, however members often imagine the communion that exists between them. The imagined community represents an ideal or a desire that the members of a community have for a physical space of which they are or can be an integral part. Within the imagined community, all members share a certain affinity for one another and a comradeship that transcends gender, race, class, or geography. The members’ specific station in life is not important in the imagined community, only the connection those members feel with the community and fellow members.

Arjun Appadurai extends Anderson’s analysis to his exploration of the “imagined world,” the myriad imaginative realms that have been historically situated in the minds of persons and groups dispersed across the globe. In the imagined world, the line between reality and fantasy is mostly blurred as people dream of fanciful spaces that do not resemble the actual physical world they wish to inhabit. Clarke asserts that the “move toward imagining is intensified and more variable with increasingly mobile subjects.” I agree with Clarke’s assertion that the imagining of mobile individuals is intense, but I argue that mobility is not just a physical experience. As this study’s participants show, media and technology can also facilitate mobility and take people places they wish to inhabit. The farther away a person is from the geographic location, the more romantic and whimsical that place becomes, especially if the media and technology the person consumes positions the geographic location in a fanciful way. I call this phenomenon the crafting of an ‘imagined paradise,’ a place that supposedly offers unfettered access to happiness and success. People living within a geo-cultural area rife with economic, political, and social instability may imagine themselves to be in a nation where paradise is

22 Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 222.
23 Clarke, Mapping Yoruba Networks, 35.
defined in terms of the availability of education, employment, independence, housing, basic utilities, and consumer goods. Africans who are citizens of postcolonial nations still striving to unlock the shackles of their colonial pasts view immigrating to the United States as a means to dwell where opportunity and hard work can fuse for an ethereal experience in a mystical and resplendent utopia.

American media circulating around deterritorialized African nations fashions the utopia for potential migrants. This “proliferation of mass communication media outlets, where the material goods of the West are frequently disseminated, serves as catalyst for migration…The relatively high standards of living in the West are directly beamed into the homes of poor West Africans through televisions and other media channels.”

Films like the Eddie Murphy comedic vehicle *Coming to America* and the 1980s popular television program *The Cosby Show* offer opulent visions of an America where anyone can obtain wealth and upper class social status. Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes contend in *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange* that a global viewer of American film (and media) may misrecognize the artifacts as representations of the whole of American culture and not as “complexly resonant, since in his or her experience, it is not” mostly because their distance from America obscures the realities of the nation and muddies understandings of the complexities of life in the United States.

Paul Messaris and Jisuk Woo offer a similar analysis in their article “Image versus Reality in Korean Americans’ Responses to Mass-Mediated Depictions of the United States” stating that media contributes to potential migrants misunderstanding of America as a monocultural “dream land”

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or “paradise for laborers.” Similar ideas are commonplace for pre-migrants from Africa seeking to journey to the imagined paradise of the United States as my conversations with people during my first trip to Nigeria taught me.

However, not all of this study’s respondents interpreted the imagined paradise and the mediascapes that present it in the same way. The immigrant’s socioeconomic class in their African home nation indicated how that individual viewed America and the messages within American media. The immigrants who graciously spoke with me typically fell into two noticeable groups, “Afropolitans” and what I call ‘Afroproletarians.’ In 2005, writer Taiye Selasi, published an article that pushed the terms “Afropolitan” and “Afropolitanism” out of the academic sphere, where they are thought to have originated in the works of scholar Achille Mbembe, and into the popular cultural lexicon. The terms are used to describe African individuals who possess socioeconomic and political clout within their home nation; Afropolitans have the financial capability and flexibility to move about the world to seek higher degrees, well paying career opportunities, and luxury items in an international economic system of exchange. Viewing American media allows Afropolitans to connect with an imagined paradise they believe will give them greater access to money, career advancement, and social and business contacts and experiences once they return to their home nation or migrate to other parts of the world. For Afroproletarians who do not have the sort of sociopolitical, cultural, or economic capital that would enable them to live privileged lives on the African continent, messages about America in the media help them dream up an imagined paradise where their

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basic needs will be met and will afford them the chance to aid their relatives and communities remaining in the home nation. Returning home is rarely, if ever, a viable option.

As stated, media and technology can expedite the construction of the imagined paradise. Marshall McLuhan’s basic theories about media offer an opportunity to ponder the interdependent relationship between the individual and technology, particularly that which enables potential migrants to consume American media prior to their journey to the United States. These relationships can be linked to conversations about technological determinism, a reductionist belief that a global society’s technology facilitates the development of that society’s social structure and cultural values. Indeed, the ideas surrounding technological determinism are aligned with the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Some of the main ideas about technological determinism posit that changes in or the advancement of technology strongly influence the organization of individuals’ relationships with the world. Thus, technology, especially various types of media, can solve or aid in solving social problems, such as those postcolonial pathologies that motivate the desire for international migration. As McLuhan’s theories suggest, the media available to individuals in a society at a given time has a great impact upon the ways people interpret messages distributed through that media.28

For example, an African pre-migrant’s consumption of American film, television, other forms of media, and websites/social media aids in the adoption of certain messages about her social and economic position within her country of origin and her potential social and economic position in her American imagined paradise. Stuart Hall points out that a person’s “frameworks of knowledge” impact the ways she or he decodes ideas from televisual discourse.29 A potential

migrant’s frameworks are dependent upon the financial, sociocultural, and political capital at her or his disposal. The participants in this study reveal that socioeconomic class and social status greatly shape how they decoded American film and television prior to coming to America.\textsuperscript{30}

**Immigrants’ Responses to the Imagined Paradise**

After World War II and in the wake of the multiple processes of decolonization on the African continent, the United States emerged in the minds of many Africans, regardless of social or economic class, as the world’s only feasible site for economic advancement.\textsuperscript{31} The promise of a postcolonial Africa where “the end of foreign colonization would usher in a new era – an era of self-determination and autonomy” that would lead to social, economic, and political stability for its people was not and has yet to be fulfilled.\textsuperscript{32} Scholars posit that there are four main reasons why African immigrants come to the United States: to pursue secondary education, to reunite with family members who have previously migrated, to take advantage of economic opportunities and access to consumer goods, and to escape political instability.\textsuperscript{33} John A. Arthur states, “Migrating to America is seen as a way of escaping deteriorating economic conditions and the breakdown of political and civic institutions.”\textsuperscript{34}

The American dream for the subjects in this study is intricately woven into lofty notions of economic success and active participation in America’s consumer culture through the purchasing of expensive goods like cars, homes, and electronics. Christina Greer notes that the American dream for “black ethnics,” or non-native born blacks in the United States, is rooted in

\textsuperscript{30} Chapter two delves into class and its impact on media decoding.
\textsuperscript{31} I explore this phenomenon more in the study’s third chapter.
“the promise of economic, political, and social advancement within the polity and the equitable delivery of these goods to all members, regardless of race or other circumstance.” Greer’s assessment of the American dream for “black ethnics,” of which African immigrants are a part, are consistent with and in conversation with the findings in this study. Yet, the experiences immigrants from the continent can have upon arriving in the United States can reshape the belief in or definition of the American dream, especially for those who desired to return to their home or decided to return once the truth of life in America settled into their minds.

Reality for many migrants, especially Diversity Visa winners who come to the United States seeking education and/or employment and access to the lives their home nations have not afforded them, is riddled with disillusionment over the inability to adjust to American culture and the realization that life in America can be difficult. As Arthur and Thomas Owusu state, various factors influence the African settlement and adaptation processes in America, such as the “limitations that [immigrants] face in the receiving society including rejection, racism, and discrimination.” Ultimately, “newcomers must learn the expectations of American culture if they are to survive and adapt to life in their new country.” Arthur states that a number of factors including access to immigration networks and information, English language fluency, education, “attitude to risk, predetermined expectations, and even luck” influence the adjustment process; the “initial months and years after arriving in the United States thus present traumatic challenges to most of the immigrants from Africa.” The traumatic challenges can be lack of access to employment information and resources, low educational attainment, a

36 J. Arthur and Owusu, Africans in Global Migration, 308.
38 Ibid., 30 – 31.
misunderstanding of American culture, and the melancholic realization that the imagined paradise is rife with adversity.

Sara Ahmed supports a complication of the term ‘home’ that recognizes the impossibility of a “space that is pure, which is uncontaminated by movement, desire or difference.” If the imagined paradise as home is impossible, the African immigrant is subject to an ‘impossible homecoming,’ a concept Iain Chambers explains in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* to discuss the ways in which global migration can mutate conceptions of ‘home.’ He states:

> “Migrancy…involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming…becomes an impossibility.”

Thinking this way, the impossibility of the pure, uncontaminated, and comfortable imagined paradise collides with preconceived ideas that the paradise will engender the comfortable and fortuitous life established in the pre-migrant’s dreamscapes. This leads to the distinct possibility that a number of African immigrants can become what Ahmed calls “melancholic migrants” who must reconcile the colonial and postcolonial projects that motivated their migration and the difficulties inherent within attempting to possess the unfamiliar and uncompromising new home in body and mind. It is how the African immigrant responds to the challenges that determines the immigrant’s acculturation processes and progress.

**African Cultural Experiences in Nigerian Film**

Over the last twenty years, Nollywood has grown into the second largest film industry in the world behind India’s Bollywood and ahead of Hollywood in the United States; Nollywood’s growth into a major global industry can be attributed in large part to the popularity of the

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dramatic narrative conventions that the industry has perfected.\textsuperscript{42} Nigerian films focus on the affective spectacle of melodrama. Jonathan Haynes contends that melodrama, imported from Latin American \textit{telenovelas}, films from India, and Anglo-American television soap operas, has been combined with the dynamic oral story telling in Yoruba theater to become the narrative and aesthetic standard.\textsuperscript{43} The films’ “extremes of fortune, emotion, and moral character are classic melodramatic elements; their predominantly domestic settings, multiple interwoven plot lines, and emphasis on dialogue rather than action” are what I argue make them affective combinations of western soap operas, \textit{telenovelas}, Bollywood \textit{masala} films, and Nigerian popular art.\textsuperscript{44}

At their core, Nollywood films are spectacles, or a public show or display on a large scale. Guy Debord states that the spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive and indisputable.\textsuperscript{45} Many Nollywood films contain spectacular or lurid stories of witchcraft and the occult, family conflicts, poverty and financial ruin, the struggles of living abroad, romantic relationships and sexuality considered aberrant and seedy in African culture in general, Christian salvation and redemption, and the struggle to maintain African cultural traditions in the face of globalization and modernity.\textsuperscript{46} Nigerian films appeal to “other Africans” partly because of “artistic representation…the so-called melodramatic mode…the history of encounters between Nigerian cinema and television and American and Hindi films, and…the aesthetic dimension of


\textsuperscript{44} Haynes, “Introduction,” 22.


Narrative syncretism is at the heart of many Nollywood films. Their narratives are a layering of affective responses to the spiritual, sexual, civic, and especially the financial plight of the postcolonial African subject searching for personal agency against seemingly insurmountable odds.

Also, Nollywood films offer a (however subtle) reflection of the African continent’s ongoing sociocultural and socioeconomic issues. Reflection theory offers a pragmatic tool to analyze how Nollywood’s affective spectacles, which could be viewed as exaggerations of Nigerian life, actually reflect the positives, negatives, and in-between in society. What “is depicted in the book or on the screen is something that reflects a slice of the familiar world.”

The familiar world reflected in many Nollywood films is one of instability and the search for a means of political, financial, cultural, and social survival. Plots containing these themes resonate highly with African immigrants negotiating life in the United States. Indeed, messages about money, tradition, sex, religion, and the occult would be difficult for African immigrants in the United States to ignore or dispute. The films contain evocative moments meant to induce fear, disgust, sympathy, anger, sadness, joy, love, and/or understanding and leave viewers with the feeling that they have watched stories that reflect their lives before and after migration.

Immigrants may readily accept the narrative spectacles and derive a sense of pleasure from them because they are a reminder of the cultural and emotional paradigms they left behind and are attempting to overcome in their move to America.

While some scholars deride African communalism as the link between African immigrants and Nigerian films, others have championed this communalism and have explored

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the myriad ways Africans living around the world consume Nollywood features. Monica Dipio contends, “Nigerian film is popular in the sense that it traverses the immediate culture in which it is set as people beyond the borders of the immediate community can identify with it.” 49 Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome call this phenomenon “Africanity.” They state:

Measured against the reified culture of American films and television series broadcast by African TV stations, the culture on display in Nigerian video films may indeed look familiar to many viewers in Africa…Nigerian films are first and foremost hailed for their Africanity. 50

At the heart of Africanity is a phenomenological proximity that enables Nollywood films to extend beyond Nigeria’s borders to various parts of the African continent; the lived experiences reflected in these films are considered comparable for many postcolonial Africans throughout the global diaspora. 51 Giovanna Santenera argues that for African immigrants, viewing Nollywood films allows for an analysis of familiar behaviors and beliefs of home and this analysis encourages reflections on the homeland and the social experience of migration. 52 Africanity resonates with African immigrants in the United States as well. While it would be culturally and intellectually irresponsible to insist that the experiences of all Africans from throughout the continent and the diaspora are exactly the same, the similarities are present. The postcolonial struggles for personal and economic solvency are transnational; Nollywood films allow immigrants an opportunity to “measure themselves against a familiar, symbolic, and discursive

52 Ibid.
order to cope with feelings of disorientation in a foreign land. These films enable immigrants to meditate on the abject conditions they left behind and the abject conditions they are confronted with in the new home as a means of constructing a new reality based on the desire to survive the daily rigors of life in a place that may not have met their expectations.

**Viewing Nollywood Film in Social Media Platforms**

African audiences throughout the diaspora are attracted to Nollywood’s Africanity because of the familiar and comfortable ideological leanings embedded within this cinema’s narrative. As Olivier Barlett keenly states, “We often underestimate the public: it determines its tastes and choices according to what moves it, what deeply animates it.” An audience’s sociocultural and socioeconomic position determines not only what it consumes, but also how it consumes.

Access to digital media plays a profound role in the formation of audiences in what numerous scholars call a digital diaspora. Michel Laguerre offers this definition of digital diaspora:

…an immigrant group or descendant of an immigrant population that uses [information technology] connectivity to participate in virtual networks of contacts for a variety of political, economic, social, religious, and communicational purposes that, for the most part, may concern either the homeland, the host land, or both, including its own trajectory abroad.

This definition is a useful starting point in articulating the African digital diaspora and its consumption of Nollywood films. Again, access to information technology and the Internet

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plays a key role in the ways African immigrants in the United States keep home alive through virtual networks of contacts that Nollywood films provide.

In “Nollywood on the Internet: A Preliminary Analysis of an Online Nigerian Video-Film Audience,” Ikechukwu Obiaya points out that poor infrastructural development has a profound effect on online Nollywood viewership throughout the African continent. However, access to the Internet and the ability to use it “imply certain characteristics on the part of [the online Nollywood audience] in terms of age, educational level and, possibly, economic standing.”56 Certainly, these factors are relevant to the African digital diaspora, including the potential migrant’s relationship with digital media in their home community and in the immigrant’s use of the Internet and social media after arrival in America. While specific numbers on African immigrant’s Internet usage in the United States are difficult to nail down because of the large numbers of diaspora members dispersed through the country, it can be argued that American infrastructure increases the numbers of immigrants using the Internet and the rates at which they use it.

Obiaya contends that the Internet has changed the way audiences respond to popular art, particularly Nollywood. He says that the Internet has intensified heterogeneity in Nollywood’s filmic output and sympathetic relationships with Nollywood as it provides an increasing amount of access to culture.57 The industry’s popularity is largely due to it’s online presence around the world. Noah Tsika states Nollywood has the power to expand exponentially because of this presence, create additional fan bases and subscriber bases for paid streaming services, and

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57 Ibid.
establish Nollywood celebrities through promotional videos dispersed online for consumers around the globe.\textsuperscript{58}

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green ask in \textit{YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture} if YouTube is a site that actually provides access to culture or if it is a platform strictly for consumer-producers.\textsuperscript{59} Michael Strangelove would argue that it is a platform for consumer-producers looking for an outlet to tell and share their stories.\textsuperscript{60} For African immigrants using the platform to view Nigerian cinema, YouTube is both a place for their culture and a site where they can be consumer-producers, but not in the traditional sense. Burgess, Green, and Strangelove consider consumer-producers to be those who not only watch videos, but also create and post videos onto the site. However, immigrants are not producing their own Nollywood films and posting them online. Instead, they are producing affective connections to home for themselves through subscribing to sites like IrokoTV and using YouTube to gain entry to Nollywood, watching films that foster this connection, and commenting on films they watch.\textsuperscript{61}

Social media acts as a point of re-entry into or a point of reconnection with the cultural home. Digital media platforms enable reconnection, community building, and provide a means for reimagining the African continent through narratives rendered in online spaces. Madhavi Mallapragada contends in her work on Internet usage amongst Indian immigrants in the United States that the continuous movement of people around the globe is one of the “defining features

\textsuperscript{58} Noah Tsika, “From Yorùbá to YouTube: Studying Nollywood’s Star System.” \textit{Black Camera, An International Film Journal}, Vol. 5 No. 2 (Spring 2014), 101.

\textsuperscript{59} Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, \textit{YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 14.

\textsuperscript{60} Michael Strangelove, \textit{Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 14 – 15.

\textsuperscript{61} It is important to state that some consumer-producers are posting film reviews online. A quick search of ‘Nollywood reviews’ on YouTube yielded about 6,550 results. It is difficult to know exactly where reviewers are located. I do not anticipate that online reviews will have a major place in my research, but it is necessary to note that some participants may post reviews on YouTube.
of modern life.” She states that scholars must now understand immigration through online media; physical mobility is often a result of technological mobility.

This assessment is an apt characterization of African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara Desert. As economic, political, cultural, and social crises exacerbate the problems for a sizable swath of the African continent’s population, migration to points west, especially the United States, is considered the solution for claiming some semblance of humanity in an unstable world. Many African individuals become a part of the global African digital diaspora prior to migrating. Upon arrival in the United States, online media is a catalyst for connectivity and sociality as individuals use platforms like Facebook, Skype, and WhatsApp, an Internet based text messaging service that allows users to send and receive texts to and from nations around the world, to maintain ties with family and friends remaining in the home nation and use these platforms to connect with dispersed individuals in the new home. Social media platforms and the Nigerian cinema within them remediate the original home as a new paradise for immigrants who become part of a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora, a group within a larger diaspora that is built around a shared set of activities, beliefs, consumption practices, likes, and experiences.

Methodology: Finding Voices, Analyzing Narratives

To examine the four primary areas and questions in this study, I initially intended to apply a grounded theory approach to the analysis of qualitative data from in depth interviews and focus group conversations with African immigrants currently living in the United States and from the examination of comments and discussion threads posted on social media sites like

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63 Ibid.
YouTube, IrokoTV, and Amazon for various Nollywood films. Grounded theory allows for the construction of theory based on the narratives within the data collected during the course of a qualitative study. Narratives often reveal similarities in categories (themes) and codes (ideas) across a data set and offers alternate and/or expanded theoretical frameworks for the study of culture, identity, and human interaction. Studies employing grounded theory are often thought to present new conceptual leanings not tied to existing theory. However, because this study is rooted in theories related to capitalism and globalization, immigration and diaspora formation, and media consumption and reception, many of the conceptual foci presented here build off these theories and seek to expand upon common understandings of the issues related to media, migration, and diaspora.

Therefore, the study ultimately takes a phenomenological approach to the study of the narratives within the interviews, focus group discussions, and online conversations about immigrants’ lived experiences, especially as they relate to their experiences with Nollywood. Stan Lester notes that the purpose of a phenomenological approach to research is to “illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation.” Phenomenological practices, which Edmund Husserl developed in his critical work *Logical Investigations*, involve gathering deep information and perceptions through interviews, conversations, participant observation, focus meetings, and analysis of personal texts. This allows for an epistemological understanding of data based in the investigation of personal choice, knowledge, subjectivity, and perspectives. Voices considered in a phenomenological study

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generally provide powerful ways for looking at and processing personal experience and the internal and external motivations for actions that inform that experience.

In phenomenology, frequently taken-for-granted assumptions about lived experience are interrogated and described in a manner that enables an individual’s life from their own perspective; these perspectives regularly challenge and disrupt the researcher’s preconceived ideas about the people who are the focus of a study. As Clark Moustakas contends, “The everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and the phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego.” 67 At the beginning of this study, my ego and assumptions were toppled as I began to speak with participants and truly listen to the stories they graciously shared with me. What follows this introduction is my attempt to connect the voices of the immigrants with existing theory and recorded histories in order to design new rhetorical and discursive methods of inquiry in the study of this immigrant group’s acculturation and media practices, everyday life occurrences, and search for agency in a potentially hostile and inhospitable American culture.

**Interviews and Focus Groups**

From February to November of 2015, I conducted in depth interviews and focus meetings with 30 individuals, 27 of whom are from nations south of the Sahara Desert. 68 These individuals range in age from 18 to 65 years. Of the 27, 25 have been living in the United States for at least nine months; several immigrated to the United States twenty or more years ago. 69 I

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68 Three individuals from the Caribbean (Jamaica, Guyana, St. Thomas) were present during a focus group event and were eager to speak with me because they claimed to be avid Nollywood viewers. Their experiences do not appear in this study; I may return to their perspectives in the future.
69 Two of the attendees at one focus meeting were tourists visiting the United States from Nigeria and Ghana during the summer of 2015. They too were eager to speak about their online Nollywood viewing habits. My conversations with them informed my comprehension and analysis of Nollywood focused digital sub-diasporas; I became aware that any consideration of diaspora must include not only individuals dispersed outside the home region, but also those still living there. This is an area I will explore more in chapter five.
define these immigrants as those who were born in a nation south of the Sahara Desert, who identify as black, and who migrated to the United States after the age of 16. I chose the age of 16 as a determining factor for migration because subjects who may have migrated prior to this age may not have developed strong attachments or memories to their home nation. One young woman I briefly spoke with during a focus meeting migrated with her adoptive family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo when she was two years old.\textsuperscript{70} She has no memories of the “big Congo” and most of her knowledge of the African continent comes primarily from her parents, her Congolese friends, and the women who frequented her mother’s hair braiding salon while she was growing up. Her voice is not represented in this study, but the voices that illuminate the following chapters exemplify African immigrants who have powerful and recognizable attachments to and relationships with the African continent through contact with friends, spouses and children remaining in Africa, other relatives, business associates, and Nollywood films.

The 24 (twelve females, twelve males) individuals who inform this study come from the following nations: Nigeria (14), Democratic Republic of the Congo (five), Ghana (two, both of whom have connections to other African nations), Cote D’Ivoire (one, who is also connected to Ghana), Republic of Benin (one, who is also connected to Ghana), Sierra Leone, Cameroon, and Kenya. Currently, these individuals live in and around Wheeling and Parkersburg, West Virginia; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; and, Washington, DC. These areas were chosen because of my social and professional connections to individuals living there. Also, the Baltimore – Washington, DC metro area has the third largest populations of African

\textsuperscript{70} This young woman came with her friend. Like the other individuals I talked with who do not fall within the scope of this study, she is a Nollywood fan and recalled watching the films alongside women who had their hair braided in her mother’s salon outside Pittsburgh.
immigrants in the United States behind the New York – New Jersey metropolitan area and Los Angeles, California. My contacts helped arrange interviews and organize focus meetings; three opened their homes for me to conduct research conversations and served as cordial hosts (providing food and drink) for focus group events. Twenty-three of the conversations took place face-to-face; one in depth interview took place in Google Hangout because scheduling conflicts prevented an in person discussion. Prior to this electronic meeting, I had anticipated a disconnect and discomfort between the participant and I because of the distance and potential digital ‘noise.’ However, the participant and I were able to establish a rapport within the first few minutes mostly because we are close in age (late 30s), have backgrounds in journalism, and have lived in the same northern Virginia suburb of Washington, DC. This conversation was the warmest and one of the longest.

Overall, interviews and meetings lasted on average one hour; the shortest conversation occurred in about twelve minutes during a focus group event when I pulled a woman aside to speak with her because she was rather soft spoken and seemed nervous to speak in front of the rest of the group. The longest discussion lasted close to three hours with three university students who shattered my preconceived ideas about their reasons for migrating. Initially, I had intended to use this focus group as a practice exercise for future group meetings; I did not think university students would provide the sort of experiential knowledge that professionals who are older and more established in the United States possess. However, these students exposed unexpected complexities related to their reasons for coming to the United States, their post education plans, and the role of socioeconomic class in the formation of perceptions about

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America. I decided to include their voices when their narratives mirrored those of some of the older participants, many of whom work and take undergraduate and graduate courses. Two participants hold doctoral degrees and one holds a Masters’ degree. Four have undergraduate degrees, five are full time undergraduate students with part time jobs, one is a full time graduate student who works part time. Of the remainder who work full time, two study part time.

It is important to state here that my position as an African American researcher played a discernible role in my data gathering process. Aware of the tensions that can exist between black Americans and non-American blacks, which is a topic I explore more in chapter three, I was careful not to assume an automatic position of affinity with the individuals in the study. I understood that being of African descent did not necessarily make me kin. Having traveled to Nigeria and Morocco prior to and during the course of this study, I was cognizant of the possibility that I may not be immediately coded as black because of my complexion and hair texture. Many considered me biracial or multiracial, just as many of the Nigerians considered me half-caste during my first trip to the continent. Some of the participants, especially those who came to focus group meetings, approached our conversations with hesitancy. Once they learned that I have spent time on the continent, claim adoptive familial ties to Nigeria, and had no desire to shame or disrespect them in any way, I became a fellow African sister and was able to enjoy a comradery with most of the participants, some of whom stated they were honored to speak with a Ph.D.\(^\text{72}\)

**Interpreting Silences**

Despite the fact that I was able to build comradery with many of my study participants, an unexpected phenomenon occurred through many of the interviews and focus groups. Silence.

\(^{72}\) As I mention in chapter five, my assertion that I had not yet completed my doctoral program was waved off with a ‘Soon!’ or an outright dismissal.
As mentioned, my goal was to conduct interviews and focus groups from a phenomenological approach that allows for the conveying and interpretation of lived experience. Because I wanted to offer my participants the opportunity to tell their own stories in their own words, I asked questions designed to foster a free flowing conversation. Here is a sampling of questions employed during the study:

1. You have indicated that you watch Nigerian/Nollywood films. What are the primary reasons you watch these films?
2. If you are not from Nigeria, how do these films reflect your cultural experiences? What is it in particular about the films that allow you to relate to them? Familiar narratives/stories, familiar or similar cultural behaviors, etc.?
3. There are thousands of Nollywood films on YouTube. How do you choose films to watch?
4. Are there particular types of films you prefer? Romance, comedy, drama, religious/spiritual, etc.?
5. YouTube gives users the opportunity to leave comments after watching a video. Do you ever leave comments? If so, what motivates you to leave a comment about a film? Do you ever respond to other viewers’ comments? If so, what motivates you to respond to these comments?
6. Has leaving or responding to comments led you to connect with people online? Have you ever connected with someone from your ‘home’ country through watching and commenting on films online? If so, how did the connection take place? What was the film? Is that connection (friendship/relationship) ongoing?

The silence phenomenon during the interviews and focus groups was not an absence of sound. In fact, all of the study participants eagerly answered the questions once they were comfortable with me. Much of the silence I faced was the result of participants believing they did not have to explain or elaborate on their stories because they thought I would automatically understand. Thus, my time spent on the continent was both a positive and negative force during this study. I was able to make participants comfortable enough to speak freely with me as an ‘African sister.’ However, that comfort led to what I consider a silence born of affinity and perceived communality.

In several conversations, the participants answered by turning my questions into declarative statements. For example, I asked participants how Nollywood films reflect their
culture. Several responded by saying something like, “Nigerian films represent African culture. Anybody from Africa can relate to the Nollywood pictures.” When I asked for an explanation of African culture, the individuals told me that because I have spent time in Nigeria I know the culture and understand that it represents Africa. When I asked them to describe African culture in their own words for someone who would not know, they responded with a few key words like ‘religious,’ ‘communal,’ ‘traditional,’ or ‘family.’ Their responses were not succinct or distinct enough to quote in full. In some cases, I felt the participants were frustrated with my insistence that they explain something they believed I already know; I immediately turned the conversation in a different direction if I sensed this frustration.

In one conversation with twins from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the young women stated that they love Nollywood films so much they want to marry “real Nigerian” men. When I asked what a “real Nigerian man” is and they described someone who is successful and ambitious, religious, family oriented with an understanding that tradition is more important than being “in the world,” and who lets them be proper wives. When I asked them to elaborate further about tradition, one of the young women laughed at me and said, “You have been there. You know what I am talking about.” Though I do have an understanding of what they meant, it would be arrogant and irresponsible of me to suggest that I know all there is to know about African culture. However, because I have spent time on the continent, I understand that African culture is not a ‘thing’ or ‘set of things’ that can be reduced to carvings of animals, masks, kente cloth, drums, and media images of poverty and despair. As the conversations continuously showed me, African culture is felt, lived, and shared, quite often in the transnational representations of Africanity I describe in this study.
Another form of silence I experienced was what I call ‘recorder silence;’ the participants answered the questions in a focused and methodical manner when the voice recorder was actively running. Once I ended the ‘official’ interview or focus group, some participants began to speak in an entirely different way and offered even deeper thoughts and stories. This was especially the case of Jodi, a young woman from Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana. She answered my questions thoughtfully and provided a wealth of information during the interview; however, a more relaxed and confident Jodi emerged when the recorder was shut off. When our nearly forty-minute conversation ended and the recorder was out of sight, she spent an additional twenty minutes talking about her experiences in the United States and her love of Nollywood films. She offered film suggestions and gave me ideas about Nollywood production (particularly the technology used to make films and the ways other African countries are making films in the style of Nollywood) that she thought would be helpful to my research. An absence of sound did not characterize Jodi’s official interview. Yet, Jodi was silent; she allowed the performance of what she may have believed was a good interview participant to reign freely. With the recorder tucked away, Jodi began to speak and her voice emerged. “Oh, too bad the recorder is off. You have given me so much more now,” I said when she began to leave. “You just remember it and write it down,” she replied, seemingly confident that I would do just that.

Throughout this study, I have endeavored to interpret the silences without imposing a set of beliefs or values upon the voices who shared their experiences with me. This interpretation is embedded within each of the chapters as I relay back stories about the participants and paraphrase comments that would read disjointed or unintelligible if quoted in full and in the case of recorder silence where I was given permission to use the information but had to rely upon notes and memory to flesh out stories and quotes. My goal has been to reveal the voices beneath
the voices so the beautiful and sometimes disheartening truths the study participants have encountered or endured have a focused and precise place within the chapters and inform the theory and history presented in each.

**Virtual Ethnography and Online Discussions**

In order to analyze how a digital sub-diaspora of Nollywood fans is created, I examined the discussion comments of various films on YouTube, IrokoTV, and Amazon Prime. This form of research, commonly called virtual ethnography or digital ethnography, enables phenomenological ethnographic work in online spaces, especially the social media listed above. Guido Lang and Raquel Benbunan-Fich define social media as “web applications that process, store, and retrieve user-generated content.”

Also, social media also has been defined for its power to connect, collaborate, and build relationships between users. YouTube is a site where user generated content is supreme and while platforms like IrokoTV and Amazon are not designed for user generated videos, they do allow connection, collaboration, and relationship building to take place amongst people around the world watching Nollywood movies. As Nicole Constable suggests:

> The Internet allows for the articulation of preexisting group identities, while it simultaneously creates opportunities for the breakdown, violation, or calling into question of more narrowly conceived boundaries of local groups, local communities, and nations, which are replaced by new expressions and imaginings of global and transnational identities.

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75 Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and “Mail Order” Marriages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 32.
This dynamic is publically played out on a daily basis on the Internet when viewers watch Nigerian films in the aforementioned digital spaces. Viewers within the African digital diaspora articulate a coherent Africanity and group cohesion grounded in a shared love of Nollywood cinema. A sense of this digital Africanity upends ideas about African backwardness and technological ignorance that often permeates Western consciousness. Ask the everyday person in the United States what they know about Africa and the response may not include the fact that of the nearly 1.158 billion people living on the African continent in 2015, over 330 million were Internet users. The exact number of people viewing Nollywood films online is impossible to determine, however IrokoTV boasts ten million hits per day from over 200 countries. Many viewers take to the comments sections in the platforms to analyze, critique, and discuss films with other users. These comments sections provide legitimate online locations to study the formation of a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora.

John Postill and Sarah Pink suggest that comments sections in social media sites are “arranged into topical threads and peppered with avatars and emoticons to compensate for the reduced bodily cues of online communication.” Therefore, a comments section’s “thread

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76 Throughout this study, but especially in chapters two and three, I critique the misconceptions that can exist about the African continent, its people, and cultures.
sociality is polylogical – that is, it typically involves a group of conversational partners” engaged in mass mediated moments of exchange.\(^8^0\) Christine Hine has argued that conducting ethnographic studies in online spaces is focused around mediated moments or media events which she calls “Internet Events.”\(^8^1\) I consider the viewing of a Nollywood film online an “Internet Event,” not only because the melodramatic narratives Nigerian movies offer can be quite eventful, but also because watching and participating in discussion threads can be a highly affective experience for those immigrants attempting to reconnect with Africa. Thus, Nollywood film viewing for the African immigrant living in the United States (or any other part of the world) is an affective event of Internet mediated exchange; memories are stirred, emotions are arranged and rearranged, and immigrants’ positions within their homeland and the host land are constantly renegotiated.\(^8^2\)

As a virtual/digital ethnographer, I took the role of observer to attempt to understand how an African immigrant may ‘go home’ by navigating through comments sections for various Nollywood films. Though I watched numerous films over the course of this study, I did not post comments or participate in any conversations online. Because film viewing and commenting is an asynchronous activity, the possibility that my comments could sit for months (or longer) in the comments sections without response is high. Thus, I chose to view existing conversations only for randomly chosen films on IrokoTV, YouTube, and Amazon that had at least 25 to 30 comments to get a sense of how discussions took place. This random process involved choosing about forty films across the sites, watching the films in full or in part, scanning the comments, and analyzing the organization of the threads to discern the common types of discussions taking

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\(^8^0\) Postill and Pink, “Social Media Ethnography,” 130 – 131.
\(^8^2\) I discuss the affective nature of Nollywood films in chapter four.
place. Mostly, the threads were devoted to individuals posting their pleasure or displeasure with the films’ plotlines. Yet, conversations about culture, identity, and immigrant lived experience were frequent. In IrokoTV discussions, viewers also carried on conversations with site administrators to suggest films and to complain when problems arose with the platform.

Specifically, I analyze discussions for six films including two dramedies (The Birthday and The Birthday 2), one horror film (The Duplex), and three dramas (Madam Virus, Lagos Housewives Part 1, and Ijé: The Journey). These six films’ comments sections offered deep discussions of culture and lived experience, as well as the means to explore how online Nollywood viewers form affective groups around certain cultural beliefs and traditions.

Chapter Overview

This study is divided into six chapters with the first chapter being the introduction and the sixth chapter being the conclusion. Chapter two delves into the socio-historic, cultural, economic, and political factors that influence the pre-migrant’s quality of life, the intellectual and emotional conception of home, and knowledge construction about the United States. I show how Africa’s postcolonial pathologies impact the pre-migrant’s desire for a new (temporary or permanent) home that offers opportunities to improve their already stable lives at home or corrects the lack they perceive in their home nation. This chapter in no way attempts to offer a thorough overview of African history, but it traces the history of the migration from the continent to the United States. I discuss the major factors that have influenced that migration in the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, including political instability, the rise of the African dictatorship, and the institution of World Bank backed Structural Adjustment Programs.

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83 Ijé: The Journey was not randomly chosen. It was a film I have watched several times and have analyzed in depth in chapter four. I originally chose to watch this film because of the comments on both Amazon and IrokoTV. At the time (Spring 2014), I was specifically looking for Nollywood films that focus on immigration experience because of my work in a course on American immigration history.
in the 1980s. Chapter two also documents the flow of American cultural productions (particularly film and television) around the African continent and explores how it mediates differing epistemological constructions of the imagined paradise along lines of socioeconomic class.

Socioeconomic class remains a theme in chapter three. However, the primary question driving the chapter enables a critical examination of what happens when the pre-migration ideas about the temporary or permanent imagined paradise must shift or be renegotiated after the immigrant arrives in the United States and finds that her reality does not match the dreamscape she imagined, even if that dreamscape contained negative information about the nation. The way the pre-migrant negotiated the information she received from mass media ultimately influences how she responds to the paradox of progress once she settles in America. Coming to America may have seemed like the key to advancement, but early settlement experiences and acculturation practices can challenge definitions of the American dream for both Afroproletarians and Afropolitans who initially planned to return to their home or who now desire to go back to the continent because of the dissonance between their expectations and reality. For newly arrived and established African immigrants regardless of class, the dissonance creating crash between expectation and experience can produce tensions that disrupt the desire mass mediated images and representations of America fostered prior to the transatlantic journey.

In chapter four, I explore the ways in which immigrants use Nigerian cinema to create a carefully constructed media zone to facilitate an intellectual and psychological return to the continent. Nollywood as an industry with western and South Asian influences positions is a global enterprise with diasporic consumers. Narrative syncretism is what these films represent, a layering of affective responses to the spiritual, civic, and especially the financial plight of the
postcolonial African subject searching for personal agency against seemingly insurmountable odds, odds like those an immigrant might face in America. The Africanity in these films enable immigrants to meditate on the conditions they left behind (positive, abject, or in between) and the conditions they are confronted with in America as a means of constructing a new televizual zone based on the desire to grapple with the daily rigors of life in a nation that may not have met their expectations.

Chapter five theorizes that viewing Nollywood on online platforms provides the African immigrant with online spaces to connect and socially engage with home as an emotional and epistemological space. Nollywood in the cyber-sphere solidifies the industry as a transnational participatory movement that has enabled the creation of a glocalized African digital diaspora where immigrants use social media to watch films, digitally connect with their cultural values, and become a part of a global digital community. The imagined paradise the African pre-migrant crafted for herself prior to coming to America is re-imagined or reterritorialized and social media helps alleviate the negative affective impact of the paradox of progress. As a result, the original home is remediated as a new paradise for immigrants who become part of a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora, a cultural space that illuminates the plurality within the overall African diaspora and the digital diaspora immigrants negotiate both on and off the continent.
CHAPTER II. ‘COMING TO AMERICA’: AFRICAN PRE-MIGRANTS’ DREAMS

“For a new generation of Africans, being African and American,…is simply a recognition of how the structural disadjustment of Africans in the crisis of the present has become an opportunity for reimagining new narratives of the future.”

~ Simon Gikandi

When Lisa first came to the United States from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2011, she knew America. A previous trip to Disney World only solidified for her what she knew. “I thought America was all cities with big buildings and streets with houses because that’s what I saw on TV,” she explained. Lisa’s exposure to American television shows and films shaped her impressions of the United States. Networks like E! Entertainment Television, CNN, the Disney Channel, and MTV (among others) are beamed into homes throughout the African continent. Lisa, who is in her early twenties, grew up watching shows like American Idol, My Super Sweet Sixteen, Fashion Police, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Law and Order, Criminal Minds, CSI: Crime Scene Investigators, and The Voice. Tyler Perry films were extremely popular and Lisa counts American Pie and its sequels as some of her favorite films.

Lisa’s story and the stories of several immigrants who are a part of this study like her DRC native friends Patricia and Samantha offer an African continental narrative about the ways in which American culture and cultural productions transcend borders and travel around the globe. Patricia notes that a plethora of networks, like MTV and the Disney Channel, and programs like Pimp My Ride and That’s So Raven, were available to her and her family in Kinshasa. “You can watch them on cable,” she said. “If you can afford it,” Samantha added.

85 All names in this study have been changed to protect the identities and privacy of participants.
Lisa, Samantha, and Patricia are from families that can afford cable. Though owning a television set and subscription to satellite service is often limited to the economic elite in some African nations, access to American media is not dependent upon socioeconomic class.  

Fast food restaurants and open air cafes and bars in urban neighborhoods typically contain large flat screen televisions connected to satellite systems that broadcast American news networks, films and television shows, and Chris Brown, Jennifer Lopez, Lil Wayne, and Beyoncé music videos throughout the day and evening. Television is the most widely consumed medium in parts of Africa, including the DRC. American culture, its productions, and messages about wealth and opportunity in the United States are global; they spread across borders and boundaries leaving behind cultural impressions on the minds of people around the world. These impressions are a part of the ongoing processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization on the African continent. I define deterritorialization and reterritorialization as interdependent systems where the introduction of new global modes of being and thinking destabilize the indigenous political, social, economic, cultural, etc., mechanisms of a nation state. The contact between the old and the new results in the formation of reconfigured national paradigms where the global and local are combined to create a glocal cultural landscape. The processes and the incumbent flows of global culture re-conceptualize and reorient indigenous African cultures and African people’s understandings of their place in that global culture is continuously reconceived. Just as contact with global ideals and technology serve to restructure African people’s home nations into a synergistic glocal combination of the global and the local, so too does the influence of American culture shape their understandings of themselves in

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relation to the United States.\textsuperscript{88} As Samantha stated, “We grow up learning that America is better than our home.”

This chapter explores how the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the African continent through American media (particularly film and television) can influence the ways in which future migrants, or pre-migrants, from nations south of the Sahara Desert\textsuperscript{89} view the United States and construct the nation as an ‘imagined paradise.’ This fantastical paradise is a place where access to educational and occupational advancement, safety and seeming political stability, and a plethora of consumer goods enables individuals to possibly live a better life than the one they may already have in their home country.\textsuperscript{90} The loosening of economic, political, cultural, and social structures through deterritorialization and encounters with global ideals before, during, and after colonization has birthed ongoing instability in many African nations still seeking to establish themselves in the wake of European colonialism. Many of the continent’s citizens have been left behind in all facets of life (both public and private) in their home nation’s quest for stability and find themselves searching for new spaces or homes to occupy. Home is both a physical and epistemological space where an individual resides and it is also a place an individual can mentally and emotionally create through reterritorialization. The created home is developed using the information and information technology future migrants’

\textsuperscript{89} I use the term pre-migrant here as a means of identifying those who have not yet migrated to the United States. Though the respondents are currently living in America, I focus on their memories and the beliefs they possessed prior to their transatlantic migration.
\textsuperscript{90} Though access to the Internet and social media is rapidly growing throughout Africa, I focus mainly on film and television because their distribution is more widespread. While subjects may have to travel miles to access the Internet at cyber-cafes, television sets and DVD players are common even in rural areas. For an historical overview of telecommunications infrastructure systems in Africa, see Gairoonisa Paleker, “Television: 1900 to Present: Africa” in Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia, & Africa: An Encyclopedia, ed. Andrea L. Stanton, Edward Ramsamy, Peter J. Seybolt and Carolyn M. Elliot (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012), 385 - 386; Eli M. Noam, Telecommunications in Africa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Patrick J. Burnet and Marie-Claude Vettraino-Soulard, Ethics and the Internet in West Africa: Toward an Ethical Model of Integration (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004).
“frameworks of knowledge,” or demographic background, afford them. The ‘imagined paradise’ combines the acute desire to migrate to the United States with a fantastical urban wonderland articulated with plush images and representations from films, like John Landis’s 1988 comedy *Coming to America*, and television shows, like the long running National Broadcasting Company (NBC) situation comedy *The Cosby Show*. These media dreamscapes are peppered with images of big houses in big cities where the standard of living, access to goods and basic services, and opportunities for advancement regardless of one’s (racial, ethnic, national, class, educational, etc.,) background that may be superior to those in the home nation, thus powering the imaginations of those wishing to leave their home nation.

Though the chapter discusses some of the socio-historic, cultural, economic, and political factors that make up much of the deterritorialized African continent’s postcolonial milieu and how it impacts pre-migrants’ desire for an America that addresses or corrects the lack they may perceive in their home nations, I in no way attempt to offer a comprehensive history of the entire continent. Instead, the chapter surveys a few of the leading bases for African migration to the United States, bases that are intricately linked to the widely understood and mass circulated problems and failures of postcolonial African states. Weaving together data from conversations with African immigrants currently living in the United States, I ultimately argue that socioeconomic class greatly shapes how pre-migrants receive messages about America within the media they consume and also greatly aids systems of reterritorialization or the construction of the ‘imagined paradise.’ While economically disadvantaged pre-migrants and/or those who exist in the space between disadvantaged and privileged may craft a mythical America

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92 This region consists of 49 nations considered to sit geographically south of the Sahara Desert. The immigrants I discuss throughout this study are those that would be considered ‘black’ in global constructs of race or identify as such. Race will be discussed in the following chapter in an examination of acculturation practices.
using widely distributed images of the American dream, affluent or more economically privileged migrants may paint the American ‘imagined paradise’ as a temporary stop on their journey toward even greater socioeconomic autonomy in their African countries of origin.

