



CINEMATIC INDEPENDENCE

Constructing the Big Screen in Nigeria

NOAH TSIKA

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Introduction

Screening Nigeria

“Can Hollywood movies be so bad when they inspire gals in Nigeria?”

—*THE FILM DAILY*, JUNE 29, 1948

In 1914, British colonizers established the borders of modern-day Nigeria, calling a discrete yet geographically vast political unit into existence in the name of the Crown. Nearly fifty years later, on October 1, 1960, Nigeria won independence from the United Kingdom. As a postcolony, Nigeria has witnessed dramatic ups and downs driven, at least in part, by some thirty years of military dictatorship. The ostensible restoration of civilian rule in 1999 inspired many observers to draw connections between that historical moment—the weighty turn of the millennium, with its renewed promise of democracy—and the achievement of self-government some forty years earlier. Independence was the watchword, the conceptual pivot, of such comparisons, however partial, inadequate, or imperiled its actual character. The term spoke to ideals of liberation and autonomy, the ongoing dream and outside responsibility of Nigeria, the “giant of Africa.”

If political analogies between 1999 and 1960 seemed, as a new century approached, altogether irresistible, cinematic analogies were perhaps equally available. Decolonization and detachment from military rule both precipitated booms in theater construction and the entrenchment of film companies—foreign as well as domestic—throughout southern Nigeria, the main unit of geographical analysis in this book, chosen as much for its material significance as for the cinematic metaphors that the port city of Lagos, the onetime federal capital and current commercial and entertainment center, has itself inspired over the years. (“Lagos is the Los Angeles of Africa,” proclaimed *Forbes* magazine in 2017, localizing the more familiar assertion of Nigeria as the continent’s Hollywood.)¹ In Nigeria, two modalities of political independence have been distinctly cinematic, inspiring not only filmic representations of the achievement of autonomy but also the deployment and development of ideas about the future of moviegoing.

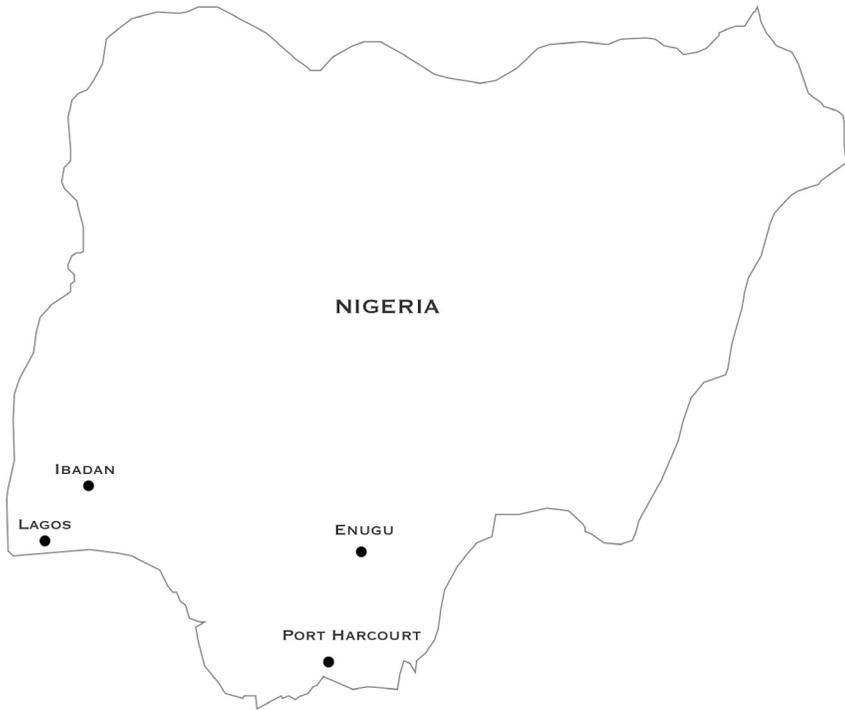


FIGURE 1. Important film exhibition centers in Nigeria. Map by the author.

Produced and released in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a number of Hollywood films endorsed Nigeria's decolonization struggle, positing political independence as a technological and economic catalyst. (A partial list includes titles examined in later chapters: *The Mark of the Hawk* [Michael Audley, 1957]; *Twilight Forest* [Sydney Latter, 1957]; *12 to the Moon* [David Bradley, 1960]; *Moslem People of Nigeria* [Raphael G. Wolff, 1960]; *A Global Affair* [Jack Arnold, 1964].)

Of course, negative analogies have also gained purchase in the historiography of modern Nigeria, with diplomat John Campbell writing that 1999 "did not mark an end to Nigeria's dysfunctional political culture and style of bad governance any more than had independence from the British in 1960."² There is some truth to this claim, however depressing. But it understates the extent to which the turn of the twenty-first century set off a wave of optimism that gained plausibility from the sheer horrors that had immediately preceded it. In 1999, Nigeria seemingly had nowhere to go but up. Indeed, it would be difficult to deny that bilateral relations between Nigeria and the United States had reached their nadir during Sani Abacha's dictatorship (1993–98), which shocked the world with various human rights abuses, including the execution of Ogoni activists who had dared to oppose the exploitation of the Niger Delta region by international oil companies, particularly Shell.

The end of Abacha's reign, and the subsequent establishment of the Fourth Nigerian Republic, its constitution patterned after the American presidential system, signaled a celebratory atmosphere—a certain hope symbolized by the lifting of a longstanding ban on political organizing and the release of hundreds of political prisoners—that recalled the excitement of independence, the promise of a fresh start. The mere semblance of democracy, following a sixteen-year stretch of military rule (the longest in the country's history), proved sufficiently motivating both internally and for outside interests. It was an appealing reminder of Nigeria's once-trumpeted status as a "showcase for democracy," and thus a magnet for capital. Certain cinematic developments are indisputable: by 2004, multiplex construction—the realization in Nigeria of a particularly extravagant model of theatrical exhibition—had begun, much as, nearly half a century earlier, ground was broken by film companies drawn to the intoxicating qualities of independence.

At stake in both instances is the postcolony's role in global debates about the future of the movie theater. I consider these two historical periods—the decades bracketing independence in 1960, and the years after 1999—not only because they are so significant on their own terms, but also because of what they reveal about widely implemented (and increasingly urgent) efforts to keep cinema alive as a big-screen, theatrical enterprise. The two epochs, that of decolonization and that of the present, are separated not simply by the multiplex's deviations from more modest, antecedent facilities but also by the ontological difference between the mechanical, celluloid-based moving image and what Laura Mulvey calls "post-cinema."³ Somewhere between the two is the electronic image so essential to Nollywood, the Nigerian film (or "film") practice that emerged, and flourished, as a direct-to-video response to the dearth of moviemaking and moviegoing opportunities that marked military rule, when it was plainly safer simply to stay at home.⁴

This book is about the periods that straddle this disappearing act. It is as much a history of ideas as it is an account of precise material practices. For while the latter's province includes the United States and Nigeria (the multiplex, in particular, being very much a North American export), the former's ambit is, because conceptual, even broader.⁵ It rests on, and activates, a notion of film projection that many have associated with political independence. Jean-Luc Godard, for instance, famously proclaimed that theatrical film "was born with the idea of democracy"—that the context of cinematic projection is, throughout the world, inextricably linked to a "feeling of freedom."⁶ What have such pronouncements meant in, and for, Nigeria?

The history of modern-day Nigeria lends substance to Godard's poetic expression, showing how the dream of independence—"imagining democracy," in Mikael Karlström's terms—has indeed been tied to the development of theatrical film, including against the threat of the medium's very extinction.⁷ As Twentieth Century-Fox put it in 1957, in a report that recognized the promise of African decolonization, "The theatre is the key to the future of the motion picture industry."⁸ Decolonization, particularly in Nigeria, was prominent among the

changing circumstances that, in the same year, motivated Jack L. Warner to express “confidence in the future of theatrical motion picture exhibition.”⁹ Yet such confidence, routinely offered by American corporate leaders and other opinion makers, bespoke an emerging form of domination from without—what would come to be known as neocolonialism. As early as 1951, Nigeria, with its large population, was inspiring widespread “faith in the future of the movie theater.”¹⁰ But what would be shown on Nigerian screens? What were the prospects for a truly indigenous film industry? Where would movie theaters be located, with what materials would they be built, and who would own and operate them?

If Nigeria’s changing political fortunes appeared, by the end of the 1960s, to destroy the possibility of the country ever becoming an axis of theatrical film, the end of military rule in 1999 seemed to restore it. For while, pace Godard, some countries have seen film exhibition flourish under military dictatorships (Brazil and Argentina come immediately to mind), Nigeria was not one of them. This is not necessarily to attribute the disappearance of theatrical exhibition to military rule. Nor is it to deny that Nollywood, which filled the gap created by the closure of so many movie theaters, tackled weighty topics in its early, straight-to-video years. For example, Gbenga Adewusi’s aptly titled *Babangida Must Go* (1993) is a sustained expression of political anger—a principled response to the depredations of the titular dictator, particularly his decision to annul the June 1993 presidential election, which sparked global outrage.¹¹ It is, rather, to emphasize the disappearance of the conditions of possibility of theatrical exhibition under men like Babangida and Abacha, whose tenures coincided with the acceleration of structural adjustment programs that helped decimate the middle class and drive Nigerians into the informal sector.

Seismic changes have been underway ever since. Eight years after it was erected, Nigeria’s first multiplex converted to digital projection, though a number of major Nigerian filmmakers, taking inspiration from colleagues like Christopher Nolan and Quentin Tarantino, persist in shooting on film. It is a measure of the multiplexes’ disciplining power that such filmmakers must now convert their work to digital files in order for it to reach Nigeria’s biggest screens, whose survival is repeatedly promised—guaranteed, some say—by the constant “upgrading” of equipment. “Throughout exhibition history,” writes Barbara Stones, “doomsayers have regularly predicted the demise of movie theatres.”¹² While theater closures hit record highs in the United States between 1948 and 1954, even that dire, television-saturated period of suburbanization paled in comparison with the comprehensive shuttering of cinemas in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s.¹³ Indeed, what makes Nigeria so relevant to global debates about cinema’s future is that the medium really *did* become extinct there, to be replaced and repurposed by television (both broadcast and satellite) and home video. That it was eventually resurrected in the flashy form of the multiplex is not simply an achievement of commercial real estate

but also a testament to cinema's persistence—its capacity to stave off annihilation or, in this case, come back from the dead.

A PLAGUE OF CASSETTES

Nigeria, the “giant of Africa,” has long inspired the observation that it lacks sufficient sites for the projection of film. No simple assertion of Africa's need of modernity, this observation has often evinced a prescriptive dimension, resting as it does on the notion that, with its vast population and potential as a continental pacesetter, Nigeria deserves *more* and *better* facilities. In 1934 the American trade paper *The Film Daily* complained that “Nigeria, with 20 million inhabitants, has no theater wired for sound films.”¹⁴ A quarter century later, at the dawn of independence, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rued the dearth of “four-walled, air-conditioned theatre[s]” in a country that “desperately” needed them.¹⁵ In 1977, the *New York Times*, lamenting (incorrectly) that “Nigeria has produced only one or two film-makers,” recommended that the country's then-booming oil economy be redirected toward the construction of new movie theaters to supplement those erected in earlier decades (many already in states of disrepair).¹⁶

That didn't happen. When Nollywood emerged over a decade later, it was as a direct-to-video industry, its products primarily viewed in private homes. The sudden preponderance of such industries across the African continent led some outside observers to view video as a source and not a symptom of theater closures. French filmmaker Jean Rouch, who had long made movies on celluloid using mostly African crews, called video “the AIDS of the film industry” in the late 1990s; the metaphor of sexual transmission served to underscore Nollywood's allegedly deadly productivity.¹⁷ According to Rouch's doomsaying schema, the overabundance of one medium (video) meant the wasting away of another (cinema, which Rouch defined strictly in terms of the projection of a photographically recorded filmstrip in a darkened theater).

Other Westerners were equally willing to view Africa's video boom as portending the worldwide death of moviegoing. When, around the turn of the twenty-first century, Jean-Luc Godard opined that “we can see the shadow of a film on the television, the longing for a film, the nostalgia, the echo of a film, but never a film,” Nollywood, whose earliest practitioners were culled from the ranks of Nigeria's national television network and whose products were watched almost exclusively on small TV sets, formed part of his subtext.¹⁸ Like Rouch, Godard had worked on the African continent: in the 1970s, the government of newly independent Mozambique invited him to develop a state television network. His failure to do so, amid objections to this “European ‘master’ coming to teach the Africans a lesson,” prompted Godard to return to commercial cinema with his “comeback” film

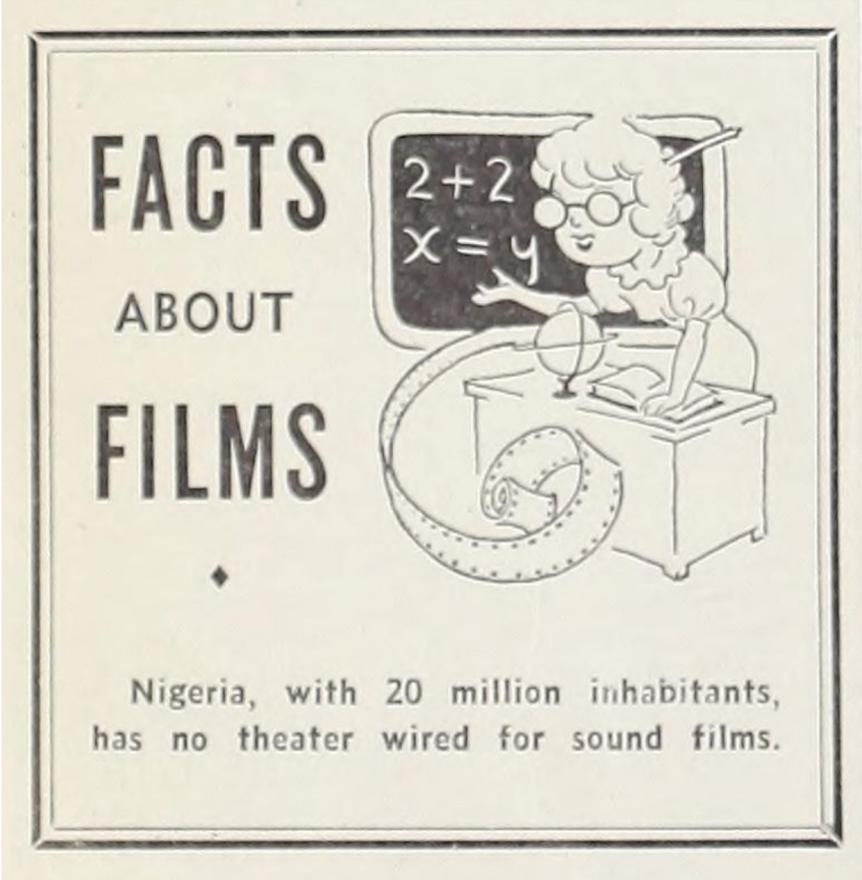


FIGURE 2. In 1934, the American trade paper *The Film Daily* drew attention to Nigeria's theatrical underdevelopment.

Every Man for Himself (1980)—and to suggest that Africans south of the Sahara were missing out on a certain cinematic ideal associated with the big screen.¹⁹

Nollywood's popularity has long placed Nigeria at the center of debates about the future of theatrical film. A cultural and business practice that dates to the early 1990s, Nollywood is typically defined in terms of the low-cost production, small-scale distribution (via modest shops and street stalls), and domestic consumption of direct-to-video films that have only rarely been exhibited on the big screen.²⁰ Jonathan Haynes has suggested that most Nollywood films—designed to be viewed “in domestic space, away from the public eye”—are simply “not at home” in venues like movie theaters and other vast auditoria.²¹ Indeed, Nollywood's emergence is usually explained as a response to the death of filmgoing in Nigeria, to the shuttering of cinema houses that occurred during a period of rampant crime

and insecurity, when a night at the movies represented a particularly dangerous proposition.²²

There is some truth to this shorthand description of Nigerian media history. Whether razed or repurposed, movie theaters really *did* disappear prior to Nollywood's emergence, but it is likely that the industry would have emerged anyway, given the growing availability on the African continent of camcorders, VHS cassettes, VCRs, and a sense that something called "film" did not need to be defined in dogmatic, Western-derived terms. According to Nollywood's decidedly populist spirit, a movie was *not* something that absolutely had to be watched in large dimensions, or in the dark. This process represented a very real cessation, the end of commercial theatrical exhibition, at the same time that it signaled cinema's possible rebirth as the "video-film," Nollywood's answer to the scarcity (and eventual obsolescence) both of film stock and of projection sites.

The scapegoating of Nollywood, and of video spectatorship in general, is more than just a symptom of cinophilia, an expression of contempt for that which seemingly fails to live up to certain "cinematic" standards. It also reflects a lack of understanding of the political and social causes of the shuttering of commercial cinemas in Nigeria in the last two decades of the twentieth century. And it ignores the persistence of filmed theater—records of performances in the Yorùbá tradition that were often screened in makeshift venues and that, had commercial cinemas actually survived, would have been kept out of such spaces anyway, owing to block-booking arrangements that favored more "conventional" fare. Nollywood did not emerge, as in Rouch's crude formulation, to "infect" and destroy theatrical film. Rather, it filled the gap left by the closure of thousands of commercial movie theaters.

Yet it would be difficult to deny that Nollywood has, through its tenacity, called into question the theoretical primacy of theatrical spectatorship: the centrality to film studies of a normative notion of moviegoing that no longer applies to the vast majority of global consumers, who watch films on ever-smaller portable devices, if at all. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Nollywood, derided by Rouch, was also, through its sheer productivity and global popularity, lending support to Philippe Dubois's controversial argument that "with the increasingly boundless diversity of its forms and practices, [cinema] is more alive than ever, more multifaceted, more abundant, more omnipresent than it has ever been."²³ Susan Sontag may have maintained, as late as 1996, that "[t]he conditions of paying attention in a domestic space are radically disrespectful of film"—that "you have to be in a movie theater, seated in the dark among anonymous strangers," in order to qualify as a film watcher—but scholars of Nollywood would powerfully contest such propositions.²⁴ In most cases, however, they would do so without attending to the complicated histories of the big screen in Nigeria. Alessandro Jedlowski's characterization of Nollywood as a "small-screen cinema," meant for modest television sets rather than massive projection panels, is apt: it takes the literal measurements of

Nollywood images without denying or diminishing the industry's aspirations—its ambition to form a true filmmaking practice, a cinema unto itself.

This book is about the early, multidirectional promise of theatrical exhibition in the context of Nigerian decolonization, and the eventual realization of that potential in the form of the twenty-first-century multiplex. It is about a distinct moviegoing experience that, initially understood as incompatible with the Nollywood revolution, now accommodates it, while remaining an index of important geopolitical shifts and a source of enrichment for a wide range of sometimes competing players. More specifically, it is about Nigeria's recurrent salience, for both indigenous and transnational interests, as a site for the construction of roofed, air-conditioned cinemas—for, in other words, the very survival of theatrical film as a means of expanding the profits of local as well as global enterprises. Central to this particular conception of cinema are “big” movies, precisely the sort of capital-intensive productions that Nollywood, beginning in the early 1990s, sought to counter in its own economical fashion.

Understanding what is happening in the Nigerian theatrical marketplace today requires looking at the past through the prism of the big screen. Though largely unrealized at the time, certain ambitions for the movie theater—as source of enrichment, index of modernization, and stimulus to cinematic innovation—were developed in and for Nigeria in the middle of the twentieth century. Such goals would come to eye-catching fruition in the form of the multiplexes whose construction began in Nigeria in 2004. In the realm of theatrical distribution, political independence has never meant national exclusivity. Less a fixed condition or a permanent achievement of self-government, *cinematic* independence is an ongoing challenge, a provocation that raises important political-economic questions. Moviegoing in Nigeria has always depended on imported products, from screens to snacks to feature films. During the period of decolonization (which I date from 1954, when the Lyttleton Constitution established a federal system, to the start of the Biafran Civil War in 1967), hardtop cinemas were imagined, and increasingly constructed, in a complicated dialogue with American companies. Today, about half of the feature films screened in Nigerian multiplexes are derived from (or, to use a less generous term, dumped by) Hollywood. Yet cultural self-determination—what Nollywood, in its earliest forms, arguably epitomizes—remains a major goal, the essence of cinematic independence. For however much they may rely on and support foreign capital, Nigeria's multiplexes are (at least technically) owned and operated by Nigerians. While bringing ever more Hollywood films to Nigeria, the big screen has also facilitated Nollywood's integration into various networks of international cinema culture. Projected in theaters throughout southern Nigeria, locally produced films like Tony Abulu's *Doctor Bello* (2013) and Niyi Akinmolayan's *The Wedding Party 2* (2017) also end up on AMC screens in New York and New Jersey.

Before 2004, the big screen was little more than a figurative force in Nollywood's affairs, a memory and a metaphor. After 2004, it was suddenly a viable, material platform for Nigerian filmmakers willing to make movies on a grander

scale. The multiplex has even inspired a new movement within the Nollywood industry. Known as “New Nollywood,” that movement owes its emergence to the growing presence of movie theaters in twenty-first-century Nigeria. Most New Nollywood films are made expressly for the big screen, their budgets dwarfing those of their direct-to-video counterparts. The latter have hardly disappeared in this age of multiplexes, however. Viewed from a certain vantage, they seem to be at least as popular as ever, particularly among those Nigerians who cannot afford admission to movie theaters, or who live far from any big screen. It would, however, be a mistake to underestimate the disciplining power of theatrical projection in an industry that once prided itself on total (or near-total) national autonomy. Initially touted as a completely independent, even “DIY” alternative to heavily capitalized and compromised co-productions, Nollywood is increasingly accommodating of foreign capital, whether from Air France (which sponsored Kunle Afolayan’s 2016 thriller *The CEO*, a marvel of embedded marketing, like the director’s other recent films) or Coca-Cola.²⁵

Hollywood giants seem particularly comfortable in Nigeria today. The exclusive regional distributor for Warner Bros. and 20th Century Studios (formerly Twentieth Century-Fox, now a Disney subsidiary), Nigeria’s FilmHouse also produces and distributes its own films through a local subsidiary, FilmOne.²⁶ A vertically integrated enterprise serving the interests of in-house productions (including by giving them extensive publicity, prime showtimes, and lengthy runs), FilmHouse has been further conditioned by the needs of its Hollywood partners. It has therefore been difficult if not structurally impossible for a non-FilmOne, non-Fox (now non-Disney), non-Warner-Bros. feature film to become a significant box-office hit in a Nigerian market dominated by the FilmHouse theater chain, whose other corporate partner—Coca-Cola—is just one of the reasons for the rise of product placement in Nollywood. The size and ubiquity, in and around Nigerian multiplexes, of Coke and IMAX signs cannot fail to telegraph the respective investments of those corporations in the country’s largest screens. It is not necessarily immediately apparent, upon entering a FilmHouse location, that Fox has been—and that Disney is now—a factor in its operation, but Coca-Cola’s role is unmistakable: FilmHouse is awash in Coke red.

If, as one Nigerian theater manager told me, “FilmHouse has been a pacesetter in the industry in terms of infrastructure and technology,” that is because, as another manager put it, “FilmHouse is one of Fox’s ‘accounts’—it has Fox firmly behind it.”²⁷ That Fox (now Disney) wants its films to be exhibited in Nigeria is obvious; in order to ensure that they will be, it has gone so far as to partner with local firms, supplying state-of-the-art technology and invaluable expertise in exchange for certain guarantees—including, of course, a significant percentage of box-office returns.²⁸ Chronic theatrical underdevelopment has made Nigeria a frequent target of such Hollywood opportunism. Viewed from this vantage, Francesco Casetti’s comments about cinema’s “spatial expansion”—“Cinema has come to occupy new environments. . . . It has emigrated, founded new colonies. . .”—acquire

the force of the literal.²⁹ In Nigeria today, multiplex formats and Marvel movies have joined immensely popular US imports that include Coldstone Creamery, the upscale ice-cream chain, and Domino's Pizza.³⁰

CLIMATE COSTS

A vast country, the size of France and Spain combined, Nigeria is a place of considerable climatic variation. For much of the twentieth century, the dry northern half of the country played host primarily to open-air cinemas—those distinctly Nigerian establishments whose social contours and implications for film theory Brian Larkin has considered at length.³¹ The far south, with its tropical rainforest climate, has been significantly less conducive to open-air cinemas, an ecological reality that has helped to make this part of the country a magnet for those committed to a particular idea—and ideal—of big-screen spectatorship. For if southern Nigeria is climatically distinct from the northern portions of the country, it has also exhibited political, cultural, and religious differences. Identifiable less with the “unruly” open-air cinemas of the Muslim-dominated north than with the “closed,” “covered,” and “civilized” facilities familiar from European and American models of moviegoing, the dreams of the big screen that have converged in southern Nigeria speak volumes about the area's cultural ambitions and ties to international capital.

The many attractions of population-dense Lagos, the southwestern port city that was Nigeria's federal capital from its amalgamation in 1914 until 1991 when centrally located Abuja took over, have magnetized all manner of foreign and local investors with little if any interest in northern life. Normative definitions of moviegoing, derived from Western contexts of commercial theatrical exhibition, have consistently underwritten this attempt at internal differentiation. Larkin writes of the “bawdy, rowdy atmosphere” of northern open-air cinemas where distractions (including those provided by the skyline itself) abounded, and where Islamic proscriptions against certain activities competed with the pull of commercial entertainment and sheer sociability.³² In 1948, William H. Offenhauser, Jr., an electrical engineer at RCA, observed after a trip to Nigeria, “There is a wide variation in the psychology that you find in theaters in different places. . . . I have seen pictures in the open down in Africa, and I can assure you the psychology of the theater there is quite different.”³³ What the chairman of the National Theatre Supply Company mocked as “the African theater [with] no walls and no ceiling” was thus generative of a different, implicitly lesser form of cinema spectatorship, one that would require a kind of neocolonial intervention—nothing less than the architecturally induced “psychological transformation” of Nigerians.³⁴

The roofed, fully climate-controlled movie house was, in Nigeria as elsewhere, envisioned as a modern site for the close, committed contemplation of cinematic art. As the theater architect Ben Schlanger put it in 1948, referring to moviegoers the world over,

[W]hat we need greatly [is] a theater auditorium where a person can sit down and look at what is ahead of him and not be conscious of the physical shelter in which he is enjoying that picture. He has to be able to look at that picture, lose himself in it completely, and have no reminder of the fact that he is in an enclosure and looking at a picture. . . . In other words, the auditorium has to be a completely *neutral* enclosure, to enable you to enjoy completely that which is being shown to you. . . .³⁵

Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece has examined the so-called “neutralization” movement that Schlanger spearheaded, showing how attention to the physical structures of the movie theater intensified by the middle of the twentieth century.³⁶ This obsession with cinematic architecture matched up well with American imperialist ambitions, particularly in Nigeria. Criticizing the country’s “primitive” open-air cinemas on the eve of independence in September 1960, the MPAA outlined the need for “U.S. interests [to] engage in a theatre-construction program” in the country, where “[m]ost agreed” that “enclosed theatres [would] be profitable in the larger communities”: “Frankly, Nigerian theatres aren’t among the best in Africa. They are open-air affairs and show one program nightly . . . when it doesn’t rain. Ibadan, a city of almost one million, has only four theatres.”³⁷

If, by the middle of the twentieth century, the roofed or “hardtop” movie theater was proposed as a high-class alternative to the “untamed” Africanity of open-air spectatorship, it is today being couched as an equally lofty (and, for many Nigerians, altogether too pricey) alternative to the smartphone and other digital networked technologies that appear to threaten cinema’s preeminence—even its very existence. In the 1950s, as Nigeria was fast approaching independence, the reduction of distraction was deemed essential if the anti-Communist, pro-capitalist messages of American films were to be adequately received and fully assimilated. By mid-decade the independent American production company Lloyd Young & Associates, working in collaboration with the Cinema Corporation of Nigeria (a government-owned body established in 1955), was outlining the construction of hardtop cinemas with these ideological goals very much in mind. While it failed to lay any bricks, Lloyd Young & Associates succeeded in making a film—*The Mark of the Hawk*—that pushed for the penetration of American-style capitalism and the eventual creation of what one character calls “shiny facilities,” including “real” movie theaters, as opposed to the decidedly downmarket venues in which Nigerians were, ironically enough, obliged to watch the film upon its worldwide release.

Between the late 1940s and the early 1980s, Hollywood studios did business in Nigeria via a number of independent organizations and overseas subsidiaries, many of them based in Beirut, Lebanon: Twentieth Century-Fox Import Corp.; Al-Fajar Film Co.; Hikmat Antiba; Mikael Antiba; the Arab Company for Cinema; Atlas Film; Warner Bros. Pictures International Corp.; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer of Egypt; the United Artists Corp.; and Paramount Films of Lebanon, which was managed by Willy Goldenthal during and after Nigeria’s transition to independence. Other intermediaries included the studios’ own individual sales representatives for Africa and the Middle East, as well as the American Motion Picture

Export Company, Africa (AMPECA), headquartered in Apapa, Nigeria (to the west of Lagos Island) and overseen by Abe Gotfried after the death of chairman of the board and MPAA president Eric Johnston in 1963.³⁸ Since 1915, when Fox opened its first office outside North America—a distribution center in Rio de Janeiro—local territory offices have been significant components of Hollywood’s political economy.³⁹ Fox was, of course, hardly alone among major Hollywood firms in setting up shop in Lagos at independence. By 1965, the city was one of only seven official Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA) outposts abroad, joining London, Paris, Frankfurt, Rome, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, and Jakarta within the Hollywood imperium.⁴⁰

Many of the Lebanese distributors who conducted business in twentieth-century Nigeria were associated with the Twentieth Century-Fox Import Corporation, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer of Egypt, and Paramount Films of Lebanon, all of which had offices in Beirut beginning in the immediate postwar period, after the end of the French mandate.⁴¹ When Lebanese retailers shifted to the more profitable import trade in the wake of their own country’s independence, they began acting as carriers of a modernity expressed through and embodied by commercial theatrical films. Their transition into distribution and exhibition was therefore part of the rapid postwar growth in imports, symbolized by the establishment in the early 1960s of the Mattar Bros. theater chain, which included venues in various Lagos neighborhoods: the Roxy Cinema in Apapa; Odeon Cinema and Central Cinema in Ebute Metta; Idera Cinema in Mushin; and Plaza Cinema on Lagos Island.⁴² In the political climate of independence, the perception of a “changing composition of demand towards more sophisticated goods” was abetted by collaborations between Hollywood studios (including United Artists, which established permanent offices in Lagos in 1961) and the Lebanese, Indian, and Chinese merchants who helped bring films to Nigerian screens.⁴³

By 1962, six powerful Hollywood studios had permanent offices in Lagos: Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia, Walt Disney Productions, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Paramount International, United Artists (UA), Universal International Films, and Warner Bros.⁴⁴ A smattering of much smaller firms, from Esther Green Humphrey’s Omaha-based FEPCO Theatre Advertising to New York’s Auriema Group, had also set up shop in the country, where they pursued opportunities from the installation of air conditioning to the marketing of films and associated products (like soft drinks).⁴⁵ Nigeria’s devastating Biafran Civil War interrupted this entrepreneurial flow, as did a succession of mercurial military dictatorships.⁴⁶ Such political upheavals (which included the federal government’s declaration of a state of emergency in the Western Region shortly after the major American studios put down roots there) ensured that Hollywood would, at best, keep the country at arm’s length. With the ostensible restoration of civilian government in 1999, however, Nigeria’s promise was seemingly reignited. The twenty-first century

has thus, in its apparent propitiousness, duplicated some of the excitement of an earlier historical moment.

The two eras, encompassing formal detachment from British colonial rule and the beginning of the so-called Fourth Republic (or the fourth attempt at democratic governance in Nigeria), share more than just the celebration of political liberty. They are also united as precipitants of the rise of film projection in Nigeria, highlighting the country's role in what Gregory A. Waller, referring to a different national context, calls "the story of the movie theater's survival through the Age of Television and into the Age of Video."⁴⁷ When, in the 1960s, Hollywood marketed Cinerama⁴⁸ in Nigeria, the country had no permanent Cinerama theaters, just plastic-and-nylon "Cinedomes" that took eight minutes to inflate with air pumps. The Hollywood firm Cinestar used these structures to promote the Cinerama process, employing multiple projectors and a curved, "hemispheric" screen. At the same time, various American companies simply sold old films to new Nigerian television stations. Via such varied approaches, Hollywood—always less a fixed location than a flexible business practice, a profoundly mutable idea—managed to advance its own interests in and through Nigeria during the period just prior to and in the immediate aftermath of independence.⁴⁹ Today, it is back after a long hiatus fraught with fears of piracy, and it is finding new, well-organized Nigerian firms with which to conduct business, all of them committed to theatrical projection.

A certain infrastructural bias is at work here: Nigerian companies had only to buy up real estate in order to pique Hollywood's interest, providing the industry, as well as select local filmmakers committed to the New Nollywood style, with key projection sites. Piracy may have been a factor in Hollywood's earlier estrangement from Nigeria, but the loss of physical infrastructure was at least as significant. Nigeria has, in other words, periodically played host to "Hollywood's reselling of the motion picture experience," its capacity to consolidate ambitions for the big screen all but guaranteed by its population size.⁵⁰ As the Nigerian filmmaker Ola Balogun maintained as late as the mid-1980s, "in spite of the myriad problems facing [film exhibition] in Nigeria, the prospects are excellent because the basic element (i.e. the audience) is there."⁵¹

Hollywood's willingness to accept modest profits in Nigeria is well captured in a 1962 trade report: "Admittedly, revenues from the so-called underdeveloped nations will be skimpy for some time to come. . . . [They] will not represent a financial windfall by any stretch of the imagination. But past experience has taught American distributors that a limited market can develop into a flourishing one."⁵² What is assumed to have been a "lost period" characterized by "an unremarkable stagnancy"—"a period when nothing happened" and "a period to be skipped" in chronologies of Hollywood internationalism—was in fact an era of innovative, ceaselessly aspirational activity, especially in Lagos.⁵³

As James Ferguson puts it, perhaps too politely, “the picture of Africa as a place that has been simply abandoned by global capital has to be qualified.”⁵⁴ The stubborn assumption of Nigeria’s irrelevance to film and media studies should be seen as part of what Kenneth Cameron calls the “complex of received ideas” about Africa that continues to animate discussions within and beyond the academy.⁵⁵ This epistemic complex functions not simply as a result of screen representations, as in Cameron’s film-specific account (which itself mentions Nigeria only twice), but also in spite of them. Indeed, Hollywood has depicted Nigeria as directly relevant to a variety of US interests since as early as the silent era, albeit in mostly non-canonical films. These include MGM’s *Congo Maisie* (H.C. Potter, 1940), which repeatedly positions Lagos as a global entertainment capital and reliable source of enrichment for Americans, and the same studio’s *White Cargo* (Richard Thorpe, 1940). In the latter Lagos is described as a consumer paradise—a source of expensive items (“Cost plenty at Lagos,” one character says of the latest fashions) and fresh ways of “making money.”

Even prior to World War II, American publications were celebrating Nigeria’s “friendliness” to Hollywood, joining *Congo Maisie* in praising Lagos as what Michael Curtin would later call a “media capital.”⁵⁶ “There is no legislation [in Nigeria] in effect detrimental to American films. . . . There is no special taxation upon distributors and theaters showing motion pictures,” stated an American trade paper, with palpable relief, in 1938, the very year that Arnold Thurman, head of the Anti-Trust Division at the US Department of Justice, filed suit against the major Hollywood studios, demanding that they divest themselves of their first-run theaters.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the paper claimed, “American films are well received [there].”⁵⁸ Nigeria was thus, in such enthusiastic accounts, depicted as doubly conducive to American interests in the wide (and widening) realm of cinema, for not only were manufacturers and distributors made happy by the fact that “cinematograph equipment” and individual films were all admitted “free of duty,” but American motion-picture producers could also take comfort from the knowledge that Nigerian audiences were *already* especially appreciative of Hollywood fare.

By 1967, there were at least three modern movie theaters in Lagos—air-conditioned alternatives to the open-air cinemas so prevalent throughout the country. These elite exhibition spaces included the Plaza, the Glover Cinema (part of Glover Memorial Hall, named after John H. Glover, Administrator of Lagos, which was initially open-air), and the Metro. In a 1968 study, the United Nations Statistical Office praised Nigeria’s “growing number of modern, air-conditioned cinemas, showing good films.”⁵⁹ It was only a matter of time, however, before even these facilities would fall victim to disrepair and the parallel deprivations of austerity and military rule. When major commercial movie theaters returned to Lagos in 2004, they took an entirely new form, one predicated on modes of transnational cooperation and methods of revenue generation previously unfamiliar in Nigeria’s exhibition scene.⁶⁰

METHODOLOGICAL OBSTACLES AND THE SEARCH
FOR THE BIG SCREEN(S)

“A study of the distribution and exhibition of the feature film in Nigeria is a study of foreign interests.”

—HYGINUS EKWUAZI, *FILM IN NIGERIA*, 88

In my 2015 book *Nollywood Stars*, I made a case for the centrality of social media to Nollywood’s star system, particularly as that system evolved beyond the control of the industry’s marketers (producers and distributors, in Hollywood’s parlance).⁶¹ Initially a means of contesting the marketers’ proprietary claims on star images (and, as such, a supplement to television, radio, and print interviews), personal Twitter accounts have become a way for Nollywood professionals to dialogue with something like a global film culture. “Naija Twitter,” as it is affectionately known (“Naija” being contemporary politicized slang for “Nigeria” and “Nigerian”), was a boon to the research that I conducted for this book. Between 2017 and 2019, I tweeted several calls for participation in the project that has become *Cinematic Independence*—requests for interviews mainly with multiplex employees, precisely those workers whom I had overlooked in my previous, production- and reception-centered studies. These were reliably retweeted and otherwise widely circulated by my friends and principal contacts, including Nollywood directors, performers, and cinematographers, and I was eventually able to schedule and conduct multiple interviews both online and on the ground, in my home city of New York and in West Africa. Lagos and Accra are the hubs of the region’s budding exhibition circuits, but I have also met with respondents in other African cities, such as Dakar and Thiès.

My methodological approach is rooted in the recognition that information about imperialist ambition is to be found primarily in the metropole and not in the colony—that Hollywood’s designs on Nigeria are, archivally speaking, more abundant in the United States than in Lagos or Ibadan. Cinematic fantasies assume material forms in archival documents that map corporate aspirations, and it is to such documents that I have turned in an attempt to sketch some of the specific film-related designs and developments of the mid-twentieth century. If the celluloid-centered edifices of that period have been razed in the decades since, their imposing multiplex replacements presently exist as enterable spaces, at least for those who can get past security (the list of forbidden items grows seemingly by the day and is often supplemented by temperature checks and all manner of informal prejudices) and afford the (also steadily rising) price of a movie ticket. The latter half of this book, while not primarily ethnographic, is informed by my experience of large-screen cinema in contemporary Nigeria, as well as by my extensive conversations with current and former multiplex employees. Many of these workers spoke to me on the condition of anonymity, since their positions were precarious even before the coronavirus pandemic forced exhibitors to operate at reduced

capacity (if at all) and furlough hundreds across West Africa. Indeed, as I detail in these pages, the digitization of cinema has dramatically minimized the number of available jobs in the exhibition sector, and most workers are understandably worried about the next innovation bringing with it another spate of layoffs. They also fear reprisals for daring to criticize any aspect of large-screen cinema in Nigeria—whether the “Disney imperialism” that one insider so memorably described or the seemingly more mundane actions of local theater managers.

For those instances in which there is significant overlap between Nigerian and American archives, I have elected to cite the latter, whether the Billy Rose Theater Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, whose offsite holdings include FESTAC programs that are more complete and in better condition than any I have encountered on the African continent, or Harlem’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, with its remarkable array of Nigerian publications, including canonical works of Nigerian film history and criticism. My intention is not to deny the existence of African archives but to point the reader to sites—to specific archival conditions—that are comparatively stable, though, to be sure, subject to their own limitations, particularly during a global pandemic. Andrew Apter, upon whose important account of FESTAC I draw in chapter 3, writes of “the problem of politics” as a kind of witchcraft constantly bedeviling archives in Nigeria, including—perhaps especially—those sites that, like the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), represent “extraordinary resource[s] and achievement[s].” Apter acknowledges the maddeningly “shifting limits” within which one is permitted to conduct certain types of research in Nigeria, and while his account of such constraints looks back to the period of military rule, innumerable obstacles remain in the ostensibly democratic (and certainly fiscally deficient) present.⁶²

In some cases, however, American archives are simply the only storehouses of information on how certain government, corporate, and philanthropic agencies saw Nigeria and (to invoke this book’s subtitle) planned the building and embellishing of exhibition sites in the country. Because I understand the big screen’s construction to be a material as much as a discursive process, I have mined archives that consist of “mere” architectural blueprints, timber orders, and contracts with energy companies—precisely those sources that have long been overlooked by film scholars.⁶³ The Rockefeller Archive Center, for instance, is a repository of documents that cannot, to my knowledge, be found anywhere else. Such archival materials offer insights into companies (like the little-known Cinestar) and products (like the equally obscure Multitrax) that were developed specifically for an imagined Nigerian market. Cinestar and some of the other firms addressed in this book were not Lagos-based, but they were certainly Lagos-fixated, and their files shed considerable light on Western aspirations for cinema in Nigeria.

I have elected to make extensive use of documents housed at the Rockefeller Archive Center for a number of reasons, not least of all because of their origins

in the period on which I focus in the first half of this book. Launched in 1957, and with its main office in Lagos, the West Africa Program of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which was concluded at the end of 1962, provided technical assistance “tailored to the economic development needs of Nigeria,” producing numerous “feasibility studies,” including of the business of film exhibition. The program’s director, Robert I. Fleming, acted as a liaison between the Nigerian government and private US investors like Cinestar International and the Cinerama Corporation. A kind of think tank for Hollywood developmentalism, the West Africa Program kept extensive records of its dealings with those film companies whose ambitions in and for Nigeria I detail in these pages.

