Nollywood in the Diaspora:
An exploratory study on transnational aesthetics

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## CONTENT

Preface 1  
Acknowledgments 2  

1. **INTRODUCTION** 3  

1.1 **Introduction** 3  

1.2 **Methodology** 4  

1.2.1 **Research purpose and method** 4  

1.2.1.1 Research purpose, relevance and structure 4  

1.2.1.2 Research subjects 5  

1.2.1.3 Research method 8  

1.2.1.4 Source-criticism 8  

1.2.2 **Theoretical frame** 9  

1.3 **Empirical context** 14  

1.3.1 **Nollywood** 14  

1.3.1.1 Cinematographic production 14  

1.3.1.2 Film consumption: Cinema, TV and the *home video* 15  

1.3.1.3 Nigerian *home video* 16  

   a. Development of the industry 16  

   b. Production: making film with minimal budgets 17  

   c. Distribution: a never seen spread on the continent 19  

   d. Content and form: African film made by Africans 22  

   e. Transnational dimension of Nollywood 25  

1.3.2 **Nigerian Diaspora** 27  

1.3.2.1 Pre-colonial migration 27  

   a. Hausa migration 27  

   b. Religious migration 28  

   c. Slave trade 28  

1.3.2.2 Nigerian migration in 20\textsuperscript{th} – 21\textsuperscript{st} century 28  

   a. Context 28  

   b. Prostitution 30  

   c. Bad reputation 31  

   d. Causes of migration 32  

   e. Diasporic communities 34
2. CASE STUDIES: Nollywood made in Europe 39

2.1 Transnational subjects 40

2.1.1 Pioneers: Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran 40
2.1.2 The show must go on: Isaac Izoya 43
2.1.3 Spiritual and social outreach: John Osas Omoregie 46
2.1.4 Satire: Azubuike Erinugha 48

2.2 Nature of the transnational practice 52

2.2.1 Aim 52

2.2.1.1 Celebrate Nigerian contemporary culture 52
2.2.1.2 Inform and educate the people 53
2.2.1.3 Promote integration 55

2.2.2 Film 56

2.2.2.1 Nollywood 57
2.2.2.2 Realism vs. the supernatural 58
2.2.2.3 Portraying the immigrant experience: drama vs. comedy 60
2.2.2.4 Life in the diaspora 64
   a. Crime 66
   b. Personal experience 67

2.2.3 Projects 69

2.2.3.1 Nigerian Entertainment: European tours 69
2.2.3.2 Khamileon 71
2.2.3.3 Social and religious outreach 72

2.3 Publics and scales 75

2.3.1 Nigeria 75
2.3.2 Europe 79

2.3.2.1 The Netherlands 79
2.3.2.2 Germany 81

2.3.3 The diaspora 84
2.3.4 The City 87
2.3.5 Christianity 89
2.4 Transnational aesthetics: Nollywood made abroad

2.4.1 Visual style
2.4.2 Setting
2.4.3 Transnational spaces
2.4.4 Performance art

3. CONCLUSION

Videoography
References
Appendix
   A. Interview Tony Akinyemi & Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran
   B. Interview Azubuike Erinugha
   C. Interview Isaac Izoya
   D. Interview John Omoregie
   E. Film covers
PREFACE

African film has always interested me. I have been working as a volunteer for the past seven years at the Cinema Novo festival in Bruges. This ‘Third World’ cinema festival shows films from Asia, South-America and Africa, although the African contribution has always been a little scarce. I learned about Nollywood, however, only two years ago when I was on holiday in Uganda. Wherever I came in that country, in hotels, in restaurants, at people’s homes, I noticed people watching ‘Nigerian movies’. Some were huge fans, others loathed the films but nevertheless, everyone was watching them. The success of these Nigerian-made films fascinated me enormously and I have grown to be quite an admirer. I admit it took me some time to get used to the specific Nollywood style, but I now regularly watch them. For my Bachelor paper last year, I decided to focus on Nollywood and I wrote my paper with the title ‘Kan de home video een alternatief bieden voor eigen filmcultuur in Afrika? Case studie: Nollywood’ While working on that paper I saw the documentary NOLLYWOOD ABROAD by Saartje Geerts. The documentary is a personal portrait of John Osas Omorogie, a Nigerian immigrant making Nollywood films in Antwerp. I wondered if he was the only one. After some research I knew I had found myself a subject for my master thesis.
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4. INTRODUCTION

4.1 Introduction

The Nigerian home video industry, more commonly known as Nollywood, emerged locally in the early nineties. It has now grown to be the second biggest producing film industry in the world, releasing no less than 1500 films a year. The films are very popular and rapidly reached an audience far beyond Nigerian borders, all over Africa and the diaspora. Nigerians are a very mobile people and constitute the majority of the African diaspora in Europe. Every year thousands of Nigerians make the journey overseas to try their luck in Europe. In the last 10 years the Nigerian diaspora worldwide has been gradually integrated in the Nollywood industry. It has become quite popular to partly shoot films abroad, often in collaboration with western-based Nigerians. Nigerians living in the diaspora, who don’t want to miss out on the success of this blooming industry, have equally taken up the initiative themselves to produce their own films. Having migrated to the West and experiencing life in the diaspora, they feel the urge to tell their stories. Nollywood is a commercial film industry and, because of cheap digital technology and video, has made it possible for many Nigerians to express themselves. Even immigrants are now able to have a voice through film. Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran, Isaac Izoya, John Osas Omoregie and Azubuike Erinugha are five of these dispersed Nollywood filmmakers, living in western Europe, more specifically in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. For them Nollywood has become a means of communication that crosses boundaries. Not only do they write/direct/produce films, they also feel it as their special mission to bring Europe and Africa a little closer, through various ‘cultural and social projects’. The practice of the five protagonists, three individuals and one partnership, will be placed within the frame work of transnationalism and diasporic film making.
4.2 Methodology:

4.2.1 Research purpose and method

4.2.1.1 Research purpose, relevance and structure

The purpose of this Master thesis is, firstly, to ‘map’ or describe the Nollywood filmmaking scene in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. Particular attention will be given to their individual diasporic situation and the other cultural and social projects they are involved with. Departing from the frame of transnational film, I will try to unravel the different transnational dimensions that are present in the work of these individuals. In different chapters the following questions will be asked:

- To what extent are the filmmakers themselves transnational subjects?
- What is the nature and purpose of their work?
- What transnational publics and scales do they integrate in their media projects?
- What is the nature of the transnational aesthetics present in their films?

In this thesis I intend to bring into picture the multiple publics and spaces that are involved in the transnational practices of five Nollywood filmmakers, living in western-Europe, on the levels of production, distribution, content and aesthetics. I will thereby examine how these protagonists negotiate the various cultural and national boundaries they cross. I will argue that the transnational nature of their work exists in the integration of the local reality of their immediate diasporic lives in the tradition of Nollywood. Nollywood has a preoccupation with local realities, and I will look at how these are translated differently by the protagonists, in their films as well as in their other projects. Central is the immigrant experience which seems to entail the constant dichotomy between life abroad and life in Nigeria.

I will try to answer following subquestions throughout the thesis:

- What is diasporic about the work of these individuals?
- How is Nigeria present in their practices?
- How are these protagonists and their practices inscribed in the Nollywood tradition?

Finally, with this thesis I argue for a transnational understanding of Nollywood filmmaking in general. Diasporic Nollywood filmmaking is inextricably bound up with a transnational
Nollywood, as a broader term that includes regional, national and local specificities that cross Nigeria’s borders.

In line with the ambition of Ginsburg, Abu-lughod and Larkin to ‘Remap media’, diasporic Nollywood filmmakers, albeit in the margin, are essential to today’s study of transnational film and media. Today, there is still a lack of interest for alternative circuits of media production in the discourse of transnational media. Popular forms of media, like Nollywood, are furthermore dismissed because they are claimed to be ‘sociologically insignificant’. This thesis asserts the importance of the work of these diasporic Nollywood filmmakers, who, through their transnational practices have created new spaces and networks that not only connect different African communities throughout Europe but also strengthen the ties between Nigeria and the African diaspora. Nollywood and the diaspora are changing rapidly, they are both worlds where people come and go all the time. It is therefore important that such practices be researched and documented, for they will evolve quickly or disappear all together in the future. Some research has been done on Nollywood filmmaking in the US and the UK, but the actual scene in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium is a story that has never been told, and it has proofs to be surprisingly rich.

The thesis consists of three main parts. In the large introductory part, the methodology and research purpose of this thesis is explained, followed by an outline of the theoretical frame of transnationalism. Furthermore, two introductory chapters are written on Nollywood and the Nigerian diaspora, as those are two themes central to this thesis. In the second and main part of the thesis, the various transnational dimensions of the work of the five diasporic filmmakers mentioned above, will be examined. In four chapters different elements are brought into focus in an attempt to completely grasp the meaning of their lives and work. The thesis ends with a conclusion that will try to provide some answers to the questions asked in this introduction.

4.2.1.2 Research subjects

This thesis focuses on the work of three individual producers/directors and one partnership, whom I will refer to as the protagonists in this thesis. They are Nigerian immigrants living in The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany who are all engaged in Nollywood filmmaking and other projects. Kenneth Oviahon was once active in Amsterdam, with his production company Comic Relief. He recently passed away in Torino and his contribution will therefore not be discussed here. He does act in some of the films of the five protagonists. The choice of the

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1 ABU-LUGHOD, L., GINSBURG, F.D., LARKIN, B. (e.d.), Media Worlds, California, University of California press, 2002, p.14
countries was primarily made for practical reasons as it made it possible to cover all people involved in diasporic Nollywood filmmaking. In other countries in Europe with a significant Nigerian community, Nollywood productions are also being made, as is the case in Italy. The countries were chosen because of their geographical proximity and thus because of the networks they constitute. The protagonists also know and inspire each other. These are moreover countries that do not have a strongly defined ‘national film culture’. The UK was very consciously excluded from this research because Nollywood embodies an entirely different scene there. When asked about the Nollywood scene in the UK, the protagonists of this thesis all agreed that it is a world on its own, more intensely intertwined with the Nigerian-based film industry than they are. In the UK, Nigerians are present, mostly centred round London, in far larger numbers than anywhere else in Europe as the UK and Nigeria share the same language and colonial history. Talking about the Nollywood scene Azubuike Erinugha said: “London? Oh London is Lagos”.

Tony A.B. Akinyemi aka Tony Holland and Leonard Ajayi-Odekhiran aka Khamileon together make up Double ‘A’ Entertainment, a production company based in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Tony and Leonard, respectively from Ondo state and Edo state, travelled West in the early nineties. Like many of their peers at that time they left for Europe looking for a greener pasture. They were both active in the entertainment sector back in Nigeria, Tony as an actor and Leonard as a dancer. They picked up on Nollywood in Europe and felt they too had a story to tell. They made the first Nollywood movie ever to be shot in Europe: UNDER PRESSURE in 1998. The film was a success and so the two men paved the way for other Nigerians in Europe to follow in their footsteps. They continued to make more films: DAPO JUNIOR, HOLLAND HEAT, FROM AMSTERDAM WITH LOVE, and their most recent Edo-film VBE ETI HOLLAND. They have invited Nollywood stars from Nigeria to star in some of their productions. Tony and Leonard write, direct, and even act in all their films. Central themes in their work are the immigrant experience and mixed marriages. They are well integrated in the Dutch community and include a lot of local, non-Nigerian actors in their films. Additionally, Tony and Leonard have invited Nigerian music artists and have organized tours with them all around Europe.

Isaac Izoya is all about entertainment. In his early twenties he left Edo state to travel overseas. On his way to Denmark, he ended up staying in Germany. After living in Frankfurt for a while,

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3 DAPO JUNIOR (Netherlands: Tony A.B. Akinyemi, 2000)
4 HOLLAND HEAT (Netherlands: Tony A.B. Akinyemi, 2002)
5 FROM AMSTERDAM WITH LOVE (Netherlands: Tony A.B. Akinyemi, 2003)
he has now made Berlin his second home. Living abroad Isaac first made his living as a journalist for *African Courier Magazine*. He entered into the movie business as an actor, in the movie *SINNERS IN THE HOUSE* in 2003. Founder and president of his own organization and production company Ehoziya Golden Entertainment he is determined to spread Nigerian culture in the world. He has produced and starred in several Nollywood movies made in Germany, most of them in collaboration with the renowned Nollywood director Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen. Above all this, Isaac is a show promoter and has toured Nigerian Nollywood stars, musicians and comedians around Europe in more than twenty cities. Isaac is driven in all his projects by his will to change Nigeria’s reputation, promote Nigerian culture and promote integration.

**John Osas Omoregie** left Benin city, Edo state in 2000. Passing through Spain he settled in the city of Antwerp, Belgium, a city he has made his own. Inspired by *UNDER PRESSURE* produced by Double “A” Entertainment he made his first film in 2003, about the situation abroad for African migrants. He has put together the group ANAABEL, the association of Nigerian actors and actresses in Belgium, a recognized and subsidized non-profit organization. As a team of cast and crew they have continued to make religiously inspired films with a strong message: *DESPERATE HEART*, *MAMA WHY ME? I&II* and *AMAZING WORLD*. He works closely with a Nigerian production team that shoots his ‘Nigerian ’scenes for him. In 2009 John started the Jomosa International Foundation, a charitable organization to help people in need.

**Azubuike Erinugha** aka Zubi is a Nigerian director currently living in Brussels, Belgium. Azubuike is well-travelled. He left Nigeria in 1997 and has since lived in the US, Canada and Germany. He lived in Germany up to 2009 where he taught business English at the university of Cooperative Studies in Erfurt. Azubuike is a writer, producer and film director. Several literary works of him have been published. He made his first Nollywood film living in Nigeria, *CHOICES* in 1996. He is a member of *Towncrier International*, a Canadian-based production company. Other films he worked on are *THE PLUMBER* and *THE ASYLUM*. These films were all shot in Nigeria. *THE CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTSMAN*, which premiered in Berlin in April 2010, is his first production overseas. It is equally the first German-Nollywood coproduction, in cooperation with InterArte, a German artists collective. With this movie the issue of migration

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6 *SINNERS IN THE HOUSE* (Nigeria/Germany: Lancelot Imasuen, 2003)
7 *DESPERATE HEART* (Belgium/Nigeria: John Osas Omoregie, 2007)
8 *MAMA WHY ME? I&II* (Belgium/Nigeria: John Osas Omoregie, 2008)
9 *AMAZING WORLD* (Belgium: John Osas Omoregie, 2010)
10 *CHOICES* (Nigeria: Azubuike Erinugha, 1996)
12 *THE ASYLUM* (Nigeria: Azubuike Erinugha, 2007)
13 *THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN* (Germany/Nigeria: Azubuike Erinugha, 2010)
has become Azubuike’s primary concern. His literary work and scripts are overall characterized by comedy and satire.

4.2.1.3 Research method

This thesis is a qualitative empirical study made through the meeting and interviewing of the five filmmakers. Interviews were held at their homes in the period of April - July 2010. The interviews were recorded and transcribed (see appendix). In the interviews the protagonists were questioned about their personal migration experience and about their films and other cultural projects they are involved with. Similar questions were asked to all of them. Through these interviews I was able to start out from the perspective of the protagonists, whose words I will quote extensively. In addition, my own point of view is integrated through my personal interpretation of the films. I had copies of almost all the films these filmmakers had made, and made close analyses. Although I consider myself part of the Nollywood audience, the analyses are nevertheless coloured by my own ‘western’ background. Some films I watched together with their makers in their homes, of others I just saw fragments as those films were still in post-production or had not yet been released. I additionally had access to audiovisual material on some of the cultural projects that will be discussed.

4.2.1.4 Source-criticism

In recent years, Nollywood has attracted the attention of scholars and film fans worldwide. Considerable academic research has been made in the United States, France and Germany, especially from within the field of anthropology. Two whole volumes on Nollywood were published in 2000 by Haynes, and in 2008 by Barlet. In 2009 A conference titled ‘Nollywood and Beyond: transnational dimensions of an African video film industry’ was held in Mainz, Germany in 2009, organized by Matthias Krings and Onookome Oome. The conference was about the role of the diaspora in Nollywood and provided me some useful articles. Literature on diasporic Nollywood consumption exists, but there is hardly any on diasporic production. Claudia Hoffmann has written an interesting essay on Nollywood filmmaking in the US and Jonathan Haynes has written about the imagery of abroad in both diaspora-made and Nigeria-made Nollywood films. Apart from a few vague mentions, academic literature on the actual Nollywood filmmaking activity in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, is non-existent.

I could get my hands on all the films I wanted to use for this thesis. There was one difficulty, however, that hindered my understanding of the films to some extent. Most film are partially in pidgin English, which I do not understand very well. Consequently, I missed the content of some of the dialogues.
4.2.2 Theoretical frame

Ginsburg, Larkin and Abu-Lughod stressed the importance of mass media and its influence on individuals. Over the last twenty years an “anthropology of media” has emerged that studies the impact of all media on everyday life. Many forms of ‘alternative’ media were being ignored by conventional Media Studies. Circuits of consumption like illegal cable and internet are disregarded and cross-cultural work was neglected as only dominant industries were studied. Through new audiovisual technology, however, a lot of people at the margin are now able to raise their voice, however small scale their production or reach. Larkin argues that this democratization of communication technology that came in the 1990s has led to the creation of a more diverse, informal and fragmented media production and consumption, which he calls ‘small media’. These technologies have blurred borders between nations and created a subculture that is a ‘culture of access’ that functions outside of the hands of the state, or any kind of centralized control. These ‘alternative’ media are situated somewhere between the local and the global and ask for new theoretical frames to study film.

Ezra and Rowden and Shohat and Stam propose the concept of the ‘transnational’ as “the global forces that link people or institutions across nations,” in film studies. The ‘transnational is no defined category but a frame that offers a perspective on film cultures. It has become an important concept in a world where nations are no longer the only organizing forces for people to be in the world. The globe is, on the contrary, characterized by the flows of nations and culture through migration, tourism, terrorism, technology etc. whereby borders seem to be fading slowly. In cinema the concept of ‘national cinema’ has been the subject of debate for the last 20 years. After all, cinema has been equally characterized by weak borders and a great mobility since its existence. A production generally involves several different ‘nations’ as to the setting, the nationalities of cast and crew, the production, etc. However, with the advent of the global economic market and new communication technology, the concept of ‘national cinema’ has become even more inapplicable. Never before have films so easily crossed borders. Characteristics of this transnational film culture are:

14 ABU-LUGHOD, L., GINSBURG, F.D., LARKIN, B. (e.d.), o.c., p.1
15 Idem, p.2
16 Idem, p.3
17 EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), Transnational cinema, the film reader, New York, Routledge, 2006, p.6
18 EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), o.c., p.1
19 Idem, p.5
20 VAN GORP, J., ‘Wat is nationaal aan nationale cinema’ in: Tijdschrift voor communicatiewetenschap, vol.38, no.1, pp. 53-67
films whose aesthetic and narrative dynamics, and even the modes of emotional identification they elicit, reflect the impact of advanced capitalism and new media technologies as components of an increasingly interconnected world-system.²¹

The concept of the ‘transnational’ can seem vague and empty. Is not every cultural product in a way transnational?

...the term ‘transnational’ is, on occasion, used simply to indicate international co-production or collaboration between technical and artistic personnel from across the world, without any real consideration of what the aesthetic, political or economic implications of such transnational collaboration might mean – employing a difference [from the ‘national’] that, we might say, makes no difference at all.²²

Nevertheless, it reflects both “the scale, distribution and diversity of such exchanges,”²³ and its impact on a local and global level, better than the frequently used concept of ‘globalization’, argue Higbee and Lim. The ‘transnational’ does not merely oppose itself to the ‘national’.²⁴ The nation has played an important part in the development of film and media and still does today. The Nigerian home video industry, for example, can be looked at from different perspectives. The industry is transnational, for it is a collection of regional production industries and its production and distribution system crosses national boundaries. Nollywood is also very ‘national’, as Hoffmann has noted, for it has become a symbol of national pride and it represents “issues, conflicts, and tensions that are specific to a contemporary Nigerian reality.”²⁵ Nollywood has brought Nigerians all over the world together and has created new economic opportunities in the country. Nevertheless, the transnational is more inclusive as it does not ignore the national dimension and above that, acknowledges other realities, as sometimes urban centres are more significant to film cultures than a nation.

The transnational offers solutions for problematic categories like Third World Cinema or World cinema. These are labels that still had some credibility in the period of the cold war, where the world was divided in capitalism, communism and the so-called ‘third worlds’. Third World cinema equally constitutes a problem when it comes to its individual representatives, as most world cinema ‘auteurs’ were and are formed in the West.²⁶ Although the concept seems to

²¹ EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), o.c., p.1
²³ Idem, p12
²⁴ EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), o.c., p.2
²⁶ EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), o.c., p.4
have lost its meaning today it does have a historical value as it is a sign of the existence of a rich film culture in Asia, Africa and Latin-America, that is different from the dominant western film industry.\textsuperscript{27} Equally problematic in the concept of \textit{Third World cinema} is the fact that it generally tends to exclude all popular forms of film production. The \textit{home video} industries in for example Nigeria and Ghana are ignored because they are commercial and do not fit into the so called category of ‘African cinema’, defined by international festivals.\textsuperscript{28}

The transnational opposes itself to the \textit{post-colonial} as, according to Ezra and Rowden:

\begin{quote}
...post-colonialism loses its conceptual coherence when it is called upon to provide analytical grounding for situations that do not have or that have not been defined exclusively by the imperial or colonial pre-histories of which it has functioned as a deconstructive critique. (...) And increasingly, this real world is being defined not by its colonial past (or even its neo-colonial present), but by its technological future, in which previously disenfranchised people will gain ever greater access to the means of global representation.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Transnational cinema is situated in between cultures, somewhere between the local and the global, where concerns about \textit{cultural purity} and \textit{authenticity} are no longer essential.\textsuperscript{30} The existing criticism of a so-called lack of authenticity, according to Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin, “reflect the changing status of “culture,” which is increasingly objectified and mediated as it becomes a source of claims for political and human rights both nationally and on the world stage.”\textsuperscript{31} This notion of culture is, however, replaced by Appadurai in favour of the concept ‘culturalism’ that embodies “the mobilization of identities of which mass media and the imagination play an increasingly significant role.”\textsuperscript{32} This concern with cultural purity coincides with the criticism of the devastating influence of American culture in popular transnational media production. Media anthropology and transnational studies, however, choose to adopt a more positive attitude, without ever denying its failures.

Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’\textsuperscript{33} is an influential concept in media and film studies, as “…media (...) play crucial roles in producing nations and shaping national imaginaries.”\textsuperscript{34} The transnational frame calls for a revision of Benedict Anderson’s theory of ‘imagined

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{27} Idem, p.5 \\
\textsuperscript{28} ABU-LUGHOD, L., GINSBURG, F.D., LARKIN, B. (e.d.), \textit{a.w}, p.15 \\
\textsuperscript{29} EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), \textit{o.c.}, p.5 \\
\textsuperscript{30} Idem, p.4 \\
\textsuperscript{31} ABU-LUGHOD, L., GINSBURG, F.D., LARKIN, B. (e.d.), \textit{a.w}, p.9 \\
\textsuperscript{32} Ibidem \\
\textsuperscript{34} ABU-LUGHOD, L., GINSBURG, F.D., LARKIN, B. (e.d.), \textit{a.w}, p.11
\end{flushright}
communities. Shohat and Stam argue that, “by facilitating a mediated engagement with distant places, the media partially deteritorialize the process of imagining communities.”

Ezra and Rowden do not reject Anderson’s concept but rather, demand a revision of the term to come to a “postnational version of the “imagined community”. They acknowledge the influence media has on identity construction, that, in line with Anderson’s theory, is constructed in the imaginary and does not directly respond to the lived experience. Ezra and Rowden want to break away from the national context, however, to include transnational imagined communities, present for example in the films of diasporic filmmakers. Similarly Mei-hui Yang stated with regard to Chinese media that, “The mass media are vehicles for imagining not only to the nation, as elaborated by Benedict Anderson (1991), but also the larger space beyond the national borders.”

Higbee and Lim distinguish three approaches in the study of film under the frame of the ‘transnational’. Firstly, the transnational is opposed to the ‘limiting’ national, in studying production, distribution and exhibition of films. Secondly, the transnational is looked on as a regional phenomenon, studying film cultures that share some kind of cultural heritage that crosses national boundaries. Thirdly, the transnational is approached from the angle of diaspora, exile and postcolonialism, “which aims, through its analysis of the cinematic representation of cultural identity, to challenge the western (neocolonial) construct of nation and national culture.” The focus lies on diasporic filmmaking in the West, “aware of power relations between centre/margin, insider/outisder, as well as the continual negotiation between the global and the local...” The most notable writers on diasporic filmmaking are Naficy and Marks. Their theories are based on independent, experimental filmmaking, situated in the margin. The films are marked by narratives of migration, loss and displacement. They do not include popular or commercial modes of film production in the diaspora. Naficy proposed the concept of ‘accented cinema’, which includes exilic, diasporic and postcolonial filmmakers that work in the West. He opposes accented cinema to the dominant film culture, whether national or Hollywood, of the host nation, “it signifies upon them and criticizes them.”