**Leaving Home**

Previous studies have pointed to four main reasons why African immigrants come to the United States: to pursue secondary education, to reunite with family members who have previously migrated, to take advantage of economic opportunities and access to consumer goods, and to escape political instability. In fact, data from the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) show that in 2013 a total of 94,589 individuals and in 2014 94,413 individuals from the continent obtained lawful resident status in the United States. Of these, 79,027 came from nations south of the Sahara in 2013 and 80,280 in 2014. The following offers a look at migration based on three of the major migration factors:

1. Family (Sponsored, Immediate, and Adoptees) – 44,628 entrees in 2013; 39,026 in 2014
2. Employment Based Preferences – 3,680 in 2013; 3,733 in 2014
3. Political (Refugees and Asylees) – 16,615 in 2013; 18,037 in 2014

OIS classifies the remaining individuals under the categories ‘Diversity’ and ‘Other.’ In this data, ‘Diversity’ refers to those entering the United States legally as a part of the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, a provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1990 also known as the Green Card Lottery or the visa lottery. The Act was set up to offer permanent

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95 As of July 5, 2016, the most recent OIS immigration statistics are from the year 2014. The OIS immigration yearbooks date between 2004 and 2014; other statistical data in the form of spreadsheets and tables can be accessed for the years 1996 through 2003. It is important to note that all of the yearbooks and data tables from 1996 to the present consist of immigration data from fiscal year 1820 to 2014.

96 The category ‘Other’ is not explained.
resident visas to citizens of countries that the United States government deems to have low rates of immigration to America.\textsuperscript{97} Between 2000 and 2013, one in five Africans from nations south of the Sahara entered the United States through the visa lottery.\textsuperscript{98} While those entering as a part of the lottery do go on to attend colleges and universities and/or obtain employment, OIS data does not specifically state this.

In total, it can be surmised based on immigration data that 159,307 individuals lawfully entered the United States from nations from south of the Sahara in 2013 and 2014. The numbers offered here from OIS do not include race-based data. Thus, these numbers could include immigrants who would not be considered ‘black’ in global constructs of race or would not identify as such. Statistics on race are not collected. Yet, these individuals are a part of the 1.6 million Africans living in the United States today; 36 percent are from West Africa, 29 percent are from East Africa, and Africans from Southern and Middle Africa make up 10 percent of the immigrants from the continent currently in America.\textsuperscript{99} Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria represent the largest African immigrant populations.\textsuperscript{100} Immigration statistics show that these individuals migrated to the United States to reunite with family, take advantage of employment opportunities, escape political oppression, or to receive higher education.

\textsuperscript{97}“The Diversity Visa Process,” \textit{U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs}, accessed March 11, 2015, \url{http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/immigrate/diversity-visa/entry.html}.
\textsuperscript{98}Monica Anderson, \textit{A Rising Share of the U.S. Black Population is Foreign Born; 9 Percent Are Immigrants; and While Most Are from the Caribbean, Africans Drive Recent Growth} (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015), 5, \url{http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/04/09/a-rising-share-of-the-u-s-black-population-is-foreign-born/}.
\textsuperscript{99}Christine P. Gambino, Edward N. Trevelyan, and John Thomas Fitzwater, \textit{The Foreign-Born Population From Africa: 2008 – 2012} (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), 2 – 3, \url{http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/acs/acsbr12-16.pdf}. The remaining 25 percent are classified as immigrants from North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Sudan) and ‘other Africa,’ a category that includes persons who listed ‘Africa’ as their country of birth. Though the U.S. Census Bureau considers the Sudan to be a part of North Africa, OIS does not. For the purposes of this study, I follow the OIS’s regional distinctions and include Sudan as a part of the area considered Middle Africa or below the Sahara.
\textsuperscript{100}Ibid.
These reasons can be perceived as pointing an accusatory finger at the economic, political, and sociocultural states of African countries in the wake of deterritorialization on the continent. Deterritorialization arguably began during the seventeenth century when Europeans (merchants, missionaries, etc.) traveled to and settled on the continent for the purpose of spreading religion, to exploit the continent’s agricultural and mineral resources for the benefit of empire building, and to traffic black bodies as free labor to the West. Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Great Britain carved out the continent and staked claims in most of its nations. Colonization and the encounters between European settlers and indigenous Africans facilitated the deterritorializing of African cultures and tradition as settlers sought to ‘civilize’ or ‘Europeanize’ Africans. European governments disrupted and determined systems of local government, religious practices, migration, employment, and educational structures. Western values impacted food choices, dress, styles of worship, and artistic and cultural output. Africans reterritorialized; European behaviors were incorporated into their own creating glocal African cultures.\(^\text{101}\)

Though colonization ended about a half a century ago for many nations, the residual effects have left lasting damage on the African continent. The systems of rule and power the colonizers symbolically bequeathed to African natives forged the path “for a neocolonial dispensation whereby the resources of Africa continued to be appropriated by the former colonizers working in corrupt collusion with the indigenous political leadership.”\(^\text{102}\)

\(^{101}\) During my travels in Nigeria in 2011 and 2012, I was surprised to learn the rate at which many Nigerians eat coleslaw. Salad, as Nigerians call it, is a staple food and can be found at most celebrations involving food and even at fast food restaurants. The mixture of cabbage, onions, carrots, mayonnaise, and other ingredients is a leftover from British colonialism in the country; coleslaw is a culinary example of African reterritorialization.

established what Frederick Cooper calls a “gatekeeper state.”\textsuperscript{103} During colonial rule, African states relied upon taxes and tariffs to run their economies. The colonizers ultimately controlled what came and left their respective African states, including agriculture/food, people, systems of education, media, and other resources. After colonialism, power was left in the hands of those the colonial powers could continue to control. Postcolonial governments embraced and furthered policies of exploitation instituted during colonial rule.\textsuperscript{104} Colonization remained, but with a new face.

Frantz Fanon laments in much of his work the machinations of colonialism and postcolonialism and echoes Cooper’s arguments about African gatekeeper states. Fanon notes that once independence was won in many countries, elite Africans became the new colonizers (often in the form of dictators) and abandoned and neglected those in the proletariat who pledged undying support to these pseudo-leaders who had profusely promised democratic reform centered on correcting the colonizers’ legacy of social, economic, and political ills.\textsuperscript{105} Yet, as Isidore Okpewho points out, these ills continue to sicken the continent. He states:

But how can anything be set right when a nation has lost its sense of mission in its blind pursuit of power and privilege: When the government abandons its responsibility to provide the resources for quality education in its schools and universities and instead diverts them to grandiose, meaningless schemes both inside and outside the country?\textsuperscript{106}

Okpewho goes on to infer that the intersection of the poor conditions under which many Africans live as well as neocolonial power and wealth grabbing play a major role in individuals’ migration pursuits. In numerous African nations, wealth “remains resolutely out of reach of anyone who

\textsuperscript{103} Frederick Cooper, \textit{Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 141.  
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{105} Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 35 – 66.  
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 9.
might choose to pursue a legitimate career.” Also, civil wars and conflict in countries across the continent make daily living an untenable experience for many without the political or economic capital to protect themselves. As a result, thousands of individuals seek to migrate (sometimes taking arduous and dangerous illegal routes) hoping they can settle in a new land where they can be educated with the possibility of being employed after graduation or where they can gain employment, purchase necessities, and live comfortably without resigning themselves to a life of corruption, war, and famine which have historically haunted the continent and have captured the imaginations of individuals around the world.

Patricia and Samantha bemoaned the ideas some Americans have when they are asked questions about elephants and lions “like everywhere in Africa is a safari.” The young women, along with Pascal, a Nigerian immigrant in his late thirties who has lived in the United States for over a decade, deplore the poverty, famine, disease, inter-ethnic civil war, terrorism, corruption, coups, and dictatorships form the sticky stage upon which many beliefs about the continent often rest. Sam, Pascal’s contemporary, also lamented the misinformation about Africa that Americans have, misinformation he claims led to numerous awkward conversations with his daughter’s classmates and their parents in the Nebraska town they lived in prior to moving to the Baltimore, Maryland area. Much of the research on African migration to the United States paints a portrait of Africa and its subjects that falls in line with some of these prevailing notions that exist thanks to mass mediated images and representations of pathology readily apparent in American news and entertainment. The West African Ebola crisis that began in 2014 and the resulting global panic revealed just how little many people know about the continent. Two Rwandan students at a New Jersey school were forced to stay at home when parents raised

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concerns about the health and safety of their children. Parents at one Mississippi school kept their children at home after the school’s principal returned from a trip to the Zambia and another Mississippi school district forbade a school bus driver who had visited Ghana from returning to work. A Wisconsin school saw its absentee rate increase on the day it hosted two visitors from Uganda. None of these African countries were affected and some are not in close geographical proximity to the disease’s epicenter. This irrational panic made clear the fact of Africa as a continent that consists of many countries, cultures, and languages is lost on some Americans who think of the continent as a dark and uncivilized place where disease and famine run rampant.

Scholars note that beliefs about Africa date back to early European travelogues depicting Africa as a savage jungle of wild animals and barbarian bush people. Beverly G. Hawk argues that since “Stanley was sent in search of Livingstone, Africa has been a wild adventure story and it continues to be perceived as such. The images and representations of Africa in the American mind, then, is worse than incomplete, it is inaccurate.” The American media has refrained from accurate storytelling about the continent, its cultures, and its people. Bosah Ebo contends, “More meaningful stories that need commitment to cultural knowledge about Africa, and the patience of explanation are shunned by American media.” This inaccuracy and shunning is particularly distressing to Africans living in the United States, especially those who participated in this study. What often goes unnoticed in mainstream America is the rate at which Africans like Lisa, Patricia, and Samantha who come from financially privileged backgrounds migrate to

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America for undergraduate degrees, advanced degrees, or jobs. What also goes unrealized is the African immigrant who comes to the United States with a college education already in hand, leading to an African ‘brain drain’ of doctors, nurses, professors, and other highly skilled laborers, artists, intellectuals, and members of the elite classes in their countries of origin.\textsuperscript{111} These Africans have been called, “Afropolitans,” or those among the higher classes on the continent and around the diaspora who possess the means to travel to and live outside their countries of origin.

\textbf{Afropolitanism Considered and Reconsidered}

In 2005, Taiye Selasi, a Ghanaian-Nigerian writer whose family immigrated to the United Kingdom before eventually settling in the United States, published an article that pushed the terms “Afropolitan” and “Afropolitanism” into the semi-mainstream cultural lexicon.\textsuperscript{112} Selasi’s article titled, “Bye-Bye Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?),” offers this definition:

They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You’ll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes…others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos… There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie’s kitchen. Then there’s the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.\textsuperscript{113}

Selasi’s article tells a tale of African migration success seasoned with dashes of sociopolitical and economic prosperity. Her assessment of the Afropolitan is largely celebratory. On the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[111] Amadu Jacky Kaba, “Africa’s Migration Brain Drain: Factors Contributing to the Mass Emigration of Africa’s Elite to the West” in \textit{The New African Diaspora}, ed. Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 109 – 123. Kaba notes that Egyptian and Nigerian immigrants are amongst the most educated groups in America with 60.4 percent and 52.9 percent, respectively, holding at least a Bachelors degree.
\item[112] There is some confusion as to who exactly coined the term “Afropolitan.” Some attribute it to Selasi’s article, others attribute it to Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe.
\item[113] Taiye Selasi, “Bye-Bye Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?),” \textit{The LIP Magazine}, last modified March 3, 2005, \url{http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76}.
\end{footnotes}
representations of Africa and Africans that circulate around the West, she states, “The media’s portrayals (war, hunger) won’t do. Neither will the New World trope of bumbling, blue-black doctor. Most of us grew up aware of ‘being from’ a blighted place, of having last names from countries which are linked to lack, corruption.”"114 This sort of essentialism, of not recognizing or situating the successes within the continent alongside the pathologies, is what Afropolitanism complicates. Those, like Selasi (and as I contend, some of the participants in this study), offer an alternate portrait of the continent that includes the designer suit wearing young professional who epitomizes a twenty-first century consumerist ethos and who consciously represents “the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique.”115 For Selasi, the twenty-first century Afropolitan will ultimately upend longstanding images of the African continent as she returns to the continent to redistribute the talent, skills, and knowledge she has acquired abroad to aid in her nation’s financial, social, cultural, and political development.

Since the publication of “Bye-Bye Babar,” Afropolitanism has become a much studied and talked about concept in African studies and in the media.116 In the summer of 2015, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art hosted an event entitled “An Afropolitan Experience” which primarily focused on African fashion and dandyism. However, in September of 2011, the Houston Museum of African American Culture (HMAAC)117 hosted a symposium

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
117 The location of this event is telling. According to Census data of the African born population in America collected from the bureau’s 2008 – 2012 American Community Survey, over 134,000 African born individuals live in Texas. Of those 134,000, 50,000 are in the area that comprises the Houston metropolitan area. Nigerians and Ethiopians are the largest groups residing in and around Houston. See Christine P. Gambino, Edward N. Trevelyan, and John Thomas Fitzwater, “The Foreign-Born Population from Africa: 2008 – 2012,” American Community
titled “Africans in America – The New Beat of Afropolitans” to celebrate the achievements of African immigrants in the United States. The HMAAC website states, “This symposium marks the rise of a new cultural influence, brought to America and the world by a wave of fascinating young and creative cosmopolitan African immigrants, so called “Afropolitans.””

As this website and Selasi’s article suggest, migration is the primary prerequisite for Afropolitanism. In his description of Selasi’s work, J.K.S. Makokha states, “African immigrants and citizens of African nations living in the West are automatic Afropolitans.” However, Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe uses the term to signify transnational movements within the continent of Africa as well as out. To Mbembe, an Afropolitan could just as easily be a Sierra Leonean professor teaching in Togo as a Kenyan artist painting murals in Los Angeles or a physician in Accra who returned to Ghana after receiving a European education or an Abidjan businessman who uses his political connections to secure business contracts and build his wealth and social standing or a self taught fashion designer in Durbin who is able to show her designs during Lagos Fashion Week.

Selasi’s article has been a primary source on Afropolitanism, but it has not gone without critique or controversy. Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina’s lecture “I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan” from the African Studies Association – United Kingdom 2012 conference

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offers what has been considered the most vocal criticism of “Afropolitanism” to date.\footnote{For an overview of the criticism and analysis of Wainaina’s lecture, see Stephanie Bosch Santana, “Exorcizing Afropolitanism: Binyavanga Wainaina Explains Why ‘I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan’ at ASAUK 2012” africainwords.com, last modified February 8, 2013, \url{http://africainwords.com/2013/02/08/exorcizing-afropolitanism-binyavanga-wainaina-explains-why-i-am-a-pan-africanist-not-an-afropolitan-at-asauk-2012/}. I have attempted to acquire the full text of Wainaina’s lecture to no success. Of the many responses to this lecture, Santana’s arguably offers the most thorough overview and includes additional analysis of the praise and critiques Selasi’s work has received.} The Nairobi based Wainaina refers to Mbembe’s take on “Afropolitanism” as being more accurate and notes that “Afropolitanism has become the marker of crude cultural commodification – a phenomenon increasingly ‘product driven,’ design focused, and ‘potentially funded by the West.'”\footnote{Ibid.} In writing about Wainaina’s response and her own aversion to “Afropolitanism,” Marta Tveit says:

> Besides from adopting the tone of a National Geographic documentary, the text is clearly addressing a Westernised audience, explaining to them the strange ways and particulars of this tribe of ‘Afropolitans’... For fun, imagine applying what Selasi is doing with Afropolitans to a group from another continent – for instance, everyone with one or more parent from Europe. Half of America would be “Europolitans! Coming soon in a country-music joint/blue-collar job near you, a group whose beautiful skimmed-milk skin and subdimensional booties…”\footnote{Marta Tveit, “The Afropolitan Must Go,” ThinkAfricaPress.com, last modified November 5, 2013, \url{http://thinkafricapress.com/culture/afropolitan-must-go}. It must be noted here that the title of Tveit’s article is a play on the title of Selasi’s first novel Ghana Must Go.}

Tveit’s scathing analysis of Selasi’s article points to a phenomenon that is largely (and I argue, negligently) missing from “Bye-Bye Babar:” class, a fundamental discursive concept that must be discussed when considering the transnational movements of Africans from nations south of the Sahara around the world and particularly to the United States.

Selasi’s article, while bold and rather ambitious, fails to address the socioeconomic privilege inherent within being an Afropolitan. Though she does mention the privilege of determining who and what she and those like her want to be in the world, she does not address the fact that education, employment, finances, and continuous access to them play a role in
identity shaping. The clothes and shoes an African immigrant living in the West wears, the bars and clubs she might frequent, the cultural productions she may patronize, her circle of friends, etc., are not handed out at customs in airports across America. They are often the spoils of financial stability a well-to-do African immigrant brings with her and are cultivated and expanded as a result of regular allowances from parents or family back on the continent, family or social contacts already living in the United States, American education, and/or employment opportunities post-arrival (for those already with degrees) or post-graduation (for those who come for undergraduate and graduate degrees). As Tveit states, “The people Selasi describes belong to a narrow class…What is most appalling is that Selasi excites this class to take up battle on behalf of the rest of Africa.”124 Certainly, Tveit is correct in her indignation; what Selasi calls for is reminiscent of the sort of neocolonial dynamic that Fanon eviscerates in The Wretched of the Earth, a new neocolonial dynamic where Afropolitans with their Western college degrees and access to capital would replace the existing gatekeepers who have systematically denied basic services and a human quality of living to those amongst the proletarian class. Colonization would remain, but with an even newer face.

While I agree with Tveit’s and Wainaina’s views on Selasi’s Afropolitanism, I do believe that Selasi’s (transnational outside the African continent) and Mbembe’s (transnational inside the continent) concepts provide a means to examine the different responses an African pre-migrant might have to the mass mediated images of America. These images aid the construction or non-construction of the imagined paradise and the desire or lack thereof for the United States that the pre-migrant might have before coming to America. As such, I offer a slightly different definition of Afropolitan and Afropolitanism that connects (and possibly conflates) Selasi’s and Mbembe’s

124 Ibid.
ideas and takes into consideration a broader understanding of economic class and the colonial and postcolonial structures that often feed it. I do not offer it as one meant to be inherently positive or negative, though I could make arguments in both camps. Instead, I attempt here to bridge the gulf between Selasi and Mbembe while acknowledging the power and privilege of being an Afropolitan on the African continent and abroad.

Therefore, I define Afropolitan as an individual who possesses the economic, political, and sociocultural capital necessary to fashion an existence both in her country of origin and outside it devoid of poverty, lack, and economic instability. The Afropolitan may have been educated in the West; though a Western undergraduate or graduate education is advantageous, it is not always necessary. What is necessary is the ability to adequately master the sociopolitical and socioeconomic scales within one’s country of origin and in the country where the Afropolitan migrates. The Afropolitan who settles in the West, particularly in America, has the means to successfully negotiate middle or upper class life (if only economically) using connections at home and in America that will ensure an existence that includes access to education, employment, a steady income, housing and basic utilities, transportation, food, medical care, and consumer goods. Afropolitans do not necessarily come to the United States to escape hardship at home; life at home is quite good. Afropolitans come because they can. Migrating is seen as a way of building more socioeconomic, political, and cultural capital and a resume to boot. If the Afropolitan returns home, she returns to much fanfare and (almost) guaranteed success as a returnee with American credentials. As Patricia stated, “I’m going to steal all the knowledge I can while I’m here and go home to Congo.”

125 In the next chapter, I explore the ways in which race and ‘blackness’ influence an African immigrant’s experiences in and perceptions of the United States.
Though Lisa, Patricia, and Samantha did not explicitly state that they come from privileged backgrounds, their statements offered clues that speak to the economic status of their families. Phrases and terms like ‘my driver,’ ‘the cook,’ ‘the housekeeper,’ ‘having cable,’ and attending private school punctuated their talk of home, all things that are more or less unavailable to the working class and impoverished in an African nation. Like Lisa and her friends, Thomas, Joseph, and Sarah, three Nigerians in their early to mid twenties, spoke similarly of their lives in their home nation. Thomas explained that for him, coming to the United States was a familial obligation. His father insisted that he join his sister Tonya, a night nurse at a nursing home who is in the country raising a young daughter alone. He stated, “I had everything I needed at home.” All of these young people’s parents are fully funding their studies in the United States; they do not receive financial aid or have scholarships. Kevin, a young man in his late twenties born to an affluent family in the Republic of Benin and raised in Ghana, represents Afropolitanism in two ways; his affluence and social mobility enabled his family to migrate transnationally within the continent and enabled him to eventually migrate to America. Combined, all the markers stated here suggest that these young people are indeed Afropolitans (sometimes in multiple ways) and stand in contrast to those immigrants in the United States who come from more modest backgrounds.

126 Though neither Tonya nor Thomas explicitly stated this, I gleaned from my conversations with them that Tonya’s migration to the United States was the result of an unplanned pregnancy out of wedlock. Possibly, the social shame of Tonya’s pregnancy facilitated the move. I also gathered that Tonya receives no financial support from Nigeria, while it appears that Thomas is attending an American university with full funding from their family at home.
127 Several participants say they were forced to take out student loans to help cover the cost of their degree programs.
Those Who Are Not Afropolitans

What then can we call those who are not Afropolitans and come to the United States through hard work, will, the luck of the Diversity Visa lottery, or a combination of these?\textsuperscript{128} While the postmodern deconstructionist turn in cultural studies has largely dismissed and upended the use of binaries when describing people, cultures, and the movement of culture, the growing and celebrated use of the term Afropolitan creates an inherent binary system of privilege and cultural identity that ignores the majority of Africans living on the continent or abroad. Simon Gikandi suggests that the term Afropolitanism is opposite of the term “Afropessimism,” or “the belief that the continent and its populace is hopelessly imprisoned in its past, trapped in a vicious cycle of underdevelopment, and held hostage to corrupt institutions.”\textsuperscript{129} Gikandi goes on to explain that Afropessimism emerged in the 1980s during the height of political and economic crises in many African nations. He states:

Fitting neatly into traditional Western notions of Africa as the “other” of modern reason and progress, Afro-pessimism has proven hard to dislodge because it seems to be the only logical response to political failure and economic stagnation in Africa.\textsuperscript{130}

Like Afropolitanism, Afropessimism has enjoyed a healthy debate within both academic and non-academic rhetorical circles.\textsuperscript{131} However, as Ebere Onwudiwe implies, the term “Afropessimist” describes those theorists, politicians, political analysts, and scholars who use the term to describe those who subscribe to notions of Africa as an assortment of ills that will never


\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.

be cured. Following this logic, using the term “Afropessimist” to describe migrants as victims of the overwhelmingly negative circumstances within their countries of origin is grossly inaccurate and reeks of the same sort of African essentialism that Selasi derides and her critics claim she employs when characterizing Afropolitans. Certainly, Wainaina’s vociferous call to be considered a Pan-Africanist is valid, but the term is so broad that it encompasses African diasporas or people of African descent living throughout the world including Afrasians, Afro-Caribbeans, African Americans, Afro-Europeans, Afro-Latinos, etc.

I will, thus, refer to the incredibly diverse group of African immigrants in the United States (or larger West) who could not be considered Afropolitan as Afroproletarians in keeping with my use of the terms ‘proletarian’ and ‘proletariat’ in the beginning of this chapter. I use these terms to signify those individuals or groups of individuals who do not possess power, property, or financial resources and must rely solely upon their labor (physical and/or intellectual) in order to survive. Using this working definition as a base, I define Afroproletarians as individuals of African descent without the sort of sociopolitical, cultural, or economic capital that would enable them to live as socio-politically, culturally, or economically privileged people in their nations of origin. These people are laborers who rarely ascend to the socioeconomic level of their Afropolitan cousins, though the type of labor they provide may seemingly place them on an upward trajectory. Benjamin, a Nigerian man in his sixties who was once a television producer and newspaper editor, is an example of a laborer whose work as a journalist suggested socioeconomic mobility. However, his chosen careers did not translate into the lifestyle of an elite African. Instead, it placed him somewhere in the middle of the scale.

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between elite and poor. For Benjamin it was necessary to manage life with the limited resources available to them while acutely understanding how the pathologies of their postcolonial nation affected their lives and those of their family members.

For Afroproletarians, migration to locales considered better than their home nations is a goal; the belief in the West, particularly America, as a place where they can transcend the powerlessness that can exist for them bolsters their desire to migrate. However, migration is not a simple enterprise. These individuals do not have the same financial flexibility as Afropolitans. This in no way means that they were all impoverished in their country of origin or the victims of political instability, terrorism, or civil war. As noted earlier, many may have existed in the space between privilege and disadvantage. Therefore, I use the term Afroproletarian as a means of capturing the social, economic, and cultural diversity that can exist within this group of people.

Benjamin, Pascal, and Brian, another Nigerian in this study, come from this in between socioeconomic space. They were neither wealthy nor impoverished. Pascal’s father was an administrator at a local hospital. Pascal was able to come to the United States as a Masters/PhD student in 2004 with a Bachelors degree in philosophy in hand. His relative Brian came to the United States three years ago with a Bachelors degree in education and is currently pursuing a Masters in higher education administration. As Pascal said of Brian, who was amongst the last group of Nigerians who entered as part of the visa lottery, “He won the lottery.”133 In Brian’s case, Pascal’s statement is something of a double entendre; Brian won one of the visas distributed to Nigerians in the visa lottery, which allowed him to migrate to the United States, and he won the ‘employment lottery’ when he was quickly able to find work as a corrections

officer shortly after arriving. Brian is now saving money so that he can bring his wife, who lives with his parents in southeastern Nigeria, to America and start a family. Brian and Pascal came with high hopes for their chances at higher education and employment and have been relatively successful so far, though Pascal has not secured the higher paying academic job he seeks.

Afroproletarians can consist of visa lottery winners, students, refugees, those gaining entry to the United States to reunite with family members, or those who come with employment preference. Of the four primary reasons for migrating to the United States that previous scholars have asserted (education, family reunion, war/political instability, employment), the pursuit of secondary education and the ability to acquire job opportunities are the two factors most consistent with the participants in this study. Benjamin, Pascal, and Brian represent Afroproletarians who did not live in poverty. Brenda, a Kenyan woman in her thirties who migrated to America in 2005, is an example of a laborer whose socioeconomic status in Kenya placed her close to disadvantaged. Rob, another Nigerian who won the visa lottery, was from a rather disadvantaged family and saw his visa as a way to “make it” in the world. Despite the financial differences between (and diversity within) the groups, the main things that unite the Afropolitans and the Afroproletarians in this study are the pre-migration perceptions of the United States they gained from the steady flow of media in their home countries. Media consumption helped fuel their desire to seize the advantages of living in America.

Media Flows

The history of American media on the African continent began during colonialization and has become a complex tale within the global record of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri would call “Empire.” It is an “irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural

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134 This study does not include individuals who identify as refugees. This is not by design, but by coincidence.
Deterritorialization is at the heart of Empire. Cultural, financial, political, and social structures and strictures are uprooted in these exchanges and indigenous citizens of a nation must contend with a new order that is both familiar and foreign. While it is not my intent here to have a discussion of the machinations of Empire around the globe, I offer it as a means to understanding how American cultural products circulate around the world and leave discernible footprints on the literal and imaginative soils of African nations and their people. Empire has no leaders, though those in charge of the “primary factors of production and exchange – money, technology, people, and goods,” appear to form a cadre of powerbrokers partially responsible for American “mediascapes,” or the images of the United States that have been electronically distributed to a growing swath of the African continent from colonial times to the present.

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the presence of American film on the continent grew out of Great Britain’s sociopolitical relationships with American film producers. Brian Larkin explains that the circulation of film in Africa’s British colonies was very much a projection of Empire’s mobility. He states, “Lines of transportation and communication – the media system of Empire – regulate this mobility, giving empires their sense of space and time, organizing relations with an imperial center and other nodes in the system.” At this time, Great Britain was the “imperial center” and Hollywood operated as a node in the system. British colonial leaders often used film imports (and other mass media) as a means of

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136 Ibid. Also, Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 221. I will return to this idea of “mediascapes” later in this chapter.
maintaining order and social control. They also used it as a means of determining how to best set up systems for educating colonized Africans.

In correspondence from Secretary of State for the Colonies Malcolm MacDonald in Lagos to the British Home Office in London dated February 27, 1940, MacDonald includes a report dated September 30, 1939 that outlines how the British authorities in Nigeria employed American films to educate Lagos schoolchildren on European social mores.\textsuperscript{138} British adults, typically teachers and school managers, and elementary and middle school children were given tickets to special theater showings. In discussing how the films helped social relations between Africans and their European colonizers, the report states:

> The manners and social poise of the young African are improving as a result of attendance at the cinemas. Very many of our children come from houses which are dirty squalid and poverty-stricken in the extreme: it is inevitable that the films should encourage a demand for a better standard of living.\textsuperscript{139}

The report goes on to state that the quick and clever nature of short films and cartoons perplexed the schoolchildren, but they adjusted well to viewing long form Hollywood films like \textit{Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs} and \textit{Mutiny on the Bounty}. Not surprisingly, both films are ultimately treatises about the triumph of good over evil and adherence to prescribed orders and authorities. The films served the purpose of civilizing and disciplining schoolchildren who the colonial powers hoped would become compliant adults.

Larkin notes that colonial rule was predicated upon the “symbolic constitution of boundaries placing ruler and ruled, white and nonwhite, in carefully demarcated positions” and film exhibition in public spaces in colonial Africa was a “performative social event in which the

\textsuperscript{138} Malcolm MacDonald to Professor Harlow, 27 February 1940, Films – Educational, Showing of films to schoolchildren in Nigeria, 1940 Social Service Papers, The British National Archives – London.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
semantic relay of meaning between film and audience was shaped by the precise conjuncture of racial…and political relations that preconstituted citizens and subjects.”

Chukwuma Okoye frames film exhibition and viewership in the African colonies as a mechanism for the complete colonization of the African mind as films were chosen to glorify whiteness, deify the colonizer, and demonstrate the colonizer’s superior technological inventiveness.

The introduction of broadcast media in the late 1920s exemplified Europe’s technological wizardry or its ability to mortgage its associations with the actual techno-wizards to maintain its colonial control. In 1926, the United Kingdom established the Empire Marketing Board to promote the British Empire throughout the United Kingdom and its colonies. Radio broadcasts became a staple weapon in EMB Chairman Leo Amery’s propaganda arsenal the following year. By 1927, the British East Africa Company began to distribute BBC programming from Nairobi, Kenya and by 1932, the British had established a system of radio broadcasting to all its colonies and dominions including the entirety of Anglophone Africa. French efforts began in the early 1930s as well with small operations out of Madagascar in 1931, but did not gain traction until 1939 with the establishment of Radio Dakar in Senegal. The late 1930s also saw the rise of Belgian radio in what is now Zaire; Jesuit priests began broadcasting religious programming on Sundays and major holidays. With the start of the 1940s, radio broadcasts touched most of the continent. As the political climate on the continent began to shift from colonization to independence in the 1950s, television became the broadcast medium of choice in many countries.

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The first television station in Africa began operating in Ibadan, Nigeria in October of 1959, just one year before the nation gained independence from Great Britain. In the months leading up to the establishment of Western Nigeria Television (WNTV), British authorities were particularly concerned with the possible proliferation of American programming and influence in the Anglophone African colonies. In briefs for the Secretary of State for the Colonies Alan Lennox-Boyd between February and June of 1959, colonial officials documented the seemingly tempestuous process of establishing the station and determining who would be responsible for its operations. Chief Olafemi Awolowo, who was Premier of the Western Region of Nigeria at the time, along with Chief Anthony Enahoro, the Western Region’s Minister of Home and Mid-West Affairs, were instrumental in bringing WNTV to Nigeria. Several cables note the British authorities’ consternation with Awolowo who traveled to the United States to speak with Hollywood producers about programming for the station. Awolowo viewed television as an educational tool to better the lives of Nigeria’s people. British officials saw this as a problem; too much American influence would lead to a reorienting of the Nigerian people toward the United States.

Though attempts at producing original programming were made in the months and weeks before and after WNTV began broadcast operations, these efforts were thwarted largely due to the breaching of contracts between production companies, local Nigerian governments, and British officials because of Awolowo’s connections with American stakeholders. For the British authorities, Nigerian independence was inevitable. By the late

\[144\] Ibid., 104. It is important to note that though Ibadan was not a major seat of colonial governmental power, it was the largest city in Nigeria at the time of independence in 1960 making it a ripe market for television infrastructure. The city is the home of one of Africa’s most prestigious universities, the University of Ibadan, which until 1962 was a campus of the University of London system.


\[146\] Ibid.

\[147\] W.J. Cheesman to C.M. Drukker, 13 October 1959, Nigeria Television Service: Establishment and Policy, The British National Archives – London. This particular correspondence is telling; Cheesman was trade commissioner in
1950s, Nigerians had retained control of local governments with power over the nation as a whole resting in Great Britain. Yet, the timbre of officials’ communications suggest they expected independence would be purely symbolic and sociocultural control of Nigeria would remain firmly with the British.

In December of 1959, cables between Governor of the Western Region J.D. Rankine and Secretary of State for the Colonies Iain Macleod noted the “deplorable” result of British and Nigerian (a nod toward Awolowo) officials’ ignorance about the “power of television in influencing public opinion” being the increasing broadcasting of “American Westerns” on WNTV. These westerns included programs like The Lone Ranger, Highway Patrol, The Cisco Kid, and Hopalong Cassidy which Rankine believed showed “disrespect for the law and violence in various forms” and “hand-to-hand fighting and shooting.” Rankine lamented:

…I can now understand why so many complaints have been made of the demoralising and brutalising effect of the less desirable features of television and the cinema and their inevitable contribution towards juvenile delinquency. The tragedy here, of course, is not only this but that the African viewing public will come to believe that the way of life depicted in these programmes is not merely that of Hollywood or the seamy side of Chicago, but must be typical of the European and in particular, the British way of life.

Rankine’s views show the colonial authority’s hesitance about allowing American television programs, particularly westerns, to proliferate in Nigeria. British officials actively sought to detrerritorialize the nation during colonization and reterritorialize or reorient it toward a British affect, a feat they believed American media would ultimately disrupt.

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Lagos at the time while Drukker was head of the Commercial Relations and Export Department of the Board of Trade in London. Cheesman’s letter outlines the tensions between Awolowo and British authorities that were escalating at this time.


149 Ibid.

150 One study participant, a Nigerian man in his late fifties, mentioned that during his visa interview at the American Embassy in Lagos during the late 1970s he told the official in charge that he wanted to come to America to be a cowboy.
For the colonizers, the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization through media was a means to hold onto power even after technically handing over the nation to the Nigerian authorities. Later correspondences between British authorities discussed *Laurel and Hardy, Lassie, Science Fiction Theater, I Spy, The Lone Ranger, Tugboat Annie*, and *A Man Called X*.\(^{151}\) Officials believed American programs and films would continue to be a major part of WNTV’s daily lineup because the much larger Hollywood industry could produce and distribute films at a faster pace. Because of the vast differences between Hollywood’s and Britain’s production economies of scale, American programs and films were cheap to import while British products were less prolific and more expensive to produce both in and outside the colonies. As one official noted about the possibility of more films and television shows from the United Kingdom premiering on Nigerian television, “The main obstacle to W.N.T.V. taking such material…is the financial one. Their resources are limited…”\(^{152}\) Another official noted that American programs could be acquired for just over £6 because they had circulated through American stations several times over:

Judging from the figure of £6 10s. a half-hour, one can assume that all the feature films showing on W.N.T.V. have been shown and shown ad nauseam to all ‘Western’ television audiences in existence; but here at last in Africa is a new audience, an unexpected windfall for the American renters, and a curious situation arises in which British firms who wish to advertise on television are compelled to associate their names and their products with the adolescent fantasies of American ‘horse-opera’, the disagreements of small-town ‘newly-weds’ and tales of how


\(^{152}\) Ibid. During the early twentieth century, the United States developed a vested interest in Nigeria because of its oil production and began investing in the country in earnest as a means of ensuring economic opportunities through the petroleum industry and ensuring that growing communist sentiment in the country as it marched toward independence did not hinder those opportunities. The aforementioned letter between Rankine and Macleod notes the growing presence of Russian influence in Nigeria, the continent’s most populous nation. Megan Engle offers an overview of America’s Cold War era involvement in Africa, especially the Central Intelligence Agency funded Congress for Cultural Freedom’s activities which sought to use modernization theories of capitalist democracy, art, and culture as a way of appealing to African elites suspicious of European neo-colonialism. See Megan Engle, “The Congress for Cultural Freedom, Modernization, and the Cultural Cold War in Anglophone Africa, 1958-1967.” PhD diss., Binghampton University, 2014. ProQuest (UMI 3683149).
‘Mike’, an American Intelligence Agent, won the last war!\textsuperscript{153}

Despite the clear disdain for American programs and films, these products continued to flow into Nigeria at a rate much larger than British products. As Nigeria was the model for the rest of the continent, other nations adopted WNTV’s operating structure; some officials active during the lead up to WNTV’s going ‘on air’ noted that nations like Ghana sought to form television networks in the same vein.\textsuperscript{154}

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, television (largely state run) had been introduced in much of Africa south of the Sahara. Having television was considered a step toward modernity; “television, like a national airline, was seen as a symbol of national status.”\textsuperscript{155} Post-independence nations like Nigeria and Cote D’Ivoire enjoyed rapid economic growth. Cote D’Ivoire’s agricultural markets and Nigeria’s petroleum markets made them economically viable postcolonial states.\textsuperscript{156} Television was a point of pride. Benjamin, the former television producer and newspaper editor prior to migration, recalled the technology he and his colleagues in Ibadan enjoyed working with in their studio. “We had the latest of everything and we would watch all the channels from America on the satellite,” he says. Unlike Nigeria, which regularly produced independent programming that aired during the day (mostly news programs and soap operas based on Yoruba plays which became a basis for Nollywood films in the 1990s)\textsuperscript{157} and ran American programming at night, much of the programming in the early days of television in some nations was not indigenous. While post-independence state run television broadcasting was designed to bolster fledgling nations’ projects of national development and identity, by the

\textsuperscript{155} Bourgault, \textit{Mass Media}, 105.
\textsuperscript{156} Frederick Cooper, \textit{Africa Since 1940}, 86 – 97.
\textsuperscript{157} This phenomenon will be discussed in chapter four which focuses on Nollywood.
late 1980s and 1990s political chaos in many nations and economic instability resulting in World Bank/IMF sponsored structural adjustment programs forced new African governments to cut spending for broadcast enterprises. Stipulations placed on the World Bank loans restricted how they could administer public funds in their countries. This led to a larger spread of television programs and films modified for television viewing from the United States into Africa that continues unabated thanks to the proliferation of satellite technology and despite the more recent turn toward original African programming and filmmaking.

Deterritorialization through the spread of American mediascapes on the continent has created new reterritorialized African mediascapes that produce programming based upon the structures, narratives, and themes of the soap operas, serialized dramas, religious broadcasts, reality shows, documentaries, and music video based programs imported from the United States. The primary example this study will examine in later chapters is the Nigerian film industry, known as Nollywood, which produces films that are cultural blends of traditional Yoruba theatre narratives and aesthetics, Anglo-American and Latin American soap operas and serial dramas, and Indian Bollywood masala films. Arjun Appadurai argues that global flows of technology, media, people, finances, and ideas do not travel on a “one-way street in which the terms of global cultural politics are set wholly by…the vicissitudes of international flows of

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technology, labor and finance” that necessitates subtle or simplistic changing of “existing neo-Marxist models of uneven development and state-formation.” The globalization of culture creates a locality where the global is absorbed into the local. Appadurai notes that cultural globalization is not the same as homogenization; instead, the “instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, clothing styles…)” and, I argue, media structures, narratives, and themes establish reterritorialized glocal cultural productions that become syncretic mash-ups of local and global culture. Turn on a television in many African nations and you will likely find Big Brother Africa, Africa’s Next Top Model, or Africa’s Got Talent being broadcast alongside the American versions.

Programs like Big Brother Africa, Husbands of Lagos, and Desperate Housegirls exist within a highly glocal African media sphere. Tilo Grätz notes that since 1990, the proliferation of mass media on the continent has led to a diverse African mediascape; “the widespread appropriation of new technical means such as computers, information and communication technologies (ICT), Internet and satellite, has even increased the connectivity and multimediality of media production as one of the new aesthetic formations.” Appadurai’s celebratory assessment of globalization and the reterritorialized mediascapes it can produce include these new aesthetic formations. Still, they are steeped in the deterritorializing circulations of Empire. Empire has no borders, thus, the steady stream of American mass media into Africa has led to the glamorization of American culture and life and a belief in the nation’s potential for acquiring clout and riches, something highly present in conversations about the two American productions participants in this study discussed the most.

161 Ibid., 229.
Coming to America, The Cosby Show

“The best movie…I enjoy American movies…is Coming to America. Eddie Murphy!” said Henry, a 50 year-old Nigerian who has been in the United States since 1990. “In fact, I consider it an eye opener because when you watch that movie, sometimes you feel you can see how they really live in America. You can see. That will give you an idea of what is really going on in that country.” Henry’s statement rings true for many of the immigrants in this study; when asked about films and television shows they remember watching prior to migrating, an overwhelming number of respondents stated that they had watched, sometimes repeatedly, the comedy Coming to America. Also on the list was the family situation comedy The Cosby Show, starring a once revered Bill Cosby in a role that would earn him the title of America’s favorite TV dad. This begs a question. What is it about these productions, especially the 1988 Eddie Murphy star vehicle, that was and remains so appealing to the subjects of this study and those people still on the African continent who may be regularly watching them? A brief analysis here of their plots and underlying messages, especially in the film, may provide hints as to why the participants regard them so highly.

In Coming to America, Eddie Murphy plays the crown prince of a fictional African nation called Zamunda. At the start of the film, Prince Akeem, who has reached his twenty-first birthday, is set to meet the woman his parents have arranged to be his wife. Dissatisfied with the custom that does not allow him the power of choice, Akeem, along with his friend Semmi (a role Arsenio Hall delightfully plays), travels to Queens, New York to find a wife of Akeem’s choosing. Prince Akeem is adamant that the women he meets remain unaware of his wealth and royalty; he desires a woman who will love him and not his power and status. Much to Semmi’s

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163 Bill Cosby’s reputation has been severely damaged in the last two years because of allegations that he drugged and sexually assaulted numerous women throughout his professional career.
disgust, Akeem insists they live modestly and take jobs in a fast food restaurant while telling people they are exchange students from Africa. Ultimately, Akeem falls in love with the daughter of the owner of the fast food restaurant, McDowell’s (an obvious and humorous play on McDonald’s), and tries to woo her with stories of his poverty and life as a goat herder.

In the film, the fictionalized Queens neighborhoods that Akeem, Semmi, the McDowells, and the other characters occupy, operate as a microcosm for America and offer alternating views of the nation, the wild and mostly impoverished urban ‘ghetto’ and the relatively plush ease of upper middle class life. Upon arriving in America, Akeem asks a taxi driver to take him and Semmi to the most common part of Queens. The taxi driver deposits the pair in a run down neighborhood with dilapidated buildings, an abundance of litter, and homeless people wandering the streets (most of whom are black). The two rent a room that was once an active crime scene from a slumlord obsessed with money. As Akeem and Semmi explore their urban landscape, their encounters with the people, including women in bars and the operators of a neighborhood barber shop, and the environment surrounding them offers a picture of a mostly black underclass existence juxtaposed with the ascendant life of the McDowell family and their acquaintances, namely Daryl Jenks who is set to inherit a black hair care empire.

The McDowell’s are self-made; the restaurant has enabled the family to acquire wealth and community prestige. In a scene where the McDowell patriarch invites Akeem and Semmi to the family’s home (to work as servers at a party for his interracial and equally affluent group of friends), he ironically tells Akeem about the value of perseverance noting that with “20 to 30 years of hard work” he may be able to have a home as fine as the McDowell home. Compared to the degraded corner of Queens where the prince and his companion live, the home is rather opulent. Daryl, who does not work and lives off the money his father made from “SoulGlo” hair
products, adds to this picture of class opulence; he wears designer clothes, has season tickets to
college and professional sports teams’ games, and drives a powerful red sports car around
Queens. The Jenks and McDowell families are nouveau riche; business acumen and unwavering
diligence facilitated their climb up the socioeconomic and sociocultural ladder. While the
majority of the people in the film represent the black underclass, Jenks and the McDowell family
occupy a special place. Their existence within a rather impoverished and socioeconomically
impotent urban space represents a promise, the promise that through grit and determination one
can achieve the American dream. The McDowell home, Daryl’s clothing and car, and the clear
presence of their money define the dream.