Equally useful are the records of the US Department of State, which detail all manner of consular and corporate attempts to make sense of postcolonial Nigeria. Such documents indicate the intense interest with which newly independent Nigeria was viewed by US government officials and Hollywood insiders alike. As Eric Smoodin notes, “historians have paid relatively little attention to Hollywood’s foreign markets”—and almost none to Nigeria.⁶⁴ The same cannot be said, however, either of the US government or of Hollywood companies, as State Department records alone attest. When, in 1948, the American trade paper *The Film Daily* asked, “Can Hollywood movies be so bad when they inspire gals in Nigeria?,” it established certain rhetorical norms for those who sought to describe—and excuse—the industry’s ongoing incursions into the African continent.⁶⁵ But it was also drawing on the US government’s own ways of advancing Nigeria’s “Americanization.” By 1963, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was announcing that Hollywood’s image was “not so bad” in post-independence Nigeria, where, according to the agency’s statistics, “among those who cannot read, an average of 38 percent are regular moviegoers.” That the movies to which such Nigerians subjected themselves were Hollywood productions was an article of faith at the USIA, whose “professional surveys”—reportedly “conducted by independent, impartial institutes of public opinion” and initially reserved “for official use only”—found that “preference for, and enjoyment of, Hollywood films” was pronounced, and that “[i]mpressions of America obtained from these films are generally favorable.”⁶⁶

Beginning as early as the 1950s, Nigeria was also the subject of US Department of Commerce publications that stressed the country’s promise for, among other pursuits, theatrical exhibition. These, too, were generative speech acts—performative reflections of the need to establish overseas markets and investment outlets. Articulations of entwined national and business interests, they suggest a certain kinship between Hollywood and the US government that standard film histories, with their focus on federal antitrust legislation and other state-imposed impediments, tend to belie. By the middle of the twentieth century, Nigeria had become a key site in which such state-private symbiosis could be elaborated, including in the arena of theatrical exhibition. United Artists production executive Steven Bach, whose

company was installed in Nigeria by 1961, noted that “practices very much like block booking were still common” internationally—and actively supported by the US government—even after the major studios entered into a consent decree with the US Department of Justice in 1948.⁶⁷ Again, what was technically forbidden at home was permitted, even actively encouraged, abroad, making decolonizing, population-dense Nigeria one of the cauldrons in which an ostensibly “Americanizing” stew could, by midcentury, be stirred.

Yet such a process was neither unambiguous nor uncontested. In her book *Vernacular Palaver*, Moradewun Adejunmobi cautions against the impulse to read African attachments to English-language media as evidence of assimilationist tendencies—as, that is, “a sign of the surrender of a culturally alienated elite to the culture of the colonizers, a sign of their complicity with the hegemony of Europe [and, by extension, the United States] over various spheres of life in postcolonial Africa.”⁶⁸ Heeding Adejunmobi’s warning, I take official US reports (diplomatic records, policy papers, corporate pronouncements, and “scientific” studies published between the 1950s and the 1970s) not at face value—not, that is, as necessarily offering evidence of “Americanization”—but as wishful projections intended to help materialize the very “market ripeness” that they repeatedly imputed to Nigeria. (Such reports were also increasingly desperate efforts to forestall capital flight, particularly during and after the Biafran Civil War.) As Smoodin suggests, to adopt such a skeptical approach “is not to discount Hollywood hegemony but instead to call for a more nuanced understanding of the place of American movies in the world.”⁶⁹

Indeed, the many interviews that I conducted substantiated, in their own ways, the respective claims of Adejunmobi and Smoodin. All who spoke to me expressed ambivalence regarding the role of American—and, for that matter, Chinese, British, French, and Lebanese—companies in the construction of cinemas in postcolonial Nigeria. In most cases, these cinemas, and the jobs that they have generated, simply wouldn’t exist without foreign capital, foreign equipment, and foreign films. Yet such foreignness is often experienced with a mix of pleasure (Marvel movies dependably entertain audiences all around the world) and pique. Plenty of Nigerian multiplex workers are understandably happy to be paid by the deep-pocketed likes of Disney, IMAX, Pepsi, and Coca-Cola. At the same time, however, few among them are unwilling to use the term “imperialism” to describe such arrangements. The keywords of critical political economy, then, are not unknown outside of academia. The concepts of economic and cultural imperialism are, in fact, widely understood, and just as widely mobilized, in order to account for the complex experience of a specifically cinematic modernity in Nigeria.

Decolonization may have inspired much of the rhetoric of “Hollywoodization,” but it also led to the literal construction of a pronounced American presence throughout Lagos. By the end of the 1950s, US finance capital—including, significantly, that on which Hollywood companies themselves depended—had

entered Nigeria as more than just an idea. The late-colonial establishment in Lagos of US banking facilities reliably promoted large-scale investment by Hollywood studios, effectively presaging the entrance of Hollywood capital into Nigeria. In the lead-up to Nigerian independence—two months before the flag-raising ceremony on October 1, 1960—the Bank of America opened a facility in Lagos, the very first branch of a US commercial bank in West Africa.⁷⁰ The documentary *Nigeria: Giant in Africa* (Ronald Dick, 1960), a production of the National Film Board of Canada, stresses this “building boom” through visual and rhetorical attention to what the voiceover narrator calls “rapidly growing cities like Ibadan, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Onitsha.” “Everywhere,” he continues, “the expanding economy is throwing up new buildings.” The film’s image track shows such edifices in all their modernist splendor. “Nigeria,” the narrator concludes, “is becoming more and more a world of plans and machines.”

The following decade, however, witnessed not merely the emotional reverberations of a bloody civil war but also a series of practical challenges to American investors. In 1976, Nigeria’s Federal Military Government noted in a report on “bilateral U.S.-Nigerian relations” that the immediate aftermath of the assassination of General Murtala Mohammad did not represent a “propitious time for new Nigerian initiatives via-à-vis [the] U.S.”; nor was it convinced of the “durability and relevance of any [new] initiatives [the] U.S. might [under]take with regard to Nigeria.” Numerous American firms remained undeterred, however; they worried only about the “implications of expanded indigenization actions,” in the words of US Deputy Secretary of State Charles W. Robinson. After General Olusegun Obasanjo, who had been appointed military head of state following Mohammad’s death, delivered a major speech on indigenization, one Nigerian diplomat immediately received a “flood of phone calls from U.S. companies wanting to know what the speech meant and whether they were included.” Consular reassurances soon followed, with all of the American firms, including movie companies, being reminded that they could comply “only cosmetically with the requirements for Nigerian participation in management.”⁷¹ Such superficial compliance was, and would remain, the bane of those proponents of “Nigerianization” who witnessed with horror the steady erosion of the possibility of meaningful freedom from foreign influence and ownership.⁷² Even in the 1970s, with the subject of indigenization on the lips of millions, Nigeria’s cinema screens could scarcely be considered independent.

PROJECTING SOFT DRINKS

Examples of the internationalization of exhibition abound in Nigeria today. IMAX, for instance, outfits new (and retrofits “old”) multiplexes, which operate according to the company’s proprietary technologies, much as, in the early 1960s, the MPAA enlisted the Theatre Equipment and Supply Manufacturers Association

of America to design, develop, and construct fully air-conditioned motion-picture theaters in West Africa, including Lagos. As Clement Crystal of Paramount International Theaters Corporation put it in 1948, “The rest of the world looks to us for the latest innovations in theater construction and equipment and they try to follow in our footsteps”—thus “their efforts and endeavors [must] be as American as possible, [with] American plans and devices.”⁷³ Today, Coca-Cola and Pepsi maintain contracts with exhibitors doing business throughout Nigeria; as a result, theater concessions are dominated by the eponymous soft drinks. Indeed, the so-called “Cola Wars” are currently fought on the terrain of theatrical exhibition in Nigeria.

In the twenty-first century, however, local, national, and regional media firms have emerged and expanded against the backdrop of China’s growing influence, offering particular opportunities for collaboration and competition. Indeed, Nigerian companies like FilmHouse and the Silverbird Group, with financing from the Bank of Industry, have effectively created the capacity for the return to the country of commercial theatrical exhibition, even if, or precisely because, they have remained tethered to foreign films and technologies in a manner that recalls earlier transnational relationships. No attempt has been made by any of these companies—or, for that matter, by the Nigerian government (which provided the aforementioned capital through the Bank of Industry)—to stem the tide of media flows into Nigeria.

Instead, a logic of cooperation has subtended the return of theatrical film, indicating the difficulty of devising solutions to screen scarcity in the absence of support from established players like Disney, Warner Bros., and IMAX. During her first term as Nigeria’s Minister of Finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala promoted such transnational cooperation, noting its capacity to reanimate the “arrested histories” of the big screen in Nigeria. Indeed, her handpicked economic-reform “dream team” made her “the toast of the international financial community” in the months leading up to the opening of Nigeria’s first multiplex. A former development economist at the World Bank, Okonjo-Iweala built up foreign reserves, negotiated a settlement of most of Nigeria’s foreign debt, and enabled the country to gain access to crucial international credit markets.⁷⁴ Concurrent with these efforts was, of course, Hollywood’s renewed appreciation for the Nigerian market, a renewal precipitated as much by desperation as by the possibilities seemingly afforded by the end of military rule and the growth of Nigeria’s middle class. As Ivan Turok points out, “stagnant markets in Europe and North America mean that foreign corporations are bound to look more favorably on African markets for growth potential.”⁷⁵ Nigerian multiplexes were built, in part, so that Hollywood could return.

Today, press releases and other advertorials routinely imply that the refined, cosmopolitan likes of Ben Murray-Bruce (founder of Silverbird Group) and Kene Mkpuru (co-founder and former managing director of FilmHouse) are at the helm of accountable businesses in a truly competitive market, in sharp contrast to the

“mafia” of uneducated and “corrupt” marketers who have managed the production and distribution of low-budget, straight-to-video Nigerian films since the early 1990s.⁷⁶ This plainly classist suggestion serves to obscure what may well be restrictive and anti-competitive about Nigeria’s new and strengthening oligopoly system, placing a premium on the polished self-presentation of suited businessmen and reading into such gentility a sense of Nollywood as finally having “arrived” as a legitimate industry on a stage shared with the likes of IMAX.

Yet because Nigerians like Murray-Bruce and Mkparu founded and have overseen the country’s multiplex chains, the chains themselves are imbued with a powerful sense of indigeneity, despite the preponderance of American soft drinks and other imported products, and despite the fact that Hollywood films make up at least half of each theater’s offerings at any given time.⁷⁷ Indeed, Silverbird and Filmhouse remain, justifiably, sources of considerable pride among many Nigerians—shiny examples of what Nigerian ingenuity can achieve. They are also important components of what AbdouMaliq Simone calls “the worlding of African cities.” The theatrical innovations of Murray-Bruce and Mkparu suggest that, in Simone’s terms, both men have been “attempting to elaborate a transurban, ‘worlded’ domain of operations” for big-screen cinema in Nigeria, “try[ing] to balance the need to maintain some functional sense of local ‘rootedness’ while at the same time gaining access to opportunities that are more transnational, even global, in scope.”⁷⁸

Emblematic of this access is Murray-Bruce’s early involvement with the Miss World beauty-pageant franchise, through which he developed the continent-specific “spinoff” competition Miss Africa World. A *de facto* diplomacy organ, Miss World would eventually facilitate lucrative partnerships between Murray-Bruce’s Silverbird Group and Coca-Cola. Both brands, the beauty pageant and the soft drink, would give Murray-Bruce some of the capital necessary to construct Nigeria’s first multiplex in 2004. Murray-Bruce has since been hailed in trade publications as a capitalist champion whose enterprise is, almost by definition, Hollywood-friendly. After all, if Silverbird was good enough for the Miss World and Miss Universe franchises, having helped to “internationalize” the pageants through the incorporation of Nigerian events and delegates, then it was—and is—surely good enough for MPAA member studios like Disney and Warner Bros.⁷⁹

Symbolic of this widely touted return to the idea of Nigeria as a space of cinematic invention—a place of particular promise for film production, distribution, and exhibition—is a controversial planned community called Eko Atlantic, which is currently being constructed on land “reclaimed” from the Gulf of Guinea. Set to be surrounded by a massive concrete barrier (already dubbed the “Great Wall of Lagos”) in expectation of worsening storms and sea-level rise, this “planned city,” adjacent to swank Victoria Island and modeled on Dubai and Abu Dhabi, is meant to be a haven for the rich. Eko Atlantic is being set up to serve as the new financial center of West Africa—a hub of commerce on a par with the major

capitals of global finance, as well as a place where “300,000 prosperous and technologically sophisticated people will live in sleek modern condos, fully equipped with fiber-optic Internet connections, elaborate security systems, and a twenty-five-foot-high seawall protecting them from the attacking ocean.”⁸⁰

Eko Atlantic vividly recalls the “charter cities” movement associated with the American economist Paul Romer. As planned, it suggests precisely the sort of “urban free enterprise zone” that Romer has advocated—and IMAX wants in.⁸¹ Tellingly, Eko Atlantic’s sales office promotes a vast (though yet to be constructed) IMAX theater as an indispensable part of this “shiny new appendage to a megacity slum,” the latest in a long line of Hollywood bequests.⁸² Broadly speaking, this is a public-private partnership involving the Lagos State Government (acting with the full support of the federal government) and majority funding from the China Communications Construction Company, which has been conducting business in Lagos since at least 2007. As such, Eko Atlantic is just one example of the clustering of elite, multinational interests around the promise of big-screen spectatorship—a clustering to which Nigeria has periodically played host since at least the late colonial period.

Rather than the realization of a more sophisticated and durable model of urban exhibition than that associated with previous organizational regimes, the manufactured landscape of Eko Atlantic will be no less likely to result in breakdown, despite special “protection” from climate change. In this sense, the commercial detritus so characteristic of Nigeria toward the end of the twentieth century—the empty cinemas bulldozed or converted into churches and warehouses, those graveyards of moviegoing that, in typical accounts, symbolize a broader urban decline and neoliberal transformation—is not an anomaly of military rule but a promise of late capitalism, which repeatedly stages cinema’s death and resurrection. We might recall that the filmmaker Douglas Trumbull turned his back on a Hollywood that, he complained, was “multiplexing itself to death”—only to become a vice president of the IMAX Corporation.⁸³ Like Chevron’s aging infrastructure, abandoned but not decommissioned (and leaching pollutants into the Niger Delta), the defunct movie theater may be seen in Benjaminian terms simply as “symptom and substance of history’s destructive force.” It may be a ruinous inducement to those willing “to take the measure of the ‘fragility’ of capitalist culture from the decaying structures left scattered across our urban and rural geographies,” to quote Ann Laura Stoler.⁸⁴

Nigeria provides plentiful examples of the “ends of cinema.”⁸⁵ The Port Harcourt film laboratory established by the Muhammed-Obasanjo regime “barely had a trial run” before its ruination.⁸⁶ Sanya Dosunmu’s film-processing center in Ikeja was a victim of inflation.⁸⁷ A popular destination for over twenty-five years, Idera Cinema in Mushin, Lagos—part of the Mattar Bros. theater chain—was purchased by Abraham Evangelistic Ministries in 1988 and promptly transformed into a place of worship; like other components of Nigeria’s once-thriving Lebanese-owned

exhibition circuits, it is now in a state of disrepair, all but unrecognizable as a former movie house amid the generally crumbling infrastructures of congested Mushin, abandoned even by the evangelicals, who have newer, glitzier megachurches to attend. The depopulation of Nigerian exhibition sites is not, then, necessarily a failure of individual initiative—of consumers to brave crowds and buy tickets, or of law enforcement officials to ensure safe conditions of consumption. It is plainly continuous with the broader attenuation of moviegoing as entertainment alternatives proliferate and governments—in Europe and North America as well as West Africa—permit the private sector to dictate the terms of big-screen spectatorship according to business models that are rarely viable for very long, if at all.

Though conventional wisdom dates the threatened obsolescence of the big screen only to the late 1940s and the rise of television and suburbanization, the specific infrastructures of theatrical film have always been imperiled, even in the United States. From the nickelodeon's decline to the closure of hundreds of theaters unable to be wired for sound at the dawn of the Depression, film history, when viewed through the prism of infrastructure, suggests nothing less than the constancy of disruption and disrepair. Nigeria's tumultuous experience of the big screen is not unique. Movie theaters are transformed into churches and drugstores throughout the world, or else they are merely abandoned, left to (further) decay as their fossilized marquees continue to advertise the first-run films of long ago. Again, Nigeria's transmogrified infrastructures are not isolated examples, utterly eccentric in their Africanity. Long before Idera was turned into one of Mushin's many houses of worship, the Regent Theater in Harlem became the First Corinthian Baptist Church; Chicago's Central Park Theatre became the House of Prayer Church of God in Christ; the three-thousand-seat Loew's Valencia, once the most successful movie theater in Queens, New York, was sold to the Tabernacle of Prayer for ten dollars; the Warner Hollywood, one of Broadway's grandest cinemas, was reborn as the Times Square Church; the Academy in Englewood was turned into a chapel; in downtown Los Angeles, the United Artists Theatre was leased by the televangelist Gene Scott before becoming the Ace Hotel, while the nearby Warner became a jewelry store; the Golden Gate, in East Los Angeles, became a CVS; the Fox on Venice Beach became a swap meet; and so on.⁸⁸ Constructed to signal a specifically cinematic modernity, roofed movie theaters are also built to be repurposed, their metamorphic fluidity a sign of just how difficult it is for *any* company to remain in business. Even the heavily capitalized, IMAX-equipped likes of the Filmhouse venue in Lekki cannot survive on film exhibition alone. Nor are mere concession sales sufficient to make up for any deficits. Indeed, Nigeria's multiplexes, touted as magnets for movie lovers, must constantly accommodate activities other than film spectatorship. Famous names give well-attended talks while standing beneath blank cinema screens. Corporate retreats are held in IMAX halls, much as they were once convened at the Glover Cinema when that venue was still a "primitive" open-air theater.

While the sheer impermanence of theatrical exhibition is not a uniquely Nigerian phenomenon, the big screen has offered signal demonstrations of development, progress, and modernity in the postcolony. In Nigeria, the complex materiality of theatrical film has, at various historical moments, lent the post-colonial state a powerful symbol of independence—a liberal modernity distinct from the minimalism of the mobile cinemas once introduced by Britain—even as the big screen has played host to new imperialisms. The multiplex’s aesthetics, its poetics, have contributed to the much-desired impression that Nigeria is coeval with the United States, an occupant of the same order of time, and a beneficiary of an identical (indeed, standardized and sanitized) modernity. This remains the case even when such facilities cease to be functional—when they break down or are abandoned, whether by capital or by human bodies diverted by Pentecostalism, pandemics, and the promise of “safe,” individualized alternatives to the big screen. “Whether they are being built or crumbling, infrastructures simultaneously index the achievements and limits, expectations and failures, of modernity,” write Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta.⁸⁹ As products of itinerant capital and of equally unbounded technical and logistical systems, they connect the global South and the global North both materially and affectively, even as they also register and reproduce profound inequalities.

Nigeria’s specific histories of film exhibition vividly illustrate Doreen Massey’s reminder that “no spaces are stable, given for all time; all spaces are transitory and one of the most crucial things about spatiality . . . is that it is always being made.”⁹⁰ The sheer changeability of theater space is not a uniquely Nigerian characteristic, nor is it a recent development. The notion that American movie theaters are only now beginning to disappear amid the massification of Netflix and other streaming services—memorably illustrated in Paul Schrader’s film *The Canyons* (2013), which repeatedly features still images of the crumbling infrastructures of former exhibition sites, as if to suggest the unprecedented depreciation of moviegoing in the twenty-first century—distorts and obscures a complicated history. Nigeria’s role in that history requires serious consideration.

“The Nigeria Solution”

Creative Destruction and the Making of a Media Capital

“To ignore the phenomenon of the United States’ influence upon Nigeria and the Nigerian media is to take flight from reality.”

—NOSA OWENS-IBIE, “PROGRAMMED FOR DOMINATION: U.S. TELEVISION BROADCASTING AND ITS EFFECTS ON NIGERIAN CULTURE,” 141

“I got a job waiting for me in Lagos.”

—ENTERTAINER MAISIE RAVIER (ANN SOTHERN) IN MGM’S *CONGO MAISIE* (H.C. POTTER, 1940)

There is a moment in the Fox film *Ambassador Bill* (Sam Taylor, 1931) when the eponymous diplomat, played by Will Rogers as a folksy former “cattle king” from Oklahoma, confronts a United States senator in a fictional Balkan country beset by revolution. As the ambassador to said country, Rogers’s Bill must quell the unrest by promising robust American investments in infrastructure. But the blustering Republican senator, intent on preventing undue “intervention,” protests Bill’s plans. “No meddling in foreign politics!” he bellows. The plainspoken Bill responds with a calm defense of the “commercial treaty” that he has painstakingly devised: “It gives America the contract to build the railroads, put in the telephones, sell ‘em all their farm machinery and everything!” The corpulent senator, who is prone to pontificating, counters: “Yes, but this country isn’t in a happy enough state to warrant the investment of American capital.” Bill can only laugh. “American capital,” he declares, “ain’t been in a very happy state even at home, has it?” The senator remains unmoved. “It’s absolutely contrary to the spirit of American government to mix or meddle in the affairs of any other country!” he shouts. Again, Bill must chuckle. “Yeah?” he replies. “Tell that to the Marines!”

Rogers’s seemingly casual joke is, in fact, an apt description of the use of military intervention to secure US capital gains. It invokes the very twinning of public and private interests that, Nick Turse reveals, has long centered on the African

continent.¹ Fittingly, *Ambassador Bill* gives the US armed forces the final word on the capitalist penetration of foreign countries: the Balkans might not wish to fill American coffers, but the Marines will open their markets anyway. The later Fox film *The Big Gamble* (Richard Fleischer, 1961), which depicts European neocolonialist incursions into Central Africa, puts the matter just as crudely. It begins with Stephen Boyd's Irish protagonist announcing his plan to move "to Africa"—to "live there, to work, go into business." "Exploit the natives, you mean," retorts a sharp-tongued relative. "Till they wake up one morning and cut your throat. Come on now, be practical—come out of the eighteenth century." Asked to explain "why Africa," Boyd's character answers bluntly, "It's a gold mine," adding: "With a little capital, a man can make a killing."

Unlike the fictional Sylvania of *Ambassador Bill* and the factual but broadly conceived Central Africa of *The Big Gamble*, Nigeria served as an explicit and carefully historicized reference point in American films produced in the 1950s and 1960s—which is to say, in the period of Nigeria's transition to independence. Today, Hollywood's permanent investments in Nigeria, complemented by cross-border short-term expenditures by private equity firms (from The Carlyle Group to Bain Capital), increasingly accommodate local partners.² These joint ventures serve as significant reminders that the globalization of Hollywood has necessarily entailed considerable local economic and political support. As François Chesnais points out, "Corporations from countries still listed by the UN as 'developing countries' are now part of many global oligopolies."³ In Nigeria, FilmHouse, Silverbird, and other firms serve as foreign contract vendors for Hollywood studios and soft-drink companies alike, performing numerous high-value functions, particularly as sites of audience research, data collection, and various experiments in "synergy" and product placement. It is not so much that these offshore locations are cost reducers for Hollywood corporations but that they function as increasingly important testing grounds for advertising and marketing strategies. Indeed, IMAX is hardly saving money by investing in a planned community—Eko Atlantic—that may never come to pass. It is, however, acquiring greater knowledge about a market that it already exploits via a number of Nigerian "partners." Such knowledge is prized precisely because it is not, in the parlance of multinational corporations, "in-house knowledge" but rather "organizationally and geographically distant knowledge," the valuation of which represents one of the intangible assets—one of the "new forms of investment"—distinct from foreign direct investment.⁴

What H.F. Iskander, the general manager of Chevron's Kuwait office, called "the Nigeria solution"—a formula for "business success" devised and developed in Nigeria and later exported to other markets—has been embraced by Hollywood since at least the 1950s. Employed by Iskander in the late 1990s, such rhetoric—the language of Nigerian exceptionalism—is familiar from Hollywood's efforts to exploit Nigeria as a site of experimentation and a source of what Iskander called "corporate memory": "The key to our business," Iskander said, "is to tap that memory, and bring out the solution that we used to solve a problem in Nigeria



FIGURE 3. Independence on film: an American director records footage of Nigerian diplomats in Washington, DC, on October 1, 1960.

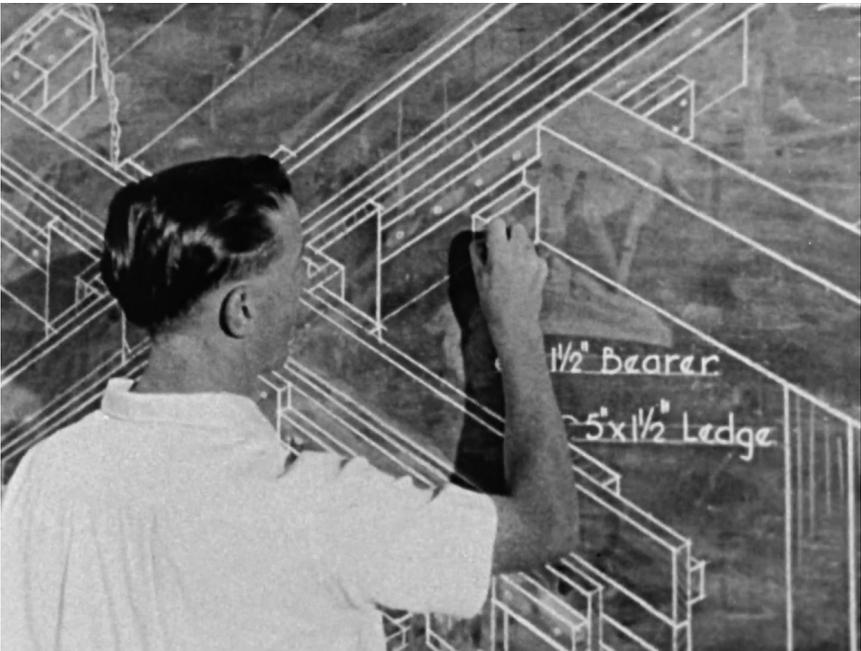


FIGURE 4. “Nigeria is becoming more and more a world of plans and machines.” The documentary *Nigeria: Giant in Africa* (1960), a production of the National Film Board of Canada, focuses on the exportation to Nigeria of Western corporate “know-how.”

in order to solve the same problem in China or Kuwait.”⁵ This chapter considers the careful application and elaboration of “the Nigeria solution” in the realm of theatrical film. When, for instance, Hollywood participates in the planning of a “cutting-edge” project like Eko Atlantic, it does so partly in the hope of one day translating what it learns from Nigeria into new ways of doing business elsewhere in the world, including in the United States. But to focus exclusively on Hollywood’s involvement in the “futuristic” aspects of Eko Atlantic, highlighting the planned function of multiplexes therein, is to ignore the industry’s longstanding role in shaping the built environment of Lagos and other Nigerian cities. Eko, a prime example of “geoengineering” as a neoliberal response to biosphere degradation, is merely the techno-utopian, allegedly climate-change-resistant (but already environmentally damaging) culmination of efforts that have been underway since the colonial period.

EXCAVATIONS AND OTHER EXCHANGES

Nigeria’s environmental affordances, so essential to the development of global capitalism, have also been liabilities for big-screen cinema. They include weather that encourages mildew, particularly in film projectors. Throughout the colonial era and beyond, film breakages were common, and costly. Yet the problem proved motivating, with Kodak and DuPont pursuing the development of more durable film stock, which would be far less likely to tear at the sprocket-holes, for use throughout Nigeria.⁶ After 1953, a byproduct of tin mining—the mineral columbite, a rare heat-resistant steel alloy—became increasingly valuable to the United States. “Virtually all of it,” noted W. Alphaeus Hunton in 1960, “comes from one place, Nigeria.”⁷ This was hardly a one-way process limited to imperialist extraction, however. Coincident with the appropriation of Nigerian tin and columbite was the exploitation of another natural resource: Nigerians themselves. Touted throughout the 1950s as likely purchasers of American commodities, Nigerians were, by the end of that decade, given a steady supply of Hollywood films that had rather cannily been recycled as television broadcasts and packaged with countless commercial advertisements for imported products. This was all part of a new kind of public-private partnership known as Nigerian state television, one whose remit unavoidably recalled fundamental aspects of the establishment of broadcasting as a sponsor-supported system in the United States.

Television advertising in Nigeria was, from its inception, firmly tied to the needs of American capital, with a growing number of Nigerian organizations pursuing legitimacy through their own, reciprocal appeals to Hollywood. In the fall of 1959, the newly established Nigerian Advertising Service (NAS), touted as “Nigeria’s first indigenous advertising agency” and located in Yaba, a suburb of Lagos, began promoting the needs of those Nigerian government agencies and private firms that were desperately seeking American capital participation and technical



FIGURE 5. American film expert John Tyo, appointed Audio-Visual Advisor to the Nigerian Ministry of Information in 1962.

assistance. NAS and its many clients thus moderated the rise of ethno-regionalist politics with an emphasis on capitalism as a unifying national force, and on “foreign aid” as a common requirement.⁸ In fact, NAS was so successful in its strategic appeals to American interests (which, at the time, hardly needed to be pressured



FIGURE 6. In 1960, the Audio-Visual Society at Indiana University set up a special “Nigerian Project” in preparation for the country’s independence.

into paying attention to Nigeria) that, just two years after its establishment, the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), a US government agency, began dispatching American businessmen to Nigeria to serve as salaried agents of “international expansion” for American media companies.

Founded in 1955, the ICA, a precursor of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), was responsible for devising and executing “foreign assistance” and “nonmilitary security” programs. Shortly before its responsibilities were absorbed by USAID in the fall of 1961, the ICA invited applications for three positions (each carrying the title of “Visiting Professor”) for American “business experts” who would pursue “AV work” in Nigeria.⁹ In 1962, the head of motion-picture production for the California-based System Development Corporation, Dr. John H. Tyo, relocated to Ibadan, a sprawling city some eighty miles northeast of Lagos, where, working under the auspices of USAID, he “advised” the Nigerian Ministry of Information. While headquartered in Ibadan between 1963 and 1965, Tyo, an expert on educational motion pictures, oversaw the production of a number of industrial films.¹⁰ Tyo’s erstwhile employer, Indiana University, had set up its own “Nigerian Project” in preparation for independence in 1960. By the spring of 1961, the university’s celebrated Audio-Visual Society was firmly committed to “establish[ing] such a society in Nigeria,” a country whose newly acquired independence made it seemingly ideal for “the formation of . . . professional fraternities.”¹¹

The ICA’s stated mission was “development”: “doing” audiovisual work in post-colonial Nigeria would entail the introduction of new technologies and the careful inculcation of “proper media uses” in a diverse national population.¹² From the perspective of the ICA and of the business interests that it so nakedly represented in this particular instance, “proper” uses of media were not merely technical but also—and equally importantly—consumerist. American “experts” would teach Nigerians how to “handle” the mechanics of media (especially television as a specific electronic device) while simultaneously promoting an understanding of

broadcast technologies as incitements to consumption of the products that they invariably represented.

THE DRAMATIC APPEAL OF INDEPENDENCE

There is a moment in the Bob Hope comedy *A Global Affair* (Jack Arnold, 1964) in which independent Nigeria emerges as a political bellwether—a guide to “global democracy” and its challenges. Set (and partly shot) at the United Nations, where one day an abandoned infant is found, the film focuses on the competing efforts of member nations to claim guardianship of the child. Prominent among the countries vying for custody is Nigeria, whose delegate crafts a compelling analogy between the “dawn” of the “new Lagos” and the birth of the baby. Both neonates are thus symbolic of “promise” and require “protection.” Should Nigeria be awarded guardianship of the infant, the country will, its delegate maintains, be well equipped to provide “a safe environment” and effective child care. He says of “the new and independent states” of Africa, “We’re among the most progressive democracies in the world, where this child may be raised without fear or prejudice.” Reminiscent of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa’s speech on the occasion of Nigeria’s admission into the United Nations, the delegate’s disquisition on “African independence”—on the continental achievement of democracy—gives *A Global Affair* a fleeting documentary quality. In fact, by featuring Nigeria so prominently, the film calls to mind the ordoliberal Wilhelm Röpke’s bitter denunciation of the United Nations as an organization that “Western state wisdom had constructed such that Europe’s voice could barely be heard in comparison to the developing countries.”¹³

Cinema was on hand to record and further disseminate what *A Global Affair* celebrates as “Nigerian political speech.” “When Nigerian embassy officials in Washington first raised the country’s flag of independence, they called on a group of Washington film specialists to capture the historic moment on film,” noted one trade paper. Paragon Productions, a so-called “Embassy Row” studio based in Washington, was among the companies that recorded and distributed footage of independence celebrations in the US capital. “They have been especially busy in recent weeks on films about the fascinating but often bewildered representatives of brand new African republics,” the paper continued.¹⁴ Companies like Paragon were prepared not merely to circulate their “Nigerian films” throughout the United States (including via the sale of these 16mm shorts to television stations), but also to ship them to Nigeria, where those newly released from colonial rule might desire images of the global impact of such seismic change.¹⁵

Nigeria had previously been the subject of experiments designed to gauge and shape the visual literacy of its population. In the early 1920s, William Sellers, a medical officer working for the Nigerian government, began studying Nigerian cinema spectators, eventually producing his own films for local distribution.

Sellers's experiments were of interest to more than just the Crown; they also attracted the attention of a number of American individuals and organizations interested in breaking into the Nigerian market.¹⁶ The Carnegie Corporation, one of the most prominent philanthropic organizations in the United States, had been firmly focused on "developing" media literacy in Nigeria since the 1930s, and its commitment to the country—or, at least, to the funding of educational shorts and features to be produced and exhibited therein—only grew during the Cold War, often in ways that directly benefited private companies willing to make their own forays into nontheatrical nonfiction film.¹⁷ Private individuals got into the potentially remunerative act, as well: in 1961, the American attorney Leonard N. Cohen, inspired by the Nigerian magazine *Drum*, requested access to shorts produced by the successors to the Colonial Film Unit, which he hoped to distribute "in the United States for both theatrical and non-theatrical use."¹⁸

Like Nigerian classrooms, churches, factories, clubs, and other nontheatrical locations, Nigerian cinema halls were regular recipients of American largesse as early as the interwar period. By 1940, the Rex Cinema in Lagos was consistently screening American educational films for schoolchildren at discounted rates and with an average attendance of between four and five hundred young spectators.¹⁹ Many of them produced and distributed by major corporations, the films were meant to promote "the American way of life" (and, in particular, those business norms associated with American-style capitalism). Moreover, their audiences constituted key objects of study—groups to be observed by visiting corporate representatives or by "cooperative" colonial officials.²⁰ Such surveillance was increasingly common, and considered commercially as well as politically expedient. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, for instance, the US Department of Defense selected Nigeria for "behavioral research," with the aim of "increasing [America's] capacity to anticipate social breakdown and to suggest remedies," and as part of its contribution to facilitating "the transition from the colonial era to the American Century."²¹

Such a "transition" was premised, in part, on the belief that the British had not done enough to cultivate Nigerian markets, particularly for motion pictures, and that American-style capitalism would have to "step in." In 1965, Kwame Nkrumah would go so far as to assert, in attempting to account for the country's "economic maladjustment," the "total disregard under colonialism of Nigeria's potentialities," though he would reserve even sterner words for colonialism's American successors, inveighing against "the brazen onslaught of international capitalists": "Here is 'empire,' the empire of finance capital, in fact if not in name, a vast sprawling network of inter-continental activity on a highly diversified scale that controls the lives of millions of people in the most widely separated parts of the world, manipulating whole industries and exploiting the labor and riches of nations for the greedy satisfaction of a few."²²

By the late 1950s, a growing number of American films, made in anticipation of Nigerian independence, were depicting the country's readiness to "open up"



FIGURE 7. Cory Devlin as a Nigerian astronomer in Hollywood's *12 to the Moon* (1960).

to capitalism—a term taken from US Department of Commerce “pix specialist” Nathan D. Golden, who had used it to describe Nigeria’s “maturity” as early as 1944.²³ A case in point is the eleven-minute documentary *Moslem People of Nigeria* (Raphael G. Wolff, 1960), produced by Photographics International in collaboration with the Hollywood-based Raphael G. Wolff Studios, Inc., which distributed the film to American audiences.²⁴ An example of sales promotion presented as ethnography, *Moslem People of Nigeria* offered a glimpse of the potential popularity of American products—including Hollywood films—“even among” Muslim populations.

For its part, the sci-fi film *12 to the Moon* (David Bradley, 1960), distributed by Columbia just months before Nigerian independence, depicted Nigeria as a source not just of promise but also of genius: a Nigerian PhD—introduced by the film’s narrator (Francis X. Bushman) as “the great astronomer Asmara Markonen” (Cory Devlin)—is among the dozen astronauts, each representing a different “major country,” selected to make the first trip to the moon, a journey intended to proclaim the celestial body international territory. That Nigeria is central to this vision of internationalism is made clear during the film’s opening credits, which are superimposed over a table on which the word “Nigeria” appears on a place card next to those for the United States, Germany, Israel, and eight other “important” countries. Nigeria is here capable of making “world-shattering history,” having produced one of the globe’s leading scientists, a man who serves as the chief navigator of a rocket ship bound for the moon, and who, in that capacity, helps steer the spacecraft away from threatening meteors and toward its destination. In *12 to the Moon*, distributed by a studio with permanent offices in Lagos, Nigeria has earned a seat at the world’s most illustrious table—a development literalized in the film’s opening-credit sequence.

FROM CINERAMA TO "SHELLARAMA"

The dawn of Nigeria's political independence saw Hollywood studios like Columbia aggressively pursuing expansion in the country. Trade fairs helped to promote Hollywood films as well as associated American technologies, with Cinerama exhibits proving particularly popular in Lagos and other cities.²⁵ Cinerama was a widescreen process involving three synchronized projectors and a curved screen, patented by the Cinerama Corporation in the early 1950s. Promoted as an entirely "new technique" that involved "motion pictures breaking away from their old, narrow restrictions," Cinerama was an ideal ambassador of American corporate ingenuity. It was also a powerful imperialist agent in its own right, as the widely distributed and immensely popular promotional film *This Is Cinerama* (Merian C. Cooper, 1952) attests: "We have taken our new technique abroad for a look at the world overseas through our new medium," announces the film's narrator, well-known newsreel commentator Lowell Thomas. Cinerama's capacity to "revolutionize the technique of motion-picture storytelling" was thus firmly tied to its sheer export power—to, in the case of *This Is Cinerama*, a (mostly) dialogue-free, (arguably) non-narrative spectacle sure to be widely appreciated, including by illiterate and otherwise "untutored" African audiences.

The narrator of *This Is Cinerama* is quick to point to the global palatability of filmic spectacles, suggesting the titular technology's utility in "infiltrating" foreign markets and cultivating a popular appetite for (more) Hollywood products. *This Is Cinerama* thus evokes the legacies of magic lantern shows and other proto- and early-cinematic displays designed to capture and colonize the African imagination. "The pictures you are about to see have no plot," proclaims Thomas. "They have no stars. This is not a stage play, nor is it a feature picture nor a travelogue nor a symphonic concert nor an opera. But it is a combination of all of them." The Cinerama system, which used three adjacent 27mm wide-angle lenses, boasted seven channels of discrete stereo sound, and projected at twenty-six frames per second on a wide, curved, 146-degree screen, was introduced in Nigeria via a series of temporary "promotional theaters" erected by the Cinerama Corporation and Cinestar International Inc. for the purpose of marketing the technology. Like a number of American firms before it, the Cinerama Corporation expected to be so welcomed in Nigeria as to be able to construct permanent facilities on the government's dime—to "invest in the country at the country's expense."²⁶

Perfected independently of Hollywood in the late 1940s, the Cinerama camera and projection system—the brainchild of Fred Waller, whose previous inventions included water skis—was first demonstrated to studio executives on a converted tennis court on Long Island, precisely the sort of makeshift exhibition space that would later be constructed for the system's unveiling in Nigeria. John Belton argues that the social phenomenon of Cinerama, a system that cost from \$75,000 to \$140,000 to install, "serves as a remarkable index of postwar leisure-time



FIGURE 8. Cinematography and oil extraction in *Shellarama* (1965).

activities.” The system’s popular travelogue format “not only [took] advantage of the increased interest by Americans in domestic sightseeing and travel abroad but function[ed] itself to stimulate tourism.” Designed by the McCann-Erickson agency, the advertising campaign for *This is Cinerama* stressed the novelty of the experience. Cinerama’s “incomparable” effects thus resonated with ahistorical celebrations of political independence as an unprecedented phenomenon on the African continent. But they were also a way of promoting travel—including by Americans to the continent of Africa. Indeed, the first five Cinerama features were travelogues. Back in the United States, however, the Cinerama theater chain collapsed by the early 1970s, making the full realization of the company’s Nigerian dreams unfeasible.²⁷

For a time, however, the Cinerama Corporation exploited Nigeria in numerous ways, including as a shooting location. Sponsored by the Shell International Petroleum Company, the short film *Shellarama* (Richard Cawston, 1965) opens with a team of cameramen, guided by prospectors, making their way through the muddy waters of the oil-rich Niger Delta, their elaborate equipment—instruments of image recording associated with the large-format Technirama process—complementing some equally intricate mechanisms of resource extraction. Featuring pre- and post-title sequences set in Nigeria, *Shellarama* suggests the country’s significance not merely for the titular company but also, by extension, for the world economy of which its chief product—petroleum—is a driving force. Through the motif of automobility, the film demonstrates that Nigeria powers the world, as passenger cars and other vehicles are “awakened” by gas derived from the Niger Delta. In New York, Paris, Rome, and other capitals of finance, automobiles come to glamorous

life. Lest Nigeria seem “pre-modern” by comparison—a producer but not a user of oil and gas—two Nigerian businessmen are later shown commuting via mopeds to their shiny, state-of-the-art offices in Lagos. *Shellarama* thus visualizes Nigeria’s centrality to global capitalism, setting up the country as a fount of crude oil and, as such, a source of global activity—the veritable engine of the world.