35 ANDERSON, Benedict, Imagined Communities
36 SHOHAT, E., STAM, R. (e.d.), Multiculturalism, post-colonialism, and transnational media, New Brunswick, Rutgers university press, 2003, p.1
37 EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), o.c., p.8
39 HIGBEE, W., LIM, S. H., o.c., p.9
40 Ibidem
41 Ibidem, p.13
Naficy’s theory ignores any possibility that the home country of the film makers could have a well established film culture.

Claudia Hoffman has placed Nollywood films produced in the US, and more particularly set in New York, under Naficy’s concept of ‘accented cinema’. She adapted his theory to these films to reflect how much they integrate the filmmaker’s own immigrant existence. In the use of space and the portrayal of the city, Naficy’s ‘accented’ themes are clearly present: alienation, journeying, hope and loss.43 She argues “in favor of an “accented Nollywood cinema” that uses the city as a cinematic site within which the transnational identity of the filmmaker and the diasporic mode of production manifest themselves.”44

However much globalization and its consequences are considered in a positive light in the context of Nollywood, the devastating effects must not be overlooked. However much the flow of cultural influence and new hybrid production may be celebrated, it must not be forgotten that “the growing invisibility of autonomous local voices linked to local publics is as much a critical consequence of globalization in its dominant manifestations as the disappearance of cultural forms considered in some way traditional.”45

43 HOFFMANN, C., o.c.
44 Idem, p. 3
4.3 Empirical context

4.3.1 Nollywood

The Nigerian film industry is unique in its production and distribution system. It focuses solely on the spread of productions on different types of home videos (VHS cassettes, VCD’s and DVD’s). The films are not shown in cinemas and hence the name home video industry. In addition, the films are made with new digital technology and are not shot on celluloid. The cinema of Nigeria is known as Nollywood, derived from the industries Hollywood and Bollywood.

4.3.1.1 Cinematographic production

Film and Africa in general have always had a somewhat problematic relationship. Producing a film in Africa is a difficult task. The few people who do succeed barely get the opportunity to show their films on their own continent. Film was introduced by the western colonizer in the early twentieth century in two ways. Firstly, films were made about Africa, mostly documentaries, for the country of the colonizer. The films showed a wild Africa and promoted colonization. Secondly, film was used to promote western values and educate the local population in the colonies about issues like hygiene and nutrition. After independence Africans started making films for the first time. As there was no support from their own governments young filmmakers relied heavily on support of the former colonizers, and they still do today. This situation upholds a certain ideological dependence on the West. The more money that is put into a film, the more it becomes dependent on the market. This market is primarily situated in the West. African productions are rarely seen by Africans themselves because of the lack of a decent infrastructure and financial means. But also the Western market is very limited. A few films reach specialized festivals, but are rarely taken up in the programs of regular cinemas. Support from African governments remains scarce, with some exceptions, primarily South Africa and Burkina Faso. In francophone Africa film directors have succeeded, with help of the French, in building a small but qualitative auteur cinema. Through lack of its own production industry Africa, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, cannot escape cultural imperialism of countries like the US and India.

Nigeria produced but a few cinematographic productions after its independence. Originally, members of the Yoruba theatre were the main initiators. They experimented with celluloid

46 CONVENTS, Guido, Afrika Verbeeld, Berchem, EPO, 2003, pp.11-12
47 Idem, p.13-14
48 Idem, p. 7-8
49 Idem, p. 140
50 Idem, pp. 143-144
and started recording some of their performances. A second generation of directors was trained in the West. In 1970 the first feature film was made on 35mm, KONGI’S HARVEST by Wole Soyinka. The director Ola Balogun was the only Nigerian to achieve international reputation, partly due to his film education in France. In the eighties the production of films on celluloid came to a halt.

4.3.1.2 Film consumption: Cinema, TV and home video

A cinema-going culture in Nigeria existed to a certain extent in the larger cities until the mid-eighties. In the few cinemas that remained in Nigeria after Independence, imported films were shown, mostly from the US, India and Hong Kong. Besides this, the population could watch whatever the government chose to broadcast on television. Nigeria was the first African nation where TV made its entrance (1959) and it was an example to other countries for its high percentage of own productions. Nevertheless, foreign programs were shown, especially American and British soaps and South-American telenovellas. After the mid-eighties, the cinema going culture ceased to exist. The economy collapsed and crime rate went up. There was no money to maintain the cinemas and a general sense of insecurity, especially of night life, dominated the streets. Cinemas were abandoned and later transformed into churches, schools or shops. It is precisely at this point that the home video as a medium made its entrance in Nigeria. Those who could afford it had now access to a whole range of imported films and film thus became a domestic matter. In the North of Nigeria, around the city of Kano, a certain cinema culture has survived up to today. Indian films are very popular and are shown on 35mm in cinemas. Due to strict Islamic rule and the Sharia law, nightlife is relatively safe in the North. Since 2000, however, women no longer have the right to go to the cinema. Millions of women now form the ideal audience for the home video. In the South of

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52 KONGI’S HARVEST (Nigeria: Wole Soyinka, 1970)
56 Ibidem
57 EBEWO, Patrick J., o.c., pp. 46-58
58 BARROT, P., o.c., p.20
59 LARKIN, B., o.c., p. 209
Nigeria a few new cinemas have sprung up in the last couple of years. They are multiplexes owned by Lebanese and South African companies.\(^61\)

4.3.1.3 Nigerian home video

However, a few years later Nigerians took the camera into their own hands and initiated a new home video industry. The official beginning of Nollywood is generally situated in 1992 with the release of the film LIVING IN BONDAGE\(^62\) from director Kenneth Nnebue. The film was an enormous success and sold about 200,000 copies on video cassette.\(^63\) Promptly a veritable film industry emerged, developing itself completely independent of every form of support. According to recent UNESCO research (2009), Nollywood is the biggest producing film industry, after the Indian Bollywood and before the American Hollywood.\(^64\) The numbers are impressive. On a yearly basis about 1,500 films are released. On average, 37,000 copies of a film are sold. The films are extremely popular in Nigeria, on the rest of the African continent and in the African diaspora. The Nollywood industry furthermore employs about 200,000 people.\(^65\) According to Madu Chikwendu, one of the leading directors in the Nollywood industry, Nollywood embraces four separate industries. The most famous is the English language industry mainly centred round Lagos, and it is to a large extent in the hands of the Igbo population. In the South the Yoruba language production is situated, which has a long tradition in the Yoruba theatre. In the North then, is the Hausa industry, very different through the strong influence of Bollywood and the Islam. Lastly, there are a whole range of smaller productions made in local language in the South, around the Niger Delta, for the most part in Edo languages.\(^66\) As all the protagonists of this thesis are from the South, the northern industry will be almost completely neglected in the discussion, because of the substantial differences. The latter is a successful industry that equally emerged in the early nineties, centered round the city of Kano, and generally not always considered under the name Nollywood. Analogous with Nollywood, some have even given it the name Kanollywood.\(^67\)

a. Development of the industry

\(^{61}\) BARROT, P. (ed.), o.c., p.56
\(^{62}\) LIVING IN BONDAGE (Nigeria: Kenneth Nnebue, 1992)
\(^{63}\) BARROT, Pierre (ed.), o.c., p.18
\(^{65}\) Cijfers van het NFVCB uit: BARROT, Pierre (ed.), o.c., p 32-40
\(^{67}\) NOY, F., o.c., p.79
Nollywood came to exist when profound changes in the organization, control and production of media in Nigeria were taking place. In the late 70s and 80s the Nigerian government, aware of the influence of cultural imperialism, gave people the opportunity to take technical film courses in the West. They hoped to show more Nigerian productions on television. Many members of the Yoruba theatre, disappointed by the difficulties of working on celluloid, went to television. In the late eighties, coerced by the World Bank to follow the Structural Adjustment Programs, the Nigerian government was forced to allow greater privatization in many sectors, including media. It invested less in television. Suddenly, a group of professional television makers were left jobless. The encounter of these people with the new digital technology made Nollywood possible. Later, many others followed in their footsteps. According to Larkin, the privatized character of the home video industry is the result of the integration of the Nigerian economy in the world wide market, which was made possible due to the higher oil revenues.

b. Production: making films with minimal budgets

Technologies are economic instruments that affect everyone in indirect or direct ways. The drawback of globalization is that you can only participate on a world level when you have access to the newest technologies. Not everyone does and this leads to unequal and unfair chances on the global market. Africa finds itself more than once in this position. On the cinematographic market, Africa clearly finds itself at the margin. Digital technology, which includes the hand-held-camera and the possibility of editing on a personal computer, however, has made it possible for Nigeria to establish its own film culture because it is cheap.

‘What we are witnessing today is a democratization of means of production. There’s no doubt about it, working in celluloid was exclusive. If you didn’t have the money, you didn’t have the voice. And suddenly, by shift in technological advancement Nigerians found their voices.’

These are the words of Tunde Kelani, one of the most renowned Nigerian directors. In a way, Nollywood forms an unconscious reaction against cultural imperialism of other dominant nations. Competing with these dominant influences only becomes possible by entering into the system. Video technology made it possible for many Nigerians to make films and as never before to have a voice. Because of the low production cost, they are not financially dependent

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68 LARKIN, B., o.c., p.224
69 Ibidem
70 LARKIN, B., o.c., p.216-217
71 FRIEDMAN, T.L., Globaliseren: aanpassen of verpauperen, Rotterdam, Lemniscaat, 2003, p.58
72 WELCOME TO NOLLYWOOD (USA: Jamie Meltzer, 2007)
73 FRIEDMAN, T.L., o.c., p.97
from western organizations or the government. This creates enormous artistic freedom that is quite rare for a country like Nigeria.

The production process of Nollywood films is characterized by stress and time pressure. To limit the costs and owing to the high rate of competition, a film is made in the least amount of time possible. A film, that can take up to 6 hours, is made in one to two weeks on average. The quality of the movies suffers under these conditions. The quality of the sound is of minor importance. The volume tends to change according to the position of the camera, even during a dialogue. External noises, like cars and other street noise, sometimes make dialogues unintelligible. The lighting is often dark or artificial. A lot of directors are convinced that “their video cameras are good at picking up ambient light,” claims Haynes. A lot of directors work with non-professional actors, for financial reasons. Out of those amateurs, many stars have now risen. There is often barely time for rehearsals and a lot is improvised. The script frequently lies open on the floor during the shooting. Previously used scenes (from other movies) are recycled. Especially establishing shots of streets or skylines are used and reused. The outside scenes are neorealist in the way that the directors literally go outside on the streets to shoot. Passers-by in the films were mostly just passing by in real life. It is not rare to find someone glancing at the camera. This is one of the reasons that most scenes in Nollywood films are shot indoors, because the space is more manageable. Special effects are added with the computer. The director does not have complete control over what is filmed and a lot is left to coincidence. Jeta Amata, considered one of the best Nollywood directors, said in an interview that when in the script, it says it is a sunny day, but on the day of the shooting it is raining, they do not wait but change the script. The films are mostly filmed in the houses of wealthy Nigerians. The director works with the interior he is able to get.

There is a lot of criticism of the industry because of its low technical quality and its commercial nature. Nigerian professor Osofisan considers Nollywood “(...) a multimillion naira business, till their products have almost completely displaced the far more sophisticated, far more technically competent products of Hollywood and Bollywood.” Others like Haynes and

75 EBEWO, Patrick J., o.c., pp.46-58
76 BARROT, P., o.c., p.14
78 Naira is the currency unit of Nigeria.
Barrot\textsuperscript{81} are convinced that the technical quality of Nollywood films are of secondary importance. The strength of Nollywood, according to them, lies in its narratives and dialogue. The film must touch an audience through the intensity of the story and the persuasiveness of the actors. The low visual quality of these \textit{home videos} is not so important, as they are meant to be watched on small TV screens. “Nollywood films are tailored to the small, low-resolution screens on which they appear,”\textsuperscript{82} says Haynes. Nollywood developed out of television rather than cinema and this is still visible. The images are full of close ups. It’s a ‘cinema of faces’.\textsuperscript{83}

The fact that Nigeria (...) doesn’t have any large studios, just a multitude of ‘artisans-bricoleurs’ has guaranteed not only its diversity but also its authenticity. (...) There is an impressive resistance to being structured, constrained and having to adhere to norms. (...) By remaining hand-crafted, dispersed and barely professional, video production keeps its more spontaneous character and remains closer to the public than televised productions or African cinema.\textsuperscript{84}

Nollywood-film productions, with low budgets and simple production values have led to the creation of a unique kind of aesthetics.

c. Distribution: a never seen spread on the continent

They [the marketers] import hardware: videomachines, televisions. They have the videocassettes which we need. You tell the man, “I got a movie and I shot this movie with fifteen thousand dollars. Give me twenty thousand and I’ll give you the master tape.”\textsuperscript{85}

These are the words of Don Pedro Obaseki, producer and director, describing the functioning of the distribution system of Nollywood films. When a director or producer has finished his film, he sells it at a certain prize to a distributor, generally referred to as a marketer. From this moment on, the film is no longer in his hands and further profits are for the distributor. These marketers are generally occupied with more than the distribution of the videos. They tend to ‘direct’ the directors: they provide them with a star actor, give them a success story or an advance on the proceeds.\textsuperscript{86} The films are publicized through an aggressive street marketing (sticking posters anywhere it is possible), advertisements on television and radio and most of all through word of mouth- publicity.\textsuperscript{87} Films are preceded by trailers of other movies from the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[81]{BARROT, P. (e.d.), \textit{o.c.}}
\footnotetext[82]{HAYNES, J., ‘Nollywood in Lagos. Lagos in Nollywood films’ in \textit{Africa Today}, p.130-151}
\footnotetext[83]{Ibidem}
\footnotetext[84]{BARROT, P. (e.d.), \textit{o.c.}, p.58}
\footnotetext[85]{WELCOME TO NOLLYWOOD (USA: Jamie Meltzer, 2007)}
\footnotetext[86]{BARROT, P. (ed.), \textit{o.c.}, p.15}
\end{footnotes}
same distributor. Movie marketing has changed street image in cities like Lagos. On the posters and jackets of films there are no names, only faces. Due to the success of the films, a veritable star system has emerged and this is exploited to the fullest in the marketing. The name of the director is only discretely present on the posters. The name of the distributor, however, gets a prominent place.

The medium video allows the films to be spread on an enormous scale to reach all kinds of audiences in rural and urban areas. It is the first time that African film is being watched and celebrated by a huge African audience. Today VCD’s are the most dominant support, though VHS cassettes still exist and DVDs are making their entrance. Nollywood videos have gained an important value in Nigerian families. According to recent research by the NFVCB, 67% of Nigerian households in urban areas possess a video player. In the whole country there are about 23,000 video clubs that sell and rent videos. Besides that, small vans go around selling videos in more abandoned places. Video clubs organize screenings on television screens for those who do not own video players. Nowadays it is happening more and more that films, especially more expensive productions, are being projected on bigger screens, as a result of the devastating consequences of piracy. The films are projected as premieres when a film has come out and thus the actual distribution on video is put on hold. Almost half of the films (51%) are made in local Nigerian languages. Because of this, argues Ike Oguine, they become accessible to all classes in society. Women are often excluded from cinema going culture in Africa, as it is associated with prostitution. They have become one of the most, if not the most important audience of the home video. The domestic area, where Nollywood has gained its place, is the domain of women.

What started quite locally has become a source of national pride and in the last 15 years the videos have become popular far beyond Nigeria’s borders. They are immensely popular in the whole of Africa and the African diaspora. The films have entered into the foreign market through digital television channels, satellite and internet sites. However, the most popular support remains also here the video discs or cassettes. The videos have become standard accessories to deliveries from Africa, and are sold in Afroshops in cities in the diaspora. This

88 BARROT, P. (ed.), o.c. p.12
89 Idem, p.15
91 BARROT, P. (ed.), o.c., pp.32-40
92 Ibidem
93 Ibidem
enormous distribution of a cultural product is an unseen and unique development in Africa. 

Obaseki:

These days videos are the best way of promoting Nigeria. Two days ago I was in Liberia interviewing some of the rebel leaders. They took me to a remote place in the north of the country. In the middle of the bush they got out a video-player, a television, and incredibly, started showing Nigerian films. Previously if you went abroad people would ask if you had brought food or spices from home. Today they ask if you have brought any Nigerian films. 96

The evidence of the enormous presence of the Nigerian home video also speaks through the criticism of it. Some speak of an epidemic. 97 Jean Rouch, father of the Nigerien film said about Nollywood: “Video is the AIDS of the film industry.” 98

Contemporary cheap and digital technologies worldwide have inevitable led to the illegal practice of piracy. This is globally controlled by the introduction of intellectual copyright. The Nigerian Copyright Commission has introduced STRAPs (Strategic Action Against Piracy) to protect films against piracy. 99 The efforts made have, however, not been very effective. Piracy is practiced on a large scale and this has great impact on the production process and distribution system of the films. The films are distributed on cassettes and VCDs and they are thus available for illegal copying right after they have been released. This can lead to great losses, especially concerning the foreign market. Instead of actually exterminating this illegal practice, the marketers think of every possible strategy to beat pirates to the task. The marketers apply aggressive marketing. They have to make all their money before ‘copies’ are being sold. At the release of a film they will saturate the market so there is no place for copies. After approximately one week they generally lose their grip on the market. As a consequence, film budgets stay low and bigger investments in productions are discouraged because a bigger profit in this system is impossible. According to Barrot, some of the people that are responsible for piracy, are the same producers and distributors that have a monopoly on the ‘legal’ video market. Because of the additional profit, they can keep investing in new projects and new film productions so that the system preserves itself. 100 Larkin: “Many video entrepreneurs see

97 BARROT, P. (ed.), o.c., p.5
98 Idem, p.3
99 EBEWO, P. J., o.c., pp.46-58
100 BARROT, P. (ed.), o.c., p.18
themselves as latter-day Robin Hoods, robbing the wealthy media conglomerates so that the world’s poor can have access to programs that are otherwise beyond their means.101

The market is even more uncontrollable in the diaspora. There is no organized video market and few actual video shops, as Nigerians are scattered all over the world. Someone can just bring a small number of different videos over from Nigeria and start copying them to sell in Afroshops. The films are now also easily accessible on the internet, where you can download them or watch cable TV online. Isaac Izoya, a Nollywood filmmaker in Germany, when he was asked if he was a victim of piracy:

if you are not a victim I mean you are not doing well (laughing) no we are all badly hurt you know you release movie today you are thinking okay the next one week you will be able to sell so many movie tomorrow people will be calling you ‘hey Isaac man your film is so good’ from Italy you know or calling from Holland ‘oh that was a nice movie’ someone would call you from Paris and then they call you from Abuja you say ‘have you got a copy?’ they say ‘no I watch it online’ ‘Huh?’ it’s crazy you can’t control it you don’t know who is put it in online you only need a copy and it’s there and everybody will watch it 102

d. Content and form: African film made by Africans

Because the industry is financially independent from any kind of foreign aid or the government, there is a complete freedom of speech. The directors feel they can express themselves openly without restrictions. Barrot:

The freedom expressed through Nigerian video production are exceptional in the African context. Despite the democratization of the 1990s, one is still struck by the amount of political and social control, and the level of moral conservatism. Freedom of expression is restricted both by tradition and by the recent inroads made by Islam and Evangelism.103

However, freedom of speech is not absolute. In 1993, the National Film and Video Censors Board was created. It keeps record of all the legally distributed home videos and labels them. About 86% of the films are marked ‘not appropriate for under 18 years’ and equally get the marking ‘NTBB’ (not to be broadcast on television). This label actually only heightens the popularity of the films.104 The censorship is not effective and the directors are not very concerned about the markings as the responsibility ultimately lies with the customer.105

101 LARKIN, B., o.c., rian, p.221
102 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
103 BARROT, P., (ed.), o.c., p.44
104 Idem, pp.32-35
105 Idem, p. 48
Nollywood is a commercial film industry that produces different film genres: from crime films and comedy to romantic films, it is all there. The competitive market has created a focus on drama and the sensational. Directors will do anything to make their films stand out from the rest.  

Particular to Nollywood films is the recurring theme of black magic and violence, although in recent years, this has slightly decreased, in favour of more secular stories.

The common question that people ask (...) is, “why this unceasing preoccupation with juju, this relentless celebration of dark rituals and diabolical cults? Practically every Nollywood director seems to have been caught in the spell.”

The obsession with the occult world (witchcraft, black magic, human offers etc.), prostitution, obscenity, murder and violence are characteristic themes of the Nigerian video film. “Apart from nudity everything else is allowed: murder, suicide, torture, rape, incest and infanticide,” observes Barrot. He argues that the violent and frightening climate of the films lead to a kind of cathartic experience, in a society where there is a lot of violence. Christian themes are also strongly present in the stories. Church communities sometimes finance productions and this results in highly religious films, often with a proselytizing intention.

Nollywood movies further discern themselves by a certain luxury of life. “Nollywood is all about selling the dream of individual advancement”, writes Haynes. This is indeed the goal of many of the characters in the films and undoubtedly that of many of the directors. It is furthermore the reason why so many people choose to watch Nollywood again and again. Nigeria is the most populated country in Sub-Saharan Africa with an average income of about 1 dollar a day. The oil revenues made some Nigerians disproportionately rich in the 1970s, which caused great inequality between a few rich elites and the rest of the population. In the films the audience is confronted with the lives of wealthy Nigerians. Haynes claims that this is a global phenomenon, “the videos have an obsessive interest in people who tap into the sources of wealth – their houses, parties and cars. Films everywhere give disproportionate attention to the elite.” The films give people the opportunity to see what is happening behind the high walls of rich houses in the suburbs. It gives people a chance to daydream about the luxury they will probably never know.

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106 Idem, p.15
107 OSOFISAM, F., o.c.
108 BARROT, P. (ed.), p.44
109 Idem, p.19
111 Ibidem
The constant portrayal of luxury coincides with the visualisation of the city. In the article "Nollywood in Lagos," Haynes describes the imagery of the city of Lagos in Nollywood films. The mega city of Lagos forms the backdrop of many Nollywood movies. The story of the film is nevertheless always situated in the wealthy suburbs. The camera sometimes pulls away to show the attractive skyline of Lagos. The dirty streets, open sewers, chaos or poverty of the biggest and most chaotic city of Sub Saharan Africa are never shown. Establishing shots of the city are often taken at night because the many lights disguise the chaos and dirt and give Lagos a kind of ‘urban glamour’. In between domestic scenes there are shots of highways or roads with cars roaring by. The famous Lagos traffic jams are somehow never shown. In this constructed elite world, social issues and everyday worries are projected: not in the neo-realistic background images but in the story lines. The films are about families that are ruined because of unemployment or illnesses. Criminality and violence are present in many crime films that Nollywood produces. As Barrot says: “(...) it [Nollywood] does not turn its back on the ills of Nigerian society. On the contrary, it delights in them, denounces or exorcises them.”

Nollywood directors feel they have established the first real African film industry. This Africanness is stressed with great pride by all who are involved. Director and producer Don Pedro Obaseki says about Nollywood: “We are telling African stories, from an African perspective. Slow, very dialogue-orientated, because we are a speaking people.” Nollywood films are marked by a special way of storytelling and audience-oriented stories. The stories are ingrained in traditional culture and possess strong moral messages. Nigerian narrative culture and the Yoruba theatre tradition are shared sources of inspiration. Tunde Kelani situates himself in the long tradition of Yoruba theatre “qui est extrêmement riche dans sa production littéraire et théâtrale”, and uses the traditional myths as an inspiration in his films. Director Enem Isong sees the video films as a contemporary reinvention of the Nigerian narrative culture.

Nigerian films are very rich in their ethnic diversity and create the possibility to celebrate culture on a very local level. There are great regional differences in the industry as described above by Madu Chikwendu. Most films are shot in the big cities of Lagos, Enugu and Abuja, but there are also many films that are situated in villages. The home video-industry, however, is

112 Ibidem
113 Ibidem
114 BARROT, P. (ed.), o.c., p.59
115 WELCOME TO NOLLYWOOD (USA: Jamie Meltzer, 2007)
116 MONFORT, P., o.c.
117 MUSKENS, R., o.c., p. 26-27
characterized by the uniform and unique nature of their production and distribution system that bring about a certain aesthetic.

e. Transnational dimensions of Nollywood

Nollywood can be placed under the frame of the ‘transnational’. The advent of the home video created a new ‘public sphere’ (Habermas), argues Larkin, characterized by the combination of the local and the global, with remarkable absence of the national. For the first time the consumption of mass media happened entirely out of state control.\textsuperscript{118} The home video industry is a form of unofficial popular culture marked by fragmentation and the absence of a centralized system,\textsuperscript{119} and characterized by privatization of media production and consumption.\textsuperscript{120}

Nollywood films are inherently transnational as they originated as a hybrid form full of different influences. The \textit{home video} industry was not spared the impact of cultural imperialism of some of the great film nations. The most tangible influence is that of films from the US, Hong Kong and India and of South-American telenovellas. They dominated the cinema circuit, television programming and video watching at the time when Nollywood emerged. Television tried to offer a regional/national alternative to avoid the influence of these global media in the 1960s and 1970s. Nigerian \textit{home videos}, on the contrary, often borrow, consciously and unconsciously, from other film cultures, outside of national control.\textsuperscript{121} There are two types of Nollywood movies, as Haynes argues: those that unwittingly imitate western life and those that ingeniously integrate outside influences to make true Nigerian films.