Similar to the Jenks and McDowell families in Coming to America, the Huxtable family
in the widely regaled television series The Cosby Show is an example of upper middle class life.
Cliff, the affable obstetrician father, and Clair, his high-powered attorney wife, reside in the
affluent Brooklyn Heights enclave of Brooklyn, New York. The family’s upper middle class
status is a major point of the show; the show suggests they both attended a historically black
college as undergrads but matriculated to Ivy League universities for law and medical school. In
one episode, one of the Huxtable daughters gets into a fist-fight with a girl at school who bullies
her about being spoiled and rich. The family’s wealth and privilege is in stark contrast to the life
of working class characters that appear in the series, including the eldest daughter who opens a
wilderness store that eventually fails with her husband. The daughter and her husband’s
missteps with the store and their low-income apartment is corrected when the two begin law and
medical school and eventually return to their advantageous roots and the promise of future
privilege. During the final two seasons of the show, the Huxtable family ‘adopts’ one of Clair’s
underprivileged relatives from a poor part of New York, who through her contact with the family
begins to transcend her meager beginnings and meld into upper middle class life. The Huxtable family also represents the promise of education that teaches that through advanced degrees one can (regardless of race, ethnicity, class, or national origin) ascend to the higher classes.

Ultimately, the film and television series (along with others like *The Jeffersons*, a show about a black dry cleaner mogul who moves his family to New York City’s upper east side, which was also mentioned in conversations with participants) represent the hope and potential of the United States. Robin Wood notes that the idea that America is the land where everyone can be happy because all problems are solvable within the existing capitalist system pervades Hollywood productions. This feeds into audiences believing that anything is achievable with hard work and perseverance. Underlying the narratives in these aforementioned productions is the message that the American dream can be obtained through ‘pulling oneself up by one’s boot straps.’ These productions offer an illusory image of America. Underclass individuals are solely responsible for their life’s circumstances; they are poor and disadvantaged because they do not work hard enough. The media mirage tells the tale of an America paradise teeming with great possibilities without acknowledging or deeply exploring the societal and historical dynamics that lead to the plight of the underclass represented in films and series like *Coming to America* and *The Cosby Show*. As Benjamin, the former television producer and journalist, stated, “Hollywood is the biggest teacher on life in America. Hollywood is a tool of public relations. It is what gives people from all over the world their ideas about this place.” Indeed, the expansion of American “cultural artifacts,” or items like movies and television shows can impact Africans perceptions of America.

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Imagined Paradise

As American films and television programs circulated after the introduction of broadcasting on the continent, African people began to form new opinions of the nation they saw on television screens. As mentioned, some African states experienced periods of economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s and some African individuals were able to carve out comfortable lifestyles. During periods of economic stability on the continent, individuals sought to migrate to America in the hopes of gaining advanced educations, employment, and sociocultural opportunities that would give them greater economic, social, and political capital in their home nations; returning home was expected within a few years. Ernest, a Nigerian in his mid 50s, came to the United States at the height of his nation’s oil boom in the 1970s. He said, “Oh, I was only going to be here a few years and go back. I told the man in the embassy during my visa interview I wanted to go to America to be a cowboy in Texas or Oklahoma or somewhere. I really thought I could become a cowboy because I thought anything was possible in the U.S. The man laughed and said, ‘Enjoy the U.S.’” However, Ernest did not become a cowboy and he did not return to Nigeria. The crash of Nigeria’s oil industry and the steady procession of dictators in the 1980s and 1990s made going home a virtual impossibility for Ernest. For people across the continent struggling to survive their nation’s socioeconomic downturns in the 1980s and 1990s, remaining at home became an impossibility. America, beamed into their television sets, became the destination of choice, a paradise where becoming a cowboy or anything one desired to be was not just possible, but a given.

Arthur notes that the “proliferation of mass communication media outlets, where the material goods of the West are frequently disseminated, serves as a catalyst for migration…The relatively high standards of living in the West are directly beamed into the homes of…Africans
through televisions and other media channels.” In their study of Korean immigrants in the United States, Paul Messaris and Jisuk Woo offer a similar analysis; they state that media contributes to the pre-migrants understanding of America as a mono-cultural “dream land” or “paradise for laborers.” A global viewer of American productions may misrecognize cultural artifacts as representations of mono-cultural America and not as “complexly resonant, since in his or her experience, it is not.” For pre-migrants from Africa seeking to journey to the United States, films, television shows (like the ones explored in the previous section), and even music videos can offer ostentatious visions of an America where anyone can access riches and status; these visions rarely show the full spectrum of American life. Like Benjamin, Patricia stated, “The media sells America.” One need only to walk through urban centers and rural markets around the African continent and be offered a pirated Kenny Rogers CD or DVD of Independence Day to comprehend the truth of Benjamin’s and Patricia’s statements and perceive the long reach of American culture, a reach that I argue can lead to the formation of America as an ‘imagined paradise,’ an adaptation of Benedict Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community.”

Benedict Anderson uses the concept of the “imagined community” to define a nation as an “imagined political community” where members understand that they “will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” The imagined community represents an ideal or a desire that the members of a community have for a physical space of which they are or can be an integral part. Within the imagined community, all members share a certain affinity for one another and a

166 J. Arthur, Invisible Sojourners, 36.
169 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 5.
comradeship that transcends gender, race, class, or geography. The members’ specific station in life is not important in the imagined community; only the connection those members feel with the community and fellow members has value. Appadurai employs Anderson’s concept to discuss “imagined worlds’, that is, “the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread across the globe.”

The theories of the imagined community and the imagined world offer a means to consider how members of one nation may view a nation presented to them through mass media. The promise of a postcolonial Africa where “the end of foreign colonization would usher in a new era – an era of self-determination and autonomy” that would ultimately lead to social, economic, and political stability for its people has yet to be fulfilled. “Na Yankee me want go,” is a common pidgin English expression for those who desire to leave their homeland for the paradise they perceive America to be. The citizens of a nation rife with economic, political, and social instability may imagine themselves living in an imagined paradise. This paradise is a community or world that provides access to education, employment, independence, housing, basic utilities, and consumer goods. In the paradise, problems are few, possibilities to achieve power and privilege are endless, and participation in the civic and social life of the paradise come with ease. The ongoing socioeconomic and political problems that plague many African nations coupled with the proliferation of media images of an America where life appears to be better are motivations for an exodus to the imagined paradise.

Appadurai states that in the construction of imagined worlds through mediascapes, the lines between fantasy and reality are often blurred; mediascapes “provide (especially in their

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170 Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 222.
television, film and cassette forms) large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ‘ethnoscapes’ to viewers throughout the world.”  

The farther away an individual is from the direct experiences of a place, “the more likely they are to construct ‘imagined worlds’ which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects.”  

As a result, the constructed fantasies of imagined worlds could become “prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement.”  

Living daily in the shadows of corrupt political systems, failing healthcare systems that are incapable of responding to curable diseases, a scarcity of educational and occupational opportunities, and a lack of access to basic infrastructural services like water and electricity can cause many Africans to begin to cast their hopes on an imagined paradise that American mass media constructs.

Mediated Desire

American media can expedite the construction of an imagined paradise; ultimately, the creation of the paradise is a form of reterritorialization for both Afroproletarians and Afropolitans seeking to make the United States a permanent or temporary home. As Marshall McLuhan’s theories suggest, all technology is communication. He notes that the media available to individuals in a society at a given time has a great impact on the ways people interpret messages distributed through that media. For example, an African pre-migrant’s consumption of American film, television, other forms of media, and websites/social media can aid in the adoption of certain messages about her social and economic position within her home country of origin and her potential social and economic position in her American imagined paradise. In this

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172 Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 222 – 223. Appadurai uses the term ‘ethnoscape’ to mean the “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups and persons” who make up a certain world and affect the politics within it. 

173 Ibid. 

174 Ibid. 

175 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 9 – 15.
regard, media becomes an extension of the pre-migrant for the purpose of reterritorialization, or using the technology available to fashion a new space to exist. The use of media can create a strong sense of attachment to the home within which she desires to live (the United States) and a sense of detachment from the home where she actually lives (her African nation of origin). The pre-migrant reterritorializes her existence and America because of her media consumption. For many future migrants, American media can act as the driving force behind their desire to live in the United States, either temporarily (as is the case of many of the Afropolitans in this study) or permanently (which most of the Afroproletarians desire). As Kerry Segrave argues, “Hollywood integrates its consumers from the top down; producing a product for mass consumption, then creating a demand for it.”\textsuperscript{176} This can be said for a considerable amount of the entertainment media reaching the African continent from the United States. American cultural producers create desirable products for consumption that not only establish a demand for the products, but can also develop a desire for the place from which those products came.

Media products circulating in the global arena of exchange foster the connection to the place the pre-migrant desires to inhabit. Desire travels around the imagined paradise in multiple ways. Some African future migrants may be convinced that journeying to the United States will be the source of their success and enable the sort of life they could not dream to have at home or advance the already affluent life they live in their home nation. Media further facilitates desire and helps to create a new home (permanent and temporary) in the pre-migrant’s imagination. Scenes of well dressed, professionally and financially stable people with nice homes and cars in films and television programs gain incredible affective power when viewed. Daryl Jenks’s

sports car, Cliff Huxtable’s sweater collection, Cleo McDowell’s palatial urban mansion, and George Jefferson’s ‘deluxe apartment in the sky’ create the desire to migrate to a seeming paradise where wealth and consumer goods can be easily acquired with a little bit (but usually not a lot) of effort and struggle. The pre-migrant’s home country and its perceived problems and deficiencies foster a desire to migrate and dwell in a nation divorced from the sorts of difficulties the future migrant regularly faces.

It is important to note here that the idea of America, the imagined paradise, does not hold the same meaning for all African pre-migrants. Pascal, an Afroproletarian, claimed that he regularly watched news programs and read newspapers and understood that “America was not perfect.” He said, “I knew crime, corruption, and poverty was here, but I knew it was better than Nigeria.” Thomas, an Afropolitan, summed up the impression of America he gleaned from the police dramas he watched like CSI in one word, crime. The fact that many respondents discussed their consumption of Coming to America, a film that does offer glimpses of America’s pathologies, shows that they were exposed to some unpleasant American realities. Pascal’s and Thomas’s statements are telling and suggest that potential migrants understand the complexities and difficulties of American life, but those difficulties are brushed aside or rationalized away. Arthur states that, “Information about crime, violence, racism, and discrimination, including anti-immigrant sentiments, are…channeled into the homes of many…Anti-immigration sentiments from the American public to curb legal and illegal immigration do not cause would-be immigrants [to shelve] their motivations to migrate.” An Afroproletarian wishing to migrate may understand that “Yankee na war-o,” (America is war.) but the potential war to settle in and acclimate to America is far preferable to the socioeconomic and sociopolitical wars they face at

\[177\] J. Arthur, African Women Immigrants, 32.
home. She may believe herself to be fortunate to live in poverty in America because advancement is only a few moments of hard work away. For people like Lisa, Kevin, Patricia, and other Afropolitans, hardship may not resonate because they believe that their socioeconomic and sociocultural positions in life prior to migration will shield them from adversity. Also, they may believe that any struggle they endure is worth the clout they will receive once they return with heightened status to their African homes.

Decoding Perceptions, Decoding Desire

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed how American media flows in and around the African continent can facilitate the construction of the United States as an imagined paradise, or a place where some pre-migrants perceive they can escape the tenuous lives they live in their country of origin. The imagined paradise is an emotional and intellectual creation that is built upon a foundation of images of the United States as a nation of wealth and political stability, where anyone has the chance to achieve the American dream through hard work and perseverance. However, the American dream may not have the same meaning for all African immigrants in the United States. Their perceptions of the America ‘sold’ to them and their dreams of and desire for the nation may differ according to the socioeconomic status they hold in their countries of origin. An Afropolitan may view the images of America differently than an Afroproletarian and may use them differently in the process of reterritorialization; as Stuart Hall notes in his

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178 I would be remiss not to state here that the flow of media in Africa is unidirectional. As chapter three will show, African media also proliferates in the United States.

179 James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1931), 214 – 215. Over the years, the term “American dream” has enjoyed a healthy life in global rhetoric; its definition has changed as American cultural, political, and economic structures have shifted. I use it in the same manner as James Truslow Adams when he first articulated the term in 1931. He states it is a “dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement…It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.
‘encoding/decoding’ theoretical paradigm, individuals’ frameworks of knowledge dictate the way they process messages within a televisual production. A person’s frameworks of knowledge, which can include socioeconomic class, education level, race, gender, culture, geography, and collective memory as the result of social conditioning and/or image naturalization function synergistically when a televisual message is received. Together, these factors can add multiple layers of meaning to the message and affect the way the messages are reterritorialized within the future migrant’s system of affectively articulating the imagined paradise for herself.

For example, the makers of a picture like American Pie, a movie that Lisa noted as a favorite, created a dreamscape that includes well-kept houses with manicured lawns on picturesque streets, the sort that Lisa said she thought made up all of America. No one in the film appears to be poor; in fact, the characters represent what can be considered the ‘American dream,’ people mostly in nuclear families with large homes, nice cars, technological gadgets, and stylish clothing. Patricia and Samantha said that shows like My Super Sweet Sixteen, an MTV program that follows wealthy families giving their children lavish sixteenth birthday parties, which can be said to glorify consumer products like homes, cars, clothes, and gadgets, “sell” this as the American dream. From the way the film and show are presented, it can be deduced that this is a purposeful rendition of American life; it is a version of America that resonates with American and global audiences. Because Lisa, Samantha, and Patricia come from well to do families that have access to a lifestyle similar to the one shown in American Pie and My Super Sweet Sixteen, their belief in their ability to maintain that style of living in America was strong prior to arrival. However, Henry, Benjamin, Brian, Ernest, and Rob who claimed a fixation on

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180 Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” 140.
**Coming to America** and *The Cosby Show* prior to migration interpreted the purposeful rendition of life in those American productions based on their understanding of their lower status and desire to work hard to achieve the stature of the characters in the movie and show. Elevation was their pre-migration wish; maintenance of their economic and social status quo was not their desire.

A pre-migrant viewer of American media may not readily recognize that the images beamed into the television and/or computer screens in their homes, fast food restaurants, open-air cafés, and cybercafés do not represent all of America spatially or culturally. To restate, some may not see America as “complexly resonant, since in his or her experience, it is not.”181 I would fall hard into an essentialist trap if I asserted here that all people within a group, like Afropolitans and Afroproletarians, have the same “frameworks of knowledge” and cultural understandings or think the same way. Instead, I have offered an analysis based upon the responses of participants in this study that provide clues about how members of these groups negotiate American televisual messages.

Additionally, my analysis is in conversation with Sonja Brown Givens and Jennifer Monahan’s contention that “stereotypic media depictions become highly accessible with continued viewing. Over time, the imagery becomes an informational resource to the extent that it is considered common knowledge.”182 This assertion can be applied to images of America like the cinema and small screen series discussed in this chapter; over time, scenes of urban comfort, including seeming riches and expensive goods, become “common knowledge” for pre-migrants. Robin Wood offers a list of eight ideas/ideologies that he argues can be present within American

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films or, which I argue, can rest within American media in general: capitalism, heterosexual relationships, agrarianism, the wilderness or the wildness of nature (or even urban space), technological progress, success and wealth, the Rosebud syndrome or the belief that ‘money isn't everything,’ and a theory of an America where happiness is a given and problems can be easily solved. I add a ninth factor to this list: America as the greatest nation on earth. All nine of these factors, I argue, can be found in a vast amount of American media products.

Specifically, capitalism, success and wealth, the theory of inherent happiness and ephemeral problems, and ‘America the great’ are the ideas that resonate with African pre-migrants the most; these ideas can become common knowledge and contribute to how pre-migrants decode televisual messages and reterritorialize them to craft the imagined paradise, especially if the pre-migrant has no other knowledge of or means to gain knowledge about the United States. This does not mean that the pre-migrant is a natural dupe of America’s cultural imperialism. As Pascal’s (and Thomas’s) relationships with American media implies, the pre-migrant does have some agency and decodes using what information she or he possesses. Pascal grew up in a small city. Yet, his father’s job as a hospital administrator enabled him and his family to have access to newspapers and own one of the only television sets in their community. Though Pascal understood America’s complex cultural landscape, he decided to migrate to the United States to gain a doctorate degree that could be valued more than an indigenous doctorate if he ever decides to return to the continent.

According to Stuart Hall, viewers like Pascal, Thomas Lisa, Benjamin, Henry, Samantha, and Patricia are not passive consumers who mindlessly ‘buy’ whatever is sold to them in media representations. Viewers can actively interpret televisual discourse in three ways:184

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1. The dominant-hegemonic position. In this position, the decoder takes the message the way the encoder intended. The encoder operates from the dominant sociocultural position and uses ideological codes that will reinforce that position. As posited earlier, purposeful renditions of American life are presented throughout that reinforce the idea that America is the greatest nation on earth; some, like Rob or even Kevin the affluent Ghanaian, readily accepted this dominant position without question. The paradise they reterritorialized prior to migrating was rooted in images of the American dream.

2. The negotiated position. This position is more adaptive and oppositional. The decoder accepts the legitimacy of the dominant position and even cooperates in its consumption and reproduction, but chooses to decode the message using her own “ground rules.” Subjects in this study state or suggest that prior to migrating they had been exposed to the idea that America is great and the idea that the nation has problems they would potentially have to navigate upon arrival. However, their process of reterritorializing the United States focused on what they believed was great about the nation, how they could succeed through fortitude and tenacity, and the sociocultural capital they could gain back home from living in America.

3. The oppositional position. In this position, the decoder has an understanding of the literal and connotative context of the discourse, but chooses to decode the message in a “globally contrary way.” For example, Thomas who associated the United States with crime because of the crime dramas he enjoyed watching prior to migrating stated that he only came to the United States out of a sense of familial duty. His system of reterritorialization did not include the United States as a paradise, but an African paradise that included access to power, money, and social standing.

Hall says that it cannot be taken for granted that the way the viewer processes a televisual is dependent upon a number of factors including social conditioning, connection to a prominent national collective memory, and discursive tools that a viewer’s social position make available to her. The viewer can decode the pictures, music, dialogue, plotlines, etc., in a film or television program based on her socioeconomic standing, the specific cultural values in her ethnic group, and what she has already learned about America.

As implied above, both Afropolitans and Afroproletarians may take the dominant-hegemonic position. However, how they position themselves within the position largely depends on the knowledge they have gained about America, their relationship with their country of origin, and how they merge or mix (reterritorialize) the two to understand their position in the world.

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185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
The Afropolitan who comes from a higher socioeconomic background may think America is the greatest nation on earth, but her experiences in her country of origin may not lead her to think that she lacks anything at home if she has what she needs or has the ability to obtain what she needs for survival. Her desire for America may be fixed in a want for American education or employment credentials that will elevate her socioeconomic status even higher at home. For her, America may be a temporary home, a paradise where she can acquire skills that she can take back to her country of origin. The Afroproletarian may think America is the greatest nation on earth because it appears to possess everything her home lacks. As Henry stated, “We believe that if you go to U.S., live there, you have a lot of opportunities. You see, we look at U.S. like it is full of everything, everything you can think of.” The Afroproletarian’s desire for America may be rooted in a want for American education or employment opportunities that will enable her to survive on a higher level than she could at home and even offer her the ability to take care of those she left behind. Thus, the United States may be viewed as an imagined paradise for permanent settlement and a paradise where her relatives may be able to join her in time and with more hard work.

A viewer’s frameworks of knowledge would operate differently in the negotiated position. For the pre-migrant, a reservoir of additional information about the United States beyond entertainment television and film may influence the way she decodes. In this position, the decoder chooses to use her own methods for decoding the televisual. The dissonance between what the viewer knows and what she sees and hears is not enough to prevent her from wanting to migrate; this dissonance speaks back to Pascal’s story and the point raised earlier
about “would-be immigrants” who do not “shelve their motivations to migrate” despite the
information about violence and poverty “channeled into the homes of many.”

Again, both Afropolitans and Afroproletarians may take this position. The
Afroproletarians who understand the complexities of American culture and life may still desire
to migrate because they view their chances for success or basic survival at home to be bleak or non-existent. Being in poverty in the United States is far preferable because the possibilities for advancement outnumber those in her country of origin; struggle in America is more palatable than struggle at home. Likewise, the Afropolitan may also understand the conceivable difficulties of life in America, but her social and financial resources may assuage potential hardship. Struggle, if it exists at all, is only temporary, a minor fleeting blip.

In the oppositional position, the encoder’s conscious and unconscious intersect, and the
decoder, who is fully conscious of the ideologies and multiple meanings in televisual messages,
chooses to oppose them. Unlike the viewer who takes the dominant-hegemonic or negotiated
position, the viewer here openly resists the messages and ideologies during the decoding and reterritorialization process. The viewer does not actively support the ideologies encoded within the American television or films she consumes. She may openly express her distaste for them to those around her.

While an Afroproletarian may take this view, the Afropolitan is more likely to adopt this position. The Afropolitan’s frameworks of knowledge, due in large part to the resources at her disposal, includes enough information to allow her to consciously see the layers of truth behind the pretty pictures of America. Coming to America and The Cosby Show may tell her that American living is easy, but she notices that the successful characters in these media forms

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possibly exist at the expense of the underclass, like the McDowell and Jenks families that made fortunes on cheap fast food and ridiculous hair care products. Perhaps she has visited places in America that do not match the pictures. Or, she may have a more intricate understanding of America’s economic, political, cultural, and social mosaic. America may be an imagined paradise for some, but not necessarily for her. She may not view it as a place where she can gain anything beyond what her country of origin claims; her desire for America may be ephemeral (She may wish to vacation there for a few days.) or entirely absent. The Afroproletarian who takes this position may do so because she does not see the advantage of leaving behind her familial and social network to struggle in a place where she is not immediately guaranteed a good life. Therefore, she uses the media available to remix or reterritorialize her African experience and find basic satisfaction in the life she lives.

**Conclusion**

The reading of the pre-migrant’s relationship with media, desire, and the imagined paradise through Hall’s encoding/decoding model I offer in these pages affords an even more nuanced view of the structures of deterritorialization and reterritorialization I outline in the introduction to this study. A more refined deconstruction this system and the circulation of media beg for a different model that gestures toward class as rendered through the definitions of Afropolitanism and Afroproletarianism presented in this chapter. In this new paradigm, class influences media consumption, message decoding, reterritorialization, and ultimately affects the desire to migrate. The African pre-migrant’s socioeconomic status in her home country guides how she perceives her home and the reasons for which she wants to dwell in the United States. She may wish to live in a nation divorced from the sorts of postcolonial difficulties that are widespread on the continent. Or, she may want to use America as a stepping-stone for her future
aspirations in her home country. While media facilitates the fashioning of a paradise in the pre-migrant’s imagination, class may dictate or have power over the ways in which the Afropolitan or Afroproletarian pre-migrant not only consumes American media but also how she processes the (ideology permeated) messages about the United States she sees in the television shows and films she watches. This is a phenomenon I witnessed in my travels to the continent.

During the final days of my first trip to Nigeria in 2011, I spent time with a family in the Ikeja neighborhood of Lagos near Muhammad Murtala airport. The husband, wife, and three children are street merchants who sell goods (mainly hair products, laundry detergent, and cold drinks) in a tiny shop a few blocks from their small basement flat. At the time, Edward, who holds a degree in English literature and also designs men’s suits when he has the money to buy fabric, had been searching for full-time employment for about ten years with the hope that he could eventually save enough to move to America where several of his extended family members live and later bring his wife and children. Edward and his family are an absolute contrast to a family I met in Port Harcourt that lives in a rather posh mansion in a wealthy neighborhood that houses oil company executives, politicians, high-ranking military officers, and the pastor of a five-thousand-plus member evangelical mega-church that meets several times a week at a sprawling campus within the neighborhood. While Edward’s children are growing up playing football (soccer) in the streets outside their flat, Emmanuel’s children are growing up playing Xbox and Nintendo and watching Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel. Two of the five are currently attending universities on the East Coast and Emmanuel intends to send a third (who attends an elite British boarding school) to the United States for an undergraduate degree in the

188 This dream may not be realized. As stated earlier, Nigeria is no longer eligible in the Diversity Immigration Visa Program. The program restricts the number of visas to 50,000 for individual countries. Nigeria has met that limit in the last year. Edward’s only chance of migrating now is to apply and gain acceptance into an American university and receive a student visa.
next few years. His ultimate hope is that his sons will return to Port Harcourt and run his businesses.

These two very different families represent the Afroproletarians and Afropolitans described in this chapter. As I argue here, American mass media plays a keen role in the formation of America as an imagined paradise and in the desire to migrate. However, socioeconomic class is not moot; an Afropolitan with access to financial capital may have more resources at her disposal, more power circulating through her life, and more ways to meet her desire for America. Economically/educationally/occupationally disadvantaged or in between Afroproletarians may craft a dreamlike United States using widely distributed common knowledge images of the American dream that makes them want to permanently stay. Affluent or more privileged Afropolitans may desire to come to America to seize skills, knowledge, and resume boosting experience they can take back home and turn into even greater socio-economic autonomy and privilege in their country of origin.

Class and desire remain themes in the following chapter. The primary question driving the chapter enables a critical examination of what happens when the pre-migration ideas about the temporary or permanent imagined paradise must shift or be reterritorialized when the suddenly deterritorialized immigrant finds that her American reality does not match the dreamscape she imagined, even if that dreamscape contained negative information about the nation. The way the pre-migrant negotiated the information she received from mass media ultimately influences how she responds to what I call the ‘paradox of progress’ once she settles in America. ‘Coming to America’ may have seemed like the key to advancement, but early settlement experiences and acculturation practices can challenge definitions of the American dream for both Afroproletarians and Afropolitans who now desire to go back to the continent.
because of the dissonance between their expectations and reality. For newly arrived and established African immigrants regardless of class, post migration deterritorialization or the dissonance creating crash between expectation and experience can produce tensions that disrupt the desire mass mediated images and representations of America fostered prior to the transatlantic journey to the United States.
CHAPTER III. DREAMS DEFERRED: AFRICAN MIGRATION, ACCULTURATION, AND THE PARADOX OF PROGRESS

“…we sing songs of hope, hope that tomorrow will be better than today, hope that one day soon, our lives will begin to resemble the dreams that brought us to America…My father reminds my brother and me almost everyday how lucky we are to be living in poverty in America, he claims that all of our cousins…would die for the chance…”

~ Tope Folarin

“I came here thinking there would be money in the streets and all I had to do was pick it up. Now, I wish I had never stepped my two legs in this country.”

~ Rob, Nigerian Immigrant

Benjamin came to the United States from Nigeria (during a military dictatorship) in the early 1990s with one goal in mind, to make a better life for his family. Having spent decades working for various Nigerian print and broadcast media outlets, he believed his transition to America would be relatively simple. “I couldn’t find work in media. I went to a newspaper in Detroit with my credentials, but I was not hired.” Benjamin states that he was unaware of the differences between American writing and Nigerian writing (which is rooted in British English); he also noted that he did not know how hard life would be in America. “I took whatever small…small jobs I could get. What choices did I have?” However, his limited choices did not disrupt his desire to bring his family to the United States. Even in his early 60s, Benjamin expressed a disquieting belief that somehow his life could have been better. “You see the people on the television living like big men. That’s not real America.”

For numerous people living on the African continent, the dream of America presented in the media creates a belief that the United States is the ‘greatest country in the world.’ As the

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190 All names in this study have been changed to protect the identities and privacy of participants.
participants in this study reveal, televisual productions (cinema and television shows mainly) have the power to inform and influence pre-migrants’ thought processes about and desire for America prior to migrating. These televisual entities offer snapshots of America that many take to heart. Pre-migrants understand that the United States is not a perfect place, but for Afroporletarians and Afropolitans alike, the promise of the ‘imagined paradise’ to ascend the socioeconomic ladder and access chances at a life beyond what their home nation offers is omnipresent and potent. Thus, ‘coming to America’ is a step toward progress in spite of struggles that might arise in this temporary or permanent home.

While it is impossible to pinpoint the exact thoughts of every citizen of every African nation dispersed throughout the diaspora, recent events including the ongoing migration crises; contentious politics leading to protests and/or violence in Uganda and Burkina Faso; terrorist attacks in Cameroon, Mali, and Nigeria; and, the Ebola epidemic have shed a bright light on the vast numbers who attempt to undertake the journey from their African country of origin to places in the West, particularly the United States. Between 2014 and 2015, these major global events have brought increasing attention to the African continent and its people dispersed throughout the world. During June of 2015, the increasing political turmoil in Burundi led numerous students to attempt to seek shelter and safety at the United States Embassy in Bujumbura. The students scaled the walls outside the embassy and slid beneath fencing to escape the brutality of the local police seeking to stamp out antigovernment protests. Most of the students were turned away. However, another story in the United States captivated and terrified American citizens in the summer and fall of 2014.

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The 2014 global Ebola crisis forced several African nations into the news; the disease afflicted thousands of West Africans primarily in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea with a handful of cases in Nigeria and Senegal. Many Americans’ fears of infection were heightened when ill doctors and aid workers were returned to domestic specialty hospitals for treatment. These fears were arguably most palpable in Texas where Liberian immigrant Thomas Eric Duncan was hospitalized and later died in a Dallas hospital after being released from another medical facility’s emergency room. Duncan’s death and the infection of two of his nurses created panic from Texas to Ohio where one of the nurses visited as a part of her wedding planning efforts.

The Ebola crisis caused numerous Americans to cast suspicion on any black face they perceived to be from the African continent. An Ethiopian parking lot attendant in Dallas was told to quarantine himself. A Sierra Leonean in New York reported that subway passengers would not sit near him after hearing his accented English. Several schools across the country shut down or prevented students, parents, employees, and/or guests from the continent from entering the schools. By the start of 2015, Ebola fears had largely subsided, but the crisis has potentially created an even larger vacuum of information about the African continent and its people that affects the way African immigrants are viewed in the United States; this information

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vacuum could influence immigrants’ pursuit of the American dream in a nation with longstanding misconceptions and erroneous ideas about them for years to come.195

For the participants in this study, the American dream is intricately woven into lofty notions of economic success and active participation in America’s consumer culture through the purchasing of expensive goods like cars, homes, and electronics. Christina Greer notes that the American dream for “black ethnics,” or non-native born blacks in the United States, is rooted in “the promise of economic, political, and social advancement within the polity and the equitable delivery of these goods to all members, regardless of race or other circumstance.”196 Greer’s assessment of the American dream for “black ethnics,” of which African immigrants in the United States are a part, are consistent with and in conversation with the findings in this study. Yet, as this chapter shows, the experiences immigrants from the continent can have upon arriving in the United States can reshape the belief in or definition of the American dream, especially for those who desired to return to their home nation or decided to return once the truth of life in America settled into their psyches.

In arguably his most noted poem “Harlem,” African American poet Langston Hughes asks readers what happens to a dream deferred for blacks in America seeking social, cultural, political, and economic autonomy and/or viability.197 Hughes’s question touches upon the key themes and questions in this chapter. What happens when the imagined paradise and the realities

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195 As I note in the introduction and previous chapter, I use the term immigrant to include both those who intend to remain in the United States and those who will eventually migrate back to Africa or to another location. Though the term immigration connotes a permanent move or settlement in another nation, this is simply not the case for several of the participants of this study who intend to move back to their nations of origin. These individuals are migrants in America or people who will eventually move on. I acknowledge here that not all of the study participants fall into the same categorical group. Also, I use ‘African immigrant’ to describe those who hail from nations considered to begin below the Sahara Desert; therefore, this project does not include individuals from North Africa. The North African countries excluded are Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria, in keeping with the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics regional distinctions for the African continent.
196 Greer, Black Ethnics, 5.
of life in America collide in unexpected ways? What happens when assumptive ideas and goals for achieving the American dream must be suspended or waived entirely in favor of basic survival in a difficult American landscape? For newly arrived and established African immigrants regardless of class, the collision can disrupt the desire that mass mediated images and representations of America foster and it can create unanticipated tensions in the new home. Immigrants find that the realities of American life deterritorializes the imagined paradise; cultural misunderstandings, difficulty in finding employment opportunities, social tensions based on race and/or ethnicity, and other factors unsettle the social, economic, and cultural attributes African immigrants emotionally and/or intellectually prescribed to the paradise before migration. Though the imagined paradise is an epistemological space that exists mainly in the minds of immigrants, it can be deterritorialized when the actualities of life in America force immigrants to interrogate the limits of their knowledge about and perceptions of the American paradise.

This chapter examines how the disquieting practices of post-migration acculturation deterritorialize the imagined paradise for African immigrants navigating life in the United States. Though the chapter engages with the history of African migration from the early twentieth century to the present, it is more concerned with evaluating twenty-first century African migration data in order to present a portrait of African immigrants currently in the United States and some of the factors that have an impact (positive and negative) on their lives. Some of the major issues African immigrants face that force the process of deterritorialization when they arrive and as they settle in the United States include lack of access to financial and material resources, problems of adjusting to a new culture, misunderstanding about the African continent that leads to unpleasant racial experiences, and tenuous relations with native-born blacks/African Americans. Thus, a re-articulation or reterritorialization of home becomes central to immigrants’
ability to successfully navigate American terrain that has lost its halo. Ultimately, the imagined paradise for both Afroproletarian and Afropolitan potential migrants designed prior to migration shifts when the encounter between this construction and the actualities of life in the United States produce intellectual and emotional dissonance. This dissonance leads to what I call the paradox of progress for African immigrants. Because this paradox can bring about cultural, economic, and social difficulties in the lives of immigrants, many who had planned to remain in the United States permanently may desire to return to their countries of origin after acquiring educations or the financial means to live comfortably back at home.

**Crossing the Atlantic: Migration from Africa to America**

To best present a clear picture of the paradox of progress for African immigrants in America, it is important to examine a history of the flow of African bodies to the United States. I have noted that previous studies list four main reasons why African immigrants come to the United States: to pursue secondary education, to reunite with family members who have previously migrated, to take advantage of economic opportunities and access to consumer goods, and to escape political instability. The history of African migration to America is intricately linked to these reasons and is an often-ignored narrative of the nation’s overall immigration history and legal and political discourse. From 1790 to the present, the United States Congress has passed nearly 50 pieces of immigration related legislation, including the pivotal 1924 Johnson – Reed Act and the 1965 Hart – Cellar Act. Scholars have undertaken the task of offering (sometimes competing) histories of immigration and its laws through a variety of cultural, economic, political, and social contexts. It is through these contexts that I attempt to

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link the documented history of African migration to the United States to themes present in the nation’s immigration history, from the desire to create a decidedly white nation to the clamor for skilled laborers from around the world, that have set the stage for recent and future migrations of Africans to America.

Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson has employed Theodore Roosevelt’s “barbarian virtues” terminology to undertake a critical examination of American ideologies of citizenship, national identity, and individuals’ sociopolitical autonomy in a late nineteenth and early twentieth century climate of intensified economic and military involvement abroad and immense population rushes in the United States.  

Jacobson asserts that in the period between the Centennial Exhibition in 1876 and the beginning of World War I, America’s encounters with people from other nations were linked to the interdependent relationship between growing industrialization and imperialism. As the nation grew into an economic superpower, its industrial complex developed an acute need for cheap, unskilled labor. Also, as the American industrial complex grew to the point of what some considered overproduction, the need for a foreign policy that connected imperialism with national economic interests also developed. Immigration was necessary for fueling the nation’s rapidly expanding economic structure and the economy relied upon the exportation of goods to stem the tide of overproduction. Yet, the nation displayed contempt for and a purposeful misrecognition of ‘othered’ bodies combined with a “plaguing – if quieter – sense of self-doubt.” America’s imperialistic impulses and its racial undertones lead to an industrialization that brought people from around the globe to the United States in search of economic opportunities at a time when formerly enslaved blacks attempted to

200 Ibid., 3.
make lives for themselves as free people. As a result of the influx of people from around the world and the emancipation of previously enslaved black people, America’s sociopolitical stakeholders (specifically lawmakers who were intent upon maintaining the United States as a white nation) created a racial hierarchy through eugenics that included degrees of European whiteness. While western and northern European immigrants from nations like Great Britain, Norway, and France were immediately afforded whiteness and considered “white on arrival” in America, eastern and southern Europeans from places like Italy, Hungary, and Greece were not. Also, the Irish (especially Irish Catholics) and Jews from all over Europe were mostly kept out of the classification of desirable whiteness and were considered “white, but not quite” along with their eastern and southern European fellow sojourners.201 Furthermore, the immigration policies and racial ideologies developed or exacerbated during the politically and socially tempestuous time between 1876 and 1916 after Reconstruction era policies failed to fully incorporate newly freed black people into America’s civic and economic fabric greatly affected the flow of African individuals into the United States in later years.

The themes of imperialism and industrialization speak to the ways in which African bodies migrated to the United States in the twentieth century and how they were viewed within the nation’s cultural and sociopolitical landscape. Some of the African-born individuals in the United States during the roughly forty years between 1876 and 1916 came as a part of America’s international expositions in the late nineteenth century; however, many of these individuals were non-black. As Robert Rydell explains, the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 vividly

201 David Roediger, Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 110 – 130. Roediger describes how European immigrants’ assimilation into American life often contributed to racial and ethnic strife in many of America’s major industrial areas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
displayed the underlying ideological notions of race and culture centered in whiteness. The expo included an exhibit of the cultures of Dahomey, an area on the African continent that is located in the present day Republic of Benin. The black African participants in the exposition were placed on display as a living exhibit of primitiveness. They wore animal skins and were placed in grass thatched mud huts with primitive tools for hunting, farming, and gathering foodstuffs; indeed, they were depicted as the opposite of industrial and civilized. This depiction, rooted in racist assumptions about the continent, positioned America as the center of all advancement and civilization. Advancement meant science and technology. Civilization meant whiteness. Through the ostentatious displays of racism and supposed progress, expo organizers perpetuated a belief in a powerful nation far superior to any on the globe, a belief that continues to circle the globe and penetrate the minds of global citizens like many of the African individuals who endeavor to make the journey to the United States.

The following data from the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service for Africa from 1860 through 1919, or the years leading up to the Civil War through the 1893 World’s Fair to the years leading up to the 1924 Johnson – Reed Act that established quotas based on national origin shows how migration from the African continent increased over a sixty year period: 458 entered in the 1860s; 441 in the 1870s; 768 in the 1880s; 432 in the 1890s; 6,326 from 1900 to 1909; and, 8,867 from 1910 to 1919. This data suggests that after the turn of the twentieth century, migration from the African continent to the United States dramatically increased. Scholars such as John A. Arthur and April Gordon attribute the migration jump to the

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203 United States Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2013* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2013), 6 – 11. It is important to note that these numbers include migration from North Africa. Also, these numbers do not include race-based data or data on those who may have entered the nation illegally.
growing tide of European colonialism on the African continent.\textsuperscript{204} In fact, between 1900 and 1949, when colonial rule was the norm in many African nations, 30,395 Africans crossed the Atlantic and arrived in America.\textsuperscript{205} Gordon notes that the roughly 600 Africans who immigrated each year during this period represented a mere trickle of individuals compared to overall American immigration numbers. Because Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) data considered persons European individuals “African,” many who entered the United States from these countries were not individuals who would be considered black, a point both Gordon and Ira Berlin make when considering how individuals from the African continent were counted upon arrival.\textsuperscript{206}

The Johnson – Reed Immigration Act of 1924 was largely in effect during the final twenty years of this period; the act created a quantitative based system of immigration that allowed specific numbers of people from certain nation-states into the country according to desirability for admission to the United States.\textsuperscript{207} It stipulated that American inhabitants as of the early 1920s did not include immigrants from the western hemisphere and their descendants (chiefly Mexicans), aliens ineligible for citizenship or their descendants (individuals and groups from the Asian region including the Middle East), the descendants of slaves (black peoples from the African continent), or the descendants of the American aborigines (Native Americans/First Peoples).\textsuperscript{208} Mae M. Ngai posits that theories of race, identity, American superiority, and definitions of whiteness spread widely during the twentieth century, especially between 1924 and

\textsuperscript{205} USDC, \textit{Yearbook}, 9 – 10.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 26.
Thus, the racial hierarchies that were the foundation of restrictive immigration policies created an even wider chasm between white Americans, black descendants of enslaved Africans, Native Americans/First Peoples, Mexicans, and those who came to the United States to improve their lives and economic conditions. Excluded from the Johnson – Reed quota system were those whose race, cultural differences, and perceived inability to assimilate into American society made them ineligible for citizenship.

As such, no one considered to be black was included as a part of the American population in the early twentieth century. As Ngai asserts, the Quota Board responsible for the law’s numerical formulas failed to recognize the difference between the descendants of enslaved black Africans, the descendants of those blacks who were free or freed during the course of slavery, and voluntary immigrants from the African continent. Ultimately, dismissing nonwhites from the American population formulas allowed for larger quotas for desirable European countries. Had the aforementioned black inhabitants been included in the formulas, nine percent of the national origin based quota would have been reserved for African countries from which the majority of America’s enslaved black population was imported. Independent African nations, such as Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa, each were given quotas of 100 persons while “European mandates and protectorates…for example, Tanganyika (now Tanzania) [and] Cameroon…each had their own quotas, which in practice served to increase the quotas of Great Britain, France, and Belgium, the nations with the largest colonial empires.” For example, 100 slots for those from both the British and French Cameroon (200 total) were allocated, the

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209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid., 27.
Belgian mandates of Ruanda and Urundi were given 100, and the British Togoland was also assigned 100 slots.\textsuperscript{212}

The roughly 600 individuals who entered the United States each year between 1900 and 1949 fall in line with quota systems established in the early twentieth century. However, as I have stated, no clear distinctions were made between whether the people from these countries were black Africans (or those of mixed ancestry who were considered black) or Europeans who had settled in the mandates. Thus, a white person of European descent or people of other nonblack races could enter the United States as one of the 100 apportioned for these areas making migration data past and present difficult, if not impossible, to decipher based on race.\textsuperscript{213}

However, it can be argued that the effects of colonialism on the African continent contributed to the overall migration of black Africans to the United States, a nation many Africans did not view as a part of the West’s colonial and imperial projects on their continent.

When independence was finalized for several African nations in the 1950s and 1960s, migration to the United States continued to rise with a total of 36,796 individuals coming into America between 1950 and 1969.\textsuperscript{214} The Hart – Cellar Act of 1965 essentially ended quota-based entry restrictions and contributed to African population increases during the last portion of this period. Africa to America migration at this time exposes one of the four main reasons why subjects left the continent in pursuit of the United States: educational attainment. While some migrants from the African continent came in the mid 1920s to attend historically black colleges and universities, including the first presidents of independent Nigeria and Ghana, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Kwame Nkrumah (respectively), the majority who came to gain an advanced

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 27 – 29.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Berlin, \textit{The Making of African America}, 205 – 206.
\item \textsuperscript{214} USDHC, \textit{Yearbook}, 9 – 10.
\end{itemize}
education arrived after World War II. As Nemata Blyden and Fenda A. Akiwumi note, some had the sponsorship and backing of American missionaries who hoped the African students would return to their homelands and become missionaries themselves.\textsuperscript{215} Some of the African students had the backing of their home governments to migrate to the United States to obtain degrees highly necessary for the building of new postcolonial states. Newly established postcolonial governments “recognized the imperative of well-educated cadres of civil servants and skilled workers to work in both the public and private sectors following the end of colonization and the ascension of African political leaders to power.”\textsuperscript{216} Certainly, the push toward independence and the establishment of sovereign African states created a demand for an educated labor force and leaders. However, the question arises, why did so many postcolonial African citizens and governments chose the United States, especially considering the proximity and long established relationships between the continent and Europe?

Gordon argues that the answer lies within changing attitudes toward Africans and the rise of restrictive immigration policies in Europe after the 1960s.\textsuperscript{217} After World War II, European nations actively recruited Africans to provide cheap labor as competition for increasingly expensive European labor, but this welcoming was short lived. By the 1960s, European nations had greatly restricted immigration from its former African colonies; Great Britain passed legislation in 1962 that completely stripped Africans living within the nation of any social and political rights. African subjects were rarely granted visas to study in European universities. By the 1970s, demand for African labor had sharply decreased while the desire to leave the


\textsuperscript{216} J. Arthur et al., \textit{Africans in Global Migration}, 2.

\textsuperscript{217} Gordon, “The New Diaspora,” 85.
continent became acute for many African citizens.\textsuperscript{218} The promise of sovereign and economically viable African nations was beginning to show cracks “as country after country in the region were roiled in political and economic conflicts” including relentless coup d’états which ushered in an era of military dictatorships that lasted for many decades.