The nineteenth of twenty-one films exhibited in the Super Technirama-70 format, and one of the few to be presented in 70mm Cinerama at select venues, *Shellarama* vividly illustrates how Nigeria—typically assumed to have always been beyond Hollywood’s ambit—has, in fact, and at various stages of its incorporation into the capitalist world-system, been exploited cinematically to serve a range of Euro-American interests. For *Shellarama* was designed not only to promote the eponymous petroleum company, which spent one million dollars producing and distributing the film, but also to sell a certain idea of Hollywood innovation. Five years after independence, Nigeria continued to seem sufficiently promising for Shell to turn to the country in the hope that some of its postcolonial shine would rub off on the corporation. Nigeria was used not merely for realism’s sake (the Niger Delta really *did* provide much of Shell’s oil) but also to give Shell a “progressive image,” in the words of one of the corporation’s production managers, who estimated that by the end of 1965 *Shellarama* would be seen by over twenty million people around the world. It was, he proclaimed, more than “just an advertising film.”²⁸ A newly independent nation and a freshly perfected set of filmmaking strategies had come together to give Shell a new and specifically cinematic status. Through its associations with state-of-the-art technologies of recording, processing, and playback—from Technicolor and 6-track magnetic sound to Super Technirama-70 and Cinerama—*Shellarama* functioned to advertise inventiveness in the fields of film production and exhibition.²⁹ At the same time, it served as a celebration of postcolonial Nigeria, presenting the country as having “the confidence of a ‘progressive’ industrial society.” The source of a “stereophonic chorus” of multilingual go-getters, Nigeria was optimistic, energetic, and even “exuberant”—a “major capital of the world,” readily signifying “speed and power.”³⁰

Such associations survived *Shellarama*’s reduction to more manageable dimensions, as the promotional short was transformed from large-format exclusivity to small-gauge ubiquity. Initially released in over fifty ultramodern cinemas in twenty countries, *Shellarama* later became something far less rare—something that could be shown in classrooms, factories, offices, church basements, and town squares, as well as on television. The short’s growing accessibility as a “nontheatrical” film did not diminish its promotional potential—its capacity to advertise Shell while simultaneously advancing certain convictions regarding Hollywood capital and what it could achieve worldwide, even in the alluvium of the Niger Delta.³¹

Shell’s growth in the 1960s was due, in part, to Nigeria, and so, for related reasons, was Hollywood’s. Both entities—one a multinational corporation, the other a broadening set of private yet state-aided interests associated with the production,



FIGURE 9. Shell strikes black gold in *Shellarama*.



FIGURE 10. Powered by Shell: the modern Nigerian in *Shellarama*.

distribution, and exhibition of screen media—had exploited Nigeria long before the making of *Shellarama*, and they would continue to do so long after the film’s completion. Capitalist, colonialist, invasive, and extractive, both have been able to benefit from Nigeria in ways unrecognized by neoclassical economics, maintaining interest in the country despite the occasional absence of profits and surpluses, and aggrandizing their commitment to this “giant of Africa” even in the face of local resistance and scornful warnings from the international business community.

Since the early 1960s, Shell has maintained two film libraries in Nigeria—one in Lagos and another (shared with BP) in Port Harcourt—from which it distributes its own productions as well as the occasional “old” Hollywood film either licensed to the corporation or available in the public domain. Both cinematic categories have served similar interests, the former functioning in an overtly promotional capacity, and the latter as entertainment for Shell employees and others who, it is hoped, will recognize and appreciate the corporation’s role in circulating Hollywood divertissements.³²

Especially attractive to the Cinerama Corporation were the “untapped” lands of Nigeria’s Eastern Region—precisely those plots in and around Enugu that the newly established Cinema Corporation of Nigeria had, in the previous decade, identified as ripe for the establishment of a “movie colony” modeled on Hollywood (understood as a discrete geographic location consisting of so many studio facilities). All-important Lagos could hardly be ignored by the Cinerama Corporation, but the Eastern Region offered, in addition to ample spaces on which to erect the vast apparatus of the Cinerama exhibition system, a well-entrenched television sector—a “semi-commercial” broadcasting system, the product of the kind of public-private partnership that the Cinerama Corporation hoped to enjoy in Nigeria. While several London financiers were able to partner with the Enugu-based Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation by the fall of 1960 (just in time for independence), the Cinerama Corporation arrived in Nigeria arguably too late to secure the substantial investment of the by-then floundering national economy, despite—or perhaps because of—the latter’s commitment to attracting foreign capital.

Post-independence Nigeria may, in other words, have succeeded in tempting the Cinerama Corporation to begin paying close, committed attention to the country, but the American firm’s interest was belated at best—the product of its desperate efforts to secure additional foreign markets a decade after Cinerama’s domestic unveiling, and in the wake of the success of competitors like VistaVision, the Todd-AO system, and other large-screen and widescreen processes. Nevertheless, the Cinerama Corporation’s sometime partner, Cinestar, was able to secure funding from public as well as private Nigerian sources in order to further its infiltration of the national market, including with plastic-and-nylon “CineDomes” that could be used to screen Cinerama films, but that stood in stark (and sometimes pitiable, as when the fabric was nicked and the domes deflated) contrast to the far more durable lattice-shell structure of, say, the famous Cinerama Dome on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood.³³

While no permanent Cinerama theaters were actually constructed in Nigeria, the promotion of Cinerama as a specifically American technology and “exciting” system of exhibition was intended to further cultivate local interest in Hollywood exports. Throughout the 1960s, much as Shell was using films like *Shellarama* to signal its beneficence in Nigeria, American publications were endeavoring to

disentangle the international trade in Hollywood films from any suggestion of imperialism, as in articles that explicitly celebrated African independence and the ongoing anti-imperialist cause while simultaneously promoting Hollywood’s domination of African markets. “Africa has set itself against all external imperialisms,” announced a 1960 article that praised Hollywood’s expansionist efforts through recourse to the Cold War rhetoric of “containment” of communism. American films could be counted as part of the “big [Western] diplomatic offensive in Africa against Russian plans to capture the confidence and sympathy of the millions of inhabitants of an entire continent,” and thus could not be considered imperialist in any meaningful sense, given that the only imperialism that truly “threatened” post-independence African countries, with their “natural” affection for capitalism, was that exercised by the Soviet Union.³⁴

Anticipating Stuart Hall’s conception of the “legitimate materialism” of subaltern populations (a materialism whose “legitimacy” derives solely, or mostly, from its belatedness), the article went on to address the allegedly expansive African appetite for cinema as not simply an object of consumption in its own right but also a stimulus to other, equally avid engagements with American-style capitalism. Such an inducement was rooted as much in narrative devices as in various extracinematic appeals, including in the form of commercial advertisements and concession sales. These, the article was quick to point out, “provide[d] important revenue” to local exhibitors forced to share the bulk of box-office proceeds with American distributors.

Even this article, however, was attuned to the patently anticompetitive practices of the major Hollywood studios, to the point of contradicting its claim that American internationalism could never be properly imperialist. “In the Union of South Africa,” it went on, “American film distributors are running a monopoly which they would never be permitted by law to operate in the States.” Predicting that “the South African film public” would eventually “arouse the local government into passing bills designed to control the film industry and curb unfair film practices,” the article held out no such hope for “dark” Nigeria, where there appeared to be no appetite—governmental or otherwise—for any “anti-monopolistic” bill.³⁵ What the article did not mention were the signal differences between South Africa’s status as a settler colony, wherein film distribution and exhibition were dominated by white capital and further characterized by the racial segregation of consumption, and Nigeria’s status as a newly formed independent federation whose coalition of conservative parties had no interest in establishing protectionist measures for a national film industry that, at the time, simply did not exist. The South African “film public” envisioned in the article was thus a distinctly white public with all the advantages of the white settler class.

As “the most advanced state” on the continent, South Africa was allegedly equipped to resist Hollywood hegemony, in marked contrast to Nigeria. But South Africa was a site where Hollywood’s domination was all too evident—where, in

fact, only two studios, Twentieth Century-Fox and MGM, enjoyed a monopoly on film distribution. The apartheid government's decision to abolish import duties on films was explicitly designed to inspire the formation of white-owned independent distribution companies, which, by the early 1960s, were integrated with local (and also, of course, white-owned) exhibitors, including at the expense of Hollywood interests.³⁶ Hollywood studios were hardly left uncompensated by the sudden expansion of independent distribution in South Africa, however: the new companies quickly began distributing American reissues, providing ample revenue from the rental of these "old" films.³⁷

Nigeria, by contrast, remained dominated by a Lebanese merchant class whose arrangements with Hollywood studios were established through numerous circuits of exchange that spanned Africa and the Middle East. These diffuse arrangements were powerfully enforced, beginning in 1961, by the Lagos-based American Motion Picture Export Company, Africa (AMPECA), an offshoot of the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA) that, despite its expansive name, focused solely on Anglophone markets in the region of West Africa. AMPECA, which had two offices—one in New York, at 522 Fifth Ave., and one in Apapa, Nigeria, headed by Abe Gotfried—was never meant to be permanent; indeed, its announcement in the Hollywood trade press was accompanied by the promise that it would not be.³⁸ Dubbed "the little State Department," the associated MPEA was a legal cartel founded in 1945 under the protections afforded by the Webb-Pomerene Export Trade Act (1918), headed by Eric Johnston of the US Chamber of Commerce (and, later, president of the MPAA).³⁹ Designed to ensure that American exporters would be exempt from the nation's antitrust laws—that they would be free to "fight monopoly with monopoly" overseas—the MPEA successfully removed and precluded unfavorable trade barriers in Nigeria, among them import duties and remittance taxes.⁴⁰

In contrast to the situation in South Africa, where the apartheid government endeavored to cultivate and protect the interests of the white merchant class in the latter's confrontations with the Fox-MGM duopoly, the abolishment of import duties in Nigeria was directly engineered by Hollywood studios via the MPEA. While the latter was initially committed to the equal distribution of opportunities and profits among all member studios, its emphasis on collective action was merely a temporary measure, a means of establishing an effective overseas presence while simultaneously preparing for increased competition.⁴¹ It was Johnston who proposed that the West African Development Company (as AMPECA was initially known) be organized under the Webb-Pomerene Act to enable Hollywood capital to pursue any and all means of securing its interests in the subregion, with its newly independent countries like "English-speaking Nigeria" (as Johnston happily called it).⁴² Based in Lagos, AMPECA was designed to transform Nigeria into the pivot of a market that also encompassed, among other countries, Ghana and Liberia.⁴³ Johnston's goals were clear and quickly realized by 1961: "Nigeria,

with its 172 cinemas all privately and mostly Lebanese-owned, serves as a distribution point for American films in anglophone West Africa.⁴⁴ At the time, AMPECA's competition in the field of film distribution was minimal; it included such small- and medium-size distributors as the Indian-owned Nankani Company and the Lebanese-owned Captan Brothers, both of which relied rather heavily on Hollywood films.⁴⁵

In Nigeria, United Artists (UA) proved most competitive. It was the first major Hollywood company to substantially expand its material presence in the country, where it established permanent offices just a few months after Nigerian independence. Since UA had no production sites to support and was primarily in the business of distribution, it enjoyed a pronounced global mobility and was, throughout the 1960s, the single most aggressive American film company operating in foreign theatrical markets. UA's steady expansionism even extended into several Soviet bloc countries, where, beginning in 1958, it managed to sell many of its films—a kind of Cold War victory that no other American distributor experienced (or even pursued) at the time.⁴⁶ Functioning solely as a distributor of independent productions, UA was, in Tino Balio's words, “an ideal example of a modern, that is, post-1950 motion picture company.”⁴⁷ The crux of UA's modernity can be seen in its powerful presence in postcolonial Nigeria. The country was hardly beyond the radar of Hollywood's increasingly internationalized political economy, but UA, in particular, did much to promote itself as a vanguard outfit by exploiting its ties to Lagos. Trade papers routinely touted UA's “Nigerian operations” throughout the 1960s, when there were well over one hundred licensed commercial movie houses in the country.⁴⁸

Entrenched in post-independence Nigeria, UA enjoyed the powerful backing of AMPECA and the MPEA, sister agencies that, by the early 1960s, amid the globalization of financial markets and the rapid growth of private international financial activity, were firmly focused on the “new” Nigeria, seen as a potential source of major profits.⁴⁹ When it was established at the dawn of Nigerian independence, the Lagos-based AMPECA was headed by men from the MPAA. Johnston was its first chairman of the board, while Ralph Hetzel, an executive vice president of the MPAA, was its first president. Other leaders, such as its vice president, George C. Vietheer, came directly from the US Department of Commerce; still others, such as its secretary, Herbert J. Erlanger, had close ties to the State Department (via the MPEA), thus recalling Will Hays's description of the MPAA's precursor as “almost an adjunct of our State Department.”⁵⁰ General manager Jack L. Labow, who had an office in Lagos beginning in 1961, was a Canadian-born executive in RKO's international sales department before Johnston appointed him to AMPECA. In addition, Labow ran, out of his Lagos headquarters, one of thirty-eight foreign branches of United Artists, and his close association with UA enabled that company to thrive in Nigeria, including at the expense of American competitors.⁵¹ In the early 1960s, Lagos was one of only seven MPEA outposts abroad.⁵² (The others

were London, Paris, Frankfurt, Rome, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, and Jakarta.) That Nigeria was assigned such significance among foreign markets has much to do with its population size and the rapid rate of urbanization, but it was also premised on the assumption, however essentialist, that Nigerians were uniquely film-literate and even “movie-hungry.”

A 1960 article in the American trade press outlined this appetite, along with the “expansion pains” that had led the MPEA to focus, eventually, on Nigeria, pinning its “African hopes” on this one, “exceptional” country. The account, composed as it is of primitivist, neocolonialist rhetoric intended to position Africa and Africans as ripe for the plucking, is well worth quoting at length:

Swept by raging fires of nationalism, Africa burst into the New World for American films as the Dark Continent exploded to independence, splintering its freed colonies into opposing shards of self-sovereignty. Safaris of MPAA-MPEA executives roamed Africa, south of the Sahara, blazing trails to exploit the area, one of the last underdeveloped markets. Long a dumping ground for films, Africa loomed as a future source of profits for the film industry, confronted with increasing competition abroad.⁵³

Its sheer primitivism notwithstanding, the prose is notable for its insistence on the exploratory acumen and (literally) path-breaking power of executives from the MPAA and MPEA. Yet rather than “blazing trails to exploit the area,” these men merely confirmed the circuits of exchange that were already very much in place, thanks in large part to the entrenched Lebanese merchant class and to avenues of trade that long predated colonialism. AMPECA would, for instance, merely come to control Lebanese-owned distribution circuits, including NDO and CINE Films.⁵⁴ The derogation of African markets as representing a collective “dumping ground for films” is similarly misleading, of course, suggesting as it does that MPAA member studios would, via the MPEA and AMPECA, eventually engage in something other than cultural dumping. Indeed, the article’s seemingly unashamed use of the word “exploit” speaks volumes in this respect—as it does in more recent IMAX press releases, which, with a similar tendentiousness, insist that Nigeria is a “new” market in need of “penetration” and “exploitation.”

Perhaps most patently absurd, however, is the suggestion that decolonization, in creating a series of independent states, successfully differentiated African markets for motion pictures for the very first time. According to the logic of the article, it was only by “splintering . . . into opposing shards of self-sovereignty” that “Africa burst into the New World for American films,” constituting itself as a series of markets of differential sizes and values. What such language obscures is the heterogeneous power of colonial rule to shape the nature and boundaries of trade on the African continent. Prior to Nigerian independence, the MPEA well understood that political, economic, infrastructural, and linguistic conditions in the British colony differed from those in, say, Senegal, and its member studios responded accordingly, importing films in Nigeria from the dollar area (including Liberia,

where import permits were not required, and where there were no restrictions on the transfer of foreign exchange) under open general license.⁵⁵ In Senegal, by contrast, import licenses were required, and American films were typically imported from France, with payments made in francs; buyers were forced to travel to Paris in order to purchase prints for flat fees on five-year contracts.⁵⁶ What was truly new about the so-called “New World for American films [on] the Dark Continent” was AMPECA itself, and its initial plans to construct new theaters in Nigeria; to provide direct distribution of films to said theaters from American studios (rather than from British agents, Ghanaian exhibitors, Lebanese merchants, or Liberian intermediaries); and to aggressively promote and protect American film interests throughout Anglophone West Africa.⁵⁷

Recognizing the popularity of Hollywood films among “French Equatorial African audiences,” the MPEA sought to strategically blur some of the distinctions between Anglophone and francophone markets, citing rural-urban migration as a shared characteristic of these countries and a clear justification for the heightened targeting of the entire West African subregion. In August 1960, Johnston and Hetzel estimated that, despite “heavy competition” from other countries, American films accounted for over half of all features screened theatrically in Mali, Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria. Emphasizing migration “from the hills and the countryside to towns and cities where earnings are higher,” these representatives of the MPEA positioned “the need for new theaters” as a function not of Hollywood’s own economic imperatives—of the industry’s plainly imperialist doggedness—but rather of the pronounced consumer desires of newly urbanized (and, by implication, newly solvent) populations. Thus the “new opportunities for U.S. films” that Johnston and Hetzel hailed were inclusive not merely of theatrical exhibition but also of habits of consumption that extended well beyond, but remained firmly tied to, film spectatorship. “High-earning” urban Africans, with their “abundant” disposable income, could “prove” the value of product placement for Hollywood studios that, as Patrick Vonderau has argued, were renewing and extending their commitment to the practice in the 1950s and 1960s, amid considerable competition from television, a medium with its own, pronounced imperatives to advertise.⁵⁸

Individual experts were essential to this transnational enterprise. In 1961, Syracuse University sponsored Emmanuel Fadaka, a service manager at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, on a summer-long tour of US broadcasting operations. While in the United States, Fadaka met with executives at Meredith Corporation, an American media conglomerate based in Des Moines, Iowa (and currently the largest magazine company in the world, following its buyout of Time Inc.). Subsidized by Syracuse, Fadaka’s trip to Meredith was one manifestation of the university’s commitment not simply to cultural exchange but also, more specifically, to the further normalization of the privately owned, competitive commercial broadcasting system associated with the United States. At the time, this particular system was widely considered a useful weapon in the cultural Cold War, a tool of

containment in its own right, given its putative reflection and promotion of consumer “freedoms.”⁵⁹ “Americans supported private ownership of broadcasting and news services abroad,” notes Emily S. Rosenberg of the period, “and they championed the spread of the same advertiser-shaped mass culture developed at home.”⁶⁰ Fadaka’s tour of the United States was an instance of what Michelle Hilmes has called “the aggressive recruitment of other nations into the commercial system.” It was not a unidirectional process but a true system of exchange, in that the Nigerian broadcaster, by learning how to better serve private interests (even under cover of a state-chartered, public-service monopoly like the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation), provided useful fodder for American media interests (including film producers and distributors) eager to invest in the growing solvency of urbanized Nigerians.⁶¹ Fadaka, in other words, was expected to—and did—provide evidence of the expanding Nigerian middle class whose needs, as a service manager, he himself was required to meet.⁶²

Fadaka’s trip to the United States serves as an important reminder that, while representatives of Hollywood frequently visited Nigeria in the early 1960s, numerous Nigerians followed a reverse path as part of a multipronged effort to yoke their newly independent country to the interests of a rapidly diversifying American media system. As early as 1959, the US State Department’s international-exchange service sponsored a four-month study of American broadcasting operations by a delegation from Nigeria.⁶³ Two years later, the State Department subsidized the Nigerian Minister of Education’s trip to New York to inspect radio and television facilities there. Rather than pursue quotas or other forms of protectionism, the education minister merely requested that distributors provide “better U.S. films” for use on Nigerian television. In language that echoed that of the colonial administrators who had so concerned themselves with the capacity of Hollywood products (particularly gangster films) to besmirch the white race, he warned that filmed images of “crime and cowboys” were threatening, via their saturation of Nigerian screens, to undermine “our image of America.” In order to persuade producers and distributors to provide “good broadcast material” (rather than “antiquated and inferior American filmed shows”), the education minister emphasized the elite nature of television viewing in Nigeria in the early 1960s. Since “set ownership [was] limited largely among the political and economic leaders,” and given the influence and purchase power of these particular television watchers, he commented, “the broadcast message has an influence far out of proportion to the actual number of sets.”⁶⁴ His words also aptly describe Hollywood’s longtime stance on film distribution and exhibition in Nigeria, practices whose importance has always been seen as far out of proportion to the actual number of movie theaters in the country. For his part, Christian Scott-Emuakpor, a program assistant at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, traveled to Washington, DC, in the summer of 1961 in order to meet with FCC Commissioner Robert E. Lee. Scott-Emuakpor’s

four-month stay in the United States was meant to forge additional links between the American and Nigerian commercial broadcasting systems.⁶⁵

Discernable in these exchanges are the origins of the present-day attention to the “Afripolitan” consumer eminently capable of investing not merely in moviegoing at the multiplexes, but also in the consumption of concessions and all manner of commodity tie-ins, from music to clothes to cars. Hollywood’s periodic attempts to ascertain the consumer power of Nigerians have therefore spanned several decades, starting in the colonial era and extending to today. Such genealogical connections to the present suggest that Hollywood’s interest in Nigeria was not generated by the twenty-first-century discourse of “Africa Rising.” Rather, this interest accompanied and even predated the excitement of independence.

In 1960, the US Department of Commerce estimated that 50 percent of Hollywood’s revenue was “accounted for by foreign distribution,” including in newly independent Nigeria.⁶⁶ “As the world spotlight turns on Africa [as a result of decolonization], there will be more and more attention focused on the image of Americans that is created in the African mind,” announced Eric Johnston in August 1960. “There is, of course, no more important medium of communication or no more important way of reaching the African people than through motion pictures.”⁶⁷ Johnston’s second trip to Nigeria, which took place in the summer of 1960, was hardly without precedent, of course. It came in the wake of a June 1960 visit by a five-man delegation from the US State Department, whose mission was to identify new arenas for “economic cooperation” between the two countries. The department announced that “the primary interest of the U.S. in Nigeria is to see it grow and prosper, within the Free World, as a leader and good example for other African countries.”⁶⁸ As a result of this particular state-sponsored visit, the United States pledged \$225 million in “development aid,” to be disbursed over a five-year period—a major statement of faith in Nigeria’s “growth potential.”⁶⁹

When Johnston first visited Nigeria on the eve of independence he discovered, much to his surprise and chagrin, that only two American films were being screened in commercial cinemas in Lagos, and that these were tattered prints of old westerns that he did not even recognize—B movies from minor studios like Monogram and PRC. Of the eight other films being exhibited commercially during Johnston’s visit, no fewer than five were Indian (“subtitled and . . . primarily action fantasies in color”), while the remaining three came from Britain. “Two needs must be filled in Nigeria if there is to be a massive and loyal following for U.S. product,” Johnston announced. “The first is more better-quality American films, and the second is more and better theatres. The U.S. industry can, and should, be doing something about both.”

Johnston claimed that, in his conversations with Nigerians (including cabinet ministers and other politicians), “most agreed” that enclosed theaters would be profitable in the country—air-conditioned alternatives to the “open-air affairs”



FIGURE 11. Nigeria's theatrical promise often made headlines in the United States.

susceptible to rainy weather—and that American interests should immediately engage in a comprehensive theater-construction program. Such a program would be good not merely for the major studios, whose films—both new releases and reissues—would “undoubtedly” be welcome in roofed venues in Nigeria, but also for enterprises like the Auriema Group (AG), a New York consulting and export company that already had multiple contracts with Nigerian Electronics Ltd., which, with AG's assistance, established Nigeria's first air-conditioner factory in Apapa in 1962.⁷⁰ For Johnston and other observers, that factory was further evidence of Nigeria's “readiness” for more and better movie theaters, precisely the kinds of establishments that would require air conditioners. “What a four-walled, air-conditioned theatre, with multiple showings daily, couldn't do in Ibadan!” Johnston exclaimed.⁷¹

On those rare occasions when he acknowledged the possibility of variation in “audience taste” across national and cultural contexts, Johnston simply assumed that Hollywood, and not an indigenous film industry, would be able to meet the unique spectatorial needs of Nigerians—would, in fact, be interested in producing films for them and them alone. The chauvinism of these remarks should not distract from what they indicate about the size and value of the Nigerian market as constituted in the Hollywood imaginary. Johnston claimed that Hollywood studios would find sufficient profit in the production and distribution of “Nigerian” films; the only question was whether they *should*. “Should the U.S. make a few pictures not for universal appeal but geared especially to African audiences?” he asked, before citing Nigeria specifically—a slippage common in accounts of the continent (then as now), in which “Africa,” associated with vastness, becomes metonymic of the scale of Nigeria itself. Stressing Hollywood's “responsibility to Nigeria,” Johnston sought to couch exploitation as camaraderie: “Nigeria is a

growing, dynamic country; its people have the indomitable pride and spirit of Texas, Florida, and California combined. If we are alert to our responsibilities, we can make lasting friends and do welcome business here—good business.”⁷²

“NOW NIGERIA”

Nearly every major distributor of Hollywood films and television programs was active in Nigeria by 1962, including ABC Films, Twentieth Century-Fox, MGM-TV, Warner Bros. TV, Official Films, United Artists, Desilu Film Sales, Four Star Television, Seven Arts, Freemantle International, the National Telefilm Association, the William Morris Agency, and Danny Thomas Enterprises, Inc. These companies sold American feature films along with news and public affairs programs, competing with Britain (US producer-distributors often complained of the “built-in” advantage enjoyed in Nigeria by their British counterparts, including the state-subsidized BBC, which did not need to show a profit and could thus sell programs at low prices) but clearly dominating the market.⁷³ Hollywood’s competition for that market in fact predated independence (a reality that I examine more fully in chapter 2), thereby redressing the familiar, almost axiomatic notion that the United States, in the late colonial period, “had few interests in Africa and tried to remain aloof from European rivalries there.”⁷⁴

Respect for “European rivalries” hardly prevented the United States from aggressively pursuing the breakup of the British monopoly of cables in the Western Hemisphere, or establishing preeminence in radio, film, newspaper wire services, and commercial aviation, and it is equally unconvincing as an alibi for those seeking to avoid considerations of Nigeria’s longstanding relevance to US interests. In 1960, the Stanford Research Institute’s Ministry of Economic Development identified Nigeria’s “tremendous potential and prospects” in various sectors, including commercial theatrical exhibition; it nominated “forward-looking American industries”—Hollywood chief among them—to serve as ideal participants in the shaping of Nigeria’s “bright future.”⁷⁵ The Stanford team was seemingly unaware of the fact that Hollywood was already well-entrenched in Nigeria and that the industry, in a variety of guises, had long been attempting to accomplish what the team prescribed in 1960.

On February 11, 1961, a “special documentary about Nigeria,” *Now . . . Nigeria*, was broadcast in prime time on WABC-TV in New York, preempting a popular variety show.⁷⁶ Hosted by Hollywood actor Alexander Scourby, the episode—the first of the *Schaefer Circle of Special Programs* sponsored by the F & M Schaefer Brewing Company—was filmed in Nigeria by independent producer William Alexander (“himself a Negro”). Hoping that all its clients would eventually follow F & M Schaefer’s lead in conducting business in the country, the advertising agency Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO) had hired Alexander to show Nigeria’s post-independence progress. In an indication of its avowed commitment



FIGURE 12. A Nigerian school is seen in the BBDO-sponsored television program *Now . . . Nigeria* (1961).

to “Nigeria’s promise”—to touting the country’s “peaceful emergence as one of the free nations of Africa”—BBDO was heavily involved in the production of *Now . . . Nigeria*, “contributing some writing, structuring and basic editing.” Designed to appeal to “beer-drinking males,” the program depicted Nigeria, not inaccurately, as a brewery capital—and Nigerian men as “much like” their American counterparts. Beer, then, was a symbol of independent Nigeria’s capitalist connectedness to the United States—the common thread (or beverage) of “freedom.” The program’s reception and ratings performance were “sources of satisfaction for advertiser and agency,” both of which cited “warm letters from viewers.” “Additional mileage from the show, brought in for minimal production costs,” was “potentially endless since expectations” were that it would “develop into a perennial presentation”—including in Nigeria, where theatrical and nontheatrical distribution via 16mm film (the program’s originating format) was made possible by BBDO, which believed in Nigeria’s promise as a “media center.”⁷⁷

Whatever their past practices, Hollywood filmmakers, supported by BBDO and other steadily expanding advertising agencies, were among the “American

businessmen drawn by this growing half-billion-dollar export market,” as one trade paper described Nigeria in early 1961.⁷⁸ Established in the aftermath of independence, the Arthur D. Little Industrial Development Program in Nigeria—the latest branch of a Massachusetts-based international management consulting firm committed to the privatization and deregulation of media around the world—repeatedly arranged for Hollywood representatives to visit Nigeria as part of the program’s efforts to “expand [the country’s] economy, create new industries, and stimulate private investment,” as vice president William A.W. Krebs told the Nigerian-American Chamber of Commerce in 1962.⁷⁹ Calling Nigeria the “marketing prize of Africa,” the trade paper *Printers’ Ink* suggested that the country’s “will for self-improvement” would enable it to become, by the mid-1960s, a veritable “cinema strip”—a major site “for mass consumption” of American movies and other commercial goods.⁸⁰ Even *Mademoiselle*, in the early 1960s, addressed Nigeria’s potential as a site of film production and exhibition, identifying Ibadan—a place “charged with great expectations,” where “old and new exist side by side,” against a “skyline . . . punctuated with occasional handsome skyscrapers and . . . several beautiful buildings in contemporary style”—as a future “film capital.”⁸¹

Hollywood companies and individual American entrepreneurs had carefully prepared for this post-independence explosion of interest in Nigeria. Concurrent with the country’s emergence as an effective source of state and private funding for American media firms was the latter’s (hardly selfless) commitment to “development”—a trope widely promoted in the American trade press as early as the 1920s, when an American film exhibitor by the name of E.O. Gabriel relocated to Nigeria, where he began managing the Empire Theater in Lagos.⁸² The American exhibitor B. Frank Newell quickly followed suit, moving to Nigeria to manage the nearby Coliseum Theatre as part of what many observers termed an exhibitor’s gold rush—a rapid relocation of “courageous” American businessmen to what was still, among other things, an outpost of the British Empire.⁸³

Both Gabriel and Newell would later join the Managers’ Round Table Club, an American organization committed to “fostering . . . competition among [theater] managers and exploiters,” including those savvy enough to insert themselves into a colonial economy on the cusp of major changes (such as the introduction of wired broadcasting and the establishment of the Colonial Film Unit) in the arena of mediation. The amenability of the British colonial government to inflows (and outflows) of American businessmen and American capital was strategic, part of the goal of legitimating empire as a conduit of technological progress. That such progress could scarcely occur in the complete absence of American agents (from the human to the financial) speaks to the increasingly hegemonic position of the United States in a system of economic globalization premised on the spread of media forms and practices.

Based in New York, the Managers’ Round Table Club advertised in a special section of the *Motion Picture Herald*, where it offered “exploitation suggestions” that, in a number of instances, centered on Nigeria as a market well worth infiltrating

(as the personal experiences of Gabriel and Newell purportedly “proved”). Embracing the vocabulary of capitalist penetration, the organization, and the publication in which it advertised, relied heavily on the motif of exploitation, which, far from an anti-imperialist gesture—an honest and self-critical reckoning with abuse and oppression—was in this instance proudly deployed as an accurate index of American efforts to capitalize on Nigeria as a “ripe” exhibition site. Such content often assumed a somewhat anxious tone, as when American corporations and individual entrepreneurs were deemed at risk of “missing the boat” on media development in Nigeria, or when Nigeria was positioned as being very much in danger of “falling through the cracks” of economic globalization. A 1934 issue of *The Film Daily*, for instance, featured the following, alarmist “fact about films”: “Nigeria, with 20 million inhabitants, has no theater wired for sound films.” Intrepid representatives of American capital were thus implored to fill this particular gap, using their own ingenuity and commitment to personal enrichment and the global spread of market fundamentalism in order to bring Nigeria “up to speed” in the realm of sound cinema. If Nigerian theaters were to be rendered capable of showing sound films, it would have to be with American equipment. American industry would thus meet the “unsatisfied needs” of the Nigerian people.⁸⁴

The language employed to describe Nigeria in such accounts is almost always contradictory. Touting Gabriel’s work in Lagos, the Managers’ Round Table Club positioned Nigeria as simultaneously exotic (“If that isn’t a far-off country, we don’t know what is!”) and smoothly contiguous with American exhibition practices. The club was thus committed to identifying and facilitating connections between domestic operations and “how things are done in faraway lands.”⁸⁵ To many observers, Lagos, in its capacity as a space of exhibition, resembled a mid-size American city, offering as it did a couple of well-appointed movie houses (the Empire, the Coliseum) in addition to a smattering of smaller venues at the urban margins. In 1944, a study sponsored by the US Departments of State and Commerce determined that Nigeria had just thirteen commercial film theaters, representing a total of 8,200 seats. Alarming “sparse,” this particular “African market” was nevertheless positioned as a major “growth area” for American studios because it “favored Hollywood films.” The evidence for this assertion was not ethnographic—not culled from conversations with Nigerian moviegoers—but, rather, restricted to the simple fact that American films enjoyed far more showtimes than their British and Indian counterparts.⁸⁶

That Hollywood was “favored” was not, then, a matter of taste; it was, instead, a function of the industry’s output and export power. If, following the state-mandated restructuring of the classical studio system in the late 1940s, the productivity of the major studios declined (at least in terms of the number of films made per year), their export power only grew—including, of course, as a direct (even panicked) response to this restructuring. In many cases, what was illegal at home was fair game abroad, particularly in a decolonizing Nigeria that remained strategically

amenable to American interests. These interests included the Chicago-based Radiant Manufacturing Corp., which tested its patented Magniglow Astrolite Screens in Nigeria in the 1950s, including through showings of John Ford’s *Mogambo* (1953), which had been shot on location in East and Central Africa. Boasting a reflection surface made with pure silver (itself derived from Nigeria), Astrolite was designed to ensure “perfectly controlled illumination” and was extremely attractive to Twentieth Century-Fox, whose CinemaScope process demanded new projection surfaces, enhanced reflectivity, and greater light distribution.⁸⁷

The promise of independence was also the ongoing challenge of amalgamation. Because it retained the political borders arbitrarily imposed by empire, post-colonial Nigeria preserved a potentially volatile ethnolinguistic admixture. Enter Cinestar International, a Hollywood-based company that developed its patented Multitrax projection system in and for newly independent Nigeria.⁸⁸ Announced as a low-cost alternative to the multilingual system of production pioneered (and quickly abandoned) by Paramount, MGM, UFA, and others in the late 1920s, Multitrax incorporated five separate magnetic soundtracks—each in a different language—on the edges of 16mm film prints, enabling “the audience [to] hear only the sound version appropriate to them as selected by the projectionist. Simultaneous playback of all tracks [was] also possible via earphones for mixed groups of various nationalities or with different educational backgrounds.”⁸⁹ Dedicated projectors were available to Nigerian exhibitors at \$100 apiece, but they were not necessary; as Cinestar pointed out, “many models of conventional projectors [could] be easily modified for Multitrax projection.”⁹⁰

Conceived for Nigerian audiences, Multitrax illustrates Alan Williams’s argument that “the shape of [film] sound in the rest of the world seems to have been rather different from what happened in the United States.”⁹¹ Multitrax underscores, as well, Nataša Đurovičová’s observation that, in the history of sound cinema, “the crude terms of economic competition . . . were occasionally recast—and translated—into other social discourses.”⁹² Indeed, the pursuit of product differentiation sometimes acquired “exotic” reverberations. In the absence of indirect rule and other forms of colonial mediation, Multitrax was meant to serve a useful social function. With empire’s oversight ostensibly a thing of the past, Cinestar could, the company cannily surmised, step in to fill the void and, through Multitrax, manage the “chaos” left in colonialism’s wake. Of course, Cinestar’s efforts cannot be understood in isolation from Hollywood’s broader, ongoing public relations campaigns. An example of capitalist rationalization masquerading as “cultural sensitivity,” Multitrax—a technological means of mastering the problem of language—was engineered to benefit from association with Nigeria’s polyphonic postcoloniality.

The case of Multitrax also demonstrates that the postwar revolution in magnetic recording was not limited to the United States but extended, via Hollywood companies like Cinestar, all the way to Nigeria. Cinestar targeted the country



FIGURE 13. Hollywood-based Cinestar International developed its patented Multitrax projection system in and for newly independent Nigeria. Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center.

in part because of its multilingual character, and in response to rapidly proliferating Pan-Africanist discourses that insisted on the need to respect more than just the colonizer's tongue. What the first wave of postcolonial thinkers viewed as a means of preserving African traditions, Cinestar saw as a way of earning profits. Recognizing the “requirements of vernacular language audiences” in the country, the company promptly “created a marketing plan for processing, dubbing, distributing, and exhibiting 16mm motion picture films” for multilingual Nigerians, as well as for those demonstrating “different intellectual levels of the same language” (like English).⁹³

Cinestar's development of Multitrax offers one indication of how American cinema was, in Miriam Hansen's terms, “translated and reconfigured” in and for Nigeria even as early as the immediate post-independence period.⁹⁴ Rather than dogmatically (and, of course, inexpensively) adhering to Standard English, Cinestar

made costly interlingual and even intralingual efforts in order to reach a broader Nigerian audience, offering a fantasy of national unity through film technology. Exercising a certain control over language, Multitrax promised to contribute to an ongoing project of national unification made newly urgent by independence and the controversial preservation of political borders so haphazardly imposed by European imperialism. More than just a quest for interethnic “harmony,” this project of national unification was also believed to be a precondition for comprehensive capitalist penetration—a way of easing the entry, and facilitating the uptake, of American companies, products, and practices. Cinestar pursued such penetration, quite literally, in the idiom of ethnic minorities and others not served by hegemonic English. In the absence of a national consensus, Multitrax could, its engineers hoped, speak across the divides. If interlingual labor led to the translation of American films from English into Igbo, Yorùbá, and Ibíbio (among other tongues), intralingual undertakings entailed the preparation of Pidgin versions of the very same films. It is unclear who, exactly, was responsible for these individual translations. The archival record offers no clues in this regard, though it is certainly possible that Cinestar employed actual Nigerians in its attempts to render American cinema (more) intelligible to African moviegoers.

Cinestar’s efforts were neither entirely altruistic nor strictly commercial. They combined the profit motive of a Hollywood company with a pronounced ideological investment in telegraphing the industry’s responsiveness to foreign audiences. With its marketable attention to African languages, Multitrax was meant, in part, to assuage growing concerns about the Americanization of the world’s movie screens. Cinestar was thus participating in a particular public relations strategy that Abé Mark Nornes has identified with Hollywood’s various modes of translation, including the industry’s storied yet cost-prohibitive production of multiple-language versions. Multitrax, as adapted for Nigeria, was simply the latest language-based “way to combat the charge that Hollywood was invading the world.”⁹⁵ It was, at the very least, a way of making that invasion seem less a top-down process of cultural homogenization than a sympathetic reaction to audience needs, a means of “bring[ing] the foreign text to the spectators on their own domestic terms.”⁹⁶

Yet the aggressive promotion of the technology itself served as a reminder to Nigerians of its emphatically American character. Multitrax was a product of capitalist ingenuity and thus, like many of the innovations of its era, a geopolitical tool, a weapon in the ongoing cultural Cold War. Thus even when Hollywood’s fantasy of a uniformly English-speaking national audience began to erode with the advent of Nigerian independence and the intensification of long-nurtured discourses of decolonization and Pan-Africanism, individual companies like Cinestar cultivated their own fantasies of translation as a source of comfort, entertainment, and profits. These latter fantasies pivoted around Cinestar’s expectation of a welcome reception for its Multitrax technology in multilingual Nigeria. The company does

not appear to have conceded the potentially innumerable challenges associated with translation. Contracts and various memoranda omit mention not only of individual translators (thus evoking Nornes's claims about the historical sidelining of such figures and the careful effacing of their labor), but also of the possibility of controversy—of a Nigerian reception context marked by hostility to perceived distortions caused by poor translation. By “respecting” Nigeria’s linguistic diversity, Cinestar sought to manage (if not eliminate) the impression that African sites of cinema exhibition were “becoming increasingly compromised by American-style modernization and capitalism.”⁹⁷

A savvy response to Nigeria’s linguistic diversity, Multitrax was also an architectural provocation, a challenge for theater design and construction. Projection sites would need to be equipped for the reproduction not simply of standard monaural sound but also of the stereo associated with Multitrax (and, for that matter, Cinerama). If Nigeria’s climatic variations called for the construction of permanent four-walled movie theaters, particularly in the south, the country’s *linguistic* diversity demanded equally unprecedented efforts. Hollywood had long sought to capture linguistically differentiated world markets, but Nigeria was *internally* differentiated, and dramatically so. Cinestar’s strategy rested on a paradox, representing as it did an attempt to respect—and capture—Nigeria as a discrete nation-state precisely by “honoring” the very diversity that threatened to tear the country apart.