Despite a undeniable imitative element (Nollywood draws on a great number of cultural influences, domestic and foreign, Hollywood among them), Nollywood fundamentally does not resemble Hollywood-or anything else (...) The same is true of African popular culture, which has long been involved in acts of creative creolisation where cultural influences from the West, the Islamic world and Asia have been incorporated into African expressive traditions and their representational power subordinated to an African aesthetic.\textsuperscript{122}

Influences that are taken in, locally and globally, are reused and transformed in such a way that it blends with Nigerian local cultural and religious values.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{118} LARKIN, B., \textit{o.c.}, p.218
\textsuperscript{119} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{120} Idem, p. 211
\textsuperscript{121} Idem, p. 231
\textsuperscript{122} HAYNES, J., ‘Nollywood in Lagos. Lagos in Nollywood films’, pp.130-151
\textsuperscript{123} LARKIN, B., \textit{o.c.}, p.233
Adejunmobi has proposed an understanding of Nollywood as a ‘minor transnational practice’:

Where the technology of production and reproduction of a creative practice is accessible both in technical and financial terms to many individuals in minoritized populations, but costly enough to require a certain level of profitability, distribution of the finished product is likely to extend beyond national borders, giving rise to what could be described as an instance of minor transnationalism.  

The Nollywood industry crosses its national boundaries through its worldwide audiences. Yoruba films find their audiences in Benin and Togo. The Hausa films have moved into Niger and other West-African countries. English speaking film reached even further in Africa and the diaspora worldwide.  

Nollywood is also transnational in production. It has become popular to shoot in other African countries like Ghana, Sierra Leone and Cameroon. These productions generally include some actors of the countries where the films are shot. The diaspora is equally engaged in Nollywood production. As Haynes points out, collaborations with the UK and the US are the most fertile, and big initiatives are organized to promote the industry abroad. These markets are probably the biggest outside of Nigeria. Stars from the industry go to visit their fans overseas.

As to why Nollywood has such a big diasporic audience, Jonathan Haynes states,

The emotional adhesion of the expatriate communities to Nollywood film culture is strengthened by their circumstances: the films answer a longing for home and serve as a vehicle for showing children and non-Nigerian friends what Nigerian culture is.

Falola and Heaton likewise acknowledge that Nollywood contributes to life in the diaspora. Through their ‘Nigerian’ topics the films spread Nigerian culture in the world and constitute a stronger link for Nigerians, and even Africans, living in the West to their home country/continent.

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124 ADEJUNMOBI, M. A., o.c., p.6
125 Idem, p.5
126 Ibidem
128 Ibidem
4.3.2 Nigerian diaspora

The nation of Nigeria came into existence at the Berlin conference at the end of the 19th century. Suddenly, boundaries created territorial limits between the different nations in Africa. These borders were chosen rather arbitrarily, without taking into account pre-existing social, cultural and economic unities. It is therefore not remarkable that people of the present state of Nigeria have crossed their borders systematically since the creation of their state, nor that nationalist sentiments were and still are in conflict with ethnic and regional identities.\textsuperscript{130}

The word diaspora (from the Greek διασπορά, which means ‘scattering’) means the scattering or spread of a people over different parts of the world. The term originally referred to the Jewish migration. Nowadays, its meaning has been broadened to include, according to Esman:

\textit{...any transnational migrant community that maintains material or sentimental attachments to its country of origin (its home country), while adapting to the limitations and opportunities in its country of settlement (its host country)...} \textsuperscript{131}

The people of the region of what is currently Nigeria have travelled abroad for many centuries. They have settled far beyond their borders and constitute an important part of the African diaspora. The story of Nigerian migration is a complex one of voluntary and involuntary moving.\textsuperscript{132} Nigerians in the diaspora have always kept strong ties with their home country. Moreover, they have established communication networks among themselves, all over the world.\textsuperscript{133}

4.3.2.1 Pre-colonial migration

a. Hausa migration

In pre-colonial Nigeria the Hausa, one of the major ethnic groups of Nigeria, spread all over western Africa, thus creating a commercial network. They were a trading people and their language spread and became the language of trade. The Hausa formed an important participant in the Trans-Saharan trade connecting Northern Africa and Europe with Sub-Saharan Africa. Between the 13\textsuperscript{th} and the 20\textsuperscript{th} century it was along these routes that slaves

\textsuperscript{130} FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p.244
\textsuperscript{131} ESMAI, M. J., Diasporas in the Contemporary world, Cambridge, Polity, 2009, p.14
\textsuperscript{132} In their book ‘A History of Nigeria’, Falola and Heaton distinguish two kinds of Nigerian migration settlements. Firstly, they discern diasporic communities, established before 1900, where migration was primarily forced. Secondly there are semi-permanent, transnational communities, formed after 1900, where migration was mostly voluntary. Here this distinction in name will not be made and ex-patriate communities, immigrant communities and diasporic communities are used as synonyms.
\textsuperscript{133} FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p.243
were forced out of present day Nigeria. Apart from economic goods and slaves it was via these exchanges that new ideas and cultural influences came into Nigeria. In the eleventh century Islam made its way into the Hausa states that now constitute northern Nigeria.

b. Religious migration

Soon the new African Muslims started to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. Not all of them made it that far however. Many Nigerians only reached Sudan or Chad. Some settled on the way and made new homes. Today one can find third-, fourth- or even fifth-generation settlers. These pilgrimages still continue today. In 2005 alone, more than 50,000 Nigerians left for Mecca. In the 1980s the government made an effort to encourage similar pilgrimages to Jerusalem by the Christians. There is now a respectable number of Nigerians currently living in Jerusalem.

c. Slave Trade

Since the 16th century people of modern Nigeria have equally travelled overseas to the West. Unfortunately, this migration was originally –and for many centuries- directed to the Americas in the context of slavery. Exact statistics of the number of Nigerians that left are hard to come by. Firstly, Nigeria did not yet exist and secondly, there is no reliable and correct documentation of that time. Falola en Heaton have estimated that around 3.5 million slaves left from the ports of Benin and Biafra, both situated in presentday Nigeria. They were shipped along the famous Middle Passage to the Caribbean, the United States, and Brazil and were primarily forced to work on huge plantations.

4.3.2.2 Nigerian migration in 20th – 21st century

a. Context

if you find yourself on Walter Carrington Crescent, Victoria island, Lagos and indeed any other street where embassies and mission of many countries are located in the mornings of the working days, you would marvel at the number of Nigerians who seek travel documents to leave Nigeria for Europe and the Americas for the so called greener pastures. This does not include those who pay

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134 FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., pp. 246-248
135 Ibidem
136 Ibidem, p.249
agents to procure visas for them. People arrive these embassies as early as they can (many as early as 3 a.m.) to queue, irrespective of the stress they subject themselves to in the process. In 2005 it was estimated that around 200,000 Nigerians were living in Europe, as legal residents, most of them in the UK, followed by Italy, Germany, Spain and Ireland. When Nigeria became a colony of the UK, it became a part of the British Empire and Nigerians became British subjects. If they could afford it, they were free to move around in the British Empire, including the UK. Hoping for better education and employment opportunities, some people made the journey overseas. This trend has continued after Independence in 1960, until now. Since the 1980s, when well-educated Nigerians started leaving in such amounts, it has been referred to as the ‘brain drain’. Nigerians with an education, left to find more comfortable and better-paid jobs in the West. They make the sacrifice to provide for their family and to possibly get a foreign education for their children. This has contributed to the decline of the Nigerian economy, as it has lost many of its talented and skillful people, in different fields like medicine, engineering and law, to the benefit of the economy in the West. Others went abroad for education and training but came back to work in their country. In 2000, on average 1 out of 3 Nigerians with a university education lived overseas.

Not all Nigerians come to the West in a legal way. The more unfortunate who make the journey are often faced with great difficulties and they end up in miserable circumstances. In a public speech in August 2008, the minister of foreign affairs, Chief Ojo Maduekwe, declared that between 1999 and 2002 about 10,000 Nigerians died overseas trying to make their way to Europe. But even those who do make it, without the required papers, may have to live their lives in illegality and in poor conditions. Many can only make it as smugglers and criminals. Most Nigerians have a utopian and unrealistic image of Europe. They think that once you can afford to make the journey, you will make it. The reality, however, is very

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139 FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p. 253
140 Idem, p. 238
141 Idem, p. 223
142 Idem, p. 255
144 FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p. 223
146 FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p. 256
different. Abdul-Mumin Bello, a Nigerian school teacher, in the documentary NOLLYWOOD ABROAD:

There are guys who think that they can better benefit from their talents over there. And they want to go there, there are desperate! No matter what they hear about the place. They want to go, they want to make a name. And when they go, well, what happens there, is a story to tell when they come back.¹⁴⁷

Almost all Nigerians that migrate to Europe are from the southern part of the country, especially from Igbo-states or Niger Delta states (including Edo state). The South, which is the Christian part of Nigeria is far more westernized and capitalist-orientated than the North, which is Islamic and has totally different migration patterns.

b. Prostitution

Within the broader context of migration, trafficking in women cannot be ignored when it comes to Nigeria. In the last twenty years prostitutes in Europe have been coming from everywhere in the world. It is hard to get exact statistics as the trafficking in women is an illegal practice. Nigerian women have been brought to Europe as prostitutes only in the last twenty years but the numbers have grown beyond reason. Between 1997 and 2003, about 300,000 Nigerian women were trafficked, mostly to Europe, mainly Italy.¹⁴⁸

Carling argues that trafficking in women and children is a common practice in West-Africa, both within Africa as beyond the continent. The majority of prostitutes coming from Sub-Saharan Africa is Nigerian.¹⁴⁹ They are generally deceived or even forced into prostitution.¹⁵⁰ The success is based on two major factors. First, there is the widespread existing aspirations to emigrate, and second, the great difficulty and constraints of migrating to the West. Carling:

Much of the explanation, however, lies in the self-reinforcing mechanisms that come into force once a migration flow has been initiated. When networks, infrastructure, and expectations have been established, migrations flows tend to increase, even if the initial movement was a matter of coincidence.¹⁵¹

The documentary NOLLYWOOD ABROAD explores the issue of Nigerian prostitutes in Europe through the life of John Osas Omoregie, one of the protagonists of this thesis. Augusta Uyi

¹⁴⁷ NOLLYWOOD ABROAD (Belgium: Saartje Geerts, 2008)
¹⁴⁹ Idem, p. 169
¹⁵⁰ CARLING, J., o.c.
¹⁵¹ Ibidem
Evbuomwan, a water seller in Nigeria who featured in the documentary, confirms Carling’s theory:

The people who first went there, came back with a lot of money, but without telling you the truth, they got caught up. So they’ve lost the value and look onto the money, in the process. That’s how those people decide to migrate for that prostitution. Even though they didn’t like it. (...) Even when they know they want to go there because they see people that come back with money. So, the money blinds them. Maybe they don’t know what it takes.\textsuperscript{152}

Nigerian women and girls are smuggled out of the country and made to work as prostitutes in Europe, Saudi Arabia and other African countries. Their journey is generally paid by the traffickers and it is agreed that the woman in question will repay her debt working once arrived. Many do not know they are going to end up in prostitution. Some do, however, but the prospect of a better life in the West, once they have repaid their debt, seems to justify the job.\textsuperscript{153}

Most Nigerian prostitutes come from Edo state in the South of Nigeria. Carling estimated in 2005, that 1 out of 3 young women living in Edo state had gotten offers.\textsuperscript{154} Opara confirms this with the estimation of about 80 percent of all Nigerian prostitutes coming from Edo state. In a letter by the Edo Cultural Association it was written that, “there is practically no home in Edoland without a girl being sent to Belgium, Holland, Spain, England and especially this country, Italy.”\textsuperscript{155}

Young women are seduced with the promise of a decent job and a luxurious life. Once arrived in the host country, by contrast, they are forced into prostitution in order to repay their debts. The trafficking network is controlled by women, the so called ‘madams’. A Nigerian madam recruits girls in Nigeria and is in contact with a madam overseas. She is often the sponsor of the journey, and binds the girl to her with a pact. It is a pact of secrecy and debt reimbursement. The pact is religiously sealed by a traditional priest, which makes women strongly committed not to break it. The prostitutes are controlled by the network and later often become madams themselves. The prostitution network is therefore self-reproductive.\textsuperscript{156}

c. Bad Reputation

\textsuperscript{152} NOLLYWOOD ABROAD (Belgium: Saartje Geerts, 2008)
\textsuperscript{153} FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p. 256
\textsuperscript{154} CARLING, J., o.c.
\textsuperscript{155} OPARA, V.N., ‘Emerging issues in the trafficking of African women for prostitution’, p.172
\textsuperscript{156} Idem, p.231
In his speech mentioned above, the minister of foreign affairs, Chief Ojo Maduekwe, stresses the effect illegal emigration has on the reputation of Nigerians in the world. He says they give Nigeria a bad name and this to the disadvantage of the well-intended and legal Nigerians travelling abroad. People all over the world have become particularly suspicious when it comes to Nigerians.157

When surfing on the internet it is not hard to find this negative image Nigerians have internationally, confirmed. On a forum, someone entered the following message as she had received a suspicious e-mail from Google asking for money:

The following email has to be the biggest pile of bullshit I have ever seen. The English is atrocious, not something you would expect from someone representing Google. The fact that it comes from Nigeria should really set the alarm bells going. It is definitely a phishing type email scam, and if you seriously believe that Google would indiscriminately send out this crap, and choose to ignore all the warning signs, then perhaps you deserve to learn by your mistakes.158 (emphasis mine)

Similar stories are equally found on other forums with titles like ‘Nigerian men have bad reputation’159 or ‘Why do Nigerians have such bad reputation’160 in an entry on a forum on the Nigerian site with the topic: ‘Have you ever denied your country?’:

I guesssed i’ve not had the opportunity to. Nigeria has a very bad image outside; thanks to the 419ers, fraudsters, ritualists and our leaders who disgrace us all. Most people who travel with a nigerian passport are looked down upon, the innocent ones suffer for this. Opening a bank account abroad using a Nigerian passport is very difficult. Quite a number of Nigerians now own Ghanaian passports If u ever find yourself abroad, be very careful of the Nigerians you meet. They could put u in trouble (emphasis mine)161

d. Causes of migration

The reasons for migration seem to be unanimous: the search for a better life, possibly an education and a well-paid job, for the benefit of oneself and one’s family. It seems obvious amongst Nigerians that this is not possible in Nigeria. Carling argues that the current situation of unrest in Nigeria is to blame for the growing number of Nigerians emigrating today. Besides

157 IFFER, E., O.C.
160 http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080606033742AAgsEi1 (last seen on 1/08/2010)
161 http://www.nairaland.com/nigeria/topic-339588.0.html (last seen on 1/08/2010)
high poverty and unemployment rates, Nigeria is one of the most violent countries, with a lot of corruption and organized crime.

The causes for the situation of unrest in Nigeria are of a complex nature. Having the biggest population in the whole of Africa and through the discovery of oil reserves in the Niger delta region at the end of the 1950s, Nigeria had great potential to ‘make it’ at its independence in 1960. Yet, Nigeria has known a very unstable and violent history. The sixties were a devastating decade for the country and helped further shape its future. The 1960s were characterized by military coups, economic instability, corruption and the Biafra war, a civil war that lasted two and a half years. Falola and Heaton attribute this violent era to what they refer to as the ‘national question’. Most people didn’t identify themselves as Nigerians.\textsuperscript{162,163} Falola and Heaton state that “...when Nigeria became an independent sovereign state in 1960, in many ways it was a state without a nation.”\textsuperscript{164} They further argue that Nigeria was now, “unified under a federal constitution in which politically conscious ethnic groups vied for control of the central government through ethnically based political parties.”\textsuperscript{165}

Many Nigerians left during the fifteen years of military rule from 1984 to 1999: a period in history marked by corruption, oppression, coercion and manipulation. Money ended up in pockets of individuals in charge, crime rates continued to be high and no criticism was allowed.\textsuperscript{166} Many fled overseas in that period. Even after the return of democracy in 1999, little changed and people got disillusioned.\textsuperscript{167} Because mismanagement and corruption are so great, people of Nigeria have never had a lot of confidence in their government, which continues to encourage migration. Many have tried their luck in Europe. Fred Iwenjora:

> The desire to “travel abroad” is further fuelled by the show of opulence by those who had gone and returned home on visits, as well as tales of how “attractive” life could be over there, compared with the daily grind in the home country with the endless traffic jams, interminable power outages, poor healthcare, etc. Aside from these, the typical Nigerian gets carried away with the so called show of wealth with big cars and fancy clothes by the Nigerians who live abroad.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{162} FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., \textit{o.c.}
\textsuperscript{163} According to Falola and Heaton this might partially be explained by how the political system works. According to the constitution that created in the 1950s, a political party could only participate on a national level when it had acquired power on a regional level. This way politics helped maintain the struggle between different ethnic groups.
\textsuperscript{164} FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., \textit{o.c.}, p.159
\textsuperscript{165} Idem, p. 137
\textsuperscript{166} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{167} This was preceded by 15 years of military rule
\textsuperscript{168} IWENJORA, F., \textit{o.c.}
Nigeria has a great ethnic and religious diversity. There are about 250 different ethnic groups and the country is now divided into 36 states (whereas there were only three states at Independence) each with their own individual character. There are three dominant ethnic groups. In the North there are the Hausa, who are Islamic and in the South and East the Yoruba (southwest) and the Igbo (southeast) who are Christians. These ethnic and religious differences create tensions, the most irresolvable being between the North and the South of the country. Since democratic rule these tensions have resolved in violent conflicts. The military regimes, Oyeniyi argues, were able to keep tensions and conflict under strict control.\textsuperscript{169} The advent of a democratic rule opened up the space for competition and frustrations. This has resulted in huge displacements of persons and greater geographical divisions between the different ethnic and religious groups, for example, a lot of the Hausas fled the commercial city of Lagos and Christians massively fled the northern part of the country.\textsuperscript{170}

Poverty, Opara argues, is also one of the biggest causes of the success of the trafficking networks, as individuals take advantage of the needy who desperately seek to improve their life. It is moreover one of the major reasons behind crime and corruption in general. The position of women is a fragile one as in many countries they are victims of sexism, and have a lower economic and social status.\textsuperscript{171} As a result of political, ethnic and religious conflict, Nigeria is a turbulent and rather chaotic state. It therefore forms an ideal operating base.\textsuperscript{172} Tessy Oliseh, fashion designer from Lagos:

Everyone wants to leave Nigeria. Honestly it’s hard down here. It’s difficult for people to cope. So they think that the only way they can have a greener pasture is to go outside the country. Some parents have no idea what is going on. Here we are in Lagos state. There are people of Delta state. There are people in Edo state, far back. They don’t know. They are not educated parents, so they have no idea. You wake up one day and your daughter says: ‘I’m going to Lagos. You don’t even know what she’s going to do in Lagos. From Lagos, she gets a visa and she’s in Italy or in Belgium. So you don’t know what she’s doing. Basically some parents have no idea, but some parents do have an idea. They do but they tend to keep their eyes off it, because all they want is: ‘I want my daughter to go there, so I can have a better life, she can send me 50 euros and I’ll be fine.’ Yes, some parents do that, which is not good.\textsuperscript{173}

e. Diasporic communities

\textsuperscript{170} Idem, p.328
\textsuperscript{171} OPARA, V.N., ‘Emerging issues in the trafficking of African women for prostitution’, p.166-167
\textsuperscript{172} Idem, p.170
\textsuperscript{173} NOLLYWOOD ABROAD (Belgium: Saartje Geerts, 2008)
Most Nigerians who have left their country to live in Europe and North-America, see this as a temporary settlement. They hope to return one day and use their acquired wealth and skills to improve their life and that of their family. In the first half of the 20th century racism and prejudice were some of the primary factors that made permanent settlement in the West unattractive. What defines these immigrants, argue Falola and Heaton, is that they form communities “…in which migrants become partially assimilated to their new environments but remain socially and culturally committed to their homeland.”174 Most Nigerians leave without their immediate family. Only a few are so lucky to bring the rest of the family over. In that case, even though the immediate family is united, Nigerians stay strongly connected to their extended families and through kinship. Emigrated Nigerians are expected to send home money to support their family and friends. This goes so far that these incomes are now the second largest source of foreign exchange earnings, after oil, in Nigeria.175 Nigerian emigrés are often under enormous pressure to send money home as in some cases the family has given up everything to afford their journey to the West.

Nigerians bring their own culture and traditions with them when they come overseas. In the host country, coherent communities are established between Nigerian and other African migrants. Networks are created between emigrant communities and Nigeria as well as between Nigerian migration communities all over the world.176 Nigerians make up the biggest percentage of Sub-Saharan Africans living in Europe. Moreover, in 2004, Nigerian asylum seekers were estimated to be the fifth biggest migrant group in Europe.177 Almost all Nigerians migrate to urban centres, preferably metropolises and capital cities. They generally look up other Nigerians or Africans and settle in so called African neighbourhoods. In Belgium one can find most English-speaking Africans, and thus Nigerians, in the city of Antwerp. Brussels, the capital, has a large francophone African community. In Germany there are many cities with a substantial number of Nigerians, with leading cities of Frankfurt and Berlin. In Holland the largest African communities are found in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Learning the language of the host country remains a difficulty in countries like Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Most Nigerians, as many of the filmmakers who are the subject of this thesis, do not master their host country’s language well and continue to use English in their contact with locals. Confronted with the disillusion of a luxurious life in the West as an (illegal) immigrant and the pressure from home to send money, many Nigerians find themselves lost and disoriented in a strange country where they don’t understand the language. African

174 FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p.253
175 Idem, pp.255-256
176 Idem, pp.267-270
177 CARLING, J., o.c.
communities represent home in a certain way and provide some warmth and guidance for these immigrants.

In an article on the internet a 38- year old Nigerian, ex-patriot and father of two, expresses his worries concerning the up bringing of his children. He wonders if they will become alienated to their Nigerian roots having been brought up in the UK. He then gives several suggestions, for possible readers, as to how this can be avoided. He considers Nigeria morally and culturally superior and finds it essential that the connection to their ‘home’ country be kept alive. For the benefit of the education of the children, he advises that they should be taught the Nigerian lifestyle and culture, from food to music to dress to actual behaviour as this will make them better people. He writes:

Insist that they practice common Nigerian courtesies – such as kneeling down or doing a full (or half) prostrate when greeting their elders. A handshake should never be enough when your children are greeting your friends who are fellow Nigerians. Also, important is that they address older people as ‘aunty’, ‘uncle’, ‘mummy’ or ‘daddy’. A practice which seems to be dying out amongst modern Nigerian families is that of addressing older siblings as ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. Please, please, please let us uphold such practices and continue to stress their importance to our children (...) I am appalled at falling academic and moral standards prevalent in British state schools. (...) However, I discovered that Nigeria abounds with so many excellent private schools that offer the same standard of academic and boarding facilities as many of the best private schools in Britain. (...) Moreover, my son would have the opportunity to be exposed to the Nigerian culture and an environment where teachers enjoy absolute respect and authority, an environment in which children are not allowed to talk back to teachers, and an environment where children are expected to be high-achievers.

The article illustrates perfectly the continuous ‘longing for home’ experienced by Nigerians in the diaspora. Although they stay abroad for economic and educational, reasons they miss their country and culture back home. They are determined to stay true to their roots and hope their children will always remember their African heritage.

f. Nollywood in the diaspora

Nollywood is very popular in the African diaspora. In all cities with a substantial African community in Europe (and elsewhere in the world) the videos can be found in Afroshops.

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179 Ibidem
Internet and satellite TV offer other accessible ways to watch Nigerian movies. To many African immigrants living in Europe, Nollywood represents home. Azubuike Erinugha:

(...) a man wife three four five kids there’s no way they can go back to Africa at the same time again it’s very expensive (...) some people they can’t go home not that they don’t want to go they really want to go but when they calculate how much it would cost them to go but they’re still you know they’re hungry to know what is happening they want to see how this place the village I left like twenty years ago how is it what is going on I want to see the roads the palm tree so that ‘s where Nollywood comes in

Isaac Izoya equally sees in Nollywood a connection with Nigeria for a diasporic audience:

...this is our story you are not trying to strain yourself in hearing English you here English like your brother and sister is talking to you and whatever when they are doing voodoo or love or whatever you know this is also what happen in your neighbourhood so it’s just your story being told by your brothers and sisters (...) the children born here who have not had opportunity to visit Africa were also there when they watch Nollywood movie they feel at home yeah they just feel at home and that’s it

180 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
181 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
5. Case studies: Nollywood made in Europe

Nollywood emerged in Nigeria in the early nineties. It did not take long before people in the Nigerian diaspora learned about the successful industry at home. They became an important audience of the films and some felt something itch inside them. Having lived through the immigrant experience and living in Europe, they felt they had quite a story to tell. Collaborations were set up, especially in the US and the UK, with the Nigerian based industry. Some Nigerians turned to filmmaking on their own initiative, as part of a broader project to strengthen the connection with home. In the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany Nigerians equally wanted to be part of Nollywood. From 1998, they too started making movies. Tony A.B. Akinyemi, Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran, Isaac Izoya, John Osas Omorogie and Azubuike Erinugha are all enterprising individuals who did not stick to filmmaking. They have also put their creative and organizing talents in other media and cultural projects which will also be discussed in an attempt to grasp the transnational dimension of their work. The work of the five protagonists have different emphasis but their loyalty to the core of Nollywood film making and their basic concerns as immigrants result in great similarities. In this second part an attempt will be made to reveal the different transnational dimensions of the work of the protagonists. Firstly, I will tell you something about their lives and highlight the interconnectedness and the way they have influenced each other. Secondly, I will discuss the different publics and scales they address and involve in their projects. Thirdly, I will examine what message or content they are trying to bring across. And lastly, I will expose the transnational nature of the aesthetics and form of the films made.
5.1 Transnational Subjects

The protagonists of this thesis are Nigerian ex-patriates who left Nigeria between 1990 and 2000 and have experienced the difficulties of arriving in a European country as an African immigrant. They have settled in their new environments which they now consider to be their second home. Still very strongly attached to their home country, they feel they have a privileged position and they have made it their mission to bring Nigeria and their new home a little closer. They have all seen in Nollywood a great potential to let their voice be heard and alongside engaged themselves in numerous other projects. The diasporic filmmakers here discussed can be called ‘transnational subjects’ as they are in their personal lives situated between two nations, between two cultures. They have left their home country as young men and settled in Europe as immigrants. The protagonists are subjects of today’s global age where technology has made it possible for them to be heard, for media have enabled those who find themselves outside society to come to the centre of the frame. Their personal history of migration and their current diasporic lives are central themes of their own lives as well as of their films. After all, in Nollywood personal experiences is a primary source of inspiration.