With Europe closing its doors to its former subjects, America became a desired site for education, employment, and socioeconomic advancement. Between 1970 and 2009, a period of massive instability on the African continent due to continuing economic crises and war and dictatorships in countries like Rwanda, Togo, Cote d’Ivoire, and Nigeria, a total of 1,319,536 individuals from the continent entered the United States. The period of 1970 to 1979 saw 71,405 migrants entering the nation; between 1980 and 1989, the number nearly doubled to 141,987. However, the bulk of migrants from Africa arrived in the United States between 1990 and 2009 with the period between 1990 and 1999 witnessing the migration of 346,410. During the 2000s, 759,734 individuals from the continent came to America and from 2010 to 2014, 474,229 Africans entered the nation.\textsuperscript{219}

Ngai notes that the quota based system that the Johnson – Reed Act instituted only shifted once the Hart – Cellar Act went into affect. She contends that exclusion remained a primary focus of the 1965 legislation as it stipulated that no country in the Western Hemisphere could receive more than 20,000 visas.\textsuperscript{220} However, African migration scholars argue that the 1965 act was largely responsible for the influx of African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara Desert into the United States. Hart – Cellar introduced labor and occupational preferences for persons with specific skills that the United States Department of Labor

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} The migration data that the Office of Immigration Statistics provides ends with 2014. Data for 2015 has yet to be released as of June 28, 2016.
\textsuperscript{220} Ngai, Impossible Subjects, 7.
considered in high demand; the legislation also relaxed family reunification standards for those immigrants whose families wished to join them in America. Arthur points to these two provisions of the act, as well as the shift in policy toward refugees in the 1970s, as the impetus for the mass migration of African individuals to the nation. These provisions show the inextricable link between the reasons for Africa to America migration and immigration policy in the United States. Subsequent legislation, such as the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which allowed Africans in the nation illegally to apply for permanent residence status, and the 1990 Immigration Act that instituted the Diversity Visa Program and increased the number of skilled labor visas, enabled large numbers of Africans to enter the United States and legally remain in the country. Prior to 1965, one black person in one hundred was foreign born, but thanks largely to Hart – Cellar and successive immigration legislation the number of foreign born blacks had increased to one in twenty by the turn of the twenty-first century.221

Educational attainment and economic/employment opportunities are the two key reasons for historical and current patterns of African migration. The opportunity to attend colleges and universities in the United States has consistently been a deciding factor for migration. Rob, the immigrant quoted at the beginning of this chapter, entered the United States through the Diversity Visa Program; despite being in his late thirties at the time, Rob enrolled in an undergraduate criminal justice program at a university in the South. However, many of the African immigrants who enter the United States do not necessarily come to gain college degrees. Like Benjamin, Pascal, and Brian, many come with degrees in hand; as such, “secondary school

221 Berlin, The Making of African America, 206 – 207. Though this statistic includes black individuals from Caribbean nations, OIS and U.S. Census Bureau data show that the vast majority of the black foreign born population who entered the United States between 1990 and 2013 came from the African continent. These numbers do not include those who entered and remain in the country illegally. While this study does not focus upon undocumented Africans, several of the participants I spoke with acknowledge knowing or knowing of someone who is in the United States “without papers.”
and university students across the African continent focus their ambitions on leaving, upon the completion of their studies.”

This migration phenomenon has led to a brain drain of highly educated and skilled laborers from the African continent.

Amadu Jacky Kaba states that African brain drain in the twenty-first century has been the topic of many international debates about the plight of the African continent and its future as the century continues. Kaba notes that an estimated five million plus African entrepreneurs and professionals are currently living in the diaspora, including the United States. For many, leaving home with skills that are competitive in the global market epitomizes the inability of many postcolonial African nations to incorporate the massive numbers of those educated within the nations’ secondary and postsecondary education systems into their labor markets. From a lack of employment opportunities to a lack of basic social services like electricity shortages that would burden those aspiring entrepreneurs in various nations, these factors contribute to the western migration of many of the continent’s most capable citizens. Echoing Kaba, Arthur argues that the “continent faces gigantic social, economic, and political problems” if leaders on the continent continue to allow the mass exodus of its “best and brightest.”

Yet, the phenomenon of brain drain does not always begin once an African native receives an education and moves West. It can also begin when the “best and brightest” students leave their countries in search of an American undergraduate degree. Between 1990 and 2013, nearly nine in ten African-born immigrants arrived in the United States with a high school

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222 Ngai, Impossible Subjects, 5.
224 J. Arthur, Invisible Sojourners, 8.
In his July 2015 speech in Kenya during a multination visit to the African continent, President Barack Obama said to the crowd, “You don't need to do what my father did, and leave your home in order to get a good education and access to opportunity. Because of Kenya’s progress, because of your potential, you can build your future right here, right now.” The President’s statements in his ancestral homeland nod toward his acknowledgment of the pervasive desire to migrate that many African citizens possess and his acknowledgment that the outward migrations or mass exodus of capable and talented subjects can leave various nations on the African continent without the human intellectual capital they need to develop in the twenty-first century. As President Obama’s statements suggest and as scholars contend, this mass exodus will ultimately lead to widespread crises in Africa and contribute to the increase of black bodies entering and settling in the United States, a phenomenon that will contribute to the increasing diversification of America’s racial and ethnic milieu.

The Paradox of Progress: Negotiating the Ups and Downs of Acculturation

Prior to migrating to the United States, African individuals are often aware that America is a country with socioeconomic, cultural, and political issues that could affect their migration and settlement. Though the televisual productions they viewed prior to migrating present American splendor overall, images and representations of violence, poverty, lack, and social injustice exist. However, these images and representations are often not a part of the imagined paradise the African pre-migrant develops prior to migration. Yet, many are aware that their American experiences will depend on the ways in which they reterritorialize themselves by adopting American cultural practices, particularly the idea of hard work and perseverance. Many


\[226\] Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Kenyan People,” (speech, State Visit to the Republic of Kenya, Kenyatta University, Kenyatta, July 26, 2015).
pre-migrants believe they can avoid problems in paradise if they work hard enough, something they fully intend to do while also enjoying the spoils of American splendor. As Tonya’s friend Jennifer, a twenty-something Afroproletarian whose entire immediate family has settled in the United States over the last twenty years, stated, “I knew it wasn’t going to be easy here. I knew what I had to do because my father told me.” Jennifer is an example of an immigrant who entered America to reunify with her family, a family that tempered her American media derived ideas about the nation with the truths of their lives in the country before Jennifer arrived. Jennifer claimed that she was “ready for America,” but sadly acknowledged that she still believed life would be far easier than her family insisted. She also recognized that the majority of her African peers spread across the United States were not prepared and remain unable to acculturate to American life because their preconceived ideas about America have paralyzed them mentally and emotionally. Acculturation, or the process by which individuals or members of a cultural group adapt to or adopt traits, beliefs, and behaviors of another group, has proven difficult if not impossible because their American lives have unsettlingly deterritorialized their imagined paradise.

The process of acculturation can be a complex game of social and behavioral adjustment for immigrants, and “a commitment on the part of the immigrants to incorporate elements of the culture of the host society into their normative system” determines the ways they may play that game. ²²⁷ Acculturation is largely viewed as the course of minority groups existing within a dominant culture. Ira Berlin keenly states, “…these new immigrants recognize their reality and then seize opportunities of American life, going about the business of establishing their families, educating their children, and building their fortunes.”²²⁸ I argue that a number of changes can be

taken to make acculturation easier and more palatable. These changes can include dialect and language preference (particularly those from non-Anglophone nations); dress and attire or the wearing of Western style clothing (a practice they may have begun in their home nation); increased consumption of American popular culture; adoption of common attitudes and values of the nation including participation in civic, educational, and political institutions and organizations; and active participation in American capitalist consumer culture.

As many of the African individuals who come to the nation were American media consumers prior to migration and have ideas about the country upon arrival, these changes are often welcome and expected and the imagined paradise remains in tact. Rob, for instance, was prepared to participate in an economy unlike the one he left behind in Nigeria. He expected money to flow freely to him (“money in the streets”) through high paying jobs he could obtain without much problem and minimal effort. Pascal, Brian, and their friend Ken have developed an affinity for American popular culture; Pascal is an avid consumer of American music from folk and country to pop and gospel. Ken claimed that he loves American movies so much that he spends the majority of his days off from school and work watching films.

However, acculturation does not necessarily mean that the African immigrant fully integrates into American society. Arthur states, “Acculturated but not assimilated, the Africans engage the host society selectively, confining their activities to carefully constructed zones, mainly educational and economic, that are vital for their survival in this country.” The engagement and integration activities he speaks of are frequently dependent upon the age of immigrants at the time they arrive in the United States, country of origin, racial and ethnic identification, the values immigrants possesses prior to migration, the presence of relatives or

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acquaintances in the nation, as well as their socioeconomic status (or Afropolitan or Afroproletarian status) and educational attainment before entry into American society. The engagement and “carefully constructed zones, mainly educational and economic” are a part of the process of reterritorializing the imagined paradise and are dependent upon what happens in the early period of the immigrants’ time in America. For Patricia, Samantha, and Lisa, living in a tiny city surrounded by rural areas was an early shock; the young women had expected all of America to look like the towns and cities with skyscrapers, large homes, and well manicured streets they had previously seen in American television shows and films. This is the environment they had expected to live within. They were not prepared for the mountains, forests, small homes, and cultural isolation (as access to shopping and various attractions is over an hour away) that surrounded them. Their reality deterritorialized their imagined paradise; the America to which they migrated was unrecognizable. As a result, the young women have created social outlets that mainly consist of the few other Africans, international students, and foreign-born peoples in their tiny city. While the expectation may be that the United States will be or become sublime through hard work, African immigrants like these young women often quickly learn that their access to America is limited. These lessons deterritorialize America and immigrants begin to reterritorialize or selectively negotiate the “carefully constructed zones” within which they believe they will be able to exist with the least amount of discomfort.

The Discomfiting United States

On a warm early July afternoon in 2015, I attended a barbeque where about 45 African immigrants and tourists/visitors (mainly from West African nations) had gathered for an evening of food and fellowship. The atmosphere was relaxed and light; various languages flew around

\(^{230}\) Ibid., 69 – 70.
the backyard, women shoved plates of food into the hands of the newly arrived partiers, and a steady stream of Afro-pop flowed from makeshift speakers set up in the grass. Many of the partiers are employees of the Maryland Department of Corrections; through their contacts with each other at work, they had created an offline social network. Some were students at universities in the Baltimore area who had developed friendships with those corrections officers who attended college during their hours off from their prison work.

Throughout the evening, I floated around the barbeque, chatted with different people, listened to their stories, and learned about how they manage their lives in America. I was acutely aware that this was a social space that these immigrants had given me permission to enter; in that carefully constructed zone, despite sharing a related black identity, I was foreign. My ability to talk with the partiers depended upon the hosts deeming me safe and trustworthy and upon me constantly mentioning that I have visited the African continent a few times. As one man told me, “You are different. You speak well and you have a good countenance.” One stated, “Oh! You are more Nigerian than American.” Another said, “You are getting a doctorate. I will do what I can to support you.” Being deemed safe and trustworthy, as well as my identity as an adopted daughter of an African nation working toward a Ph.D., was of vital importance to the partygoers; they spoke more freely about their experiences once they were sure I was not there to mock, shame, or ridicule them or their ‘African-ness’ in any way.

The common theme of the personal narratives I heard throughout the evening was directly linked to ideas of progress in America, ideas that were couched in economic terms and notions about hard work. “I want the American dream” or some similar statement including the words American dream fell from many lips that evening. One’s ability to discuss beliefs about that dream relied upon their station in life, specifically employment associated with middle and
upper class life, possession of material goods, and large bank accounts. Yet, as many of the partygoers I spoke with recognized, progress was not always easy and many had not ascended to the level they had hoped for in their time in the country.

Nicolas, a Nigerian in his thirties who received an undergraduate degree in communications from a Missouri university, has been unemployed for some time and has spent the last few years trying to make it as a writer. Tonya, the nurse with a young daughter she supports with little to no assistance from the child’s father, lamented the fact that much of her biweekly paycheck goes to the American government. “At home,” Tonya stated at the party, “what’s yours is yours. Here, what’s yours is the government’s.”

Tonya admitted that her life and her daughter’s life are better in the United States than in Nigeria as it may be easier for her to be a single mother here than in a highly religious nation with clear disdain for female premarital sexual activity. Despite this, she claimed that she would move back immediately if she knew she could have the sort of life and income there that she has been able to secure in this country.

Nicolas and Tonya exemplify what I call the ‘paradox of progress.’ While the move to the United States is an inherently positive step for many African immigrants, life in the nation can make advancement and attainment of the American dream an especially onerous enterprise. Migrating to the United States, the imagined paradise, is considered progress for those leaving behind nations marred in political strife, violence, and economic despondency. However, that progressive step becomes paradoxical when the expected progress from hard work in paradise doesn’t match or even come close to reality. As Patricia noted, “People back home in DRC [the

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231 I spoke with Tonya twice over the course of 2015, in early March during a research visit to the Baltimore area and at the July party.
232 As noted in the proceeding chapter, Tonya’s identity as an unwed mother may prevent her from returning to her home nation as her Afropolitan family may not desire to have that shame on their house. From the conversations I had with Tonya and her brother Thomas, who appears to receive financial support from their family that Tonya does not receive, Tonya’s stay in the United States may be permanent and visits home rare.
Democratic Republic of the Congo] would not believe me if I told them what it’s really like here. They would think I was making it all up because that’s not what they see on the television. They would think I was saying things to stop them from coming so I can keep America for myself. I say, let them come and find out for themselves.” Tonya and Jennifer had similar sentiments; though they declared they try to inform friends and family still on the continent about their struggles here, the information has mostly fallen on ears unwilling to hear.

I noted earlier that various factors can contribute to the paradox of progress becoming the matter of life for African immigrants. Scholars like Arthur, Owusu, Takougang, Berlin, and others note that lack of access to the employment opportunities immigrants may have expected, misconceptions about Africa and its people, and tenuous relations with native born black can inflate the tensions and stresses of life in the United States. The primary factor that the subjects of this study discussed was the fact that they (some of them educated prior to arriving in the nation) were forced to labor in menial or service industry jobs that require little to no experience or skills. Takougang and Bassirou Tidjani assert that the strong desire to succeed has led many African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara Desert to take “the 3Ds: dirty, dangerous, and difficult jobs that most natives eschew.” However, the ‘3Ds’ were not necessarily what many of the participants in this study wanted to do upon arriving and settling in America.

Brenda, a Kenyan, mentioned that she had expected to find a high salaried office job as an administrative or executive assistant in corporate America when she arrived ten years ago. Currently, she is a corrections officer in the Maryland prison where many of the barbeque attendees work. Perhaps the most poignant of the narratives came from Benjamin, who had been

a television producer and newspaper editor before migrating to the United States. As mentioned, he came with the expectation that he would be able to secure a job as a newspaper journalist in the Detroit area where he initially settled; however, he quickly discovered that his journalism education, experience, and writing skills did not translate to employment with an American newspaper. Benjamin stated that he at first drove taxis, “flipped burgers and did what I had to do” in order to survive and bring his family to America. Eventually, he moved to the Baltimore area and secured a position as a corrections officer. He said, “My children are better off here…my son…he is interested in communications and film. He will do well, I know.”

Like Benjamin and Brenda, Rob too expected to receive employment with a high salary in the States despite not having a college degree or discernible job skills. His enthusiasm was squashed upon realizing that only McDonalds would initially employ him. After a few years of shift work at the fast food chain between classes, Rob was able to get a job as a nighttime security guard at a nursing home, a position a bit closer to his criminal justice major. Takougang and Tidjani state that people like the immigrants I spoke with work with determination because “failure is not an option for these students or the thousands of other African immigrants coming to the United States annually.”

However, many may be disillusioned when years (and even) decades of hard work do not lead to the type of success that is depicted in the American media they were familiar with in their home nations. Daryl Jenks’s sports car, the McDowell family’s Queens mansion, and Clair and Cliff Huxtable’s Brooklyn Heights brownstone are often out of reach, as are the sort of employment and/or economic resources that would enable some African immigrants to purchase these items. The reality of ‘coming to America’ sometimes laughs at the dream of achieving greatness through

\[234\] Ibid.
determination and a powerful work ethic; upper (middle) class status and its spoils become fugacious fantasies, especially for those Afroproletarians who had built their hopes on a narrative of their African flavored American dream. While Benjamin, Nicolas, and Brenda have decided to remain in the United States for a while longer, Rob insisted he will leave as soon as he has the employment experiences and financial means to return to the African continent. Also, Pascal has begun contemplating a return to the continent; with a Ph.D. and various American work experience, he now understands that his chances for success in academia will be far better in Nigeria than in the United States. Even some Afropolitans find that their own preconceptions of their American success story are erroneous. Patricia and Lisa complained that America was not the wonderland they had envisaged from their privileged lives in the DRC and state that their return there is inevitable. Patricia said, “America is hard. I was not ready for that.” Lisa agreed, “I’m going home where it is easier and with a diploma from America. HA!”

Not all of the Afropolitan subjects here shared Lisa and Patricia’s experiences and their reaction to them. Kevin, the Afropolitan born to an affluent family in the Republic of Benin and raised in Ghana, saw his juxtaposition of graduate courses as a leap forward from life in Ghana where he complained, “You can’t do anything because you don’t always have electricity.” He rhetorically asked, “What can you do if you don’t have power to work with?”\(^{235}\) Kevin admitted to struggles in the United States and notes that his life has not been free of trials, but the paradox of progress has not dampened his appreciation of America. Though he intends to return to

\(^{235}\) Kevin admitted that the power situation in Ghana has improved in the last few years. One party guest, a tourist/visitor from Accra who was eager to tell me how much she loves America and hopes to live here someday, argued that Ghana will emerge as a major African power in the next five years. Her job with a global telecommunications company enables her to live as a globetrotting Afropolitan; though she and another guest from Nigeria are not a part of this study, her thoughts open additional doors to understanding Africa to America migration, especially of those who were able to come as tourists prior to settling in the United States.
Ghana, he knows that his life there will be better because of his time gaining educational and financial resources in the States.

**Misconceptions**

For many with little knowledge of the African continent, infrastructural problems like a lack of access to electricity, water, food, and medicine may seem like the African status quo. Americans are bombarded with televisual representations of a backward uncouth continent with leaders that thumb their noses at their nation’s laws and create life long dictatorships. The American news media helps facilitate these perceptions with facile reporting about the continent that shows little to no regard for the history of colonization that may have heavily influenced a nation’s current affairs. Films like *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004) and *Beasts of No Nation* (Cary Fukunaga, 2015) show the horrors of violence, dictatorship, and civil instability in Africa. War and genocide flavor American perceptions along with poverty, hunger, and naked children with distended bellies who, according to Sally Struthers, live on less than a dollar per day.236 “When am I naked?” Patricia fumed. “When I bathe!”

Some of the participants of this study speak with disgust about these misconceptions, especially the pervasive idea that one can go on safari anywhere on the continent. In fitting with Taiye Selasi’s definition of Afropolitan, some state they are frustrated that Americans do not seem to understand that there are people in Africa who “have money.” The email scams originating mainly out of Nigeria that attempt to dupe (and have successfully duped) unsuspecting Westerners out of thousands of dollars is a source of shame and anger from

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236 Struthers’ “Feed the Children” campaign is an incredibly misguided and misleading enterprise. What the infomercials fail to state is that the exchange rate between the American dollar and the currency of an African nation can be quite large. Thus, the American dollar that Struthers speaks of may translate to a sizable amount of money for an African family.
many. Sam, Pascal’s contemporary, argued that all of the common misperceptions have led to cumbersome conversations with his young daughter and with people in the Nebraska town he and his family once lived in. He noted, “My daughter was born here. She doesn’t really know Africa. I had to teach her.”

Sam’s experience raises a particularly vexing problem that many African immigrants in the United States might face. How do these immigrants inform others about their ancestral home, about their culture, and about themselves when so much misinformation, negativity, and stereotyping exists? American media is particularly unreliable and were it offering more meaningful portraits of the continent, there is no guarantee that Americans would consume or trust those portraits because the “stereotypic media depictions” become what Sonja Brown Givens and Jennifer Monahan call “common knowledge.” As Bosah Ebo has lamented, the American media has consistently shunned meaningful stories that require a commitment to cultural and historical knowledge about Africa and the patience of explanation. This lack of true commitment to cultural knowledge about Africa also creeps into stories that are intended to positively portray some aspect of African culture; these stories are often filtered through the ‘journalist’s’ limited and often essentialist frameworks of knowledge.

One fairly recent example is a 2013 story that VICE News produced for its weekly HBO documentary show. VICE correspondent Thomas Morton traveled to Senegal for a piece on the nation’s fascination with laamb, a sport that combines Greco-Roman wrestling with dance and a

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238 Sam’s primary method for teaching his young daughter about Africa was through Nollywood films. I will discuss this more in the following chapter.
239 Givens and Monahan, “Priming Mammies, Jezebels, and Other Controlling Images,” 87-106.
variety of pre-fight spiritual rituals. Morton reported that becoming a *laamb* fighter is viewed as a path toward economic prosperity for Senegalese men in much the same way as professional athletics (such as basketball or football) are seen as the keys to fame and riches for underclass boys and men of color in the United States. What began as an intriguing look at how the fiscal failures of postcolonial Senegal has affected millions and bred an obsession with succeeding as a *laamb* fighter quickly descended into a cartoonish pseudo-comedy where Morton, a short and thin white American male, participates in *laamb* training with a large black male champion three times his size named Bombardier (who eventually taps his young son who is about Morton’s size to train him), learns a traditional dance, and undergoes spiritual rituals before a fight which he eventually wins most likely for the benefit of the cameras. This potentially poignant examination of the circumstances within Senegal became a spectacle of the absurd with ugly colonialist/imperialist undertones where a small white male conquers a much larger black body.

Certainly, colonialist/imperialist attitudinal frames structure many of the images and representations of Africa that Americans hold onto, either consciously or unconsciously. Even films like *Invictus*, which tells the story of newly elected South African President Nelson Mandela’s efforts to unite a racially divided nation through rugby, includes imperialist notions because it ever so subtly posits that the demolition of apartheid resulted in the nation being taken from white South Africans. However, the film concludes with a pat reconciliation that allows viewers to detach from the ongoing struggles in the nation and focus on the ‘look at how we can all get along’ overtones of the film. The viewer potentially walks away from the film satisfied that they were progressive enough to watch a film that explores race and social relationships between blacks and whites on the African continent.

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The idea of American misconceptions and misperceptions about the African continent is not new and can be positioned within theory that looks at the way audiences can separate themselves from the realities within the media they consume. Judith Hess Wright notes that films (and I argue television shows) act as a social tonic that allows viewers to escape into a fictional world that mirrors their own social, economic, and/or political stations in life. A film’s or television show’s fictional world offers up models for resolving conflicts that do not rock the boat of sociocultural hegemony. Even if the images are uncomfortable, the audience may squirm for a few minutes but does little to change the real world that the fictional world recreates. Either the audience does not believe anything needs to be done, or it believes it can do nothing to change the world in which it lives. Hegemony or the status quo is maintained. In this way, the images that Americans see of the African continent remain common knowledge; the images are accepted as representations of the truth and the audience does little to learn about or challenge these misrepresentations.

While it may appear that African Americans would be particularly sensitive to the pervasiveness of the erroneous information that exists about what technically is their ancestral home, numerous scholars note that they too can possess unrealistic beliefs about Africa. Dean MacCannell notes that “the data of cultural experiences are somewhat fictionalized, idealized, or exaggerated models of social life that are in the public domain, in film, fiction, political rhetoric, small talk, comic strips, expositions, etiquette, and spectacles.” If an African American situates the continent as a place of purity, spirituality, and “cultural mimesis,” their cultural experience of the African motherland can become a stew of mysticism and esotericism flavored with .

with a different sort of colonial rhetoric. This rhetoric may seem innocuous and appear to contain positive qualities, but it inaccurately and vapidly situates the continent as a peregrine site of ‘otherness’ devoid of tangible and separate national identities, cultures, and histories. An African American may misrecognize Africa if they view it as a cultural monolith or view it solely through the institution of slavery. Because the American descendants of enslaved Africans view the same media images and representations as other Americans, they too may situate Africa as the dark continent, savage and untamed, and full of hungry children Sally Struthers has been trying for years to feed. Berlin says that some American born blacks dismiss:

Africa as a primitive place bereft of civilization – a place where, in the satirical formulation of Eddie Murphy, people “ride around butt-naked on a zebra”…Others celebrated a mythological Africa, wrapping themselves in kente cloth and observing Kwanzaa, but with small appreciation for the continent itself.

Depending on African Americans’ frameworks of knowledge, they can view Africa through a Pan-Africanism that situates the continent as the site of solidarity for all people of African descendent without understanding the ways in which the transatlantic trading of black bodies and the legacies of colonialism has left a lasting rupture between Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora.

Not Black Like Me

In the August 2015 issue of Essence magazine, African American journalist Ayana D. Byrd’s reported on a roundtable discussion between scholars and journalists about the

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244 I borrow the term “cultural mimesis” from Jennifer Hasty’s analysis of the psycho-symbolic motivations some African diaspora members may have for traveling to the continent. See Jennifer Hasty, “Rites of Passage, Routes of Redemption: Emancipation Tourism and the Wealth of Culture,” Africa Today, Vol. 49, No. 3, (Fall 2002): 51.

245 Berlin, The Making of African America, 219. In this quote, Berlin is referring to Eddie Murphy’s hugely successful stand up comedy film Eddie Murphy Raw (Robert Townsend, 1987).

misunderstandings between African Americans, African immigrants, and Caribbean immigrants in the United States. The article seeks to explore the divisions and similarities between black peoples negotiating American life. Nearly all of the participants in the roundtable acknowledge that the primary reason for the rupture (or gaping chasm) between native born blacks and foreign born black immigrants in America, who share a racial identity, is the result of a lack of awareness between the groups. Participant Luvvie Ajayi, who identifies as Nigerian first and then as American states, “If you come here when you’re 35, you don’t get to take 18 Afro classes to get the information you need to know [about the experiences of blacks in America]. So you’re carrying around the idea that if I get here and I was a doctor back home and I’m a cabdriver here and I somehow sent my kids to school and they somehow end up being Ph.D.’s, why couldn’t you, and you’ve been here this whole time?”

Journalist Lola Ogunnaike says, “There was an understanding in my house when I was growing up that you weren’t supposed to fraternize with certain types of Black Americans.” She does not elaborate on what “certain types” means, however one can deduce that she is referring to African Americans who belong to the lower economic class and live in oppressed neighborhoods, a group Eugene Robinson affectingly calls the “Abandoned.”

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248 As this study deals specifically with African immigrants, I will not attempt to unpack the beliefs of native born blacks in America. I will endeavor to deconstruct the thought patterns of those African born immigrants and how they may have come to their conclusions.


250 Ibid.

Both Ajayi and Ogunnaike touch upon what African immigrants may think about when they arrive in America and find themselves dealing with African Americans for the first time. Christina Greer argues:

This complex tension between shared racial identity and cultural ethnic distinction has been a staple within the larger black community for decades…This particular struggle between unified identity and cultural and ethnic distinction affects intraracial relationships among blacks and also exposes a different picture of modern-day race relations involving white and other nonblack members of society.  

Like Ogunnaike, Greer notes that the children of African immigrants are often told not to associate with “black kids.” While this is not true of all African-born immigrants, the admonition is rooted in many immigrants’ belief in the lack of work ethic, immorality, dangerousness, and academic apathy that they contend exists amongst “just blacks.” Ira Berlin notes that many African-born individuals who are currently living in the United States are loathe to be associated culturally and socially with American born black people and cling to national identities to avoid being called ‘African American.’ Berlin relays an anecdote about a 2004 Washington, DC area community meeting of African immigrants where a perplexed Ethiopian immigrant with American citizenship asked if he was not an African American; “To his surprise and dismay, the overwhelmingly black audience responded ‘No, no, no, not you.”

This rather powerful example of the schism amongst black peoples in America is echoed in the statements of participants in this study who do not consider themselves African Americans; some hold a generally negative view of American born blacks that suggests that African immigrants may misunderstand the complexities of African American life, history, and culture. Participant Henry, who had once been married to an African American woman, believes

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253 Ibid.
American born blacks, especially those living in urban areas, “have no culture” in comparison to the “African culture” he was raised in and maintains here in the United States. He said:

> Our culture tells you that when you see an elderly person you have to bow down. You have to talk with respect. You can’t just talk to them anyhow. That’s a cultural thing. But, here in America…Let’s say…I’m 50 years old…I talk to a five-year old boy, maybe he is doing something wrong, you try to correct him. Guess what he’ll tell you? He’ll tell you, ‘you ain’t my father. Don’t tell me that.’…What I thought about black people in America…they don’t even know…they know they’re from Africa, but they can’t really identify their roots…we see them like people who are lost. These people, who, they can’t even come back home anymore. Never. …because we believe that all black men there is something there that shows…that portrays them to be a black man and we believe that if you are black in America, you have lost all that.

Henry’s comments suggest that he, along with other immigrants from the continent, believe that a loss of culture or rootedness to their ancestral home is the source of black Americans’ behavior. Participant Samantha from the DRC quietly told me that she believed American born blacks were mostly criminals and gang members before she migrated; she said her family warned her not to fraternize with black Americans. While Samantha’s experiences in part confirm Ajayi’s assessment, Henry’s comment is in opposition to her assertion that African immigrants have no real awareness of how the transatlantic trading of black bodies in many ways severed the ties between those enslaved and their African homelands and cultures. Henry’s words show he understands the separation from the culture lost during the transatlantic trading of black people; returning to Africa culturally and spiritually is an impossibility because the descendants of enslaved Africans are no longer attached to their African home.

Stripped of their clothing, hair, and other ethnic or identity markers and often separated from their kin and community, African individuals were hoarded onto ships and regarded as a mass commodity group of people to be eventually sold for the purpose of hard labor. Saidiyah Hartman notes, “No longer anyone’s child, the slave had no choice but to bear the visible marks
of servitude and accept a new identity in the household of the owner. It was one thing to be a stranger in a strange land, and an entirely worse state to be a stranger to yourself. By the time the enslaved Africans reached their place of enslavement, they had become transatlantic merchandise lacking any links to the place of their enslavement in the West and entirely disconnected from their African home. While some were able to incorporate remembered aspects of their cultures, particularly religious practices, languages, and food, into their new identities, most were not. Thus, a culture emerged from the enslaved blacks’ and their descendants’ efforts to forge identities that positioned them as fully human beings born with a mosaic of intrinsic desires, emotions, intellectual and civic yearnings, and historical understandings.

However, African immigrants, like Samantha, who are largely unaware of the complexities of black American life may adopt a posture for dealing with American society at large that separates them from African Americans. This is true of Pascal’s contemporary Sam who was faced with explaining Africa and African culture to the citizens in the Nebraska town where he once lived; Sam discussed his pride in being Nigerian, in being African, and raising his American born daughter to be Nigerian first. Though they are faced with the ugliness of racial discrimination, African immigrants may embrace the distinctions between what they believe is their superior behavior and the inferior behavior of American born blacks in an effort to inform

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256 Arguably, the most notable example of enslaved Africans maintaining their cultural practices is represented in the Gullah people of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida whose creole language closely resembles West African dialects mainly from Sierra Leone and Guinea. I had the opportunity to visit Gullah territory in 2010 and learn about the Gullah language and culture. For more information, see Michael Montgomery, *The Crucible of Carolina: Essays in the Development of Gullah Language and Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994) and Lorenzo Dow Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002). Also, Tracy Hucks offers a portrait of Nigerian religious traditions amongst African Americans; see Tracy Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalisms* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).
the (white) American public at large that they do not carry the same sociocultural baggage as those “abandoned” black Americans. Msia Kibona Clark’s study of African and African American relationships in the United States shows that many immigrants chose to identify with their African culture and even participate in mocking African Americans. As Nemata Blyden notes, the misunderstandings between African Americans who are taught to view Africa as the dark continent and African immigrants seeking to avoid anti-black racialization can lead to violence, as was the case of a street brawl in Harlem in 2005 when an Ivorian street vendor retaliated against a group of African Americans who had consistently harassed him.

These tensions exacerbate the distinctions between the four black Americas Eugene Robinson contends exist today: the Mainstream black middle class, the Abandoned black underclass, the Transcendent black elites, and the newly Emergent group that consists of individuals of mixed race heritage and African born immigrants. Robinson explains that while African Emergents desire to possess the socioeconomic success and clout of the Transcendent class, misunderstanding is at the root of tensions between the African Emergents and the Mainstream and Abandoned blacks they choose to avoid. The disdain between the groups creates an atmosphere of distrust that may not be resolved. Robinson asserts:

These are generalizations, but they are true: Native-born African Americans often envy the immigrants their deep historical knowledge and heritage, and immigrants often look down on the native-born for their rootlessness. These deep and seldom-expressed differences over identity, I believe, may underlie the shallower complaints that the two groups voice about each other. The native-born say that the immigrants are arrogant, and the immigrants say that the native-born have no pride in themselves.

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259 Robinson, *Disintegration*, 5.

260 Ibid., 176.
Ultimately, very separate and distinct black Americas exist. The strain between American born and African born blacks may never be resolved. Misperceptions will continue as long as there is mass mediated popular culture fuel for the fire.

American televisual productions circulating around the African continent help to position native born blacks as lost cultureless and ahistorical people without morals or values who must be avoided and/or rejected once a migrant arrives in the United States. Samantha said she came to America afraid of native born blacks because of the way American television shows and movies available in the DRC depicted them. “I was afraid of gangs and rape,” she said. When Thomas spoke of the crime he associated with America before his journey here, he did not specifically mention race or African Americans. However, it can be argued that black bodies commit the majority of the crime presented in television shows and numerous movies. It can also be argued that the majority of the people representing the lower classes in televisual productions like Coming to America and The Cosby Show are black. Television shows like the long running American Broadcasting Company (ABC) situation comedy Roseanne and subscription based cable network Showtime’s dark dramedy Shameless which depict working class and low income white Americans most likely do not circulate around the African continent. Therefore, the views African immigrants may have of the descendants of enslaved Africans in America depends on how they process the information presented in the media and their experiences with African Americans upon arrival. If an immigrant’s early days in the United States involves an unpleasant encounter with an American born black person, the media posited views they hold may become intellectual and emotional truths and lead to continued tensions between black brothers and sisters.
Reconciling the Struggles?

The first few years after arriving in the United State can present “traumatic challenges to most of the immigrants from Africa”\(^{261}\) that work to dislodge or deterritorialize the imagined paradise. For example, a traumatic challenge for immigrants that deterritorializes the paradise may be the low paying service work (3Ds) they are forced to take upon arrival. The work is unexpected and seems to come from a place they had not imagined would be a part of their American paradise. When immigrants begin employment, they may notice that their colleagues are like them, other immigrants from the continent who may have expected more from America. As they attempt to expand their employment opportunities in the States, they may notice that they are only able to obtain other low paying service positions that do not require much skill, but much effort. If immigrants are able to secure better employment, it is solely because they have proven their value as an unskilled laborer who is consistent and able to blend into the American workplace. Again, the common belief amongst African immigrants, including those who participated in this study, that one can grasp the American dream if one works hard enough is shattered when lengthy periods of meagerly paid labor (or even university degrees) do not translate into the sort of financial autonomy necessary for a better life in America or the skills and lofty bank account necessary for an easy and comfortable repatriation back to one’s African home.

Ultimately, it is how the African immigrant responds to the deterritorialization of their imagined paradise that determines the immigrant’s acculturation processes and progress. How they reterritorialize America shapes their daily lived experiences. Kevin said he chooses to accept the challenges as a routine part of life for African immigrants and remains optimistic.

about his chances to ascend America’s socioeconomic ladder in the years to come. Benjamin also acknowledged that he accepts them as the natural result of his decision to immigrate and uses his difficulties as motivation to aid his children’s efforts to achieve the American dream of advanced degrees, high paying careers, and possession of valuable consumer goods he once wished for himself. Yet, immigrants like Lisa, Patricia, Samantha, and Rob (and Jennifer, Tonya, and Brenda to a lesser extent) have admittedly not responded well to the processes of deterritorialization that have created the challenges they have faced since coming to the United States. For these immigrants, especially Lisa, Patricia, Samantha, and Rob, returning to their countries of origin is their long-term goal. Rob stated, “I’ll go back as the big man from America.” Until then, he, along with other participants in this study, must find ways to make the acculturation processes of reterritorialization, as well as the paradox of their progress, more palatable.

Dealing with deterritorialization of the imagined paradise and the challenges within the reterritorializing systems of acculturating to life in the States can lead to the creation of the aforementioned carefully constructed zones. These zones may include participation in immigrant groups organized around African nations of origin like the Association des Sénégalais aux USA or the Organization for the Advancement of Nigerians, membership in specific ethnic group (Igbo, Yoruba, Ashanti, Akan, etc.) social clubs or professional organizations like Egbe Omo Yoruba (National Association of Yoruba Descendants in North America), attending nation based African immigrant churches, membership in professional organizations for African immigrants (Young African Professionals in Washington, DC, Association of African Women Scholars), campus organizations for African students (African Students’ Association), and
others. Constructed zones may also include social and familial contacts that, like the ones present at the barbeque I attended, are almost exclusively African. An immigrant’s friends may all be from her home country or from culturally or geographically proximate nations. For example, there is a large population of Nigerians living in Houston, Texas that largely socialize with each other. Churches and businesses have been established in the city to meet the specific needs of their community. Other West Africans, especially those from Anglophone nations (Ghanaians and Nigerians), may stick together because of their shared colonial ‘mater’ and the proximity of their cultures. Kenyans and other East Africans living in and around Washington, DC have also created social systems that are country or ethnic group based. Thus, immigrants create these zones through reterritorialization as a means to arbitrate their desires for life in America and the many shades of acculturation. Home, then, must shift from pre-migration beliefs in the imagined paradise to one that adapts to the ever deterritorializing and shifting American cultural, social, economic, and political landscape the immigrant finds herself upon.

**Conclusion: Redefining Home**

Sara Ahmed supports a complication of the term home that recognizes the impossibility of a “space that is pure, which is uncontaminated by movement, desire or difference.” If the imagined paradise as home is impossible, the African immigrant is subject to an “impossible homecoming,” a concept Iain Chambers employs to discuss the ways in which global migration can mutate conceptions of ‘home.’ He states that migration:

…involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for dwelling in language, in histories, in

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262 Berlin notes that organizational membership as well as the organization of independence day celebrations, cultural and art events, and festivals contributes to the overall acclimation of African immigrants to America and to black society. Berlin, *The Making of African America*, 217 – 218.

identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming…becomes an impossibility.

Thinking this way, the impossibility of the pure, uncontaminated, and comfortable imagined paradise fights against preconceived ideas that the paradise will engender the comfortable and fortuitous life through hard work established in the pre-migrant’s televisual dreamscapes. The country of origin is not fixed; it is constantly in motion. The home of the imagined paradise is also a kinetic construction; it requires constant negotiation, renegotiation, and reterritorialization on the part of the immigrant.

Thus, I argue that the impossible homecoming works in two ways: 1) the pre-migrant’s desire to inhabit and belong to the home of the imagined paradise is impossible because the home that they have affectively/emotionally and intellectually established prior to migration does not always exist in reality, and 2) once the immigrant has arrived in the new home, returning to the home country of origin is impossible because, as Chambers states, the migrant has left behind histories and identities that do not remain static. An immigrant’s African country of origin continuously changes. People move. Politics shift. Advancements take place. No immigrant ever returns to a home nation that has not changed since their departure. Though thousands return to their countries of origin for visits, as Stuart Hall states, “Migration is a one-way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to.”

Put in the context of this study, Hall’s assertion can be interpreted as such: migration is a trip with no fixed destination the immigrant can completely inhabit. There is no home to go to because the imagined paradise does not actually exist and there is no home to go back to because every nation’s social and political environment transforms with time and constant contact with global cultures creates changes that are

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264 Chambers, Migrancy, Culture, Identity, 5.
permanent and tangible. Despite the fact that many of the participants in this study desire to return once they have the capital necessary to return to their countries of origin, that return is not necessarily eminent or immediate. Arthur notes:

There will be not be a rush to return as long as some of the immigrants are able to structure their lives in such a way as to enable them [to] straddle between or among multiple transnational localities or sites…Repatriation as a migratory strategy is indeed an uncertain proposition with unknown or less predictable outcomes.\textsuperscript{266}

For an immigrant like Rob who states that he wishes he had never migrated to the United States, returning home is the desire; yet, many understand that returning to the continent may only be a dream if they do not possess the resources and skills to successfully navigate life in home nations whose economic and employment opportunities may not have changed much, if at all. Though some Africans successfully return to the continent and establish businesses or gain high paying jobs, uncertainty about going back to the African continent, especially to a nation where there may be a paucity of opportunities for Afroproletarians and Afropolitans alike regardless of their education and/or skill building in America, could lead to the distinct possibility that a number of African immigrants become what Ahmed calls “melancholic migrants.” These migrants must reconcile and reterritorialize the colonial and postcolonial projects that motivated their migration with the difficulties inherent in attempting to possess the uncompromising new American home in body, mind, and wallet.\textsuperscript{267}

Henry’s statement about his pre-migration belief in America ‘having everything’ rings hollow. The familiar televisual messages about the American landscape that the immigrant held before her journey can transform into melancholic memories. When working hard does not lead

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\textsuperscript{266} J. Arthur, \textit{Invisible Sojourners}, 137.
\textsuperscript{267} Ahmed, \textit{The Promise of Happiness}, 121 – 159.
to material riches and overall success, the intellectual and emotional challenges of dealing with a culture that knows little about the African continent, and the attempt to separate from native-born black Americans does not result in the absence of racialization and ethnic understanding, the African immigrant who has renegotiated and reterritorialized home understands that returning to the African continent may not be immediate or possible. As a result, immigrants may come up with alternate reterritorialization strategies beyond their carefully constructed zone to make their time in America less complicated.

In the next chapter, I explore the ways in which African immigrants from various nations below the Sahara Desert use Nigerian cinema to create a carefully constructed media zone that facilitates an intellectual and psychological return to the continent. Nollywood as an industry with influences from various cultures is a global enterprise with diasporic consumers. Many Nollywood films appeal to Africans partly because of “artistic representation…the so-called melodramatic mode…the history of encounters between Nigerian cinema and television and American and Hindi films, and…the aesthetic dimension of affect.” Narrative syncretism is what these films represent, a layering of affective responses to the spiritual, civic, and especially the financial plight of the postcolonial African subject searching for personal agency against seemingly insurmountable odds, odds like those an immigrant might face in America. I argue that the postcolonial struggles for personal and economic solvency are transnational; Nollywood films allow immigrants an opportunity to reterritorialize the United States and to “measure themselves against a familiar, symbolic, and discursive order to cope with feelings of disorientation in a foreign land.” The “Africanity” in these films enable immigrants to

meditate on the conditions they left behind (positive, abject, or in-between) and the conditions they are confronted with in America as a means of constructing a new televisual zone based on the desire to grapple with the daily rigors of life in a nation that may not have met their expectations.\textsuperscript{270}

\textsuperscript{270} Krings and Okome, \textit{Global Nollywood}, 3.
CHAPTER IV. RETURNING ‘HOME’: REIMAGINING AFRICA (AND AMERICA) THROUGH NOLLYWOOD CINEMA

“Because it’s my culture.”

~ Patricia, Immigrant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

“They say America is the gateway to heaven. How many get to see the other side?”

~ Chineze Anyaene, Ijé: The Journey

Cameroon native Sara is in love with love stories. “I like to see people falling in love getting married in Nigerian movies. The wedding scenes are so nice!” One of her favorite romance film begins with a young woman in love. The young woman, a doting girlfriend and dutiful daughter who works at her parents’ flower shop, meticulously decorates a reception hall in preparation for a lavish wedding. In Flower Girl, Kemi the ‘flower girl’ stands transfixed as a throng of women and men dressed in traditional African garb march into the hall before a bride and groom draped in elegant robes. She wants nothing more than to marry her stuffy businessman boyfriend Umar and become a wife and mother. When Umar breaks up with her because of her lack of sophistication and modern graces, Kemi enlists the help of a hard partying film actor on the verge of a break in Hollywood with whom she is involved in an automobile accident. As Kemi and Tunde get to know one another, the distance between traditional African culture and modernity closes. Tunde introduces Kemi to modern Africa through music, dance, and fashion; Kemi enables Tunde to reunite with the African values of community and family he left behind upon entering the film industry. Tunde’s estranged girlfriend Sapphire, jealous of his relationship with the simpleton Kemi, plots to end their friendship and marry her off to Umar.

who happily takes the marriage bribe for a job promotion. The film ends with a young woman in love. However, Kemi, Tunde, Sapphire, and Umar’s story is much more than a hyper-dramatic African romance. It is a meditation on culture, values, and the ways modern Africans can retain tradition in a rapidly changing world where globalization reigns. It is ultimately a globalization that springs from deterritorialization and the reconfiguring, or reterritorialization, of traditional culture to meet the demands of an increasingly global Africa.