Multitrax, one of many technologies that Cinestar developed, serves as further evidence that Nigeria, far from a backwater or an afterthought, was in fact at the forefront of developments in film technology. For Nigeria was not simply a site of experimentation but also a source of funding for many of Hollywood’s riskiest ventures. Cinestar’s records, some of which are housed in the Rockefeller Archive Center, indicate that it sought and even received “Nigerian investment as a franchised corporation.” Nigerian private and public expenditures covered “local purchases, local labor and construction, lease or rental of land and facilities, minor alterations to existing facilities for a small recording studio, costs of incorporation-registration, other local legal fees . . . etc.”⁹⁸ As this list suggests, Cinestar was committed to more than just the adoption of its Multitrax system. In establishing the Nigerian Cinestar Franchised Corporation, which enjoyed “the licensed and *exclusive* privilege to use the revolutionary and patented MULTITRAX language conversion system and to distribute films dubbed by it,” the Hollywood firm also pursued the uptake in Nigeria of its “economy cinemas.”⁹⁹ Known as CineDomes, these exhibition centers consisted of plastic-and-nylon “aero-tents” that, “in eight minutes flat,” could be “blown up like balloons with air pumps,” serving, in the punning language of Cinestar publicity, as “theaters in the mound.” “Plain and fancy, solid and flexible, domes are bulging out all over,” the company boasted, “bringing surprising methods to the construction business and surprising shapes to the landscape. Modern demands have found a variety of

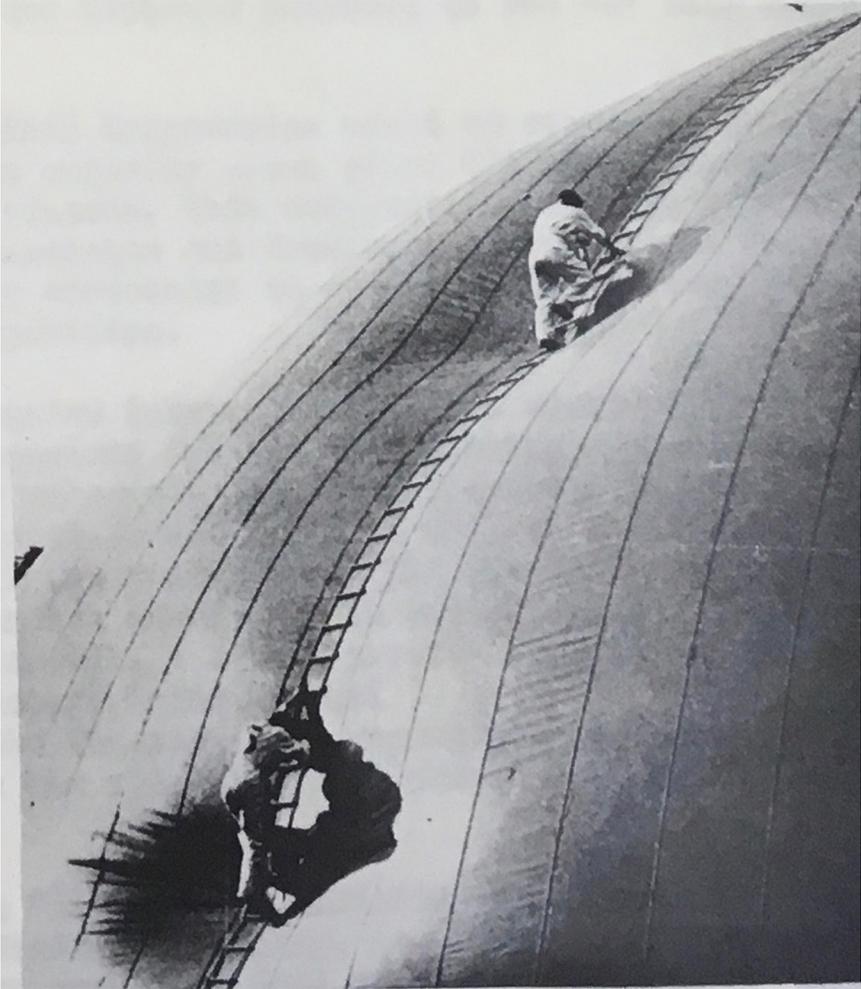


FIGURE 14. The Nigerian Cinestar Franchised Corporation puts up a CineDome, a plastic-and-nylon “aero-tent” for film exhibition, in 1963. Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center.

odd uses for domes, from keeping concertgoers dry to protecting a fragile radar antenna from rough weather.”

Nigeria was not the only country in which these “balloon cinemas” went up—Cinestar marketed them throughout Europe, touring various towns—but, with its dusty Harmattan winds and its monsoon rains, it served as an ideal test of the CineDome’s capacity to withstand extreme weather.¹⁰⁰ If Nigeria’s exceptionality as a multilingual country led Cinestar to pioneer Multitrax as a means of meeting the needs of the market (the running banner at the top of the company’s letterhead was “FILMS IN YOUR LANGUAGE AT A PRICE YOU CAN AFFORD”),

its tropical monsoon climate, with especially rainy wet seasons and pronounced and dust-laden dry seasons, motivated major experiments with the architecture of film exhibition.¹⁰¹

“WINNING” NIGERIA

As the case of Cinestar suggests, Hollywood’s diverse presence in Nigeria requires a rethinking of what qualifies as interesting and consequential in film-historical scholarship—a moving away from the sort of binarism arguably inherent in economic studies of Hollywood, in which box-office receipts serve as the most (or even the only) admissible evidence, and in which “business failure” (conventionally defined) is used to justify inattention.¹⁰² According to such accounts, there is no reason to take seriously the industry’s varied pursuits in parts of the world where commercial theaters are relatively scarce and “corruption” allegedly abundant. But to exclude Nigeria from histories of Hollywood imperialism—to proceed as if the country were, given its want of auditoria, altogether irrelevant to American film companies—is to discount the fact that those companies, far from focused on theatrical exhibition alone, were for decades committed to selling Nigerians 35mm filmstrips, 8mm reduction prints, and soundtrack recordings, all of which could be used in classrooms and other nontheatrical locations.¹⁰³ Hollywood’s vast “technological systems,” to borrow a term from Thomas Hughes, involved more than mere software. Even in Nigeria, and even as early as the 1960s, they encompassed “hardware, devices, machines, and processes,” as well as the “transportation, communication, and information networks that interconnect them.”¹⁰⁴

Nigeria was a “tough market,” conceded Richard G. Lurie, the vice president of *American Exporter Publications*, in 1962: “Some American potential investors have come, looked and then gone away. But some have stayed.”¹⁰⁵ The latter included Nigerian Electronics, a joint venture between American and Nigerian capital, which, based in Apapa, powered and cooled the Roxy Cinema and also assembled television sets and three-band transistorized portable radios. Eluchie Electrical Works, another firm buoyed by Hollywood investors, also powered and cooled cinemas, and its American overseers stayed in Nigeria despite the “toughness” of conditions there.¹⁰⁶

Like Black Africa in general, and as the 1961 collaboration of BBDO and William Alexander attests, Nigeria inspired creative attempts to leverage race to further the penetration of American capital. These attempts often hinged on the hiring of African American intermediaries (like Alexander) on the assumption that such figures would be welcomed—and trusted—in a Black-majority country like Nigeria. Here, the philosophy of negritude, a term coined by Aimé Césaire in the 1930s, was strategically transformed to include commerce. The “cultural values of the black world,” as Léopold Sédar Senghor, the leading theorist of negritude, famously called them, were now seen as encompassing economic ones.¹⁰⁷

Co-opted by big business, negritude lubricated many of the deals made in Nigeria. In the late 1950s, Ayerst Laboratories, a pharmaceutical company based in New York, hired its first Black executive, Dr. Maurice Maximilien. Ayerst immediately tasked Maximilien with appealing to Nigerians concerned about the company’s presence in the country, where it began manufacturing products on the eve of independence. Maximilien declared of Nigerians, “I believe they have a brilliant opportunity to forward the cause of the Negro race. I do hope they will take up the matter of assisting Negroes seriously.” Summarizing the executive’s position, the *West African Pilot* pointed to the widely shared conviction “that Nigeria will benefit immensely by having commercial contacts with the USA.”¹⁰⁸

In the spring of 1960, the US Department of Commerce announced that Nigeria exhibited “‘more than average’ promise for [the] expansion of American exports,” including cinematic ones.¹⁰⁹ Hollywood, which has always enjoyed considerable diplomatic backing, proved especially responsive to the discourses of Nigerian exceptionalism circulating in and through the international diplomatic community. Consider, for instance, Arnold Rivkin’s 1962 description of Nigeria as “an oasis of democratic development in an arid desert of authoritarian-inclined African states.”¹¹⁰ The director of MIT’s Project on African Economic and Political Development, Rivkin considered Nigeria a “unique nation”—exceptional both on its own sociocultural (and certainly mineral) terms and as a potentially “economically strong and politically stable ally of the West, integrated into the global capitalist order.”¹¹¹ In 1961, Rivkin would inform the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that Nigeria was “a society very responsive to economic incentives,” and his confidence was borne out by the decision of Hollywood studios to set up permanent offices there. Nigeria—what Rivkin, extending his exceptionalist rhetoric, called “an oasis of rationality in a sea of unreason”—was considered a “natural” home for Hollywood interests committed to expansion after the collapse of the studio system.¹¹²

Notwithstanding the industry’s active interest in South Africa and Zimbabwe, Hollywood embraced Lagos in the 1960s in ways that echoed the US State Department’s view of Nigeria as “the most important country in Africa.”¹¹³ Particularizing—and, indeed, praising—Nigeria in the wake of independence was the State Department’s way of building on its earlier, pre-independence articulation of the African continent’s significance “as a geographical area four times the size of the U.S. producing minerals and primary agricultural products of great importance to America.”¹¹⁴ Outside of the State Department (but hardly untethered to it), the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations were committed to demonstrating the cultural and economic value of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, bolstering US-backed economic planning units, including at the University of Ife.¹¹⁵

The foundations’ efforts may have been mired in “superficial generalizations, prejudice, and blind faith in the ‘rational’ methods of the social sciences,” but they were remarkably effective, exerting a pull on Hollywood studios already

drawn to Nigeria—and all too happy to accept and even trumpet social-scientific justifications for their collective commercial interest in Lagos.¹¹⁶ “Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller were,” writes David H. Price, “selectively predisposed to nurture ideas aligned with their founders’ political-economic interests.”¹¹⁷ Such foundations were thus, as Joan Roelofs has argued, “examples of mortmain, the dead hand of past wealth controlling the future.”¹¹⁸ In the case of Nigeria, this was, of course, a specifically postcolonial future. Endeavoring to determine the course of independence, Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller were among the architects of neocolonialism; the ill-gotten gains that made them possible were also preserved and reproduced in the guise of decolonization. The revolving door between such wealthy private foundations and government positions meant that state power often fueled corporate schemes that masqueraded as “neutral” modernization studies. Simply put, private foundations shaped how Hollywood saw Nigeria, facilitating conceptual as well as literal constructions of theatrical film in and “for” the country.

Nigeria has only rarely witnessed the form of settler capitalism familiar from, say, South Africa, where, in 1954, MGM renovated one of its first-run cinemas (the Plaza in Cape Town) to make it resemble New York’s Radio City Music Hall. Until the twenty-first century, Nigeria had no such spectacularly imitative facilities. The dazzling venues constructed in the 1960s by the Cinerama Corporation for the marketing of its own widescreen process were merely temporary. Akin to fairground exhibits, they were strictly promotional and provisional. For their part, the commercial theaters run by Americans (such as the Empire and the Coliseum, both in Lagos) were hardly architectural marvels. But however modest they may have seemed to observers accustomed to the pomp of first-run movie palaces, these spaces were shaped by and in the interests of foreign capital.

If the outbreak of the Biafran Civil War surprised US policymakers and other political experts, so too did it surprise Hollywood. Peter Hopkinson, director of the Unilever-sponsored 1962 short *African Awakening*, which celebrates economic development in Nigeria, later said that “such a bloody failure of high hope was not to be anticipated, let alone envisaged, in my [film].”¹¹⁹ Mere months before the outbreak of war, the Hollywood company Seven Arts Productions launched a special committee—part of Variety Clubs International, a children’s charity—in Lagos.¹²⁰ Seven Arts eventually acquired a controlling interest in Warner Bros. Pictures in 1967.¹²¹ Along with the other major studios, however, Warner Bros.–Seven Arts abandoned Nigeria by decade’s end. But whatever challenges Nigeria posed in the aftermath of Biafra’s secession, Hollywood would return to the country again and again, exhibiting an all-but-unshakeable faith in the country’s exceptionality. In the late 1950s, Rupert Emerson, a Carnegie-funded member of the newly established African Studies Association, had written of the importance of perpetually “‘discovering’ and rediscovering” Nigeria in particular, and that is precisely what Hollywood has done since at least the late colonial period.¹²²

Hollywood’s efforts to infiltrate Nigeria have never been exclusively about selling tickets to theatrical films. They have also been about moving any number of other products, even apart from the usual suspects (such as official tie-ins and other merchandise associated with particular motion pictures). Markets for movies are also markets for other, even seemingly unrelated goods and services, some of which may be sold by the parent companies of individual film studios.¹²³ Ashcraft Suprex Arcs and Kaplan Projectors were in use in Nigeria by 1940, having been marketed there by a number of American companies.¹²⁴ In the early 1960s, Western Electric began selling 16mm Bell & Howell automatic-exposure cameras in Nigeria, while the company made monthly film reports from the country for NASA, in the process importing 35mm Eastmancolor film, to which its 16mm footage was “blown up” and with which it was carefully color-matched.¹²⁵

Cinema’s association with a wide-ranging consumerism was undoubtedly deeply familiar to many Nigerians by independence.¹²⁶ Indeed, during and after British colonial rule, mobile cinema units were exploited by major commercial organizations, including Unilever and Procter & Gamble, in order to move various products.¹²⁷ By the 1960s, numerous pharmaceutical companies had co-opted the immensely popular cinema vans in order to advertise and sell their manufactures, employing hawkers (often dubbed “interpreters”) to describe these goods in detail (and, of course, to identify their prices for cinema audiences).¹²⁸ For its part, Cinestar International marketed its patented Cinego mobile cinemas in Nigeria beginning in 1963. Cinego units included folding screens; film shipping cases “constructed of heavy-duty, reinforced rust-resistant steel . . . equipped with steel runners on the bottom, [and] 3 . . . handles for one or two men carrying” that were “moisture-proof, dust-proof,” and “perfect for tropical areas” like Nigeria; projectors; and 16mm films, including those produced by Cinestar itself, which the company leased in blocks of 10, 20, 40, or 50.¹²⁹ In Nigeria as elsewhere, Cinego “packages” were meant, through both their state-of-the-art design and the films that they brought to rural audiences, to promote the wonders of American capitalism. Such efforts were, in part, products of the Cold War conception of Nigeria as imperiled by Soviet communism, and they were not limited to Cinestar, whose “prospects in Nigeria” seemed healthy by 1963.¹³⁰

Sponsored by Unilever and distributed by the New York-based Contemporary Films, Inc., the 28-minute 16mm documentary *Twilight Forest* (Sydney Latter, 1957), which was later included in Cinego packages, depicts the “changing technological and economic growth” in Nigeria as a result of harvesting timber. As this example suggests, Hollywood majors have never been the sole representatives of American cinema in Nigeria; they have always enjoyed the expansive—indeed, globe-spanning—support of smaller enterprises. Cinestar, for its part, remained committed, through its patented Multitrax language-conversion system, to the “economical dubbing” of Hollywood studio films “even into minority languages and dialects.”¹³¹ The efforts of small-scale producers and distributors

of nontheatrical nonfiction film were not, then, necessarily antithetical to those of their Hollywood counterparts. As Victoria Cain points out in her work on the Rockefeller Foundation, which was active in Nigeria—including cinematically—by the 1950s, the makers of educational films like *Twilight Forest* “attempted to collaborate, rather than compete, with Hollywood studios.”¹³²

Independent American exhibitors, such as the Lagos-based Stanley Jones, were active in Nigeria as early as 1903; they joined European missionaries operating on a largely non-commercial basis—as, that is, “benevolent” bringers of “civilization” through cinema.¹³³ Esther Green Humphrey, owner and general manager of the Omaha-based, exhibitor-focused marketing firm FEPCO Theatre Advertising, began doing business in Lagos in 1962, at the behest of Benjamin Mabadeje of West African Pictures Co., a Nigerian distributor. While in Lagos, Humphrey helped to market not merely motion pictures produced by the Hollywood majors but also many of the consumer items that those films depicted, some of which could be sold in and around the city’s movie theaters.¹³⁴ This was the same year that Nigerian Electronics Ltd. established its air-conditioner factory, with substantial backing from Auriema Group and the Rockefeller Bros. Fund, both of which were actively committed to assisting Hollywood’s efforts to establish more hard-top, climate-controlled cinemas in Nigeria.¹³⁵ As MGM’s publicity department had put it in 1940, “air conditioning properly controlled . . . is so important in the . . . climate of the [African] city.”¹³⁶ Along with Eluchie Electrical Works, Nigerian Electronics powered and cooled cinemas throughout southern Nigeria, thus helping to realize some of MGM’s longstanding ambitions in and for the country. The studio wanted Lagos, like Cairo (site of the opulent Cinema Metro, which opened in 1940), to have “a theater worthy of [it],” one with the “most comfortable chairs, perfect projection, unexcelled sound, [and] air conditioning, . . . all combined in one magnificent edifice, which cannot fail to be a source of great civic pride.”¹³⁷ The question of what films would be screened in Nigeria’s permanent four-walled motion-picture theaters was one that MGM was eager to answer. The studio recommended, among other works, the latest entries in its Tarzan series—“African” films for African audiences.¹³⁸

“FAITH IN NIGERIA”

Even after Eric Johnston was able to concede that the common factor of “global television” was, if anything, reliance on Hollywood films, he chose to focus on theatrical exhibition as a more feasible sphere of expansion for Hollywood interests in Nigeria. “The hazards to [Nigerian television’s] growth, mostly economic, are likely to keep it stunted for a good while yet,” he wrote. Such “stunting” was thus an invitation to Hollywood to invest in extensive theater construction.¹³⁹ The big screen, increasingly under siege in the United States, had not yet been vanquished in Nigeria, where television was still too nascent to properly compete with it. In

the fall of 1960, Johnston issued a formal recommendation to MPA member companies, urging them to take “a more active role in Africa exhibition,” particularly in Nigeria. Johnston’s “confidence in the growing market that is Africa” often pivoted around Nigeria as a country of “immense potential.” “With TV coming into Europe,” Johnston wrote, “we ought to look for new markets, and the new market that is waiting for us is in Africa.” In Johnston’s view, the importance of expanding global distribution centers beyond London and Paris could not be overstated. Hollywood companies needed to “embed themselves” in African countries—including and especially Nigeria—in order to circulate their films there.

That the rate of construction of cinemas did not accelerate following Johnston’s 1960 statement of faith in Nigeria has everything to do with the lack of participation of the Nigerian federal government, whose capital investment was deemed “a necessary prerequisite” by AMPECA, which seemed unaware of (or simply strategically unwilling to concede) the regionalist character of the country.¹⁴⁰ After all, the American production company Lloyd Young & Associates had, just a few years earlier, recognized the entrenchment of regionalism in Nigeria, cannily appealing to the Eastern Region government for assistance, which Enugu readily supplied, resulting in the globally distributed *The Mark of the Hawk*, if not in any local material gains. Though the boom in theater construction that Johnston predicted did not come to pass, at the end of 1960 Nigeria still reported a significant increase in the number of film theaters in the country—“sizeable gains” that stemmed directly from Hollywood investment.¹⁴¹

Whatever its material effects, AMPECA’s plan for a public-private partnership in the arena of theater construction was finalized—instructively, without the involvement of the Nigerian state—by a four-man committee consisting of Eric Johnston, Barney Balaban (president of Paramount Pictures and co-founder of the American exhibition company Balaban & Katz, whose opulent “picture palaces” included the world’s first mechanically cooled movie theater), Wolfe Cohen (president of Warner Bros. International), and Arnold Picker (vice president in charge of foreign distribution at United Artists). It is unclear exactly why, in the minds of these men, public investment was required where federal involvement in AMPECA’s planning was not. The Nigerian government was simply expected to accede to demands made by Hollywood strategists seeking to establish (but not themselves subsidize) venues for the direct distribution of the industry’s films, just as exhibitors in Nigeria were expected to accept strikingly asymmetrical arrangements.

A clearer indication of what AMPECA had in mind for Nigeria was provided a few years later by the construction of an expansive (and expensive) new theater on Burke Street in Melbourne, Australia. Subsidized by the Australian government under the “guidance” of Warner Bros., the new venue was “specially built” to accommodate the requirements of the studio’s *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964), which utilized the Todd-AO process, a patented high-resolution widescreen film format designed to compete with Cinerama.¹⁴² Thousands of miles from

Melbourne, Nigeria would, for the time being, have to make do with the sort of makeshift structures—including CineDomes—that were intended not merely to appeal to the curiosity of Nigerian consumers but also to stimulate government expenditure. Ultramodern movie houses would have to wait.

Enugu in Technicolor

Independent Production in Late-Colonial Nigeria

“The index of economic independence will be measured not by pretentious economic plans or the amount of foreign capital that is attracted, but rather by the pursuit of calculated economic development programs based upon a definable economic doctrine that reflects the needs of the people.”

—F. OLADIPO ONIPEDE, “AFRICAN NATIONALISM: A CRITICAL REPORT,” 1956

“An offshoot of the surge of nationalism and general improvement in living and educational standards in West Africa is a desire for the development of a local film industry. As a matter of fact, East Nigeria has already completed plans which it hopes will make Enugu, its capital, the ‘Hollywood of West Africa.’”

—HY HOLLINGER, “WEST AFRICA, UNDER NEW NATIONALISM, AIMS FOR OWN FILM INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA,” *VARIETY*, JUNE 12, 1957

“It is one thing for the gentlemen of the West to disavow colonialism and declare it dead; it is quite another thing for them to abandon the habits of colonial masters.”

—W. ALPHEUS HUNTON, *DECISION IN AFRICA*, 1957

“I support the right of sovereign nations to offer enticements to producers.”

—JACK VALENTI, QUOTED IN *THE GAZETTE* (MONTREAL, CANADA), FEBRUARY 8, 2002

On the eve of Nigerian independence, an American businessman named Lloyd Young traveled to Enugu, the administrative capital of the country’s Eastern Region, in order to establish and nurture a film industry there—or so he and his cheerleaders (including the US Departments of State and Commerce) claimed. By 1957, having spent close to two years in Nigeria, and amid much talk of the country’s promise as a “film capital,” Young had succeeded only in producing a single feature-length motion picture for his own independent company, Lloyd Young & Associates. That film—the melodrama *The*



FIGURE 15. "ACTUALLY FILMED IN THE HEART OF THE DARK CONTINENT!": advertisement for *The Mark of the Hawk*.

Mark of the Hawk (Michael Audley, 1957)—is itself a telling document of decolonization as defined by and in the interests of American capital. It is, simply put, an advertisement for capitalist anticolonialism, a contradiction in terms whose very contrariety would be

borne out by Young and his fellow market liberals, all of them openly enamored of free enterprise while happily and heavily relying on American and Nigerian state support.

The film's specific conditions of production—the precise political-economic circumstances that made it possible—are equally instructive, suggesting as they do the extent to which Enugu, as the seat of a regional government seeking fiscal autonomy in the waning days of colonial rule, was pressured to pursue a species of mixed economy that would ultimately benefit only an ensemble of American interlopers. These included the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church; the Methodist Church of America; Film Productions International, an independent company established in Burbank in 1955 and oriented toward the religious market, making films for, among other organizations, the Commission on Missionary Education; and Lloyd Young, for whose fledgling company *The Mark of the Hawk* served as an “exotic” calling card.¹ Funding for the film was hardly limited to the aforementioned religious groups, all of which were eager to enter the business of film production at a time, in the immediate aftermath of the (partial and temporary) breakup of vertical integration in Hollywood, when alternatives to studio financing were proliferating in response to a perceived power vacuum. It also came, crucially, from Enugu, which supported the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* in exchange for gains that never materialized.

A curious chapter in the history of foreign capital's efforts to shape the landscape of screen media in Nigeria, the story of Young in Enugu is that of a public-private partnership premised on the need to “develop” decolonizing Nigeria along firmly capitalist lines, one that vividly evokes Antonio Gramsci's sense of hegemony as involving more than the simple dominance of the periphery by the center. In Gramscian terms, hegemony is a *process*, one that requires the active (if coerced) participation of the periphery in the mechanisms of its own domination, such that the economic capabilities of the emergent, outlying state are harnessed to the hegemon's interests. In this process, Robert Cox makes clear in his influential work on the “internationalizing” of the state, capitalist “values and understandings are relatively stable and unquestioned”; they “appear to most actors,” states and non-state entities alike, “as the natural order.”² Fittingly, *The Mark of the Hawk* is explicitly about such acquiescence, such normalization. It directly addresses the need for decolonizing countries to capitulate to capitalism—to accede to its specific, globalizing demands—lest they be “swallowed up” by the “Communist menace.”³

Anticommunism was a convenient pretext for capitalist expansion, and it was often recognized as such by African intellectuals. In an address delivered at the Plenary Session of the British Peace Congress in London in 1949, Nnamdi Azikiwe, who would serve as Premier of the Eastern Region during the production of *The Mark of the Hawk*, noted, “Now the peoples of Africa are being told that it is necessary, in the interest of peace and the preservation of Christianity, that they should be ready to fight the Soviet Union, which the war buglers allege is aiming at world domination.”⁴ In the film, capitalist goals are at once general and firmly focused on

the mining of natural resources—an industrial practice that, the film argues, need not be carried out under the oversight of colonial masters, but that may in fact be expanded by “native decision” to include the work of foreign corporations, whose payment of rents will profitably replace (and stand as the principled antithesis of) the colonial collection of taxes.

The Mark of the Hawk should thus be seen as a cinematic extension of state efforts that dated at least to the CIA’s confidential report *The Break-Up of the Colonial Empires and Its Implications for US Security* (1948), which paid particular attention to resource-rich Nigeria and fretted over the country’s susceptibility to Soviet propaganda.⁵ An important source of tin and other raw materials, Nigeria was also the site of what the CIA, in something of a misnomer, dubbed “the Zik movement”—an expression of “rising nationalism” that directly threatened US military and economic security. According to the CIA, Zikist agitation was, because opposed to colonial power, likely to lead directly to resentment of US economic dominance (understood in the report as an achievement of World War II that was sure to extend into the postcolonial epoch). The Zikist movement’s specifically “Negro” character posed an additional challenge, of course. Black economic nationalism was doubly daunting for a neocolonial enterprise that, the CIA freely admitted, was insufficiently antiracist. “Capturing the ‘good will’ of nations achieving their independence was vital,” notes David H. Price, “and a failure to do so would result in antagonism toward the United States and a loss of vital clients.” The task of securing postcolonial loyalties, pursued well in advance of political independence, assumed diverse forms in relation to Nigeria. Certainly “foreign aid and promises of technical assistance and modernization” were materially and rhetorically effective, but equally crucial were cinematic reflections on decolonization.⁶ Film, too, was expected to temper demands for economic nationalism, helping to balance US and postcolonial African interests in a world in which European power was on the decline.

Cinema’s mystifying potential—its capacity to overwhelm the senses, manipulate the emotions, and generally deflect from the very political economy that made it possible and, for American agents, profitable—was indispensable. A growing number of filmmakers, supported by public and private foundations, government agencies, and major corporations, endeavored to represent the purported distance between the United States and its European allies. In its own way, *The Mark of the Hawk* reflects the Eisenhower administration’s staunch determination “that the United States not appear associated, even indirectly, with sponsoring what seemed a return to the era of colonial domination.”⁷ Indeed, Eisenhower himself championed the film both for its specific textual elements and for the precise political economy—the particular “development program”—out of which it emerged.⁸ Like the broader construction of large-screen cinema in Nigeria, the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* in that country involved “technological infusions along with accompanying ideological overhauls.” It also epitomized the limitations of

modernization theory. Viewed from a postcolonial vantage, it vividly reveals how “the measurable outcomes for development often had little to do with improving the lot of underdeveloped nations per se.” Indeed, “development aid” as disbursed in the 1950s (and beyond) was merely “a weapon against communism, a tool to be used against insurgents.”⁹ So was *The Mark of the Hawk* itself.

On those rare occasions when the film has been cited at all, *The Mark of the Hawk* has been subjected merely to aesthetic evaluation, and dismissed as, in the words of one critic, “an insignificant sermonette”—a condescending characterization whose very redundancy is emblematic of interpretive approaches that, through their hyperbolic derision, function to preclude attention to the political economy of moviemaking in pre-independence Enugu.¹⁰ For whatever its formal shortcomings, *The Mark of the Hawk* was produced in—and partly “for”—a regional government preparing for a new period in Nigerian history, a political watershed that promised to place the country on an economic par with Malaysia, Taiwan, and Thailand. This unprecedented epoch would require forms of cinematic self-representation that could be exported to the wider world, and employed as promotions for Nigeria’s environmental splendor, cultural richness, and democratic progress.

This chapter challenges the assumption that *The Mark of the Hawk* signifies nothing more than artistic failure. It focuses on the film’s broader significance in late-colonial Nigeria and contextualizes its plot and themes in relation to the growing number of Hollywood films that, shot on location outside of the United States (including in Africa south of the Sahara) reliably functioned as Cold War advertisements for American-style capitalism—instruments of “the propagation and extension of the American business system and its values.”¹¹ (In *Capitalism and Freedom*, first published in 1962, Milton Friedman would famously claim that “competitive capitalism”—by which Friedman meant “the organization of the bulk of economic activity through private enterprise operating in a free market”—is “a necessary condition for political freedom.”)¹² In taking *The Mark of the Hawk* seriously as an instrument of statecraft, I heed Reinhold Wagnleitner’s call for scholars of film and media to “rise above judgments of aesthetic disdain” in order to address consequential questions of political economy.¹³ The entrenchment in and dependence on Enugu of Lloyd Young & Associates also disproves Hyginus Ekwuazi’s 1987 claim that “there has never been any foreign-owned film production company in Nigeria”—a claim that has been uncritically reproduced in scholarly as well as popular accounts.¹⁴ The excavation of this history thus has major historiographical implications. Taking seriously Enugu’s status as an important administrative region in a modern bureaucratic state in the process of development, it is possible to better understand—to particularize—some of the mechanisms by which Hollywood interests became incorporated into Nigerian political and economic logics, even prior to independence.

In the 1950s, the Eastern Region boasted multiple open-air cinemas, including the Rex Cinema in Enugu and the Emy Cinema in Aba, located about ninety miles

south of the seat of the regional government. The Rex was started by a Lebanese man named Elias Solomon, who came from a family with major cinema holdings throughout Nigeria. The smaller, indigenous-owned Emy, by contrast, often served as a site of political events—a place in which individuals could debate the nature of the Nigerian state in the lead-up to independence. A two-day economic conference was held there in May 1952. Politician Margaret Ekpo, a Nigerian women's rights activist and social mobilizer, hosted another meeting there in February 1953.¹⁵ Two years later, the nationalist A.A. Nwafor Orizu delivered his address "The Leadership We Want" at the Emy, while the Nigerian jurist Taslim Olawale Elias made use of the cinema for the first public reading of his paper "Towards Nationhood in Nigeria."¹⁶ Cinemas in the Eastern Region were, then, sites of political debate, including about the nature of cinema itself.

In the lead-up to and immediate aftermath of its attainment of self-government, the Eastern Region was a self-fashioned alternative to what Brendan Shehu would term "the extreme conservatism" of the federal government in the area of "film development."¹⁷ The evidently "inadequate appreciation of films as a source of profit" among local financial institutions and the local business community could be rectified, according to Enugu's emergent bureaucratic logic, by the regional government's commitment to attracting Hollywood capital—a commitment that would require considerable expenditure, as well as a willingness to "tempt" American filmmakers by promising tax breaks, climatically inviting shooting locations, and various forms of direct governmental assistance.¹⁸

"Most governments in the country do not think the film industry deserves any priority in terms of funding," Shehu would later complain. But the Enugu of the 1950s, openly eager to realize the cultural potential of the Igbo (one of the foundational promises of federalism), was committed to sponsoring cinema's regional development, albeit in a way that explicitly demanded the importation of American "expertise," and that, as a consequence, precluded sufficient attention to the cultivation of local talent. Hollywood was expected to perform such cultivation but plainly did not, however loudly the industry proclaimed its philanthropic motives in turning to Nigeria.¹⁹ Besides, as Shehu would put it, "mere copying of Western processes cannot engineer rapid changes," and with Hollywood all but abandoning Enugu after the completion of *The Mark of the Hawk*, the likelihood that a regional film industry would become a reality swiftly diminished until the Biafran Civil War appeared to obliterate it entirely.²⁰ Enugu would, however, eventually realize these lofty ambitions—in a sense—through the prolific production of low-budget Nollywood films, and while the degree of regional governmental support for such films is eminently debatable, it is impossible to ignore Enugu's contemporary significance as a wellspring of popular media.²¹

The making of *The Mark of the Hawk* in mid-twentieth-century Enugu offers a vivid illustration of the postcolonial, particularly as defined by Robert J.C. Young as "a dialectical concept that marks the broad historical facts of decolonization

and the determined achievement of sovereignty—but also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination.”²² The promise of decolonization, notes Abou B. Bamba in his study of Ivory Coast, “attracted many footloose historical actors, including development experts, social scientists, and foreign job-seekers anxious to tap into . . . exceptional wealth.”²³ Lloyd Young was one such actor, eager to insert himself into United States-led development efforts in Nigeria, at a time when, as Bamba puts it, “the allure of American-inflected modernity loomed large.”²⁴ Young, then, was not simply a typical Hollywood independent; he was also a quintessential American modernizer, and it is not incidental that he ended up in Nigeria in the 1950s.

Writing in 1956, the Africanist scholar Thomas Hodgkin remarked on the “growth of public spending” in Nigeria’s Eastern Region, drawing attention to the precise political economy out of which Young’s venture was, at that time, already growing.²⁵ *The Mark of the Hawk* thus illuminates what Chika Okeke-Agulu has termed “the regionalization of the decolonization process.” A self-conscious expression of Igbo practicality, Enugu’s decision to finance the film was clearly “motivated by the desire for an effective platform for advancing a specifically regional cultural agenda.”²⁶ But the regional government’s American collaborators—so necessary to its vision—had aims of their own. If British colonizers had previously endeavored to “organize and transform” Nigeria into a “fundamentally European construct,” then Hollywood, via Lloyd Young & Associates, sought to remake the country—or at least the Eastern Region—in distinctly American terms.²⁷

That American capitalism could effectively remediate Nigeria, expiating the specifically economic sins of British colonialism, was not a novel argument in the 1950s. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, the Austrian political economist (and future American citizen) Joseph Schumpeter was already claiming that a “purely capitalist world can offer no fertile soil to imperialist impulses”—that “pure” capitalism, which Schumpeter associated with the United States, “is by nature anti-imperialist.”²⁸ In 1936, Grover Clark, an economist for the Carnegie Corporation of New York, published a detailed account of the economic irrationality of European colonialism, to which he implicitly proposed American capitalism as a solution.²⁹ As Bamba puts it, “the global ascendancy of an American-sanctioned modernization paradigm necessarily involved passing judgment on colonial developmentalism.”³⁰ It is no accident that the Carnegie Corporation was, along with the Ford Foundation, among those championing the efforts of Lloyd Young & Associates in the Eastern Region. The making of *The Mark of the Hawk* thus illustrates Hollywood’s active participation in the politics of postcolonial development. The film was itself intended to promote American-influenced modernization, with a plot that pivots around “the moral saga orchestrated by the emergence of the American Century.”³¹ “For many,” writes Irene Gendzier, “Development and Modernization are terms that refer to a politics of reform designed

to preserve the status quo while promising to alter it.”³² There can be no better description of a film that was produced in neocolonial fashion as a critique of European colonialism.

The “economic possibilities” of Nigerian cinema, eagerly identified by the Eastern Region government in the 1950s, were ultimately immaterial to Lloyd Young & Associates.³³ Drawn to Enugu by the promise of tax incentives, low labor costs, and otherwise amenable shooting locations, Hollywood was—despite its public rhetoric—hardly interested in returning any favors.³⁴ Film exposed in Enugu was processed in London for later assembly in Los Angeles. Far from the developer of a regional film industry, then, Lloyd Young & Associates simply entered a long line of firms that flee once the resources of a site no longer suit their needs.³⁵ For its part, newly autonomous Enugu proved itself to be a singularly facilitative government, capable of enforcing agreements that benefitted Hollywood capital.³⁶ In this instance as in so many others, Hollywood’s gain in overseas experience was, without a doubt, Nigeria’s loss.

ENUGU’S “EXTRAVERSION”

The Mark of the Hawk depicts an African revolution that is ultimately suppressed, its passions redirected by an American missionary (played by John McIntire) who proposes that nation building proceed “within the framework of the Christian church.” He prescribes “patient faith” in place of violent revolt, and his Christian paternalism puts an end to an anticolonial uprising that, in his view, is “moving too fast.” Though made in Nigeria and eventually acquired by Universal-International for distribution to the country (as well as to Europe and the United States, among other global markets), *The Mark of the Hawk* is set in an unnamed British colony “somewhere in Africa.” It therefore strategically subsumes a Nigerian specificity (which nevertheless remains eminently recognizable in, among other elements, the film’s many exteriors) under an abstracted Africanity.³⁷ It would, however, be a mistake to attribute such vagueness to racism alone. When *The Mark of the Hawk* was made, the “most basic foreign policy” of the MPAA “was to avoid giving offence to any country which provided the [Hollywood] industry with any revenue,” however meager.³⁸ With the MPAA advising Lloyd Young on his state-supported, quasi-diplomatic excursion into Nigeria, the producer-screenwriter well understood that he would not be able to explicitly identify Nigeria at the level of the film’s narrative.³⁹

This unwillingness to offend was a measure not simply of Nigeria’s status as a potential source of box-office revenue but also of Britain’s well-established importance as a foreign market for Hollywood films. If Universal, the film’s distributor, was eager to bestow *The Mark of the Hawk* upon Nigerian cinemas (partly on the assumption that Nigerian audiences would want to see their own homeland on the screen), it was also committed to reaching the British domestic market, in

which it regularly conducted business.⁴⁰ Explicitly identifying Nigeria was thus out of the question for a “political” production that, though made at the tail end of formal imperial rule and in the wake of Ghana’s independence, could not risk offending either a colonial government (which, in 1957, could easily have prevented the film’s exhibition in Nigeria) or its counterpart in the metropole.

In *The Mark of the Hawk*, the African characters are said to “speak African.” A workers’ revolt, however evocative of actual Nigerian labor movements, is carefully tailored to reflect the sort of generalized anticolonial sentiments seen in the exactly contemporaneous Harry Belafonte film *Island in the Sun* (Robert Rossen, 1957). Set on the fictional island of Santa Marta (“just Jamaica with the name changed,” Belafonte called it), the film’s plot pivots around the efforts of “colored natives” to claim capitalism—formerly the exclusive preserve of white plantation owners—for themselves.⁴¹ While the film’s premise was heavily indebted to the labor rebellions that had been convulsing the British West Indies since the 1930s, the finished work offers no such acknowledgment. Furthermore, as a Darryl F. Zanuck production, shot in CinemaScope in Barbados and Grenada, and distributed by Twentieth Century-Fox, *Island in the Sun*, like *The Mark of the Hawk*, suggests a continuation of imperial propaganda, with its persistent conviction “that Africans [and individuals of African descent] can do nothing except under tutelage”—least of all represent themselves in the struggle for emancipation.⁴² Jamaica could scarcely be directly referenced in a film about the “management” of Black liberation.

Such indirection had its costs in the case of *The Mark of the Hawk*: the reviewer for *Film Bulletin*, for instance, assumed that the melodrama was really about the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, writing, “This Universal offering squarely tackles the problem of the Mau Mau in Africa. . . . The Lloyd Young production [has] some ticket-selling points in its favor; there are, indeed, some stunning Superscope on-location shots of primitive African splendor, handsomely done up in Technicolor.”⁴³ Universal’s public description of the project, the first tagline that the studio prepared, was “Unrest and nationalism in Africa,” which was later changed to the more attention-grabbing “Terror reigns as Africans seek equality!”⁴⁴ Vagueness of this sort was a product of persistent “British colonial sensitivities,” even as the film in whose service it was so strategically employed was permitted to articulate US opposition to neo-mercantilist colonial policies.

The Mark of the Hawk thus became a cinematic enactment of what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, using a filmic metaphor of their own, describe as “the historical lap-dissolve by which the British-dominated imperialism of the nineteenth century faded into the US-dominated imperialism of the twentieth.”⁴⁵ Throughout the 1950s, Hollywood was, as Brian Larkin puts it, a “visible symbol of a far-reaching transfer of economic and political dominance from Europe to the United States.”⁴⁶ Young, a Hollywood independent, had his own part to play in this process. Indeed, *The Mark of the Hawk*, as a Cold War advertisement for American capitalism, suggests some of the “very specific conditions in which traditional forms

of colonialism were transformed into capitalist types of imperialism.” It shows, in fact, how Enugu was made to emerge as one of many new “transmission belts for capitalist imperatives,” all of them functioning to “enforce the ‘laws’ of the market.”⁴⁷

Made by American independents committed to the ideal of free enterprise, its plot pivoting around the capitalist rejection of colonialist protectionism, *The Mark of the Hawk* vividly illustrates Edward Said’s claim that Americans “tend to regard [themselves] as somehow exempt from the more sordid imperial adventures that preceded [their own],” even as they obviously exploit Africa and Africans.⁴⁸ American cinema reliably served as a form of soft power, in contrast to, say, the British government’s suppression of two daily papers—the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet*—that, published in Lagos, had dared to cover local strike agitation.⁴⁹ During the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*, American aid was placed in direct opposition to the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC). Of particular concern to Enugu’s political elite was the latter’s stagnating plans to provide “new and better houses” in the Eastern Region; by 1959, the CDC had succeeded only in approving Freetown Hotel in Sierra Leone, a project that, to many in Enugu, symbolized its commitment to European and American tourists.⁵⁰

Evoking other anticommunist films of its era, *The Mark of the Hawk* features an extended flashback to an American clergyman’s experiences in China, where this man of the cloth comes face to face with the “evils” of an “inhuman” communism. The regime, accusing him of being “an agent of American imperialism and white superiority,” captures and imprisons him while he rather feebly insists that “God knows no color.” When the clergyman, having escaped the clutches of the Chinese (whose communism is presented as a direct consequence of British imperial failure), returns to the African continent, it is to enjoin Africans to fasten themselves to the American cause of capitalism. Brokers of American-style modernization, the makers of *The Mark of the Hawk* lustily shared the goals of this particular character, strategically appealing to anticolonial nationalists as part of a global effort to curb perceived communist-led agitation.