5.1.1 Pioneers: Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran

I went to an Afro-shop in Antwerp in the beginning of my research and I asked for Nigerian movies made in Europe. After some hesitation as to why I wouldn’t just want the newest Nollywood movie, the woman went upstairs and came back with some old video cassettes. “UNDER PRESSURE, that was the first one ever,” she told me, “from those guys in Holland.”

It all started in the early nineties. The young Tony A.B. Akinyemi left Ondo state, Nigeria, and decided to try his luck in the West as many of his friends were doing. Intending on going to North-America, he got stranded in the Netherlands. There he met Edo state-born Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran in his hotel, who had come on the same mission two months before. They became close friends. It was quite common in that time to travel abroad for those who could afford it. Tony:

...while we were growing u as a youth we reached an age where some of our friends were traveling abroad some went back to school some were born here and they came there to go to school till a certain age and then they were travelling after a while there are all you age mates we were seventeen eighteen nineteen twenty a lot a your age mates are travelling some are in London some are in America that’s how it is

182 EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), o.c., p.7
183 Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
At that time they were thinking that their stay in the Netherlands was going to be temporary, three years at the longest. But twenty years later, they are still there. Tony and Leonard are happy with their lives in the Netherland although they travel back to Nigeria whenever they can.

Tony: so it’s always going to be two homes whether you like it or not for life I always say if somebody ask me ‘what’s your country?’ ‘I only know of two N’s Nigeria the Netherlands the Netherlands Nigeria’ (...) It like you can never forget the source Nigeria is our source that’s where we originate from we can never forget Nigeria but after living here for long time and like when I think of having a family here uhm my children my first son is almost thirteen years old now so eventually you like it or not like he said it’s your home still when I’m here I will miss Nigeria then when you get to Nigeria after some time

Leonard: you miss here

As there is no real African or let alone a Nigerian community in Eindhoven, Leonard and Tony live quite far away from each other and they often go to the nearby cities of Antwerp, Amsterdam and Rotterdam when they want to mingle with other Africans. Tony and Leonard consider themselves lucky as they had quite a pleasant migration-experience. They are very fond of the Netherlands and have always felt welcome. Besides the obvious language difficulty and some other cultural differences, they felt they fit in easily:

Leonard: In Holland you ask me as in my own experience yeah Holland yeah they are welcoming they’re friendly that’s my own experience

Tony: yeah but when we came it was strange to us too because of the language but I think as time goes on you see that many people are accommodating they welcome you they are curious they want to know more about you so from that curiosity we met we know each other and ultimately they welcome the foreigner I mean that can give people the edge to want to feel at home that can make it easier for you at first to make you feel at home so I mean I remember when in the nineties nineteen ninety people called Holland as a little America because they welcome uhm foreigners and different people you can see their nationale luchthaven I remember those days we see about maybe from eleven five will be blacks mixed color and such so Holland is a very nice place yeah they welcomed us it was not that difficult

Tony and Leonard are well integrated in the Dutch community. Tony is married to a Dutch woman with whom he has two children. Their determination to learn Dutch is quite uncommon among English speaking immigrants in the Netherlands (and Belgium), as they can often get around with English in everyday life and see the language learning process as a huge burden.

184 Ibidem
185 Ibidem
Leonard: it’s always good to learn the language

Tony: I think I was here less than six months in Nederland when we started learning the language when came we were going to stay like two three years and go back to Africa we never thought we were going to stay we were here like one year two years before going back but I just told myself I’m in a new country at least I can tell anybody if I meet a Dutch girl in Africa ‘I’ve been to your country before’ and okay she will say something so that was my motivation then to learn the language

Sophie: even with the thought of going back

Tony: yeah even the thought of going back I just wanted to learn Nederlands because you never know I might meet somebody.186

Tony and Leonard are creative people and were active in the entertainment sector back in Nigeria. Tony used to act, on stages and on television. He started his acting under the guidance of Baba Babs Animashaun. Leonard was a dancer and was in a musical television series called Beat Wave. When they left Nigeria and settled in the Netherlands, they were unaware of the emerging home video industry, back in Nigeria. When Leonard visited Antwerp in 1994, the nearby city in Belgium, he got his hands on a copy of Kenneth Nnuebe’s GLAMOUR GIRLS.187 This film was among the first great successes of the Nollywood industry. Leonard saw it and was impressed. He went to see Tony right away and said: “Let’s make a movie”. They began their own production company: Double ‘A’ Entertainment, the name derived from their two surnames. It was not until 1998, however, that their first movie became a reality: UNDER PRESSURE.

UNDER PRESSURE marked the debut of Leonard Ajayi-Odekhiran as an actor. When the lead actor failed to show up for a shooting – he had suddenly left for Nigeria – someone had to take over. In Nollywood there is after all never time to wait. Leonard continued to play lead roles in all of their films and Tony took it on him to direct. The film was a hit and so they paved the way for other Nigerians in Europe to follow in their footsteps. For their second movie, DAPO JUNIOR, Tony and Leonard were more ambitious. They brought two Nollywood stars, Liz Benson and Saint Obi, over from Nigeria to star in the film. It was a big and – according to Nollywood standards – expensive production. They continued to make other films: HOLLAND HEAT, FROM AMSTERDAM WITH LOVE. Tony and Leonard also made an animated Nigerian movie CHIKA & THE WARRIORS about a village girl who gets a vision of a deceased king. It was made in collaboration with a US based company: Mayhem Production Inc. After some years of inactivity they are currently working on a new production ETI VBE HOLLAND188, their first

186 Ibidem
187 GLAMOUR GIRLS (Nigeria: Kenneth Nnuebe, 1994)
188 ETI VBE HOLLAND (Netherlands: Tony A.B. Akinyemi, post-production)
movie in the Edo language, translated as ‘Trouble in Holland’. The films are shot in different cities in the Netherlands, sometimes in Belgium but never in Nigeria.

The work of Double “A” Entertainment does not end with the production of films. Determined to explore all aspects of Nigerian culture and entertainment, they have organized gatherings and shows in the Netherlands and in cities all over Europe. They brought Nigerian musicians over and organized tours around Europe. Unfortunately their last tour was held in 2003, for it was financially no longer attainable to reach a break even after the tours.

5.1.2 The show must go on: Isaac Izoya

Isaac Izoya has yet another story to tell. He left Ishan, Edo state, around 1993 under the military rule of Ibrahim Babangida which he says doesn’t need any further explanation as to why he left.189 “yeah when you tell in Nigeria you left at that time everybody understands ‘no more comments’ (laughing)”190 Planning to go to Denmark he found himself stranded in Frankfurt, Germany. “I never choose German German choose me,”191 he claims. He later moved to Berlin to better realize his ambitions. About his experience as an immigrant he says:

it takes some time yeah like all you know even when you’re in your country you move from south to north it takes time to get used to this uhm coming from Africa to Europe this is opposite life uhm German for that matter those days oh absolutely difficult you don’t understand the language the culture is quite different the weather is quite different Germans are so strict and strict when they say 5 o’clock it’s 5 o’clock (...) and in Africa we have African time (laughing) yeah so, and when they’re working they work like crazy everything was quite different and their food that was horrible for us to cope with because I found out their stable food is more or less bread uhm bread is for poor men in Africa (laughing) yeah but those days when they gave us bread we’d say ‘what are you doing’ we stayed here long before they said ‘this bread is for big men’ we said ‘bread, big men’ (puzzled) you know it takes time it actually takes some time192

Isaac had some trouble adjusting to his new life and still feels like a true Nigerian. He is strongly engaged in diasporic life in Berlin. Isaac:

I can never forget my identity as an African I am an African I’m an Nigerian and I wanna be seen like that because uhm in German a black man in German oooh common (laughing) (...) yeah you see like I told you a child can never play and forget his home no matter how hard it is here

189 Ibrahim Babangida ruled Nigeria from his coup in 1985, until 1993.
190 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
191 Ibidem
192 Ibidem
you’re still feeling you’re still mixing you belong to somewhere a society where you wake up 
you’ll be welcome no matter how long you spend in Germany you are still foreigner you are still 
_Ausländer_ (laughing)¹⁹³

He nevertheless feels privileged to be living in Germany and is not planning to leave any time 
soon, or at all for that matter:

_Isaac_: hmmm the truth is that uhm I spent most of my useful age here in Germany which I 
would have used to develop my country except I did it in other man’s country (laughing) yeah 
that is it plus minus it’s cool to be here 
_Sophie_: you are happy to be here 
_Isaac_: off course¹⁹⁴

Isaac is divorced, father of three and lives in an apartment in Wedding, Berlin. He graduated 
from the London school of journalism. When he first arrived in Germany Isaac started working 
as a journalist for the magazine _African Courier_, a magazine published in Germany which 
reports on news and cultural events in Africa and the African diaspora in Europe. He 
discovered Nollywood through his girlfriend he had at the time, who was hooked on the films.

_Isaac_: …before 2000 I don’t watch Nollywood movie so much but around that time 2000 I had a 
girlfriend that time a Nigerian she always run to African shop to borrow newly released movies 
of Nollywood and when I’m watching I strain myself I don’t see the picture and the sound is not 
clear I said ‘goddammit, what is this?’ and you see whenever she’s watching a movie she’s 
always always happy then you know continuously the interest started coming up and I was 
saying to myself ‘oh’ and everywhere you go it’s always Nollywood Nollywood all African shops 
all over Europe Americans Asia it’s Nollywood they cannot do without Nollywood it’s part of 
their shop then I said ‘okay, okay’¹⁹⁵

It made him think. When he saw DAPO JUNIOR by Double “A” Entertainment he was inspired. 
The film prooved him that film production abroad was possible and could result into unique 
films within Nollyood production. Additionally, Isaac saw the large audiences, Nollywood had 
generated:

_Isaac_: …when you spend time writing for magazine newspaper how many people actually will 
have time to read but that same story if you put in a movie millions will watch it you will buy it 
five persons will come to you to borrow it and each person will also tell their friends so I said 
‘cool we can use this medium to fight this western world medium’ and also in medium you can 
also use to pass a message and a medium you can also use to promote integration I said ‘okay

¹⁹³ Ibidem  
¹⁹⁴ Ibidem  
¹⁹⁵ Ibidem
this this is cool’ if it’s done well you have a picture quality a good sound quality you can pass
the message and that was how it is and that was what gave birth to Sinners in the house Sinners
in the house my first movie and the way it was received (enthusiastic) the Africans from the
diaspora said ‘God!’ and that’s it

He entered the movie business as an actor and associate producer of SINNERS IN THE HOUSE,
a film directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, aka ‘de Guv’nor’, in 2003. He subsequently started
his own Berlin based production company Ehizoya Golden Production, which produces and
distributes Nollywood movies in Germany and continued to work with Lancelot Imasuen as his
director. Lancelot Imasuen, aka the guv’ner, is one of the most prolific Nollywood directors
and has directed over 100 films. In 2007 their collaboration came to a halt due to some
misunderstandings, extensively covered in the Nigerian press. He now continues to produce
films with different other directors. His films are always shot in Germany and Nigeria. The films
which will be considered in this thesis are ZERO YOUR MIND, LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING
POINT I&II and RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE I&II. When asked what motivated him into
movie production in an interview, Isaac responded:

It’s about recognition, about promotion of Nollywood, about Nigeria Image launderin
about living up to my name Izoya meaning “rescue” and Isaac which means “laughter” (and we rescue
people with our comedy or laughter shows) and to be remembered for a man that has done so
much for motherland.

In accordance with his motto ‘The show must go on’ Isaac is a very ambitious man. He is a
director, writer, actor, producer and show promoter and sometimes referred to as “the Don
king of Africa entertainment in Europe”. Besides the production of films he has organized
numerous shows with some of the most famous Nollywood and comedy stars throughout
Europe. These tours are organized by Ehizoya Golden Entertainment, which stands for show
promotion and event organization. Inspired by Double “A” entertainment he has taken the
promotion of Nigerian culture to a higher level. Isaac Izoya is well known in Nigeria, has
appeared on different TV shows and has received several awards. In the last couple of years he

196 Ibidem
197 ZERO YOUR MIND (Germany/Nigeria: Lancelot Imasuen, 2003)
198 LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT (Germany/Nigeria: Lancelot Imaseun, 2007)
199 RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE I&II (Germany/Nigeria: Peter Gabriel Taiwo Oduala, 2008)
200 X, ‘If it’s easy, stress free and critics Venture it’...Isaac Izoya’, Nigeriafilms.com,
http://www.nigeriafilms.com/content.asp?ContentId=3580&ContentTypeId=3 (last seen on 1/08/2010)
is touring with Nigerian musicians. “We’re giving the fans what they request for,” states Isaac.

Isaac has quite an ambivalent relationship with Germany. He was falsely accused of human trafficking and was therefore unable to continue his projects for a while.

Isaac: It’s so sad that all the things we have been doing for Germany in terms of integration for African and Germans has been misconstrued. We are an entertainment promotion company with interest in the promotion of culture and showbiz. (...) These events attracted both German and African audience. (...) one day the German police stormed my home while I was in Nigeria organizing another show. They carted away everything in my house, searched every nook and crany (...) According to them I was trafficking in human beings (...) I have lived in Germany for several years and have been law abiding and have respect for constituted authority. I do not involve myself with lawless matters. Why should Germany discriminate for trying to create an enabling environment to clear the racist attachment on it? Why should the German police treat me like this?  

The accusations were rather ridiculous as they accused him of illegally bringing over his two children, Chinedu Ikedia and Osita Iheme, aka Aki and PawPaw. They are two of the most popular Nigerian actors he brought on one of his tours. They suffer from Growth Hormone Deficiency which gives them a unique and rather small appearance. Nevertheless Isaac continues to engage himself in society and set up collaborations with Germans. Isaac:

...if you don’t mingle with them you won’t have that opportunity because what you get from the African brother is quite different from what you get from the Germans so it’s good to play like prostitute both sides (laughing)

5.1.3 Spiritual and social outreach: John Osas Omorogie

A Nollywood promoter in Belgium and the rest of Europe, through evangelist John Osas Omorogie many people have gained God given direction for their life. He is a man of principle.

John Osas Omorogie left Nigeria in 2000. He came from Benin city, Edo state where he was a mechanic until the age of 26. He spent a year in Spain before coming to Belgium. His biggest motivation for leaving Nigeria was “to experience outside world.”

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202 IWENJORA, F., O.C.
203 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
204 http://www.jomosainternationalfoundation.org/ (last seen on 1/08/2010)
John: I never had this intention of staying in Belgium but as time pass when I pass by I see the environment the atmosphere the people they were friendly and I mean it felt to me that it would be a better place to have a future.206

He felt welcome in Belgium and considers it as his second home. He currently lives there with his Nigerian wife and three small children. They live in Deurne, Antwerp a multicultural suburb of the city of Antwerp.

John: ... now that I have children here and uhm what I mean they are Belgians and I do believe they’re going to stay in Belgium but for me I still have intention of returning back to Nigeria when I’m getting old let’s say around sixty years so what I mean there’s no place like home home is home no matter how it goes so I think when I get older I will love to go back to my country207

John Osas Omoregie is a strongly religious man. He has a diploma in bible study and was ordained an evangelist of the Christ Apostolic Church of God Mission in 2007. He is a preacher and an active member in his church. John Osas Omoregie has not returned to Nigeria since he moved to Belgium in 2001.

John Omorogie got into filmmaking when he was already in Belgium. He made his first movie in 2003, in his native Edo dialect IGH EFBUE EBO, translated ‘Money abroad’. “when I was watching a film in me I knew that I was able to do it so I just uhm one day came and I said let me try this thing.”208 John had seen UNDER PRESSURE, Tony Akinyemi’s first film, when he was still in Nigeria. He later learned about Isaac Izoya when he came to Antwerp on one of his tours. John looked at Ehizoya Golden Productions and Double “A” Entertainment for inspiration to start his own production company in Belgium: ANAABEL.

John: of course of course I love Tony I love Isaac what I mean being in Europe starting a film production (...) Isaac came to Belgium when he produced what was it uhM SINNERS IN THE HOUSE then I already had my first movie so I met with him and we were just exchanging words and he told me that he’s Isaac he’s from Germany he has production house oh that’s what I’m also working on so from there we became friends whenever he came to Belgium he always contact me before he comes he always contact me and they also gave me some insight in uhm movie making and Tony also even Tony came to me I think once or twice uhm I bring my crew together so he gave us a lecture how to make uhm acting so he has taught us two or three

205 Interview with John Osas Omoregie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
206 Ibidem
207 Ibidem
208 Ibidem
times then we have meeting and he tells us the general things so we have I Tony and Isaac we have a strong friendship.  

In 2005 John Omorogie founded ANAABEL, the Association of Nigerian Actors and Actresses in Belgium, a recognized vzw in Belgium. They are a group of about 20 Nigerians residing in Antwerp that have come together to make Nollywood films. They are both the crew and cast of the films John directs and produces. John involuntarily got caught up in a human trafficking scandal and spent one year in prison. This experience inspired him to make their first movie DESPERATE HEART in 2007. ANAABEL further made the films MAMA WHY ME? I & II (2008) and AMAZING WORLD (2010). John Omorogie makes films with strong moral lessons. In 2009, John founded the Jomosa International Foundation. It is a charitable organization made to help the less fortunate in the world. John made his first documentary THE IMMIGRANT EYES, premiering in August 2010. It portrays the story of immigrants originating from different parts of the world that live in Antwerp.

5.1.4 Satire: Azubuike Erinugha

Azubuike Erinugha is a Nigerian writer and director from Imo state, in the South-east of Nigeria. He is a well-travelled and educated man. He has bachelor degrees in both English and Literary studies and a Major in Screen productions. He left Nigeria in 1997 for further studies in the US.

Azubuike: actually when I left in 1997 the first time there wasn’t any I mean it was like in vogue you know people leave you know so I also I always want to do what I think is best at any time so I looked at myself and said ‘what am I doing here’ you know ‘I think I should also leave and see what those people are doing there so I left but I knew I was going to study actually so I left and it wasn’t easy but I tried my best to get some more studies.

After three years Azubuike went back to Nigeria to try and build his life there. He felt, however, that he could not live to the fullest of his potential in his home country.

Azubuike: …I came back like 2000 the year 2000 2001 and then I felt I mean when I left school before I travelled I didn’t understand what life is all about but when I stayed in Nigeria for under three years after going to USA I kind of checked it out and compared living outside

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209 Ibidem
210 THE IMMIGRANT EYES (Belgium: John Osas Omorogie, 2010)
211 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
Nigeria and in Nigeria and uhm unfortunately I'm someone with so much ambition and I found out that I can never realize my ambitions staying there so I left again.

Consequently, Azubuike went overseas again, this time to Montreal, Canada. There he obtained a management degree at the university of Montreal. After Canada, Azubuike moved to Germany to take up a teaching job for the next three years until 2009. He taught communication and business English at the university of Cooperative Studies in Erfurt, Germany. The existing African community was important for him, as he says: “did I stay with Africans yes yes of course we always gather somewhere in the evenings to discuss”.

He got married to a German woman and moved to Brussels with her in 2009, where they are currently living. He goes back to Nigeria regularly and is strongly inscribed in the Nigerian based home video industry. Azubuike has moved around a lot and his base in Nigeria is very important to him. Azubuike:

...anybody I don’t know many people who come from especially Nigerians I can’t say for Africans but especially people like me from Igbo-land I think Nigeria also I don’t think anything could just make them find another home no matter what even if you don’t like it there’s still something keeping you there simple psychology you know development psychology where this is where you were born the environment and you grew up with some people and these are the people you know you know these are the people you know and these are people you grew up together with and the culture the food the language the jokes the plays everything just formed who you are today so no other place could ever be your home.

Azubuike experienced strong differences in how he was treated as an African immigrant. He felt there was more racism in Germany than he experienced in North America.

Azubuike: ...it’s given it’s natural you know uhm everything all depends on how you absorb it you know uhm when I went to the US I mean there’s a kind of culture in the USA that even if people discriminate against you you may not find out you know obviously and when you even find out you can also say ‘you know what I’ll press charges I’ll take you to court’ and the person say ‘I’m sorry’ you know so it’s different but when I came to Germany you find out that there’s not even law protection that is the worst part it yes it’s more painful you feel it more in Germany.

Azubuike is a writer. He writes poetry, essays and plays and has also written on his experience abroad in his online blog. He writes with a humour and irony.

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212 Ibidem
213 Ibidem
214 Ibidem
As an African I’ve always frowned at the so called African Time. This has almost become a sarcastic insult that I’ve made up my mind erasing such stereotypes by appearing unbelievably early to further appointments. But here in Germany, that is unacceptable! One must appear on the EXACT time! Your host is unhappy with you showing up early for appointments. And you’ll be severely punished if you try to be just a few minutes late.215

Azubuike made his first Nollywood film when he was still in university in Nigeria: the comedy CHOICES (1996). In an Interview, Azubuike said:

Taking a plunge into Nollywood thus came naturally. I mean, when one grows up fabricating films in his head, join the drama club of his high school, sneak around TV houses and become a university theatre director at the Abia State University as an undergraduate, and he is proud Nigerian? Of course it will not be a surprise he eventually found himself in Nollywood.216

In his time abroad he continued to be active in the Nollywood industry. He has worked as a screenwriter, line producer, production manager, executive producer, producer and director in many Nollywood movies. He wrote and produced THE PLUMBER (2003) and THE ASYLUM (2007), both shot entirely in Nigeria. His films are equally characterized by humour and satire, as a way to convey serious subjects to the Nollywood audience.

Azubuike: ... I try to adapt the style the genre satire because I know everybody in this world would want to laugh so what I do is I try to bring the message and paint it with a satire and some people watch this movie and they laugh all through the movie but maybe they don’t get the message the same day but few days later the message will come down.217

Azubuike is a member (producer) of Towncrier International, a Canadian (Montreal) based production company. It has a big international reach and players in Berlin, London and Lagos. They want to distinguish themselves within Nollywood to bring quality and relevant work and apply effective and aggressive marketing and distribution strategies. Towncrier wants to provide superior entertainment to inform and educate products and services.218

In Germany he worked on the first German-Nollywood coproduction THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN, as the director in collaboration with the German artist collective InterArte. The

217 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
218 http://www.towncrierinternational.com/index.html (last seen on 1/08/2010)
film premiered in Berlin in April 2010. With this latest film, Azubuike has made migration his primary concern.
5.2 Nature of the transnational practices

The five protagonists are all engaged in filmmaking and other cultural and social projects. The nature and content of their work will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

5.2.1 Aim

Why are these men doing what they are doing? Making a fortune cannot be the only goal as they all struggle financially to continue their work. Tony Akinyemi:

...it doesn’t get you anything my woman started complaining ‘we don’t have any money to do anything you always put money into this thing’ my house I have to take second mortgage on my house in order to do film (...) if we put ten thousand euro into a film and we get back ten thousand without a cent as gain we’d be happy doing it

Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran from Double “A” Entertainment, Isaac Izoya, John Osas Omorogbe and Azubuike Erinugha are enterprising and creative individuals who feel the need to speak up to inform and entertain people worldwide. They share a political agenda to stop migration flows and racism and promote integration. Their mission is versatile and their lives in the diaspora contribute to their motivation to bring Africa and Europe a little closer.

5.2.1.1 Celebrate Nigerian contemporary culture

It is the dream of Double “A” Entertainment to develop young talents and contribute its share to the growth of Nigerian entertainment, but above all to promote a positive image of Nigeria to the outside world through entertainment.