Africa’s contact with the rest of the world has facilitated a globalization and deterritorialization that began in the late nineteenth century and continues unabated in the present moment. Richard Lane contends that globalization:

is a process that many thinkers regard as a new phenomenon, belonging to the world of post-industrial global flows of money, new high-speed technologies that offer near instantaneous data communications, and the global distribution of ideas, brands, and ideologies (be this through the dominance of ‘Western capitalism’, ‘Americanism’, religious ‘fundamentalism(s)’, and so on). 272

However, as the African continent continues to globalize through international exchanges of ideas, culture and cultural productions, and consumer products, many Africans must contend with the ways globalization brings both progress and hardship in their home nations. Definitions and understandings of “Afropolitanism” suggest that globalization has allowed individuals to become global consumers who drive expensive luxury cars and purchase iPads, smart phones, other gadgets, and designer fashions as signs of their affluence. Yet, the numbers of people around the African continent with access to these items grossly contrasts life for the people roaming the streets of Lagos, Accra, Kinshasa, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, and other cities and rural villages looking for quick fix jobs, fast money, and even their next meal. For the characters in Flower Girl, globalization is generally a positive force; Kemi’s family florist business benefits

from the markings of the global wedding industry in a culture where African wedding customs are combined with Western practices, such as church weddings and large receptions with elaborate décor and food. However, as the viewer watches the selfish actions of Sapphire and Umar, globalization and modernity become non-human villainous powers that pervert African morality with warped ambition and greed.

What Sapphire, Umar, and even Tunde, who is able to go off to the United States and have a successful Hollywood debut, represent is the ability of some citizens of globalized African society to not only access consumer goods, but also to move about the world with relative ease. Thus, Lane’s definition of globalization can be expanded to include the movement of bodies, especially those Afropolitans with the means to travel or migrate from place to place in search of opportunities to maintain and improve their socioeconomic and cultural status in their home nations. Chris Barker notes that globalization is not just an economic issue, but also a matter of cultural meaning(s) that includes the transnational movement of people during and after colonization. He states:

…patterns of population movement and settlement established during colonialism and its aftermath, combined with the more recent acceleration of globalization, particularly of electronic communications, have enabled increased cultural juxtapositioning, meeting and mixing.273

Barker’s argument suggests that cultural juxtapositioning, meeting and mixing, which are at the heart of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, can promote migration or the desire to migrate. Because access to western mass media is widespread, knowledge, even warped or erroneous knowledge, about western nations, particularly the United States, can be formed through viewing music videos on MTV or VH1 or watching television shows and films. For a young girl watching Rihanna videos with friends in a Nairobi fast food restaurant, wealth,

advancement, glamour, and prosperity are culturally marked upon the American landscape. In the context of this study, African pre-migrants from nations south of the Sahara may pen foreign cultural markers, such as fashion, wedding customs, hairstyles, slang or speech patterns, etc., upon their African behaviors and bodies, thus rewriting or reterritorializing themselves as syncretic glocal citizens of the African continent and the United States. For example, Lisa and Patricia (both from the Democratic Republic of the Congo) mix their French with slang terms common with American teenagers and young adults. During my interviews with them, phrases like ‘OMG’ and ‘cray-cray’ flowed with the same ease as the French and English they spoke with each other, even when they did not realize I was listening. Their syncretism, as well as the syncretism of Pascal, Brian, and Henry who enjoy wearing American designer labels purchased inexpensively on eBay and in discount retailers like TJMaxx along with traditional clothes from the continent, speaks volumes about how they have crafted glocal identities that are uniquely theirs with elements that also have a place within African culture and American popular culture.

For these individuals, the consumption of America’s popular culture (particularly films and television) not only facilitates the desire to migrate and eventual migration; it also allows pre-migrants to straddle cultures. Part of them is rooted in their home nation and the other part extends forward across the Atlantic to the United States. Straddling cultures is a game of reterritorialization or the “cultural juxtapositioning, meeting and mixing” that continues after migration, especially when the adopted culture does not resemble the one presented in the American cultural productions immigrants consumed prior to migrating. Immigrants dealing with the struggles of American life can be said to turn their bodies; one foot is situated in the United States and the other extends back across the Atlantic to their African home nations. Just as pre-migrants rewrite themselves in anticipation of their journey to America, immigrants revise
their behaviors and bodies once again using African cultural markers that enable them to maintain the familiar in a foreign place.

Enter Nollywood, the Nigerian video-film industry, as a new, yet recognizable, pen and/or ink the immigrant can use to reimagine the African nation she left behind and the American paradise that has failed her. As Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome contend:

Nollywood stirs the imagination, provoking its viewers to compare their own daily lives with what is presented on-screen as they explore the similarities and differences between the pro-filmic and the filmic world.274

Nollywood’s popularity since its inception in the early 1990s has caused it to grow from a street-spun Nigerian video-film market into the second largest film industry in the world behind India’s Bollywood and ahead of Hollywood in the United States.275 How does Nollywood stir imaginations across the globe? Its growth into a transnational industry can be attributed in large part to the popularity of the affect inducing dramatic narrative conventions it has perfected.276

The clash between the modern and the traditional, as evidenced in films like Flower Girl, with a focus on the affective spectacle of melodrama is a common aesthetic and narrative practice in Nollywood films. For Nollywood audiences watching films like Flower Girl, the message is simple and transparent: true African values of home and tradition always win out over the sins of avarice and a longing for a modernity that induces extreme individualism. Modernity through reterritorialization is not inherently evil, yet this film and others suggest that centuries old

African values must mitigate modernity so that romances with globalization do not lead to loneliness and despair.

The cautionary message within *Flower Girl* offers a particularly apt approach to analyzing the ways in which immigrants from nations south of the Sahara employ Nollywood films to assuage the dilemmas and hardship that may arise when the imagined paradise is sullied. Just as the immigrants who left and are continuously leaving their African homes for the United States are examples of the transnational flows of people, ideas, and culture, Nollywood is also an example of the potentials of both globalization and glocalization, or a phenomenon which encompasses the global production of the local and the localization of the global in a process of reterritorialization that values the old while embracing the new. At once a national cinema that has glocalized elements from diverse media cultures like Bollywood and Hollywood and a transnational cinema that continuously moves (and is made local) around the world, Nollywood has reached broad African diaspora communities in the roughly twenty years since it began in 1992. This chapter explores how Nollywood, a local Nigerian cultural industry that has become a glocal phenomenon through advances in technology and electronic communication, appeals to Africans from nations below the Sahara living in America.277 I argue that the affective messages inherent within Nollywood films culturally juxtapose many, if not most, postcolonial African experiences; this juxtaposition enables both Afroproletarian and Afropolitan immigrants to see their culture and circumstances (past or present) reflected back to them on the (small) screen.278

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277 Over the last ten years, scholars have strategically analyzed Nollywood’s production models, narrative practices, and economic impact. While this chapter touches upon those things, it will only briefly touch upon the technological proliferation of Nollywood. The next chapter will discuss this issue in more depth within a larger conversation on the use of the Internet and Nollywood in creating a digital African diaspora.

278 In the second chapter, I defined an Afroproletarian as an individual of African descent without the sort of sociopolitical, cultural, or economic capital that would enable them to live as socio-politically, culturally, or economically privileged people in their nations of origin. An Afropolitan is an individual who possesses the economic, political, and sociocultural capital necessary to fashion an existence both in her country of origin and outside it devoid of poverty, lack, and economic instability. As stated in the introduction, the subjects in this study
The highly affective world Nollywood reflects not only offers immigrants a means to connect with their African cultural values, it can also act as a foil to the notion of the United States as a paradise embedded within American media. In recent years, some Nollywood films primarily shot in the United States and using combinations of both African and American actors have begun to challenge the idea of a mystical America as the imagined paradise and have begun to depict the difficulties many immigrants face in the United States, regardless of their circumstances prior to migration. These films reflect the day-to-day skirmishes with American culture that many pre-migrants may believe they can avoid before making the journey to America. Ultimately, Nollywood’s cultural juxtaposition of African tradition and values and its representations of the paradox of progress enables immigrants to paint a new affective portrait of home and the America they must renegotiate for emotional survival.279

**From National to Transnational, From Local to Glocal**

At the beginning of the documentary film *Nollywood Babylon*, director Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen leads the cast and crew of his 157th film *Bent Arrows* in a hymn and prayer prior to shooting. Imasuen, calling on his and his team’s Christian faith for support, is resolute. His film will be shot on the Nigerian streets and edited within a two-week time frame; another film awaits him once *Bent Arrows* is complete. It, too, will be filmed, edited, and released in a quick period most Western filmmakers would find impossible. However, the documentary makes it clear that this ‘pop-pop-pop’ street production model and Imasuen are Nigerian and in Nigeria, films

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279 I defined the paradox of progress in the previous chapter as a phenomenon where the difficulties of acculturating in the United States belie the seeming amelioration that life in America is supposed to produce.
materialize in mere moments.\textsuperscript{280} Audiences await new releases with the patience of children waiting to play outdoors on a rainy day. Actress Uche Jombo says in the film:

Nollywood is a child of circumstance, because Nigeria at this stage is cut across a bridge with Western world and tradition...So, it’s basically just Africans telling African stories.\textsuperscript{281}

Jombo’s statement perfectly captures both the essence of what ultimately defines Nollywood as a national and transnational cinema born out of the residual effects of deterritorialization. Born out of the ingenuity of a Nigerian businessman seeking to sell large piles of videocassettes, Nollywood films incorporate Western aesthetics and tradition to tell stories of the African experience. Imasuen, whose success as a director has landed him transnational recognition, says, “Nollywood has practically become the voice of Africa, the answer to CNN.”\textsuperscript{282}

Indeed, Nollywood’s reach extends as far as CNN’s. Journalist Tambay Obenson notes, “There’s an audience for Nollywood cinema...all over the world.”\textsuperscript{283} Nollywood has been on the rise in the last twenty years and shows no signs of slowing down. The film industry makes up five percent of Nigeria’s gross domestic product and eleven percent of the country’s non-oil exports and has generated close to $300 million for Nigeria’s economy.\textsuperscript{284} Nigeria produces around 2,000 films each year. Many of the films, like those Imasuen has created with great

\textsuperscript{280} I borrow the ‘pop-pop-pop’ phrasing from a conversation I had with a few Nigerians about Nollywood while traveling through the nation in the summer of 2011. I learned then that a Nollywood film can be produced in as little as ten days if the director/producer has the necessary funds to complete the film. Without a steady flow of cash, productions can be delayed until the director/producer can raise the money to continue.

\textsuperscript{281} “Uche Jumbo Interview,” \textit{Nollywood Babylon}, directed by Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal (2008, Montreal: National Film Board of Canada), DVD.

\textsuperscript{282} “Lancelot Imasuen Interview,” \textit{Nollywood Babylon}, directed by Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal (2008, Montreal: National Film Board of Canada), DVD. In November 2014, Imasuen’s film \textit{Invasion 1897} premiered in the United States as a part of the opening of a photography exhibit at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art titled “Chief S.O. Alonge: Photographer to the Royal Court of Benin, Nigeria.” My knowledge of this premiere and the fanfare surrounding it comes courtesy of the internship I completed at NMAfA in the summer of 2014.


success, are inexpensively produced direct to video releases that are sold on street corners, in shopping complexes, and African markets around the world. Nollywood movies are also available to the African diaspora and other fans through online streaming from YouTube, and also through subscription services such as IrokoTV, an online platform devoted to Nollywood films that launched in December of 2011. Netflix, which began offering Nollywood films in mid 2014, and Amazon Prime, which began to include Nigerian movies between 2013 and 2014 for consumers to digitally buy, rent, or stream for free as a part of their Prime membership. In 2013, Nollywood superstar actress and philanthropist Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde made the Time 100, an annual list of the most influential people in the world. The reigning “Queen of Nollywood’s” inclusion marked the first time a Nollywood figure had cracked Time’s list. Nollywood’s global reach is undeniable. The industry’s brief history offers clues as to why and how it emerged as a national cinema that has morphed into the transnational cinema in the last decade.

**Local Street Films**

In order to show how Nollywood has come to be known as Nigeria’s national cinema and the industry’s progression from national to transnational cinema, it is important to explore the multiple meanings that the terms local, national, and national cinema can possess within film culture and film studies. This first requires an examination of the word ‘nation’ and its loaded interpretations. Nation can be defined as a group of people, who are sufficiently conscious of

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286 One can easily deduce from Netflix’s and Amazon’s recent investment in Nigerian films that the companies recognize that Nollywood’s popularity creates an opportunity to capitalize on and profit from viewership in digital spaces. The following chapter will look closely at online viewership, particularly on IrokoTV and YouTube.

their unity, seeking to possess a government of their own. It can also be described as a country or nation-state.\textsuperscript{288} Michael Walsh claims that the term nation refers to “a conceptual or mental territory, and to the internalization of a set of cultural meanings,” a definition clearly in line with Barker’s notion that globalization encompasses the juxtaposition of cultural meanings.\textsuperscript{289} Walsh argues that the term can embody principles shared within a community “with nationalism entailing the view of oneself as a member of a common group bound by some set of shared cultural and historical experiences and traits which will ideally, but not always, coincide with origin or residence within the physical boundaries of a state.”\textsuperscript{290} I argue here that the terms nation and national are also synonymous with the term local, which most often characterizes a specific geographical place.

While facile or surface definitions of ‘local’ do not situate it as a place that can encompass an entire nation or a large portion of a nation, in the case of Nigerian cinema and what the world knows as Nollywood it does. Nollywood’s birth in 1992 and maturation since its inception mark it as a distinct national cinema that has altered itself as Nigeria moved from dictatorship to democracy in the late 1990s. Though the name ‘Nollywood’ suggests that the Nigerian film industry is an illegitimate African Hollywood, Jonathan Haynes argues that the term ‘Nollywood’ covers up the fact that the films are unique cultural productions based within an informal (street) business and production model that became necessary considering Nigeria’s lack of an established film industry and government support in the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{291} Haynes states

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{288} Michael Walsh, “National Cinema, National Imaginary,” \textit{Film History}, Vol. 8, No. 1 Cinema and Nation (1996): 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{290} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{291} Haynes is considered the dean of the growing academic field of Nollywood studies. A new Haynes text set to be released in 2016 focuses on Nollywood genres. See Jonathan Haynes, \textit{Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
\end{itemize}
that Nollywood emerged out of dire socioeconomic and political crises that ended film production and closed movie theaters in Nigeria.\footnote{Jonathan Haynes, “Close-Up: Nollywood—A Worldly Creative Practice: “New Nollywood”: Kunle Afolayan.” \textit{Black Camera, An International Film Journal}, Vol. 5 No. 2 (Spring 2014): 53.} This led to the need for new methods of film production and consumption that transcended economic crises and existed in spite of political volatility. The methods that developed have become the norm and Haynes contends that Nollywood’s rapid fire production style and the industry itself are permanent fixtures in Nigeria and beyond:

‘Nollywood’ is here to stay because the term is irresistible to journalists and, more importantly, because it neatly expresses powerful aspirations by people in the video film industry and by their fans to have a big, glamorous entertainment industry that can take its place on the world scene and appeal to international audiences. The export of Nigerian films has been remarkable…\footnote{Jonathan Haynes, “‘Nollywood: What’s in a name?’” \textit{Film International} Volume 5, Issue 4 (2007): 106.}

What makes Nollywood remarkable is the fact that, as a child of circumstance born during dictatorship when the import of foreign film into Nigeria was sharply limited, the industry has survived and will continue to thrive in the systemic political, economic, and social instability that has become Nigeria’s postcolonial milieu. As Alessandro Jedlowski states, “The success of the Nigerian video phenomenon has in fact been based on its capacity to interpret the dreams, fears, and expectations of its local popular audience.”\footnote{Alessandro Jedlowski, “From Nollywood to Nollyworld: Processes of Transnationalization in the Nigerian Video Film Industry,” in \textit{Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry}, ed. Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 40.} Imasuen argues that Nollywood is the answer to CNN, and it is also a voice that speaks of Nigeria’s national and transnational image.

Ralph A. Austen and Mahir Şaul suggest that Nollywood presents a globalized image of one part of the nation where it originated and argue that the term ‘Nollywood’ applies mostly to films from the mainly Christian southern region of Nigeria shot in the Igbo, Yoruba, and English
languages. Haynes argues that films made in these three languages misrepresent the breadth of Nollywood in much the same way that the term ‘Bollywood’ “covers up the production of Indian films in Tamil, Bengali, Telegu and other languages besides Hindi in other parts of that huge country.”

However, Hausa language films produced in the mostly Muslim north of Nigeria (with the same ‘pop-pop-pop’ rapid fire production model), and powerful filmmakers like Imausen and Emem Isong (who have recently begun producing hyper-local films in their native tongues, Bini and Ibibio) are an integral part of Nollywood. Also, as more African nations like Liberia, Tanzania, and Ghana capitalize on Nigerian video-film production models, the term local in the Nollywood context is very much national.

When using these meanings of nation and local to situate national cinema, multiple ways of understanding the term arise. Articulations of culture and national character are what Timothy Corrigan employs to characterize national cinema and the ways scholars can approach writing on films originating from specific geopolitical areas or nations. A national cinema can thus be the collective cinematic representations of a group of unified people who seek or possess a unique government. It can also be a cinema of a particular country, or a collection of films representing an ethnic family linked together through language and/or culture. Corrigan states:

The presumption behind this approach is that film cultures evolve with a certain amount of individuality...ways of seeing the world and ways of portraying the world in movies differ for each country and culture, and it is necessary to understand the cultural conditions that surround a movie if we are to understand what it is about.

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297 Haynes, “Close-Up,” 57. It is important to note that about 500 languages are spoken in Nigeria with English being the official language of the nation.
Corrigan’s and Walsh’s arguments are in conversation with one another and when combined, create an opportunity to expand upon or develop a more nuanced meaning of national cinema that takes into account the collective identity people within a nation or locality can share and the individual and autonomous ways a distinct culture can evolve within a global context and come to represent a specific collective.

National cinemas, thus, are representative of the ways filmmakers and audiences view themselves as citizens of a common community. The community represented within a national cinema’s fictive dream world (assuming that films within a national cinema are fictional features as opposed to documentaries) is fixed and defined with a cultural lexicon that is arguably crafted at a nation’s genesis and develops as that nation undergoes periodic local renaissances, rebirths, or reterritorializations. Of course, national cinemas are not local entities that grow or develop within a vacuum devoid of global influences, as the affects of deterritorialization make evident; the cinema that does evolve distinctly reflects a local sociocultural, political, historical, economic, and psychological atmosphere, as well as a nation’s relationship(s) to disparate forms of electronic communications, such as online chats on mobile phone apps and film viewing on laptops and tablets. As that nation and its character shifts and changes with the passing of time, so does its cinema.

‘Living in Bondage’: The Beginning of Nollywood as National Cinema

Nollywood director Chico Ejiro says in the documentary Welcome to Nollywood (Jamie Meltzer, 2007), “We do drama that the people can watch and learn something from.” Indeed, drama is a major component of Nollywood films and has been its primary aesthetic and narrative focus since the industry’s beginnings with the release of a film that keenly epitomizes Nigeria’s

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299 “Chico Ejiro Interview,” Welcome to Nollywood, directed by Jamie Meltzer (2007, New York City: Cinema Guild), DVD.
socioeconomic culture at the time. *Living in Bondage* (Kenneth Nnebue, 1992) is the tale of an Igbo man named Andy who gains power and wealth after he kills his wife Merit in an occult ritual. The film follows him as he rises to power and prominence in his Onitsha community, but his rise is not free of torment. After suffering through months of his wife’s ghost haunting him, Andy is redeemed spiritually and emotionally when he repents and asks his evangelical Christian community to forgive his murderous act. *Living in Bondage* was a huge local success in Nigeria and many Nollywood insiders, journalists, and Nigerians believe it set the standard for all future Nollywood productions like those from Imasuen, Ejiro, and cinematographer turned director and producer Tunde Kelani. It established the Nollywood canon and the industry as a national cinema.

Nnebue’s great success with *Living in Bondage* and the film becoming the model for Nollywood as a national cinema can be attributed to four important factors: the lack of a local film culture prior to *Living in Bondage*, the socioeconomic plight of Nigerians at the time the film was produced, the ways the film reflected conditions at the time, and its glocalized storytelling conventions. Film viewing in Nigeria began during British colonial rule; colonial leaders imported Western films into their African colonies and staged public exhibitions for British settlers and African subjects. After Nigeria gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960, Nigerian themes and performance styles began to enter films, particularly Yoruba cultural elements such as the Yoruba traveling theater (which influenced many of Kelani’s early productions), musical forms like *fuji* and *jùjú*, and plotlines from familiar dramas that

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300 The name Merit in the film is ironic because it suggests that Andy does not have merit and has done nothing to merit his dutiful and loving wife.


transitioned from the stage to television.\textsuperscript{303} Cinema houses in Nigeria were not in large number and existed in major urban areas; those that did exist mainly showed films imported from America, Europe, and India. Prior to 1992, television was the major mass medium in Nigeria. With the beginning of the first television station in Ibadan in 1959, Nigerians, particularly those in urban areas in the southern part of the nation, began viewing television. However, as Noah Tsika points out, the destabilizing effects of civil war in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed by a great petroleum boom that eventually burst, and the Motion Picture Association of America’s 1981 moratorium on film distribution in Nigeria thanks to widespread charges of corruption created a film vacuum in the nation.\textsuperscript{304} Tsika argues:

\begin{quote}
\ldots complications included the confusions engendered by successive military governments, which tended to swing precipitously between rejecting the significance of cinema and embracing documentary as the filmic mode most apt to glorify their regimes\ldots a steep rise in urban crime discouraged millions of Nigerians from visiting cinema houses, especially during evening hours; more than simply expensive and imperialistic, celluloid films required darkened public spaces that proved physically dangerous to spectators.\textsuperscript{305}
\end{quote}

With the rise of state funded television broadcast stations that adapted theater productions for the small screen, the cost of production, government control of film, international freezes on film exports, increasing economic strife in the 1980s, and security concerns during the revolving door of dictators in the 1980s and 1990s, Nigerians stopped going to the movies.

Study participants Henry and Benjamin, the former television producer, spoke about the proliferation of television in Nigeria in the period from post-independence leading up to the early 1990s prior to their migration to the United States. Both men noted that Yoruba plays and news

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{303} Fuji and jùjù are popular Yoruba dance music forms. Fuji came out of a Yoruba Muslim practice where singers used song to awaken the faithful for morning prayers during Ramadan. Jùjù is a highly percussive dance music where the lead instrument is the ‘talking drum.’ For more information, see Toyin Falola, \textit{Culture and customs of Nigeria} (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 172 – 173.


\textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
broadcasts made up a significant part of Nigerian television programming. Henry states that American films and television mainly aired during the evenings after ten o’clock. Echoing Haynes and other Nollywood scholars, Benjamin said that many of the Yoruba theater actors and stories that migrated to television eventually migrated to film after Nnebue, looking to sell a large batch of imported videocassettes he thought Nigerians would purchase to record television programs on their VCRs, recognized how well they would sell if there was something on the tapes.306 Living in Bondage emerged from Nnebue’s desire to make a living, something many (if not most) of his contemporaries would have understood at the time.

The socioeconomic plight of Nigerians at the time the film was produced is starkly represented in the film. When Living in Bondage was released, the nation was in the midst of General Ibrahim Babangida’s military dictatorship, poverty was widespread, and unemployment was high in large part because of World Bank/International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programs which Babangida championed during his rule. The structural adjustment programs (SAPs) consisted of loans that were intended to mitigate a nation’s failing economy and set it up for long term economic growth; however, Nigeria’s economy did not rebound causing widespread financial suffering throughout the nation.307 The social conditions prevalent in Bondage were highly relevant and resonant. The film’s opening scene is of Andy, in soliloquy, announcing that he has quit his job at a bank because the salary was not enough to allow him to survive.308 He states that he has worked for four companies and even started a trading business, but has not ascended to the level of economic and social success of friends and classmates who

306 Ibid.
308 Andy is about 30 years old and Merit is in her early twenties.
began trading businesses. Andy eventually contends that he believes someone has bewitched him and this is the reason for his financial despondency. Merit, who has been listening off screen, enters the room with his meal and tells Andy that he has not been bewitched and that he should not have negative thoughts about money because many of his peers have not yet had their first job. She also mildly scolds him for quitting his job with the bank against her wishes. Merit later confides in a neighbor that she is concerned about Andy’s proposal to invest the 20,000 Naira she borrowed from her father to cover their basic household needs. Inevitably, Andy loses the money in a bad business exchange. Much like the aging Faust, who sold his soul to the devil Méphistophélès to reset the life he viewed as a failure, Andy murders Merit after joining a demonic cult to reset his own life and acquire the riches he believes he justly merits.

Ideas about money, survival, and the unsavory means to acquire and/or maintain both would have been keenly affecting for many of the Nigerians watching the narrative unfold, producing expressed emotional responses to the film in a process Teresa Brennan calls the “transmission of affect.” Affect is not solely linked to emotions or feelings, but also to existence, experience, and temporality and can be transmitted just as readily through televisual methods as through contact with other human beings. Carl Plantinga notes, “When emotions, affectively charged qualities, and the cognitive processing of narrative information work together…a film can induce striking moods in spectators in an orchestrated and constantly evolving temporal experience.”

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309 At the time, one dollar was the equivalent of 22 Naira, making the amount Andy and Merit possess about $909. As of July 5, 2016, one dollar is officially equivalent to about 282 Naira at the official market and 342 Naira at the black market, making the amount about $50 to $55.


affective occurrences beyond what is deemed normal or normative. For many Nigerians surviving through the nation’s financial and political struggles at the time, viewing a film released solely on videocassette tape was a queer occurrence; however, the narrative contained on the tape was not. The narrative within *Living in Bondage* created an affectivity where the relationship between Nigerian viewers and the film’s images worked to situate the viewer and film in an exchange of ideas where judgments were made about the images on the screen and the state of the viewers’ lives.

Andy’s professional and social plight would have resonated with those Nigerians chafing under the unsuccessful economic policies that Babangida and the International Monetary Fund implemented in the country in 1986. Adebayo Adediji, the former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, stated that the structural adjustment programs implemented in the late 1980s did more harm to Nigeria’s economy and its citizens than all the decades of colonialism put together. The purpose of SAPs was to deregulate the economy and pay down foreign debt. However, the program left many Nigerians believing the SAPs had sapped them dry. The idea that many Nigerians (and other Africans), including people like Andy and his friends (one humorously named Obi Million), would resort to occult practices to gain power and wealth was highly plausible. Jean and John Comaroff consider these practices to be the mechanisms of an “occult economy;” in an occult economy, postcolonial economic forces reveal the lopsided nature of African capitalism and financial abundance magically or mystically appears with no clear link to employment or other labor. The Comaroffs and Lindsey Green-

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313 Monga, “Commodities, Mercedes-Benz & Structural Adjustments,” 228 – 229.
Simms contend that occult economies create social anxieties and fear of demonic spiritual behaviors in nations where money was (and is still) gained through illegal means like advanced pay scams (also known as “doing 419”) and pyramid schemes with or without links to magic.\textsuperscript{315} The largely Christian audiences were and remain suspicious and terrified of religions and spiritual practices that fall outside their notions of proper Christian religion. As Sarah, a Cameroonian immigrant currently living in an area just outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania fearfully said to me, “Witchcraft is real and Nollywood movies…they show all of it and it’s really real.”

Sarah’s “really real” fear of witchcraft and her insistence that she tries to (but often cannot) avoid films with these themes is representative of many African people’s views on non-Christian belief systems. Obododimma Oha contends that witchcraft and demonic forces are also often blamed for an individual’s economic instability, as is seen in the opening scene of \textit{Living in Bondage} when Andy questions whether his financial misfortune is the result of being ‘bewitched.’ Oha argues that films with Christian themes work to shape public attitudes “in a social context of fear, uncertainty, helplessness, and hopelessness.”\textsuperscript{316} Nigerian audiences would have been aware of the double entendre within the title \textit{Living in Bondage} as many lived in economic bondage and would have been fearful of living in the sort of supernatural bondage in which Andy lives after he sacrifices his wife. Green-Simms concurs with Brian Larkin’s argument that Nollywood films create an “‘aesthetics of outrage’ designed to stimulate and provoke reactions in the audience by sensationally depicting religious, social, and moral


transgressions that contribute to everyday instability and uncertainty in the postcolony.\textsuperscript{317}

However, the painful affect the film generated did not prevent viewers from watching, enjoying, and appreciating \textit{Bondage}; the very opposite is true. Just as the socioeconomic and supernatural themes reverberated for audiences, so too did themes of Christian redemption and restoration that reflected the familiar world for Nigerians in the midst of the Babangida regime.

John Markert’s explanation of reflection theory is a pragmatic tool to analyze how Nollywood’s affective films, which could be viewed as exaggerations of Nigerian life, actually reflect society. He argues that what “is depicted in the book or on the screen is something that reflects a slice of the familiar world.”\textsuperscript{318} The familiar world reflected in many Nollywood films, for which \textit{Bondage} set the bar, is one of African financial instability and the search for a means of survival in the wake of economic collapse. Films like \textit{The Master} and the recent \textit{Confusion Na Wa}.\textsuperscript{319} exemplify the highly resonate methods Nigerians feel they must employ for basic economic survival. The nation holds the largest number of universities on the African continent, but it also contains a large number of unemployed college graduates.\textsuperscript{320} Indeed, messages about money, tradition, religion, and the occult would have been difficult for Nigerians to ignore or dispute at the time the film was released. \textit{Bondage} contains evocative moments meant to induce fear, disgust, sympathy, anger, sadness, joy, love, and/or understanding. Markert argues, “Movies…serve as a window on the world …the content of the cultural form is viewed through a mirror into the group’s values. The reflective metaphor allows the cultural object, in this case,


\textsuperscript{318} Markert, \textit{9/11 Cinema}, xv.

\textsuperscript{319} Gyang’s \textit{Confusion Na Wa} documents a few days in the lives of a group of interconnected Nigerians struggling with crime, unemployment, corruption in the workplace, marital infidelity, sexual assault, and the absence of African traditions in an unnamed Nigerian city. \textit{The Master}, considered a classic Nollywood comedy, portrays the life of a scammer who becomes quite good at 419 schemes, defrauding innocent people out of large sums of money.

movies, to be ‘read’ as a sign of what people in society are thinking at any given time.” Sara Ahmed contends that to “experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object but to what is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival.” Markert’s and Ahmed’s arguments are relevant to conversations about Nollywood films’ ability to transmit affect; audiences watching Bondage, a filmic ‘object,’ in the early 1990s were able to look into the window of their individual and collective worlds. There, they saw the economic difficulties and religious faith surrounding. The conditions in which the film was made were flashed back at them. Their occult economic conditions were essentially wrapped up in a dramatic ending depicting Andy’s release from demonic powers and Merit’s ghost gaining peace and finally transitioning to the heavenly afterlife. As stated, the film’s themes and ending became typical of Nollywood’s syncretic narrative conventions.

The storytelling or narrative in Living in Bondage contributed to the film being labeled the first Nollywood film and the beginning of Nollywood as a national cinema with glocalized narratives and aesthetics. Haynes states that melodrama, imported from Latin American telenovelas, films from India, and Anglo-American television soap operas, has been combined with the dynamic oral storytelling in Yoruba theater to become the narrative and aesthetic standard. The films’ “extremes of fortune, emotion, and moral character are classic melodramatic elements; their predominantly domestic settings, multiple interwoven plot lines, and emphasis on dialogue rather than action” are what make them combinations of western soap operas, telenovelas, Bollywood masala films, and Nigerian popular such as Yoruba theater and

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321 Markert, 9/11 Cinema, xvi.
musical forms like *fuji* and *juju*.\footnote{Ibid., 22.} Indeed, Nigerian film narratives’ affective symbiosis of global and local elements make Nollywood a glocal cinema that transcends Nigerian national and African continental borders.

Guy Debord’s ideas are particularly appropriate in examining the glocalized affective spectacle in Nollywood films. At its core, a spectacle is a public show or display on a large scale. Debord states that the spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive and indisputable.\footnote{Debord, “The Commodity as Spectacle,” 108.} Many Nollywood films like *Living in Bondage* and it’s thematic cousin *Confusion Na Wa* contain lurid stories of seedy urban life, family conflicts, poverty and financial ruin, crime and corruption, witchcraft and the occult, and Christian salvation and redemption. Other films like *Flower Girl* tackle romantic relationships and aberrant sexuality in African culture in general, the struggles of living abroad, and the fight to maintain African cultural traditions in the face of deterritorialization, globalization, and modernity.\footnote{For an extended conversation on Nollywood narrative construction and the films’ effects on society, see T. Arthur, “Reimagining the ‘Blockbuster’ for Nigerian Cinema,” 101 – 116.} In the final scenes of *Bondage*, Andy, deeply guilty for resorting to occult practices to gain wealth and status, is redeemed through an evangelical exorcism when he repents at a local church. A group of church members surround Andy, sing hymns, and pray before the minister casts out the evil spirits that possessed Andy upon his joining the cult and murdering his wife. Merit’s ghost, which haunts Andy through much of the film, is finally able to leave the natural world after a group of women hold a prayer and praise song vigil at her grave. In *Flower Girl*, Tunde returns to Lagos from Hollywood after a successful American film debut to reunite with Kemi and the Nigeria he realizes he loves. It is this return to African Christian spirituality and the continent that enable Andy, his dead wife Merit, and the reformed playboy Tunde to find peace; both films’ spectacle
driven messages suggest that African Christianity and traditional values overcome malevolence and losing one’s culture for the sake of modernity.

Much of the spectacle within *Living in Bondage* set the tone for subsequent Nollywood video-films such as *The Master, Osuofia in London* (Kingsley Ogoro, 2003), and the aforementioned *Bent Arrows*. Films like *Bondage* and filmmakers like Kenneth Nnebue created and solidified a cultural machine that continues unabated today. Karin Barber stresses, “Modern popular arts have the capacity to transcend geographical, ethnic, and even national boundaries.”

Nollywood is a prime example of a boundary transcending industry made popular through local production and consumption. Since the early 1990s, the industry has gained the attention of journalists, scholars, filmmakers, and viewers around the world allowing Nollywood to eclipse its status as Nigeria’s national cinema and become a truly transnational cinema.

*(New) Nollywood: Transnational and Glocal*

The recent turn in Nollywood studies toward delineating the differences between traditional Nollywood and a ‘new Nollywood’ that has emerged since 2009 shows the ever evolving African and global cultural and political landscape’s influence on Nollywood as the nation’s national cinema. Since 2009, numerous films have emerged that combine the narrative aesthetics of the affective Nollywood spectacle with the larger budgets, highly stylized special effects, and production values of Western films to create a new reterritorialized type of globalized and glocalized Nollywood film. The ‘new Nollywood’ that Haynes, Jedlowski, and even I have discussed in our published work is the emerging theatrical film that retains Nigerian

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narrative forms while combining the technological features (special effects, better quality shooting and editing, larger settings) of a large budget feature.\textsuperscript{329} 

Narratively and aesthetically linked to its Nollywood sister, the fictive dream world in New Nollywood is “visually stylized” while still retaining “the insular feel of a \textit{telenovela} or theater production.”\textsuperscript{330} Haynes and Carmela Garitano suggest that ‘new Nollywood’ films are related to traditional Third Cinema or FESPACO (Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou) films that are more widely discussed in African film studies because of their political as well as artistic value.\textsuperscript{331} While a comprehensive history of African film is impossible to complete in a study such as this, it can be said that African film prior to Nollywood’s emergence in 1992 primarily consisted of Francophone films from filmmakers like Ousmane Sembène, Moustapha Alassane, and Safi Faye.\textsuperscript{332} Nollywood changed the African film paradigm and has ushered in novel approaches to thinking about African cinema, particularly the New Nollywood films that are now shown at international film festivals like FESPACO and in theaters around the world. Haynes states:

New Nollywood filmmakers aim to open their films in these theaters, perhaps after a gala premiere somewhere else, and try to move from the circuit of these multiplexes to London or vice versa… There are points of convergence between New Nollywood and the rest of African cinema: larger budgets, slower production schedules, the possibility of shooting and/or releasing films on celluloid, scripts that go through many drafts over a period of years, international coproduction, revenues from foreign distribution built into financial calculations, international training, rubbing shoulders at international film festivals.\textsuperscript{333}

\textsuperscript{329} Neither Jedlowski nor I call it ‘new Nollywood’ in our work. We both refer to it as ‘emerging’ or ‘new theatrical’ film.
\textsuperscript{332} Indeed, Ousmane Sembène is considered the godfather of African film. His work and contributions to global filmmaking cannot be understated.
\textsuperscript{333} Haynes, “Close-Up,” 56, 57 – 58.
For example, in 2012 director/producer Mahmood Ali-Balogun inked an agreement with Odeon for his 2010 film *Tango with Me* to be shown in the chain’s theaters across the United Kingdom.\(^{334}\) The aforementioned Imasuen film *Invasion 1897* premiered in the United Kingdom and the United States before reaching audiences in Nigeria. New Nollywood’s aesthetic practices are old; its highly dramatic storytelling style has not changed. However, what makes New Nollywood ‘new’ is its inherent transnationality, or its ability to move across borders and exist in more than one space.

As such, Nollywood/New Nollywood (which I will refer to simply as Nollywood from here on out) is a transnational cinema.\(^{335}\) Broadly defined, transnational cinema is the collective cinematic representations of a group of unified people who seek or possess a related cultural identity. It is a cinema of a particular collection of nations rooted in the local customs of one. Also, it can be described as a collection of films representing a multination community linked together through phenomenological and cultural proximity. Ultimately, transnational cinemas are glocal. While they exist in a borderless space, they are models of the synergistic and interdependent combinations of the global and the local.\(^{336}\) What makes Nollywood transnational and glocal? I have noted in this chapter that Nollywood as a film form borrows film, television, and theater elements from nations around the world and incorporates them with storytelling methods, production models, and consumption practices that are categorically local. Yet, this glocal syncretism does not capture the depth of Nollywood’s transnationality. Nigerian

\(^{334}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{335}\) I conflate the terms because the moniker ‘New Nollywood’ is merely a representation of the transnational shifts the industry has taken in the last decade.

\(^{336}\) This definition is in conversation with previous scholarship that explores the connection between globalization and culture and the ways cultural imperialism affects the global media landscape, but the definition is my own. See John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and J.D. Straubhaar, “Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity,” in *International Media: A Reader*, ed. Daya Kishan Thussu (London: Routledge, 2010), 261 – 278.
cinema is transnational and glocal for two primary reasons: Nollywood’s global impact and its continuous reflection of what is relevant and important to Africans from different nations south of the Sahara.

Global Nollywood

“If you go anywhere in the world and you don’t find a Nigerian, that place is uninhabitable.” Upon making this declaration, Pascal fell into a robust and rather infectious laughter. “Ah…Nigerians! We’re everywhere!” While Pascal’s statement is quite humorous and a bit grandiose, it does hold a small yet fundamental nugget of truth that can be applied to Nollywood. Nollywood films can be found all around the globe. Claudia Hoffmann states, “…Nollywood’s uniqueness is not limited to its commercial success, but includes its potential to reach an audience way beyond native Nigeria while at the same time remaining local in terms of themes and aesthetics.” The “way beyond” Hoffmann speaks of includes European locations such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany; African nations like Ghana (which has an independent industry, but often shares acting, production, and distribution resources with the larger Nigerian industry), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, and South Africa; and, the Americas, including the United States and Caribbean nations like Barbados, Jamaica, and Guyana. As I will mention in the following chapter, much of Nollywood’s

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337 I borrow this language from the title of Kring and Okome’s edited anthology, Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry.


339 Again, I must note here that during my research process, particularly at the barbeque outside Baltimore during the summer of 2015, I met and spoke with women from Jamaica and Guyana who were interested in my research and insisted upon speaking with me about their love of Nollywood films. Though these women exist beyond the scope of this project, I spoke with them in an ‘off the record’ way that allowed them to feel as if I was hearing, capturing, and acknowledging their voices while still maintaining the parameters of my research. Scholars like Jedlowski, Hoffmann, preeminent Nollywood and African film scholar Jane Bryce, and Giovanna Santanera discuss the transportability of Nigerian cinema and the ease with which transnational audiences relate its narratives in their work.
transportability can be attributed to its rise and proliferation in online/digital spaces. However, its global/glocal growth is also the result of Nollywood production in places outside Nigeria, the adoption of the ‘pop-pop-pop’ production model in other African nations, and the transnational film ‘tourism’ of Nollywood actors and filmmakers seeking to promote films.

Though Nollywood films are shot on location in Nigerian cities and rural villages, the industry has a history of production outside Nigerian borders. One of the first Nollywood films to be shot outside of Nigeria was Kingsley Ogoro’s 2003 transnational comedy Osuofia in London, which tells the story of the titular character’s quest to collect a sizable inheritance from a relative who amassed a fortune in the United Kingdom, died, and left it to Osuofia. Subsequent productions in other nations have expanded the reach of Nollywood to the United States, throughout Africa, and Europe. Notably, the Nollywood production Laviva tells the story of Nigerian peacekeeping soldiers stationed in Liberia during its civil war and Faith Isiakpere’s 2011 film Foreign Demons, a film about misunderstandings between Africans from different nations, was co-produced with his South African wife Firdoze Bulbulia. Nollywood has even ventured into the Ukraine for Feathered Dreams, a story about a Nigerian medical student who falls in love with a Ukrainian man while dreaming of becoming a singer; the film is a meditation on the plight of Africans adjusting to unfamiliar cultures and languages. These films are only a few transnational Nollywood productions that have garnered audience and media attention.

While these transnational films largely did not retain the ‘pop-pop-pop’ style of most of their Nollywood cousins, other African filmmakers have adopted the distinctly Nollywood rapid-fire production and narrative model. As mentioned, Ghana’s film industry’s (sometimes called Ghallywood or Ghollywood) methods are almost identical to Nigeria’s; quite often, Ghanaian and Nigerian film personnel, especially actors, move across borders for productions that are
labeled Nollywood films. Ghanaian actors like Jackie Appiah, Yvonne Nelson, Majid Michel, and Van Vicker are well established in Nollywood and enjoy star power in both their home nation and Nigeria. Films like the romantic comedy *The Groom’s Bride* and traditional historical film *I Sing of a Well* are examples of Ghanaian films that employ Nigerian production and narrative aesthetics. The aesthetics are also present in the historical epic *Hatred*, Liberia’s first feature length film. Tanzanian productions like *Nsyuka*, *Shumileta*, and *Popobawa* employ Nollywood witchcraft and occult themes to tell complex horror stories of vampires and demons. Like the transnational co-productions mentioned above, these transnational films are but a few that use features of Nollywood production to create glocal movies that are syncretic mash-ups of Nigerian aesthetics and local narratives.

Nollywood’s transnational impact can also be attributed to its stars, the well known filmmakers and popular actors who travel the world, often with suitcases full of DVDs, to promote their latest film (and themselves). While tourism scholars mostly situate film tourism as a phenomenon where film fans travel to the location where a favorite or popular film was shot, Nollywood personnel have added a new layer of meaning to film tourism. Directors like Imasuen and Kunle Afolayan travel through Europe and the United States to promote their films at festivals, international premieres, and release parties and events designed to introduce Nollywood to wider audiences within and outside the African diaspora. For example, festivals like the popular African Diaspora International Film Festival, which takes place yearly in Washington, DC, Chicago, New York, and Paris; the American Film Institute’s New African Film Festival; the Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles and Atlanta; and, the Nollywood Week Film Festival in Paris regularly feature or are solely devoted to Nigerian feature films and

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often host ‘conversations with the director’ where filmmakers have the opportunity to discuss their work. However, Noah Tsika points out that film stars are the most visible Nollywood faces around the world; he claims that Nollywood stars are accustomed to setting up events on their own and traveling to diverse locations because funds for international publicity are often scarce.\textsuperscript{341} He candidly notes:

\begin{quote}
Nollywood stars “become” transnational not through contact with Hollywood performers and production funds,...but instead through individual, itinerant, industrially sanctioned agency;...by joining forces with some of the least seemly but most visible agents of transnationalism, such as major corporations;...and, perhaps most importantly, by maintaining an emphatically antiessentialist, self-pluralizing approach to African and Africans.\textsuperscript{342}
\end{quote}

Thus, Nollywood stars engage in the sort of film tourism that enables them to transcend the (large and small) screens upon which they appear and exist in living form in cities around the world where they are routinely deified and honored for being ‘role models’ for Africa, particularly female stars like Genevieve Nnaji and Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde who are consistently considered the greatest Nollywood actresses of the moment.