Yet for all their contempt for British colonialism, these American filmmakers were working in a distinctly colonial vein. Albert Sarraut, the architect of the French colonial doctrine of *mise en valeur*, had long since promoted the idea that “economic development was essential to limit the popular appeal of leftist ideas to colonized peoples,” to quote Martin Thomas.⁵¹ It is therefore no surprise that, as the Nigerian writer Godwin Udegbonem Meniru observed in 1954, American-Nigerian “cooperation”—the rhetorical production of cross-cultural “partnerships” like that between Hollywood and Enugu—was, despite the best efforts of Young and other American interlopers committed to “uplifting” Africans, “creating the impression of ‘American Imperialism’ in Africa.”⁵² For the more men like Young proclaimed their “faith in the ability of Americans to perfect and apply laws of progressive betterment and to uplift those lower on the evolutionary

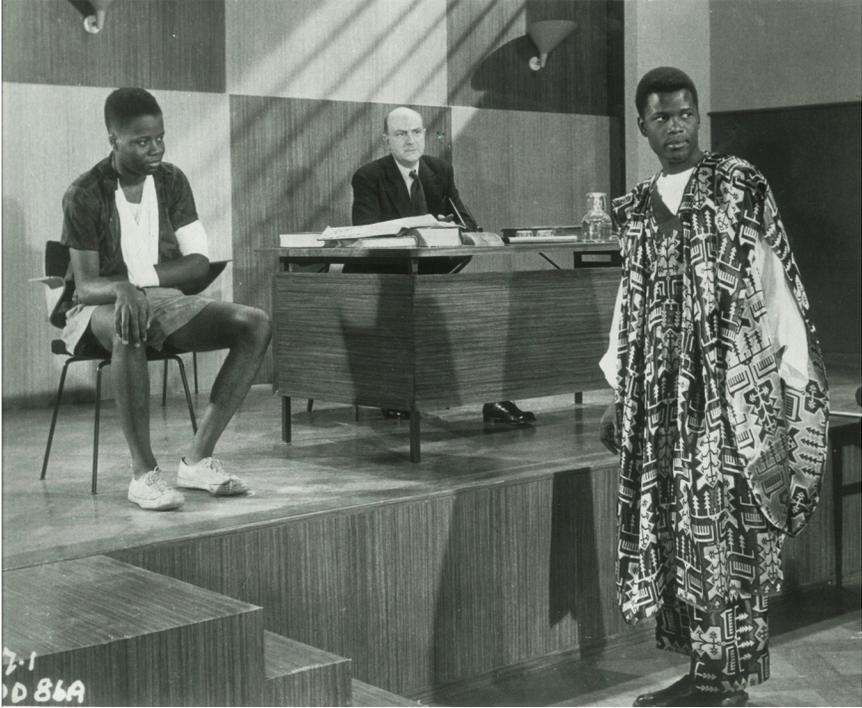


FIGURE 16. Debating the “timetable for independence” in *The Mark of the Hawk*.

scale,” the more they seemed like agents of a new, Americanized mode of imperialism—exponents, that is, of America’s global leadership position in the wake of the Second World War.⁵³ However much “American freedoms” (particularly consumer freedoms) were discursively positioned as Nigeria’s postcolonial bequest, the fact remained, for Meniru and other Nigerian intellectuals, that American exploitation of African resources was “hopelessly inimical to the freedom of Africa from European colonial imperialism.”⁵⁴ Young’s production, pursued with “blessings and stacks of dollars from the Presbyterian Church” (as star Sidney Poitier put it), was also an effort to further Christianize the African continent—a cinematic means of “heralding Christianity as a vehicle for both spiritual and material development” in the postwar period.⁵⁵

From the very beginning, the effort was rife with ironies and paradoxes. The theme of Christian universalism was, first and foremost, very much in line with Hollywood’s own precedents, including Frank Capra’s *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), the first motion picture ever screened at New York’s Radio City Music Hall. In that film, Barbara Stanwyck’s American missionary, finding herself in Shanghai during the Chinese Civil War, attempts to serve a mediating function with her pious pronouncement “We’re all of one flesh and blood!” For some Nigerians,

living and working in Enugu a quarter of a century later, the Christian dimensions of *The Mark of the Hawk* could only echo memories (both direct and inherited) of the European missionaries whose excursions into the African continent had facilitated colonial conquest, lubricated imperial rule, and eroded local religions.⁵⁶ Whether wittingly or not, the film's production represented the centennial of "the coming of the Gospel to Igboland," as Chinua Achebe called it, referring to the arrival in 1857 of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).⁵⁷ A branch of the Anglican Church, CMS established a mission at Onitsha in 1857. For Achebe, this curious centennial also augured Africa's "captur[ing] by Cold War manipulators" and "skew[ing] into a deadly season of ostensible ideological conflicts."⁵⁸ Fittingly, then, *The Mark of the Hawk* was made to express, and advance, what was specifically "Christian" about anticommunism.

Enugu's accommodation of Hollywood's commercial-ideological ambitions should not, however, belie the fact that the Eastern Government clashed with the Church throughout this period. In 1956, for instance, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) risked alienating Catholic leaders by adopting an educational policy designed to shift primary education away from the influence of the mission schools, which the government decried as "centers of dogmatic indoctrination."⁵⁹ If Young was aware of these tensions, such cognizance is not evident in the finished film, which confidently cites a particular historical reality—the plain fact that Christian missionaries "did not contest the underlying structures of an economy in which Africans labored for a 'vigorous and enterprising [Euro-American] community.'"⁶⁰

In *The Invention of Africa*, V.Y. Mudimbe associates the work of Christian missionaries with the spread and normalization of capitalism, and that is precisely the discursive labor that *The Mark of the Hawk* performs. Its narrative bridges gaps between two towering figures in the African colonial experience—the "missionary who wanted to save souls and remake African culture in a 'Christian' mode and the owner of a mine or plantation who wanted to exploit labor without regard to the humanity of the worker."⁶¹ As Toyin Falola has pointed out, Christianization was introduced partly as a means of modernizing Nigeria's economy: "Conversion in the early years was motivated by a desire not just to preach the gospel but to redeem Africans from their so-called barbarism and economic deprivations; to create a so-called industrial class that would produce for the market; and to produce a new elite that would be the agents of change."⁶² *The Mark of the Hawk* was made toward the end of the period that witnessed Christianity's most dramatic expansion in southern Nigeria, a time when Nigerians were increasingly "expected not just to be good Christians but also 'civilized people' constituting a middle class with income."⁶³

The goal of "becoming moneyed" was seen by many activists as a distraction from—and distortion of—the decolonization struggle. As the Nigerian nationalist A.A. Nwafor Orizu put it in 1944, "What really disarmed Nigeria was the Christian

missionary.”⁶⁴ For Orizu, Christianity and capitalism were two sides of the same imperialist coin, the former helping to naturalize the latter and, in the process, to prevent the possibility of meaningful political-economic change, as “the Christian missionary taught the gospel of turning the other cheek until every initiative toward repelling an enemy was lost.”⁶⁵ Orizu’s denunciation of Nigeria’s “educated” class—and of that class’s capacity to “exploit the masses” by constantly reproducing an imported capitalist ideology—critically anticipated the roles of those elites in Enugu who, by the 1950s, firmly believed that “Hollywood knew best,” and that the Eastern Region was right to accommodate Young and other American filmmakers capable of helping them realize their artistic and commercial ambitions.⁶⁶

Enugu’s “extraversion”—its attention to the world economy and commitment to assisting Hollywood filmmakers—was partly a product of the general process by which regional governments acquired public boards, including cinema corporations, in the lead-up to independence.⁶⁷ In 1955, the Cinema Corporation of Nigeria, a government-owned body designed to give the Eastern Region an advantage by facilitating collaborations with foreign capital, was established. One of its first official actions was to invite the California-based Film Productions International to Enugu, where, working with Lloyd Young & Associates, it began shooting *The Mark of the Hawk* in November 1956.⁶⁸ Conceivably, Enugu’s pronounced cinematic ambitions were compatible with the pursuit of “unity in diversity” by nationalist intellectuals, who “underscored the necessity of the stage of difference for the performance of the nation’s unity.”⁶⁹

But Enugu’s difference wasn’t merely a matter of ethnicity; it was also, in the context of cinema, a measure of its specific willingness to collaborate with Hollywood capital in the name of regional progress. Enugu was plainly operating on the assumption that “American investors would assist in the development of native potentialities.”⁷⁰ The responsibilities of filmmaking in Enugu were effectively outsourced to Young’s company at Young’s behest. The grounds for this were that the Nigerian federal government, let alone the Eastern Region, was simply “unprepared” for a major cinematic undertaking, and that it had, despite the existence of the Eastern Region Film Unit (an offshoot of the Colonial Film Unit), no specialist knowledge—save Young’s—on which it could possibly draw.⁷¹ Never mind that Lloyd Young & Associates, a fledgling independent production company with no previous features to its name, was scarcely more “experienced” than the Cinema Corporation of Nigeria. Young was a representative of Hollywood in more than just a symbolic sense, his purpose to help pave the way for private (American) interests in Nigeria. These interests included, of course, the proliferation of independent producers of which he himself was a part.

On a promotional trip to New York in the spring of 1957, Young delivered a special “report on Nigeria’s aspirations in the motion picture field.” As a self-described “technical adviser and agent on film matters for the Nigerian government,” Young was actively seeking American film technicians “willing to go to Nigeria on a

three-year contract.” He publicly confessed “that the Nigerian government realizes that the task will be a formidable one since it will have to organize a film industry from scratch,” though his statement, which he offered as a means of encouraging American support, was not entirely accurate.⁷² By “Nigerian government,” Young meant not the federal government but Enugu’s regional one. Furthermore, the notion that *any* of Nigeria’s administrative bodies would have to “organize a film industry from scratch” appeared to ignore the organizational, infrastructural, and artistic precedent of the Colonial Film Unit, which had spawned not only the Nigerian Film Unit but also, by the time Young arrived, the aforementioned Eastern Region Film Unit (based, like Young himself, in Enugu).⁷³ Indeed, Nigerians had begun formal training in film production nearly a decade earlier, in Accra in 1948, where a representative of Enugu, a sort of ambassador for the Eastern Region, worked under the instruction of experts, including a longtime employee of Kodak. Yet if these trainees had been taught, as one colonial student put it, “how to make films the English way,” Young’s tutelage, coming some ten years later, appeared to offer an alternative model emblematic of postwar Hollywood, with its runaway productions and increasingly desperate search for tax breaks and other benefits.⁷⁴

For the most part, Africa meant a reduction in expenditure for Hollywood filmmakers who elected to work there, and who benefited—by design—from lower labor costs associated with the continent’s histories of economic underdevelopment and enforced by the growing number of “political elites dedicated to the interests of capital investment.”⁷⁵ Young may have excluded Nigerians from above-the-line positions on *The Mark of the Hawk*, but he took the opposite approach with respect to below-the-line labor, availing himself of Nigerian set builders, boom operators, gaffers, grips, and truck drivers. He thereby contradicted his own claim that Nigerians were entirely “unskilled” and “ignorant” in the context of cinema—a claim that becomes readable, in this context, as an elitist reduction of filmmaking to a strictly above-the-line affair.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, with Young, an ambitious Enugu was placing its own cinematic development in the hands of an outsider, and an American, at that. This was hardly unusual at the time: Wolfgang Stolper, a German-born American economist, received Ford Foundation funding to draw up Nigeria’s First National Economic Plan, which he completed with the cooperation not of a Nigerian expert but of another American, Lyle Hansen.⁷⁷ Like Stolper, who would spend over eighteen months in Nigeria, Young established himself in the country for close to two years, where he played the part of modernizer—would-be developer of Enugu’s film-production infrastructure—while doing little more than serving his own immediate interests and those of an expansionist American state.

Young’s mission, the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* in an Enugu that was promised considerable assistance as it struggled to establish its own film industry, suggests a significant yet understudied augury of Stolper’s plan, which would similarly favor “short-term benefit over long-term investment, free movement

of capital, unhindered repatriation of profits by foreign corporations, and complete opposition to nationalization.”⁷⁸ Stolper’s agenda—“at heart a neoliberal project that fetishized the market mechanism, profit maximization, and an export-oriented economy”—was the technocratic culmination of the logic that Young himself embodied, and that *The Mark of the Hawk*, as a film text, expresses.⁷⁹ During the film’s production, which took place between the fall of 1956 and the spring of 1957, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund set up its Lagos-based West Africa Program to provide technical assistance to men like Young—private US investors whom the program’s director, Robert I. Fleming, would connect to various Nigerian government agencies, the goal being to locate sources of “soft money”: subsidies, tax breaks, and other forms of government assistance.⁸⁰ When the West Africa Program was terminated in June 1963, its functions were merely transferred to the Arthur D. Little Company, a Massachusetts-based international management consulting firm.⁸¹ In the spring of 1957, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund sent John Camp, who was then in charge of the American International Association for Economic and Social Development (a philanthropic organization based in Caracas, Venezuela) to Enugu, where he met with Nnamdi Azikiwe and “visited a number of field projects including the very interesting ‘community development’ work” that involved (however misleadingly) the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*. Camp, for his part, was clearly less interested in this relatively small “cinema project” than in the need for “rural water supplies, access roads, and rural electrification.”⁸²

In 1957, Azikiwe and other politicians consulted with Nelson Rockefeller and Stacy May, whose visit to Enugu coincided with Lloyd Young’s stay there.⁸³ The production of *The Mark of the Hawk* depended on the efforts of a number of intermediaries, among them the American consul, Ralph Hunt, and Jim McCullough, head of Mobil’s West Africa operations, both of whom worked closely with Sir Ralph Gray, the Chief Secretary of the Federation, to ensure that outsiders like Young would be “received with the most open friendliness and cordiality.” Enugu was to open its doors as well as its pocketbooks to them. (Camp wrote of the need to secure fiscal “contributions from the Eastern Region Government.”) The goal was clear: accession to American capital would have to become second nature to Nigeria’s political elites.⁸⁴

But the film whose production these elites invited and assisted was intended as an advertisement not for true African autonomy but for the continent’s ongoing dependence on American capital. Indeed, the sort of anticommunism embedded in (and expressed through the making of) *The Mark of the Hawk* “meant shying away from authentic social and economic planning, state ownership, and strong regulation of currency and capital flows.”⁸⁵ The Eastern Region’s institution of a subsidy scheme, with tax-incentive packages for men like Young, was, according to the government, an attempt to turn Enugu into a major production center, but it is arguably best seen as an effort to “secure the field of play for corporate commerce and venture capital”—to, that is, “collapse . . . the lines of separation

between the state and the market”—amid the global rise of neoliberalism (which, Quinn Slobodian makes clear, was an intelligible ideology with abundant material effects long before the reigns of Reagan and Thatcher).⁸⁶ The making of *The Mark of the Hawk* reveals, in fact, that Enugu was among the proliferating subnational contexts in which the “practical workings of neoliberalism have been tried and tested,” to quote Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff.⁸⁷

Installed in Enugu by the mid-1950s, Lloyd Young & Associates—a foreign company—was treated as a “domestic” producer, and thus managed to benefit from Nigerian funding programs, despite pushback from Nigerian activists concerned about Hollywood’s capacity to “swallow up” the entire Eastern Region.⁸⁸ In a scathing article written during the production of *The Mark of the Hawk*, Oladipo Onipede condemned Nigeria’s political elites for their unashamed, faux-naïve support for Hollywood’s self-serving aims, and he praised the comparatively “dynamic response of India” to the ongoing production and increasingly aggressive exportation of “Hollywood’s mythical Africa.” He cited the decision of the Indian Central Board of Film Censors to ban eight films—*West of Zanzibar* (Tod Browning, 1928), *The African Queen* (John Huston, 1951), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (Henry King, 1952), *Mogambo* (John Ford, 1953), *Below the Sahara* (Armand Denis, 1953), *Tanganyika* (Andre deToth, 1954), *African Adventure* (Robert C. Ruark, 1954), and *Untamed* (Henry King, 1955)—in response to the complaints of African students at Delhi University. Onipede denounced the contrasting “silence and complacency” that, at the time, underwrote Hollywood’s infiltration of the African continent—precisely the sort of complicity with Hollywood capital emblemized by Enugu’s embrace of Lloyd Young & Associates.⁸⁹

As Onipede understood only too well, the American firm was expected to serve an educative purpose while in Enugu, representing “the transfer of industrial know-how from the United States to the rest of the world.”⁹⁰ Indeed, this was the purpose most frequently (if disingenuously) proclaimed by various Hollywood firms in their Nigerian operations throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Cinestar International, in attempting to “state as fully as possible the anticipated benefits to the economy of Nigeria” as it marketed its patented Multitrax language-conversion system, Cinego mobile-cinema packages, and plastic-and-nylon CineDome theaters, cited the “creation of new industry, [the] introduction of new technical processes, know-how, etc.,” as well as an expected “increase in employment of local labour.”⁹¹ The case of *The Mark of the Hawk*, like that of Cinestar, is thus useful in contesting approaches to power as a zero-sum game in which private interests compete rather than collaborate with the state. After all, as Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel put it, “economic decolonization is a matter of degree,” and *The Mark of the Hawk* was made possible by an elite network that straddled the state-private divide.⁹² Though buoyed by US private interests, the film was also financed by Enugu, which supported Young—via measures that O.U. Affiah, the Eastern Region’s Minister of Customary Courts and Chieftaincy Affairs, maintained had

been “introduced in the best interest of the people”—even at the risk of over-extending the public sector and straining its fiscal capacity.⁹³ Such support was hardly unprecedented, however. In 1950, the Nigerian government had instituted the allotment of semi-annual grants of \$30,000 for the purchase of American films, a program designed to fill the coffers of Hollywood studios producing the sort of audiovisual entertainment that Nigerians were said to favor.⁹⁴ Enugu’s contributions to Young’s project did not derive from this source but rather from a regional budget, neither the first nor the last example of state monies being used to subsidize a Hollywood production.⁹⁵

In the 1950s, Enugu was so eager to recruit Hollywood investors that it engaged in various exchange programs intended to help cultivate the most conducive economic and social conditions for American capital. In 1954, Nnamdi Azikiwe, then Minister of Local Government and premier of the Eastern Region, joined the wealthy Nigerian businessman Louis P. Ojukwu on an “economic mission” to Europe and North America, where the two men acquired designs for “stimulating economic expansion” in soon-to-be-independent Nigeria.⁹⁶ It is in this aspirational, cross-cultural context that Enugu’s support for Lloyd Young and *The Mark of the Hawk* should be understood. One result of Azikiwe’s trip was the Eastern Region Finance Corporation Law of 1954, which empowered a newly created statutory body (the Finance Corporation) to grant loans and subsidies, including to foreign firms like Lloyd Young & Associates.⁹⁷ Due to such concessions, Young’s production would offer only marginal benefits to government revenue through the payment of direct taxes.⁹⁸ (S.J. Timothy-Asobele would later complain of “the cutthroat entertainment tax being levied on [indigenous] film producers by the government”—precisely the sort of tax that was *not* imposed on the foreign makers of *The Mark of the Hawk*.)⁹⁹ Enugu certainly counted on benefitting indirectly through, say, the purchase by Young and his fellow Americans of highly taxed luxury goods thought to be attractive to tourists and other visitors, but there is little evidence to suggest that such purchases were actually made by those involved in the production of *The Mark of the Hawk*.¹⁰⁰

However strenuously (and strategically) Young and others may have worked to distinguish American capitalism from British colonialism, the economic aims of the two systems were hardly incompatible by the late 1950s. *The Mark of the Hawk* makes no mention of this convergence, relying instead upon the rather tendentious notion that capitalist decolonization required Africans to align with a “uniquely” American program and to reject as retrograde any entreaties from their colonial masters as well as from the Soviet Union. The film emphasizes the inevitability of self-government—precisely what had brought Young to Nigeria in the first place. “I love Africa,” declares one colonial administrator in the film. “We’ve given you a standard of living.” In response, Poitier’s character calls this an “incidental benefit,” one that must not distract from the need to obtain a firm “timetable for independence.”



FIGURE 17. Poitier's Obam addressing the members of his trade union in *The Mark of the Hawk*.

Lest the film appear to endorse the initial impatience of the Poitier character, however, *The Mark of the Hawk* introduces a young African man whose “extreme views” are meant to suggest the dangers—the sheer destructive power—of radicalism, of “rushing.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* would put the conflict in the clearest possible terms in its review of the film: this “realistic look at race relations in an unnamed African colony” centers on Poitier’s Obam, “a Negro labor leader, who is torn between apparently fruitless peaceful efforts to win some measure of economic, political, and social equality for his people, and more direct and violent means to the same end.” Allied against him on one side, “the newspaper continued, “is a segment of his own union, including his brother, who is bent on driving out the white man by terrorism and violence. On the other side stand some of Obam’s white friends and associates on the governing council, and the cooler heads among the natives, led by an African Christian minister (Juano Hernandez). . . . Standing by through it all [is] a newly arrived American minister, who ultimately leads Obam to his decision for peaceful evolution rather than revolution.”¹⁰¹

The Mark of the Hawk is thus an advertisement for liberal incrementalism—for “peaceful evolution rather than revolution.” And, of course, “standing by through it all”—a constant, ever-watchful presence—is the American missionary, an envoy not only of Christ but of capitalism, and an outspoken enemy of any African who wants to “move too fast.”¹⁰² Belittling Obam’s “not-quite-African wife” (played by

Eartha Kitt) and calling attention to his obsequiousness with certain members of the colonial regiment (“What are you—an Uncle Tom?”), Obama’s brother, an “angry radical,” is presented as entirely unsympathetic—a thorn in the side of the cause of decolonization, which, the film makes clear, will have to proceed along far less “strident” lines.

PAVING THE WAY FOR POSTCOLONIAL CAPITALISM

Whatever his credentials, and however pronounced his ambition, Lloyd Young was ultimately a mere instrument of Hollywood capital—a tool designed to gauge Enugu’s receptiveness to American interests at a time when the city’s growing significance could scarcely be ignored. Enugu’s coal mines opened in 1915 and by 1948 were employing approximately six thousand workers.¹⁰³ The 1938 designation of Enugu as the Administrative Headquarters of the Eastern Region ushered in a period of elite migration to the city, whose population swelled with non-indigenous government employees and “men of initiative in the professional, business, and service fields.”¹⁰⁴ The income and living standards of these migrants to Enugu far exceeded that of the Udi indigenes who found employment mainly in the mines.¹⁰⁵ Sidney Poitier’s account of the socioeconomic inequality of Enugu is instructive, and worth quoting in full:

The majority of Enugu’s population lived up in the hills in shanties and mud huts that overlooked the town below. In the mornings they poured down into the town by the hundreds to work for the middle-class blacks and upper-class Europeans who dominated the economic life of the region and could thereby afford to live in town, and at night they returned by steep and dangerous trails to places *a thousand years away*.¹⁰⁶

Strictly as a source of cheap labor, Enugu was scarcely different from those overseas filmmaking locations (like London and Rome) that have received considerably more attention in accounts of Hollywood’s postwar internationalism.¹⁰⁷ But the city was equally significant as a source of government assistance, and it served the additional purpose of providing an “exotic” (and thus widely marketable) backdrop, a documentary quality that Lloyd Young & Associates could easily exploit.

Enugu discovered Young not by accident but because a research team at UCLA had identified him as a “film-industry expert” with an interest in “new and developing markets” like Nigeria. Young would eventually return the favor to UCLA, convincing Nigeria’s federal government to send students to study film production at the school, all as “part of Nigeria’s long-range program to establish a film industry for West Africa.”¹⁰⁸ Even in the mid-1950s, then, Nigeria was envisioned as a source not simply of a national but also of a subregional film industry, one that would be explicitly patterned on Hollywood, with crucial postcolonial inspiration coming from India, which, in Young’s tendentious telling, had made “amazing progress . . . from scratch,” becoming “a leading film production country in a



FIGURE 18. Enugu's coalmines in *The Mark of the Hawk*.

period of a little over 15 years.”¹⁰⁹ In keeping with Young's identification of India as a potential source of inspiration for Nigerian cinema (and a potential market for Nigerian films, given the long histories of Indian-African cultural and economic exchange), *The Mark of the Hawk* emphasizes the Indian presence in Nigeria, focusing on an Indian merchant class that is at once foreign and nonwhite, and thereby suggesting a truly global anticolonial struggle. Yet the Indian characters are agents of modernization strictly in the sense of promoting private enterprise. (They are hardly akin to the real-life Indian film censors who, as noted earlier, were moved to shield African expatriates from racist representations.) One Indian man, who manages a mine, thus serving as an engine of extractive capitalism for the near-exclusive benefit of Britain, urges the Africans to abandon their traditions (including their religion, with its alleged hostility to capitalism). He thus functions, ultimately, to help prepare the local ideological ground for the seeds of American-style capitalism.

That Young ended up not in Lagos but in Enugu speaks to the aggressiveness with which the Eastern Region pursued Hollywood-style filmmaking in the 1950s. Hollywood, for its part, was increasingly committed to identifying global opportunities for American capital. It was routinely abetted by African intellectuals at a time when, as Elizabeth F. Thompson argues, “American culture was not yet fully regarded as part of the hegemonic engine of . . . European colonialism.”¹¹⁰

Indeed, some of Africa's leading nationalists warmly welcomed Hollywood's incursions into the continent, reading these as rebukes to European colonialism—hence Young's strategic though scarcely convincing commitment, both in his script for *The Mark of the Hawk* and in statements made during the film's production, to distinguishing American capitalism from British mercantilism.¹¹¹ Yet Young's venture came to embrace (in fact, to depend upon) the notion of a fiscally supportive host country. Poitier, for his part, later described Enugu as being “in every way a small town with visions of becoming a big city,” and the breadth of its ambition was—by design—compatible with, and ultimately inclusive of, Hollywood's own aims.¹¹²

This was hardly a unidirectional process of enrichment, however. The Eastern Region government earned revenue, and gained institutional legitimacy, by providing accommodations for the members of the cast and crew, who stayed in a government-owned hotel designed to attract tourists.¹¹³ But such benefits were relatively meager or merely symbolic, and they certainly did not last. Poitier observed that in Enugu in the mid-1950s “a few banks [were] digging in for the anticipated growth of the years immediately ahead”—for an expansion that would stall by 1957, when Young and company simply fled, anticommunist film in hand.¹¹⁴

THE ENUGU TANGLE

“If any of you movie or TV producers are thinking of going over to Africa and making a picture with a supply of colored beads, some red calico cloth, and some sacks of salt, you had better redo your thinking. Times have changed in Africa. The beads better be from Van Cleef & Arpels; the calico you can forget; and the only sacks the natives know is Saks Fifth Avenue.”

—HAL BLOCK, “AFRICA SPEAKS AND HOW,” *VARIETY*, MAY 26, 1954

“It is sometimes claimed that the main sleight of hand for neoliberals is to hide the state, but even a cursory reading of the main theorists shows that a positive vision for the state is everywhere. The main thing . . . neoliberals hide is not the state but asymmetries of power.”

—QUINN SLOBODIAN, *GLOBALISTS*, 269

By 1957, the Eastern Region government had finalized its plans to make Enugu the “Hollywood of West Africa.”¹¹⁵ Now the hub of a dramatically different kind of filmmaking—a fount of low-budget, direct-to-video works that are clear and, in some quarters, cherished alternatives to the cosmopolitan polish of theatrically distributed New Nollywood productions—Enugu was, in Young's day, the source of a twenty-three-acre plot of “unused” land and the object of a \$24,000,000 investment by the government to turn that plot into a bona fide “film colony” modeled on Hollywood.¹¹⁶ The government-owned Cinema Corporation of Nigeria, with whose “cooperation” *The Mark of the Hawk* would be made, even commissioned a Los Angeles architect, Richard Neutra, to produce blueprints for studio facilities

as well as for permanent four-walled alternatives to open-air cinemas like the Roxy and the Emy.¹¹⁷

Upon arriving in Nigeria, Young immediately issued his request for experienced American “film technicians,” writers, and directors who would be willing to relocate to the decolonizing country for up to three years. As *Variety* put it on Young’s behalf and at his behest, “In addition to aiding in organizing a local film production program, the American creative talent and technicians will, of necessity, have to serve as instructors to train local citizens in the mysteries of filmmaking.”¹¹⁸ Though Young’s call for behind-the-scenes labor came with no racial stipulations, his associated request for performers suggested not only an ignorance of Nigerian theatrical talent but also an eagerness for “American Negro actors” (as he called them) to portray Nigerians on film. *The Mark of the Hawk* would ultimately suggest a somewhat more expansive, even prototypically Pan-Africanist gesture, with a cast that, though it boasted no credited Nigerian performers, included the Bahamian-American Sidney Poitier, the Afro-Puerto Rican Juano Hernández, the Bermudian-British Earl Cameron, and the American Eartha Kitt. When the West African Students’ Union (WASU) spoke out against the filmmakers’ failure to cast Nigerian performers, it echoed the complaints that its members had made some sixteen years earlier, upon the completion of the CFU’s *An African in London* (1941). Anticipating the Nollywood classic *Osuofia in London* (Kingsley Ogoro, 2003) by over half a century, the CFU short purported to show a wonderstruck Nigerian’s eye-opening tour of the imperial center, but, in sharp contrast to its direct-to-video descendant—and much to WASU’s chagrin—it featured a Guyanese actor, Robert Adams, in the title role.¹¹⁹

Made on location in Nigeria but starring a constellation of foreigners, *The Mark of the Hawk* could not help but recall, and reanimate, such controversies. If the film’s cast suggested a Black internationalist network of stage and screen talent, it was a network that did not extend to Nigerians. Among the film’s extras, however, was nine-year-old Kalu Kalu, described in the American press as “a top scholar in English at the local missionary school.” *The Mark of the Hawk* made the boy “a hero in the eyes of the citizens of his hometown, Enugu, Africa,” as the *Los Angeles Times* put it.¹²⁰ “The hero of Enugu,” echoed another newspaper, “is only nine years old, but to his townspeople he’s already a great man. For key location scenes in Africa for [the] Lloyd Young & Associates production . . . a young native who could speak English well enough to carry dialogue [stepped] into the magical world of moviemaking. And because the film company spent their location in his home town, Enugu, the boy became a celebrity.”¹²¹ But, for all the press’s emphasis on Kalu Kalu’s English skills, his was not a speaking part, and whatever publicity he received was, of course, vastly overshadowed by that accorded Kitt and Poitier.

Rather than providing major opportunities for Nigerian actors, Young’s production plans would, in a paternalist gesture, require “American Negroes” to “model” film acting for “untutored” Nigerians.¹²² In this sense, Young’s reliance on Enugu

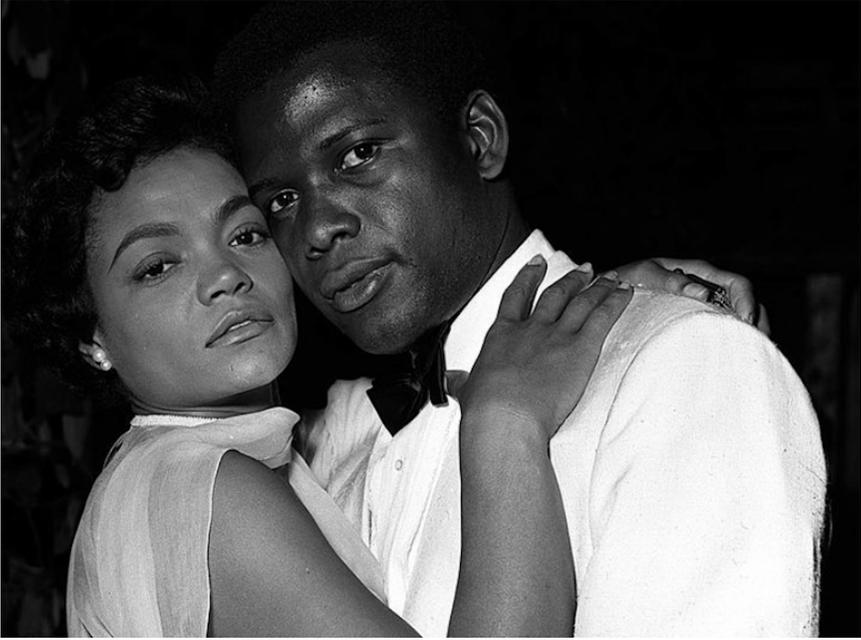


FIGURE 19. United in Enugu: Eartha Kitt and Sidney Poitier, the stars of *The Mark of the Hawk*. Author's collection.

to subsidize—and serve as the principal shooting location for—*The Mark of the Hawk* contrasted sharply with the terms and conditions of the roughly contemporaneous Eady Plan, by which the British government sought to provide financial assistance for foreign films with the requirement that they be filmed in Britain with a mainly British cast and crew.¹²³ Young had in mind the production in Nigeria of just one feature film per year, of which *The Mark of the Hawk*, though made by an American company with the mere “cooperation” of the Cinema Corporation of Nigeria, would represent the first.

Young's self-serving celebrations of decolonization did not prevent him from turning to Britain for crucial post-production assistance. Such help would eventually arrive in the form of the Associated British Studio Orchestra, which furnished the instrumental score for *The Mark of the Hawk*. Equally useful were the Associated British Picture Corporation studios in Elstree, England, where reshoots and rerecording occurred. Working out of Elstree, Young incorporated his Nigerian footage—including hundreds of feet of film recorded on location in Enugu by a second unit—into matte process shots. Adding interimperial insult to Enugu's injury, Lloyd Young & Associates would later take out a full-page ad in *The Hollywood Reporter* thanking the Associated British Picture Corporation for providing expert postproduction services on *The Mark of the Hawk*. This “vote of thanks” was, in its own way, an expression of doubt regarding Enugu's infrastructural

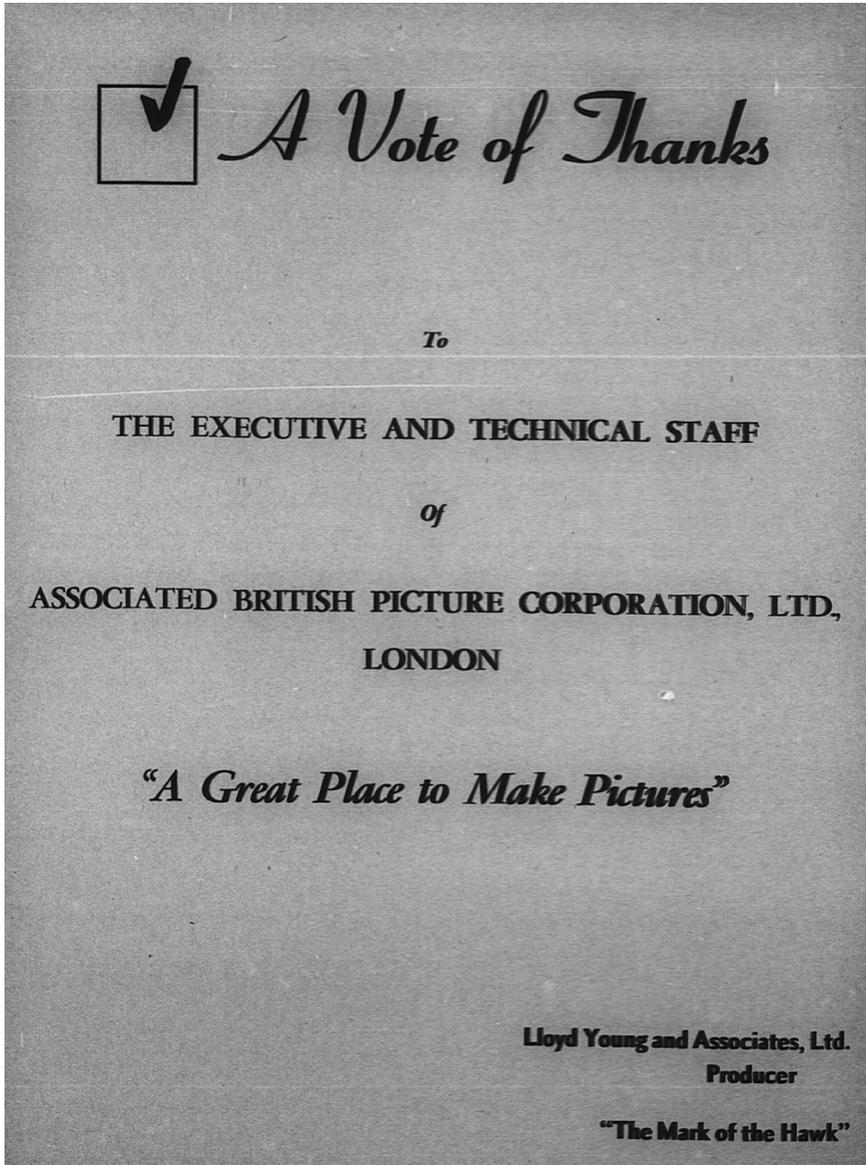


FIGURE 20. Lloyd Young's full-page ad in *The Hollywood Reporter* made no mention of Nigeria.

capacity—a sign of the very underdevelopment to which Lloyd Young & Associates had contributed. Calling London, rather than Enugu, “a great place to make pictures,” the company only reinforced (through the Hollywood trade press, no less) a sense of Nigeria’s dependence on Euro-American capital.¹²⁴

However much *The Mark of the Hawk* may have served the interests of British firms, American companies stood to benefit the most from the film's production and global distribution. Lloyd Young & Associates cannily availed itself of Technicolor and Superscope—the latter a “widescreen process applied at the printing stage rather than during photography, demanding adjustments to existing theatre projection equipment rather than the installation of new equipment, as was the case with processes such as CinemaScope.” While the Superscope image “tended to lose definition and was regarded as inferior to other widescreen processes because of this image degradation,” it was nevertheless considered a cutting-edge technique at the time *The Mark of the Hawk* was made. Its marketability had recently been demonstrated by United Artists, which had distributed Robert Aldrich's *Vera Cruz* (1954), shot on location in Mexico and the first Hollywood feature to be released in Superscope.¹²⁵ As Emily S. Rosenberg points out, displays of technological sophistication were, within the framework of liberal-developmentalism, thought to augur “a new Christian age in which all peoples of the world would progress toward prosperity.”¹²⁶

Technicolor and Superscope served precisely this purpose in the case of *The Mark of the Hawk*, constituting a kind of “Hollywood sublime”—an American variant of the “colonial sublime” described by Brian Larkin in his work on British technologies of transportation and communications in Nigeria.¹²⁷ The novelty of applying Superscope and Technicolor to specifically African subject matter was not lost on Young, who, in keeping with his ideological-diplomatic mission, expected these “awesome” technologies to serve as overwhelming advertisements for capitalism.¹²⁸ Something similar was at work with *Giant in the Sun*, a 1959 production of the Northern Nigerian Information Service that, under the direction of British filmmaker Sydney Samuelson, relied on Eastmancolor, Kodak's single-strip multilayered color negative film, known for producing a sharper image than Technicolor's dye-transfer process.¹²⁹ Young's project promised to pull Enugu, and by extension all of Nigeria, into a filmic modernity marked by Superscope and Technicolor—as well as by public-private partnerships and a commitment to global distribution.¹³⁰

ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION IN ENUGU

“The economics of decolonization remain to be explained.”

—FREDERICK COOPER, “AFRICA AND THE WORLD ECONOMY,” 141

Via the Macpherson Constitution of 1951, the regions of Nigeria—previously mere administrative divisions—were transformed into bona fide political and governmental systems, complete with executive councils and legal assemblies.¹³¹ The Western and Eastern Regions of Nigeria obtained internal self-government in 1957, when *The Mark of the Hawk* was in production in Enugu. During that decade, Nigeria's gross domestic product increased at an average annual rate of more than

4 percent.¹³² Foreign investment expanded and intensified in direct response to a spike in effective demand occasioned by a rise in national income levels.¹³³

Nigeria's ongoing pursuit of a modernized economy unfolded, in other words, both federally and regionally, and it was not without discrepancies. For instance, in its specific development strategy, Enugu attached a uniquely high priority to cinema as a mechanism of modernization. "The rationale of regional autonomy was that it would enable each region to develop according to its own pace until differences among them were eliminated," wrote the Nigerian political scientist Eme O. Awa in 1964.¹³⁴ But the homogenizing potential and equalitarian purpose of regionalism did not prevent the development of some rather striking asymmetries, including in the realm of "film development."¹³⁵ "The regions have been in keen competition with one another," Awa noted, "particularly as between east and west. The government of the Western Region has maintained a clear lead in most activities because of its stronger financial resources, better planning, and the help of a very able team. Labeled a poor region, the east has been concerned to show that it is not so poor as many people have been led to believe, and in planning and carrying out certain programs it has not always related them as precisely as possible to available resources."¹³⁶ *The Mark of the Hawk* was meant in part to improve the Eastern Region's national reputation, whatever the compromises involved in the film's production. Investing in Hollywood, and with it the rhetoric of private enterprise, was a way for Enugu to show that, at the very least, it was "not so poor" a source of cinematic fantasies as proponents of media-rich Lagos had been willing to admit. Hollywood capital could, in the short term, be counted on to lend Enugu an impression of connectedness to the wider world—and, in particular, to the idea of commercial theatrical film—that it could then exploit politically.

For its part, the American political discourse on decolonizing Nigeria was increasingly attuned to regional distinctions. "At the moment Nigeria is under a federated system of government which permits each of the three Regions—Eastern, Western, and Northern—considerable autonomy," noted a US Senate subcommittee in 1957, reporting on a study undertaken in 1955, just prior to the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*. Proceeding to single out Enugu for special praise, the subcommittee made clear that the Eastern Region was ripe for exploitation by American companies; it pointed out that "the rudimentary family or clan authorities typical of the politically fragmented peoples of the east" stood in sharp contrast to both "the large and highly organized emirates of the Islamic north" and the "developed chiefdoms of the Yoruba country" to the west. The sheer "concentration of Negroes in Igboland" was, according to the subcommittee, another advantage for companies looking to cultivate consumers. "Our mission was happy to learn," it continued, "that large numbers of students in the Eastern Province were being assisted in studying in the United States." Technical training programs offered a means of rationalizing the exploitation of "underdeveloped" countries like Nigeria, which had been sending promising students to American institutions

for decades. The subcommittee stressed that Nnamdi Azikiwe was himself “educated primarily in the United States,” and, without going so far as to embrace Leninist theories of imperialism, it praised Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot* for its “frequent criticism of English policies” and for “extolling the racial consciousness of a free African Africa.”