The protagonists are proud of their Nigerian, and in general, African origin. Nigeria has a very rich entertainment industry which they want to share with the rest of the world. They want to enrich life in Europe, for African immigrants and Europeans alike, which, according to them, misses a kind of ‘joie de vivre’ that is so typical of Africa. Isaac Izoya:

yeah I love my country so much when you look at me you know I love my country uhm yeah you know Nigeria was voted as the most happiest nation so every Nigerian is the average Nigerian is a happy person we are poor but we are always smiling we’re always happy (...) look at German they are so rich they’re the power house of Europe economy but enter their subway station U-bahn it’s the metro metro is full you won’t hear a single noise everybody silent and sit there when will you

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219 Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
220 http://www.theconqueror.tv/double_a.html (last seen on 1/08/2010)
enjoy your money man make some goddamn fucking noise (...)you see when you look at that in Nigeria we have comedy show we have live music in Nigeria we have bunch of talents entertainment is the soul of Nigeria 221

That is why they are all promoters of Nigerian culture, through Nollywood and the blooming Nigerian music industry. “It was to show the good face of Nigeria that made me to venture into Nollywood, which is a pride to Africa. We decided to bring the Nollywood stars on tour to create a greater awareness for the industry in Europe,” 222 explains Isaac. In this process, they hope to change the bad reputation Nigeria has attained internationally. This smeared image is something that really frustrates them and continues to inspire them in their projects and films.

Isaac: those days you always have it was so common having articles like uhm about Nigerian Connection when anything negativity happened when they said ‘oh, people were caught today we want dealer of cocaine’ and they’re Nigerians tomorrow you see in the headlines Nigeria Connections if it is that thing the whole news in Germany would exaggerate on it if it is good thing no reports about 223

ANAABEL [Association of Nigerian actors and actresses in Belgium] is also trying to prove to the Belgium government and the world in general that there are lots of Nigerians who are gifted, despite their situation, they can still make use of their talent, and that Nigerians are not liability, but useful and important in any society they are. ANAABEL is working on how to project the positive part of Nigerians in this land an in the world in general. I see ANAABEL with a small beginning but a great future. 224

5.2.1.2 Inform and educate the people

Azubuike: I don’t believe in just making a movie for making a movie I think the film maker should also play a very important social role in society 225

In Nollywood in general, films commonly have strong moral lessons. This morality is inscribed in the tradition of the didactic character of folk tales. The films are a source of information and moral insight. Through watching Nollywood, people can learn about Nigeria. Isaac is convinced Nollywood can help break through the stereotyped image the West has of Africa.

221 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
222 http://www.ehizoyafilms.com/index.php (last seen on 1/08/2010)
223 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
224 http://www.jomosainternationalfoundation.org/(last seen on 1/08/2010)
225 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
Isaac:...when you watch movie Nigerian movie you will not back tomorrow and say ‘Oh, in Africa you live on top of tree’ they will say ‘hey you are crazy go and watch movie’ because picture doesn’t lie.

With their own films they equally aim to inform the Nigerian audience back home about the situation of African immigrants in Europe. Tony Akinyemi:” ...we show it to Africans at home what they they’ve not seen what they’ve not known about Africans living in the West”

John: I decided to become a filmmaker to be able to send messages back to Nigeria back to Africa in general because there are some things happening here in the western world in Belgium that people back in Nigeria do not know about.

Azubuike: everybody keeps saying ‘oh it’s very tough in Germany it’s very tough’ they hear it all the time and then they get tired of hearing it they still want to come because ‘if Germany is very tough then what are you still doing there’ you know so the thing is you can come to Germany you can do whatever you want you can come here but when you come these are the things you’re going to see so if you like come if you like don’t come that is the problem.

The immigrant experience and all the difficulties it entails, is a central theme in most of their films. They want to break through the idealist image lots of Africans have of life in Europe.

John: ...movies always talk about life experience talk about the situation of life abroad normally back in Nigeria let’s say Africa there’s that believe that Europe is a greener pasture there’s that believe that when you comes to Europe you have made it so we like try to tell them that it is not the idea they have that’s how it goes it’s a little bit different here you need also to struggle the way you struggle in Africa to get a living.

They additionally hope, in that way to stop desperate migrants risking their lives to come oversea, which has become a grinding reality Isaac: “I chose to adopt the film medium which is more broad-based and entertaining to reflect the true story about Europe that all that glitters is not gold. This will invariably control the influx of unwanted immigrants”

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226 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
227 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
228 John in NOLLYWOOD ABROAD (Belgium: Saartje Geerts, 2008)
229 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
230 Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
Azubuike:... and these people leave by ship and these people walk the Sahara desert up to Libya or Morocco and then they try to pay eight thousand equivalent three thousand dollars to find a small canoe to paddle the Mediterranean sea or the Atlantic ocean to come into Spain or somewhere you know how many people are dying you know (...) these are the things that I really want to look into because I don’t think many people are really saying something tangible the people who are making movies (...) I think I should find a unique way to you everything about migration I’m really looking into now but from film production point of view and then it will hopefully evoke discussion232

The storylines of the films contain many other moral lessons for the viewer. Some films, that feature crime stories, warn the viewer that you can never get away with crime. It will haunt you until it catches up and death or prisons will await you. This is a message inscribed in films like HOLLAND HEAT, RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE. MAMA WHY ME? is a specific message to mothers back in Nigeria.

John: some mothers have decided to sent their daughters on a mission of migration for their own interest, this is a warning message to such mothers (...) the truth is bitter but it must have to be said, wicked mothers need to be talk to, stop using your daughter as your money venture233

Azubuike is the producer of Towncrier International, the production company based in Canada. The origin of the name reflects this social function that film have for all of the protagonists.

Azubuike:....I’ll tell you what Towncrier actually is in my place we are in Igboland there are these people that very early in the morning they go around the whole village and make a notice ‘this is what is going to happen at this time’ these people are the town criers so that’s why we as town criers we also try to inform the people although we are making movies although we are making arts our mission is to just to warn these people caution the people give them notice make the announcement that this is what is going to happen so it’s not just movies it’s also to express our announcements in several ways234

John Osas Omoregie wants to furthermore educate people through the Jomosa International foundation. The charitable organization is still young but has set up an ambitious educational programme. They equally organize ‘Mother’s Care’ gatherings that help and inform women on how to run their household and raise their children.

5.2.1.3 Promote integration

232 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
233 http://www.jomosainternationalfoundation.org/(last seen on 1/08/2010)
234 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
The protagonists want to symbolically blur the boundaries between Africans and Europeans, between black and white. They treat problematic issues like discrimination and mixed marriages. About LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT, Isaac said: “without love, there will be no global integration, no inter-cultural marriages between blacks and white. Love is the major force in fighting racism and hatred, which is what LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT is all about.” At the end of the film ‘LET UNITY & LOVE REMAIN EVEN IN OUR DIVERSITY...’ appears on the screen. When the protagonists organize screenings, social gatherings or entertainment shows, they also hope to bring together a mixed audience.

Isaac: ...I also use our movie to promote global integration we try to tell them whether you are black or white we’re human beings we can live together and this is exactly what our movie has achieved and we also try to tell them whether you are a black you can marry to a white and have a happy home if a black marry to white doesn’t work out it does not mean he or she married for some paper it doesn’t work it doesn’t work because the European they marry today the next month they divorce but if it happens to foreigner with European they say ‘oh he’s trying to use us to get some paper’ see this is what we’re trying to

Isaac calls his European tours ‘Summer Integration Tours’. In the beginning of his films the following message appears: ‘This film supports global integration and not migration.’ Leonard and Tony sometimes organize and event they call ‘Africans and friends meet’. These are gatherings in Eindhoven for Africans and their non-African friends, where they engage in social activities with the purpose of getting to know each other.

5.2.2 Film

What links the five Nigerians, the protagonists in this thesis, is their involvement in filmmaking. Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran (the Netherlands) have their own production company Double “A” Entertainment, of which Tony is the director/actor and Leonard the producer/main actor. They write their own stories and made the first film UNDER PRESSURE in 1998. They further made HOLLAND HEAT, DAPO JUNIOR and FROM AMSTERDAM WITH LOVE. They are currently working on their newest production, the Edo film ETI VBE HOLLAND. Isaac Izoya (Germany) started his production company Ehizoya Golden Productions. He produces and acts in all of his films. For a long time he worked together with Lancelot imaseun, a Nigerian based prolific director, as his director. For his latest film he worked with other directors. Isaac writes most of the stories and has produced and starred in SINNERS IN THE

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236 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
John Osas Omorgie (Belgium) is a director/producer/writer and made his first film in 2003 IGHO EVBUE EBO, in his native Edo dialect. He subsequently founded ANAABEL, the association of Nigerian actors and actresses in Belgium, with whom he made DESPERATE HEART, MAMA WHY ME? I&II and AMAZING WORLD. He also made a documentary THE IMMIGRANT EYES. Azubuike Erinugha (Germany/Belgium) is a writer/director and has directed several films back in Nigeria. He made his first film abroad in 2010: THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN. It formed the first German-Nollywood collaboration ever.

5.2.2.1 Nollywood

John: what made me fell in love with Nollywood is that most of Nollywood stories are true life stories whenever you watch it you must gain something from it.

The protagonists all inscribe their films in the Nollywood tradition. When asked what ‘Nollywood’ meant to them, the protagonists answered:

Tony: at the core of a Nollywood movie from nothing achieve something in a very short period of time because time is money (...)the impossible and make it possible that’s what Nollywood is all about.

Isaac: Nollywood is a movie told by African written by African produced and directed by African for African consumption we are able to rise and tell our story (...) and we’re also teaching the world how to do movie without spending 200 million dollar.

Azubuike: Nollywood is just an experience so it doesn’t matter where you are you can be in Europe and then tell your experience is still Nollywood you can also trace it back to your roots in Africa in Nigeria anywhere it is still Nollywood and that is why Nollywood is what it is.

John: ...any movie made by a Nigerian automatically is Nollywood because I think it is by nature so automatically when you are an Nigerian and you make a movie it is called Nollywood and Nollywood have made enough name and I mean I can’t call it Hollywood I can’t call it Bollywood because I’m from Nigeria (laughing) so I have to raise the name of my country (...) [Nollywood] is good and it give a lot inspiration and uhm you don’t just what I mean feel bad when you watch it you always get things or knowledge wisdom from it.

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237 HOME AND ABROAD (Germany/Nigeria: Lancelot Imasuen, 2004)
238 John in NOLLYWOOD ABROAD (Belgium: Saartje Geerts: 2008)
239 Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekirin on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
240 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
241 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
242 Interview with John Osas Omorgie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
Jonathan Haynes argues that Nollywood films set partially or entirely overseas, constitute a specific genre within Nollywood. For his argumentation, he includes all Nollywood films that have some kind of imaginary abroad (outside the African continent) whether it is real or not. There are different levels of collaboration between the diasporic community and the Lagos-based industry. At one end there are those films that are entirely made in Nigeria and where ‘abroad’ is merely part of the imagination. A film, situated in the US, might be completely shot in Nigeria, occasionally borrowing a shot of an American city skyline in between ‘indoor’ scenes. At the other end are those films that show the point of view of Nigerian ex-patriot living overseas. These productions come out of the initiative of Nigerian immigrants, with or without a collaboration with the Nigerian based industry. A lot of what characterizes the stories of their films, is specific to Nollywood films in general. They treat all kinds of universal issues of life like love, family and the pursuit of a fortune, all common themes in Nigerian films. “The remarkable similarities [with Nollywood]are rather due to the persistence and extension of essential thematic complexes of the Nollywood video as a whole,” he observes. In the films studied here, love is especially present as a universal theme that transcends the diasporic reality. The films evolve a lot around romantic relationships, often of the main character, and those are given considerable attention in the storylines and filmic imagery.

5.2.2.2 Realism vs. the supernatural

The diasporic filmmakers tend to bring slightly more secular stories, less ‘fantastic’, although this is a development that is slowly taking place in domestic Nollywood films as well, as Haynes has observed. This fantastic dimension in Nollywood is normally expressed through the presence of supernatural forces, either in a Christian context or in the form of spirits from traditional religions.

Leonard: ... Africans they believe so much in religion people in the West here not that they don’t believe in religion but they don’t put religion as number one in everything they are doing but to we Africans we took it to the extent that we don’t there’s some things that we don’t believe that they happen by self of our own mistakes we don’t believe this because maybe we sin to African if you got a sin that’s why this thing happened to Africans it’s like nobody can done that because of one thing he did wrong maybe from smoking maybe from cancer or something no they don’t believe that there’s somebody there’s one witch in their family that

244 Ibidem, p.3
245 Ibidem
246 Ibidem, p. 5
247 Ibidem
there that killed that so all those little thing play in Nollywood film a lot but that doesn’t play over here because we bring a little bit of western idea about life different from how a Nigerian sees it so those are the little things that you notice the differences in our telling stories.

Isaac Izoya thinks religion is important in his films only when it is useful to the story. He feels that to also reach a German audience, religion must not dominate the movie.

Isaac: we are religious people (laughing) a little bit you know like in Nigeria we believe in witches and wizards and we believe no matter what the witches and wizards are trying to oppress you the power of the bible the power of God will overshadow them later on giving victories to God and that is things that are common in Africa we will come to Europe you see a very huge multimillion world church go there on Sunday and you don’t find people if you put a movie in Abuja people will be looking at you they don’t know what you’re talking about Germans start going to church when they are 80 so that when they die the church will bury them (laughing) that’s it.

In the films of John Osas Omoregie (Belgium), religion is more present and ‘supernatural elements’ play decisive roles in his storylines. His film DESPERATE HEART is about a young prostitute Naomi who reports the people who brought her to Belgium, to the police, in order to obtain a residence permit. A spirit appears in her dream at the end of the film. In the dream Naomi hysterically runs into the woods where she’s met by a kind of phantom (made with a computerized effect). In a voice-over God speaks to her and tells her she has sinned. The spirit hands a pamphlet to her. It shows a picture of Jesus and reads: ‘The power of grace is strong. Come to my house (...) Confess your sins and I will forgive you’. When she wakes up she quickly grabs a pen to write down the address that was on the pamphlet.

In MAMA WHY ME? I&II this ‘fantastic dimension’ is even more present. The film is about a Nigerian girl, Juliet, who lives in Belgium. Her mother who is back in Nigeria, is always calling her, making excuses and asking for money. She even goes to a witch doctor, a bit of a shady character who is only after her money, for a potion that will make Juliet do whatever she commands. When Juliet wants to visit her family in Nigeria, her mother convinces her to stay in Belgium. She claims that Nigeria has become too dangerous a place, but in fact she does not want Juliet to see that she has wasted all the money and not spent it on building houses like Juliet had asked. Desperate to go back to her country, Juliet decides to go without telling her mother. Before she leaves, however, she visits a pastor and asks for his guidance and protection on her journey. The climax sequence in the film is a series of constant alternating

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248 Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
249 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
shots of Juliet praying in her room in Nigeria, the pastor and three other members of the church passionately praying for her in Belgium and the mother performing a kind of ritual. It is a ritual that the witch doctor has instructed her to do, in order to keep Juliet in ignorance about the money she has lost. The prayers get louder and intense until suddenly a kind of ‘animated’ lightning bolt strikes the mother. She falls down and Juliet runs out. It was the force of God that did its justice. The mother starts crying, confesses everything and begs her daughter for forgiveness.

5.2.2.3 Portraying the immigrant experience: drama vs. comedy

One of the main themes in the films of the protagonists is the portrayal the immigrant experience. The source of stories is often drawn from the personal experiences of the filmmakers and actors involved in a Nollywood productions. In this case, the protagonist share their migration experience and some storylines and motifs are remarkably similar.

John: the story depends on what is happening in the environment you have like that you talk about so here it is what you see what we hear and what we experience that we portrayed so likewise those in Nigeria what they hear what they see and what they experience they also portrayed so there’s difference there will be a difference 250

Tony Akinyemi’s UNDER PRESSURE (the Netherlands), Isaac Izoya’s ZERO YOUR MIND (Germany) and Azubuike Erinugha’s THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN (Germany) tell the story of an Nigerian man coming to Europe in the hope of making a fortune. This story line is common among all diasporic filmmakers all over the world, as Jonathan Haynes has observed in his analysis of 22 Nollywood films set abroad, most of which are set in the US and UK. He refers to this theme as ‘the immigrant-situation’ and discovered recurring narrative structures and motifs. 251 The films explore all aspects an immigrant is confronted with when arriving in Europe: alienation, loneliness, ignorance, cold weather, racism etc. The expectations of the main character are shattered and it is hard to communicate this new reality to his families back in Nigeria. Most of them did not leave for their own benefit but in order to help and support their family. Expectation from home and the desire to meet these expectations results in stress and deception, “…leaving both sides trapped in a circle of demanding and confirming a reality which doesn’t exist.” 252 Romances can sometimes offer comfort or form a way to enter diasporic life. 253

250 Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
252 http://www.championsportsman.com (last seen on 1/08/2010)
UNDER PRESSURE, the first Nollywood film ever made in Europe (1998) and that inspired many others, was produced by Double “A” Entertainment. Tony A.B. Akinyemi pioneered as the director and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran as the producer and lead actor. The film tells the story of a young Nigerian, Victor who, much like the directors have done, comes to the Netherlands in the hope of leading a better life. Thinking the streets in Europe would be filled with money, his prospects are quickly shattered. He arrives with a small suitcase in the airport. The first person he speaks to is, by coincidence, a Nigerian. The encounter is not very fertile, however, as the man tricks Victor into giving him all his money and passport and then taking off. Luckily, Victor is then picked up by the brother of his best friend from Nigeria, who has been living in the Netherlands for a few years, and who Victor had informed of his coming. Victor is quickly integrated in the Nigerian community. He learns how to ride a bicycle and finds work on a farm where many other Nigerians work. He is disillusioned with the life he is leading and letters from home asking for money stress him. He falls in love with Mandy, a Dutch woman, he ends up marrying. The relationship, however, does not go smoothly. They struggle with the cultural differences that exist between them. Although Mandy is the only one working, Victor insists that he, as the husband, should manage the funds. In the end they are unable to pay the bills as Victor keeps sending money back to Nigeria. In the final scene of the film, they have a huge argument in which Mandy threatens with a divorce. Victor runs off. The film ends with a promise of a sequel UNDER PRESSURE II, that was, however, never realized.

ZERO YOUR MIND is a similar story about Teddy, played by the late Kenneth Oviahon. He travels to Berlin but upon arrival, finds out the person he was going to stay with, is no longer living in Germany. When he is forced to sleep in an abandoned building on his first night, he is robbed of all his money. Just like in UNDER PRESSURE, the first confrontation with life abroad is a violent one. He ends up living on the streets, sleeping in underground stations. Then one day, his fate changes. He bumps into an old school friend, Donatus, from Nigeria. Donatus decides to take Teddy under his care, who now also enters the diasporic community. Teddy experiences the pressure from his father in Nigeria, constantly asking for money. He is determined to get himself a German wife, but the film ends before an actual romance can take place. When Donatus ‘white’ wife comes back after a trip, Teddy is thrown out of his house. He finds himself back on the streets and this is where the film ends. The film has a secondary plot on the subject of prostitution. Eke, a friend of Donatus, is involved in the trafficking of girls from Nigeria. In Berlin, he sells them to ‘madam Susy’. The film shows how the girls are treated like objects with no respect. They are inspected like animals as Eke and madam Susy negotiate their price.
THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN, directed by Azubuike Erinugha, is about a Nigerian middle aged man, Okoro Ajouonuma, who travels overseas to Berlin. His wife in Nigeria has left him for a rich Nigerian who lives in the diaspora, and Okoro is now determined to equally make his fortune abroad. THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN is a comedy, starring the famous comedian John Okafor aka Mr Ibu. Life in Europe turns out to be quite a challenge and he ends up living in a yellow phone booth. He is alone in a strange world, he cannot engage in because of language troubles, cultural differences, economic difficulties etc. He meets some Nigerians who try to explain to him that life in Europe is not what he imagines, but continues his personal pursuit for money. His mother, back in Nigeria, pressures him for gifts and money and Okoro cannot bring himself to tell her the truth. He lies and says he is living the dream in his big fancy apartment and will send containers home soon. Desperate to make quick money, he decides to entertain people on the street. Unfortunately, during one of his acts, he is arrested by the police for deportation. This is where the story takes a unique and interesting turn. While Okoro is in custody and being interrogated, he is suddenly released and welcomed as a celebrity. As it turns out, the fake passport Okoro had bought back in Nigeria, carries the name of a famous Nigerian sports champion, expected to represent Africa in an upcoming reality TV show in Berlin. The comedy lies in his physical appearance, as he is old and overweight. Ending up in hospital after every round, he becomes the absolute favourite of the TV show. When Okoro's true identity is discovered by the television crew, they do not tell him and he is kept on the show. They cannot afford to lose him and above that, doctors have declared him to be in a critical medical state, by which any minor emotional disturbance could cause his death. After the screening in Berlin Azubuike received some criticism from pro-migration movements, that the film was not critical enough towards European border politics:

Azubuike:...as an African I support pro-migration I want the borders to be open everybody can freely move to anywhere they want but the thing is that while we are fighting this fight how about the people that keeps coming (...) we keep saying oh we will fight we do demonstration we do demonstration fine I will do that but the problem is that your fight I don’t know when it will end and then you’ll be victorious but meanwhile thousands of Africans are coming here to lose their

The immigrant experience, however dramatic the reality of the story, is often approached from the genre of comedy. Haynes argues that the theme of ‘national character’, inherited in the main protagonists entering Europe, creates comical situations when confronted with life abroad. The films portray typical clichés, that Nigerians might have, of a life in the West. Misunderstandings due to cultural differences are highlighted and have a humorous effect. In a

254 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
theatrical acting style, characteristic of Nigerian comedy, the protagonist makes a fool out of himself in Europe. Two of the most famous comedies that portray the immigrant experience are OSUOFIA IN LONDON\textsuperscript{255} and MR IBU IN LONDON\textsuperscript{256}, both set in London.\textsuperscript{257}

Azuubuike used comedy and satire in the film THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN to portray the issue of migration. He feels it is effective in delivering a serious messages to a Nollywood audience:

\textit{Azuubuike:} ...I try to adapt the style the genre satire because I know everybody in this world would want to laugh so what I do is I try to bring the message and paint it with a satire and some people watch this movie and they laugh all through the movie but maybe they don’t get the message the same day but few days later the message will come down (...) humor is also very important because of the development of the beginnings of Nollywood if you’re too intellectual in your movie nobody will like it and then you lose your audience because but then with humor you can also bring any topic you can talk about anything CHAMPION SPORTSMAN is big international politics European Union and Africa you know the travelling across the ocean and the way Africans are treated when they come here (...) the Nollywood audience will not watch it but now it is reduced to comedy we’re still making a point...\textsuperscript{258}

The comedy HOME AND ABROAD, a film produced by Isaac Izoya, offers a variation on the typical ‘immigrant experience’-storyline. Two Nigerian comedians, played by John Okafor and Victor Osuagwu, are invited to Germany to receive an award at a special ceremony. The film is full of comical elements. In the preparation of their trip, for example, the character played by John Okafor, is already adjusting to the cold weather by locking himself up in a big refrigerator. Once in Germany, everything seems to go wrong. They arrive later than planned and miss the ceremony. The two stars get lost in Berlin, where eventually a German woman offers them hospitality. They are determined to go back to Nigeria with a fortune. Meanwhile the organizers of the award ceremony, two Nigerian ex-patriates, are fervently looking for the them. They are furious because their reputation was damaged when they did not show up. They had even invited the ambassador. HOME AND ABROAD, Haynes states, reflects the opposition present between the Nigerian national character: “Nigerian fecklessness, childish greed, irresponsibility, quarrelsome, endless wheedling, geniality, humor, liveliness, and sheer force of personality\textsuperscript{259} and German rationalism, adopted by the Nigerian organizers of the award ceremony.

\textsuperscript{255} OSUOFIA IN LONDON (UK/Nigeria: Kingskey Ogoro, 2003)
\textsuperscript{256} MR IBU IN LONDON (UK/Nigeria: Adim Williams, 2004)
\textsuperscript{258} Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
The films that portray the immigrant experience but do not belong to the comedy genre as such, also integrate comedy conventions in the confrontation with western life. The humour often lies in the typical theatrical acting style, present in for example the film RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE. It is a crime movie set in Berlin that tells the story of a criminal, played by the comedian Francis Agoda aka I Go Die, who flees to Europe to escape authority back in Nigeria. His expressive acting and encounter with ‘western’ technology creates comical situations. In ZERO YOUR MIND, the main character Teddy, is forced to put his socks over his hands as gloves, when he is struck by the cold weather. He then goes to look for a pay phone, passing many on his way. He finally asks a man on the street where he can find a working pay phone. In Nigeria, when there is no line in front of a phone booth, it means that it is not functioning.

5.2.2.4 life in the diaspora

The films discussed above share the plot of the Nigerian who migrates to the West and is confronted with the European and diasporic reality. Other movies simply treat subjects concerning life in the diasporic community. In the films, the relationship with the host country is problematized. Central themes are: mixed marriages, discrimination, economic difficulties etc. On the other hand, the film also treat the connection with Nigeria on different levels. Nigeria can be a place of nostalgia or a source of constant pressure. Themes of treachery and betrayal, typical for Nollywood in general, are transported into the immigrant community. Typical is the betrayal between friends and lovers, Haynes observes.260 In the films by the protagonists, people are constantly being cheated on. The newly arrived immigrant seems to be the most vulnerably.