Indeed, film tourism – Nollywood style – sets up a transnational system of “cultural juxtapositioning, meeting and mixing” that creates chances for Nollywood stars hoping to capitalize on their star power to expand their profitability, acting credentials in other film markets, and overall knowledge of the global film industry. Tsika suggests that Nollywood stars have no immediate interest in becoming Hollywood names; as Nollywood’s proliferation around the world suggests, Hollywood notoriety could not begin to match their transnational mega-stardom. The primary question that arises for many Nollywood actors traveling to expand their professional reach is rather simple. Why struggle in Hollywood, an industry where roles for

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{341} Tsika, \textit{Nollywood Stars}, 8.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
black and other actors of color are limited and often rooted in racial and ethnic stereotypes, when fame and fortune are far easier to attain in Nollywood and it’s global/glocal networks? Certainly, Nollywood stars’ film tourism compliments and bolsters Nollywood stars’ international power, production methods, and popularity. Many Nollywood scholars have urged critics who view Nollywood as a bastardized or illegitimate mode of cultural production not to dismiss its ‘pop-pop-pop’ production style, highly melodramatic plots, and its glocalization as not being worthy or sophisticated enough to study like its FESPACO and high political art (mostly Francophone) counterparts. John McCall argues for Nollywood naysayers to “be careful not to condemn it because it departs from intellectual formulations of what progressive political thought is supposed to look like.” As Tsika contends, “one would have to be a rigid, Eurocentric film snob to see Nollywood as valueless.”

Geography of Identity

Nollywood’s value as a film industry is intricately linked to its status as a transnational cinema that individuals throughout the African diaspora can relate to and enjoy. In fact, the participants in this study, especially those not from Nigeria, view Nollywood in much the same way as Imasuen and Jombo who consider the industry the “voice of Africa” with “Africans telling African stories.” As Patricia vehemently stated when I ask her why she enjoys Nollywood so much even though she is not Nigerian, “Because it’s my culture.” Benjamin, the older Nigerian man whose work in television positioned him close to Nollywood (but not in it) in

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344 Tsika, Nollywood Stars, 299.
345 I also borrow this language from the title of a collected volume on the role of space and place in crafting individual and collective identity. See Patricia Yeager, The Geography of Identity (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996). The title is a fitting way of discussing how Nollywood’s transnationality expands conversations about African identity or what is considered African. I acknowledge here that it would be unrealistic for me to attempt to define African identity in this project. However, this section will offer suggestions that seemingly fit well into conversations about why Nigerian cinema/Nollywood is incredibly relevant and resonant to black Africans throughout the African diaspora.
the industry’s early days, forcefully said that Nollywood appeals to all Africans “because Africa is one.” Sierra Leonean immigrant Margie argued, “All African culture is home.” Patricia’s fellow Congolese, Penny and Paula whose enthusiasm for Nollywood is thick enough to slice screamed that Nollywood is important to them because, “We are all Africans. We’re different, but we’re the same.”

This sameness is a topic that numerous scholars studying Nollywood’s transportability have reflected on. Akin Adesokan argues, Nigerian films appeal to “other Africans” partly because of “artistic representation…the so-called melodramatic mode…the history of encounters between Nigerian cinema and television and American and Hindi films, and…the aesthetic dimension of affect.” Though Adesokan does not explicitly discuss Nollywood as a transnational and glocal cinema, his argument does this work for him, though he derides the essentialist and “much-abused notion of African communalism, with its assumption of altruism as a moral imperative” that drives belief in communal affect. However, other scholars have championed this communalism and have explored the myriad ways Africans living around the world consume Nollywood features. Monica Dipio contends, “Nigerian film is popular in the sense that it traverses the immediate culture in which it is set as people beyond the borders of the immediate community can identify with it.” Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome call this phenomenon “Africanity.” They state:

Measured against the reified culture of American films and television series broadcast by African TV stations, the culture on display in Nigerian video films may indeed look familiar to many viewers in Africa…Nigerian films are first and foremost hailed for their Africanity.

348 Krings and Okome, Global Nollywood, 3.
Dipio, Krings, and Okome provide a scholarly supplement to the voices of Benjamin, Patricia, Penny, and Paula, who believe in an African sameness within an Africa that is made up of many countries and cultures.

To deeply grasp the gravity of this sameness, attention must be paid to this idea of Africanity, what it means, and how geography is (ir)relevant or (un)important to the ways scholars render the theory, how Nollywood embodies it, and how Africans from nations south of the Sahara understand it as important to their experiences as immigrants in the United States though they may not articulate it in precise terms. In truth, for the subjects of this study, my questions about Nollywood’s expression of African culture were often met with blank stares or an answer that repeated my questions in declarative form such as “Nollywood shows African culture” or “Nollywood is about all of Africa.” Margie, who offered the most detailed response, spoke of experience and history as the unifying factors for Africans when she commented, “We have so many similarities in our histories.” Her statement speaks to Africa’s overall history, a history with an image that Margie lamented “hasn’t been the greatest.”

While this project cannot offer an encyclopedic overview of African history or articulations of African culture and identity, history is important to this study, especially as it interprets the cultural and phenomenological proximity of African culture. Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, historians and other scholars have attempted to articulate this proximity historically and culturally. Aimé Césaire, considered one of the founding fathers of intellectual discourse on Négritude, considers the theory to be rooted in a shared history of black people who can trace their lineage to the African continent. He asserts:

“Négritude, in my eyes, is not a philosophy. Négritude is not a metaphysics. Négritude is not a pretentious conception of the universe. It is a way of living history within history: the history of a community whose experience appears to be … unique, with its deportation of populations, *its transfer of people from one
continent to another, its distant memories of old beliefs, its fragments of murdered cultures. How can we not believe that all this, which has its own coherence, constitutes a heritage? Césaire’s powerful statement about Négritude’s “transfer of people,” “memories of old beliefs,” and “fragments of murdered cultures” is consistent with Léopold Sédar Senghor’s assertions in his work that Négritude “is founded on the notion of vital force. Pre-existing, anterior to being, it constitutes being. God has given vital force not only to men, but also to animals, vegetables, even minerals. By which they are. But it is the purpose of this force to increase.” To Senghor, this vital force existed in the varied, yet complementary cultural traditions of the African continent, especially its art. Césaire’s and Senghor’s theories of Négritude are keen modes for understanding the experiences of African immigrants living in the United States who turn to Nollywood to hold onto their traditional beliefs from a culture that was deterritorialized during colonization and a culture that neocolonial occult economies continues to destroy. Négritude is about loss, reterritorialization, and reclamation and ultimately, so is Nollywood. However, the process from loss to reclamation is only a small part of what makes Nollywood a transnational phenomenon.

Understandings of Négritude are the building blocks that make up notions of Africanity. Jacques Maquet claims, “Africanity is this unique cultural face that Africa presents to the world” that encompasses “the totality of cultural features common to hundreds of societies of sub-

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349 Césaire’s *Discours sur la Négritude* (“A Lecture on Négritude”) from which this quote is taken was originally a lecture given on February 26, 1987 at Florida International University in Miami. However, his ideas on Négritude and colonialism predate this lecture. See Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001). This theory of Négritude should not be considered one that applies only to black people hailing from the African continent; it is an applicable theory to the overall black diaspora experience, be it Afro-European, African American, Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, etc.

Maquet asserts that Africanity is related to Négritude in that both stress the affirmation of cultural character, but instead of focusing on the negation or destruction of blackness (memories of old beliefs, fragments of murdered cultures) that typically took place in Western thought, Africanity hones in on shared and common experiences. As different as African people may be from one area of the continent to another and from culture to culture within those areas, Africans still share an existence and lived experience that make them culturally and phenomenologically proximate. I argue that Nollywood presents the “unique cultural face” of Africa to the world through this proximity.

Nollywood’s Africanity and transnational appeal is ultimately rooted in a familiar culture and recognizable lived and historical experiences. All or most of the actors in Nollywood films are black and the settings (both urban and rural) are reminiscent of African spaces beyond Nigeria. As Jodi, whose family is from Ghana and Cote D’Ivoire (where she grew up), told me, “It’s nice to watch a movie and all of the faces are black like yours and the places are like your village.” Sarah, the Cameroonian, noted that the films she enjoys most are traditional cultural narratives of love and romance in kingdoms or chieftaincies in pastoral settings. Traditional cultural narratives also appeal most to Lisa, Patricia, Samantha, and Margie as well as Pascal and Benjamin who view them as stories that harken back to a pre-colonial Africa where Africans controlled their lives, bodies, and cultures. Pascal’s contemporary Sam, who lived for a short time in a Nebraska town with his wife and American born daughter, proudly said he uses traditional/pastoral Nigerian films to educate his young daughter about her history and culture. The preference for films with pastoral settings is telling; it reveals the aspects of loss and

352 Other scholars like Ali Mazrui and Souleymane Bachir Diagne have sought to redefine Africanity to situate it as more than connected to a place, but linked to an idea that transcends geography, space, and culture. However, their ideas do not offer a definition so drastically different from Maquet’s that they require attention in this study.
affirmation that are inherent within Césaire’s assertions of Négritude and the desire for cultural communalism and agency within Africanaity. As Patricia Yaeger notes:

The physical world is...a site where unrequited desires, bizarre ideologies, and hidden productivities are encrypted, so that any narration of space must confront the dilemma of geographic enigmas head on, including the enigma of what gets forgotten or hidden, or lost...  

Relating Yaeger’s statement to the context of this study, I argue that the physical world of the American landscape that African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara Desert must negotiate is a world of contradictions; unrequited desires; masked productivity, especially as the riches of America and a high quality of life are glaringly out of reach for those working in service industries or intimate labor; and ideologies bizarre to many of the immigrants who arrived with preformed ideas about what the United States would be. Nollywood’s Africanaity presents a physical world where desires for home can be fulfilled and ideologies are familiar; the enigma of America is met and tamed with narratives of an Africa that operate as sites of remembrance and reconnection.

However, I argue that Nollywood with its affective spectacle does not seek to mask the complexities of African life; the opposite is true. Nollywood presents phenomenological or experientially proximate narratives that appeal to postcolonial subjects. In a film like *Confusion Na Wa*, which affectively contemplates postcolonial African poverty, crime, the futility of corporate labor, ‘aberrant’ sexuality, and the seeming ‘godlessness’ of those seeking wealth or basic survival in a modern Africa, the common problems that postcolonial African people (especially those who could be considered Afroproletarians) must tackle are on full display. Films like *After the Proposal* fictionalize the tensions that can ensue in an occult economy when dowry requirements from a would-be bride’s family (essentially demands for a man to

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financially support his future wife’s entire family) chase away a would-be groom. Desmond Elliot’s 2014 film *Knocking on Heaven’s Door* offers a distressing portrait of domestic violence and the religious reasons why many African women remain in abusive marriages. In addition, the film *Last Flight to Abuja* showcases corporate fraud and greed and hints at African governmental apathy to airline industry malfeasance. The lives and struggles presented in these phenomenological films are not unique to just one African culture (or any one culture in general); the films present relatable African cultural experiences and settings. Hoffmann says, “Despite the primary intention to entertain, Nollywood films re-create issues, conflicts, and tensions that are specific to a contemporary Nigerian reality, such as gender inequalities, religious and ethnic tension, cults and the occult, and so on.” Yet, these issues, conflicts, and tensions are not just specific to Nigerians, but to Africans from nations south of the Sahara with a relatable colonial and postcolonial legacy. Margie, perhaps, summed up the nature of Nollywood films best when she claims, “That’s the beauty of cinema. You are able to cross over and touch people because of these experiences you [African people] can all draw upon.”

Thus, Nollywood’s Africanity is reflected in its affective narratives. Though the films are global for those Africans outside Nigeria, they become glocal because of the cultural and phenomenological proximity of the actors, settings, themes, and narratives that exceed temporal or chronological histories. The affective response to and reception of these films are representative of a displaced psychogeography in which the geographical environment and its incumbent meanings represented in the films consciously or unconsciously affects the emotions

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354 Tonya, the Nigerian night nurse mentioned in the previous chapters, noted that she learned about resources for women in abusive relationships (resources she claims did not exist when she lived in Nigeria, though others disagree) through Nollywood films. Her statement along with Sam’s, who uses Nollywood films to educate his daughter about Africa, are in line with Ejiro’s insistence that Nigerian films are learning tools.

355 Hoffmann, “Made in America,” 123.
and behaviors of the individuals watching. Guy Debord defines psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviors of individuals.”356 Debord’s ideas mainly speak to the way individuals experience urban spaces while inhabiting those spaces. Yet, I extend his theory to consider the ways African immigrant Nollywood consumers process films. Viewers are not physically in the filmic space, but they have been transmitted there emotionally and psychologically and feel close to it even if it is not their specific country of origin.

Sara Ahmed’s notions of the melancholic migrant speak to the experiences of African immigrants in the United States who use Nollywood as a way of redirecting themselves or turning back toward the African continent in their personal reterritorialization practices. Nollywood’s Africanity produces a displaced psychogeographical affect that enables them to inhabit the home that is lost through migration while viewing films. For many, especially those Afroproletarians who will most likely remain in the United States and may not have the financial means to visit their countries of origin very often, viewing Nollywood films is the primary way to ‘go home.’ I deem this displaced psychogeography to be proof of what Ahmed calls a “membership in an affective community” where individuals not only “share an orientation toward certain objects as being good,” but also share the recognition of the “same objects as being lost.”357 She states:

So if an affective community is produced by sharing objects of loss, which means letting objects go in the right way, then the melancholics would be affect aliens in how they love: their love becomes a failure to get over loss, which keeps them facing the wrong way. The melancholics are thus the ones who must be redirected, or turned around.358

357 Ahmed, The Promise of Happiness, 141.
358 Ibid.
African immigrants are in a constant process of redirection, reorientation, and reterritorialization. They find themselves straddling the Atlantic and grounded in both Africa and America. However, as transnational individuals attempting to rectify their American lives, they often find themselves facing Africa in search of the home and culture they lost during migration. Readily aware that acculturation is necessary to survival in an American culture that belies their own culture, Nollywood films become a means for attaining balance. Transnational cinema Nollywood with its glocalized relatable narratives afford immigrants the ability to face both Africa and America at once. Thus, African immigrants, especially those in this study, are like Janus figures with two faces, one looking at their past (and/or future) experiences on the African continent and the other looking at their current lives in their temporary or permanent American home that is not the paradise they expected.

A Different Take on America

In the last five years, Nollywood films have begun to talk back to the idea of the United States as a paradise. Several films released in the last decade critique America and offer portraits of the paradox of progress for African immigrants living in the United States. These films are glocal; shot in the United States and employing both African and American actors, their narratives alter the overarching ideology of progress embedded within the setting to speak the truth to viewers from Africa living in America and those on the African continent. Hoffmann notes that many of these films are shot in American urban spaces like New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta, all areas with large African immigrant communities. She states:

Through diasporic filmmaking,…immigrant communities become cinematic manifestations of transnational movements of money, labor, goods, media, and people, and the actual city space, with its buildings, streets, sidewalks, cars, and other symbols of urbanity, is a place where social actors “negotiate
the relationship between the local and the global.”

Hoffmann’s study of transnational and glocal Nollywood films shot in the United States focuses on the ways members of immigrant communities handle the cultural adjustment to life in urban America. Her argument is sharp; she argues, “…although the immigrant seems to be at the center of the plot, they are often just the vehicle of a macrolevel political statement about the oppressive global structures and inhumane immigration practices of individual nation-states.”

Ultimately, the urban American landscape in transnational and glocal Nollywood films are sites where the paradox of progress and the emotional dissonance it can produce are explored.

Affect transmitting and inducing narratives set in the United States potentially represent another form of psychogeography. Immigrant viewers are physically in the place represented in the film and can be emotionally and psychologically drawn to the narratives because they reflect the issues they may be attempting to reconcile within their acculturation experiences. Films like Missing in America, Overseas, and Mother of George probe the experiences of African born women who come to the United States to reunite with spouses, for career advancement, and to marry American based men. Others like In Her Shoes and My Life My Damage analyze the efforts that some African women will undertake in order to secure an American based husband and the potential dangers of life (sex and drugs) for an overly ambitious single young African woman in an immoral American culture, respectively. As the filmmakers of these transnational and glocal Nollywood films are often immigrants themselves, they operate from “an inside-out, point of view” and “represent how immigrant characters negotiate the local and the transnational space while (physically and mentally) navigating the diaspora.”

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359 Hoffmann, “Making America,” 121. See also Barbara Mennel, Cities and Cinema: Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City (London: Routledge, 2008).
360 Hoffmann, “Making America,” 124.
361 Ibid., 124 – 125.
 posit notions of America not as a paradise for African immigrants, but as a pocket of hell on earth possibly in an effort to educate would-be migrants about the pitfalls of American life or to steer potential migrants toward traditional life at home.

This American Life

Many Nollywood films are thematic representations of the sometimes multiple rifts between African traditional culture and modernity. Transnational-glocal movies follow the same narrative and aesthetic model of the basic Nollywood films; the immigrant experience featured in these films are meditations upon the tensions that can arise when attempting to tightly hold onto African traditions while embracing enough of American culture and life to survive day to day. Missing in America and Overseas, in addition to Chineze Anyaene’s 2010 film Ijé: The Journey and Anchor Baby focus on the clash between the traditional and the modern; Africa is the site of tradition and cultural familiarity while America is a place where dallying with modernity can lead to personal collapse and disgrace. These films are very much cinematic portrayals of what it means for the African immigrant to be a Janus figure in the United States.

The clash between the modern and traditional is present in Ijé: The Journey through the two main characters. In the film, Anya (Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde), who is in her early twenties, travels to Los Angeles with dreams of becoming a pop superstar much to the disapproval of her very strict and traditional farmer father. Anya’s singing talent is well known throughout her village community. As a child, she frequently used her beautiful voice to soothe her younger sister Chioma (Genevieve Nnaji), whose care she is charged with in the absence of their mother, and to entertain the village children. When she tells her father that she has dreams of becoming a singer, he threatens to beat her and reminds her that she is and always will be the daughter of a farmer. He informs her that it is her obligation to be and become nothing more than a dutiful
daughter, wife, and mother. This is not an acceptable life plan for Anya; though the film does not reveal her means, she manages to gather the money necessary to fund her migration to America. Shortly after her arrival, she meets an American record producer, marries, and attempts to launch a recording career. Her attempts fail. Instead, she learns that she has unwittingly become the wife of a known mobster and drug dealer; her husband is not just a producer. When her husband and two other men end up dead after a late night poker game, Anya is arrested and must contend with an American justice system that has no concern for a black immigrant woman charged with first-degree murder. Her court appointed attorney is only interested in getting the case resolved as quickly as possible and that means allowing Anya to spend decades in jail for a crime she vehemently claims she did not commit.

The complexities of Anya’s situation are amplified when her naïve younger sister, Chioma, arrives from Africa. Chioma immediately learns that the court appointed attorney, a white woman who unashamedly evokes race and immigration status in her conversations about the case, does not care to really assist Anya. Ultimately, Chioma fires the attorney and seeks the counsel of a young African American lawyer who has just lost a major case. Chioma also learns that Anya is not telling the entire truth about what happened on the night the three men were killed; Anya has a secret and her younger sister begins her own investigation to discover what happened. As Chioma learns more details of her sister’s case and begins to develop romantic feelings for Jalen, the new attorney who happens to be sympathetic to Anya’s cause because he is African American, her profound ignorance of American culture and laws threaten to derail Anya’s case. After attempting to destroy evidence that could boost the prosecution’s chances of winning, Chioma is jailed along with her sister. It is at this moment when Chioma realizes the difficulty of life and existence as an immigrant in America. She says to Jalen, “They say
America is the gateway to heaven. How many get to see the other side?” Chioma’s realization that the United States is not the paradise that she and Anya once thought it was is affecting and distressing; the two black women from another land are locked in a seemingly unwinnable legal battle where their status as women, othered bodies, and ‘foreigners’ renders their plight almost untenable.

During the film’s climax, Chioma learns that Anya has indeed killed her husband and the two men in self-defense after her husband allows the men to rape Anya and attempts to rape her himself. Because rape is considered a marker of impurity, shame, and damage in Anya’s and Chioma’s culture, Anya keeps quiet out of fear that news of the trial and what has happened to her will reach her disapproving father and the people in their home nation. It is also revealed that a bandit nearly raped a preteen Anya during a raid on her village. Anya is able to subdue her would be attacker with her voice; her singing distracts the man and enables her father to kill him before the rape can take place. For Anya, her relationship with her father is virtually non-existent after the attempted rape and being a young woman who has been raped will only cause the relationship to further deteriorate; rape signals to men that a daughter is unfit to become a wife and mother.

Tradition and modernity are at war in the film; Anya and Chioma embody this war. Anya represents the rebellious and overly ambitious ‘trouble woman’ who snips the strings of tradition to lead a modern American life. It is clear that Anya has no desire to become a transnational laborer who will support her father and sister back home. She has dreams of pop superstardom. The film even shows clips of her highly stylized, but unsuccessful music videos. These clips speak to the proliferation of mass media images on the African continent; the video resembles an American hip hop or pop video with flashy clothes, dancers, and a driving beat that
does not resemble African music. Equally important is the fact that Anya’s record producer husband is white, which suggests that she has completely dismissed her African culture in favor of American notions of marriage and womanhood. Because of her disobedience and her disregard for her culture and customs, Anya is thoroughly penalized in the place she once believed would be her path toward success, wealth, love, and happiness. Anya’s imagined paradise does not provide the ‘gateway to heaven.’ Instead, it becomes a pathway toward punishment, despair, and disgrace. Though Jalen is able to win the trial, the film’s conclusion suggests that Anya will live a marginal existence in the United States for the rest of her life. The stigma attached to her because of her rape and incarceration will prevent her from ever returning to Africa and to her father. The film infers that Anya will have to find stability through her relationship with her sister who will stay in America with Jalen. As such, the caretaking roles are reversed. Whereas Anya once took care of Chioma, Chioma and Jalen must now care for a thoroughly traumatized Anya.

Chioma is essentially Anya’s opposite. Initially, the film implies that Chioma only comes to America to help her sister; she is the dutiful daughter of an adoring father and does not desire to upset the balance of her father-daughter relationship. Chioma is coded as the ideal African woman; she is demure, sufficiently obsequious, and appears to have no real ambitions other than marriage and family. In America, she cleans Jalen’s home, assists him in his work, and is moderately submissive to him. Though Chioma does have a sexual encounter with Jalen for which she is punished with the brief stint in jail, her one time lapse in judgment is quickly resolved through the romantic relationship that develops between them. Her sexual slip up is redeemed when Jalen tells his mother over the phone that he will be bringing home someone for her to meet. The conversation suggests that an engagement and marriage are imminent.
Chioma’s redemption through an American man enables her to become the epitome of good African womanhood, a soon to be wife of a successful lawyer. For Chioma, her relationship with Jalen, possible marriage, and care for her sister in America is her ‘gateway to heaven,’ a gateway that remains closed to Anya who went about life in the United States in the wrong manner.

The theme of going about life in America in the wrong way runs through the aforementioned film *My Life, My Damage*. In the movie, Dora travels from Africa to America to attend medical school and almost immediately falls prey to a life of partying, sex, and drugs. Dora’s transformation from a studious and demure African girl who desires to be a physician to an Americanized young woman who says she wants to have experiences to show she has really lived. Scenes of Dora’s descent into personal chaos attempt to drive the point that her African values are evaporating as she increasingly adopts practices associated with aberrant American life. She begins shooting heroin (which her white lover introduces to her), dances and drinks at nightclubs, loses the job she gained upon arrival in the United States, and gets a tattoo that covers most of her back. Dora grows increasingly out of touch with African tradition; like Anya in *Ijé*, she is punished for her actions when her doctor informs her that she has contracted HIV.\(^{362}\)

*My Life, My Damage* is ultimately a film that issues a warning to viewers about what life in America can become for those who abandon their cultural morality, especially women who are the primary characters and consumers of these films. Adedayo Ladigbolu Abah argues that Nollywood films:

issue dire warnings for women who exceed the limits placed on their dreams by construed tradition as well as women who fail to meet the expectations placed on their domestic roles by cultural institutions...there is a lot to be said for the power of the medium to perpetuate and propagate disabling messages that is not shared by prior means of communication.\textsuperscript{363}

In other words, Nollywood can not only highlight the cultural war between tradition and modernity, it can also serve as a means to naturalize appropriate behavior in a culture where Africans, especially women are expected to uphold specific values. Many Nollywood films code the ideal woman as one who is highly religious, married with children (preferably sons), and submissive to her husband and mother-in-law. Also, women who are professionally or socially autonomous are not always considered desirable marriage partners unless they explicitly show that they are grounded in tradition (as is the case of Kemi in \textit{The Flower Girl}); a desire for high achievement and modern resources can prevent ungrounded African women (like Kemi’s nemesis Sapphire) from having a marriageable countenance.

Overly ambitious professional and individual achievement is one means by which African people can turn away from tradition; also, a desire for a life away from family and culture is another. In Lonzo Nzekwe’s 2010 morality tale \textit{Anchor Baby}, a young undocumented woman named Joyce (Omoni Oboli who also starred in the aforementioned Nigerian-Ukrainian feature \textit{Feathered Dreams}) is forced to fend for herself in Chicago after her husband, Paul is deported for overstaying his visa. Joyce is about five months pregnant at the beginning of the film; she and Paul entered the United States two years prior to the events of the film and did not leave when their visas expired. When Joyce and Paul learn she is pregnant, the couple decides to remain in Chicago until the baby is born so that the child can become an American citizen. Joyce and Paul desire that the child will have access to the benefits and upward mobility (or what

they believe to be the upward mobility) of United States citizenship; they firmly believe in notions of the American dream. During a conversation just before Paul is deported, he reminds Joyce that they came to the United States to fulfill dreams they would not be able to fulfill in their home nation. He cautions her not to lose hope, tells her not to worry, and stresses that they will return to Africa after the baby is born and attempt to return to America the proper way when the child is older. After Paul is caught following an Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid on the retail warehouse where he works, Joyce is left to figure out how she will navigate America as an undocumented pregnant woman without a place to live and without health insurance to receive proper prenatal care.

As the film progresses, a woman named Susan befriends Joyce upon seeing the young pregnant woman attempt to receive medical care at a clinic. Seemingly a nice person on the surface, Susan confides in Joyce that she and her husband, Tim, have been unable to conceive. Susan desperately wants a child, but has been unsuccessful for unknown reasons. Joyce is reluctant to reveal information about herself to Susan for fear of being turned in to immigration authorities, but eventually comes to trust the woman. Susan eventually offers to allow Joyce to live with her and Tim until the baby is born. The American woman (an African American woman) extends numerous kindnesses to Joyce. She connects the young woman to an immigration attorney and allows Joyce to assume her identity so that she can use her insurance and have regular doctor’s visits. Joyce later rejoices when Susan announces that she is pregnant.

However, the life that Susan has provided for Joyce in the final months of her pregnancy proves to be a sham. Joyce gives birth to a son as “Susan Beckler” and receives a passport for the boy with the name “Beckler” and with Susan listed as the mother. When Joyce realizes that she will not be able to travel back to her home country with her son because she is technically
not “Susan Beckler,” she devises a scheme with Susan and the lawyer. It is decided that Susan will travel with the baby to Africa and Joyce will turn herself in to immigration with the expectation that she will return home on the same domestic flight with Susan and the baby boy. It is only after she is detained and Susan takes off with the baby that Joyce realizes that she has been duped. In the final scenes of the film, Susan drives off with her actual husband, John, the man who had acted as Joyce’s immigration attorney. Tim is actually a man that Susan and John paid to act as Susan’s husband. Joyce is eventually deported, childless and despondent. The film makes it clear that she not only grieves for the loss of her baby, but also for the life she lost as a result of Susan’s deception.

While Joyce is not the same sort of overly ambitious woman that Anya is in *Ijé: The Journey* or Dora in *My Life, My Damage*, her desire to give birth to an American citizen can be coded in *Anchor Baby* as ambition and a desire to African traditional life, if not immediately. Having an American citizen as a child gives Joyce the ability to potentially settle in the United States after her child reaches the age of twenty-one and petitions for green cards for Joyce and Paul. Joyce and Paul are clearly young parents barely in their twenties; therefore, they could arrive in the United States with several years of employability left in their lives. This sort of ambition, to give their son access to a better education/better life and to live in the imagined paradise in the later years of her life, is brutally punished in the film. Despite the fact that Joyce is a proper wife to Paul and a relatively virtuous young woman, both she and Paul are violently chastised for desiring to improve themselves in the United States. Thus, their misfortune operates in a dual manner in the film. First, their zeal for America is punished. Second, the film acts as a warning to virtuous and wholesome young people to refrain from traveling to the United States to have anchor babies because their lives and the lives of their families could be destroyed.
A similar message runs through Sola Osofisan’s *Missing in America*. The 2004 film, like the ones discussed already in this section, is also a morality tale about the dangers of American modernity with its lack of familiar traditions and values rooted in home, community, family, and faith. A pregnant Agatha travels to New York with counterfeit immigration papers to find her husband Fela (Osofisan in a cameo role) who left Nigeria five years before, but recently visited and impregnated his wife. Desperate to find Fela and inform him of her pregnancy, Agatha’s attempts to reach him by phone and address are futile; Fela is not where he claims to be living. She wanders the streets of New York and New Jersey disillusioned and afraid; her suitcase and purse containing her forged immigration documents are stolen after a ride in an unscrupulous African immigrant’s taxi. Agatha rather serendipitously stumbles upon successful immigrant Bimbo, whose name speaks nothing about her character. Suspecting that Agatha is undocumented, Bimbo still decides to help her find Fela out of pity for the pregnant woman and her unborn child.

Eventually, Agatha finds Fela with Bimbo’s assistance. She discovers that Fela has married an American woman as a means of obtaining a green card. When Agatha approaches the home Fela and his American bride share and reveals the truth to this wife, the wife threatens to report his actions to immigration authorities. Heartbroken and desolate, Agatha decides to return to Africa to raise her child with her family. The America she had believed in, the America she had hoped to share with her husband is destroyed; financial freedom and security are unobtainable. So is her husband’s desire to live a traditional life as African husband and wife; Agatha sees that her illegal efforts to reunite with the man she loves are futile. She has lost him to America and the seedy values it holds. The conflict between tradition and modernity is clear and ultimately resolved; by the end of the film, Agatha wants her family and her culture, while
Fela is willing to resort to a form of emotional/marital fraud to secure his position and life in America.

Though education and employment in a strong global economy are the motivating factors in the majority of the films discussed here, a transparent transnational message emerges. Immigrants from nations south of the Sahara living in the United States are reminded that they can never fully leave behind who they are or where they come from once they arrive and settle in America. These Nollywood films attempt to show the difficult realities and paradoxes of migration. The paradox of progress is evident, migrating can be a positive step, especially for characters like Chioma and Bimbo (who falls in love with and marries another African living in America) whose success is virtually guaranteed in the filmic world they inhabit. Modernity is, thus, not all bad or evil, but the potential traps of life in America shown become a habituating and disciplining force. *My Life My Damage, Ijé: The Journey, Missing in America,* and *Anchor Baby* are morality tales meant to derail the glamorous beliefs that some Africans may inherently have for the United States. The films peddle a troublesome and complex reality that renders the magical American imagined paradise an abyss of suffering and affliction for those who dare to journey and anchor in the United States without a strong connection to their African roots.

‘It’s Not Nollywood’

Though the films I have discussed in the last few pages have a strong connection to the continent despite being transnational and glocal Nollywood productions in America, it is these connections that prevent many of the participants of this study from viewing and enjoying them. Paula, who confessed to watching one to two Nollywood features each week with a preference for traditional pastoral dramas, vehemently said (mere moments before her sister Penny), “Those films in America aren’t really Nollywood. They aren’t really Nigerian or African.” Penny
stated, “I feel like they are trying to tell you a story about what is really life in America, but nobody back in Congo believes it.” Paula added, “Why would I want to see America when I watch my African movies? I already live here.”

Transnational and glocal Nollywood films set in the United States can offer the different sort of psychogeography I mentioned earlier. Being in the place where the films are set can create emotional and psychological affect; viewing the familiar new world reflected in films from the home culture can be a way for consumers and feature filmmakers to reconcile their American life with the culture they left behind. However, the African immigrants I spoke with claim they are not interested in dealing with the present in the films they watch. They are motivated to reconnect, reclaim, and solidify the African values and traditions they hold in high esteem. Of the American produced transnational-glocal features, Margie exclaimed, “I like old school Nollywood. I want to see my home. I want to see villages and African clothes and black people who look like me. Those movies…it’s not Nollywood.” Jodi, from Ghana and Cote D’Ivoire, and Cameroonian Sarah hold similar sentiments about Nollywood romances shot in urban American areas. Jodi said, “The ones in America are OK, but I want to see Africa.” Paula, who described watching Missing in America though she could not remember the name of the film, exclaimed, “I want to see my culture.” Others describe watching parts of the aforementioned films, but note that they quickly abandoned them when they lost interest in the stories and the America within them.

Margie, Paula, Penny, Sarah, Jodi, Patricia, Samantha, and Lisa told me that they really began watching Nollywood films once they arrived in America. Nollywood was available to them in their home countries, but they only gravitated toward them once they began their journeys in the United States. Margie began watching because Nollywood films provided her
with narrative replicas of her Sierra Leonean culture. Jodi found that Nigerian films helped her master English, a language she did not speak upon coming to the United States as an older teen. Samantha began watching for much the same reason, but also to alleviate homesickness.

Paula and Penny are so emotionally attached to Nollywood films that they both desire to marry “real Nigerian men” and live in Lagos or Abuja and “live a real African life.” What I believe is true for the study participants who have a powerful aversion to the Nollywood films shot in the United States is that the affect these films transmit and produce creates so much emotional dissonance that they prefer not to deal with it. The narratives in the films I analyze above are unsettling; they cannot be used to reterritorialize the African continent or reconcile a difficult American life. These films are reminders of what is possible in the United States: undocumented immigration status, frightening legal battles, blatant discrimination based on race and immigration status, troublesome marriages, and a disconnect from African culture. Therefore, the participants in this study orient themselves away from this type of Nollywood feature. Ultimately, they are members of an affective community oriented away from filmic dreamscapes they consider to be bad and position themselves toward those affective “real Nollywood” films that depict the African continent in a way that is familiar, comfortable, and grounding.

For many of my interview participants, Nollywood cinema is African cinema; it is the only African cinema many of them know, as the art and political films common in FESPACO, other film festivals, and academic discourse on African film are largely unavailable to them both in their African countries of origin and in the United States. Thus, Nollywood is not Nollywood if it does not depict Africa. Those transnational and glocal Nollywood features produced and set

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364 Samantha told me that she has significantly reduced her Nollywood consumption because she began to pick up a Nigerian pigeon English diction that proved difficult for communicating with Americans and those from other nations who speak a standard textbook English.
in the United States are simply masquerading as Nollywood films. In speaking of the filmmakers doing Nollywood abroad, Penny rolled her eyes and whispered, “Let those people go home and make a movie. Then, I will have interest.”

**Conclusion**

One of the final questions I asked many of my study subjects toward the end of their interviews was this: If you could go to Nigeria and shoot a Nollywood film, what would your movie be about? My main purpose for asking this question was out of curiosity. What would these Nollywood fans do if they had the resources to make a movie? However, other motivations inspired this question. How or would their films incorporate their own specific African culture into a Nollywood feature? The answers were surprising. Not one of the subjects stated that they would incorporate elements of their local African culture into their films. Instead, they would operate as “Africans telling African stories;” no distinctions would be drawn between nations, ethnicities, or cultures.

Nollywood’s power as a transnational and glocal cinema was evident in the answers I received. Sarah stressed that she would make a film about love and marriage. Though she did not explicitly state it, it was clear to me that her film would be rooted in African heteronormative notions of romantic relationships, especially considering that she had moments before discussed how positive gay themes were not African and that she laments these narratives in American film and television. Sisters Penny and Paula said that they would also produce a love story that ends with a big wedding “with African music, dance, and dressings (clothes).” Margie was more contemplative. At first, she pointed to her love of the Nicole Armateifio web series *African City*, which features a group of Afropolitan women who return to the continent (Accra, Ghana) to start new professional lives after years of living in the United States and Europe, to state that she
would create a reality show on repatriates as opposed to a film. She later capitulated and said she would produce a film geared toward children that would bring to life some of the common African folk tales she learned as a child; Margie claimed that many of these oral stories are dying out and today’s modern African child (living on the continent or in the diaspora) is largely unaware of these fables. My participants’ responses show that films would come out of a sense of Africanity.

Undoubtedly, the participants of this study are living embodiments of the transnational flows of people, ideas, and culture inherent within the phenomenon of globalization; their responses to Nollywood and their film ideas reveal this to be largely true. Like the African immigrants from countries south of the Sahara Desert, Nollywood is also an example of the potentials of both globalization and glocalization, or the combination of global elements (Bollywood masala, soap operas, and telenovelas) into the local and the localization (Nollywood consumption and adoption of Nigerian production practices) of the global. Equally a national cinema and a transnational cinema that continuously moves (and is made local) around the world, Nollywood has reached broad African diaspora communities in the roughly twenty years since Living in Bondage was produced in 1992.

Though rapid fire production methods persist in Nollywood, advances in technology and electronic communication have transformed Nigerian films from the ‘pop-pop-pop’ street art films to more sophisticated features that appeal to Africans living in America who can readily watch in electronic spaces, a subject that will be explored in the next chapter. Messages inherent within Nollywood films culturally juxtapose postcolonial African histories and lived experiences; this juxtaposition enables immigrants to see their culture and circumstances past or present reflected back to them on the (small) screen through African based and American set
films, though Nollywood in America narratives lack the African cultural allure of those set in rural and urban spaces on the African continent. The highly affective world Nollywood reflects not only offers immigrants a means to connect with their African cultural values, but also the opportunity to participate in the transnational flow of Nollywood films, the glocalization of the industry, and the continued development of Nigerian cinema as a truly and thoroughly African art form.

For many immigrants, the World Wide Web is the place where the desire for home can be continuously satisfied. Consuming Nollywood films digitally in online spaces like YouTube, IrokoTV, Netflix, and Amazon draws immigrants into a digital diaspora and allows them to become affective citizens of a universal Africa rendered online. The following chapter will investigate the relationship African immigrants in the United States may have with digital media. It will explore online viewing practices, potential community building in online spaces, and the means by which immigrants use Nollywood films online to reterritorialize America and to connect and reconnect with the African continent and culture they left behind through the thousands of films on the Internet.
CHAPTER V. CYBER-NOLLYWOOD AND THE REIMAGINED PARADISE:
FORMING AN AFRICAN DIGITAL SUB-DIASPORA

“As a medium coevolves with its quotidian users’ tactics, it contributes to shaping people’s everyday life, while at the same time this mediated sociality becomes part of society’s institutional fabric.”

~ Jose van Dijck, *Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*

When Margie came to the United States from Sierra Leone with her mother and sister as a teenager in the 1990s, she was eager to start a new life in the nation where her father had settled to improve his family’s well being. “We weren’t really poor at home, but my dad wanted my sister and I to have more than we could in Sierra Leone,” she said. “America was just this place everyone wanted to go.” Like many other African immigrants from nations below the Sahara Desert, Margie claimed that she and her family worked hard to ‘make it’ in America. Margie attended college and graduate school, has worked as a journalist, and currently is a communications specialist in the nation’s capitol. Yet, Margie still feels the pull of the African continent, though she visits infrequently. For her, going home involves opening her laptop, connecting to the Internet, and typing in a specific address: http://www.youtube.com. There, Margie is able to watch hundreds of African movies, all from one nation, Nigeria. She exclaimed, “I’m not Nigerian, but the scenes in Nigerian movies…the sets, the way they show the village, the clothes, the people, the stories…they are like my home. Those Nigerian movies on YouTube take me home.”

The twenty-first century has brought about a new global paradigm in media consumption. In 2000, social media was not the powerful prism by which people around the world organized

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their leisurely and working lives. Social media, as we now know it with its multiple opportunities for creation and connectivity, did not exist at the turn of the century; but with the advent of sites like Friendster and MySpace (and eventually Facebook and others), the world was introduced to a novel form of communication built upon the premise that the Internet is a ‘site’ or space for user-generated content and interconnectivity. As Jose van Dijk claims, when Web 2.0, the name given to this new twenty-first century media world of interoperability and interconnectivity, first marshaled in social media sites at the beginning of the new millennium “participatory culture was the buzzword that connected the Web’s potential to nurture connections, build communities, and advance democracy.” Broadly defined, social media is considered “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” 366 Also, social media has been defined to suggest the “many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that enable anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on common effort, or build relationships.” 367

Participatory culture is at the crux of the practices of African immigrants who view Nollywood on the web. Henry Jenkins would call the processes by which individuals use electronic tools to engage with others participatory culture. He states that “not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued.” 368 Digital media platforms enable reconnection, community building, and provide a means for reimagining the African continent through

366 Kaplan and Haenlein, “Users of the world, unite!,” 60.
367 Jue et al., Social Media at Work, 4.
narratives rendered in online spaces. Madhavi Mallapragada contends in her work on Internet usage amongst Indian immigrants in the United States that the continuous movement of people around the globe is one of the “defining features of modern life.”369 She states:

And now more than ever, we understand immigration through media, particularly online media. As a result, our physical mobility is increasingly played out via the tools of technological mobility. In turn, the equations between the physical and the virtual, the national and the transnational, the private household and the public homeland, are being reformulated in myriad ways as immigrants use online media to make sense of their place in the world.370

This assessment is an apt characterization of African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara. As economic, political, cultural, and social crises exacerbate the problems for a sizable swath of the African continent’s population, migration to points west, especially the United States, is considered the only viable solution for many seeking to claim some semblance of humanity in an unstable world. Migrating individuals become a part of the global African diaspora residing in America. Upon arrival in the United States, online media is a catalyst for connectivity and sociality. Individuals use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, an Internet based text messaging service that allows users to send and receive texts and audio to and from nations around the world, to maintain ties with family and friends remaining in the home nation. They also use these platforms to connect with diasporic individuals in the new home. Marshall McLuhan famously stated that the “medium is the message;” his theory that the media influences society through both the messages it conveys and its features can help to determine how media impacts immigrant acculturation and the formation of an African digital diaspora in a technology centric twenty-first century.371

369 Mallapragada, Virtual Homelands, 143 – 144.
370 Ibid.
Just as the media becomes an extension of the pre-migrant, online media can become a pseudo-phantom limb that extends the work of the immigrant’s hands and brain and take her back to the place she left behind. Viewing Nollywood on YouTube, the subscription based services IrokoTV and IbakaTV, Amazon Prime, Netflix, and other online platforms like AfriNolly and BuniTV provides the African immigrant with online spaces to connect and socially engage with home as an emotional and epistemological space. Nollywood online or in the cyber-sphere solidifies the industry as a transnational participatory movement that has facilitated a specific form of reterritorialization. It is a form that aids the creation of a glocalized African digital diaspora where immigrants in the United States use the technology at their disposal to watch films, digitally connect with their cultural values, and become a part of a global digital community consisting of other immigrants around the world and individuals on the African continent. Inclusion in this community is not necessarily based on active participation through commenting on or liking movies in the digital space; membership can be ontological just as membership in Benedict Anderson’s theoretical imagined communities is rooted in a belief in or desire for belonging. The imagined paradise the African pre-migrant crafted for herself prior to coming to America is reimagined or reterritorialized with the use of social media platforms and other digital media tools. A new world exists where social media helps alleviate the negative affective impact of the paradox of progress and the original home is remediated as a new paradise for immigrants who become part of a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora, a cultural space that illuminates the plurality within the overall African diaspora and the digital diaspora immigrants negotiate when they leave the continent.\footnote{While this chapter primarily focuses on the social media platforms YouTube and IrokoTV, I will offer brief analyses of Amazon Prime, Netflix, and IbakaTV because of the availability of Nollywood films in these online spaces. Of the three later spaces, Amazon Prime and IbakaTV are closer cousins to YouTube and IrokoTV because it allows users to post reviews and interact with other consumers viewing the same films. Like IrokoTV, IbakaTV is}
Discerning Diaspora

Throughout this study, I have described phenomenon distinctly related to what scholars and thought leaders (media, activists, etc.) call diaspora. Diaspora is a relatively simple term used to describe the disbursement of individuals into other geopolitical/geo-cultural spaces. Traditionally used to describe the forced dispersion of the Jewish people after the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 6 BCE and the Roman seizure of Palestine in 70 CE, twenty-first century rhetoric situates the term to generally refer to “all kinds of groups who have a history of dispersion, groups variously referred to as immigrants, expatriates, refugees, guest workers, exile communities, overseas communities, ethnic minorities…potentially all groups living outside their putative homeland.”

Ien Ang explains that the term is mostly used to describe communities or “collectivities” that exist outside the dominant culture of the host society; individuals in these “collectivities” do not feel at home. Thus, the word diaspora is a marker for trauma, marginalization, and discrimination in the past and in the present for a dispersed group of people who left their home in search of a home or left their nation in search of a nation.