When the subcommittee sent its special “fact-finding” mission to Nigeria in 1955, Enugu was its second destination after Lagos. When the mission was in Enugu, Azikiwe was in the United States—a coincidence that the subcommittee took (or at least touted) as a sign of shared goals, a symbol of mutuality and exchange. It claimed that Azikiwe was “obsessed with the idea of improving the Eastern Region by bringing industry into it . . . on the American pattern.” The “peoples of this province are called the Yankees of Africa due to their trading ability as well as their political maturity,” asserted the subcommittee, which also emphasized that its mission had been impressed by the media literacy observed there.¹³⁷ For all its contradictions (the Igbo were at once “politically fragmented” and “politically mature,” “rudimentary” and “sophisticated” in their systems of oversight), the subcommittee’s rhetoric centralized Enugu’s significance to American neocolonial aims, offering a distinct legislative expression of the sort of ideology promoted in and through *The Mark of the Hawk*.

Characterized by Sidney Poitier as a “small independent film producer seeking to move up to the big time,” Lloyd Young had long been interested in distinguishing himself via association with an “exotic” land—a place (like Enugu) to which no Hollywood filmmaker had gone before.¹³⁸ After finishing *The Mark of the Hawk*, Young would go on to India, where he hoped to make a film about Gandhi, his commitment to Nigeria and Nigerians suddenly revealed to have been fleeting at best, merely an inaugural stage in his company’s efforts to brand itself as a producer of “serious” films about global decolonization. Enugu had managed to meet Young’s capital requirements, and Young simply walked away.

The peripatetic writer-producer cultivated an image of himself as a particularly powerful figure, a new Selznick, Thalberg, Goldwyn, or Wanger. The name of the nominal director of *The Mark of the Hawk*—Michael Audley—almost never appears in the archival record, which emphasizes Young’s authorship at every turn, and in keeping with Young’s own strategies of self-presentation.¹³⁹ Audley, an American, had never directed a feature film before and would not direct one again. He appears to have been selected by Young precisely for his capacity to do the writer-producer’s bidding, although it is unclear why Young refrained from officially taking the directorial reins himself. In any case, Young, as creative producer, “was involved in all facets of production,” and *The Mark of the Hawk* surely bears his stamp; it was, after all, his brainchild, and Nigeria was, he alleged, the only place in which he could imagine filming his story of capitalist nationalism.¹⁴⁰ “‘The Mark of the Hawk,’ produced and written by Lloyd Young, mixes reason with violence in its attempt to view fairly from all sides the problem of nationalism

in Africa,” wrote the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in its review of the film. “The case for the African, as well as the white man of good will, is put with great power in the literate, open-minded script.”¹⁴¹ That Young could be considered a “white man of good will” was central to the film’s international promotional campaign, and his prominence in the *Inquirer* article is telling. The *Inquirer* did not mention Audley until the closing sentence and then suggested that he, in contrast to writer-producer Young, merely coached various members of the large cast. Most American journalists in turn emphasized Young’s authorship, as critic Mildred Martin did: “Produced and written by Lloyd Young, this gorgeously photographed, Nigerian-shot drama is a many-sided study of the various elements for good and evil in an unnamed British colony in Africa.”¹⁴²

Young was one of postwar Hollywood’s more opportunistic independent producers—“an indefatigable scrambler out of Burbank, California,” Poitier called him.¹⁴³ Though a relatively small-scale entrepreneur, he had powerful allies in Hollywood and Washington, and his infiltration of Enugu reflected “the growing confidence of corporations that they could bring pressure on any kind of government.”¹⁴⁴ Like the film itself, the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* represented the strategic melding of neoliberalism and the spiritual mission associated with Protestantism, which, beginning in the nineteenth century, attempted, throughout the African continent, to replace “primitive kinship arrangements” with “an inward-turning individualism, one that sought salvation and worldly success strictly as a private pursuit.”¹⁴⁵ An agent of this strategic fusion, Lloyd Young & Associates was a “footloose” firm in an era “in which an unprecedented mobility of capital and production . . . enabled corporations to constantly seek—and find—friendlier and friendlier business environments.”¹⁴⁶ The “friendliness” of Enugu was not a given, however; it had to be cultivated, albeit without much, if any, input from ordinary Nigerians. “Tellingly, Africans were rarely, if ever, in the 1950s consulted on development options for their own continent,” writes Inderjeet Parmar.¹⁴⁷ The making of *The Mark of the Hawk*—a public-private initiative meant to promote “modernization”—suggests a cinematic equivalent of American foundations’ efforts to “develop” Nigeria with the full cooperation of the Nigerian state.

It was far from the first. In the late 1940s, for instance, the Canadian-born Hollywood filmmaker Julian Roffman had produced *A Greater Tomorrow* (also distributed under the title *The Greater Tomorrow of the African Peoples*), a twenty-five-minute documentary made for use in Nigeria, where it was frequently screened in association with the political activism of the Nigerian nationalist K.O. Mbadiwe.¹⁴⁸ Commissioned by the African Academy of Arts and Research, a Nigerian-American cultural-exchange program co-founded by Mbadiwe and Mbonu Ojike, *A Greater Tomorrow* anticipated Young’s efforts to secure, embody, and convey the connectedness of Nigeria and Hollywood. Its explicit purpose to “promote cultural and economic understanding” between Nigeria and the United States, *A Greater*

Tomorrow was widely screened in both countries—a cinematic advertisement for precisely those benefits that Young would eventually obtain from Enugu.¹⁴⁹

Influenced by Enugu's ambitions, which it also helped to shape, Young's venture in turn anticipated Eme O. Awa's argument that, in Nigeria, "the regions are a proving ground. Within their respective areas they may pioneer and experiment under the impulse of local demand, without waiting until the entire nation is convinced of the wisdom of the measures."¹⁵⁰ The Eastern Region's development planning, with its emphasis on improving the standard of living of its inhabitants, explicitly included the *idea* of film spectatorship, a fantasy of cosmopolitanism premised on the existence and expansion of a moviegoing middle-class. But its attention to questions of employment in film production, distribution, and exhibition was inadequate at best, with the result that local unionized labor was not at all represented in the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*, a film whose plot in fact pivots around the alleged inadequacies of trade unions and the need to submit to the "expertise" of unfettered American capital.

In 1961, an American trade paper wrote of "the realization on the part of its leaders and educated class that Nigeria can best achieve its goal of leadership in Africa under a free, private-enterprise system which encourages foreign investment and technical skills."¹⁵¹ As one Nigerian government official told the *Wall Street Journal* at the time, "Nigerians think anything American, whether it is a product or advice, is bound to be better than anything else, including anything British."¹⁵² Requests for foreign capital continued apace. As the *West African Pilot* put it, "the Eastern Region stands ready to help foreign businessmen set up new industries here."¹⁵³ "Eastern Nigeria has always been foremost in acknowledging the absolute need for overseas capital, technical know-how and managerial skill," said Nnamdi Azikiwe upon the completion of *The Mark of the Hawk*. "It has never concealed its belief that the only way of attracting [these] is to ensure for those who provide them unstinted cooperation, confidence, security, and opportunities to earn adequate rewards."¹⁵⁴ In 1962, Chief B.C. Okwu, the Eastern Region's Minister of Health, proclaimed, "We need foreign capital," adding that Enugu "would welcome all investors with a genuine desire to play a part in [its] development programme."¹⁵⁵ The *West African Pilot* aptly termed this an "intensive campaign . . . to lure foreign capital in an all-out effort to accelerate [the Eastern Region's] economic development."¹⁵⁶

Americans were not the only bearers of "development assistance" during the crucial years of decolonization. In some cases, Nigerians who had studied in the United States were bringing American-style capitalist expertise back to their homeland, and were determined to modernize the country along stridently anti-communist lines. Such efforts occasionally assumed an explicitly Christian character, recalling the participation of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in the production and promotion of *The Mark of the Hawk*. After receiving a PhD



FIGURE 21. After earning a doctorate from Cornell University, B.U. Nzeribe triumphantly returns to his native Nigeria in *A Village Is Waiting* (1962).

in economics from Cornell University in the 1950s, Benjamin Uzoukwu Nzeribe appealed to the Unitarian Service Committee, a nonprofit organization based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to invest in—and make a film about—Awo-Omamma, a village in southeastern Nigeria, where Nzeribe was born and raised. The resulting documentary, entitled *A Village Is Waiting* (1962), was filmed by an American volunteer, Erica Anderson, and narrated by Nzeribe himself.

Outlining the need to “modernize” Awo-Omamma, Nzeribe explains why he requested American assistance. “I recognized the job of building our village would take more than our limited resources,” he says over Anderson’s images of his birthplace. “For this reason, I appealed for outside help, and the Unitarian Service Committee listened to me, considered what I had to say, came forward, offering us both financial and technical aid. Here was mutual respect and belief”—nothing less than “a partnership in the progress of men.” Filmed in color, the thirty-minute *A Village Is Waiting* was widely distributed by the Unitarian Service Committee, which shipped free 16mm prints out of its Boston offices and even licensed the film for television.¹⁵⁷ “Progress does not lie in buildings,” Nzeribe explains in his voice-over narration, even as the film’s image track lingers on literal construction. “Buildings are only its manifestation. Progress comes when there is a change in the hearts of men.” In *A Village Is Waiting*, as in the earlier *The Mark of the Hawk*, that



FIGURE 22. Literal construction in *A Village Is Waiting*.

change is understood to be a matter as much of Christianization as of a decisive turn toward capitalist anticommunism.

PROTESTING HOLLYWOOD

Enugu's generous concessions to Young's production were made at a time when the former was actively searching for revenue streams that were independent of the federal government, on which it otherwise relied (including for a share of oil revenues). But Enugu had to contend—particularly after the Bandung Conference of 1955, which inaugurated a Third World Project rooted in shared Asian and African concerns about “the failures of capitalist mal-development”—with popular opposition to foreign domination of the economy, or what one Nigerian economist called a “public outcry against foreign investors” like Young and his fellow filmmakers.¹⁵⁸ The trade unions then active in the Eastern Region were especially robust, containing anticolonial as well as anti-American elements. Many of these unions had been established after World War II, but some had deeper roots: the Women's War of 1929—part of a broader anticolonial uprising—had been led by some of the very unions that were flourishing in and around Enugu in the 1950s.¹⁵⁹ Desperate to reduce social unrest and to appease the unions, the federal

government responded to nativist sentiments by seeking to protect only the retail trade from foreign domination—a relatively small concession that left the film sector open to the sort of domination that the Nigerian Film Unit, as indigenous successor to the Colonial Film Unit, was ostensibly designed to sidestep beginning in the late 1940s.¹⁶⁰

If the federal government believed that Nigerians could “efficiently handle” the retail trade—and, more to the point, that foreigners would hardly be miffed at their exclusion from it—Enugu was committed to the notion that only Hollywood “experts” were sufficiently skilled to oversee the development of a regional film industry. Through its technocratic conception of film production, distribution, and exhibition, the Eastern Region anticipated Léopold Sédar Senghor’s controversial conception of *technicité*—or the technical spirit—as, in Noémi Tousignant’s words, “a quality to be imported and assimilated to enable a full, yet distinctive, African participation in modernity.”¹⁶¹ That Young would be unable or unwilling to pursue the cultivation of a local film industry was, however, not lost on Nigerian critics at the time. Hollywood, UCLA, and the State Department may have presented Young as uniquely committed to “film development,” and Enugu may have been all too eager to believe in him, but many saw the visiting American as simply the latest in a long line of propagandists committed to the normalization of capitalism as well as to the attendant underdevelopment of production infrastructures on the African continent. “Understanding and cooperation between [Hollywood and the African people] are indispensable to African development, but Hollywood has elected from the year of its birth to undermine and destroy the very basis of African development,” wrote Oladipo Onipede during the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*.¹⁶² Onipede’s was one of the most prominent and prescient voices warning Nigerians to be wary of Young and what the enterprising American—a particularly chipper ambassador of capitalism—represented.

Onipede’s remarks powerfully illustrate that Nigerians were not passive recipients of American modernization paradigms but, in some cases, actively contested them. That Young posited his plan as an alternative to British colonial modernity—as, that is, a demonstration of allegedly anticolonial US interest in Nigeria—did little to alleviate Onipede’s concerns. Regional development did not, from Onipede’s perspective, require what Young was proposing. A “partnership” between African capital and American know-how was hardly necessary when Igbo modernity offered its own forms of expertise, economic and otherwise. An implicit critique of Britain’s colonial governmentality, *The Mark of the Hawk* represented the American cooptation of Enugu’s emergent regionalist efforts. Yet rational regionalist planning, Onipede insisted, could easily have been pursued in the complete absence of Hollywood-inflected modernization paradigms. That it was not struck Onipede as a distinctly bad omen for the development of a truly autonomous Nigerian cinema.

Highlighting what he termed “Hollywood’s holy war against Africa”—a “symbolic slaughter” not simply of the possibility of socialist development on the



FIGURE 23. Nigerians performing below-the-line labor on *The Mark of the Hawk*, shot on location in Enugu. Author's collection.

decolonizing continent but also of the material and ideological opportunities for African films forced to compete in a marketplace dominated by imports and dictated by foreign capital—Onipede did not mince words. “It would be putting it mildly to say that Hollywood has engaged in an unrelenting propaganda war against the African,” he wrote. His denunciation of *oyinbo pelu jibit*—roughly, the white man and his disinformation—clearly encompassed Young and company, and, in particular, their Christianized attempts to pathologize socialism and valorize capitalism for their own gain (and certainly not for Enugu’s, despite their many claims to the contrary).¹⁶³

Onipede was especially alert to inequalities within Nigeria—to the dangers of regionalism, which, in his view, were only exacerbated by the work of men like Young and his associates, all of them unfamiliar (or simply unconcerned) with the experiential gaps between rich and poor, urban and rural:

Here it must be pointed out that movie-going in most of Africa is very much limited to the urban centers. The latter have been exposed to the impact of westernization. Consequently, the city dweller considers himself more sophisticated than the rural dweller. The reaction of the former to the trite Hollywood myth is dual: either he dismisses it as the same old attempt of the white man . . . to convince himself of how backward the African is. Or, if the city dweller is highly westernized, he would

immediately transfer the symbol of the ‘savage African’ on to some other mythical corner of Africa where ‘savages’ still live on trees and in caves. However, the average city dweller cannot ever believe for one moment that Hollywood could ever dare to portray him that way.¹⁶⁴

Onipede may have underestimated the significance of nontheatrical distribution—of the mobile cinema units and other mechanisms for bringing motion pictures to the rural communities that were, through these very efforts, hardly unaffected by the “impact of westernization” (especially considering the consumerist function of the “interpreters” and other marketers associated with the cinema vans in Nigeria). But his comments suggest the obvious discrepancies between the Eastern Region, however population-dense and subject to increasing urbanization, and such places as Lagos and Ibadan, to which foreign capital paid perhaps the closest attention at the time.

“Hollywood’s distortions” may, Onipede pointed out, “have been the subject of heated debates” in the Nigerian legislatures, but those debates led, in Enugu, to the rather fanciful conclusion that Young and other “independent” producers could help to correct the representational missteps of their compatriots and, more importantly, materially and epistemically assist the Eastern Region in its cinematic ambitions.¹⁶⁵ Despite the failures associated with the local production of *The Mark of the Hawk*—chief among them Young’s inability (or refusal) to help establish a viable film industry in Enugu—belief in the virtues of economic liberalization continued to animate Nigerian policy at federal as well as regional levels. On the eve of the Biafran Civil War, the political economist R.S. May wrote, “Given the maintenance of liberal economic policies, political stability and unity, Nigeria should continue to benefit greatly from the presence of international companies.”¹⁶⁶ But it was not the war alone—not simply the conflict’s disruption of “political stability and unity”—that prevented these “great benefits” from materializing.¹⁶⁷ It was also, as the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* attests, the very “presence of international companies” said to be eminently capable of generating local growth and prosperity.

Critics of the particular political economy that enabled Young’s production would later lament “the incentive measures provided by government to [foreign] investors and entrepreneurs without any selective criterion”—measures that had “succeeded only in enabling certain firms to amass profits at the expense of the tax-payers.”¹⁶⁸ Young was brought in as precisely the kind of development “expert” who would become prominent in Nigeria in the aftermath of independence. He presented a vision of his own enrichment and career advancement, disingenuously couched as attention to Nigeria’s “development needs,” and his scant knowledge of Nigerian cultures—a relative ignorance remarked upon by Poitier, Onipede, and others—led some government officials to reassess the qualifications required of foreign investors and push for administrative reform. Nearly fifty years later, the National Film and Video Censors Board would announce “the need for [foreign]

participants [in Nigeria's film sector] to acquaint themselves with the nature of our society so as to know what to produce and what not to." This statement echoes Onipede's remarks about American filmmakers like Young who, at a time of seismic political change in Nigeria, were committed to the country only to the extent that it could fill their coffers and advance their careers.¹⁶⁹

The Eastern Region government was clearly complicit in these efforts, however, and its entanglement with Lloyd Young & Associates—the precise partnership that it fostered with Hollywood capital—recalls the economist John Quiggin's remarks about some of the shared failures of state institutions and private enterprise. "Public sector investments, from the time of the Pharaohs onward, have included plenty of boondoggles, white elephants, and outright failures," writes Quiggin. "But the private sector has not done better. Waves of extreme optimism, leading to massive investment in particular sectors, have been followed by slumps in which the assets built at great expense in the boom lie unfinished or idle for years on end."¹⁷⁰ The twenty-three-acre, twenty-four-million-dollar Enugu "film colony" planned by the government-owned Cinema Corporation of Nigeria, which bore no fruit beyond the production of Young's *The Mark of the Hawk*, was, in its own way, an augury of failures and false starts to come. These include Tinapa Studios, part of a twenty-acre, 450-million-dollar government project in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State (and the original capital of the Eastern Region). Tinapa, which opened amid much fanfare in 2007 and was meant, in part, to compete with Lagos as a tourist destination and source of imported luxury items, now lies derelict, the promise of tax exemptions for participants in its economy an unrealizable echo of various (and similarly misguided) forms of government assistance.

In 1985, Nigerian filmmaker Ola Balogun recognized that the concept of a "film village" was nothing more than a "red herring," one that "need not occupy anybody's time or attention": "Huge capital investment in real estate development is certainly not an essential prerequisite for film production, no matter how impressive it may sound to some of us to hear of gigantic film villages (or white elephant villages?)."¹⁷¹ For even if Tinapa were fully operational, it would not directly contribute taxes and other benefits to the local economy. Like Eko Atlantic, it was designed to serve as an economic "free zone" and thus evokes Enugu's failure to levy taxes and impose restrictions on Lloyd Young & Associates (such that the company's gain became—inevitably—the Eastern Region's loss).¹⁷² Like Enugu's planned "film colony" of the 1950s, Tinapa has facilitated the production of just one feature—Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013), which, like *The Mark of the Hawk* before it, is only tenuously Nigerian. Bandele is based in Great Britain, and the film's producer, Andrea Calderwood, is perhaps best known for the Oscar-winning *The Last King of Scotland* (Kevin Macdonald, 2006). Hardly unique, Lloyd Young's experience in Enugu must be understood as part of a long history of misbegotten projects marked by the failure (or refusal) to actualize various fantasies of a truly Nigerian cinema.

That Hollywood capital has nevertheless managed to benefit from these projects is evident, at the very least, from the global reception of *The Mark of the Hawk*, which turned a considerable profit over a period of several years and via a range of methods of distribution and techniques of publicity. Billed as having been “filmed in Nigeria by Hollywood camera crews,” *The Mark of the Hawk* had its world premiere at New York’s Paramount Theater on March 5, 1958.¹⁷³ “There have been trimmer and more dramatic films on racism in modern Africa than ‘The Mark of the Hawk,’” wrote Howard Thompson in the *New York Times*. “But one moviegoer has yet to hear a better suggestion on the subject: simple adherence to the teachings of Christ. It’s about time.” Thompson was especially pleased to see a film that did not appear to lionize “native terrorists” and that instead upheld “the calm influence of [the] American missionary.” “The party responsible,” he wrote, “is Lloyd Young, a man of whom we’d like to know more. As producer . . . and originator of the story, Mr. Young has shaped—or tried to shape—a sermon in dramatic terms. . . . The trouble is simply that Africa speaks—incessantly.” With this cheeky reference to Walter Futter’s popular 1930 exploitation film *Africa Speaks!*, Thompson lamented Young’s “talky” approach even as he expressed gratitude for the cinematic sermon.¹⁷⁴

Writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, William Zinsser upheld *The Mark of the Hawk* as an antidote to the Italian film *The Last Paradise* (Folco Quilici, 1955), of which Zinsser complained, “The producers took their camera to Polynesia, shot some beautiful color scenes of the islands, and then contrived some quaint legends for the story line. . . . The film fails to grasp the nature of life in the South Seas . . . and even to the non-traveler it will seem artificial.” By contrast, *The Mark of the Hawk* evinced, for Zinsser, a keen understanding of Nigeria, for “though it is fiction, it deals with issues that are real.” “It is a neat coincidence that juxtaposes these two movies in the same week,” he concluded. “One producer goes to Polynesia to make a documentary that turns out to be mostly fiction. Another goes to Africa to tell, under the guise of fiction, a story that is absolute fact.”¹⁷⁵ That Hollywood had somehow “captured” Nigeria was central to the film’s reception in the United States.¹⁷⁶

The Mark of the Hawk was especially popular at New York’s Apollo Theater, where it played for one week in the spring of 1958, after finishing its first run at the Paramount. In December of the following year, the Apollo revived the film for a “pre-Christmas Film Festival,” calling it “one of the finest pictures that Hollywood has made,” and one whose “special impact on the Harlem motion picture-going public” was deserving of further celebration.¹⁷⁷ (The film’s religious theme undoubtedly made it an ideal choice for this holiday engagement.) The previous year, the Apollo had helped publicize *The Mark of the Hawk* as “a remarkable motion picture achievement [that] was photographed almost entirely in Africa, with the full cooperation of the sovereign new nation of Nigeria.” “Lloyd Young and Associates,” the promotional copy continued, “brings Africa to the screen

in all its lushly varied beauty, while telling a story of some people typical of the many whose daily lives are inexorably intertwined [sic] in the tumultuous play and counterplay of its conflicting forces."¹⁷⁸ This widespread focus on the film's Nigerian shooting locations prompted Bosley Crowther to reassure readers of the *New York Times*, "[T]his does not mean that Hollywood is progressively closing up shop or even letting itself be superseded as the major area of film production in the world. It is still the recognized capital."¹⁷⁹ Other critics, directly contradicting Zinsser in their own reviews of *The Mark of the Hawk*, claimed that Nigeria was used inexpressively and almost arbitrarily. "It is impossible to quarrel with the good intentions behind 'Mark of the Hawk,'" argued journalist Win Fanning before complaining, "Precious little use is made of the African setting where many of the scenes were shot. And, for one long drawn-out sequence, the story is suddenly removed to China." In Fanning's view, the film "isn't interested so much in Africa as . . . in racial tensions in general. This is laudable, of course, but it leads to scattering . . . shots so widely that few find the mark."¹⁸⁰

Religious leaders were far more likely to express enthusiasm, if only as a means of supporting the film's specifically Christian message and the continued production of religious films. After all, Lloyd Young & Associates had received assistance from more than just Enugu: World Horizons Productions, a small, independent company that made films for the Presbyterian Church, also chipped in.¹⁸¹ When, in the fall of 1958, *The Mark of the Hawk* premiered in Washington, DC, it received "a unique salute from the city's clergy." Speaking through the Council of Churches, several religious leaders praised the film for its "believable, respectful portrait of a missionary." "[B]etween the extremes [of British colonialism and African radicalism] lies the patient, long road of the middle, represented by the missionary," wrote one Washington viewer. "Christianity, he quietly believes, is the only answer to this struggle erupting all over the world"—the only means of effectively convincing Africans in particular of their lack of the political capacity for immediate self-rule.¹⁸²

As such commentaries indicate, American evangelicals were expected to work assiduously to forestall Black self-emancipation both at home and abroad. Dwight Eisenhower's personal pastor, the Reverend Edward Lee Roy Elson (who had baptized the US president in 1953 and would later be elected to the position of Chaplain of the United States Senate), singled out *The Mark of the Hawk* in a Sunday-morning sermon that Eisenhower attended. (Also present were the First Lady, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and Secretary of the Army Wilbur Brucker.) Elson "recommended the motion picture for all to see," and Eisenhower seconded the sentiment.¹⁸³ That *The Mark of the Hawk* received the endorsement of the US president was a reflection, in part, of the Presbyterian Church's impassioned advocacy. But it also signaled the film's status as a useful weapon in the cultural Cold War.

The general audience appeared to share Ike's enthusiasm. Everyday filmgoers sent letters to various newspapers testifying to the salutary qualities of *The Mark*

of the Hawk. “Average” viewer Mary G. Hundley told the *Washington Post*, “Permit me to express my opinion of the motion picture *The Mark of the Hawk*, now appearing at local theaters. A profoundly moving film with a message, it must certainly appeal to all people of goodwill.” Hundley continued, “Here we have an eloquent plea for universal brotherhood and understanding, the inevitable solution of numerous human problems. The bond of Christian fellowship is a potent force for promoting world peace.” Christian universalism could not obscure the specifically American dimensions of the film, however. Hundley’s praise took a distinctly nationalist turn when she wrote, “Men of all creeds and races recognize American humanitarianism and our democratic ideals. Asian and African leaders are coming here in greater numbers than ever before. What impression of our Christian Nation will they carry home? This film can well answer. It is a challenge.”¹⁸⁴

Eisenhower was not the only public figure to champion *The Mark of the Hawk*. In the spring of 1958, not long after his trip to Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana to observe that country’s independence celebrations, Dr. Martin Luther King added his own praise. “‘The Mark of the Hawk’ is the most captivating and moving production that I have ever seen,” King declared. “It states clearly, eloquently, and decisively the problem which the world confronts in the great social revolution that is taking place.” King continued, “The theme of the film is dramatic, the message profound, and the acting superb. It has a deep and challenging message for both the oppressed and the oppressor. In a dynamic and electrifying way, this picture poses the theme of universal brotherhood. I recommend it to all people in the highest terms.”¹⁸⁵ That King, “the great Negro leader,” and Hundley, the Washington housewife, both used the term “universal brotherhood” suggests that the filmmakers had succeeded in conveying a coherent ideological message, one that, with its familiar Christian overtones, could be adopted and circulated with ease. Yet neither King nor Hundley mentioned Nigeria, and the country’s absence suggests a different yet not-unrelated sort of success—that of a Hollywood production company in advancing the cause of American capitalism. Reporting on King’s response to *The Mark of the Hawk*, Pittsburgh’s Black newspaper noted, “Though the picture was filmed in Nigeria by a Hollywood independent, Lloyd Young and Associates, few can miss its implications for the USA. It can become one of the most powerful ‘opinion shapers’ of this decade.”¹⁸⁶ *The Mark of the Hawk* had managed to effectively present American capitalism, with its secreted reliance on public subsidies and other forms of state support (both at home and abroad), in the language of human rights and socioeconomic justice—so effectively, in fact, that even King, who increasingly critiqued the capitalist system, raved about the film.

Other publications went so far as to present American capitalism as a weapon against “tribal terrorism,” to quote a *Los Angeles Times* article on the film’s production.¹⁸⁷ “‘The Mark of the Hawk’ is a heavy yarn undoubtedly spun with great sincerity and a transcending nobility of spirit,” wrote critic Geoffrey Warren, adding, “to promote the cause of Christianity, justice, racial equality and political and

economic freedom all in one film is indeed an undertaking.”¹⁸⁸ Recognizing the film’s intergenerational appeal, *Parents’ Magazine* gave *The Mark of the Hawk* its Family Medal Award in the spring of 1958.¹⁸⁹ The film was said to serve as a useful illustration of “[t]he middle way between [the] violent extremes of the submerged masses’ worldwide modern revolutions.”¹⁹⁰ *The Mark of the Hawk*, observed critic Kate Cameron, “petitions the natives to use *patience* in their efforts to bring about political reforms.”¹⁹¹

In 1960, the year of Nigeria’s formal independence, *The Mark of the Hawk* was revived throughout the United States, beginning in New Jersey, where “A Visit to Africa, South of the Sahara” was the New Brunswick Presbyterian Church’s latest “mission emphasis.” In January, the church chose to screen *The Mark of the Hawk*, which it described as a “Hollywood film,” as a means of ushering in the new year, with its special “African” mission.¹⁹² In April, a Methodist church in Los Angeles sponsored a Sunday-evening screening, inviting “several African students . . . to lead a discussion and to answer questions after the showing of the film.” The church’s goal was to help congregants “appreciate the complex problems of a country [sic] of the size of Africa.”¹⁹³ (It is not at all clear whether any Nigerians were actually present at the special screening.) And the film lived on. Between 1958 and 1995, *The Mark of the Hawk* was shown by at least two hundred American churches, and the film was regularly broadcast on American television until at least the turn of the twenty-first century.¹⁹⁴

“An off-beat type of promotion is being employed to sell ‘The Mark of the Hawk’ by a series of individualized campaigns to various segments of the market,” wrote the trade paper *Film Bulletin* in 1958. These campaigns were attracting “lobs of attention for the African-filmed Technicolor-Superscope” production, with such “diverse groups as Protestant churchgoers, teenagers, Negroes, Puerto Ricans, women’s and educational organizations [being] exposed to beaucoup promotional activity.” After *The Mark of the Hawk* completed its first run at the Paramount in Times Square, Universal, Lloyd Young & Associates, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church of America, and Film Productions International set up a series of “special screenings” in order to promote the film as a potential teaching tool for those interested in Protestantism, decolonization, anticommunism, and Africa. “Over one thousand clergymen and lay officials from the greater New York area viewed the picture at [such] special screening[s],” noted *Film Bulletin*. “‘Mark of the Hawk’ display cards, heralds, and special leaflets for distribution to church-sponsored women and youth groups were distributed to church officials. . . .”¹⁹⁵ A prominent fan of the film, Glenn Moore, then Secretary of the General Council of the Presbyterian Church, touted Nigeria as a source of “unusual entertainment”—a place of “discernment and beauty,” the filmed record of which “should impress all who see it.”¹⁹⁶ “A film for all Christendom!” screamed ads for *The Mark of the Hawk*, two hundred thousand of which were distributed to pastors “for [their] Sunday Bulletins-Announcements-Sermons.”¹⁹⁷ Such

hyperbolic appeals to the widest possible audience continued apace: “Calling all women!” read a later ad. “Calling all youth! A film for all young people who want to do something about today’s world!”¹⁹⁸

The profitability of *The Mark of the Hawk* cannot be gauged by conventional box-office figures alone. The usual metrics can go only so far in explaining the film’s capacity to enrich its non-Nigerian participants. Universal’s nontheatrical division was especially committed to the commercial circulation of *The Mark of the Hawk* beyond standard theatrical markets, and frequent benefit screenings were held—though not, of course, to the advantage of Enugu, on which Young and company had so strategically relied. *The Mark of the Hawk* continued to generate income for the United Presbyterian Church of North America well into the 1960s.¹⁹⁹ During that decade, World Horizons Inc. distributed the film throughout Nigeria as part of the church’s efforts to “develop urban ministries” in the country, but there is no evidence to suggest that these Nigerian screenings materially profited any local individuals or organizations, much less the Eastern Region government; the records of World Horizons indicate that all Nigerian returns were remitted to the United Presbyterian Church—a confirmation of the continued capacity of Nigerian state institutions to ensure the smooth repatriation of profits, which had attracted Young and other Hollywood representatives to Nigeria in the first place.²⁰⁰

Such smoothness did not go unnoticed by the Hollywood trade press. At the time, Hollywood firms faced major “remittance problems” in much of Africa—including “all along the North African coast, in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia”—but not in Nigeria.²⁰¹ In that country, Hollywood films were easily imported under open general license, and dollars were abundantly available for remittances. In a wide-ranging report that accounted for the ongoing “distribution successes” of *The Mark of the Hawk*, the trade paper *The Film Daily* concluded, “There have been no serious problems reported . . . regarding importation or exhibition of United States films in Nigeria.”²⁰²

The case of *The Mark of the Hawk* suggests an understudied late-colonial enactment of an enduring logic of neoliberalism, one that involved an emergent instrumentality (the Eastern Region government) and a newly established, “independent” instantiation of Hollywood’s expansionist agenda (Lloyd Young & Associates). As Michael Curtin argues, “concepts such as free flow and market forces are in fact meaningless without self-conscious state interventions to fashion a terrain for commercial operations.”²⁰³ In summoning Young, the Eastern Region government telegraphed its own commitment to a certain perception of Hollywood expertise. It also anticipated later cross-cultural arrangements and exchanges. For instance, as the Nigerian Film Corporation was preparing to abandon its Victoria Island offices in the mid-1980s, the Eastman Kodak Company was called in to conduct comparative tests of the water in Lagos and Jos. The company’s experts (duly compensated by the Nigerian state) found the water in the former city to be too

hard for film processing, and Kodak-approved Jos became the headquarters of the NFC in 1987.²⁰⁴ Following Kodak's example, a group of carefully chosen Hollywood producers would visit Jos in 1991, at the request of the Nigerian government. There they were greeted by NFC general manager Brendan Shehu. "I am happy to welcome you to Jos, our movie capital," Shehu said. "This is not Hollywood—but, like Hollywood, it is the home of a film industry. Coming, as you do, from Hollywood's America, your visit to Jos should be the occasion for a dialogue and for proposals which should be of benefit to both our countries."²⁰⁵

Calling on Hollywood to "consider Jos," Shehu echoed the rhetoric with which the Eastern Region government had, over three decades earlier, appealed to Lloyd Young and other American investors, stressing scenic and climatic factors. "Nigeria, rich in culture and tourism, has much to offer to the [Hollywood] film industry," he said. "Your coming to Jos, a home widely known for its picturesque topography and accommodating weather, is hopefully the genesis of a healthy business relationship between us." Shehu's remarks suggest the continuity—the transhistorical stability—of appeals to foreign investment, particularly those issued from the ostensible periphery of the world economic order. Like his predecessors at the Cinema Corporation of Nigeria, Shehu touted the "investment prospects for Americans interested in Nigeria." "Film can help you see," he said, "what prospects there are for any investor coming to Nigeria or any filmmaker willing to have good locations to shoot his movie. Besides these, the Nigerian Film Corporation will be very willing to enter into agreement with your Chamber of Commerce or any representative agency for specific film production. This call for co-production is informed by the fact that you stand to gain from the yields as the exhibition of the films abroad will be part of the agreement." Speaking on behalf of the federal government, Shehu promised Hollywood producers in 1991 what had in fact come to pass for the makers of *The Mark of the Hawk* a few decades earlier.

Touting the possibility of "a joint working relationship" between Hollywood and the NFC, Shehu was quick to assure the former that its Nigerian operations would be unfettered—untaxed and altogether "lucrative," a "low-budget venture" whose "cheapness" could be guaranteed.²⁰⁶ Less plausible, of course, were Shehu's claims regarding the NFC's capacity to profit from such a venture. While he could convincingly promise Hollywood producers tax breaks and other forms of government assistance, Shehu could only feebly gesture toward indigenous dividends, addressing these in the broadest of terms: "The benefits to us should be tremendous," he said. "For the film business . . . can boost trade, diplomacy, culture, leisure, etc." His closing remarks, in which he touted Jos's eagerness "to be tapped and exploited," were telling.²⁰⁷ They were also—however unwittingly—accurate descriptions of what had transpired in the Eastern Region thirty-four years before.

Enugu may have been left out of these later developments in Hollywood internationalism, but, beginning in the 1980s, it served as the site of major advances in indigenous production that have culminated in the state's current status as a source

of immensely popular, low-budget, Asaba-style Nollywood films—vernacular alternatives to the glossiness of the Lagos-based cosmopolitan productions that, in their own ways, evoke the capitalist pretensions of *The Mark of the Hawk*. Between the making of that film and Enugu's emergence as a fount of popular direct-to-video fare, the state served as a shooting location not only for the NTA's illustrious adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1986) but also for Ola Balogun's industrial film *Nigersteel* (1975), about an Enugu-based steel company.²⁰⁸

Enugu's sporadic post-independence successes as a site of production of emphatically indigenous media should not, however, distract from Nigeria's ongoing role as a source of tax breaks for American firms. The country has remained a significant player in the sort of global neoliberal development agenda emblemized by *The Mark of the Hawk* and later adopted by, among other Hollywood companies, Cinestar International. In the early 1960s, just a few years after Lloyd Young left Enugu for good, Cinestar promised to "provide [Nigerian] governmental units with an additional source of revenue through box-office taxes." At the same time, however, the company sought to preempt "the enactment or promulgation of any import regulation restriction, quota or . . . import duty, tax, fee or other fiscal charge affecting" its operations in Nigeria.²⁰⁹

Power asymmetries have a tendency to perpetuate themselves. As David Harvey puts it, the "promised outcome of poverty reduction from freer trade, open markets and 'neo-liberal' strategies of globalization has not materialized"—a bleak lesson that the Eastern Region surely learned after collaborating with Lloyd Young & Associates in the 1950s.²¹⁰ *The Mark of the Hawk* was made ten years after the Nigerian premiere of Julian Roffman's unambiguously pro-capitalist *A Greater Tomorrow*, and it presaged some similar attempts to use the medium of film in order to promote American business norms (and individual American corporations) in Nigeria. After independence, the Socony Mobil Oil Company sponsored the awkwardly titled film *Nigeria Economy Run* (1960), a production of UniFilms, Inc., a firm based in New York, with a branch office and studio in Stamford, Connecticut.²¹¹ (The company also produced films and television commercials for Shell, Mobil's main rival in Nigeria.)²¹²

Like the later *A Village Is Waiting*, *Nigeria Economy Run* depicts the Eastern Region in terms that echo those of *The Mark of the Hawk*. "A cathedral stands here in the East instead of a mosque," notes the American voice-over narrator with evident pride, as the film furnishes footage of white priests leading their Nigerian parishioners through a courtyard in the heart of Enugu. "Christianity"—the vanquisher not simply of atheistic totalitarianism but also of Islam—"shapes education and encourages industrial expansion in the Eastern Region. Large- and small-scale trade flourishes along the Niger and Benue." Shots of efficient typists characterize a sequence devoted to the streamlining of business operations in "modern" office settings. "Business and secretarial schools," the narrator notes, "help the people of the Eastern Region to rush to meet the business world more

quickly than the Islamic North.” Finally, the film turns to the topic of oil, which the narrator contextualizes in relation to Enugu’s other affordances. “Oil was recently discovered in the East,” he declares, adding, “Nigerians are developing their industry with their own research methods and their own hands. This Eastern Region of Nigeria is the only coal-producing area in all of West Africa. Eastern Nigerians utilize tribal and family groups to form trading firms.”

However robust and American-inflected, such firms were no match for the neocolonial potency of the United States—a coercive power that has so often achieved expression (as with *The Mark of the Hawk*) in the financing, production, and distribution of motion pictures. Specific threats to Nigeria’s cinematic independence tend to recur; histories of manipulation and exploitation have a way of repeating themselves. Not long after the making of *Nigeria Economy Run*, the Nigerian federal government, in an echo of Enugu’s own brand of Hollywood outreach, commissioned an American production company to “collaborate” with it on the making of the nonfiction film *The First Independence Day* (1960). That company, Paragon Productions, based in Washington, DC, would go on to serve as sole distributor of the documentary, thus excluding the Nigerian state from a share of the profits from the global exhibition of a film that Lagos had conceived and co-financed.²¹³

LLOYD YOUNG’S LEGACY

After leaving Nigeria for good in the late 1950s, Lloyd Young remained committed to the commercial potential of cinematic representations of decolonization, though he himself would be unable to help realize that potential. His filmmaking career petered out after *The Mark of the Hawk*. A planned Gandhi biopic was never made. In 1960, Young secured the exclusive film rights to Louis Fischer’s *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1950), overseeing negotiations between his production company and the Navajivan Trust, a semi-public corporation established by Gandhi himself (and chaired, at the time, by India’s Minister of Finance). Mirroring other arrangements made on *The Mark of the Hawk*, Universal-International agreed to distribute the film, which Young planned to shoot on location in India.²¹⁴ That year, as *The Mark of the Hawk* was being revived throughout Nigeria (including at the Roxy, the Emy, and other open-air cinemas in the Eastern Region), Young formed a partnership with the industrialist Fred de Wilde, with whom he planned to make a “musical fantasy” based on the life of Eartha Kitt.²¹⁵ The Kitt film was never produced, and Young faded into obscurity, his sole cinematic success a measure, in part, of Enugu’s firm commitment to Hollywood production.