DAPO JUNIOR (the Netherlands), produced by Double “A” Entertainment, is at first sight, a romance film. Dapo, a Nigerian studying in Holland, falls in love with a Dutch woman, Wendy. The film deals with some of the difficulties they encounter in their relationship. Wendy’s mother does not approve of the relationship, while Larry a friend of Dapo warns him for ‘these white girls’. They appear happily in love, however, and Wendy gets pregnant before they can even go to Nigeria to get married. In the end, the film takes a sudden turn when Wendy reports Dapo to the police. As it turn out, she was only with Dapo because she wanted a coloured baby. The film integrates several other narratives. The main subplot tells the story of Risky, another Nigerian student, who is wasting his life and money smoking, drinking and partying, at the expense of his studies. His life reflects the decadence of western life to the extreme. When his mother comes to visit him, she begins to worry. She sends a Nigerian girl, Ronke, over from Nigeria to be his wife. They have a baby together but Risky does not treat his

wife well. At the end, Ronke calls the police to have him arrested, so she can have a life in peace with the baby. Other minor subplots show other characters dealing with life in the diaspora.

LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT I&II is about the difficulty of being in a mixed relationship when the families do not approve. Coolio, a Nigerian living in Berlin, is married with Tanya, an Afro-German girl who’s black father abandoned her when still a baby. Their mothers are both racists and do not want to acknowledge the relationship. When Coolio’s mother is preparing to come to see her son in Berlin, things heat up. Patience Ozokwor is playing herself as Mama G, a Nollywood star set to leave on a tour around Europe to perform for her fans. Reality enters the film as this tour actually took place and real footage of one of the shows is integrated. At the show, the two mothers are brought together. They reconcile and realize that colour does not matter. In a secondary plot, a Nigerian man Bola struggles in his relationship with the German Katarina. She smokes, drinks and watches television all day. When he finds out she is cheating on him with one of his best friends, Bola leaves her.

MAMA WHY ME? I&II deals with the difficulty of selfish mothers back in Nigeria, who constantly pressure their daughters to send home money, prevent them from getting married and thus hinder their happiness.

John: MAMA WHY ME is also a kind of life situation uhm you know there we are in abroad and yeah these girls they always make money with I mean prostitution and otherwise that they make the money and they send the money back to Nigeria for their parents please mama help me to make the best of this money for example build a house for me establish this for me and the mother will say okay my daughter or the father will say we will do according as how you have commanded and even to the extent that they start sending fake pictures like this is the building we have for you these are the things we have used the money on and at the end of the day these are zero there’s nothing like that so we’re like giving these people explanation that when you have the means if by God’s grace you are able to make the money take the time to go back to Nigeria and make use of the money yourself not send the money home because you are suffering nobody knows how you get the money or just enjoy yourself that was the message in MAMA WHY ME? (...) It was two messages there we tried also to not only portrayed the bad mother so we also tried to portrayed another one which is also a good mother (...) so there was a mother who was all after the money of the daughter (...) and when the other mother was like the girl was saying ‘mama I need to do this’ the woman said ‘no I don’t interest in whatever you want to achieve what I have interest of is you having your children’ so it was kind of two messages we were trying to portrayed

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261 Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
a. Crime

Crime is a popular theme in Nollywood films and it is also present in the films of the protagonists. To survive abroad, engaging in criminal activities often seems to be the only solution. The constant pressure from home, and the determination to meet their expectations, is the biggest motivation for this, notes Haynes.\textsuperscript{262} The moral lesson of these films, is that no good will come out of a life of crime. Engaging in criminal activities might result in fast money, but it will never last.\textsuperscript{263} The characters are caught between luxury and morality. They are ‘tested’ how far they would go for money. In the diasporic community the Nigerians that have really ‘made it’, are often involved in shady businesses. They form the ultimate temptation for the newly arrived immigrant.

In FROM AMSTERDAM WITH LOVE, the sequel to DAPO JUNIOR, Risky is released from prison. He is contacted by Dapo, who is back in Nigeria, for a job. If Risky can kidnap his son Dapo Jr for him, who is staying with his former Dutch girlfriend, he will give him 5,000 euro. Risky puts his life on the line and accepts the job. He kidnaps the boy and has to cross the ‘bush’ to reach the border with Belgium, where Dapo awaits him. When he has almost reached the destination, Risky’s girlfriend reports him to the police. Risky is subsequently caught and sent to prison. His girlfriend walks away with the huge reward the police has given her.

HOLLAND HEAT, produced by Double “A” Entertainment, and RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE I&II, produced by Ehizoya Golden Productions, are two so called crime movies. Although set in Europe, the films do not problematize the diasporic setting as such. HOLLAND HEAT, situated in the Netherlands, is about the temptation and danger of entering the world of crime. The main character Fred, played by Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran, and his friend Chris are struggling to survive financially. When Fred goes to the supermarket to spend their last twenty euro’s on food, he finds the wallet of a Nigerian mafia member Don Pedro. Returning the wallet immediately, Don Pedro wants to return the favour. He gives Fred a ‘special’ credit card that he can use to fetch as much money as he wants. When Chris, Fred’s best friend, hears his mother is gravely ill in Nigeria, Fred takes Don Pedro up on the offer to help his friend. Chris, blinded by the money, runs off with the card. Unable to give the card back in time to Don Pedro, Fred is murdered in cold blood. In a secondary plotline, Jide, a friend of Fred, robs his uncle, who has come from Nigeria to visit him, of all his money.

\textsuperscript{262} HAYNES, J., ‘The Nollywood diaspora: A Nigerian video genre’, p.9
\textsuperscript{263} Idem, p.17
RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE, set in Berlin, is about the inevitable outcome of a life of crime, for you can try to run from your illegal acts, but you can never hide from the consequences. Okuemu, played by the comedian Francis Agoda, comes to Germany to escape from the police in Nigeria. He has decided to better his life and to swear off crime. He gets a job and works hard to make his living abroad. After a while, however, he gets restless. Okuemu has to work hard and the money is coming in only slowly. His parents keep pressuring him to send them money. Okuemu decides to do one last crime, which inevitably leads to his arrest.

b. Personal experience

The life experiences of the five protagonists form the basis of the stories they portray in their films. The immigrant experience and life in the diaspora are part of their immediate reality and form the major source of inspiration. DESPERATE HEART, written and directed by John Osas Omorogie, is a real life story of something that happened to him. NOLLYWOOD ABROAD, a 2008 documentary directed by Saartje Geerts, is a personal portrait of John, at the time he was making DESPERATE HEART. John involuntarily got involved in a human trafficking scandal. He paid the plane ticket for Naomi, the sister of a friend of him, who came to Belgium as a prostitute. When Naomi stepped to the police, John was arrested and spent one year in prison. John used film to explain his own story to the people and to clear his name. John:

what are people going to think about my arrest how are they going to react to my arrest people know me as a quiet and polite man and now I’m involved in a criminal case so there was a burning passion in me I can’t explain how I felt that day I thought there was already damage to my image so I felt sad I don’t know how to explain If there was a camera that was filming me that very day it would have explained better how much burning I felt in me (...) I want to tell my story to the world how it really happened so many people doubted how can this be how you just buy an airplane ticket for somebody and at the end of the day you spend one year in prison this has never happened before 264

The film does not tell his perspective, but that of Naomi who comes to Belgium, fully aware of the fact that she will be working as a prostitute to pay off her debt. In Belgium, however, she reports John and her sister to the police, in order to obtain a residence permit. John touches upon a delicate subject with his film. The consent-argument is a complex issue in the debate on the trafficking in women. Nigerian women generally agree to be trafficked and sometimes even know that they will be working as prostitutes. According to Opara, this does not justify the trafficking, as this consent originates from their miserable living conditions in Nigeria. The so-called consent is not genuine as the contract is solely based on relationships of domination,

264 John in NOLLYWOOD ABROAD (Belgium: Saartje Geerts, 2008)
coercion and oppression. They are not valid contracts but ‘simulated’ deals, based on inequality, similar to slavery.\textsuperscript{265} John tries to show the other point of view in his film, stressing the fact that these girls beg their ‘madams’ in Nigeria to bring them over, even if it means becoming a prostitute.

\textbf{John:} ...it was on prostitution aspect of life I mean there was a time when these issue arise in Belgium that whenever you have the proof of who brought you from Nigeria or Africa as the people who are paying for you you have the opportunity to have one year from the government or so to stay in Belgium and then they will be arrested and the truth was yes it is true that these people brought them to pay for them but they forgot to also look the other angle of it that these people they are the people that also goes to the people back in Africa to start begging please I can do whatever you ask me to do as far as you are able to can what I mean make me take me out of the country and they are told black on white when you are abroad there is no other way you can do except prostitution so it is made clear if you look at DESPERATE HEART you see there is that story that make it clear that these people these girls know exactly the kind of job they come to do in Europe why then come into Europe and start denying the facts that they don’t know about it\textsuperscript{266}

Apart from telling his personal story, John wanted to bring awareness to the issue in general. He thinks the girls should equally be punished as the traffickers. Most Nigerian prostitutes (up to 80%) come from Edo state, where John comes from. For Edo girls, prostitution has become very common, and it offers them a way to experience life abroad.

\textbf{John:} ...we tried to make it what I mean we tried to make it clear to our government that when punishing the people these girls should also be punished it should be on a fifty fifty aspect punishing they should be punishing the people why bring the girl why transporting the girl into Europe but also punish that girl because she knew exactly why she’s coming when you look at DESPERATE HEART, the beginning of it, you see a lady and a man going to another woman’s house the madam and start begging please I want your daughter to take my daughter to abroad and the lady make clear to the parents look this is the work they are going there for is prostitution and the girl also says yes I know that is prostitution but at the end of the day this girl came and report the madam to police and said I never knew that was I mean the gospel we were preaching in DESPERATE HEART\textsuperscript{267}

In the productions of Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran ‘experience’ is the central concept. Tony: “our stories are always on as I earlier said is on personal experience (...)


\textsuperscript{266} Interview with John Osas Omor egie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen

\textsuperscript{267} Ibidem
so automatically it’s like telling people (...) what goes on among us.” 268 Their stories are based on their own experiences and those of their friends and family. For their film UNDER PRESSURE:

Tony: we decided okay we have a name now we want to do a film I was writing a book I was putting some story together for a book from our personal experience that’s what I was doing so when he said ‘let’s do a film’ that was the story I wanted to use and that is when I brought that idea out and we would now all work on together turn it into a film there was just the two of us and then there were some other people who helped us put it together so almost everything that was in UNDER PRESSURE was more like personal experience 269

In the casting of the actors experience is also crucial.

Tony: one thing about our production is we always try to use ‘amateurs’ to work with there’re not most of them are not professionals but the only thing is that we try to cast people to what they are doing their daily doings on who they are in real life and what they do In real life is what we try to cast them on and that has been working for us like uhm somebody to play like police officer we try to look for somebody that either is a security officer or something like that at least we have that gezag that you can see that he is a police officer 270

5.2.3 Projects
5.2.3.1 Nigerian Entertainment: European tours

For their second film DAPO JUNIOR, Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran went around different cities in Europe to organize screenings before releasing the film on video. This lead to a new idea, a fan had suggested in Italy, Leonard:

...okay you brought Saint Obi Liz Benson those are the two most popular artists in Nigeria at that time ‘why can’t you bring uhm musicians to come and perform music for us’ he [Tony Akinyemi] called me from Italy and said somebody suggested these things you can do this and why not let’s try and that’s how we tried and brought the first artist 271

They started bringing Nigerian musicians over to Europe and touring with them in cities that had big Nigerian communities in countries like Belgium, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. They organized six tours in total and brought artists including: Tony One Week from Lagos, Richard Okohmina aka Ukodo from Benin city, the Sunshine super star band, Ogie Super Star and Collins Oke. They stopped these tours in 2003:

268 Ibidem
269 Ibidem
270 Ibidem
271 Ibidem
Leonard: we have to entertain Africans here

Tony: yeah in Antwerp then we organized in Spain so different places it was like a European tour we went to places where there were a lot of Nigerians where they are concentrated that where we took the show (...) we did about five or six different artists I think the last one we brought should be around 2003 we learned that it’s costing us it’s too much because it’s we finance almost everything by ourselves (...) we organize his show and we ask people to come and pay twenty euro ‘ah no I will not pay twenty euro’ ‘so okay give me ten’ ‘no ten is too much five is what we will pay’ being an African we cannot call this thing off I mean we don’t have enough crowd to fill it so little hall with 100 maybe 200 people and we ask five euro to enter and most you know ‘ah Tony common just let me in’ this and that at the end of the day you don’t have enough money to pay the artist or to pay because we always ask for working permit for them to come over here so we still have to pay belastingen and we are doing it to make name but also to make money

Next to filmmaking, Isaac Izoya is also a show promoter. He has been touring Nollywood star actors since 2003 with his company Ehizoya Golden Entertainment. He brought over some of the greatest names in the industry. For every new tour they put together a show, with music, stand-up comedy and theatre sketches to entertain the fans. The shows have given Isaac a lot of recognition in the diaspora in Europe as well as in Nigeria. Some of the biggest actors he brought were: Ramsey Nouah, Patience Ozokwor aka Mama G, Mercy Johnson, Benedict Johnson, Jim Iyke, Chinedu Ikedieze and Osita Iheme aka Aki and PawPaw, John Okafor (aka Mr Ibu), Victor Osuagwu (aka One Dollar). These are all names familiar to every Nollywood fan.

Isaac: It’s just the demand of their African fans in the diaspora. Its Nollywood fans in the diaspora that dictate who gets on board. They are the one you are expecting to fill your halls and you only need to listen to their demand and respond to it.

Isaac has passed 22 cities and nine countries on these tours. They have faced a lot of challenges in the past: a star actress’ luggage was stolen, one of the co-organizers ran off with some of the money, actors cancelled last minute before the tour, when the ticket and visa were already paid, locations were cancelled, planes were missed etc. Nevertheless, Isaac always manages to continue the shows in accordance with his motto ‘The show must go on’. He made a series of DVD’s on the different tours titled: ‘Laugh and groove in Europe’. Apart from bringing established Nollywood stars Isaac has equally given chances to new and promising actors. Francis Agoda aka I Go Die, a comedian, said: “My breakthrough was in 2005

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272 Ibidem
when Ehizoya Golden Entertainment took me on a tour of Europe.” In 2008 he was the co-organizer of the event “Loving Lagos – Centre of excellence”. The event took place at the theatre ‘Hebbel am Ufer’ in Berlin and also starred the renowned Nollywood director, Don Pedro Obaseki. It was about the inside and outside perception of the city of Lagos, integrated in a show starring the famous actors Mercy and Benedict Johnson.

According to Isaac, Nollywood production has declined over the last couple of years. Mainly due to the problem of piracy, moviemaking is no longer profitable. This development has also effected the popularity of Nollywood stars in the diaspora. That is why Isaac, in the last couple of years, has shifted the focus of the tours to Nigeria’s blooming music industry. Isaac: “We’re giving the fans what they request for.” In 2009 Isaac toured Europe with the Benin city gospel star Mrs. Palmer. They passed Berlin, Athens, Essen, Malaga, Torino, Napoli and Paris on their tour. Her performance in Berlin was a memorable night, as reported by a Nigerian Vanguard journalist. She entertained the audience from midnight until 6 in the morning. In 2010 Isaac brought the hip-hop artist Olu Maintain aka YAHOOZEE and J.Martins aka Oyoyo. What motivates him is, “his believe that artiste’s exposition is veritable vehicles of influencing humanity, culture and the people’s mentality.”

5.2.3.2 Khamileon

Next to his involvement in film production, Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran is active as a singer/musician under the artist name ‘Khamileon’. He released his first album in 2005: The Gold Album. When asked how to describe his music in an interview with Nigerian Entertainment, Leonard answered:

My music has no name, cause as the Chameleon changes colours, so does my pattern of music.
You will find all types of music on this album, so there is always something for everybody. This album has Dancehall, Afrobeat, Calipso, Reggae...

He integrates different kinds of musical influences. Similar to his films, Leonard draws from his own experiences and tries to inform people with his lyrics:

The Gold Album-Mind of an Oracle...is about issues in life...as u take a peek into the mind of this Oracle (Khamileon) you will be confronted with issues...like Girls going after guys just for

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274 http://www.jomosainternationalfoundation.org/(last seen on 1/08/2010)
276 IWENJORA, F., O.C.
277 http://www.jomosainternationalfoundation.org/(last seen on 1/08/2010)
money, ready to sleep with anything not minding the fact that there is AIDS...you will find this on the track MONEY ...Also BASKET MOUTH deals with the issue of our leaders looting the treasury. VAMPIRE deals with the poor state of the world, where people are starving to death, non-stop wars while some of the leaders are busy enriching themselves DON DADA is about people gossiping about Khamileon... INDIAN LOVE SONG is about a good woman who is always there for her man no matter what RAGGA-MAKOSA is a song giving props to Nigerian musicians GSM is a funny song about mobile phone in Nigeria.  

2.2.3.3 Social and Religious outreach

John Osas Omamugie founded the Jomosa International Foundation (JIF) in 2009. It is a charitable organization set up to help those in need. It is just starting up but has very ambitious mission, elaborately written out on their website. Since its existence, ANAABEL, the association of Nigerian actors and actresses, is functioning under JIF. The organization’s mission is versatile and it recently created a branch in Nigeria. John’s main goal with JIF is to fight poverty in Africa and make people in Europe aware of the problems existing in the world.

Jomosa international foundation is an International Partnership of people dedicated to serve underprivileged people with the hope of helping each people maximizes their life potential. A charitable Non-governmental, Non-profit Organisation aimed at empowering people. Our programmes in Belgium and Nigeria and the rest part of the world seek to protect children, men and women at risk of economic and sexual exploitation, while ensuring that these and other children in need have access to basic care and educational opportunities.

JIF offers different services. They want to organize business training programmes with a focus on the training in filmmaking/acting. Jomosa Graphic Home offers design and printing services. On a more social level they want to provide education assistance. John is convinced that education is the way to development for Nigeria.

Jomosa international foundation will be organizing program once a year titled ENCOURAGE EDUCATION where everyone will be given an opportunity to talk on how he or she think is the way forward for the less privilege and orphan in their educational life, we should not fold our hands watching these people over-rule by poverty, let give a helping hand, let assistance the less privilege, the poor and orphans in their educational life. There are children with special educational needs.

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280 http://www.jomosainternationalfoundation.org/(last seen on 1/08/2010)
281 Ibidem
JIF also organizes activities for the community in Antwerp like visits to hospitals and prison. ’Mother’s care meetings’ are organized as part of the Home Management Training program. These gatherings have already taken place about five times.

John: every month we come together to organize what we call mother’s care. We have a lot of young mothers even we have teenagers who have not gotten to the stage of being a mother. Unfortunately it happens what can she do to have the baby? Now she don’t have that experience on how she can care for the baby? So what we do is bringing both old mothers those who have three four five children and those who have just given birth to children bring them together. Start sharing their experience of how to take care of children (...) on our first episode we tried to use a video tape that teaches how you can take care of your children and so and so forth and also like when weather changes how we can also manage our children the age of children their stages in life we talk about all the aspects of children.

The gatherings are based on the sharing of experiences of different mothers. There is not one teacher. The meetings also deal with cultural differences in parenting:

When I met John the first time in his office in Antwerp, he showed and explained me some video recordings of the mother’s care gatherings. This particular fragment was about children’s behaviour towards teachers at school. In Nigeria, looking into the eyes of an elder is a sign of disrespect. In Belgium, however, looking away or down is a sign of disrespect and one is expected to look an elder in the eyes. The mothers discuss these differences and how to cope with them.

John films the meetings and puts them on his site, as a sort of Web TV that can be watched anywhere in the world. “...you will see on the web TV whenever we have any of this activity we always put it in and I mean they have been enough testimonies they have been testifying and bringing something to this program...,” says John. With JIF, John also wants to offer spiritual guidance to those who feel lost in their lives. In accordance with his title as an evangelist, he wants to “bring gospel to the poor.”

Jomosa international foundation offers an atmosphere of love and re-generation of life to all people in need, we follows a biblical term, which says, ask it shall be given unto you, seek you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you, anyone who come to us meet him or her purpose of visit, we give life a meaning, we make you understand and realize how important you are to yourself and to your community, are you confused? Misunderstood by

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282 Interview with John Osas Omorogee on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
283 Ibidem
284 http://www.jomosainternationalfoundation.org/(last seen on 1/08/2010)
circumstances? Discourage of life? Take your chance today with us, giving life a meaning is our task.\textsuperscript{285}
1.1 Publics and scales

Globalisation not only meant the physical mobility of people, but also the new spheres of communication where people and spaces across the world virtually come together. In this chapter, the different publics and scales that are involved or addressed by the practices of the protagonists, will be discussed. The following dimensions will be addressed: Nigeria, Europe, the diaspora, the city and Christianity. While discussing these separately, the following questions will be answered: Who is involved in the production process? Which publics and scales are represented in the films and projects, and how are they perceived? And lastly, who is being addressed as an audience? How these publics and scales are integrated in the aesthetics of the films will be discussed in the last chapter.

1.1.1 Nigeria

Nigeria is central to the mission that underlies the practices of the protagonists. With their films and various other projects, they are looking to clear Nigeria’s reputation, educate Nigerians about life in Europe and celebrate Nigerian entertainment. They truly feel like cultural ambassadors.

The five protagonists of this thesis were born in Nigeria. They are all, not coincidentally, from the southern part of Nigeria, as northerners hardly migrate to Europe. Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran, Isaac Izoya and John Osas Omorogie are originally from Edo state, the state with the highest emigration number in Nigeria. Tony A.B. Akinyemi is from Ondo state (mainly Yoruba-populated), and Azubuike Erinugha from Imo state (mainly Igbo-populated). These are all states in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, a densely populated region that is rich in oil. They are all very proud of their Nigerian identity and their country’s rich cultural heritage.

By choosing to make ‘Nollywood films’ they have inscribed themselves in the national Nigerian film industry. Isaac:

...when they have not been to Africa when you watch Nollywood movie you’ve visited Africa so Nollywood movie is a story written told by African played and produced by African for the Africans (...) the children born here who have not had opportunity to visit Africa were also there when they watch Nollywood movie they feel at home yeah they just feel at home and that’s it

John: ...any movie made by a Nigerian automatically is Nollywood because I think it is by nature so automatically when you are an Nigerian and you make a movie it is called Nollywood and

286 EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), o.c., p. 6
287 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
Nollywood have made enough name and I mean I can’t call it Hollywood I can’t call it Bollywood because I’m from Nigeria (laughing) so I have to raise the name of my country...

The films herein discussed, can be classified under two of Nigeria’s four types of film productions, as described by director Madu Chikwendu: the English language productions (dominated by the Igbo people and centred around Lagos) and the Edo language productions (part of the local productions in the South). Most films are made in English or pidgin English. Nigerian pidgin English is a popular lingua franca, widely spoken in urban centres of the Niger delta states, like Benin city in Edo state. The local ‘Dutch’, ‘Belgian’ or ‘German’ actors also generally speak English in the films, even amongst themselves. John Omorjegi’s first film, IGHO EVBUE EBO (Money Abroad) was in his native Edo dialect. He turned to English for his other productions. Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran did it the other way round and their latest production ETI VBE HOLLAND (translated ‘Trouble in Holland’), currently in post-production, is their first Edo movie ever. The film offers quite a challenge for Tony, the director, for he does not understand the language. Sometimes the covers of the films don’t reveal the fact that they are shot abroad, only showing the faces of the Nigerian actors. Especially John Omorjegi’s films are indistinguishable from domestic Nollywood covers, for the titles don’t give any clue as to the foreign setting: DESPERATE HEART, AMAZING WORLD etc.

All the protagonists are connected to Nigerian based Nollywood industry in some way. Leonard and Tony acted in a Chico Ejiro-film, one of the most prolific directors in Nollywood, alongside Nollywood star Jim Iyke. They also acted in Zeb Ejiro’s ITALIAN CONNECTION. Isaac Izoya starred in several domestic Nollywood productions like FINAL SOLUTION and SAVING THE CROWN. He also collaborated with one of Nollywood’s most renowned directors, Lancelot Imasuen. Azuefbe Erinugha made three films in Nigeria before making the Nollywood-German collaboration THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN. John Omorjegi calls on the service of his brother’s film production company in Nigeria to shoot his ‘Nigerian’ scenes. Moreover, some of them have brought over Nollywood stars to act in their own films. Tony and Leonard were the first to do this, in 2000, with DAPO JUNIOR, starring Liz Benson and Saint Obi, two of the biggest actors at that time. Isaac followed their example and has included star actors in almost all his films. In HOME AND ABROAD, the lead roles were played by the two comedians John Okafor and Victor Osuagwu. Jim Iyke and Patience Ozokwor star in LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT. His latest movie RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE introduces the successful stand-up comedian Francis Agoda aka I GO DYE to the Nollywood screen. The film the CHAMPION

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288 Interview with John Osas Omorjegi on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
SPORTSMAN, directed by Azubuike Erinugha, features John Ofakor, Patience Ozokwor and Emma Achum.

Isaac appears the most integrated in the Nollywood industry. Because of the European tours he organized with Nollywood stars, he has appeared on television several times and received the Nollywood outstanding personality awards, NOPA, and the KAMA award for ‘best individual promoting African film in Europe’. For his productions, he equally calls upon the industry. Isaac:

I get my story I go to a writer I do the screenplay uhmm I bring stars I’ll open my shooting and all that then I bring a viable director that I know can do such a job before I produce my movie I send my script to a few critics a few journalist critics they read the story they ask me stupid question I give them stupid answer they tell me ‘okay change this to this’.