However, when thinking of diaspora communities in the twenty-first century, it is important to recognize that the processes of dispersion can also involve “empowerment, enrichment, and enhancement.” Paul Gilroy argues that the African diaspora, or “Black Atlantic” (which the transatlantic transporting of African bodies for chattel slavery to the Americas, Europe, and other geographic locations mostly formed and informed) is in continuous

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373 Ien Ang, “Diaspora,” in New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society, eds. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 82 – 83.
374 Ibid.
375 Ibid.
flux; hybridity and cultural renewal are at the heart of the mechanisms of migration or dispersion and the need or desire to return to one’s cultural roots or repossess the homeland are nil. Yet, as this study shows, cultural connectivity is not moot for African immigrants who have arrived on American shores in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While it is certainly true that many African immigrants see migration to the United States as a path to advancement, sites of trauma do exist. As outlined in chapter three, African immigrants in America may find the path riddled with complexities including unexpected racial tensions, a lack of access to the financial and professional resources they thought would be available to them, and an overall sense of disillusionment when they discover that the America in the media they consumed prior to migration does not resemble the America they now inhabit. Their dispersal and place in the diaspora is both a sign of progress and paradox, a binary that immigrants must analyze, interpret, and move through in order to understand the day to day order of their often scattered lives.

If we think of diaspora in terms of its Greek origins, the term can be broken into two parts \textit{dia}, meaning ‘through’, and \textit{spora}, meaning ‘the process of sowing.’ As such, diaspora refers to ‘through the process of sowing.’ This interpretation begs several important questions. Through what? Sowing what? Obvious or facile answers may be migration, moving, and people. Jana Evans Braziel’s and Robin Cohen’s notions of diaspora gesture toward victimization and multiple forms of power and (bio)power, which are pervasive, seek to “seize hold of life in order to suppress it,” and demand the total subjugation of large populations of people a nation-state may wish to control, as possible explanations to these inquiries.\footnote{Jana Evans Braziel, \textit{Diasporas: An Introduction} (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 11 – 12. Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality: An Introduction} (New York: Penguin, 1978), 135 – 145. See also Robin Cohen, \textit{Global Diasporas: An Introduction, Second Edition} (New York: Routledge, 2008).}

However, Carol Boyce Davies offers an even more nuanced answer to these questions, one that

\footnote{376 See Paul Gilroy, \textit{The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness} (London: Verso, 1993).}

is especially germane for this study of African immigrants who are a part of a larger *African diaspora*. She contends that diaspora “can be seen as a kind of harvest of peoples, cultures, and knowledge” that comes out of or ‘through’ African people or “a demographic globalization, and internalization, of African peoples created through centuries of migration.”

Here, I argue that understandings of diaspora for peoples of African descent must be considered in terms of progress and degeneration, triumph and trauma, and cultural hybridity and cultural rootedness, all of which I have previously described in this study. Though these multiple and intersecting binaries may appear to reduce arguments and theoretical bases about the African diaspora to flat exercises in intellectual essentialism, they are a starting point, a genesis I wish to exploit in this chapter and through this entire study. In fact, Boyce Davies’s contention allows for this opening, manifold renegotiation, and ‘harvesting’ of ideas about diaspora ‘through’ the processes of globalization, migration, and internalization, which I consider to be forms of knowledge construction.

Arguments I have made about the differing knowledge constructions, immigration, and acculturation experiences of Afropolitan and African working class immigrants advocate for diaspora diversity or an acknowledgment that (contrary to popular media facilitated beliefs) immigrants from the African continent living in the United States are not a homogenous group though their cultural proximity closely positions them phenomenologically and ontologically. Again, it must be acknowledged that the African diaspora is not monolithic; however, when the term is used, it often denotes the descendants of African born individuals who, through the evils of the transatlantic trading of black bodies, have cultivated lives in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and other nations around the globe. This belief is frequently the first stop on the rhetorical train;

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however, diaspora should be considered in terms of voluntary (economic and educational sojourning) and/or induced (as a result of imbalanced occult economic practices) migration in addition to forced migration (slavery, servitude, military, marriage, etc.) For some within the African diaspora, the descendants of enslaved black bodies living in various geopolitical locations may not be the first considered when membership in the diaspora is considered.

During my time in the summer of 2014 at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art, I was privy to conversations with African born black people from different nations on the continent (though mostly Kenyans from throughout the diaspora who were in Washington, DC for the 2014 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which featured Kenya and China) who viewed themselves and their children as the sole members of the African diaspora. My position and the positions of many of the museum’s personnel as descendants of enslaved Africans were not always regarded as representative of the diaspora or constituents of a larger Pan-African nation. For many of the participants in this study, diaspora is a term they apply to the various communities of African born individuals of which they are a part. As mentioned, my position as an African American initially placed me outside these communities. However, once the participants learned I have spent time on the continent and have adopted family ties in Nigeria, many accepted me as a part of their myriad networks. “Oh, you are African!” a few exclaimed. Others, after carefully watching my mannerisms and listening to my speech patterns, declared, “You are more Nigerian than American.” As such, I was equally an insider and an outsider; I

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379 While this experience and the views presented in it are important in examining the relationship between various African descended populations, it is not within the larger scope of this chapter to discuss it here. I have offered a brief conversation on this topic, but this conversation is particularly facile and a greater study of the myriad dynamics between African born blacks and black Americans is warranted. I am particularly drawn to Christina M. Greer’s study of black migrations and the tensions between African descended populations in the United States in *Black Ethnic*.  
380 Though I do not recall my specific mannerisms during the interviews, upon listening to the interviews I did notice that I spoke in a sort of pidgin English that combined Nigerian cadences and phrases with academic speech. While I cannot say this was a conscious decision, I do acknowledge that I felt as if I was being closely watched and may
could claim space inside an African nation while maintaining a national identity outside that nation.

Alexander Weheliye uses concepts of nation to locate diaspora from a geopolitical and geo-cultural “interior” and “exterior;” he takes into account those groups on the continent (interior) that cannot be placed within a narrow declamatory box where people are cohesive political subjects and propitiates those movements (exterior) that a nation’s “administrative and ideological borders” cannot contain.\textsuperscript{381} He states that diaspora “offers pathways that retrace layerings of difference in the aftermath of colonialism and slavery.\textsuperscript{382} Weheliye’s and Boyce Davies’s statements certainly relate to the assertion I have made in this chapter against the existence of a uniform African diaspora. Yet, Weheliye’s contention seemingly contradicts the argument I made in the previous chapter that African immigrants (regardless of nation of origin) in the United States are drawn to the cultural closeness within Nollywood films, a closeness built upon shared postcolonial African histories and lived experiences. However, his interpretation of diaspora opens additional ways to examine the portion of the African diaspora that employ digital media to consume Nollywood. The individuals whose experiences I render in this study share cultural commonalities, but their differences are broad and present ethnically, generationally, educationally, economically, and geographically. Access to digital media devices and social media platforms enables movements that can (and often do) resist administrative and ideological control. What ultimately emerge are distinct groups within the African diaspora; digital media and the Web have facilitated the creation of an African digital diaspora since the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{382}{Ibid.}
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early days of the Internet, which ultimately has allowed for the development of a recognizable Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora.

**Defining Digital Diaspora**

Access to digital media plays a profound role in the formation of audiences in what numerous scholars call a digital diaspora. Jennifer Brinkerhoff offers several definitions of the term diaspora that include dispersion, collective memory, and identity hybridity, but the definition that resonates most for this study is worded as such: “a commitment to keeping the homeland – imagined or otherwise – alive through symbolic and purposive expression in the hostland and or in the homeland.”\(^{383}\) Brinkerhoff’s ideas are in conversation with the precise definition that Michel Laguerre offers. For Laguerre, a digital diaspora is:

“…an immigrant group or descendant of an immigrant population that uses [information technology] connectivity to participate in virtual networks of contacts for a variety of political, economic, social, religious, and communicational purposes that, for the most part, may concern either the homeland, the host land, or both, including its own trajectory abroad.”\(^{384}\)

This definition is useful as we begin articulating the African digital diaspora. If the idea is that members of the African diaspora use their technological literacies and the technology at their disposal to “keep the homeland – imagined or otherwise – alive,” it must be asked just how individuals/immigrants affectively view their homeland upon arriving and after spending (a lot of) time in the host land using digital tools for work, leisure, and/or connection to home. Radhika Gajjala points out that quite often scholars using the term digital diaspora do so by divorcing it from understandings of the subjectivities that create diasporas.\(^{385}\) However, the


machinations of capitalism, globalization, and the occult economies that global capitalism can create, especially on the African continent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, are key components of the subjectivities that aid and abet deterritorialized diaspora and the affective relationships members of the diaspora may have with the home land.

I must acknowledge here that without the processes of colonialism and globalization, the deterritorialization of the African descended people I have described throughout this study would not exist. Without these systems, which have continuously contributed to the migration of African born individuals to cities around the globe, deterritorialization and the reterritorialization that often come as a result would be a moot topic unworthy of serious study. Colonialism, as a system of (bio)power, imposed upon African people numerous orders of oppressions (mind, body, economic, political, social, etc.) that has left lasting tears in the administrative and cultural fabric of many postcolonial African nations. One only need to look at the ongoing migration crises that have been widely covered in the global media since 2015 to comprehend that when postcolonial economic forces reveal the lopsided nature of capitalism, particularly on the African continent, many in the working class/proletariat are left without the anchors necessary to tether themselves to their home nations’ occult economies, economies ever present in many of the Nollywood films like *Living in Bondage*, *The Master*, and *Confusion Na Wa* analyzed and/or mentioned in the previous chapter.⁴⁸⁶ These individual have no access to capital. Economic and political corruption are the order of the day and seemingly the only means for gaining financial stability in the homeland. Employment is scarce, high unemployment rates continue unchecked across the African continent, and migration is viewed as the solution.

⁴⁸⁶ As in the previous chapter, I use the Comaroff’s notions of occult economies here to describe the ways in which financial resources are seemingly obtained without any connection to labor or an economic system that supports the building of wealth through illegal (and possibly attempted supernatural) means.
Post-migration, the immigrant may concede to the complexities and limitations of both the home nation and the host nation. The immigrant’s relationships with both are interconnected; one informs the other. With the difficulties of home and host in mind, the immigrant is resolutely aware that the host is not paradise. Therefore, home begins to become an affective wonderland where life is better because culture is understood and problems are not as acute because of the support of the immigrant’s community. Using digital media to reconnect with home continues the cycle of technology consumption that began in the home nation.

Members of the African diaspora living on the continent who use information technology are just as much a part of the digital diaspora as those dispersed individuals living in new geo-cultural spaces. It is these individuals who remain that provide the contact and connection with home for the immigrant through filmmaking, blogging, social media memberships, email, texting, or other forms of communication.

Here, I would like to offer an alternative definition of digital diaspora that attempts to merge the aforementioned scholars’ ideas while recognizing some of the complexities inherent in considerations of diaspora. A digital diaspora is a transnational sociocultural network of individuals who come from a shared location or culture of origin and use information technology or digital media to participate in or connect with economic, political, social, religious, or other institutions in the homeland and the host land to maintain cultural ties with home. Thus, members of a digital diaspora are not only dispersed outside the homeland as immigrants, but are also situated within the homeland and often provide the tools necessary (art, journalism, music, film, literature, websites, etc.) for dispersed or individuals living in varying diaspora locations to build multilayered connective networks for the purpose of reterritorializing. In the context of this project, reterritorialization is the use of the digital tools at the disposal of diaspora members
to produce their own glocal digital products, a phenomenon which I will explore in the coming pages.

As Arjun Appadurai notes, “…deterritorialization creates new markets for film companies, art impressions, and travel agencies which thrive on the end of the deterritorialized population for contact with its homeland.” Appadurai’s contention can be applied to the wide swath of social media outlets available around the globe. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, photo sharing platform Instagram, and other digital media entities facilitate contact, connection, and digital networks especially amongst African born members of the deterritorialized African diaspora who become members of the African digital diaspora through digital media consumption. While not all members of the African diaspora utilize digital tools because of a lack of media literacy, access, or interest, for those that do these contacts, connections, and networks constitute the backbone of the process of reterritorialization.

Throughout the fieldwork/data gathering for this project, I witnessed the potency of digital media for most, if not all, of the subjects I was in contact with either socially or scholastically. During a May 2015 graduation celebration for one subject and the July 2015 barbeque I attended where I had the pleasure of speaking with numerous immigrants, text messages, photos, and Facebook posts and responses traveled back and forth between the African continent and the United States with lightening speed. One gentleman, Rob, who I previously mentioned exclaimed that he wishes he had ‘never stepped his two legs in this

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388 See Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus.
389 I came to realize during these events that I was a subject in some of this social media activity. Several individuals called me Dr. Tori or Dr. Kuke (short for Kuke’unim, which means ‘God’s gift to us’, the name my adopted Nigerian family gave me in 2011) despite my explanations that the Ph.D. has not yet been conferred upon me. My protestations against being called ‘Dr.’ were usually waved off with a ‘soon’ and the affirmation of my ‘educated’ status as many subjects understood I was a full time journalism professor prior to beginning PhD study. Rob, in particular, posted several photos that included me on his Facebook page.
country, ’ proudly showed me his Facebook page, which was at the time, littered with photos, posts, and responses about his American life. “I am a big man in Africa,” he said. “I am doing big things in America.”

Scholars of African migration and acculturation systems discuss the phenomenon of social media expedited contact between the immigrant and the continent and the festival-like digital displays of ‘doing big things in America.’ Charles Adeyanju and Temitope Oriola note that immigrants often represent:

> stories of achievements, exposure, upward mobility, sophistication, and [the] savoir-faire of modern life. The liberatory aspect of migration is displayed by immigrants during their visits to their ancestral or former home societies and through photos, new media, videos, and so on.”

(emphasis mine)  
Rob’s online activity as a member of the digital diaspora is a prime example of this media dynamic. Though he leads a marginalized life of detached or disoriented labor in the town where he resides, many within his African digital networks do not fully understand the true nature of his life in the United States. Koleade Odutola notes that the web has generated innovative opportunities for “imagination, interaction, and communication.” Immigrants’ imaginations creates a paradise where they can showcase a carefully constructed life that gives them the freedom to ‘put on show’ for those in the homeland who may never travel to the United States. Odutola correctly (in my estimation) theorizes that Internet users have reconfigured the meaning of Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities through unlimited access to digital media.  

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391 Odutola, *Diaspora and Imagined Nationality*, 33.  
392 Ibid., 34.
While it would be false to assert that the majority of Internet users on the African continent and the diaspora have unlimited access to or own digi-cultural tools like laptops, desktops, tablets, and mobile phones, it can be stated that they use the Internet frequently and were amongst early Internet adopters in the 1990s. Anna Everett contends that the histories of the Internet popularly considered in the media (and academia) ignores the thousands of African and African American individuals who took to the web to assert digital turf. She states:

This deafening silence in evolving discourses on new information technologies…might be owing to a general presumption of black nonparticipation in the incipient technosphere or perhaps to a belief in what I am calling “black technophobia”…the overwhelming characterizations of the brave new world of cyberspace as primarily a racialized sphere of whiteness inhere in popular constructions of high-tech and low-to-no-tech spheres that too often consign black bodies to the latter, with the latter being insignificant if not absent altogether.\textsuperscript{393}

Everett explains that as early as 1992, African diaspora Internet consumers, or “Afrogeeks” as she calls them, were enthusiastically creating online spaces for themselves. Afrogeeks created “new Africanities online” such as Naijanet, the Association of Nigerians Abroad, the Buganda Home Page, the African National Congress Home Page, and sites for the Republic of Ghana and Africa Online.\textsuperscript{394} These early adopters created and were the original members of the African digital diaspora, a digital public that has grown exponentially in the last twenty-plus years.

Everett also disputes the histories of the Internet that have left out the contributions of preeminent Afrogeek/computer scientist Philip Emeagwali, a Nigerian immigrant who began working on an international digital network in 1975. She states that Emeagwali’s contributions to the formation of the web were not acknowledged until the early twenty-first century when

\textsuperscript{394} Ibid., 35.
CNN dubbed him a ‘father of the Internet.’ Yet, Everett argues that the media has largely focused on Africa and Africans as the digitally disadvantaged divided from the rest of the world. Recent analyses of Internet consumption in Africa proves that the ‘digital divide’ is quickly closing. Of the approximately 1,158,000,000 people living on the African continent in 2015, over 330 million were Internet users, representing approximately fifteen percent of the continent’s total population and nearly ten percent of the world’s Internet consumption. Nigeria (92.7 million users), Kenya (32 million) South Africa (26.8 million), Uganda (11.9 million) Sudan (9.3 million), and Tanzania (7.6 million) have the most Internet users of nations located south of the Sahara. The citizens of these nations greatly participate in the activities of the African digital diaspora and constitute a growing network of Afrogeeks crafting online identities and activities that foster connection with the rest of the world, particularly the United States.

On the continent, mobile phones and cyber-cafés, even in the remotest towns and villages, enable locals to connect to the United States through the perusal of American based news and entertainment websites and through social media. A relatively lengthy visit to a cyber-

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395 Everett notes that Emeagwali worked for free for the United States National Weather Service in the 1980s; the department would not hire him for a paid position because he is black. Ibid., 158 – 166.
397 Ibid.
café in a small town just outside of Obudu, Cross River State, Nigeria during a 2011 visit enabled me to witness the lengths at which some individuals will go to ‘get online.’ It was an illuminating moment that helped shape my perceptions of Nigerian citizens’ relationship (real and imagined) with the United States. I watched as a young man, who looked no more than 16 or 17 years old, engaged in a heated negotiation with the café manager to allow him more web time when his money ran out. “I am talking to America,” he said. “Are you talking to America with no Naira?” the manager asked, referring to Nigeria’s currency. The young man then attempted to barter a useless old mobile phone, which he claimed was brand new, for continued access. An elderly gentleman sitting next to me sucked his teeth, a typical Nigerian sign of displeasure and annoyance, and loudly exclaimed, “Eh-eh, these young people!” “You are America,” the elderly man said. “Yes, I am from America,” I replied. A conversation then commenced that included information about the man’s family in Washington, DC, his Facebook account (He had several hundred ‘friends.’), and his consumption of CNN.com. As this conversation took place, the young negotiator, who had minutes before left the café, returned with several hundred Naira and continued his Facebook session.

Sites and applications like the aforementioned Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp frequently act as arbiters through which resident Africans gain information from non-resident Africans living in the United States. A staged photo of a relative or friend standing before a luxury vehicle, which that person may or may not own, gains incredible affective power for the immigrant and the African citizen when it is posted online. As such, those deterritorialized African subjects residing in the United States may not appear to be deterritorialized or disoriented in their digital lives, but instead seem like success stories from the diaspora, as was the case of the elderly man’s family whose photos he was eager to show me and
Rob who crafted a dreamlike life for himself for those unsuspecting locals in his homeland. The elderly man, his family, the young cyber-café negotiator, and Rob used tools like Facebook and CNN to reterritorialize and craft new socio and geo-cultural existences thanks to globalization and the incumbent blurring of physical, political, social, and cultural borders.

However, migration may not be a consequence of deterritorialization; some individuals within a deterritorialized location may not have the means to physically migrate from one geo-cultural site to another. Individuals within a postcolonial cultural space where capitalism and globalization have not benefitted the masses reterritorialize using glocalized didactic methods that attempt to strengthen the connection between a nation (as defined in the previous chapter) and its overarching culture. For example, postcolonial African citizens who are web and digital media consumers reterritorialize by combining indigenous cultural artifacts and values with global products. Nollywood, the glocal and transnational cinema rooted within a historically and experientially proximate African culture, is a pertinent example of reterritorialization. When deterritorialization results in migration, deterritorialized diaspora members may conduct a similar course of reterritorialization with symbiotically mixed indigenous materials from the homeland and the host land. Viewing Nollywood in digital spaces like IrokoTV, YouTube, IbakaTV, and Amazon exemplifies reterritorialization amongst certain members of the African digital diaspora living in the United States.

**Nollywood and the African Digital Sub-Diaspora**

The concepts of diaspora and digital diaspora posited thus far in this chapter ultimately lead to a new rhetorical and didactic paradigm that must be considered in this study of African

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399 In the preceding chapter, I argued that Africanity is ultimately rooted in a familiar culture and familiar lived and historical experiences for many in the African diaspora. Here, culture refers to a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, and artifacts that members of a society use to negotiate the world around them and are transferred generation to generation through multiple methods of learning, such as film, television, music, the Internet, etc.
immigrants in the United States and their Nollywood viewing habits in online spaces as well as in the overall analysis of the rapidly evolving twenty-first century digital media climate in which we now reside. Just as nations around the globe are not culturally, geographically, or politically fixed, diasporas and digital diasporas are not static either. They move and expand as structures within capitalism and globalization change and adapt with politics, culture, and sociality. Digital diasporas, therefore, inevitably shift and broaden with the advent or development of new and existing technologies. It would be intellectually vapid to insist that the African digital diaspora (or any digital diaspora) will be the same in five or ten years as it is today. Even those diaspora members (Afrogeeks) who use digital media for work and/or leisure inherently understand that their current Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram accounts could be obsolete as time passes and new communication modes emerge to replace or decentralize these existing tools in their digital daily lives.400

**Rhizomatous Nature of Sub-Diaspora**

As digital media adapts with the advancement of technology, consumer sub-groups emerge that follow rhizomatous patterns and trends in digital media and consumption. Digital sub-groups are subject to the whims and fancies of the techno-wizards who create and expand new media tools and the (frequently) fickle users who consistently seek and flock to the ‘next big thing’ in communications technologies. Techno-wizards and consumers can be connected to multiple groups at the same time; they are not mutually exclusive. In comparison, rhizomes are considered to be cultural growths that nonlinearly materialize from different points within a society. Unlike a tree with discernible roots and branches, rhizomes are bulbous, and tuber-like and resist causality in favor of mutuality and multiplicity; it is thus difficult to know for certain

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400 The text and phone platform Viber is gaining in popularity and may soon surpass WhatsApp in users.
at what point within a culture they begin and nearly impossible to know for certain how they will
develop with time as more shoots, bulbs, and tubers constantly appear as culture flexes and
changes.\footnote{Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and
Schizophrenia}, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 6.}

For example, social media has become a place where individuals share photos, fashion
tips, and buying information for African clothing; numerous Instagram and Pinterest accounts for
African clothing exist and enjoy broad followings in the global African digital diaspora.\footnote{Instagram and Pinterest accounts “Nothing but the Wax” and “African Prints in Fashion” are amongst the most popular.} These diaspora members using digital tools to connect over clothing and fashion exist amongst
others using the Internet to congregate around various topics. Essentially, they are all connected
to the overall African diaspora and its digital diaspora. Therefore, the groups often grow
digitally as the result of the proliferation of a particular tool and can morph or create different
groups when that tool is no longer culturally, socially, and/or technologically relevant. Though
not specifically a part of a digital diaspora per se, fans of Jamaican-American reggae and hip hop
artist Sean Kingston who used social media platform MySpace to distribute his music and build
an international fan base, once represented a sub-group of reggae and hip hop enthusiasts that
used MySpace in the early 2000s. Users listened to undiscovered or underground artists and
connected with other fans before the platform’s decline, before the stagnation of Kingston’s
MySpace account beginning around 2010, and before he built his presence in other currently
popular social media venues.\footnote{The exact beginning date of Kingston’s MySpace account and his record industry discovery are unclear, though his Wikipedia profile notes that he has been active as an artist since 2004 and released an industry backed single in 2008. See “Sean Kingston,” \textit{Wikipedia}, last accessed December 31, 2015, \url{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sean_Kingston}. A quick look at Kingston’s current MySpace page reveals that the artist only sporadically uses the platform to upload music for his 61,000 friends. Gaps of as many as twelve to eighteen months exist between posts. See “Sean Kingston,” \textit{MySpace}, last accessed December 31, 2015, \url{www.myspace.com/seankingston}. Currently, Kingston has 3.5 million Twitter followers and 673,000 Instagram followers.}
Popular culture is inherently rhizomatous because it is, more often than not, nonhierarchical; it enjoys consumers who exist from the top to the bottom of a society’s socioeconomic and sociocultural class structures. This is particularly true of Nollywood as an African popular culture form. Though some critics have viewed it as a bastardized low cultural enterprise, the cinema enjoys broad popularity amongst large groups within the African diaspora from urban professionals like Margie from Sierra Leone to the working class or impoverished rural village dweller who watches communally with her kin. Nollywood is also rhizomatous because it includes multiple storytelling traditions, global influences, languages, genres, production locations (though Nigeria, specifically Lagos, is most prevalent), production styles (from the traditional ‘pop-pop-pop’ street style to FESPACO inspired art film aesthetics), and resonant African cultural themes. All of these elements work together to create an industry that defies and resists linearity in favor of mutual inclusivity, an inclusivity that gives rise to distinctly rhizomatous digital sub-groups.

Subculture

To further explore the nature of these rhizomatous digital sub-groups, it is advantageous to offer other comparisons that help situate how the groups operate. Like much of web based digital culture, the groups are like rhizomes and they are also similar to subcultures. To link ways of thinking from Raymond Williams and Dick Hebdige, a subculture is essentially a group of people who possess specific values and behavior systems that are deviant or believed to exist


404 African film and literature scholar Kenneth Harrow was perhaps the most notable early critic, but as he describes in his more recent work he has come to view Nollywood as a viable site for academic and intellectual inquiry. He posits that Nollywood and its aesthetic melodrama offer insights into how capitalism operates in a globalized world. See Kenneth Harrow, Trash: African Cinema from Below (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).
outside the dominant or mainstream society’s ‘whole way of life’ represented through that society’s signs and signifiers. Subcultures endeavor to reconcile tensions between their collective experiences (often of oppression) and the mainstream society’s values and attitudes. Subcultures are not intrinsically homogenous or linear; they are rhizomatous. Alternative experiences are encouraged and upheld and can provide multiple social or psychogeographic locations and activities where members of the subculture can convene and connect. As subcultures morph with the emergence of new bulbs and tubers, they can become unmistakably commoditized or recognizable parts of the overall consumption based order of a society.

One prime example of an American born, but African rooted subcultural rhizome that is highly profitable around the world is hip-hop culture. Originating in the South Bronx in the late 1970s, hip hop became a means by which young African American and Latino youths combined elements of soul, rhythm and blues, jazz, and disco music to create a cultural movement that included graffiti artistry, MCing (or rapping), break dance, DJing (or spinning), and beat boxing (using the mouth to create rhythms). This movement, initially dedicated to facilitating space for easy going and fun expression in New York’s black and brown neighborhoods, quickly gave rise to a street consciousness where urban youths spoke freely about the hardships they faced as people of color within a vicious capitalist system of poverty and neglect. In the early Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five hip hop anthem called “The Message,” one of the first to include biting social commentary, the group rapped:

My son said, Daddy, I don’t wanna go to school/Cause the teacher’s a jerk, he must think I’m a fool/And all the kids smoke reefer, I think it’d be cheaper/If I

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just got a job, learned to be a street sweeper/Or dance to the beat, shuffle my feet/Wear a shirt and tie and run with the creeps/Cause it’s all about money, ain’t a damn thing funny/You got to have a con in this land of milk and honey/… Don’t push me ‘cause I’m close to the edge/I’m trying not to lose my head, ha-ha/It’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.

The song inspired other hip hop artists like Public Enemy and N.W.A. to combine danceable beats with news like street dispatches that served the purpose of entertaining and educating listeners. Hip hop culture has become a multibillion dollar business fueled with album, concert ticket, movie ticket, music producing equipment, clothing sales, etc., across the globe. By the turn of the twenty-first century, hip hop was no longer an American subculture. It had become a glocal transnational culture with fans from around the world who used hip hop to express their fears and frustrations.

The African digital diaspora, like hip hop, Nollywood, and the overall African diaspora, is rhizomatous. It defies linearity and it is virtually impossible to know now how it will transform itself with time. What can be argued and articulated now is that the rhizomatous nature of the African diaspora and its African digital diaspora will continue to give rise to an increasing number of digital sub-diasporas. Consumers of Nollywood films in online spaces comprise a palpable digital sub-diaspora that is much like a subculture but with key differences.

Sub-Diaspora

I describe a sub-diaspora as a group within a larger diaspora that is built around a shared set of activities, beliefs, consumption practices, likes, and experiences. The sub-diaspora is not necessarily deemed deviant within the larger diaspora or beneath it in any way (as the use of the prefix ‘sub’ in the term sub-Saharan suggests); the larger diaspora is intrinsically diverse with

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varying values that sub-diasporas can hold. Sub-diaspora groups grow as a result of membership in a diaspora and not in spite of it; the diaspora in which the sub-diaspora group resides is not actively resisted, but is often celebrated and its people are looked upon as fellow sojourners in a collective struggle for agency and expression. A subculture may attempt to alleviate antagonisms within a society’s mainstream culture. However, sub-diasporas may use shared activities and practices to assuage tensions or renegotiate their existences within the respective larger culture of a host land from which members may feel a sense of estrangement or enmity. Members of a sub-diaspora can be dispersed individuals living in different nations; what unites them is a rally around common cultural habits or praxes. Access to and the consumption of digital media tools to communicate and connect further unite the sub-diaspora and make it digital.

In the context of this chapter and its examination of a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora, it would be incorrect to state that all members of the African diaspora view and enjoy Nollywood films. Many do not. Also, it would be false to assert that those members who do view and enjoy Nollywood watch online. Many, especially those on the continent who do not own or lack the means to utilize digital media, do not. Ikechukwu Obiaya points out that poor infrastructural development has a profound effect on online Nollywood viewership throughout the African continent. However, the numbers presented in earlier pages show that a growing swath of the African public use the Internet; access and the ability to use it “imply certain characteristics on the part of [the online Nollywood audience] in terms of age, educational level and, possibly, economic standing.”

Around the continent, Nollywood films are sold in village markets, street vendors stalls, and grocery stores and African television networks broadcast

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Nollywood films throughout the day. Still, Africa based users are still viewing and communicating about Nollywood films on YouTube, Facebook, and several blogs.\textsuperscript{410}

The older immigrants I spoke with (Benjamin, the elderly Nigerian former journalist, in particular) about their Nollywood consumption note that they still purchase DVDs from African stores, but admitted to watching online (sometimes with younger relatives) because web platforms possess more viewing options. When I asked younger participants in this study if they purchase DVDs, the answer was a resounding ‘no.’ “That’s so old school,” Paula, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, laughed. Others, especially those living in rural areas of West Virginia, stated that they watch online because they infrequently visit African stores and when they do film selection is low. Also, Pascal mentioned that buying a DVD from a store could be dangerous because the disc could be damaged and unusable, the film quality could be poor, or the disc could contain something other than the movie a consumer intended to purchase and watch. With the increasing proliferation of Nollywood films in online spaces, buying DVDs in a store has become almost obsolete; consumption is increasingly Internet based, thus establishing a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora.

Formation of this distinct sub-diaspora is a part of the systems of reterritorialization where deterritorialized diaspora members attempt to strengthen the ties between their culture and homeland that the unfortunate artifices of capitalism (devalued labor, nonexistent industry, occult economics, migration, and others) have weakened. While an immigrant from a nation south of the Sahara Desert may have fashioned the host land as a paradise where she would enjoy the spoils of stability, upward mobility, and eventual wealth, the realities of her lived

\textsuperscript{410} Popular blogs include BellaNaija, NollywoodGist, NaijaGist, and the blog affiliated with subscription service IrokoTV. Nollywood blogs, notably BellaNaija and IrokoTV, also have social media presences on Facebook, Instagram, and even Twitter.
experience may have proven to carry with it numerous paradoxes she must renegotiate. Viewing Nollywood is a quiet, yet subversive celebration of Africanity in the host land, particularly the United States, which has not (and perhaps will not) met her expectations. By participating in a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora, African immigrants around the world are Afrogeeks who use digital media to reterritorialize with a rhizomatous form of African popular culture to ground themselves in their respective geo-cultural host land and the overall cultural milieu of the African continent. Thus, the homeland and the fictive homelands in the Nollywood films become a new paradise, one where the immigrant can digitally go in a matter moments and return to repeatedly at a cost much less than the price of a ticket.

**Cyber-Nollywood**

The Internet has profoundly changed the way audiences respond to popular art, particularly Nollywood. Web platforms make it far easier to consume popular art and often make it relatively inexpensive. Thus, the Internet fosters digital relationships between the users and the art and even creates new communities among the art’s consumers. Using Karin Barber’s ideas on popular art and its African audiences, Obiaya contends that popular art audiences tend to be heterogeneous and develop deep affinities for the art reflected back to them. He says that the Internet has intensified heterogeneity and sympathetic relationships with Nollywood.\(^{411}\) This is certainly true of several of the Afrogeek participants in this study; Jody, who is Ghanaian-Ivorian, and Sierra Leone native Margie stated that they did not watch much Nollywood prior to migrating; their viewing habits increased exponentially after arriving in the United States and gaining the ability to watch online. Rob, who claimed to watch as many as eight to ten Nollywood movies each week, hardly watched prior to coming to America. He stated that the

\(^{411}\) Obiaya, “Nollywood on the Internet,” 325 - 326.
majority of his viewing takes place on YouTube on his mobile phone. Fellow Nigerians Tonya and Jennifer said that although they watched Nollywood “at home,” their consumption also escalated after settling in the United States. Though Margie, Tonya, and Jennifer live in the greater Baltimore-Washington, DC metropolitan area and are in proximity to African markets, they mostly watch on YouTube and IrokoTV. While specific numbers on African immigrant’s Internet usage in the United States are difficult to concretely access, it can be argued that American infrastructure increases the numbers of immigrants using the Internet and the rates at which they use it for various purposes, including watching Nigerian cinema on social media platforms.

I have previously noted that digital platforms like YouTube, IrokoTV, IbakaTV, Amazon Prime, Netflix, as well as the mobile application AfriNolly and Pan-African entertainment site BuniTV offer Afrogeek immigrants in the United States and abroad the opportunity to watch, discuss, and keep up to date with films, actors, and other fans online. Of these platforms, YouTube is the oldest and was the starting point for Nollywood for immigrants I spoke with when they moved to America. Therefore, it is fitting to first discuss YouTube as a cyber-cultural space where the Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora first developed (though a specific date is impossible to pinpoint) and continues to flourish. A quick search for “Nollywood” within YouTube’s search engine yields approximately 643,000 results and a search for “Nollywood full movies” yields about 102,000 results. YouTube currently contains about 2,240 channels dedicated to Nollywood films. The following is a list of popular channels and the number of subscribers to the channels: IrokoTV with 587,774 subscribers; IbakaTV with 359,635

subscribers; Nollywood5star with 263,913 subscribers; Nollywoodpicturestv with 246,286
subscribers; and, tvNolly with 217,570.\footnote{13}

YouTube is also a site for fan based Nollywood film reviews; Nollywood critic Adenike
O. Adebayo’s review channel (6,775 subscribers) and Oreoluwa Fadiran’s \textit{Nollywood Reviews}
channel (551 subscribers, though her videos receive hundreds of hits each) are popular amongst
fans and produce the most results when “Nollywood reviews” is searched for on the site.\footnote{14}

Of the nations listed above with the most Internet users in Africa, YouTube is the fifth most used
site in Nigeria, the third in Kenya, fourth in South Africa, and third in Uganda.\footnote{15} These overall
numbers and statistics suggest that YouTube is popular and Nollywood is popular on this social
media platform. It is a popularity that Noah Tsika states has the power to greatly expand, create
additional subscriber bases, and establish Nollywood celebrities through YouTube channels like
Nollywood5star around the globe.\footnote{16}

A number of factors could play a role in Nigerian cinema’s popularity on YouTube such
as no cost viewing and the relative ease of viewing on multiple platforms including desktops,
laptops, cell phones, and tablets. Also, for those newly arrived African immigrants who may not
be able to initially pay a subscription fee (roughly $5 to $10 per month depending on
subscription plans and platforms), YouTube may be the only means of accessing these films. In

\footnote{13} “Nollywood channels,” \textit{YouTube.com}, last accessed April 16, 2016,
\url{https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=nollywood&lclk=channel&filters=channel}.
\footnote{14} “Nollywood reviews,” \textit{YouTube.com}, last accessed April 16, 2016,
\url{https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=nollywood+review}.
for Sudan were not available on Alexa.com. Alexa, a global analytical insights company which is a subsidiary of
Amazon, tracks global internet patterns for several hundred countries and territories around the world. See “About Us,” \textit{Alexa.com}, last accessed March 13, 2015, \url{http://www.alexa.com/about?ax_atid=1328bf9c-448b-444f-ba6d-3a120bba5e90}.
\footnote{16} Tsika, “From Yorùbá to YouTube,” 101.
this way, YouTube provides a service to those immigrants in the United States looking for a way to access cultural products from home. Scholars Jean Burgess and Joshua Green are concerned with whether YouTube is a site that actually provides access to culture or if it is a platform strictly for consumer-producers.\footnote{417} Michael Strangelove would argue that it is a platform for consumer-producers looking for an outlet to tell and share their stories.\footnote{418} I argue that for African immigrants using the social media site to view Nigerian cinema, YouTube is both a place for their culture and a site where they can be consumer-producers, but not in the traditional sense. Burgess, Green, and Strangelove consider consumer-producers to be those who not only watch videos, but also create and post videos onto the site. However, immigrants are not producing their own Nollywood films and posting them online. Instead, they are producing affective connections to home for themselves through subscribing to various Nollywood dedicated channels, watching films that foster this connection, commenting on films they watch, communicating with other viewers, and in the case of Adebayo and Fadiran producing review vlogs.

The process of producing affective connections suggests that African immigrants spend a considerable amount of time on YouTube and become deeply entrenched members of the Nollywood focused African digital sub-diaspora. Anandam Kavoori argues that watching YouTube is “fundamentally different from watching television or film: You make time to watch television or film, you watch YouTube when you have little time.”\footnote{419} I disagree with this assessment; African immigrants in the United States make time to watch YouTube because the site is a point of re-entry into or a point of reconnection with their cultural home. Also, because

\footnote{417} Burgess and Green, \textit{YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture}, 14. 
\footnote{419} Kavoori, \textit{Reading YouTube}, 7.
the average Nollywood film can have an estimated run time between 60 to 120 minutes plus several sequels (as many stories are serialized and can have three to five ‘parts’), viewers watch purposefully and often set aside time to watch a film and its sequels. Another major consideration is YouTube’s power as a ‘gateway’ platform; it often serves as an entry point for subscription based social media sites like IrokoTV and IbakaTV. As viewers desire more recent titles or titles containing their favorite actors, many seek out paid services for access to films YouTube does not provide. Both IrokoTV and IbakaTV have dedicated YouTube channels where viewers can watch movie trailers, clips, and a limited number of full films for free.

The stories of IrokoTV and IbakaTV are indicative of the power of global flows of media, culture, technology, and industry. Launched on December 1, 2011, IrokoTV is a subscription based streaming film service affectionately known as the ‘Netflix of Africa.’ IrokoTV is considered one of the first online film distribution services on the African continent and currently offers approximately 5,000 films for subscribers to view on the website IrokoTV.com and with a mobile application. Owner Jason Njoku, the son of Nigerian immigrants in the United Kingdom, began the business when he noticed his mother, an avid Nollywood viewer, had difficulty finding the latest features in London. Njoku traveled to Lagos, Nigeria (the Nollywood film hub) and purchased the online distribution rights for numerous

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420 I would be remiss not to state here that individual YouTube users have actually uploaded a considerable swath of the full Nollywood films available on the site. One can speculate that these films were either ripped from DVDs or through online downloads which are possible on IrokoTV, Amazon Prime, and perhaps other platforms. This brings up thorny issues of international copyright law, a subject I could not begin to tackle in this study. Certainly, an extended analysis of Google’s copyright practices for its subsidiary YouTube and Nollywood films is warranted.


films directly from Nollywood producers.\(^{423}\) Along with business partner, Bastian Gotter, Njoku set up IROKO Partners in London and began the website; currently, the business has offices in London, Lagos, New York City, and Johannesburg, South Africa. The partners have content distribution deals with YouTube, Vimeo, Amazon, Netflix, iTunes, Dailymotion, Nokia, British Airways, South African Airways, Emirates, Kenya Airways, and United Airlines.\(^{424}\) Indeed, Njoku is what Everett would call an Afrogeek and follows in the footsteps of fellow Nigerian and Internet father Emeagwali in developing a discernibly African space online.

IrokoTV’s phenomenal success and popularity undoubtedly overshadows the lesser-known IbakaTV. Started in August of 2011 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, IbakaTV’s online platform and film offerings are nearly identical to that of IrokoTV. However, its reach is mainly through YouTube and Ibakatv.com. Administrators state that the site and YouTube channel have over one million subscribers around the world and receives 800 million hits per day.\(^{425}\) While IbakaTV appears to situate itself as a competitor to IrokoTV and brags about it’s worldwide success, its reach is not as wide. I mention the platform as a part of this study to acknowledge its existence and to make clear that IrokoTV is not the only African digital company operating social media services for members of the African digital diaspora. Though its history is rather cryptic as very little information about the site’s origins is available, the August 2011 start date suggests that it was the first Internet distribution service on the African continent. Whether IbakaTV will maintain a digital presence in the years to come is hard to predict. Yet, IrokoTV’s

rapid acceleration could suggest that IbakaTV’s trajectory may resemble that of MySpace after the launch of Facebook; Ibaka may still exist, but Iroko will continuously overshadow it because of the sheer amount of business acumen and industry stake that Njoku and his partner appear to possess and control. As stated, Nollywood films can also be found on Amazon Prime and Netflix, but most of them come courtesy of IrokoTV suggesting the overall power the platform has worldwide.  

In fact, with the exception of Pascal (who is a self professed “news hound”), none of the immigrants I spoke with had heard of IbakaTV. All of them linked their viewing habits to YouTube and IrokoTV. Most stated that once they began IrokoTV subscriptions, their Nollywood consumption on YouTube dropped but did not completely end. Margie, perhaps the most passionate Nollywood fan I talked with, said that she primarily watches on YouTube because it is free. Others admitted that though they do not have to pay to watch films on YouTube, they prefer IrokoTV because the streaming quality is better, films are better organized (genre, actor, theme, etc.), and the site is designed for better communications between users and platform administrators. YouTube may possess a larger Nollywood presence because of the larger number of films that can be found on the site, but for the immigrants in this study IrokoTV is their primary platform.

426 Nollywood powerhouse actor, director, and produce Kunle Afolayan inked a deal in early 2015 directly with Netflix for the exclusive online rights for ten of his films including the then unreleased film October 1 making him one of the first Nollywood heavyweights to negotiate a deal with the subscription service. See “October 1: Kunle Afolayan gets Netflix deal,” The Sun, accessed January 3, 2016, http://sunnewsonline.com/new/october-1-kunle-afolayan-gets-netflix-deal/.

427 I have been an IrokoTV subscriber since January of 2014. Since beginning my subscription, I have noticed the changes to the site’s organization (The free movies once available on the site are no longer there; they have migrated to YouTube.) and the increase in the amount of administrator support available. Within moments of a user complaint about technical difficulties in the comments section for a film, a technical ‘support hero’ responds to the user and rectifies the situation. Because the contents of IrokoTV and IbakaTV are essentially the same, I saw no need at the time of activating my IrokoTV subscription and see no need now to redundantly subscribe to IbakaTV.
I must mention here that other online platforms provide access to Nollywood. Website BuniTV, a subscription based streaming service that features film and television from around the African continent, provides access to Nigerian based entertainment though Nollywood films are not the service’s primary offering. AfriNolly, a Google backed application and the 2011 winner of the Google Android Developers Challenge - Sub-Saharan Africa for entertainment platforms, boasts approximately four million users who can use their mobile phones to track actors, watch trailers, get the latest Nollywood news, and connect with friends.\(^2\) Of the two, AfriNolly provides more opportunities for users in the Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora to connect with others; however, it does not have the impact or reach that YouTube and IrokoTV currently enjoy and maintain.

Connection and sociality are what enable members of the African digital diaspora, particularly those citizens of the continent and those African born dispersed members, to create cultural experiences daily or nearly every day of a home that is constantly in flux. As one of the immigrants who participated in the study said to me, “I can’t go back to Africa…not really, you know. I am here now. I am American now. But this…this is how I go back home.” This is a powerfully poignant assessment of the relationship that can develop between a dispersed diaspora member and the homeland. Migration creates another layer of deterritorialization through an irrefutably warped or weakened tie or bond between the dispersed individual, her home, and the culture they once shared. Since her departure, both she and home have changed. True, unadulterated ‘homecoming,’ though physically possible, is frequently affectively and psychologically dubious. Iain Chambers explains:

Migrancy…involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming…becomes an impossibility.429

Thinking this way, the impossibility of the pure, uncontaminated, and comfortable imagined paradise I have discussed in this study collides with preconceived ideas that the paradise will engender the fortuitous life established in the pre-migrant’s dreamscapes. The home country of origin is not fixed; it is constantly in motion. The home of the imagined paradise or host land is also a kinetic construction; it requires constant negotiation and renegotiation on the part of the immigrant. As Stuart Hall states, “Migration is a one way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to.”430 Migration is a trip with no fixed destination the immigrant can completely inhabit. There is no home to go to and there is no home to go back to. Digital contact through social media platforms is conceived as the best possible way to reconcile the colonial and postcolonial projects that motivated the immigrant’s migration and the difficulties inherent within attempting to possess the unfamiliar and uncompromising new home of the host land in body and mind.431 Digitally mediated interconnectivity is the answer or, if not the answer, a path toward it.