While touring the United States in 1957, Young had proclaimed that, as of that year, there were approximately eighty theaters in Nigeria, and that the Cinema Corporation planned to build forty more in and around Enugu.²¹⁶ Yet this could only be a classic case of “growth without development,” since “foreign capital and

extrinsic factors were the driving engine of [the planned] expansion.”²¹⁷ By the end of 1957, the Cinema Corporation was obliged to lower its expectations, announcing that at least two “static cinemas” would be built in Onitsha and Enugu. By decade’s end, none had been constructed. Dr. J.B.C. Okala, the chairman of the Cinema Corporation, called *The Mark of the Hawk* a “glorious edification of Africans who are fighting for freedom,” yet by the time of the film’s scheduled Nigerian premiere, in November 1957, no actual edifice had been built for the occasion, as promised.²¹⁸

1961 saw the repeal of the Cinema Corporation of Nigeria Law, which in 1955 had established the eponymous body as a regional outfit—a producer, distributor, and exhibitor—distinct from the Eastern Region Film Unit, with its colonial parentage. As a result, the Cinema Corporation ceased to function in any form—even as a mere symbol of indigeneity and regional autonomy. Just as it was unceremoniously dismantled, however, Enugu announced plans to reserve a particular plot of land (“No. C/12”) for a modern cinema equipped to show “major” imported films. A regional film bureau was killed, then, at the very moment that land was set aside for the construction of a big screen (to be adjacent to a swank hotel, no less) for the exhibition primarily of Hollywood products.²¹⁹ The Eastern Region Film Unit fared better, at least in architectural terms, having completed the construction of its very own building, complete with editing suites, in 1963.²²⁰

Enugu continued to appeal to foreign film professionals, often employing them in place of local technicians.²²¹ In 1962, not long after graduating from the University of Sydney, Australian director Bruce Beresford, who would go on to make such films as *Breaker Morant* (1980) and *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), answered an ad that the Eastern Region government had placed for a film editor. Relocating to Enugu, Beresford worked in the region’s film unit (a division of the Ministry of Information of Eastern Nigeria) until the outbreak of the Biafran Civil War prompted him to flee to London.²²² He would return to Nigeria in 1990, however, shooting his adaptation of Joyce Cary’s 1939 novel *Mister Johnson* on location in Kano. In a 2007 interview, Beresford recalled the squandering of Enugu’s resources and the squelching of its cinematic potential by Western interlopers, though he stopped short of implicating himself in such mismanagement: “Enugu[’s] government film unit . . . was a shambles. . . . They never made any films there at all: it was run by a very strange Swiss man who seemed determined to do absolutely nothing.”²²³

The American evangelical spirit dramatized in *The Mark of the Hawk* was hardly impotent, however. The very missionary mechanism at the center of the film’s narrative—the Christian purpose of the American cleric who journeys from East Asia to West Africa—had plenty of offscreen analogues in decolonizing Nigeria. In February 1960, just over a decade after he held his first tent revival in Los Angeles, the American evangelist Billy Graham brought his crusade to Enugu, where he received an enthusiastic welcome from some 35,000 Nigerians crowded into the city’s massive Sports Stadium.²²⁴ (The impressive structure was an architectural victory—the site of a competing leisure industry—that stood in sharp,

inviting contrast to the failure of the Cinema Corporation to construct any major movie theaters.) As Graham preached, memories of *The Mark of the Hawk* were activated. For here was an American who, like Lloyd Young before him, had come to Enugu to show Nigerians “the way.” “It was while on location in Nigeria that the cast [of *The Mark of the Hawk*] became more aware of the history on which the movie is based—tensions [and] the missionary’s role in easing them,” claimed an American journalist on the occasion of Graham’s crusade.²²⁵

If Nigeria could not be spared the sort of evangelism that Graham represented, then perhaps, some surmised, the country could at least be kept from drowning in a sea of imported Hollywood movies. Over two decades after the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*, the Nigerian filmmaker Eddie Ugbomah would go so far as to urge the federal government to ban the importation of all foreign films in order to enable the growth of a truly indigenous cinema.²²⁶ S.J. Timothy-Asobele would similarly call for protectionism: “The entry of foreign films into the country should,” he said, “be restricted such that their continued importation does not stifle indigenous efforts. . . . It is high time the government recognized the film industry as an economic product which is a component of the competition between Nigeria and the rest of the world.”²²⁷ In 1975, the Federal Commissioner of Information would claim that “foreign films, shown in the cinema houses, throughout the country, stretched the Nigerian economy and adulterated the nation’s culture.”²²⁸ It was in response to this situation that Ola Balogun would volunteer as an advisor to the Nigerian government, a role through which he endeavored to promote the importance of state subsidies for local filmmakers rather than American interlopers like Young.²²⁹ As Balogun surely understood, *The Mark of the Hawk* does not even furnish an explicit acknowledgment of Nigerian national identity at the level of narrative. Exploiting the 1918 riots at Abeokuta, the 1929 uprisings in and around Calabar and Owerri (which George Padmore celebrated as “monster protest demonstrations against British imperialists and their agents”),²³⁰ the General Strike of 1945, and the Enugu colliery shooting of 1949, the film is nevertheless set in an unnamed African country, and the word “Nigeria” is never even uttered. Lacking a significant “degree of local reflection,” *The Mark of the Hawk* served only to showcase Nigeria’s “spectacular scenery,” albeit in the absence of the sort of clear-cut narrative identification of the country that could, perhaps, have been counted on to promote tourism, as in typical subsidized productions.²³¹

Ultimately, the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* was, in ideological terms, “subordinate to one fundamental cause: anticommunism”—a cause that cannot, of course, be disarticulated from the profit motive of Lloyd Young & Associates, with its eagerness to cash in on what the State Department “envisioned [as] a golden opportunity to extend its Cold War outreach to Africa.”²³² Bernard Blankenheimer, chief of the African Section of the Bureau of Foreign Commerce of the US Department of Commerce, touted this opportunity with great relish.²³³ But rather than aid Enugu, the film’s production merely illustrated Pierre Jalée’s claim

that “in the very peak period of political decolonization imperialist exploitation not only persists but . . . becom[es] harsher.”²³⁴ At the administrative level, the newly self-governing Eastern Region was willing to take a chance—particularly on an “upstart” like Young. Hollywood knew that. It brought to this public-private “partnership” a set of technical skills and a flair for promotion. Enugu brought a vision of indigeneity that, rather than coalescing into an operational local industry, ended up merely feeding its partner’s global promotional faculties. “Africa” sells. If Hollywood had learned that lesson by the late 1950s, it would relearn it repeatedly in the decades that followed. Yet as the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* attests, the political-economic specificities of Nigeria were often more important—in practical as well as discursive terms—than continental generalities.

Ends and Beginnings

Rebuilding the Big Screen

In 1981, UNESCO reported that the vast majority of Nigeria's imported films—a whopping 86 percent—came from the United States.¹ The very same year, Hollywood studios and the US Department of State declared Nigeria hopelessly corrupt, and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) called for a boycott of cinematic trade with the country. However compromised, the “new spirit of economic nationalism and self-reliance” that had emerged in Nigeria amid the oil boom of the 1970s, bolstered as it had been “by the swing to the left in Nigerian politics, and by a marked distrust of foreigners,” formed part of the boycott's backstory.² When the MPAA announced its boycott, Nigeria was under civilian president and former finance minister Shehu Shagari, whose Economic Stabilization Program prescribed the limiting of import licenses and the raising of customs duties—one of several policies that proved off-putting to Hollywood amid the global inflation of the 1970s and a general profit squeeze.

Yet rather than exposing Nigeria's pathological status on the world stage, the MPAA's 1981 call for member studios to retreat from the country merely exemplified how, in “the neoliberal vision of world order, the world economy exercises discipline on individual nations through . . . the flight of investment that punishes expansion in social policy,” as Quinn Slobodian puts it.³ There can be no doubt but that Hollywood benefited from the thirty or so fully licensed cinemas that operated in Lagos alone during the oil boom, when local exhibitors could afford the exorbitant rental fees imposed by the MPAA. Falling oil prices, coupled with Shagari's strategic refusal to submit to conditions outlined by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), changed all of that—at least temporarily.⁴

At the very moment at which the Nigerian state, in its relatively brief configuration as Shagari's ostensibly civilian Second Republic, began to pursue concrete protectionist strategies aimed at curbing Hollywood's local influence and limiting

its capacity to profit, the MPAA, which has always enjoyed the cooperation of the US Department of Commerce, was beginning to more openly embrace neoliberalism as a specific (and rapidly consolidating) brand of market orthodoxy.⁵ Robert Pollin identifies 1980 as “the most appropriate point to mark the transition out of the post-World War II era of developmental state policies and the ascendancy of neoliberalism.”⁶ It is perhaps fitting, then, that the neoliberal era, as periodized by Pollin, began with the MPAA’s attempt to punish Nigeria for its resistance to the wildly asymmetrical terms on which Hollywood had always conducted business in the country.⁷ In keeping with broader neoliberal efforts to turn Nigeria into a (more) development-friendly free-trade state, the MPAA called upon member studios—precisely those companies that Eric Johnston had, two decades earlier, urged to enter so “accommodating” a country—to finally abandon Lagos. That they did, and not in defeat but in disgust, conveniently citing “corruption,” is an indication of the sheer force of the MPAA’s commitment to the neoliberal economic order from which Shagari’s Nigeria was seen as deviating.⁸

The association’s hardline position was not without precedent. In the early 1960s, for example, Cinestar International, an American movie company doing business in Nigeria, drew up a contract that gave it the unrestricted right to terminate its dealings in whole or in part, and without liability, in the event of, among other “happenings”: “the enactment or promulgation of *any* import regulation restriction, quota or embargo affecting the importation of motion picture films or the enactment or promulgation of *any* censor or *any* internal regulation affecting their exhibition or distribution”; “the imposition of *any* burden or restriction upon foreign exchange or the imposition of *any* import duty, tax, fee or other fiscal charge affecting foreign motion picture films”; and “*any* measure or action taken or authorized to be taken by *any* public official in the territory . . . prohibiting or tending to prohibit the exhibition or distribution of *any* . . . films of Cinestar.”⁹ When the company finally fled Nigeria, however, it was in response to the Biafran Civil War. Cinestar, whose patented plastic-and-nylon CineDomes were obvious targets, had listed “war or public disorders” among its litany of causes for contract termination. The Biafran conflict simply represented too big a risk.¹⁰

DISNEY’S “NIGERIA PROBLEM”

As the case of Cinestar suggests, American film history is hardly reducible to the activities of the major Hollywood companies. United Artists might have closed its Nigerian offices in response to the Biafran Civil War, but other firms, including those not primarily associated with cinema, continued to use moving images to help expand their corporate footprints in and around Lagos. Even in the late 1970s, these US firms, buoyed by soaring profits, increased their commitment to the production, distribution, and exhibition of films in Nigeria. They included Fisher Scientific, a Pittsburgh-based laboratory supply and biotechnology company that

in 1972 achieved sales of \$8.1 million in Nigeria as a result of a hospital-equipment trade mission organized by the US Department of Commerce. In the spring of 1976, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger directed the American Embassy in Lagos to participate in Fisher's production of short films "on [the] company's success story"—cinematic testimonials to Nigeria's lasting economic value.¹¹

A few months later, Nigeria's Capital Development Authority, an entity concerned with the municipal development of Lagos, sent a special fact-finding mission to the United States. The mission visited, among other sites, Disneyland in California, and it later spent two days at Disney World in Florida. (The latter park had opened just five years earlier, in 1971.) The mission's goal was to study urban and regional planning and, in particular, to scrutinize Disney's approach to year-round land care and management.¹² From Disney's perspective, however, the trip was not a success. A proposed deal with the conglomerate had "fallen through, with Disney World authorities and the [US] Department [of State] left holding the bag." Members of the mission reportedly adopted their own, idiosyncratic approach to studying Disney, and—much to the conglomerate's chagrin—they did so without any official supervision. Learning of Disney's displeasure, a Nigerian diplomat retorted that, "after all, Disney World was not one of [the Capital Development Authority's] priorities."¹³ The conflict—Disney's very own "Nigeria problem"—illustrates Janet Wasko's claim that the alleged "universality" of the Disney brand "is neither automatic nor natural, but has been, and continues to be, deliberately manufactured and carefully controlled."¹⁴ As a source of defiant developers and flippant diplomats dismissive of the conglomerate's determination to achieve world domination, Nigeria represented, in the late 1970s, one of Disney's biggest obstacles.

Disney was not deterred, however. It persisted, even at a time of global economic crisis, in seeing Nigeria as a potential player in the international proliferation of its theme parks.¹⁵ In early 1979, a team of Imagineers traveled to Nigeria as part of the Disney World Showcase Project, a global initiative to link "local cultures" to the Disney brand.¹⁶ Echoing the French colonial *politique indigène*—"the conceit that a new policy that paternalistically respected indigenous cultures was essential to lead the natives into progress"—the Imagineers sought, paradoxically, to preserve local "cultural attractions" in the modernizing idiom of Disney, gaining permanent corporate footholds in the process.¹⁷ (Cinestar, with its patented Multitrax projection system designed to serve the needs of multilingual Nigerians, was perhaps another inspiration for Disney.) Nigeria, where pirate cinemas were already beginning to vastly outnumber "legitimate" movie theaters by the end of the 1970s, proved particularly challenging to a project that required major exhibition venues, places in which to showcase Disney's support for indigenous achievements. In response to Nigeria's infrastructural shortcomings, Imagineers sought to erect their own, temporary facilities in the country. They were therefore following in the footsteps of those Cinerama representatives who had, in the early 1960s,

demonstrated their own global “exhibition revolution” by producing *Shellarama* and setting up (with considerable help from Cinestar) a number of “promotional theaters” throughout southern Nigeria.

Disney’s vision for a Nigerian theme park cited not only Cinerama’s precedent but also Imagineering’s own: in 1954, two years after Walt Disney founded it, his design and development arm oversaw a foray into the “dark continent” that culminated in “Cameras in Africa,” a 1954 episode of ABC’s anthology television series *Disneyland*.¹⁸ True to the company’s imperialist goals, “Cameras in Africa” offers up the continent as (in the words of Walt Disney himself, who addresses the camera as the episode’s host) “one of [the] many worlds . . . open to you,” the American viewer. It is Walt Disney’s “personal pleasure” to “incorporate” Africa into the company’s mawkish imperium. Tellingly, the continent does not belong to “Fantasyland, the happiest kingdom of them all,” or even to “Frontierland” (here defined in terms of “tall tales and true from the legendary [American] past,” pivoting around the persona of Davy Crockett), but to “Adventureland, the wonder world of nature’s own realm.”

In sharp contrast to America—and in keeping with what Thomas Hodgkin, writing in 1956, called the “Hobbesian picture of a pre-European Africa, in which there was no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society”—Africa is understood as lacking both history (it has no past, “legendary” or otherwise) and people (only wild animals are shown in “Cameras in Africa,” via glimpses of the making of Disney’s upcoming feature-length nature documentary *The African Lion* [James Algar, 1955]).¹⁹ As the host of “Cameras in Africa,” Walt Disney, who points to a map of the continent while surrounded by various traditional masks and other carvings, says of the production of *The African Lion*, “It soon developed that we were making a picture as big as Africa itself!” What he does not mention is that the film’s shooting locations were, in fact, confined to just three of the continent’s countries—Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika. “Cameras in Africa” proceeds in much the same vein, subsuming national particularities under a “celebration” of continental vastness. Much as the episode was meant to build audience anticipation for *The African Lion*, Imagineering’s 1979 foray into Nigeria was intended to cultivate consumers of future Disney products, including those that could be made and marketed in the country. According to the US Department of State, Disney’s designs on Nigeria were clearly “in [the] interest of development of U.S. trade and tourism.”²⁰ But as a new decade dawned, Nigeria seemed anything but hospitable, and Disney backed away—albeit temporarily.

HOLLYWOOD AT FESTAC

The discourses of corruption peddled by Hollywood interests (often in collaboration with the US Departments of State and Commerce) functioned to normalize a certain alienation from Nigeria. As Steven Pierce suggests, “corruption” is

best understood not as a specific material act but as a rhetorical tool and disciplinary strategy. "Treating it as designating something coherent and real, which states might be plagued by or not, naturalized an ideological portrait of the non-corrupt state as a *European* state," writes Pierce. Labeling Nigeria "corrupt," the MPAA endeavored to define standard Hollywood practice, which had always been marked by "oppressive, self-interested, accumulative, illegal actions," as not only upstanding but also the *normal* approach to conducting business on the global stage.²¹ Given corruption's association with local forms of exchange, the term's application to Nigeria served, in the context of film distribution and exhibition, to further mystify Hollywood's morally questionable actions around the world. If Hollywood was global (and thus good), and Nigeria local (and thus suspect), the latter's pursuit of fairer terms of trade could be seen as necessarily unscrupulous and self-serving—in a word, corrupt.²²

Upon its establishment in 1975, the MPAA's Film Security Office, an anti-piracy agency with numerous branches around the world, raised concerns about the Nigerian market, fearing the "government's desire to take in a greater share of the profits" from the exhibition of Hollywood films.²³ The signs of Nigeria's growing resistance to Hollywood's trade policies were impossible to ignore by the end of the 1970s, when they began to assume a diversity of forms following the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). Held in Lagos in early 1977, this "black cultural Olympics" was a source of considerable frustration for the city's residents, many of whom balked at high ticket prices and the presence of armed guards in and around the newly completed National Theatre, with its ultramodern screening rooms (fully equipped with 16mm, 35mm, and 70mm projectors), a closed-circuit television system, and eight interpreters' booths.²⁴ More, perhaps, than any other development, the construction of the National Theatre—and, specifically, the facility's outfitting for FESTAC—foretold the emergence of multiplex chains in Nigeria. So, of course, did the festival's controversial inclusion of so many American films, precisely those national products that would dominate the multiplexes upon the latter's introduction in the early years of the twenty-first century.²⁵

As a Black-minority country, the United States had to be incorporated (along with Canada) as a "Black community"—part of the North American zone—in FESTAC's complicated administrative organization. Nevertheless, American cinema would be well represented, its entries far outnumbering those of the host country. This was a rather scandalous (yet scarcely surprising) state of affairs that led the *New York Times* to assert in its coverage of the festival that the "film industry is still embryonic in black Africa."²⁶ As the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* had demonstrated two decades earlier, the conditions for the development of a truly indigenous cinema in Nigeria were virtually nonexistent, and little had changed since 1957. But was African cinema, as a whole, really "embryonic" in the late 1970s? Certainly far more Black African films were available than were

eventually programmed at FESTAC. With its global focus leading to a disproportionate emphasis on American cultural production, the festival would only reinforce the impression of African cinematic scarcity in the face of Hollywood excess.²⁷ The fruits of a booming oil economy and of a related desire to project Nigeria's modernizing potential, the National Theatre's two state-of-the-art cinema halls were designed, in part, to accommodate Hollywood films.²⁸ The first chairman of FESTAC's North American zone, Ossie Davis, began his tenure just two years after the release of his hit 1970 film *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (distributed by United Artists), and he helped secure private-sector support as well as funding from the US Department of State.²⁹

FESTAC organizers actively solicited CinemaScope films and other wide-gauge productions associated with the major Hollywood studios.³⁰ At the same time, they refused to consider 8mm and Super 8 submissions, thus anticipating the blatantly anti-Nollywood gatekeeping strategies of later African film festivals, including FESPACO, which barred both analog and digital video formats until 2015, effectively preventing Nollywood's inclusion (and reinforcing the impression of the industry as strictly a small-screen affair).³¹ FESTAC's directors even went so far as to adjust the festival's two-films-per-participating-country policy in order to accommodate the prolific Hollywood studios, which were instructed to apply to the International Secretariat if they wanted to "present more [than two] films."³²

Ultimately, a total of twenty-one American films, of varying relationships to studio capital, screened in the National Theatre's two air-conditioned, eight-hundred-seat cinema halls, as well as at Glover Hall (1,500 seats) and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (388 seats), between mid-January and mid-February 1977.³³ These included films typically studied in relation to Blaxploitation and the broader Black cinema boom of the 1970s, such as Sidney Poitier's *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974); Michael Schultz's *Cooley High* (1975) and *Car Wash* (1976); Michael Campus's *The Education of Sonny Carson* (1974); Gordon Parks's *Leadbelly* (1976); and Ivan Dixon's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1973).³⁴ Many of these films were distributed by major Hollywood studios, including Paramount, Warner Bros., and Columbia. By contrast, Larry Clark's fifty-two-minute, 16mm drama *As Above, So Below* (1973), which also screened at FESTAC, is now celebrated as an early contribution to the countercinema movement known as the L.A. Rebellion. Its presence in Lagos testifies to the dogged efforts of some of the movement's members to break into the international festival circuit.³⁵ Along with *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* and the activist documentary *A Luta Continua* (Robert F. Van Lierop, 1973), Clark's film stands out among the FESTAC selections for its radical political and social critique. Conceivably, it countered or at least complicated the impression of Hollywood hegemony (including over Black cinematic expression) and American state support that the festival seemed largely to provide.³⁶

Other American entries sat uneasily between the two poles represented by the crowd-pleasing likes of the Poitier comedies and the oppositional efforts of Clark, Dixon, and Van Lierop. Directed by Woody King, Jr., the family drama *The Long Night* (1976) was produced by King's own production company and, as Jonathan Munby points out, mishandled by Howard Mahler Films, "a small-time distribution company for mainly exploitation material."³⁷ Retitling it *Steely Brown*, the company gave *The Long Night* an extremely limited domestic release. That it ended up at FESTAC is an indication of the distributor's last-ditch efforts to see a return on its investment—a symbol of the resuscitative potential of a country where individual films, and the medium of cinema itself, have periodically been reborn.³⁸

Unlike the more familiar festival model of compensating filmmakers with mere exposure and the possibility of a distribution deal, FESTAC was offering mainly revivals, and organizers were able to pay distributors' fees with various funds, however irregular and ill-gotten (the products of what Andrew Apter refers to as "the euphoric marriage of oil and culture").³⁹ It is unclear how much, say, Larry Clark was paid for *As Above, So Below*, or whether distributors were able to share box-office revenues (reportedly considerable) with the National Theatre. Such opacity derives from the general difficulty of determining FESTAC's precise expenditures, as well as who, exactly, benefitted from stolen funds, misused assets, and other un- or underreported exchanges. It is, however, highly unlikely that the major studios Warner Bros. (which distributed the smash hit *Uptown Saturday Night*), Columbia (which distributed *Buck and the Preacher*), and Paramount (which distributed *The Education of Sonny Carson* and, controversially, *Leadbelly*) failed to negotiate terms favorable to them, especially given their active, coercive presence on the ground in Lagos, and the "kickbacks and corruption"—the diffuse "culture of contracting"—characteristic of FESTAC and the broader oil economy.⁴⁰ What some Nigerian commentators referred to as the festival's "dirty and secret deals" almost certainly encompassed interactions with Hollywood studios well versed in such unscrupulous practices.⁴¹

What Apter calls "mercurial money forms" were central to FESTAC's organization: "the quasi-mystical character of petro-naira" reliably filled the coffers of foreign companies, including those associated with Hollywood cinema, and drove "a peculiar form of deficit production disguised by the appearance of material progress."⁴² Such an impression was secured, in part, not only through the National Theatre's state-of-the-art cinema halls but also through organizers' controversial and widely circulated calls for CinemaScope revivals and other reminders of Hollywood's spectacular achievements. What better way to signal Nigeria's modernity, organizers and other pro-FESTAC factions wondered, than through the fluid accommodation of heavily capitalized Hollywood films? The festival was, however, obliged to strike a delicate balance between projecting moneyed modernity (including through the screening of star-studded studio films like *Uptown*

Saturday Night) and acknowledging such smaller, artisanal works as *A Luta Continua* and *As Above, So Below*. As in the ever-contentious discourses surrounding Blaxploitation, debates over Blackness were central to FESTAC's organization and implementation. The festival's "horizons of blackness" unmistakably extended to Hollywood, as oil revenues invariably fell into a wide variety of private hands, leaving some commentators to complain that, far from true champions of Black cultural production, American asset holders doing business with FESTAC were "by and large . . . cold, unsympathetic and only committed to the dollar," a reality of which members of the North American zone were only too aware.⁴³ Indeed, it was partly in response to these political-economic conditions that future filmmaker Hubert Ogunde withdrew from FESTAC, resigning from the festival's subcommittee in protest.⁴⁴

The list of films screened at FESTAC should thus be seen as representing a kind of compromise between the requirements of Hollywood capital—of powerful rights holders—and the cultural aspirations of Black American artists and intellectuals. As the career of Larry Clark makes clear, the two were not necessarily one and the same. Proponents of Clark's *As Above, So Below* and other independently produced films faced an uphill battle against Hollywood studios, many of which enjoyed direct lines to Lagos, having long since established branch offices there. As Apter points out, films reached FESTAC "following vertical channels of national distribution rather than popular interest and demand."⁴⁵ A total of only five Nigerian films screened at FESTAC—less than a quarter of the number of American films selected. These included the documentaries *God Dance, Man Dance* (Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, 1975), *T.B. Can Be Cured* (Federal Film Division, ca. 1976), and *2,000 Years of Nigerian Art* (1977), which Tunde Kuboye made while serving as head of the audiovisual section of the National Museum in Lagos. The rest of the slate comprised the historical epics *Shehu Umar* (Adamu Halilu, 1976), an adaptation of Tafawa Balewa's novel, and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (ca. 1977), a filmed record of a performance of Ola Rotimi's play about the Benin Expedition of 1897, which resulted in the theft and relocation to the British Museum of the very sculptural portrait chosen as the official symbol of FESTAC. (Eddie Ugbomah's 1979 film *The Mask* would similarly address the "incarceration" of Black art in museums, focusing on what had come to be known as "the FESTAC mask.")⁴⁶ Produced by the federal government, *Shehu Umar* was Nigeria's official entry for FESTAC, but the film screened only once, toward the end of the festival; even the white-directed *The Education of Sonny Carson* received more screenings, no doubt because it had Paramount, whose Nigerian distribution office was not far from the National Theatre, behind it.⁴⁷

As the final screening list makes clear, not all of FESTAC's American films were produced beyond the ambit—that is, outside the direct creative control—of the major Hollywood studios. Many were distributed by those very studios, which benefitted both materially and symbolically from the exhibition of their

films at the festival. Pioneering Black filmmakers like Parks and Poitier were, during this period, among the go-to “producers of content for studios that had lost their monopolistic control over the film industry.”⁴⁸ Donald Bogle convincingly refers to their works as “major studio films,” writing, “At heart, these were escapist, nonthreatening, bourgeois yarns.”⁴⁹ The presence of such films at FESTAC was enabled, in part, by the permanent distribution offices that the major Hollywood studios had established in Lagos in the early 1960s. Such branch offices served as reliable conduits not only between Hollywood and commercial theatrical exhibition in Nigeria but also, in 1977, between Hollywood and FESTAC (itself a forum for commercial theatrical exhibition, as the National Theatre’s festival program and other archival documents attest).⁵⁰ Several major studios apparently saw FESTAC as an opportunity to squeeze additional profits out of films that were already hits, such as Warner Bros.’ *Uptown Saturday Night*, or that they had mishandled domestically, such as Columbia’s *Buck and the Preacher* and Paramount’s *The Education of Sonny Carson* and *Leadbelly*.⁵¹ In at least one case, however, studio capital opted out of this remunerative process: the ailing UA, which no longer had offices in Lagos by the 1970s, had, in a much-debated move, pulled *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* from commercial theatrical exhibition in the United States and later relinquished all distribution rights.

This does not mean, however—as is typically assumed—that the film was withheld from legal commercial circulation for the next thirty years.⁵² Its resurfacing at FESTAC was, in fact, a function of the efforts of writer-producer Sam Greenlee, who, in acquiring ownership of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, also gained a new distributor, the Black-owned American Transcontinental Pictures (ATP). If (to quote *Jet* magazine) “a major white studio”—UA—had mishandled the film, “a Black distributing company”—ATP—was not only managing to “put *Spook* back behind theater doors” but also to turn a profit in the process. Targeting Black-owned cinemas in Memphis and Louisville, ATP also set its sights on FESTAC, booking *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* in the National Theatre’s Cinema Hall II over three years after its US premiere—a fact that, for whatever reason, Dixon and Greenlee failed to mention in later interviews, during which they insisted that their film wasn’t screened publicly for three decades after UA and the FBI allegedly destroyed all prints but Dixon’s original negative.⁵³ Ironically, Dixon had previously portrayed Nigerian student Joseph Asagai in the film adaptation of Lorraine Hansberry’s play *A Raisin in the Sun* (Daniel Petrie, 1961), which offers a memorable endorsement of the promise of Nigerian independence. After Walter Lee Younger (Sidney Poitier) squanders his family’s much-needed insurance money, his sister Beneatha (Diana Sands) complains, “He gave away my future!” It is a measure of Nigeria’s midcentury potential that the film, like the play, can present the country as compensatory—as, that is, eminently capable of restoring what Beneatha has lost to her brother’s misadventures. Dixon’s Asagai offers the young woman a chance to start life anew in Nigeria, an opportunity that Beneatha

seriously considers, even as she recognizes that Nigerians “need . . . salvation from the foreigners on their lands.”

Dixon’s *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* was among the cinematic foreigners taking up considerable screen space at FESTAC, where all English-language films—from Poitier’s *Buck and the Preacher* to the Nigerian government’s own *T.B. Can Be Cured*—had to be subtitled in French.⁵⁴ Favoring subtitling over dubbing, the former being the far cheaper option for distributors, the festival took an allegedly majoritarian approach to the matter of translation, favoring two widely spoken European languages and excluding all others, at least from subtitle tracks. At the level of language, then, this “black cultural Olympics” came nowhere close to what Cinestar’s Multitrax system had promised to make possible for multilingual Nigerians nearly two decades earlier.

Wole Soyinka alludes to such a failure in his acidulous critique of FESTAC, which “offered a narrowed-down, reductionist aspect of culture in a gargantuan orgy of ill-organized spectacles.” For Soyinka, Hollywood is implicated—as both cultural-ideological fount and political-economic formation—in “those extravagant fields of ‘Festacian’ revelry,” on which “complex, enriching offerings were relegated to token, or symbolic, expositions, starved of funds and given scant coverage even in the media, and were finally relegated to the archives of that supra-cultural monstrosity known as the National Theatre.”⁵⁵ Translation into more than just English and French was certainly technologically possible even for FESTAC, whose organizers had aggressively publicized the outfitting of the National Theatre (including the 1,600 seats at Cinema Halls I and II) with devices for the delivery of simultaneous translation into six languages. But it was not pursued for cinematic offerings, leading at least one critic to complain of a lack of linguistic diversity.⁵⁶

While the US State Department’s sponsorship of FESTAC was hardly uncontroversial (echoing *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, some Nigerian newspapers even “warned that the U.S. delegation contained CIA agents who were out to ‘destroy the unity of black peoples’”), it was continuous with Hollywood’s general, ongoing efforts to infiltrate the Nigerian market.⁵⁷ The State Department clearly understood the festival’s potential significance as cultural terrain on which a Cold War battle could be fought—and, with Hollywood’s help, won. Yet if the list of American films screened at FESTAC suggests an ambiguous, even blatantly contradictory collection of representational techniques—a far cry from the unequivocal anticommunism of *The Mark of the Hawk* and other monotonous capitalist cudgels—that is because of ongoing tensions between the State Department and the North American zonal committee. Such agitation ultimately ensured that Paramount and Warner Bros. properties would be screened alongside far less conventional works.⁵⁸

Even if the major Hollywood studios had not been solidly entrenched in Lagos, they would likely still have succumbed to the impulse to exploit FESTAC, the corrupt lead-up to which, Steven Pierce argues, constituted a major inducement to foreigners to do business in Nigeria. Citing the so-called “cement armada” of 1974,

when an oversupply of overpriced cement—half the world’s stock, in fact—choked the Port of Lagos, Pierce suggests that the scandal “served as a demonstration of the possibilities available to Westerners of Nigerian corruption,” catalyzing “illicit contacts between Nigerian officials and foreigners.”⁵⁹ Hollywood’s monopolization of FESTAC screens was, however, less a measure of the legacy of the cement armada than an instance of business as usual—and neither the first nor the last example of the industry’s willingness to take advantage of discourses of global Blackness in Nigeria. As Jemima Pierre points out, such discourses have long demonstrated the “significance of Africa’s racialization to the articulation of modern processes,” including of capital accumulation. Celebrating the “Black World” on the occasion of FESTAC, Hollywood merely “reinforced Africa’s marginalization,” much as it had through the earlier exploitation of decolonization (epitomized by the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*), and much as it would with the continental “saturation release” of Disney’s *Black Panther* in 2018.⁶⁰

CREATING A “CINEMATIC WASTELAND”

The MPAA’s sanctioning of the Second Republic in 1981, just four years after FESTAC, stands as a stark reminder of what can happen when states fail to accede to Hollywood’s specific demands. The Shagari administration’s attempts to resist and redirect the industry’s hegemony were, in part, responses to perceived fissures in the American political-economic system. As Fred L. Block puts it, “when a hegemonic power is at its height, other nations are usually respectful toward the global rules that are pushed by the hegemon. But when other nations see the great power struggling, they are more likely to find ways to work around or even directly violate the rules.”⁶¹ When the Second Republic seized Hollywood assets, it was in the wake of global inflation, a global profit squeeze, and—perhaps most significantly—the Vietnamese military victory over the United States, precisely the kind of “rebel win” anticipated in *A Luta Continua* and other anti-imperialist films screened at FESTAC.⁶² A reckoning must have seemed possible.

Hollywood’s subsequent estrangement from Nigeria coincided with the administrations of presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton, and thus with the shift from a certain style of cultural diplomacy—one that, in the name of Cold War concerns, centralized Africa as a strategic site and potential partner—to a period in which, as Penny Von Eschen points out, Africa was the source merely of a “grudging alliance” and the victim of devastating IMF-World Bank structural adjustment policies.⁶³ Yet those very policies helped pave the way for the return of theatrical exhibition in Nigeria in the twenty-first century, facilitating various un- or under-regulated development schemes, some of them involving the direct participation of North American companies like IMAX, with its “chain of large-screen theaters that involve massive projection systems.”⁶⁴ “From the Reagan era onward, American leadership was determined to reassert political

and economic hierarchies,” writes Von Eschen, and it is precisely as such a reassertion—a forceful underscoring of global terms of trade—that Hollywood’s renewed attention to Nigeria’s exhibition sector should be viewed.⁶⁵

The relative slump in commercial theatrical exhibition that characterized the roughly twenty years between the end of the oil boom and the transition to Nigeria’s Fourth Republic may have inspired the emergence of Nollywood as a paracinematic phenomenon committed to circumventing traditional media distribution streams with a straight-to-video panache. But it also cultivated an impression of Nigeria as—cinematically speaking—occupying an eccentric order of time, beyond or behind a global North increasingly dotted with opulent multiplexes. Such opulence, the worldwide establishment of ever more screens strategically linked to various practices of extracinematic consumption, has long benefited Hollywood at the expense of established and emergent national film industries. Hollywood’s outsize success in Britain in the 1920s was, for example, partly attributable to the construction of “luxury picture palaces,” including the two-thousand-seat Tivoli Picture Theatre on the Strand (taken over by MGM/Loews in 1925, three years before the company opened its Empire Theatre in Leicester Square), the neoclassical Capitol Theatre on the Haymarket, and Paramount’s plush Plaza Theatre on Lower Regent Street.⁶⁶

“The Americans, with their impressive supply of Hollywood pictures, have the necessary tank power to put native exhibitors at their mercy,” read a 1937 editorial in *World Film News*. “They are using it remorselessly.”⁶⁷ Tying Hollywood’s supply to the demand manufactured through the global construction of ever larger and more “attractive” theaters, the editorial rightly stressed the industry’s capacity to benefit from the steady expansion of moviegoing opportunities, particularly in “developing” and “re-building” economies. In the postwar period, Hollywood’s global hegemony only grew, thanks in no small measure to the IMF agenda of prying open new markets for US investors and preventing less powerful nation-states from restricting cross-border capital flows.⁶⁸ Nigeria’s roughly twenty-year dislocation from Hollywood expansionism has made the return of commercial theatrical exhibition—and, more specifically, the emergence of the multiplexes—a cause for considerable celebration, akin, perhaps, to the return to democratic rule, with which it is historically isomorphic and through which it is so frequently metaphorized. Formal democratization and the capitalized expansion of moviegoing opportunities are thus seen as overdue developments, the well-earned rewards of a population long manacled by military rule and social unrest.

The notion that Nigeria is deserving of consumerist “upgrades,” even those whose main economic beneficiaries are to be found far beyond the country’s geopolitical borders, has deep roots in cultural studies. In 1958, Stuart Hall suggested that the developing world’s “belated” embrace of consumer electronics constituted “a legitimate materialism, born out of centuries of physical deprivation and want.”⁶⁹ Throughout the immediate postwar period, however, several left-leaning

publications stressed the dangers of such materialism, however understandable as a response to colonial modes of dispossession, and particularly as it came to be compatible with the aims of emergent neocolonial power structures.⁷⁰ The oligopolistic fields of film distribution and exhibition offered, and offer still, striking illustrations of economic and cultural asymmetries couched in the mystifying terms of a “legitimate materialism.”

Another, more juridical discourse of legitimacy has further informed efforts to construct the big screen in Nigeria. The materialism of postcolonial Africans may have been perfectly legitimate (in Hall’s terms), but it hardly mattered to Hollywood if it could not generate profits for the industry—if, that is, it circumvented copyright and other protections. In September 1984, a US Senate subcommittee on international copyright defended the MPAA’s decision to withdraw from Nigeria, where, it contended, “copyright problems” abounded, along with “violations of territorial distribution limitations.” The Nigerian state’s attempt to benefit materially from the unauthorized circulation of lawfully imported films (including in “unofficial” nontheatrical venues that were beyond the scope of Hollywood’s surveillance) had been a cause for considerable concern for the past several years—at least since Columbia secured a Christmas 1978 release for Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) at the National Theatre in Lagos. (Prints of the Spielberg blockbuster were believed to be likely targets of piracy.) The MPAA was also, as ever, worried about the underreporting of box-office grosses (a duplicitous practice that was far from unique to exhibitors in Nigeria).⁷¹ Invoking the country’s previous contributions to Hollywood profits, the 1984 Senate subcommittee went on to argue, “Nigeria is a state in which foreign copyright holders would expect to receive ‘adequate and effective’ protection. Yet it is a place where they do not find such protection and piracy flourishes.”⁷²

In the eyes of the MPAA, the spike in piracy that accompanied the transition to the Second Republic was coterminous with—even motivated by—the attempts of the Shagari administration to “indigenize” film distribution and exhibition. Historians have—with good reason—tended to situate these indigenization decrees among the merely symbolic and otherwise “half-hearted attempts to reorder cinema policy in independent Nigeria.”⁷³ As Hyginus Ekwuazi put it in 1987, “nothing changed—other . . . than the names of the companies. . . . Essentially, the pulse has remained the same: foreign.”⁷⁴ As outlined by Shagari and others, the goal of indigenization “was to place ‘control’ of the economy in the hands of Nigerians, and ensure that they [would be] the main beneficiaries of the country’s resources,” which included moviegoers: ticket buyers who could, as a direct consequence of cinema spectatorship, become consumers of any number of other items.⁷⁵ Indigenization is not the same as nationalization (which implies a transfer of economic ownership to the state). The former, by contrast, was, in the case of Nigeria in the 1970s and early 1980s, “part of an overall program of elite accumulation,” and, as such, it did little to diminish dependency.⁷⁶ “As long as foreign

capital and technology remained the preferred means of economic development,” writes Eghosa Osaghae, “indigenization could only mean a process that allowed the Nigerian capitalist class to work out more acceptable terms of ‘compradorization’ with its foreign benefactors.”⁷⁷

In cinematic terms, it meant the attempted acquisition of a significant percentage of the box-office earnings of imported Hollywood films. It did not mean the establishment of a well-funded national film industry, despite the wishful efforts of some members of the Shagari administration to suggest that revenues from the exhibition of Hollywood blockbusters could reliably subsidize indigenous filmmaking. If anyone would benefit from indigenization’s effects on film distribution and exhibition, it was Lebanese and Indian exhibitors, not all of whom were naturalized Nigerian citizens. Ultimately, however, AMPECA was able to receive a deferment, and finally a complete exemption from indigenization—another major policy failure.

It was amid the general confusions and embarrassments of indigenization that the Shagari administration, which came to power in 1979, simply seized all of the profits that had not yet been remitted to the Hollywood studios contracted to receive them (albeit via the flagrantly asymmetrical arrangements that AMPECA had been securing since 1962). When, as a direct response, the MPAA condemned Nigeria and urged member studios to pull out of the country, the association’s actions seemed to confirm not just the bargaining failures of the Shagari administration but also Nigeria’s extreme dependence on imports. As the economist J.F.E. Ohiorhenuan put it at the end of the 1980s, “the indigenization program merely consolidated and generalized the dependent insertion of the Nigerian economy into the international economy.”⁷⁸ The MPAA, which had been conducting a major antipiracy drive since 1975, managed to estimate monetary losses due to Shagari’s indigenization measures (member studios were said to have missed out on a total of \$25 million), allowing it to put a number to an otherwise general sense of Nigerian corruption, which it nevertheless continued to invoke as a means of shaming a country deemed “treacherous.”⁷⁹

In the early 1980s, when the US Department of State began to issue “bold warnings about fraud in its advice to travelers and businesspeople contemplating visits to Nigeria,”⁸⁰ the sordid story of Shagari’s “theft” of Hollywood profits served as a useful distraction. It was, among other things, a means of deflecting from the fact that an American corporation, Stinnes Interoil, which had contracted with the Shagari administration to extract Nigerian oil and reimport refined petroleum products, owed Nigeria a whopping \$157 million.⁸¹ S.J. Timothy-Asobele has convincingly suggested that the MPAA was also seeking to publicly penalize Nigeria for the “downturn in fortunes” that immediately followed the oil boom—for, that is, an “economic predicament” that prevented local exhibitors from being able to afford Hollywood’s persistently steep rental fees in a political-economic climate of near-complete dependence on oil revenues.⁸²

Even as it emphasized Nigerian corruption, the 1984 Senate subcommittee cited the country's stubborn "promise":

Nigeria has long been at the forefront of Anglophone African states in the recognition of the rights of foreign authors and copyright owners through international agreements. . . . Since 1962, Nigeria has adhered to the UCC [the Universal Copyright Convention, first adopted in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1952]. Unlike the case with other former colonies of the United Kingdom, Nigeria did not have the UCC extended to its territory by act of the colonial power. As a result, the United States has direct copyright relations with Nigeria.⁸³

The language of diplomacy—of building and maintaining "good relations"—was designed to suggest that Hollywood had been "misled" and "let down" by the suddenly "protectionist" Nigerian state. It was meant to distract from the ironic reality that, while preaching free-market fundamentalism, Hollywood had been employing "closed" tactics in Nigeria, all under the banner of "trade facilitation," which, as Yash Tandon puts it, is typically "exploited by the developed countries to pry open developing countries' economies under the excuse that they are 'simply' helping the developing countries to become more efficient in carrying out trade and getting integrated into the globalized market."⁸⁴ The MPAA had even, upon the issuance of the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree No. 4 in 1972, allowed AMPECA's name to eventually be changed to "the National Film Distribution Company (NFDC)." This was admittedly a merely superficial transformation (particularly considering the common practice of "fronting," or getting Nigerians to serve as smokescreens for foreign ownership), but one that required Hollywood's consent, and that therefore gives the lie to the MPAA's later claim that it was blindsided by indigenization efforts.⁸⁵

"Let Nigerians distribute films!" proclaimed a correspondent for the Nigerian *Daily Times* in 1979, responding to the persistence of Hollywood domination even after the indigenization decree.⁸⁶ Referring to the ongoing "Lebanisation [and] Indianisation of the Nigerian . . . motion picture industry in spite of the Indigenisation or Nigerianisation Decree of 1972," Timothy-Asobele pointed to the paradoxical heart of the matter. In permitting naturalized Nigerian citizens of Asian and Levantine descent to count as "indigenous," the decree had merely perpetuated Hollywood's stranglehold on the national market for motion pictures—the very cartelization that AMPECA had always epitomized. Foreign-born theater owners, newly classified as "indigenous," continued to sign affiliate contracts to exhibit films produced and distributed by the major Hollywood studios.⁸⁷ In other instances, the Nigerian-born simply "fronted" for American expatriates who, thanks to this practice, retained effective control.⁸⁸

As a result of the purportedly surprising actions of the Shagari administration, the Nigerian market was subjected to sanctions, a fairly familiar state of affairs by the early 1980s. The MPAA wanted Nigeria to demonstrate a renewed

commitment to the neoliberal model at the very moment at which the federal government, in the guise of the ill-fated Second Republic, and however confusedly, was trying to alter some of the conditions of its participation in the world economy. “One way in which a government can make us withdraw is to change the rules of the game such that it is no longer commercial to be there,” declared John Jennings, chairman of Shell, in 1997. “That hardly ever happens, but there is a perpetual tension—a natural tension—between the benefit to the investor and the government take.”⁸⁹ Viewed in this light, the MPAA’s sudden estrangement from Nigeria was merely symptomatic of the “perpetual tension” that Jennings describes—part of the naturalized “give and take” between foreign capital and the Nigerian government (whatever its composition at a given time).