The protagonists aim at a Nigerian, and in extension African audience with their films. They take their films to Nigeria, organize screenings and release them on the video market. UNDER PRESSURE, the first Nollywood film made in Europe was a great success in Nigeria. In an interview, Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran said:

When our first movie “Under Pressure” was premiered in Benin City Nigeria...It was the whole town came to see the movie.....The whole two days was sold out (Three screenings a day) I felt very proud returning back to where I grew up, as a hero. We were on TV, radio and the papers... I believe I am one of the most loved person in Benin City. They truly love “Under Pressure”.

Living in Europe, the distribution in Nigeria can cause difficulties. Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran explain:

Tony: at first when we do a film when we finish it we come with different ideas you know what let’s first sell it in Europe then when we can sell it in Europe we can make little money then we’ll take it to Africa but most of the time when we release it over here before we go to Africa it’s already there so we’re like oh god you know what that’s what we’re going to do we’re going to do Africa first and then come back to Europe but we’re always too late
Leonard: we are filmmakers and everything but we are not marketers let’s put it that way

For the German-Nollywood co-production THE CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTSMAN, it was very important that the film would appeal to both an African (Nollywood audience) and European audience. Azubuike wrote the story, a true Nollywood comedy, and the German artist

290 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
292 Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
collective InterArte added a reflective documentary aspect, concerning the subject of migration. The Nollywood audience’s response was not laudatory, however, as will be discussed in the last chapter.

John Omorogie’s brother takes care of the distribution of his films in Nigeria. His organization, the Jomosa International Foundation (JIF), is equally directed towards a Nigerian ‘audience’ as it aims to fight poverty in Nigeria. A branch of the organization has now been launched in Abuja, Nigeria’s capital.

John: also Jomosa International Foundation is also recognized in Nigeria already and in Nigeria it was in newspaper in June (...) help those who are very poor like in Nigeria we all know that Nigeria is a rich country that is the fact but the truth is seventy five percent of Nigerians are still poor it’s just twenty five that are rich and those are the people that portray the image that Nigeria is rich when you go to Nigeria you know that Nigeria is rich by name but by living it’s very poor so there are still people living in Nigeria who don’t have enough to eat there are still people living in Nigeria who can’t get clothes to put on so these things sometimes touches my soul so when I see these things you see what I mean it’s a better chance for me to also create something that will also help my people back in (...) that is the main basic to help people the aim of Jomosa International Foundation

The films, made by the protagonists, are mainly set in Europe. However, they generally include scenes set in Nigeria, and Nigeria is indirectly present in the narratives. John Osas Omorogie:

the crew I have in Nigeria they belong to the Nollywood feat so it’s not what I mean my younger brother he’s my director in Nigeria (...) yeah I just I pay them and then they do what I want I just send them the script so they make it for me

Azbuike and Isaac travel to Nigeria themselves to shoot their ‘Nigerian’ scenes. The films of Double “A” Entertainment are entirely shot in Europe. The alternation between the Nigerian and European setting, sometimes causes problems as the main actors are not always able to travel for the shootings. In DESPERATE HEART (Belgium) the main character of Naomi is played by a different actress in Nigeria. In RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE (Germany) the actor-switch is integrated in the story as the main character conveniently has to undergo plastic surgery on his face before travelling abroad. The scenes set in Nigeria are mostly geographically undefined and can be rural or urban. They are either shot in villages, in the suburbs or entirely indoors. Only in the crime film RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE, the city of Lagos is clearly present and reflects a violent environment, controlled by the mafia.

293 Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
294 Ibidem
As much as Nigeria represents home for the main characters in the films, no one has any intention of going back. Furthermore, ‘Nigeria’ seems to be perceived as a source of constant stress, as Haynes has also observed in other diasporic Nollywood films. The parents of the main characters, who are back in Nigeria, incessantly pressure their children to send them money and gifts. They do not understand that life in Europe can be hard, and the protagonists often lie about their situation or engage in criminal activities not to disappoint them. Instead of missing their home country, the characters shudder at the arrival of a letter or phone call from Nigeria.

Aside from the Nigerian film industry, Double “A” Entertainment and Ehizoya Golden Entertainment focus on Nigerian popular music. They have brought different artists to Europe, from gospel to hip-hop stars. Nigeria is well known for its music and until today has a blooming music industry.

5.2.4 Europe

The protagonists of this thesis all live in continental western-Europe. Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran have been living in and around Eindhoven, the Netherlands, for almost twenty years. Isaac Izoya has been residing in Germany since the early nineties. Azubuike Erinugha previously lived in the US and Canada, but then moved to Germany, where he stayed for three years until 2009 and is currently living in Brussels, Belgium. His relationship with Germany is central here, for it is there he made his first and only Nollywood film abroad. John Osas Omorogie has been living in Belgium for the past ten years. Belgium will not be considered as such, as John’s engagement in society has more to do with Antwerp (the city where he is living) than Belgium, which will later be discussed. The host countries of the protagonists are present in their practices on different levels.

a. the Netherlands

Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi Odhekiran are probably the most integrated in their host country the Netherlands. This might be explained by the fact that they have been living abroad the longest and that there is no real African community in Eindhoven, where they live. They have to go to Amsterdam, Rotterdam or Antwerp to mingle with other Nigerians of the diaspora. Moreover, Tony is married to a Dutch woman with whom he has two children. When asked if they stay among the African community a lot, Tony replied: “... Africans they look at us like white people.”
Although their films always take place within the Nigerian ex-patriot community, Double “A” entertainment works with a lot of ‘white’ actors. In UNDER PRESSURE (1998) and DAPO JUNIOR (2000), the protagonist marries a Dutch woman, and this mixed marriage is a central theme in the story. In DAPO JUNIOR there are particularly many Dutch actors, mainly playing secondary roles or extras. Most of them are friends but on one occasion they sought an actor through a radio announcement:

Leonard: that’s what happens in Dapo Junior I think we want to go to the radio we went to the radio to make an advert on the radio it was lovely
Tony: yeah because you see there was a character we were looking for we want somebody that covers his body completely with tattoo in Dapo Junior we have somebody like that he was completely covered with tattoo that one it was through a radio advert that we were able to get that fella 295

Their crew also contains a few Dutch people. Tony and Leonard were the first to subtitle one of their films for a European audience. DAPO JUNIOR is subtitled in Dutch. The film was partially subsidized by the city of Eindhoven and became their most expensive production. In an interview, Leonard describes:

When we premiered our second movie Dapo jr. in a cinema here (Holland)....The hall (500 seat) was full, more than 75% percent Dutch people...Limo, red carpet...the whole works....we were all over the news papers and radio. My partner and I even graced the front cover of a news paper....” 296

Their other films are mostly in pidgin English, which is completely unintelligible for a non-Nigerian (non-African). Productions like FROM AMSTERDAM WITH LOVE and HOLLAND HEAT moreover only star Nigerian actors.

The titles of the films, produced by Double “A” Entertainment are often related to Holland: HOLLAND HEAT, FROM AMSTERDAM WITH LOVE and their newest Edo film ETI VBE HOLLAND. They shoot their films in different cities like Rotterdam, Amsterdam or even Antwerp, in Belgium.

Leonard and Tony more than the other protagonists, take an interest in the local setting of the films. The Netherlands is portrayed as a place of both racism and love. On the one hand the country is welcoming and the main characters easily make contact with Dutch women. In UNDER PRESSURE, Victor is hit by the cold weather, on his arrival in Amsterdam. Walking

295 Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
around on the car park of the airport, estranged, he crosses a Dutch woman. She gives him her jacket and says: 'Take it as a gift from Holland'. On the other hand, racism seems to be part of everyday reality. In DAPO JUNIOR, the mother of the Wendy, the leading female character, does not approve of her mixed marriage. Also in DAPO JUNIOR, Larry gets beaten up by a group of racist men, so badly he ends up in hospital. When Wendy, DAPO’s girlfriend and father of his child reports him to the police for deportation, the Netherlands become a hostile place.

b. Germany

Isaac has been living in Germany since 1993. He says it was fate that brought him to Germany as he did not plan on settling there. His work is recognized in Berlin and he often collaborates with other Germans. The film LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT was shown at the yearly festival Black History month in Berlin in 2010 that is “a celebration of the contributions of the African diaspora throughout the world.”297 It was the first Nollywood film ever shown on the festival. He recently starred in a German cult film ABSCHIEDSTOURNEE produced by Pfanderfilm GmbH, as a member of the Nigerian mafia. Isaac found it interesting to work on a German production, because he’s convinced Nollywood could learn a lot from them. The shooting was calm and organized and the director didn’t shout so much at the actors.298 Although sometimes a source of frustration, Isaac admires the precision of Germans and thinks this has influenced him to stand out in the industry. When he was asked in an interview to give his advice to upcoming filmmakers, he replied: “Like I always say, they should learn from the Germans. Look at German cars as an example. An average German believes “ anything worth doing at all, is worth doing well and good” (...) that is the way forward.”299

Isaac’s primary concern in his work is clearing Nigeria’s often dubious reputation internationally. Isaac experienced, however, that Germany equally has a bad image back in Africa, due to a vague reminiscence of the second world war.

Isaac:...German has such a bad image outside Germany just like Nigerians also have bad image bad name outside Nigeria but with my promotion I did because some time it so funny when I’m bringing some stars to Germany they’ll be so scared to come to Germany they say ‘Isaac please book our ticket to Italy or Holland’ I say ‘why?’ they say ‘no I’m not coming to Germany’ I say ‘Common’ they are scared because of the story they heard about German back home (...) this is

299 Ibidem
a Nazi people don’t wanna be attacked yeah they are scared so ‘hey common don’t worry I come pick you up from the airport insurance provide’

With his films and projects he wants to additionally clear Germany’s bad image and show people what a wonderful place it is.

Isaac: ...all the things we’ve been doing which has been so good for European image especially German image (...) they [Nigerian stars] come here at the end of one month or six weeks tour if they wanna go back I ask them about their experience they were full of praises of German ‘oh Germans they are so lovely they are so nice this is different from what I heard about them’ once they go back home they will go to German embassy to thank them saying ‘your country they are so good’ German will be happy but they are not giving me money to promote them (laughing) but if I have done something wrong ooooooooh there’s Nigerian Connection (laughing)

In his mission to promote integration, Isaac hopes to reach the German audience with his films. He thinks his tours and films can show them an Africa they do not know and thus clear some of the typical stereotypes that exist when it comes to Africa. Isaac: “Then you also choose a movie of Africa to tell people back here we are not only living in tree”.

Azubuike Erinugha lived in Germany for three years where he made The CHAMPION SPORTSMAN. He is the only one of the protagonists who made an actual co-production with Europeans. It is the first German-Nollywood collaboration ever. The result premiered in April 2010 in Berlin. The film is the result of the collaboration between Azubuike and the German artist collective InterArte and the Brunswick University of Arts. “The work of InterArte is focused on an ever-changing integration of different artistic genres and formats in order to create unique, vivid and complex artistic situations, which are also linked with the given local realities.”

Not coincidentally the film is the most documented in this research. The whole outline and goal of the film is carefully written out in a press folder, very un-Nollywood like.

The collaboration came out of a shared concern with the issue of migration. Migration is considered a global reality today that affects both Europe and Africa, but in very different ways. With the film they want to offer both perspectives, thus breaking African and European clichés. Apart from showing Africans the immigrant experience, they equally want to critically review the European responsibility in the matter. The film should most of all start a discussion

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300 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
301 Ibidem
302 Ibidem
303 http://www.championsportsman.com (last seen on 1/08/2010)
in both continents.\textsuperscript{304} The ‘European audience’ the film is aiming at (next to the regular Nollywood audience) is European Nollywood fans, NGO’s and organizations concerned with migration, filmmakers, art institutions and universities.

After a lot of discussions and the actual shooting, the result is “a highly hybrid format: contrasting experiences, points of view, thematical accentuations and artistic approaches have been integrated into a common concept.”\textsuperscript{305} The film combines Erinugha’s idea of a critical reflection on the expectations of Nigerian immigrants, combined -confronted and completed- with “an extensive criticism of the “frame work” caused by a whole lot of European attitudes and politics.” The interesting formal features that resulted in this collaboration will later be discussed.

Azubuike is the writer and director of the film but the rest of the crew is mostly made up of Germans. The film has a big German and thus ‘white’ cast, which makes it very unique within Nollywood production. The German way of acting contrasts sharply with the theatrical and improvisational character of the Nigerian acting style. The main actor is the famous Nollywood star John Okafor and the film also stars the Nigerian actresses Sandra Achums, as a lawyer and Patience Ozokwo, as Okoro’s mother. Having previously resided in the US and Canada, Zubi, as he prefers to be called, had a difficult time adjusting to the life in Germany. This collaboration equally proved to be a challenge. The German obsession with planning was not in line with Nollywood conventions:

\textbf{Azubuike}: …we were having so much problems every day trust me I knew because something would not make sense to me but it completely made sense to them if you know Germans very well okay I’ll give you a typical example a German wants to sit down it doesn’t matter for how long and then plan what is going to happen like next year okay now Nollywood’s tradition there’s no plan that is the thing with Nollywood they go out there and what they’re seeing there is in the film okay there’s small preproduction plan and everything but the plan always changes so this is a big country because the Germans do not understand why I should stop somebody on the street and say ‘come please can you come play this role for me they don’t understand (...) the costume woman would want me to say exactly what I want the next day I’m like ‘bring everything you have bring everything you have if we do lighting and then if what we have does not suit the lighting then off course we have to change it’ she didn’t understand it because I’m supposed to find out exactly the positions of the light (...) before the shooting so I should say exactly so that’s the problem in Nollywood we don’t want exactly but in Germany they want exactly so it was a problem for me for a good understanding at a point we were

\textsuperscript{304} \url{http://www.championsportsman.com} (last seen on 1/08/2010)
\textsuperscript{305} Ibidem
having some logistics problem and I took the script and then I cancelled some lines and then we had to redo some lines for some other people again to make it faster to shoot and it was big problem

The production of the film took much longer than a Nollywood film would normally take. The project was initiated in 2007. Only two years later the actual shooting took place and the film was released in 2010.

2.3.3 The diaspora

The filmmakers are all Nigerian immigrants that migrated to Europe between 1990 and 2000. They travelled overseas in the light of widespread emigration aspirations, existing in Nigeria, and became part of the African diaspora. According to Esman’s subdivision of diasporic communities, these individuals can be placed under the category of entrepreneurial diasporas, that “include a number of individuals with business experience and vocational skills and with some education”\(^307\) They migrated individually, not ‘en masse’, because they feel they can better realize their potential in their new countries of origin.

The protagonists enrich life in the diaspora for those involved in the projects or films. Most of them work with a more or less stable cast and crew of other Nigerian ex-patriots. John Omorogie set up ANAABEL, the Association of Nigerian actors and actresses in Belgium, that has about 20 members living in Antwerp. They were all new to film and together discovered the tricks of the trade of moviemaking. John:

it’s the same people but normally that’s how our life goes so there’s also some goes out some come in it always goes like that we have some new face then some old face are going some are coming so that’s how it goes but thank god I still have the majority of people with me.\(^308\)

The others equally use non-professional actors that are part of the African community they live in. They are mostly friends:

Tony: one thing about our production is we always try to use ‘amateurs’ to work with there’re not most of them are not professionals (...) Leonard: they are friends\(^309\)

Local Nigerian/African businesses in the immediate environment of the protagonists sometimes support productions. They are integrated in the story in way of promotion. Afro-

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\(^{306}\) Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels  
\(^{307}\) ESMAN, M. J., a.w., p.14-20  
\(^{308}\) Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerp  
\(^{309}\) Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhikiran on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
shops, African video shops and hair saloons are frequent settings in the films. John Omorogie also precedes his films with actual advertisements for these businesses.

The protagonists create networks with other Nigerian/African communities in Europe. Isaac’s shows go around to several cities in Europe, that have big African/Nigerian communities. Apart from Azubuike Erinugha, who only moved to Europe relatively recently, the protagonists all know and inspire each other. They sometimes share actors. Kenneth Oviahon, the Nigerian actor who recently passed away, played in HOLLAND HEAT (Netherlands) and ZERO YOUR MIND (Germany). For their last film ETI VBE HOLAND, Tony and Leonard have used one of AANABAL’s star actresses, Betty Orhuozee. Tony has helped John in the past by giving lectures about movie making to ANAABEL. Tony and Isaac moreover acted in SINS OF SEDUCTION together, a film set in the Netherlands, produced by Rita Azenabor and directed by Lancelot.

Tony:

we work together one way or the other because we need each other the European place is so like the country is even the whole continent the European continent is so little that we need each other one way or the other

The European tours, previously organized by Double “A” Entertainment, and now by Ehizoya Golden Entertainment, are made especially for Nigerians/Africans in the diaspora (although keen to attract Europeans). Ramsey Noah, who passed more than twenty cities on his European tour in 2007, organized by Isaac Izoya, said after his return to Nigeria:

I never knew that there are fans of Nollywood all over Europe as this tour exposed me to a lot. I saw first hand that there are indeed several Nigerians and African all over Europe all looking for Nollywood films and the stars. For the first time I felt so proud as a Nigerian that all our efforts as film producers and actors have not gone in vain.

Isaac claims he programmes the stars as desired by the diasporic community. “We’re giving the fans what they request for,” thus Isaac. Fond of the Nigerian entertainment industry, Isaac does not want Nigerians and Africans in general to be left out. The shows strengthen the bond between the diaspora and Nigeria.

Imagine at one of the shows in Athens, Greece, I Go Die lifted a well fed four-year-old boy up and asked him in pidgin English “you too dey enjoy my joke?” The boy replied him in greek language and that was another chapter of joke for the creative comedian. He screamed

310 Interview with Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran on 24/04/2010 in Eindhoven
311 http://www.ehizoyafilms.com/index.php (last seen on 1/08/2010)
President Obasanjo! Come and see your supposed citizen missing in action. No wonder, Greece is till calling for an encore.  

He brought some of the ‘biggest’ people in the Nigerian film industry like Jim Iyke, the famous duo Aki and Pawpaw, Mama G etc. and is more recently bringing music artists. Isaac invites the Nigerian (or other African ambassador) on his tours in the several European countries. In 2008 he received the cultural Ambassador Awards in Hamburg, organized by African Heritage Magazine.

The Diasporic community is also an important audience for the films of the protagonists. They all distribute their films in Europe in Afro shops. Aside from their mission to reach a Nigerian audience back home with their depiction of life in Europe, they want to bring a story for other immigrants to identify with. About THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN, Azubuike said:

..so it’s like true life story maybe not mine but it’s true life story to almost every African but I mean the day of the screening all the Africans there they really identify with this guy because everybody has passed through this maybe not one hundred percent but whatever is happened to this guy in the film already has happened to every African in Germany

The Jomosa International organization equally aims at integrating Nigerians in the diaspora in its projects.

John: ...there are some Nigerians who are also here who don’t have that awareness there are people that are indoor twenty four hours you know what I mean go to work come back they don’t even know what is going on in the community or anything so it is also our duty to I mean having the opportunity to also work with them in the city and so and so forth and a to also give out information what is happening in the community and so and so forth so it’s for both Africans Nigerians in Belgium and Nigerians in Nigeria

The films portray life in the diaspora, as discussed in the previous chapter. They almost solely take place within Nigerian communities. Against the European setting, Nigerians coincidently bump into each other all the time and the characters hang around Afroshops, African hair saloons or African bars. In MAMA WHY ME (Belgium), ‘white’ people are completely absent in the film, even in the background. The narratives deal with the issues of life as African immigrants in Europe. Prince Jackson, member of ANAABEL and leading actor, said about their first production DESPERATE HEART: “it was an opportunity for me to bring on screen what is happening in our community people will see what is going on people will know about what

313 http://www.ehizoyafilms.com/index.php (last seen on 1/08/2010)
314 Interview with Azubuike Erinugha on 1/05/2010 in Brussels
315 Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
they know nothing about.”\textsuperscript{316} The five protagonists deal with issues, typical of diasporic life: integration, racism, unfair chances, prostitution, mixed marriages etc.

For the newly arrived Nigerian, the diasporic community offers guidance and comfort. In UNDER PRESSURE (Netherlands), ZERO YOUR MIND(Germany), RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE (Germany) and DESPERATE HEART, the main characters, who have just migrated into Europe, are taken under the wing of Nigerian ex-patriates who help and advise them throughout the film. Outside the African community, life in Europe is generally portrayed as difficult and hostile. The diasporic community is portrayed differently in the various films. There are those films where it is made up of Nigerians who have ‘made it’ and who live in luxury. The ex-patriot community is represented by: parties, alcohol, luxury and there is no sign of any possible struggle. They feel different and superior towards Africans back home. “African people with their problem they are too much,” says Susan in MAMA WHY ME?, when her friend Juliet is complaining that her mother does not stop calling her. When Susan’s mother comes to Europe later in the film, she disapproves of the independent life Susan and her friends are leading, instead of starting a family. They laugh at her concerns and tell her “That is in Nigeria. We are in Europe.” In other films, diasporic life is represented in a more versatile manner. The characters often struggle to get by financially and are disappointed by the hard work they have to do to earn a living.

2.3.3 The City

Most Nigerians migrate to metropoles in Europe. These offer a multicultural atmosphere where there are a significant number of Africans/Nigerians and often veritable African quarters. Analogous with the importance of Lagos in the Nollywood industries, the cities in which the protagonists live are often more significantly present in their work than their host country. An exception is Tony Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran. They identify themselves more with the Netherlands in general. Leonard lives in Eindhoven, a relatively small city just across the border from Belgium. Tony lives about 20km outside the city. There is no Nigerian community in Eindhoven. Nevertheless, they go around to other big cities like Antwerp, Amsterdam and Rotterdam to make contacts, engage in projects and shoot their films.

John Osas Omorogie feels more like an Antwerper than a Belgian.

\textsuperscript{316} Prince Jackson in: NOLLYWOOD ABROAD (Belgium: Saartje Geerts, 2008)
John: ...I think I can’t live anywhere else in Belgium apart from Antwerp I love Antwerp (...) the people are good and you have more chances to integrate into the system they give you more chances whatever you are doing they give you support so I think I love the Antwerpers.

Antwerp has the largest Anglophone African community in Belgium, whereas the francophone Africans tend to settle in Brussels. He lives in Deurne, a multicultural suburb of Antwerp. ANNABEL and JIF are recognized and subsidized by the city. They gave John an office near het Conincksplein, the African quarter in the centre of Antwerp. A photo of him and the mayor, Patrick Jansens, shines on his website’s background. Preceding the film MAMA WHY ME?, a promotion video for Antwerp is shown on the DVD. Accompanied by images of jewellery and the streets of Antwerp a voice over speaks:

Antwerp, a city full of gold, silver and diamond. Should not be a place of crime. Stop this indiscipline. Ignoring traffic lights, picking pockets, dumping garbage in the wrong sack. Lets join hands together to clean Antwerpen. Lets clean Belgium. This message is brought to you by the Association of Nigerian actors and actresses in Belgium, vzw ANAABEL. God bless you.

For John his new home, his ‘abroad’ is the city of Antwerp. He finds it important to be engaged in society and collaborates with different people and organizations in the city. THE IMMIGRANT EYES, the documentary he made, features immigrants from different origins, all living in Antwerp. It is premiering in a cultural center ATLAS, in the center of the city, as part of a photo exhibition on migration. John was also recently asked to direct a promotion video for the annual event BorgerRio in Antwerp.

Isaac Izoya lives in Wedding, Berlin, where the streets are named after African countries. He loves the vibrant and multicultural atmosphere of the city and just as much as he does not want to be seen as a German, he loves to be a Berliner.

Isaac:

hmm Berlin Berlin (laughing) Berlin is exceptional when it comes to German story about racism Berlin may not have the money and all that but you know when you’re working there well you have freedom here when you are in Berlin it’s like you’re in Lagos there is no dull moment in Lagos in Berlin no dull moment wake up three o’clock you have club to go from Monday to Monday so when we are here we feel at home and uhm the multiculti system in Berlin helps us a lot and Berlin accept immigrant than any other part of Germany so as long as we can keep to German rules and regulation you don’t have trouble in Berlin I remember those days like I told you yesterday those days people who don’t have paper that are illegal as long as you can come to Germany Berlin you can find your way even if you are wanted anywhere in Germany as long

317 Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
318 On DVD MAMA WHY ME? (Belgium/Nigeria: John Osas Omorogie, 2008)
as you can take the next train to Berlin you are a free man it’s a promised land always buy your ticket for train for U-bahn you don’t have but the day you don’t buy you are in Lagos (laughing)\textsuperscript{319}

Berlin offers, for Isaac, ‘the African way of life’. He sees it as a very modern and luxurious city. In his films, the imagery of Berlin plays a similar glamorous role as Lagos does in Nollywood films. Isaac feels close affiliation with Lagos. His Nigerian shot scenes are situated in Lagos, the center of Nollywood film making. “‘Once a Lagosian, is always a Lagosian”, a key-player of the Nollywood film industry once said. A majority of Lagosians easily get bored elsewhere as they miss the energy and special flavour, the humour and glamour that this African metropolis has to offer”\textsuperscript{320}

Analogous which the importance of the imagery of Lagos in Nollywood films (or other centers like Enugu, Abuja and Benin city), the protagonists make the city (whether Antwerp or Berlin) as a major visual motif in their films. They way the city is portrayed in the setting of their films, present in the films of all the protagonists, will be further discussed in the chapter on transnational aesthetics.