Social Media and Sociality

The rise of the Internet and digital media tools in the last ten to fifteen years has led to a global paradigm of interconnectivity, deterritorialization, and cultural meeting and mixing through reterritorialization. As previously argued, the transnational flows of people, culture and cultural productions, ideas and ideologies, technology, and money has contributed to a borderless world where media contributes to cultural, ethnic, and social hybridity. John Sinclair situates media use within a context of globalization and the possibilities of cultural imperialism; as

429 Chambers, Migrancy, Culture, Identity, 5.
430 Hall, “Minimal Selves,” 44.
technology and media move across borders with relative ease, global citizens become consumers of both products and ideas about the landscapes and mediascapes around them. It can be argued with little to no contradiction that African immigrants from nations south of the Sahara are active consumers of western ideology. Many arrive in the United States familiar with American culture thanks to the media that has reached them in their home nations. In addition, many immigrants, both Afropolitans and the dispersed working class enter the United States with sets of digital and social media skills. However, Pippa Norris argues that a “global divide is evident between industrialized and developing countries…And within the online community, evidence for a democratic divide is emerging.” This means that though the African digital diaspora is diverse, all parts of it are not necessarily equal. Some have more access than others.

Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale similarly argues that while the availability and use of information and communication technology (ICT) is growing on the African continent, especially in nations like Nigeria and South Africa, the continent lags behind the rest of the world in terms of ICT infrastructure. Still, the Internet is widely used throughout the continent and diaspora as Everett notes and the evidence that Africa makes up about ten percent of the world’s web consumers offered previously suggests. In many of the countries considered ‘developing,’ it is not uncommon for individuals to possess more than one mobile phone each connected to a different available telecommunications network. As noted, cyber-cafés where a small fee is paid to access the Internet, mainly social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, for a certain amount of time is also common, but accessing social media on phones is most

common.\textsuperscript{435} Indeed, individuals of the African diaspora living on the continent and dispersed around the world are members of a digital diaspora rooted in participatory culture.

To understand how social media usage is negotiated amongst immigrants in the United States who are members of the African digital diaspora, especially those who use the Internet and social media to consume Nollywood films, time must be spent parsing out some of the myriad epistemological assumptions scholars have made about social media, participatory culture, and diaspora populations. The platforms mentioned in this chapter allow for the creation of content, mostly through user comments that are posted in response to the films viewed on the sites. Each allows for the exchange of content, mostly through the conversations begun about the films as a result of the comments. Posting video film reviews or review vlogs also counts toward the creation and exchange of user-generated content and becomes a part of the culture of participation for the Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora. The creative labor employed to develop vlogs and a channel devoted to them ultimately contributes to relationship building between the producer and consumers. Information is accessed and exchanged. Conversations take place. Participants, as producers and consumers, form relationships around this digital exchange.

Accessing information, as also presented in filmic or narrative form, and building relationships are at the crux of a framework that Jan Kietzmann, Kristopher Hermkens, Ian McCarthy, and Bruno Silvestre present to analyze the “functional building blocks” or “honeycomb of social media.”\textsuperscript{436} The authors lay out seven functional building blocks to define

\textsuperscript{435} For an overview of how Internet developed in parts of Africa, see Patrick J. Burnet and Marie-Claude Vettraino-Soulard, \textit{Ethics and the Internet in West Africa: Toward an Ethical Model of Integration} (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004).

social media as represented in the ‘honeycomb’ model of social media functionality and its implications: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups.\textsuperscript{437} These building blocks allow for an extended examination of the interconnected relationship between social media usage, Nollywood consumption online, and sub-diaspora formation amongst African immigrants in the United States. While the “honeycomb of social media” is a useful tool, some of the building blocks and their implications are more relevant than others. Therefore, I further unpack and offer an expanded analysis here to situate the building blocks identity, conversations, sharing, relationships, and groups in the honeycomb in relation to this study.\textsuperscript{438}

\textbf{Identity}

According to Kietzmann, identity refers to the rate at which users reveal themselves in a social media setting. These revelations can include disclosing name, age, gender, profession, location, and “also information that portrays users in certain ways.”\textsuperscript{439} YouTube and IrokoTV users, as well as Amazon Prime subscribers, register and set up profiles in the platforms and can build identities based on their user names.\textsuperscript{440} Some even include the flags or names of their

\textsuperscript{437} Ibid., 242 – 243.
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid., 246 – 247. ‘Presence’ in the honeycomb model refers to the extent to which users are aware of the availability or presence of other users in a space. ‘Reputation’ is the rate at which users are aware of the standing of other users and themselves in a social media setting. As these are not vital parts of this study, I will not analyze them here. While the presence and reputation of other users may motivate some to post comments about films, Nollywood fans in online spaces post mainly to express their opinions or have conversations with other viewers or the platform itself. Study participants did not indicate that they sought out the opinions of specific users for film recommendations.
\textsuperscript{439} Ibid., 243.
\textsuperscript{440} I have endeavored to interpret comments from users whose user names include African related terms or names or users who identify themselves as being African in some way in their posts. Like immigrants from other diaspora communities, some Africans adopt Anglicized names and use them both on the continent and in the host land. This phenomenon is true of Nollywood stars like Mercy Johnson and Desmond Elliott. Therefore, I include analysis of comments from individuals with Anglicized names, especially if those individuals “self-disclose” or show some sort of connection with an African country or culture.
native countries as their profile picture. Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein note that social media users often provide identity clues through “self-disclosure; that is, the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information (e.g., thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes) that is consistent with the image one would like to give.” For many African digital sub-diaspora members viewing Nollywood in online spaces (especially on IrokoTV whose users are primarily African) having an identity (revealed through a user name like ‘Naijagal’ or ‘Ghanababy’ or even through the use of African pidgin English in their posts) attached to the African continent appears to be of key importance. There is often great pride in the user’s comments.

Take, for example, these posts on YouTube from users who watched the film, The Birthday and The Birthday 2. Both viewers are revealing their African identity through their user names (One appears to be a user’s actual name.), through pidgin English, and/or the sort of information that can be considered self disclosure. One says, “Nja,Nja ohhh were are we going oh.no light dr are selling dr light to Ghana people hmmmmmm.” The other states:

At times these story writers "plots" have to be properly screened by the directors before shooting a scene, pure nonsense at the market. An African is dramatic in nature but will not go to the market and act crazy like that in a wedding gown; she will run home if she has to run. You guys make these exceptional actors / actresses act in some stupid and worthless scenes.

The user in the first comment appears to be lamenting that Nigeria (Nja, short for Naija, a slang term for Nigeria or Nigerian) is selling bad values (light dr – dr light) to Ghanaians. This

441 Popular amongst user names are the terms ‘Naija,’ which is slang for Nigeria or Nigerian, and ‘Ghana.’ The flags of these countries are often used as profile pictures. For more on the term ‘Naija,’ see, Bilkisu Labaran, “Nigeria at 50: What does Naija mean?” BBC News Africa, last modified October 1, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11447252.
442 Kaplan and Haenlein, “Users of the world, unite!,” 62.
suggests that the viewer is from Ghana and is dissatisfied with this particular Nigerian movie’s overall theme and absence of ‘proper’ morality or values. In the second, the user chastises the filmmaker for including scenes that do not accurately portray the cultural behaviors of Africans. For these users and many others, the desire that the films they watch reflect their African values, their African identities, and their willingness to share their desires, identities, and values are important in these forums.

Conversations

One of the primary uses of social media is to communicate with others. As Kietzmann explains, conversations “represents the extent to which users communicate with other users in a social media setting.” Platforms like YouTube, IrokoTV, IbakaTV, and Amazon are designed for sociality; users post comments about films and carry on conversations with one another about their specific likes, dislikes, and overall feelings or impressions about the film. The following conversation on IrokoTV about the horror film The Duplex (Ikechukwu Onyeka, 2015) shows that viewers are actively commenting as they watch:

    dlake: 25:49 not outside yet... come on woman

    lee: Some woman would have been on d street from d first scare, & wake up d whole neighborhood, Dpo, Igwe, army, etc., She come like a white woman, & try to study the situation. F, that just get d hell out!

    Issy: My point exactly... its only natural to run outside and take cover in the streets. [Emoji icon of face laughing to tears] Na wa though!

    monigo: I said the same thing....lol

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445 Kietzmann et al., “Social media? Get serious!,” 244.
446 “The Duplex 2015,” IrokoTV.com, accessed January 8, 2016, http://irokotv.com/video/6449/the-duplex#disqus_thread. My interpretation of the final comment in the thread is that the participant wanted to express that the moment in the film being discussed is hilarious. In Nigerian pidgin English, the words ‘na wa’ typically means ‘it is’ or ‘there is.’
In this exchange, the participants are actively engaged in the plot of a family man and his very pregnant wife who purchase a duplex at a suspiciously low price. The character’s behavior in the film offers an opportunity for the discussion thread participants to comment on film versus real behavior. User leewest22 even nods toward colonial gestures when he says that the character acts like a ‘white woman’ trying to ‘study the situation’; the participant’s language pokes fun at colonial administrators and powerbrokers who claimed to enter the continent to study the situation on the ground and not as colonizers. The user’s comment suggests that she or he understands that other African viewers would ‘get’ the joke and value it. This conversation is not only about the film, but about a shared awareness of the cultural, historical, and social ties that bind these members of their Nollywood digital sub-diaspora to one another.

When technology fails to expedite the bonds members share in digital space, viewer participants raise their voices in protest. IrokoTV subscribers not only post and carry on comments with other users, many often post comments directly aimed at the site’s administrators mostly to complain about the quality of the streaming video or their inability to download the IrokoTV mobile application:

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yhermmy: This is very bad, I'm not even enjoying the film it keeps going off, iroko you should do something about this, my friends are also complaining so it has nothing to do with my network, please fix this problem it's money I used to subscribe and i'm not enjoying what I paid for at all

IrokoTVHeroes: Hi Fakola, We sincerely apologize for the inconveniences. We would like to help you get this fixed immediately. Simply click the chat icon at the bottom right of the screen. Hope to hear from you soon. Ada, IrokoTV Hero.
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Some users also post comments asking for access to specific films like in this conversation in the discussion thread for *The Duplex*. One user begins with requests and another user joins in the dialogue with her own suggestions:

uwa: Dear Irokotv, you people are trying but pls , we need to see: being miss elliot, the good wife, jenifas diary 2, festac town 2, the good wife, stripped, dazzling mirage, journey to self, cobweb, learning curves, etc. movies when una neva upload plenty ooooo! We dey wait.

IrokoTVHeroes: Thank you for your movie and series suggestions. it will be looked into, do stay tuned with us! Best Regards, Tobi iROKOtv Support

mk: phone swap, the meeting, darima's dilemma

IrokoTVHeroes: Hello, We have registered your request and it will be worked upon. Stay tuned for more amazing movies/series. Best regards, Ada, IrokoTV Hero

Participants use the discussion and comments threads not only to discuss their thoughts about the movie, but also to discuss what they believe to be their rights as consumer-participants in the specific IrokoTV viewer group within the Nollywood digital sub-diaspora. They share with each other and with those in control who have the ability to make their participation in this culture and the exchanges it births possible.

**Sharing**

While sharing in social media spaces seems an inherent part of having conversations online, Kietzmann argues that sharing is a distinct part of sociality. Conversations may take place where no new information is presented. However, sharing in this paradigm refers to the extent at which consumers exchange, distribute, or receive content. Nollywood fans often post

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links to other films or direct viewers to reviews they have posted on their YouTube page. Some users have conversations about actresses’ or actors’ upcoming projects, share information about the issues presented in the film, or ask and receive answers to questions about parts of the film they may not have understood. The following conversation from the film *The Birthday 2* is a keen indicator of the power of sharing between users in comments forums. In this case, the users engage in a debate about traditions and behaviors amongst a particular ethnic group:

Chukwukelue: Point of correction writer please in Igbo land when someone hang him or herself they don't send his or her family out of the community; the only thing they will do is to call Nri to appease the gods to avoid further death; please don't write rubbish so other tribe will not see igbo people as heartless people thank you

Alohan: Well you should know that all these act is from his brother because of the land that Juliet father did not sold or give to him.

Chukwukelue: I know but the writer made a mistake because there's no town; village in Igbo land that will send someone away because the family member hanged he or herself; if that should be the case the whole family even the uncle will be involve cos all of them bear same surname; just a correction because i know my tradition very well.if someone hang him or herself they will call the Nri's to clean the land and no one touches the person; that is another thing; the Nri will bring the person down but when i watch nollywood and i see where someone hang on the tree the family will come and carry the person down it is wrong that is what am trying to say i don't know other tribe but igbo land i am sure. thank you

love71: Maybe not happening now but perhaps in the ancient times. However, this is just movie and these characters are fiction. I know the Igbo and other tribes are civilised in these modern days and will not do such evil acts!

Chukwukelue: Even in the olden days it never happen;now i understand because the time i wrote this i didn't complete the movie; i later found out the chief priest and the king is against it ; that some elders did that with okafor the man's brother ; that is what i found out; because i was surprise how can.  

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This exchange continues for six more posts and gets heated when a user calls another a racist name and tells him to learn how to speak English. The comment came from a user who appears to be a black African diaspora member in the photo attached to the account. The member’s post received two ‘likes’ and a response from another user that said in language consistent with Nigerian speech patterns, “Amen o.” What began as the initial user’s desire to correct what he perceived to be a mistake in the film became an honest dialogue about culture and ethnicity and perhaps an even a larger, yet unfortunate, conversation about black diaspora identity.

Diaspora identity was also the topic of conversation about another film posted on YouTube titled, *Madam Virus*:

CB: I enjoyed this movie hated the way they beat James but i know its a class thing in Nigeria just wish rich Nigerians come here to USA they get a taste of their own medicine 99% of rich whites here dislike all dark skin people the other 1% well as Elvis said african looking people only good to shine his shoes

J0920: You are correct in the regards to nigerian with money and their need to be arrogant, rude, disrespectful and without empathy towards the poorer class. I can't phantom how they would turn around and treat their own people this way. regardless of them working for you or not. But like you said, when the rich nigerians travel abroad to america, england, Dubai etc, they see that they riches does not show or matter, as long as they have dark skin.  

This conversation is a particularly poignant example of the ways members of the Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora perceive the paradox of race and class in the United States and other countries. Both individuals in this exchange appear to have a Nigerian connection and also appear not to be members of the Afropolitan group described in earlier chapters of this study. Sharing in this dialogue includes laments and chastisements as the individuals acknowledge how they perceive wealthy Nigerians may treat those without money and show an understanding that class does not make black bodies immune to racism.

Though information exchange is the primary means of sharing in this model, another form of sharing is also relevant. Sharing can also refer to the sharing of subscription information; many of the immigrants I spoke with admitted that they shared IrokoTV or Netflix subscriptions with their family members and friends. Penny and Paula share an IrokoTV account with their older sister and have given their login information to several of their friends. Lisa and Patricia also revealed that they have shared their IrokoTV login and account information with friends and family members dispersed around the United States. Jody stated that she uses a subscription that her cousin and aunt own, but noted that she only logs into the account when she has their permission or when they watch films together. Ultimately, the sharing of account information is based on relationships and in the case of Jody, watching online films communally is another aspect of sub-diaspora relationship building.

**Relationships**

In the honeycomb paradigm, the relationships building block “represents the extent to which users can be related to other users…[or] two or more users have some form of association that leads them to converse, share objects of sociality, meet up, or simply just list each other as a friend or fan.” Some of this study’s participants stated that their friendships or relationships with family members with whom they share subscriptions is often rooted in watching films together, discussing the films they have watched, or recommending films to others. Thus, watching films in online spaces facilitates the relationships that users have with people they know intimately. Paula noted that she and her twin often watch films on IrokoTV with groups of friends. Similarly, Margie stated that she and her Pan-African group of friends including her Nigerian boyfriend and several Ethiopian friends often watch movies together on YouTube.

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Passive relationships in the online platforms are also established when users like Margie rely upon the comments and opinions of other users to make viewing choices. Discussion thread posts can also assist in the formation of passive relationships around issues presented in the films. In a discussion of the portrayal of homosexuality in *Lagos Housewives Part 1* on YouTube, participant-viewers opposed to the lesbian relationships in the film rallied around each other to affirm their opinions:

AfricanThinkingChannel: You could have really done without the homosexuality.

divayanche1: i kno eh!

Bubblegum Bitch: There’s nothing wrong with the homosexuality, you homophobic loser…

Lankai: Bitch did you just say there is nothing wrong with homosexuality, am sure your mama is a gay ass hole

AfricanThinkingChannel: +Lankai Good to see we still have some sane people in the world. #StraightBlackPride

Ultimately, the relationship between these participant-viewers led to an even deeper discussion of homosexuality, religion, and Western (particularly American) values. Several of the viewers took it upon themselves to continue arguing against same sex relationships and congratulated those who held the same views. While it is doubtful that these individuals would develop active relationships offline, the individuals felt free to express their views in a passive...

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454 The overall tone of this conversation is suggestive of the anti-gay attitudes that exist amongst many Christian Africans who view homosexuality as unnatural and un-African. It is a topic that requires the depth and attention this study cannot provide. However, it is important to note that portrayals of homosexuality, especially lesbian relationships, are fairly common in Nollywood films and act as morality tales attempting to reinforce the cultural belief that same sex relationships are un-African and also against God. For more information on how same sex relationships operate in Nollywood films, see Green-Simms, “Occult Melodramas,” 24 – 59, and Lindsey Green-Simms, “Hustlers, Home-Wreckers and Homoeroticism: Nollywood's Beautiful Faces,” *Journal of African Cinemas*, Volume 4, Issue 1 (2012): 59 – 79. Also, see Claudia Böhme, “Showing the Unshowable: The negotiation of homosexuality through video films in Tanzania,” *Africa Today* Volume 61, Issue 4 (2015): 62 – 82.
relationship around their anti-gay attitudes. This exchange solidified their space as members of a notable participatory cultural group and the overall Nollywood digital sub-diaspora.

**Groups**

All of the aforementioned building blocks lead toward the formation of groups in social media settings. Groups can lead to the formation of communities and subcommunities. They argue that the more ‘social’ a network becomes, the bigger the group of friends, followers, and contacts becomes in the communities and subcommunities. This is an especially apt way of thinking about how social media aids in the building of digital sub-diasporas. Overall, fans consuming Nollywood films in online spaces constitute a distinct group that digital media helps create, render, and expand or evolve. YouTube, IrokoTV, IbakaTV, Amazon Prime, and Netflix (to a lesser extent) have led to the formation of a Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora of which people around the world are a part. Here are a few comments posted to Amazon Prime about the film analyzed in the previous chapter *Ijé: The Journey*:

- *NarcsGeek*: If You're a Nigerian, you need to see this movie. You will want to go back to your roots!!
- *Okpo*: Well written for an African movie Genevieve and Omotola were great in the movie together as always. Hope more great African movies will make to the US audience.
- *Rebert*: It's good to see the Nigerian movies explode on the big screen absolutely great i loved it.

Viewer-participants, like the ones quoted throughout this chapter, use online forums to express their affinity for Nollywood and to encourage the platforms and filmmakers to continue offering and producing films that appeal to all individuals who support Nollywood film, see no real

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distinction between it and African film in general, and also perceive it as a way to reconnect with home. Also this study shows that not only does social media encourage the creation of “communities and subcommunities” or sub-diasporas, it also promotes the building of relationships offline between people who share a love of Nigerian cinema. As Margie eloquently stated, “Nollywood brings people together. It doesn’t matter where you’re from. These stories connect you whether you’re watching on YouTube by yourself or if you’re watching at home with a bunch of friends. Nollywood is universal.”

**Conclusion**

Indeed, Nollywood can be considered a universal enterprise and digital media’s multiple social platforms have aided in the industry becoming the transnational and glocal cinema it is today. Jose van Dijk claims that social media can be seen as “online facilitators and enhancers of human networks – webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value.”

Subcommunity and/or subculture formation is an inherent part of the rhizomatous nature of social media use and Internet/Web 2.0 consumption overall. For the immigrants in this study, Nollywood viewing in online spaces offers the opportunity to become a constituent in a digital sub-diaspora that includes other immigrants in the United States, dispersed individuals around the world, and people living on the African continent who create films and platforms where those films can be shared.

Not only are films shared, values and culture are also exchanged amongst viewer-participants in a participatory culture where community members believe their ideas and voices are valued and heard. While certain beliefs and opinions may face opposition in various conversations, this does not stop people from participating or feeling as if they can safely join in

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457 van Dijck, *Culture of Connectivity*, 11.
at any time. Though the immigrants I talked with admitted that they rarely, if ever, post their thoughts in their forums of choice (mainly YouTube and IrokoTV), they did state that they felt they could and also stated that they often read other viewer-participant comments to glean how others feel about the movie and the issues it raises. The voices of those who do post serve as a guide not only to the film, but also to the cultural values and connected-collective identities of those who have watched and enjoyed or hated the film.

Nollywood’s presence in the digi-sphere is a keen indicator of where the industry will go both culturally and professionally, especially in terms of the business models in place that have led to the emergence of IrokoTV as a global provider of Nollywood films. The African continent is becoming increasingly connected to the global community through digital media and the Internet. With this connection, the wider world will gain more knowledge about the arts, industries, cultures, and people on the African continent. The voices of Africa will be heard and Nollywood online will be one of the microphones (and perhaps the most prominent microphone) used to showcase the continent. As this viewer-participant exclaimed about Ijé:

balogun: AWESOME!!! Promoting Nigeria creativity and talent. I will highly recommend this movie to everyone that cares to know about what Nollywood is becoming.458

Nigerian film’s relationship with social media and the rising Nollywood digital sub-diaspora point to what Africa is becoming and has the potential to be as the twenty-first century charges forward.

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CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION – MEDIA, MIGRATION, DIASPORA

“And the Internet is now providing a new network of Afro-Atlanticism…The fourth wave of migration from Africa to America has indeed arrived, but with strings still attached to the mother continent. Only time will tell how America – and the world – will be affected by it.”

~ Ali A. Mazrui

“Africans are…we are good people. We come to America because it is the best place for us to be.”

~ Rob, Nigerian Immigrant

Recent migration crises which have been a major part of the American and global news cycle over the last two to three years have exposed many of the complexities of the transnational movements of disaffected peoples. While the majority of these people are migrants from conflict and war torn areas of the Middle East, African born migrants have also been apart of this international flow of individuals hoping to settle in the West. Stories have emerged about the often arduous plights of black migrants from the African continent being trapped in inhospitable European countries with no status and no rights. In April of 2015, a ship carrying approximately 950 migrants from Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Somalia, Niger, Senegal, Mali, and Zambia capsized off the coast of Libya killing as many as 400 of the passengers. Ali Mazrui would call this desperate attempt to leave the African continent a part of the fourth wave of migration of individuals who are mainly citizens of postcolonial nations attempting to flee the systematic failures of their nations in the wake of European colonial rule. These individuals make up what Mazrui calls the “Diaspora of Colonialism” which “encompasses casualties of the

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461 Mazrui, The African Predicament, 3, 12 – 13. According to Mazrui, the first three waves included the pre-Christ arrival of Africans into the Americas over 2,000 years ago, the pre-Columbian arrivals taking place between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and the post-Columbian arrivals during the transatlantic slave trade between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.
displacement caused either directly by colonialism or by the aftermath of colonial and postcolonial disruptions.”

Like the individuals who were tragically killed in last year’s ship accident, many of the people I spoke with for this study are a part of the Diaspora of Colonialism. Participants Benjamin, Rob, Brian, Brenda, Margie, Jennifer, Henry, and Pascal are members of this diaspora; all of them represent Afroproletarian immigrants who come to the United States with high hopes for a stable and comfortable future.

In Tope Folarin’s short story “Miracle,” a young Nigerian in the United States participates in a spiritual rouse that convinces a mixed group of fellow African immigrants and their children that he has been healed of poor eye sight during an evangelical revival. The young man’s actions and intentions are earnest and poignant; he seeks not to gain from his deception. Instead, the narrator follows along with the “prophet” in the story to give or restore the one thing most of the members of the congregation, who are described in terms that would situate them as Afroproletarians, have lost since arriving in America, hope. He says, “My father reminds my brother and me almost everyday how lucky we are to be living in poverty in America, he claims that all of our cousins in Nigeria would die for the chance…a community is made up of truths and lies. Both must be cultivated in order for the community to survive.”

It is the lies of a grand life in America that are maintained in the story and also for some of this study’s participants. Not only is hope for a better American life at stake, but the hopes and desires of all the “cousins” still on the continent continuously ringing in the ears of those members of the Diaspora of Colonialism who have made it to America.

The overall theme in Folarin’s story is similar to those I heard from this study’s participants; many showed (either in their comments to me or in the silences and behaviors I

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462 Ibid., 12.
463 Folarin, “Miracle,” 82.
noticed between the comments) that there are certain truths and untruths of their American lives that their families and friends on the continent are blissfully unaware of. America remains a fantasy, an imagined paradise, for those remaining in Africa. During my second visit to Nigeria in 2012, I again spent time with my good friend’s family just outside Obudu in Ohong village. My friend’s older sister explained to me shortly after I arrived that her youngest son (who was about eight or nine at the time) cried for several days when my friend and I did not take him back to America with us. She told me that her children believe America is a place of endless fun where they can eat sweets, watch cartoons, and play video games all day; they developed this belief thanks to the American programs they watched on the satellite television available in their grandparents’ home, the only television in the village. I was struck by the sadness of this mother as she told me the story of her son’s disappointment. “I told him that he can go to America with Auntie Kuke when he is older, but he must behave and do well in school,” she said. It was then that I truly understood that my friend’s life in the United States is largely a mystery to his family in Nigeria, a mystery he has not helped them solve. My friend and several of this study’s participants allow their lives to remain in mystery because they understand that those they left behind in Africa would not believe them if they told the truth of their lives.

Some of the comments in previous chapters suggest that being a member of an affluent socioeconomic class does not always protect African immigrants from the difficulties of acclimating to life in the United States. Their struggles are just as acute as those of their Afroproletarian counterparts. Perhaps of all the individuals who graciously shared their time, ideas, and experiences, Rob is the contributor who most illustrates the overall scope and arguments of this project. As previously stated, he was in his late thirties when he came to the United States from Nigeria in mid 2011 having won a visa through the Diversity Visa Lottery.
Prior to migrating, Rob lived the life of an Afroproletarian day laborer taking odd jobs to survive and support his family. With the help of relatives in various locations along the East Coast, Rob enrolled as an international undergraduate student at a small university in the South and declared criminal justice as a major. Student loans paid his tuition and other school related expenses. Shortly after beginning classes, he took a job at McDonalds to earn money to send back to his wife and son in Nigeria. He admits that he had “big ideas about America” because of the television programs and movies he watched; he had no understanding of American racial politics or the ways Americans view people from the African continent. Going from an almost entirely black space to an almost entirely white town where he was regarded as different, an ‘other’, and pathological was unexpected. He told me, “White people ask if we have toilets in Africa. I ask them, ‘do you have a toilet?’”

Racial and cultural misunderstandings were not the only source of his frustrations. Rob’s “money in the streets” belief was quickly disproven; his job at McDonalds was low paying, mindless, and physically taxing. “The TV tells you that America is rich, that you want to go to America to live like a big man. Not this low-low pay work. Did I come to this country to be poor?” he said. Eventually, Rob was able to secure a better paying position as an overnight guard at a nursing home. Over the course of this study, I have spoken with Rob twice. In our initial conversation, he expressed his desire to leave the United States and return to the continent after receiving his degree. In December 2015, he graduated and received his criminal justice degree. However, though his attempts to find a higher paying job have been fruitless so far, he intends to stay in America. During our last conversation, Rob wondered aloud, “Africa? What is there for me now?” Rob acknowledges that his American life has not lived up to the expectations of his imagined paradise where money could be easily picked up in the streets, but
returning to his home in Nigeria without the success and riches he dreamed of would make him a failure in the eyes of the people there.

If you take a look at Rob’s Facebook page, you would not guess that his existence in the United States is riddled with obstacles and disillusionment. Photos of him sitting in or standing by various cars and houses wearing what he thinks are “fancy” clothes and sunglasses pepper his page along with shots of his friends and extended family. (I am in some of the photos he posted.) Rob’s Facebook life suggests that he is an African success story, an immigrant who was able to avoid the paradoxes of progress in the host land. Most of his ‘friends’ in Nigeria and other locations on the African continent are unaware of Rob’s real life of what he considers menial labor and paycheck to paycheck living. As I have previously mentioned, I was able to take brief looks at Rob’s account; he proudly showed me his Facebook activity when I mentioned that I am not an active Facebook user. What I could gather from those brief looks is that most of the ‘conversations’ are one sided. Rob posts updates and/or photos; his friends often ‘like’ his posts, but do not engage him in dialogue. When his friends on the continent post, Rob usually responds with long comments. These comments are ‘liked,’ but dialogues do not appear to take place. When he claimed to me to be a “big man,” I could see how those on the African continent would think this is true. While not entirely dishonest, the presentation of Rob’s life on Facebook is not entirely honest as is the case with many people who craft lives for their social media contacts. For Rob, these social media contacts and the eight or more Nollywood films he watches online each week are the strings which attach him to the homeland. Indeed, he is an Afrogeek, an avid social media user with a clear position within the Nollywood focused digital sub-diaspora and the overall African digital diaspora.
Rob and the other participants epitomize the importance of this study in understanding the complicated intricacies and ramifications of media, migration, and acculturation for African born immigrants in the United States. Undoubtedly for the participants, American media consumption prior to migrating had a powerful influence on the ways they viewed the United States and how they imagined their lives would be upon arrival. As outlined in chapter two, the flow of American television and film into and around the African continent began in earnest as early as the 1930s when British authorities imported films like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Mutiny on the Bounty* into Nigeria as a means of ‘civilizing’ and educating their colonial subjects on proper social mores. In the late 1950s with the establishment of WNTV in Ibadan, Nigeria as the continent’s first television station, American westerns and crime serials began airing in the evening hours. As archival documents from the period leading up to WNTV’s going on the air and in the early days of television in Africa show, British authorities were concerned with the impact American films and television programs would have on the African people in the colonies. Participants like Ernest, who told American Embassy officials that he wanted to come to America to be a cowboy during his visa interview in the late 1970s, and Benjamin, who worked in television as a producer in Ibadan during the 1980s, distinctly remembered watching and enjoying westerns. Benjamin nostalgically said to me, “I liked the cowboy programs. John Wayne, he was my favorite.” However, the participants noted that it was films like *Coming to America* and television shows like *The Cosby Show* and, also for the younger participants, *That’s So Raven* and *My Super Sweet Sixteen* that made a keen impression on them and motivated their desire to migrate to the United States. The participants show that media consumption on the African continent is strong and diverse.
One of the key factors in the ways the individuals interpreted American media and formulated the United States as an imagined paradise is socioeconomic class. This study revealed that those immigrants who hail from more affluent classes, Afropolitans, viewed the nation as a temporary stop on their journey toward greater social and economic capital in their home country. They saw the American imagined paradise as a place that offers access to advanced education, high paying employment opportunities, professional and social contacts, and consumer goods. Those in the study who are from the mid to lower classes, Afroproletarians, also imagined the United States as a paradise where they could earn college degrees, high wage jobs, professional and social contacts, and consumer goods. However, America is more often than not a permanent stop; several (especially the older participants) either have or intend to bring their immediate families to join them in the United States once they have the means to facilitate their migration.

Both the Afroproletarian and Afropolitan immigrants in the study noted that their American experiences have not always met their expectations. The seeming progress they made just by migrating has largely been marred with unexpected paradoxes. Afropolitans Lisa, Patricia, and Samantha were not prepared for life in rural America as they believed that all of the nation was urban or suburban. Nearly all the participants stated they did not expect to endure racial and cultural misunderstandings; many thought their blackness would be a non-issue as they believed anyone regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc., could achieve the American dream and live an upper class life. Others expressed disillusionment with not being able to acquire employment or wages that match their education and experience; participants like Benjamin, Pascal, Brian, Sam, and Brenda came to the United States with degrees in hand and/or professional skills and accomplishments they have not been able to use. The paradoxes of
progress are real and acute; ultimately, the realities of America have not matched the paradise crafted prior to arrival.

Overall, the participants in this study and the thousands of other members of the deterritorialized African diaspora epitomize how the Internet expedites a growing network of Afro-Atlanticism. The individuals who make up this network (be they Afroproletarians or Afropolitans) were media savvy Afrogeeks who, though citizens of deterritorialized postcolonial African nations, consumed social media at a high rate prior to migrating to the United States. Since arriving, they have used the media at their disposal to reterritorialize their everyday lives with continued media usage and online Nollywood viewing at an even higher rate. The familiar narratives of African traditions and values reflected in Nollywood films are intensely affecting. Watching Nollywood on YouTube, IrokoTV, and other platforms is about much more than sinking into a movie for a few hours. It is about reterritorialization, reconnection, and maintaining something recognizable and comfortable in a world that is unpredictable. With the assistance of the Internet, social media, and digital technology, the African immigrants in this study refashion a life that allows them to maintain the strings attached to the motherland while negotiating the complexities and frequent quandaries they say living in America presents to them regularly.

The primary question this study has attempted to answer is: why is it important to understand the migration and acculturation practices of African immigrants in the United States? The simple answer to this question is that African immigrants represent diverse identities that are more complex than the facile notions of Africa and Africans often posited in the American and global media. While images and representations of famine, war, disease, poverty, terrorism, political dictatorship and instability, etc., are dominant, a growing contingent of African diaspora
members are showing that the continent can no longer be viewed as a pathological mess of postcolonial deterioration. Nollywood figures like Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, who made the 2013 Time magazine list of 100 most influential people in the world, and people like Philip Emeagwali, considered a father of the Internet, and Jason Njoku, co-founder of Nollywood online subscription service IrokoTV, are offering different views of the continent and her people. Many of the African immigrants who come to the United States bring with them a wealth of experiences and skills that enable them to successfully acculturate and fashion comfortable lives for themselves and their families. Yet, the stories of African malaise tend to overshadow these immigrants’ accomplishments and contributions to American society.

The more complicated answer to the question lies in the fact that ‘black America’ is becoming increasingly diverse. Over the years of Africa to America migration during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, African born individuals have largely been monolithically grouped along with black Caribbean immigrants, Afro-Latinos, Afrasians, the American born descendants of enslaved Africans, and other black people as ‘African American’ or ‘black American.’ When referring to this group, political stakeholders and thought leaders mainly imply that it is a homogenous collection of individuals with the same ideas, goals, feelings, and desires. Yet, Eugene Robinson asserts,

> The fact is that asking what something called ‘black America’ thinks, feels, or wants makes as much sense as commissioning a new Gallup poll of the Ottoman Empire. Black America, as we knew it, is history. There was a time when there were agreed upon ‘black leaders,’ when there was a clear ‘black agenda,’ when we could talk confidently about ‘the state of black America’ – but not anymore.464

Robinson’s assessment is in conversation with Mazrui’s claim that multiple diasporas of black people currently reside in the United States. These diasporas include the Diaspora of

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Enslavement and the aforementioned Diaspora of Colonialism.\textsuperscript{465} In the years to come, the multiplicity of black identities in America will be apparent as more people with names like Barack Obama, Issa Rae, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, Djimon Hounsou, Dinaw Mengestu, Sade Baderinwa, and Lupita N’yongo become prominent members of the overall American community. As such, Mazrui is correct in his assertion; only time will tell how America will be affected by the growing wave of African immigrants and their network of Afro-Atlanticism. The participants in this study and the patterns of Africa to America migration outlined here suggest America’s black population will become increasingly diverse and this new black America with its distinct and divergent experiences, goals and aspirations (political, economic, social, and otherwise), and needs will not be silent or ignored.

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[https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=nollywood+full+movies](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=nollywood+full+movies).

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=nollywood+review](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=nollywood+review).


https://twitter.com/SeanKingston?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor


[http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/immigrate/diversity-visa/entry.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/immigrate/diversity-visa/entry.html).


VIDEOGRAPHY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMbCkX9Kye4.


Osuofia in London (Kingsley Ogoro, 2003

Overseas (Linda Obasi, 2013


APPENDIX A. HSRB APPROVAL DOCUMENTS

DATE: December 18, 2014
TO: Tori Arthur
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: December 18, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE: November 16, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Comment: Consent forms should say, in the sentence about contacting the chair of the HSRB, that they should do this with any questions about their rights as participants in the research.

Please add the text equivalent of the HSRB IRBNet approval/expiration date stamp to the “footer” area of the electronic consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 100 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on November 16, 2015. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.
Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT LETTERS

Informed Consent for “The Re-Imagined Paradise” Focus Group Participants

Introduction: I, Tori O. Arthur, am a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University in the School of Cultural and Critical Studies’ American Culture Studies program. I am being guided in my research by Dr. Radhika Gajjala of Bowling Green State University. I am currently researching how African immigrants in the U.S. (regardless of country of origin) employ digital media to reconnect with 'home.'

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore how these immigrants become 'digital citizens' of a universal Africa through the consumption of Nigerian (Nollywood) films on YouTube. I anticipate this research will show that Nollywood films contain stories that give people from the African diaspora a 'home' to celebrate as they live in America. You are being asked to participate in this study because you identify as an African immigrant and because you have indicated that you watch Nollywood films using YouTube. This will be your opportunity to discuss your experiences since your arrival in the United States. As your stories are a vital part of the story of America, your experiences will play a role in educating others about the unique challenges and triumphs of Africans in America and the legacy you create for yourselves and future generations.

There are no financial/monetary benefits for participation in this study.

Procedure: Your involvement in this study will consist primarily of a film viewing followed by a group discussion of three to ten individuals about the film, your immigrant experiences, and how the film’s subject matter relates to your experiences. The focus group viewing and discussions will include open-ended questions and will last approximately 180 minutes (approximately 90 to 100 minutes for the film and 80 to 90 minutes for discussion). Depending on the length of the film and the flow of the discussion, participation may take longer than 180 minutes. Focus groups will be recorded using either a smart phone equipped with a digital recording device or with a video camera. There is a possibility for individual follow-up interviews that will be conducted via email or via electronic messaging (Skype, etc). I will determine whether additional information is needed in order to accurately tell your stories in the final project based on this study.

Please note that you must be age 18 or over in order to participate in this study.

Voluntary nature: All involvement is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions with which you are uncomfortable. You may decide to skip questions. Also, you may choose to end your participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. You may also choose not to participate in follow-up interviews. The decision to participate is entirely yours. You are under no obligation to participate. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

Confidentiality Protection: In order to provide the utmost credibility to this study, I ask your permission to use your actual age, country of origin, and current city of residence in future
research reports. You will not be identified by name in these research reports. Other names will be used throughout the report. If you indicate that you wish for your name to be used, only your first name will be used in reporting.

Please note that every good faith effort will be made to protect your privacy. However, because this is a group setting, full and complete privacy may be difficult. All participants will be asked to respect the privacy of each of the members of the focus group. If you are uncomfortable in any way, you may choose to end your participation at any time.

I will keep all records that identify you by name in a secure location. Data from electronic surveys, focus group and interview notes, audio or video files (focus group events and interviews will be recorded), and all hard/physical copies of informed consent will be stored on a password protected personal laptop, external storage drives, and/or in a locked file cabinet in my home. Only I will have access to the laptop and external storage drives. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked file in my home. Only I will have access to this file.

**Risks:** All interview questions will be related to your experiences as an immigrant in America and your consumption of Nollywood films on YouTube. While I do not anticipate any physical, legal, or economic risks to you during this process, there is a chance that discussing your lived experience may bring about memories or experiences that you do not wish to discuss. In order to ensure that you are completely comfortable during this process, I will respect your desire not to answer any question with which you are uncomfortable. I will also respect your desire to end participation whenever you choose. Refer to the previous paragraph for the procedures that will be put in place to protect against a breach of confidentiality. If you feel you need to speak with a counselor after completing this survey, you can find counseling services at the following locations:

The George Washington University Community Counseling Services Center
2134 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20052
202-994-8645

Carruth Center, West Virginia University
390 Birch Street
Morgantown, WV 26505
304-293-9355

The University Counseling Center
119 University Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
412-648-7930

Counseling Center, Bowling Green State University
104 College Park Office Building
Bowling Green, OH 43403
Counseling Center, University of Toledo
Rocket Hall, Room 1810
2801 W. Bancroft Street
Toledo, OH 43606
419-530-2426

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints about the study, you may contact me at tarthur@bgsu.edu or 703-868-8366. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Radhika Gajjala at radhik@bgsu.edu or 419-372-0586. Also, you may contact the Chair of the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Research Board at hsrb@bgsu.edu or 419-372-7716. You may keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Thank you for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

____________________________________
Participant Signature
Informed Consent for “The Re-Imagined Paradise” Interview Subjects

Introduction: I, Tori O. Arthur, am a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University in the School of Cultural and Critical Studies’ American Culture Studies program. I am being guided in my research by Dr. Radhika Gajjala of Bowling Green State University. I am currently researching how African immigrants in the U.S. (regardless of country of origin) employ digital media to reconnect with 'home.'

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore how these immigrants become 'digital citizens' of a universal Africa through watching Nigerian (Nollywood) films on YouTube. I anticipate this research will show that Nollywood films contain stories that give people from the African diaspora a 'home' to celebrate as they live in America. You are being asked to participate in this study because you identify as an African immigrant and because you have indicated that you watch Nollywood films using YouTube. This will be your opportunity to discuss your experiences since your arrival in the United States. As your stories are a vital part of the story of America, your experiences will play a role in educating others about the unique challenges and triumphs of Africans in America and the legacy you create for yourselves and future generations.

There are no financial/monetary benefits for participating in this study.

Procedure: Your involvement in this study will consist primarily of face-to-face interviews that will include open-ended questions and will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews will take place in a location of your choosing. The interview will be recorded with a smart phone equipped with a digital recording device or with a video camera. A minimum of one interview and a maximum of three face-to-face interviews may take place. I will determine, based on your level of comfort and your schedule, the number of interviews that will take place. Some interviews will include a film viewing followed by a discussion about the film, your immigrant experiences, and how the film’s subject matter relates to your experiences. These interviews will last approximately 180 minutes (approximately 90 to 100 minutes for the film and 80 to 90 minutes for discussion). Depending on the length of the film and the flow of the discussion, participation may take longer than 180 minutes. There is a possibility for follow-up interviews that will be conducted via email or via electronic messaging (Skype, etc) based on your comfort level, schedule, and location. I will determine whether additional information is needed in order to accurately tell your stories in the final project based on this study.

Please note that you must be age 18 or over in order to participate in this study.

Voluntary nature: All involvement is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions with which you are uncomfortable. You may decide to skip questions. Also, you may choose to end your participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. You may also choose not to participate in follow up interviews. The decision to participate is entirely yours. You are under no obligation to participate. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University.
Confidentiality Protection: In order to provide the utmost credibility to this study, I ask your permission to use your actual age, country of origin, and current city of residence in future research reports. You will not be identified by name in these research reports. Other names will be used throughout the report. If you indicate that you wish for your name to be used, only your first name will be used in reporting. I will keep all records that identify you by name in a secure location. Data from electronic surveys, focus group and interview notes, audio or video files (focus group events and interviews will be recorded), and all hard/physical copies of informed consent will be stored on a password protected personal laptop, external storage drives, and/or in a locked file cabinet in my home. Only I will have access to the laptop and external storage drives. Any handwritten notes will be kept in a locked file in my home. Only I will have access to this file.

Risks: All interview questions will be related to your experiences as an immigrant in America and your consumption of Nollywood films on YouTube. While I do not anticipate any physical, legal, or economic risks to you during this process, there is a chance that discussing your lived experience may bring about memories or experiences that you do not wish to discuss. In order to ensure that you are completely comfortable during this process, I will respect your desire not to answer any question with which you are uncomfortable. I will also respect your desire to end participation whenever you choose. Refer to the previous paragraph for the procedures that will be put in place to protect against a breach of confidentiality. If you feel you need to speak with a counselor after completing this survey, you can find counseling services at the following locations:

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**Contact Information:** If you have any questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints about the study, you may contact me at tarthur@bgsu.edu or 703-868-8366. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Radhika Gajjala at radhik@bgsu.edu or 419-372-0586. Also, you may contact the Chair of the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Research Board at hsrb@bgsu.edu or 419-372-7716. You may keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Thank you for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

___________________________________________
Participant Signature