\textbf{2.3.4 Christianity}

The five filmmakers are all Christians and in a way want to reach out to all Christians in the world with their work. Religion is present in their films, but as previously discussed, filmmakers like Tony Akinyemi and Isaac Izoya have diminished the influence of religion to meet with the situation in Europe.

An exception are the films of John Osas Omorogie as previously discussed. He always ends his films with ‘To God be the glory’. Religion plays a decisive role in his films. In DESPERATE HEART, the main character Naomi is spoken to by God in her dreams. At this point she realizes that what she has done was wrong and that she must ask God for forgiveness. After the final shot of the movie the following line is written on the screen ‘Will God forgive Naomi?’. In MAMA WHY ME? the whole film develops towards this crucial sequence where the prayers of Naomi and the church community back in Belgium grow stronger and stronger to finally strike her mother. The mother, who was performing a wicked ritual to manipulate her daughter, collapses. She immediately admits all her sins and begs her daughter for forgiveness. John’s latest film, AMAZING WORLD, that is premiering in August 2010 in Antwerp is a ‘religious film’, as he describes it. Its content rises above his usual social concerns and as he puts it: “You will

\textsuperscript{319} Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
\textsuperscript{320} http://www.ehizoyafilms.com/index.php (last seen on 1/08/2010)
not understand if you are not a Christian”. It is a spiritual film that coincidentally takes place in Antwerp but could have been situated in China or Nigeria. It does not in any way integrate his position as living abroad nor does it collaborate with local Belgians.

John: AMAZING WORLD is a kind of a religious movie who is showing the power of God and his work in our daily life I mean these are things people don’t even understand it’s a mystery so there’s what we call the power of darkness and the power of light being an evangelist being somebody also that knows thing about the gospel of Christ so I try to also to portrayed how the power could work so there was like a man with great power who possess the power of god was coming to the city (...) we show an aspect of life I don’t really know except those who understand religious state will understand what exactly I’m talking about there’re some special powers that will sometimes cause us not achieve our goals so when you are a Christian for that aspect you need prayer

Religiously Nigeria is loosely divided into 50% Muslims and 50% Christians. Only a small minority practice traditional religions, although these traditional beliefs often co-exist next to a Christian or Muslim belief. John Omorogie is an evangelist of the Christ Apostolic Church of God Mission in Belgium. It is a Pentecostal, evangelist church that has its largest basis in Nigeria. Since 1970, “The redemptive power of fundamental Islam and charismatic and evangelical Christianity” are very popular among Nigerians. Until today they enter these groupings through their believe in the promise of “individual salvation through prayer and faith in God”. These churches are especially popular in the South of Nigeria. Religion offers comfort and safety, a sense of community which the government cannot account for. The church is Nigeria engaged in the film industry. Different church communities produce and finance films:

Isaac: ...in Nigeria actually when the government refuse to sponsor even recognize Nollywood especially the good stuff Nollywood is doing for Nigeria image but the churches recognize Nollywood some churches will give you money to produce film and how do you compensate them you go to their church and see them clapping ‘holy Jesus can sing’ you put the story of them around your story your screenplay, to honour the church because it’s church that is sponsoring your movie

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321 Interview with John Osas Omorogie on 10/07/2010 in Antwerpen
322 FALOLA, T., HEATON, M.M., o.c., p. 221
323 Interview with Isaac Izoya on 9/05/2010 in Berlin
2.4 Transnational aesthetics: Nollywood made abroad

In this chapter, several aspects concerning the form and aesthetics of the films of the protagonists, will be looked at. As previously mentioned, Haynes considers Nollywood films set abroad as a specific genre within Nollywood production, with its specific aesthetics, themes and narrative form. The general characteristics he describes, are applicable to some of the films of the protagonists. Nevertheless, although the films share many similarities, the protagonists all put their individual mark on them. Their visual ‘language’ is distinguishing. Apart from differences in camera work and editing, the most obvious contrasts lie in the way they integrate the foreign setting. Above this, the filmmakers all create so-called ‘transnational spaces’, as a way to include imagery of ‘home’ (Nigeria) in the diasporic reality. Lastly, the film THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN is unique in its integration of some of the principles of European performance art.

2.4.1 Visual style

Film-technically, the films are diverse in nature. What follows, is a general description of the individual ‘visual language’ of the protagonists. Nevertheless, every film on its own has its singularities and the filmmakers have evolved and adjusted their style in the course of their work.

The films of Tony and Leonard are technically quite complex. The camera is very mobile. There is a balance of ‘indoor’ and ‘outdoor’ scenes. The camera often moves with the characters and combines several points of view. There is dynamic editing as their scenes are constructed as successions of relatively brief shots. In the dialogues there is extensive use of the ‘reverse shot reverse’ technique. In some key scenes, Tony and Leonard use expressive camera work and editing. When the character of Larry gets beaten up in DAPO JUNIOR, the camera seems to participate in the fight: a sequence of super-fast shots of the guys hitting him. In the same film when the character Risky is smoking marihuana in his house, the image gets blurry and jumps to different angles of his head. Meanwhile a voice over of his mother is telling him to better his life. Other films like HOLLAND HEAT, use a more static camera and evolve more around ‘dialogue-scenes’ shot indoors. This is typical for Nollywood.

The German-Nollywood coproduction THE CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTSMAN is the most expensive and technically most complex film of all the productions herein discussed. Azubuike:

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... the German also has his own culture of precision and perfection so they were having so much problems so I have to make compromise because there’re certain things the technicalities why Nollywood is unique is that most filmmakers from Nollywood don’t even pay too much attention to this big time theories the film technicalities that is why it is what it is Nollywood so when I say ‘you know what we can do with this handheld camera I’ll quickly do and then go to the next scene’ they don’t want to do it they want it perfect the director of photography wants to light every scene even on the once that have sun which we don’t do we normally use reflectors to get the natural light but he wants to light it exactly and then it will take us like two three hours to just to set

They spent three months editing the film, which is unusually long for Nollywood standards. The editing and camerawork is varied and dynamic, although some dialogue scenes are still filmed quite statically. Characteristic and unique in the film are the ‘fast forward’ scenes of the main character Okoro. Extra- diegetic music accompanies the accelerated image, which adds to the comedy, much like a typical Charlie Chaplin movie.

The films of Isaac Izoya and John Omorogie are technically quite similar. The films are centred around the dialogues and the ‘camera’ is, at it were, less present. ‘Indoor’ scenes dominate their films. The scenes are made up of a single shot, or several relatively long shot. There is less editing involved and the camera is more static. The setting is slightly more constructed and theatrical. Camera often forms the ‘fourth’ wall and the characters are conveniently talking, while facing the camera. There is slightly less use of the ‘shot reverse shot’ technique. Some action scenes or emotionally crucial scenes have more dynamic camerawork and expressive editing, but in general, the films are more dialogue oriented than technically elaborated.

Particular in John’s movies is the frequent use of close-ups of items in between the shots of a dialogue. John draws the eye of the viewer to objects that often represent luxury or are subjects of the conversation. This can be linked with what Haynes describes as ‘commodity fetishism’, characteristic of Nollywood films in general.\(^{325}\)

2.4.2 Setting

The films of the protagonists are situated within the diasporic community. Besides some ‘white’ actors, the core of the cast remains African. Afroshops and African saloons commonly feature the setting. Europe is framed as an ‘African’ Europe. Haynes argued that a certain Afrocentrism dominates the diasporic films.\(^{326}\) Africans are everywhere and the characters randomly bump in to each other on the streets in mega cities like Berlin. Newly arrived

immigrants coincidently cross old friends from Nigeria. The protagonists integrate the European setting in different ways.

And as a bonus, you will get to enjoy the beauty of the Dutch and Belgian scenery, where this epic was filmed.327

Tony and Leonard pay attention to all facets of the Dutch setting. The opening scene of UNDER PRESSURE is a montage of shots of rural and urban Holland. Firstly, there are shots of the typical Dutch city life: people walking around the streets, a tower, outdoor cafés, parks etc. The images are crowded. Secondly, the opening sequence integrates shots of the classic ‘flat’ Dutch countryside with its canals and woods. This succession of shots also includes typical Dutch symbols: bicycles (in the city) and mills (in the countryside). From the beginning of the film, the Dutch setting makes its mark. Furthermore, a lot of the settings in the films of Double “A” Entertainment tend to reflect social events or gatherings like carnivals, tropical swimming pools etc.

In John Omorogie’s films the setting remains rather undefined. His films are predominantly shot indoors without integrating a lot of outdoor spaces. The setting is literal the background of the story and does not carry symbolic meaning. The indoor spaces are always respectable apartments. In MAMA WHY ME? the interiors are quite luxurious, similar to the common display of luxury in Nollywood films. Recurring elements like expensive alcohol, jewelry and trendy clothes add to the film’s glamour. John’s use of space corresponds with Haynes’ characterization of the setting in diasporic Nollywood films. For he observed that many of these filmmakers, do not give a lot of attention to the specificities of their foreign environment. Rather, they represent ‘abroad’ as an object of luxury and desire.328

In Isaac Izoya’s films, the urban metropole plays a leading role. Isaac depicts a modern Berlin, which is at the same time a place of glamour and wealth, and a place of loneliness and violence. The context of Berlin is similar to that of Lagos in domestic English Nollywood films. Claudia Hoffmann observed the same parallel within Nollywood films set in NY in the US. The city, as a transnational space, where the local and the global meet, is essential to Nollywood filmmaking.329 She argues “in favor of an “accented Nollywood cinema” that uses the city as a cinematic site within which the identity of the filmmaker and the diasporic mode of production manifest.”330 In domestic domestic Nollywood, a glamorous Lagos is shown. In between indoor shots, shots of the city and of highways with cars flying by, are edited. The camera pulls away

327 Cover: DAPO JUNIOR (Netherlands: Tony A.B. Akinyemi, 2000)
329 HOFFMANN, C., o.c., pp.1-2
330 Idem, p.3
to show the attractive sky line of Lagos. Not once dirty streets, open sewers, chaos or poverty are shown of yet the biggest and most chaotic city of Sub Saharan Africa. Establishing shots of the city are often taken at night because the many lights disguise the chaos and dirt and give Lagos a kind of ‘urban glamour’, according to Hayens.\textsuperscript{331} This portrayal of the glamorous city has been transported to the city of Berlin in the movies of Isaac Izoya. The opening credits of the films are always accompanied by an elaborate ‘Berlin-sequence’: a succession of shots of imposing buildings and places in Berlin, both historical and modern. During the film, the same images are reused in between scenes. In the establishing shots of RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE II, Isaac goes further and even includes images of a glamorous Paris. Nevertheless, Berlin also forms a hostile environment to the newly arrived immigrant. In ZERO YOUR MIND, the protagonist is forced to sleep in the ‘underground’ stations. This is far from glamorous and symbolically represents his ‘underground’ position as an immigrant. This corresponds to what Hoffmann observed in films set in NY: “Accented films establish urbanity as an important feature of the story in that it represents the urban immigrant space and its opportunities as well as dangers.”\textsuperscript{332}

2.4.3 Transnational spaces

Ezra and Rowden refer to Freud’s concept of the uncanny (= das Unheimliche)\textsuperscript{333} to describe the reality of displaced people. When a person leaves his home country, he leaves the emotional and physical familiarity of home. Migrants settle in their host countries, but often feel displaced and never cease to long for home.\textsuperscript{334} According to Nacify, the constant portrayal of ‘home’ is typical for diasporic films.\textsuperscript{335} In what follows, I will examine how Nigeria is present in the films through the use of what I will call ‘transnational spaces’. In that way, the setting of the films can be considered uncanny. Nigeria is virtually integrated through modern technologies, letters, memories and dreams. In addition, symbols of journeying, also characteristic of Naficy’s accented cinema,\textsuperscript{336} are present in the films.

Telephone

Technologies have changed the way people are oriented in the global world. The telephone is one of those inventions that connects people across the world and creates a virtual space, that

\textsuperscript{331} HAYNES, J., ‘Nollywood in Lagos. Lagos in Nollywood’
\textsuperscript{332} HOFFMANN, C., \textit{o.c.}, p.13
\textsuperscript{333} to describe something that is familiar yet unfamiliar, characteristic of the repressed and the unconscious
\textsuperscript{334} EZRA, E., ROWDEN, T. (e.d.), \textit{o.c.}, p.11
\textsuperscript{335} NAFICY,H., \textit{o.c.}
\textsuperscript{336} Ibidem
floats between one’s physical location and his global relations. The telephone is crucial in the life of immigrants. It forms a way of communicating with home. Equally, in the films of the protagonists, telephone-sequences are frequent and form a way of integrating Nigeria in the narrative.

In John Omoregie’s films, the scenes shot in Nigeria are almost always part of telephone sequences. In MAMA WHY ME? almost half of the scenes in part I are telephone conversations the main character Julliet has with her mother in Nigeria. These scenes consist of alternating shots between Juliet in Belgium and her mother in Nigeria.

In THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN, a yellow telephone booth reappears throughout the film and becomes a source of comedy. The image of John Okafor, the main actor, in the telephone booth forms the marketing image for the advertisement of the film. When Okoro, the protagonist of the film, arrives in Germany, he finds himself lost on the streets and ends up living in a yellow telephone booth. He lies to his mother about his situation and tells her he is living in a fancy apartment. When she asks him for his German cell phone number, he gives her the telephone number of the phone booth. When Okoro is arrested, his mother continues to call the number, in the attempt to reach him. Sometimes random people on the street pick up, leaving the mother perplexed.

Isaac Omorogie also integrates telephone sequences. In LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT I, Coolio, who lives in Berlin, is expecting the visit from his mother and brother from Nigeria. They telephone a few times, so that the viewer can follow their preparations, preceeding their trip to Europe.

Letter

Similar to the telephone-scenes are the letter-scenes. In almost all the films the characters are haunted by letters from their parents and friends in Nigeria. The letters beg for money and fancy clothes and always assure that ‘life must be sweet there in Europe’. They represent the unrealistic expectations of people back home and are a source of psychological pressure for the characters in the diaspora. The letters are either read aloud or by the voice over of the author, and form an indirect, non-visual way to integrate Nigeria on screen.

Television

The films, as is typical of Nollywood, are largely situated indoors. In John Omorogie’s (Belgium) films, a television is always switched on in the background. What is remarkable is that the television sets are always tuned to African programmes or shows. Africa symbolically enters
the apartments through the television screen. In one scene in MAMA WHY ME?, the television shows a performance of the comedian I GO DIE, who starred in one of Isaac’s European tours and acted in one of his movies RUN BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE.

Music

The soundtrack of the films contains a lot of African/Nigerian music. This can create an interesting dynamic. The opening credits of LOVE IN BERLIN...THE MEETING POINT, for example, are a montage of shots of different places in Berlin, accompanied by African music. Immediately the viewer is confronted with the transnational nature of the film.

Symbols of travel

“Understandably, journeys, real or imaginary, form a major thematic thread in the accented films,” states Naficy. The journey is literary present in the recurring narrative of the immigrant who travels to Europe. In addition, symbols of travel frequently show up in the films in between scenes: shots of airports, train stations, riding trains, taxis and high-ways.

2.4.4 Performance art

THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN (2010) is a German-Nollywood coproduction, unique in its kind. The Nollywood writer and director Azubuike Erinugha had a story in mind and started a collaboration with the Braunschweig University of Arts and the German artist network InterArte. Together they shared the motivation of reflecting on migration and letting the otherwise silence voice of the immigrant, be heard through a popular film that would reach a huge audience. The story, Azubuike had written, portrayed a middle aged man Okoro who came to Berlin in search of a fortune. The story takes a comical turn when the fake passport Okoro possesses turns out to be one of a famous sports champion, who is representing Africa in a reality show on television in Germany. Okoro is however middle aged, overweight and seriously out of shape.

In this collaboration the filmmakers wanted to stay true to Nollywood but add a self-reflective dimension to the subject of migration. The work of InterArte is characterized by experimental video, performance art and Docu fiction, focusing on thematic information and experimentation. The meta-dimension is typical of contemporary performance as a way of breaking through the linear narrative. In this way, they create meaning in depth, through association, and the storyline is no longer essential. In Nollywood, however, it is all about the story. The films, dominated by dialogue, lie in the extension of Nigerian storytelling. The plots

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337 Idem, p.125
are clear and mostly contain some morality. In THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN the main storyline dominates the films and stays true to Nollywood standards. The typical Nigerian comedy conventions and expressive acting of John Okafor and Patience Ozokwo, that is partly improvised, adds to the Nollywoodness of the film.

In THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN Nollywood and comedy meet with European art film and performance art. This results in a film that should be both entertaining and informative and should appeal to both an African as an European audience. They started out with the story Azubuike Erinugha had written and added two under plots. The existence of under plots is not unfamiliar to Nollywood. Here, however, they are semi-documentary in nature. The boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred, another central characteristic of contemporary performance. The underplots symbolize the reality of Berlin, where the artists and real immigrants reflect on the issue of migration and thus broaden the perspective.

One of the under plot is the story of Polly, Kaja and Odogwu, three immigrants who are actually living in Berlin. They are not actors. Okoro meets them in a bar and returns to see them on several occasions throughout the film. They give him advice and reflect upon their situation in the diaspora. They try to break through Okoro’s idealistic image of Europe. The second underplot breaks completely with the linear story. Semi-documentary fragments are inserted on seemingly random moments. The artists, and thus the actual film crew, are shown in their working place. They paint, make music, film etc. At one point David Reuter, the co-producer is taught by some Nigerian immigrants how to make a traditional Nigerian dish. In addition, some informative fragments on migration are inserted. A voice-over gives explains some issues concerning African migration to Europe. This is either accompanied by the image of an African man wondering around Berlin or animated maps and drawings illustrating what the voice-over is saying.

The message in the film is slightly more abstract than it would be in a Nollywood movie. Azubuike played around with symbolism and hidden meanings which perhaps require a more active participation of the audience. The documentary aspect contrasts sharply with what a Nollywood audience expects and wants. This combination Nollywood comedy conventions with an artistic approach to film is unique but unfortunately did not reach the goal it was aiming for. Made to entertain and inform and to appeal to both Europeans and Africans, the filmmakers seemed to have failed:

Azubuike Erinugha just recently (june 2010) came back from promoting the film THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN in Nigeria. The film that premiered in Berlin had been positively received by the German audience. I went to see him when he had just came back from Nigeria. He had
organized a screening for journalists and marketers, to see if he could find a buyer. No one was interested, he told me. They all liked the story, were impressed with the high quality and laughed at the jokes. What bothered them, however, is the insertion of the documentary aspect, which they thought was completely inappropriate and disturbed the storyline. Azubuike is now thinking of cutting out the documentary scenes for the Nigerian market.
2. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to unravel the transnational dimensions of diasporic Nollywood filmmaking in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. The Nigerian home video industry, aka Nollywood, emerged in the early nineties and grew out to be one of the most productive film industries in the world. The production-style and cheap technologies make it possible for many Nigerians to become filmmakers. Every year, thousands of young Nigerians leave their country in search of a better life in the West. Those who make it become part of the diasporic community, and in that way remain connected to their ‘home’ country Nigeria. Nigerians in the diaspora have now also turned to Nollywood to tell their stories.

Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran, Isaac Izoya, John Osas Omorogbe and Azubuike Erinugha are the five protagonists in this thesis. They are Nigerians who migrated to Europe in the last twenty years and became part of the Nigerian diaspora. They have taken up the initiative to produce, write and direct films, within the Nollywood tradition. In addition, they engage themselves in other social and cultural projects. The aim of all of them is twofold: Firstly, they want to bring across their message and educate people. Secondly, they want to entertain people, through ‘Nigerian’ music, film and comedy.

The aim of this thesis was to unravel the transnational dimensions of the practices of the five protagonists. Departing from the context of Nollywood production and the Nigerian diaspora, I gave elaborate attention to the individual diasporic reality of the protagonists. I discovered that that they experience their personal diasporic realities differently and this effects the nature of their work. Through a thorough exploration of all aspects of their films, I discovered that the transnational nature of their work exists in the integration of the local reality of their immediate diasporic lives in the tradition of Nollywood film production.

Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran do not experience the Nigerian community in their immediate environment of Eindhoven. They go around to larger urban centres in the Netherlands in order to mingle with that diasporic community. Tony and Leonard are the most integrated in the local Dutch community, partially because of Tony’s marriage. They give the most attention to the imagery of their host country. They try to portray the Netherlands from all angles, both urban and rural, in order to represent its total reality. They portray a diaspora that mixes with the Dutch community, although this does not necessarily happen in a congenial manner. The films of Tony A.B. Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odhekiran can be considered ‘transnational’ in their combination of Nollywood production conventions, their diasporic reality and a strongly-present Dutch setting.
Isaac Izoya integrates the urban reality of the metropole in his films. Isaac is the most embedded of all in the Nollywood industry and entertainment sector, centred around the mega-city of Lagos, Nigeria. He writes and produces films but works with Nigeria-based directors and Nollywood stars. In his films, Isaac links the urban reality of Lagos with that of Berlin. The city becomes a transnational space characterized by an urban reality that transcends the ‘national’. This urban reality is central in Isaac’s life and films. The city represents multiculturalism, entertainment, glamour and at the same time loneliness and displacement. In addition, Isaac is concerned with the subject of integration between Africans and Europeans. Isaac Izoya’s films can be considered ‘transnational’ through Isaac’s reality of the city of Berlin as a transnational space, his interest in global integration and his involvement in the Nollywood industry.

John Osas Omorogie is actively engaged in the diasporic community in the city of Antwerp. He is a preacher and has a charitable organisation which organizes social gatherings on a very local level in the diasporic community in Antwerp. John wants to inform and educate people with his films and his narrative line dominates all other filmic dimensions. His films are situated within the diasporic community, in an undefined country ‘abroad’. The link with Nigeria, however, is what creates its dynamics. John introduces Nigeria on the screen through dreams, flashbacks and frequent ‘telephone sequences’ from worried parents. Nigeria is constantly present. John Omorogie’s films are transnational because, with the messages they portray, John reaches across borders to a universal (Christian) audience. In addition, his films portray a diasporic world where Nigeria is constantly present.

Azubuike Erinugha has moved around a lot in the West and only briefly lived in Germany. He is a Nigerian who lives ‘abroad’ but has not really settled in the diasporic community. Driven by his interest concerning Nigerian migration, he directed and co-produced THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN with the German artist collective InterArte. This is the first German-Nollywood co-production ever made and it has resulted in a hybrid film that mixes Nollywood comedy conventions with European performance art. The film, made to appeal to both a European as an African audience, is the only film herein examined that genuinely integrates a European perspective while staying true to Nollywood. This film forms a classic example of transnational diasporic Nollywood film. The uniqueness of THE CHAMPION SPORTSMAN does not evolve out of the personal reality of Azubuike’s life, but the reality of the collaboration.
Although the five protagonists all have their own specific focuses, the similarities in their films are remarkable. I discovered that they share similar plot lines and that they put the subject of the diasporic reality at the centre of their work. Above all, they share the preoccupation with the immigrant-experience. This immigrant-experience focuses on the relationship with both the ‘home’ and ‘host’ country. As I have described above, the relationship with and reality of the host country/city is substantially different for all of the protagonists. Nigeria, on the contrary, is omnipresent in a similar way. Tony, Leonard, Isaac, John and Azubuike make their films to according to Nollywood traditions and primarily for a Nigerian audience. I discovered that, although their films are set in Europe, Nigeria enters the films in so-called transnational spaces, through letters, phone calls, music and television. This thesis demonstrates that the meaning of Nigeria is complex and versatile for diasporic Nigerians. Nigeria means ‘home’, and it represents a place of family and comfort that can contrast harshly with reality abroad for a newly arrived immigrant. Nigeria also signifies a place which has a rich music and film industry. The protagonists want to enrich diasporic life by bringing Nigerian entertainment to Europe. Lastly, Nigeria proved to be the cause of pressure and stress. The unrealistic expectations of ‘a life in Europe’ of the family at home are a constant burden on the immigrants. We can conclude that the transnational dimensions of the films made by the protagonists, are in tension with a strong ‘national’ Nigerian consciousness.

Tony, Leonard, Isaac, John and Azubuike starting out as Nollywood filmmakers. I soon discovered that these protagonists also have other social and cultural engagements, that further explore transnational dimensions. It is remarkable how they all felt the need to go beyond filmmaking. They are all true, and I cannot describe it better, ‘cultural ambassadors’.

In this thesis I have discovered that these five diasporic Nollywood filmmakers living in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany stay strongly inscribed within the Nollywood tradition. However, the local reality of their diasporic lives, create differences, that highten their transnational nature. Their own immediate reality determines how the diaspora is portrayed and how Europe is present. With this thesis I argue for a transnational understanding of Nollywood filmmaking in general. Diasporic Nollywood filmmaking is inextricably bound up with a transnational Nollywood, as a broader term that includes regional, national and local specificities that cross Nigeria’s borders.
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