Thus even as the MPAA imposed an embargo on Nigeria, US exports to the country were increasing by a factor of ten—an attempt to offset the trade deficit created by US reliance on Nigerian oil. Between 1989 and 1995—roughly speaking, the period of Nollywood’s emergence—Nigeria was the dominant source of US net income from foreign investment in Africa south of the Sahara. In 1992, the year of Kenneth Nneue’s seminal *Living in Bondage*, US investment in the country generated \$620 million in net income, a figure that would grow to nearly \$800 million by 1995.⁹⁰ Despite this dramatic rise in private US investment in the Nigerian economy, the MPAA’s annual *Worldwide Anti-Piracy Newsletter*, produced in collaboration with the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA), reserved particular opprobrium for Nigeria during the Babangida regime (1985–93), citing Hollywood’s many “difficulties” there.⁹¹

Nigerian theater owners faced their own difficulties during this period—not least of all because the loss of Hollywood films meant the programming of more “third-rate” features from around the world.⁹² A less disputable factor, however, was the rise of moving-image alternatives to theatrical film. “Some people still prefer going to Cinema houses to enjoy watching films inspite [sic] of the popularity of Television and Video cassettes,” claimed a Nigerian publication in 1985, though it conceded that, in Lagos, the “availability of video sets have [sic] reduced the patronage of cinema houses by the middle class.” These theaters included a few fully air-conditioned facilities characterized by thrice-daily screenings and a steady supply of American films.⁹³

Yet the death of theatrical exhibition seemed imminent. “The millennium,” writes Jon Lewis, “promised a sort of cosmic spring-cleaning. Cinema loomed as a possible casualty.”⁹⁴ By the 1990s, however, Nollywood had arrived to offer alternative forms of production and consumption, lending substance to Lewis’s claim that the decade marked “not the end of cinema but rather a transitional period from one new . . . cinema to another.” Such a transition was arguably more extreme, more decisive, in Nigeria than in the United States. Nollywood’s pioneers had indeed established “new material conditions under which film history [could] persist.” Lewis’s watchwords (“flexibility,” “resilience”) well describe the industry’s

inaugural mettle, even if it was seen at the time as contributing to the obsolescence of theatrical film. “Declining patronage and intense competition from video films may push cinema houses [to close],” worried the *African Concord* in 1994.⁹⁵ Nollywood was, however, arguably more symptom than cause of such dire conditions, and it would weather in its own ways the depredations of the Abacha regime. The industry’s success, ironically enough, would establish some of the groundwork for the eventual return to Nigeria of commercial theatrical film, spotlighting the country as an indisputable media capital.

THE MULTIPLEX ARRIVES— AND HOLLYWOOD RETURNS

In 2004, at the dawn of Nigeria’s multiplex era, when crude oil prices hit record highs, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) reflected on the previous two decades, during which, the agency claimed, “almost no foreign feature films [were] distributed” in Nigeria and “movie theaters ceased to operate.” Recognizing that conditions in the Nigerian market had “worsened dramatically” following the MPAA’s withdrawal from the country, the USTR appeared to blame the MPAA’s decision on a generalized Nigerian corruption, while simultaneously attempting to attract American investment in the newly revitalized “distribution and exhibition sector.”⁹⁶ Since 2016, the MPAA has consistently referred to New Nollywood (specifically, the exhibition on multiplex screens of big-budget Nigerian films) as representing “a stunning renaissance”—hyperbolic rhetoric meant to tout the emergence of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the global South.⁹⁷ The MPAA’s sudden pro-Nigeria stance marks, of course, a major turnaround from its earlier pathologization of the country. By the early 1980s, the MPAA was aggrieved by more than just the (technically) illegal seizure of the assets of its member studios. Motivated by Shagari’s failure to fulfill campaign promises—and, in particular, to raise the national minimum wage—the general strike of May 1981 directly affected film exhibition in Nigeria. Its participants included theater employees: grossly underpaid (and, in some cases, completely uncompensated) box-office attendants, ushers, and custodians, most of them from the air-conditioned cinemas of Lagos. Such participation undoubtedly led to a (further) decline in ticket sales.

The government’s inability (or refusal) to prevent Indian and Lebanese theater owners from exploiting labor—even as it promised to enforce indigenization decrees—was one of many justifications for the strike.⁹⁸ For its part, the MPAA has a long history of responding to foreign strikes by immediately suspending exports. The policy dates back at least to 1964, when the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA), created by MPAA president Eric Johnston in 1945, banned exports to Mexico after workers in that country’s film laboratories went on strike. In August 1964, the Mexican government had introduced a law requiring prints of imported

films to be made in Mexican laboratories, at the expense of the films' distributors, who were accustomed to finding—and negotiating—better deals much closer to home. MPEA member companies immediately objected, and, in their aggressive efforts to invalidate the law, inspired workers to strike. As in the case of Nigeria nearly twenty years later, the MPAA imposed a ban on exports, citing “chaotic” and otherwise untenable local conditions, which would need to “improve” before the association's member studios could be expected to return to do business.⁹⁹

In 1981, the MPAA swiftly banned all cinematic exports to Nigeria, worked with the U.S. Department of State, the World Intellectual Property Organization, and Interpol to facilitate the seizure of all Hollywood film prints that remained in the country, and, as Brian Larkin has pointed out, ensured the creation of vast infrastructures of piracy designed to fill the resulting cinematic gap.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, these pirate infrastructures—including vast cassette duplication factories (like *Transerve*, a massive facility established in Lagos in 1994)—would enable the emergence of the Nollywood industry, as equipment used to illicitly reproduce withheld Hollywood products was increasingly given over to content generated locally.¹⁰¹

The MPAA's exclusion of the Nigerian market lasted well past the country's disastrous adoption of structural adjustment programs in the mid-1980s, as cinemas—stripped of the ability to legally screen Hollywood films—were shuttered, urban crime surged, and Nigeria became an international pariah state amid the rise to power of Sani Abacha, whose dictatorship lasted from 1993 until 1998. The MPAA finally lifted the ban on exports to Nigeria after the return to civilian rule in 1999, but this was at best a symbolic gesture. There were no major, projection-ready movie houses left in the country—just a smattering of quasi-theatrical facilities equipped to screen the occasional Nollywood video for paying audiences, along with mobile cinema vans (complete with hooded screens for daytime projection) and the usual nontheatrical spaces like schools and churches. It was not until 2004, with the construction of the first multiplex in Nigeria (the *Silverbird Galleria* on swank Victoria Island), that the viability of the Nigerian market was fully restored in the eyes of the MPAA, which promptly authorized and carefully oversaw the distribution of Hollywood films to a Lagos that, in cinematic terms, seemed to be rebounding at a remarkable rate.

The balance of power between Lebanese and Nigerian theater owners finally began to shift in the latter's favor around 2004, when the Lagos City Mall, constructed in the Onikan district of Lagos Island, was launched by a Lebanese company that soon faced considerable financial difficulties. These threatened the mall's two theater screens, located in relatively small, side-by-side auditoria on the second of the mall's three floors.¹⁰² By the time the *Silverbird Group*, a Nigerian multinational conglomerate, opened its first galleria—complete with a state-of-the-art multiplex occupying three floors of retail space—in May 2004, the Lebanese enterprise behind the Lagos City Mall was insolvent. It was forced to sell the mall to *Ibukun Efundayo & Co.*, a Nigerian real estate company with deep roots

on Lagos Island and a plan to indigenize the facility's retailers, including its twin exhibition spaces. The mall's cinema, like its restaurants and boutiques, struggled to attract customers over the next decade, owing to an array of factors, including the persistence of business arrangements with Lebanese distributors, which predated the sale of the mall and which precluded the exhibition of Nigerian films, even as competing theater chains, like Silverbird's, began to regularly offer such films in 2009. Thus the modest two-screen cinema at the Lagos City Mall continued to show relatively low-budget Indian and Chinese films even as its multiscreen counterparts came to rely on both Hollywood and New Nollywood "event" films.

Uncompetitive offerings were not the only elements stymieing the cinema at the Lagos City Mall, however. Onikan is hardly considered a prime retail location, and prices at the mall have never been appreciably lower than those on nearby Victoria Island, with its greater cachet and capacity to magnetize the affluent. In a desperate effort to keep pace with the Silverbird Galleria, the Lagos City Mall began a massive renovation and rebranding effort, attempting to transform itself into what its owners called "a lifestyle shopping destination"—a place to discover and acquire "trends and style."¹⁰³ In 2013, Ibukun Efuntayo & Co. began buying out the leases of various retailers, aggressively advertising the newly vacant spaces in the hope of acquiring higher-end tenants. In June of that year, the mall's cinema, which had fallen into disrepair (and which had eliminated the vast majority of its employees in an effort to save money), was abruptly shut down, much to the chagrin of Lebanese distributors and local filmgoers alike—particularly those who had grown accustomed to the discount ticket and concession prices offered during the Christmas season. The following year, the mall's owners sold its cinema to the Genesis Group, a Nigerian conglomerate established in 1991. Initially focused on restaurants and hotels, the Genesis Group diversified into cinema in 2008, establishing Genesis Deluxe Cinemas (GDC), a theater chain whose corporate partners include Coca-Cola, Fidelity, LG, and Visa. Genesis Deluxe locations are known for their multimillion-naira escalators and lobbies that feature LG's OLED 4K TVs—flat and curved screens on which film trailers and Coke commercials tempt patrons to purchase tickets and concessions.

The Genesis Group is among Silverbird's chief competitors. In 2008, partly in response to the establishment of the Genesis chain, the Silverbird Group acquired the Ceddi Plaza Mall in Abuja. The following year, it opened the twelve-screen Silverbird Entertainment Center in that city. Ben Murray-Bruce, chairman of the Silverbird Group, called this "a retail revolution," adding, "A young Nigerian today would rather dress up and go to the mall than hang around in the market"—a site-specific criticism of Old Nollywood, with its reliance on street vendors and its orientation toward home viewing.¹⁰⁴ Yet this so-called "revolution"—the migration of big-screen cinema to the shopping mall—was well underway in the United States in the 1980s, when Nigeria's single-screen theaters began to close, one by one, until virtually none were left. In the latter country, as in the former, linking mall and

movie theater would require massive investments and the participation of a wide range of players. Based in London, the private equity firm Actis backed the Persianas Group, a Nigerian real estate investment company with a plan to contribute to Murray-Bruce's "retail revolution." Founded in 1990 and headquartered on Victoria Island, the Persianas Group had, by the twenty-first century, turned its attentions to large-screen cinema. In 2005, with Actis' help, it began developing the seven-acre Palms Shopping Mall along the Lekki-Epe Expressway. South Africa's Shoprite, the largest food retailer on the continent, is an "anchor tenant," but the Palms Mall also boasts a six-screen multiplex operated by Genesis Deluxe Cinemas, which takes up the entire top floor. Rental income from the Genesis Group allowed Persianas to buy out Actis in 2008. To this day, the Palms Mall remains powerfully symbolic of the profitable return of theatrical film to the Nigeria from which the medium had once, for the most part, disappeared.¹⁰⁵

EXPERIMENTING WITH EXHIBITION

By the start of the twenty-first century, some Nollywood filmmakers had begun to pursue theatrical exhibition in their own, idiosyncratic ways. Many of the firms involved in the New Nollywood movement have deep, precedent-setting roots in the industry, as well as crucial theatrical contacts throughout the United Kingdom. Located in Surulere, a middle-class neighborhood in Lagos, Klink Studios is one such establishment. Now a subsidiary of Kingsley Ogoro Productions (the company behind the Nollywood classic *Osuofia in London* [Kingsley Ogoro, 2003]), Klink was founded in the early 1990s, at the very birth of the Nollywood industry, primarily as an equipment-rental service. It continues to serve that function, having replaced its extensive stock of tape-based camcorders with an array of high-end digital recording devices.¹⁰⁶

Like a number of other, similarly structured Nigerian rental companies, Klink regularly acquires equipment from the US-based Red Digital Cinema Camera Company at wholesale prices. For the production of the New Nollywood film *The Mirror Boy* (Obi Emelonye, 2011), Klink provided Red Cameras specially selected by Kingsley Ogoro, an indication of Ogoro's ambition to bridge the gap between Old and New Nollywood by serving as a creative guide and equipment expert. But it also offered expansive consulting services designed to maximize the film's chances of being booked in multiplexes both at home and abroad. Klink was, in fact, instrumental in the pre-sale of the film's exhibition rights to Odeon Cinemas and Empire Cinemas, two theater chains in the United Kingdom. (Odeon is owned by the American chain AMC Theatres, which is itself owned by the Chinese multinational conglomerate Wanda Group; Empire is owned by Irish entrepreneur Thomas Anderson.) Klink's relationship with Odeon Cinemas dates to 2007, when the rental company helped book the then-three-year-old Nollywood film *Across the Niger* (Izu Ojukwu, 2004) in Odeon's Leicester Square and Surrey Quays

multiplexes, two of twenty-five Odeon locations in and around London. It thus established its credentials beyond the equipment-rental sector—specifically, as a new kind of Nigerian public relations firm capable of transforming Nollywood into a multiplex-friendly phenomenon, albeit with the considerable help of several corporate partners.

By 2007, Kingsley Ogoro was firmly in control of Klink Studios. As the producer of *Across the Niger*, he had good reason to want to revive the film, which had been only a modest moneymaker in traditional Nollywood markets—nothing like Ogoro’s smash hit *Osuofia in London*, the rights to which were quickly sold to terrestrial and satellite television as well as to a range of international distributors, including internet companies. Ogoro had long understood the importance of ancillary markets, of expanding the commercial life of a film and wringing additional revenue from a variety of “release windows” (in the case of *Osuofia in London*, VCD and DVD followed by terrestrial and satellite broadcasting and, finally, internet distribution). Three years old in 2007, *Across the Niger* seemed the likeliest of Ogoro’s films to receive a belated theatrical release. Unlike the wildly popular *Osuofia in London*, it was hardly omnipresent in media-rich African and diasporic communities, its relative scarcity such that people might actually be persuaded to go out and see it on the big screen. It is also a “serious,” memorializing film—a combat drama set in 1967, at the outbreak of the Biafran Civil War. It could thus be marketed to diasporic audiences as a thoughtful meditation on their heritage, an educative take on African history, in alleged contrast to “typical” Nollywood entertainments.

In his efforts to bring *Across the Niger* to the multiplexes, Ogoro partnered with the Nigerian businessmen Christian Chukwudozie Udechukwu and Ben Etiaba, entrepreneurs and business-development experts with considerable experience in the United Kingdom. The two men run a limited London-based company called Business in Africa Events, which Udechukwu founded in 2002 as a sort of consultancy firm designed to facilitate the work of Africa-focused organizations in the UK. One such organization was the now-defunct FilmAFRICA (not to be confused with the Royal African Society’s annual film festival, which was established in 2011, or with the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s yearly partnership with the New York African Film Festival). The brainchild of Nigerian businessman Kene Mkpuru, who served as its CEO before turning his attentions to FilmOne and FilmHouse, FilmAFRICA was a British festival without a home when Ogoro and Udechukwu crossed paths with Mkpuru in London. The three men—along with a number of business experts from Klink Studios—formed a team that eventually succeeded in securing theatrical exhibition for *Across the Niger* under the banner of Mkpuru’s African film festival. Udechukwu, with his numerous connections, gained sponsorship from a host of Nigerian and British corporations, which essentially paid for the invitation-only premiere of *Across the Niger* in London’s West End, at Odeon Cinemas’ Leicester Square location.

Establishing a major precedent for New Nollywood success, the Leicester Square premiere of *Across the Niger* was a glitzy red-carpet affair, complete with visiting Nollywood stars and various Nigerian dignitaries, along with live music and traditional dancing. While not, in itself, a moneymaker for Ogoro (since the five hundred tickets to the screening were provided free of charge to “VIPs”), it was instrumental in burnishing the film’s “brand” and, ultimately, in persuading Odeon Cinemas—along with its rival, the London-based Cineworld, the second-largest cinema operator in Europe—to book more Nollywood films as a way of appealing to African diasporic communities. In the process, Mkparu was hired by Odeon to help cultivate audiences for African films, an experience that would compel him to start his own theater chain in Nigeria, a response to the emergence of New Nollywood and, eventually, a major factor in its continued success.

Instructively, Ogoro’s initial attempts to appeal to Odeon Cinemas hinged on the technical innovations of *Across the Niger*, which director Izu Ojukwu edited with then-new software (Microsoft’s Windows Movie Maker) that gave his digital film the grainy look of well-worn celluloid. Highlighting Ojukwu’s facility with a particular Microsoft product, Ogoro and his colleagues knowingly ran the risk of perpetuating Nollywood’s association with a do-it-yourself amateurishness, given the relatively low cost and distinctly user-friendly dimensions of Windows Movie Maker, which requires no formal training and was in fact intended for consumers rather than industry professionals. But the efforts of Ogoro’s team eventually paid off. Odeon Cinemas booked *Across the Niger* on the basis not merely of its marketable connections to Microsoft but also of its serious exploration of Nigerian history—of, specifically, the Biafran Civil War.

While very much an Old Nollywood production in its conception, and particularly in terms of its (scant) financing, Ojukwu’s film nevertheless established some of the conditions of New Nollywood success. Chief among these was a readily definable—and thus widely exploitable—link to a major corporation and a narrative commitment to lofty matters far removed from the realm of witchcraft. Microsoft did not support the film’s production in any formal capacity, but it clearly stood to benefit, however modestly, from the public relations value of a Nigerian feature film that had been edited with its software; Odeon Cinemas could reasonably expect a spike in ticket sales in the event of an acknowledgment from Microsoft (which, in this case, never came). A far more feasible strategy, and one that Odeon Cinemas actively embraced, was to book *Across the Niger* alongside Jeta Amata’s *The Amazing Grace* (2006), a British-Nigerian co-production about the transatlantic slave trade and the moral awakening and spiritual conversion of John Newton, a slave-ship captain who became an abolitionist clergyman and the author of the eponymous hymn. Shot and distributed on 35mm film, and starring a number of well-known British actors (including Nick Moran), *The Amazing Grace* was in fact designed for theatrical exhibition, and Odeon Cinemas booked it nearly one year after its Lagos premiere. The Odeon booking was a boon to

the producers of *The Amazing Grace*, which was completed at a time when only a handful of multiplexes (most of them constructed in 2004) existed in Nigeria.

Amata's film was a decisive factor in what might be called the "multiplexification" of Nollywood.¹⁰⁷ It was, in fact, the showpiece acquisition around which Odeon Cinemas booked an impressive lineup of Nigerian films in 2007, at the very moment of Nollywood's crisis of overproduction.¹⁰⁸ Its rental arm stymied by the crisis (filmmakers who suddenly found themselves out of work were hardly in the market for cameras), Klink turned to novel business strategies and sources of revenue, building on the modest inroads that Ogoro had made in the UK market. With Amata securing a high-profile Odeon Cinemas release for *The Amazing Grace*, it seemed only logical to pursue theatrical opportunities for a few more "quality" films, chief among them *Across the Niger*, which had already made a splash (of sorts) in Leicester Square. Ojukwu's historical drama was the first Nollywood film that Odeon Cinemas booked to play alongside *The Amazing Grace*, though Odeon had previously flirted with Nollywood, as when it booked Obi Emelonye's clash-of-cultures comedy *Lucky Joe* in December 2006. This was thanks in part to corporate sponsorship, which Odeon required to cover some of its overhead costs (and as a supplement to concession-stand and ticket revenue), and which was secured from BEN Television, the "ethnic-serving" British satellite TV channel for which Emelonye has long served as head of production.

Nigerian multiplex operators like to trumpet their commitment to "local films" (in this case, New Nollywood blockbusters). They often claim to be sacrificing profits for the sake of supporting Nigerian movies, negotiating a split of box-office proceeds that purportedly favors Nollywood producers, in contrast to standard arrangements with Hollywood distributors, who typically receive up to 90 percent of a film's grosses, at least for the first couple of weeks of a film's run, after which exhibitors stand to receive an incrementally greater percentage of ticket revenue, or, as an alternative, incrementally lower rental costs. European theater chains like Odeon and Cineworld, however, are hardly in the business of charitably propping up Nollywood and instead set aside screens either for entirely corporate-sponsored affairs like the Leicester Square premiere of *Across the Niger* or for semi-traditional commercial runs. In both cases, the multiplexes require immediate compensation. For Nollywood's commercial (i.e., ticket-selling) runs, corporations and other sponsors agree to pay the likes of Odeon and Cineworld a substantial upfront fee, thus guaranteeing the exhibitors a minimum profit (in addition to coverage of some overhead costs) even in the event of a film's poor box-office performance.

While they clearly recognize the viability of the African diasporic market, European multiplex chains are still largely unwilling to gamble on Nollywood films, even when distributors are offering relatively low rental costs. Instead, they count on corporations (and even individual filmmakers) to cover fees that they impose in order to protect their interests against box-office failures. This is something that they do not do (and are in fact prevented from doing) with major

Hollywood distributors, whose theatrical arrangements are far more formalized (as, for example, when the distributor and exhibitor are owned by the same parent company). Nollywood's poor reputation in the West—its association with “trashy” narratives, “bad” acting, and “shoddy” production values—is hard to shake. When European theater chains treat Nollywood accordingly, keeping even the industry's most expensive, artfully made films at arm's length, the consequences are, however, far from simple. What some may see as a clear example of the ongoing marginalization or “ghettoization” of Nollywood on the global stage, others may interpret as a sign of Nollywood's respectability. After all, no less illustrious a British multinational corporation than Richard Branson's Virgin Group was one of the funders of the Nollywood film festival that Odeon hosted throughout the fall of 2007—a considerable coup for Nollywood, and one that was widely touted throughout Nigeria.

In some cases, corporate sponsorship was needed not merely to pay multiplex chains but also to subsidize the striking of new film prints and their distribution to various locations in and around London. In the case of *Across the Niger*, however, Klink Studios itself covered the cost of converting Ojukwu's digital film to celluloid, producing a handful of 35mm prints in London. It thereby established the importance of celluloid as a prerequisite for entrée into the theatrical sector at a time when few exhibitors, in London or elsewhere, were equipped with digital projection systems. If several New Nollywood filmmakers (Ojukwu included) are, by now, firmly committed to celluloid production, it may well be out of more than mere nostalgia; it may be because they remember or have heard about the headaches that Klink faced in converting Ojukwu's master disc into a few multiplex-ready 35mm prints. (It is unclear just how much money Klink lost in the process, although corporate sponsorship and the sale of broadcast and streaming rights allowed it to absorb at least some of its losses.) But many filmmakers also know that there are diminishing opportunities for celluloid projection in commercial cinemas around the world. Most American multiplexes made the conversion from celluloid to digital projection by 2012, when, for the first time in the history of American film exhibition, digital projection technologies outnumbered their analog counterparts. But some theaters—particularly small, independent cinemas, along with museums—have resisted dispensing with celluloid projection, and it is to these venues that New Nollywood often strategically appeals, with directors like Ojukwu and Kunle Afolayan presenting their 16mm and 35mm films as rare “events” (as indeed they are in the digital age). Ojukwu ran into trouble, however, when preparing for the New York premiere of his New Nollywood film '76 (2016). Not only was he increasingly unable to protect his 16mm prints from being destroyed by airport security (whose detection equipment is notoriously unfriendly to celluloid), but he also discovered that Columbia University, which was set to host the first screening of '76, would not, in fact, be able to project in the director's preferred format. The ever-resourceful Ojukwu, however, arrived at the premiere armed with a rough cut on DVD.

When Ojukwu's *Across the Niger*, newly converted to 35mm film, began its brief commercial run at Odeon Cinemas nearly a decade earlier, it was on a single screen in the sprawling Surrey Quays Shopping Centre in southeast London, which caters to a large African diasporic population. It was soon joined by a number of Nollywood films that had similarly made the dramatic, virtually unprecedented jump from VHS and VCD to 35mm film. Earlier efforts to bring Nollywood to the big screen were less examples of material conversion—of Nollywood's transformation into a new format, a new medium—than of a simple scale adjustment. When, in February 1997, Daar Communications rented ten Lagos facilities for the exhibition of *Domitilla: The Story of a Prostitute* (Zeb Ejiro, 1996), it also rented video projectors from Klink and other outlets, thus obviating the need to convert the VHS master to 35mm film. This was a move that, ten years later, would not be an option for Odeon Cinemas, given the theater chain's lofty brand and its relatively high ticket prices (which it was unwilling to reduce for Nigerian imports). The considerable loss of resolution that resulted for *Domitilla* was simply not something that Odeon was willing or even able to risk with *Across the Niger* and other Nollywood films. By the fall of 2007, the latter—Odeon's large-screen offerings—included Kunle Afolayan's directorial debut, *Irapada* (2006), a Yoruba-language thriller; Emelonye's aforementioned *Lucky Joe* (2006), which follows the quirky adventures of a pair of urban misfits who encounter official corruption; Kingsley Omoife and Richard Mofe-Damijo's *State of the Heart* (2007), a romantic drama costarring Mofe-Damijo and Stella Damasus; Aguila Njamah's *Heartbeats* (2006), a production of Emem Isong's Royal Arts Academy; Henry Omereonye's *Felicima: One Gift* (2007), starring Nollywood superstar Genevieve Nnaji as a high-powered public relations executive whose encounter with a disabled beggar changes her life; Stephanie Okereke's *Through the Glass* (2007), a romantic comedy that Okereke shot in California after earning a master's degree at the New York Film Academy; and Ojukwu's own *Images of Another Day* (2007), an omnibus film produced by the legendary Amaka Igwe and based on the lives of four "street children" (one of whom, a ten-year-old girl, is forced into a marriage with a fifty-five-year-old man). Odeon screened one of the ten films per weekend for ten consecutive weekends—from Friday, October 19 until Sunday, December 23. (*Across the Niger* was the first, and *Through the Glass* the last; in between, *The Amazing Grace*, which had played earlier in the year, was "revived" for three days.) Odeon's Surrey Quays location was not the only exhibition site for these films, nor was its special "Nollywood Season" (as the ten weeks in 2007 came to be known) the only time the theater chain embraced them. *Lucky Joe* had gone into general release a year earlier, when it played in three Odeon locations (Surrey Quays, West Thurrock, and Manchester) and three Cineworld locations (Staples Corner, Wood Green, and Wandsworth). With the Nollywood Season, Odeon was testing the viability of maintaining a relatively steady supply of Nigerian films in at least one of its locations, although it was clear that, whatever the results might be, the theater chain was not going to give up its demands for upfront compensation. It continued to require payment

from distributors, forcing them into the awkward, untenable position of having to subsidize more than just the striking and shipping of prints, and perpetuating Nollywood's lowly associations by transforming it into, essentially, a pay-to-screen enterprise.¹⁰⁹

All of the abovementioned films ultimately benefited from exhibition in Odeon Cinemas, however, although not because they became box-office hits—they didn't and couldn't, given only a handful of showtimes. Their theatrical runs instead managed to boost consumer interest, particularly in Nigeria, where theatrical opportunities have always been scarce, but where the cachet of a London exhibition can easily be exploited, as long as the pay-to-screen phenomenon is strategically omitted from the equation. Odeon conferred upon these films a certain glamor and prestige, practically guaranteeing that they could earn revenue from ancillary or "downstream" markets. Indeed, those markets quickly presented themselves, proving the importance of theatrical exhibition even for films that stand little chance of becoming bona fide box-office smashes. Odeon's Nollywood films may not have sold many tickets (comparatively speaking), and they were hardly eagerly sought by the multiplex chain. Again, their exhibition had to be subsidized, in large part, by nine corporate partners, from Nigeria's Oceanic Bank to BEN Television, the British TV channel that caters to expatriate Africans. But they all received subsequent DVD releases and were later licensed to pay TV, free TV, and various streaming and video-on-demand platforms, which might not have happened in the absence of an eminently marketable Odeon run. As Tino Balio points out in his account of Hollywood in the twenty-first century, "A theatrical run, no matter how brief, gives a picture cachet that helps sales in foreign and ancillary markets."¹¹⁰

The "movement through markets" of the abovementioned films was in decidedly eccentric directions, however, destabilizing conventional links between foreign and domestic sectors, as well as between "traditional" and ancillary windows. Many of these films, including *Lucky Joe* and *State of the Heart*, began their commercial lives not in Nigeria—their country of origin—but in the United Kingdom. This initial market proved, in nearly all of these cases, to be a minor one in terms of revenue, serving merely to whet the appetites of Nigerian and diasporic consumers and setting the stage for profitable sales to television networks and, eventually, internet companies. The American film producer James Schamus notes,

For the vast majority of films an exhibition run in cinemas is simply an advertising campaign that lends an aura of cinematic legitimacy to the "back end" ancillary exploitation of the film on various forms of television and other media—video rental and sales, pay and basic cable, broadcast television and satellite transmission, airplane and cruise ship projection. This 'back end' long ago became the front end in terms of financing and ultimate revenues.¹¹¹

Schamus is, of course, describing domestic markets in the United States, but his comments certainly apply to the New Nollywood movement, in which breaking

even is difficult with theatrical exhibition alone. Indeed, all of the elements of the “back end” that Schamus enumerates, with the exception of cruise-ship projection, are major revenue streams for New Nollywood producers.

Nigerian films have been staples of some in-flight entertainment packages—including on major airlines, like British Airways and United—since as early as 2012. Dozens of films, from Old Nollywood melodramas to the latest hits, are often bundled and sold to airlines by distribution companies that serve the in-flight market, and that acquire Nollywood content not from its producers but from the London-based video-on-demand service African Movie Channel (AMC) and, increasingly, iROKOTv, whose licensing arrangements give them the right to “resell” Nollywood films to third-party distributors.¹¹² This is merely one of many examples of how ancillary markets are exploited without the cooperation of Nollywood producers and in ways that do not necessarily financially benefit them. For while in-flight platforms have long been cited as key sources of additional exposure for Hollywood blockbusters—ways of promoting DVD sales and other profits from “ancillary audiences”—this is hardly the case for Nollywood films anonymously packaged and ported to in-flight channels whose names typically centralize the word “African,” offering no distinctions between, say, Nigerian and Ghanaian content, much less any identifying information about the films in question, beyond what may appear in the opening and closing credits (which are, in any case, often excised).¹¹³ Major Hollywood films like *Wonder Woman* (Patty Jenkins, 2017) and *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (Jon Watts, 2017) are, in contrast, routinely highlighted on the pages of in-flight magazines and on airline websites.

New Nollywood has lately exhibited a strategic orientation toward in-flight entertainment, its high-end offerings steadily becoming what Antoine Compagnon, writing about contemporary French cinema, derisively referred to as “the type of films Air France shows to its captive passengers.”¹¹⁴ In 2016, Air France sponsored the world premiere of Kunle Afolayan’s thriller *The CEO* on one of its flights from Lagos to Paris. Once on the ground in France, the film was screened theatrically at NollywoodWeek, a festival in Paris that purports to offer “Nollywood at its best.” It then made its way back to Nigeria for a gala screening at Eko Hotels and Suites, a five-star resort and conference center in Lagos, which has long hosted star-studded red-carpet premieres of Nollywood films. (Eko is the largest hotel in Nigeria and among the facilities capable of accommodating the crush of stars, producers, directors, publicists, friends, family members, and fans characteristic of Nollywood film premieres; it was designed during the oil boom of the 1970s, partly as a meeting place for international oil executives and their retinues.) A private screening of *The CEO* was later held at the Toronto International Film Festival, and, in October, the film began its brief run in London, at Vue Cinemas’ Leicester Square location, following the earlier pattern established by Kingsley Ogoro, Kene Mkpuru, and their associates. In the case of *The CEO*, Air France covered Vue Cinemas’ fees in exchange for the right to advertise there,

at least for the duration of the film's run. The Air France and SkyTeam logos were omnipresent at the October 27th premiere, which was ironically bathed not in the green and white of the Nigerian flag but in the red, white, and blue of the French airline, despite the fact that the event was timed, like most Nollywood premieres in the UK, to coincide with the month of Nigerian independence.

None of these exhibition opportunities were profitable for Afolayan—not, that is, in the short term. Most were nonprofit, invitation-only events, with the conspicuous exception of the film's exhibition at Vue Cinemas, which charged a relatively steep £30 per ticket for the gala premiere, a price that it lowered by about two-thirds for subsequent screenings (of which there weren't many, just a smattering of showtimes in late October 2016). Theatrical exhibition thus remains largely symbolic, in the sense described by Balio and Schamus—an exciting, eye-catching way of lending legitimacy to films that would, perhaps, otherwise seem substandard, quasi-cinematic products. That such products need the big screen's imprimatur is evident from the growing number of Nollywood producers attuned to Murray-Bruce's "retail revolution," eager to have their work experienced in the kind of projection sites that had largely disappeared from Nigeria by the late 1990s.

The corporate strategy of transnational co-partnering has enabled a small number of Nigerian businesses to corner the national theatrical market, committing their screens to favored Hollywood and local distributors and leaving little to no room for independents. FilmHouse, for instance, became the largest theater chain in Nigeria by partnering with Fox and the IMAX Corporation, whose press releases have consistently touted the most populous country on the African continent in rhetoric borrowed almost verbatim from Eric Johnston.¹¹⁵ In 2012, IMAX classified Nigeria as an "underpenetrated market" eminently capable of boosting Hollywood's global revenues.¹¹⁶

The corporation's targeting of the country is consistent with what Charlie Keil has called "the IMAX intervention," an aggressive program of international expansion initiated toward the end of the 1990s. IMAX, writes Keil, "insinuat[es] itself into the arena of international exhibition by defining itself apart from conventional practice," promoting and imposing its "distinct projection technology," a proprietary package that is then identified with select multiplex chains like FilmHouse.¹¹⁷ Calling the IMAX-FilmHouse partnership "a strategic move," Andrew Cripps, the president of IMAX's operations in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, stressed the size of Nigeria's population in terms that echoed Johnston's postwar bombast.¹¹⁸ In Johnston's day, the major studios, long accustomed to cartelization, had pursued their shared commercial interests by partnering with Lebanese exhibitors in an effort to secure the Nigerian theatrical market, encouraging the importation of Hollywood films from agents based in the UK as well as from exhibitors in Ghana. Beginning in 1959, the latter were authorized by the Ghanaian government to "bring in as many United States films as their dollars [could] buy"—a quota system that, by the early 1960s, had "not proved burdensome to United States film distributors," in the wry words of the MPEA.¹¹⁹



FIGURE 24. The IMAX brand has come to dominate Nigeria's theatrical landscape, as at Film-House Lekki, with its "true" IMAX screen. Photograph by the author.

Throughout the "Development Decade" that followed independence, AMPECA representatives and other "experts" were among the technocrat-guardians in charge of attending to the Nigerian media sector.¹²⁰ To this day, the Nigerian state remains invested not in the enactment of media policy via democratically elected leaders responsive to their diverse constituents, but rather in the identification of new groups of technocrat-guardians deemed capable of "correcting" Nollywood's alleged tendency toward corruption, overproduction, and other evils said to be generative of global anti-Nigerian stereotypes (which, as active constraints on potentially lucrative forms of tourism, are plainly "bad for business"). In the spring of 2012, Nigeria's Ministry of Information presented the Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria (MOPICON) bill, which had been circulating in draft form since 2006, to the Federal Executive Council. The bill, which sought to "establish an overarching regulatory framework for filmmakers in Nigeria in line with best practices, with the objective of streamlining production procedures," was among the most heavily publicized of recent efforts to attract Hollywood capital by "improving" Nollywood's image.¹²¹

In 2013, the Jos-based Nigerian Film Corporation, which continues to serve (however inadequately) as the government's agency for film development and promotion, backed MOPICON as a means of (further) integrating Nollywood into Hollywood's global political economy, maintaining that "passage of the bill would likely result in a considerable uptick in foreign investment in Nollywood."¹²² As a state-initiated inquiry into filmmaking, MOPICON was meant to break the power of Nollywood's allegedly "backward" marketers and to ensure that other,

“worthier” parties would serve a gatekeeping function, “screening out” potentially “undesirable” aspiring filmmakers—precisely those “amateurs” allegedly incapable of appealing to the likes of IMAX and Netflix. MOPICON was therefore rooted in elitist anxieties regarding the ease with which some Nigerians appear to enter the Nollywood industry. Its commitment was clearly to Nollywood’s cosmopolitan potential, and not to its local popularity. After all, low-budget Asaba films—full of Pidgin, “bush” humor, and other signifiers of Africanity suspected of estranging Hollywood—have always flourished in the face of state-sponsored elitism.

Whatever the motivations behind it, the now-dead MOPICON was far from the first attempt to regulate film production and distribution in Nigeria. Those committed to “rehabilitating Nigeria’s international standing” in the immediate aftermath of military rule were hardly unconcerned with cinema—that is, hardly inattentive to Hollywood as a potential source of direct investment.¹²³ By 2011, the World Bank was pledging \$5 million to the Nigerian Film Institute to build a studio, increase and enhance the training of personnel, and, perhaps most significantly, support the establishment of a facility for the leasing of equipment directly from multinationals, rather than from Nigerian intermediaries like Klink Studios and the Hub Media Store (located in the aforementioned Palms Mall). Couching equipment leasing as altogether necessary in an era in which “new cameras and software change with increasing rapidity,” the World Bank promoted the further integration of Nigerian filmmakers into the world economy, insisting on the “availability” of foreign manufacturers able to partner with “local stakeholders” to whom they could rent their state-of-the-art products and services.¹²⁴ But Nollywood filmmakers have been doing this for a long time and without World Bank support, as the case of Klink Studios makes clear.

The World Bank’s interest in what it envisioned as “Studio Nollywood” (“Creating a professional studio that caters to Nigerian filmmakers would go a long way to improving standards,” it announced) occasioned precisely the sort of language that has long been employed in order to strategically obscure the foreign interests that are necessarily served via such a “catering” process. Over fifty years prior, Lloyd Young exploited this rhetoric of “assistance” in introducing his plan to “help” the Eastern Region develop a Hollywood-style “movie colony” (the imaginative antecedent of the World Bank’s “Studio Nollywood”), the only observable consequence of which was the production in Nigeria of Young’s film *The Mark of the Hawk*. Emphasizing the alleged amateurishness of Nollywood’s efforts—insisting that the industry desperately needs the helping hand and capital investment of the foreign “expert”—is a convenient means of secreting corporate efforts to target not only Nigerian cultural production but also individual Nigerian consumers. “Although Nigeria’s filmmakers are extremely inventive and capable of improvising to overcome any situation,” asserts the World Bank, “they will not be able to move up the value chain without increased formal-sector training.”¹²⁵ The message is clear: submit to Hollywood capital, or stagnate in its absence.

Emphasizing “the financial benefits of a cinema release,” the World Bank has gestured toward the importance of “enabling” theatrical distribution for local productions. But its plan to “establish a venture capital facility for the [Nigerian] entertainment industry on a commercial basis” reads as just another initiative to “open up” Nigeria to foreign interests. In this sense, it is reminiscent not simply of Lloyd Young’s late-colonial initiative. It also recalls AMPECA’s post-independence efforts and other strategies for exploiting the Nigerian market in the name of Hollywood capital.¹²⁶

In 2004, the year the first multiplex opened in Nigeria, the Office of the United States Trade Representative assured potential Hollywood investors that “there are no [Nigerian] trade restrictions that discriminate against the United States.”¹²⁷ Prior to and even in the wake of the MPAA ban (when Muhammadu Buhari, imprisoning scores of trade unionists, was widely seen as “reversing” Shagari’s “errors,” despite his resistance to structural adjustment and other externally imposed market reforms), Hollywood studios were well aware of this reality, their interests vigorously defended by the MPEA, whose purpose was to eliminate and preempt all manner of trade restrictions. Today, many of the same studios participate in asymmetrical relationships with the Nigerian-owned multiplex chains that guarantee screens for their films. Hollywood distributors have long enjoyed pricing power in Nigeria, as when they ratcheted up rental fees during the oil boom, swiftly withdrawing their business when the boom went bust and exhibitors could no longer afford to pay the extortionate premiums. Lasting from the early 1980s until the late 1990s, Hollywood’s relative estrangement from Nigeria would, at first glance, appear to suggest the expendability of the Nigerian market—the capacity of the American film industry to survive and even thrive without it. But it was, in part, the fear of Nigeria’s population size that motivated this retreat. In banning exports to the country, the MPAA cited not Nigeria’s disposable status but, rather, its awesome power, inextricable from an expansive consumer base capable of doing great damage to the American film industry through the theft of film prints and other illegal practices presented as prototypically Nigerian.

When, in 1998, culture ministers from twenty countries met in Ottawa “to discuss how they could ‘build some ground rules’ to protect their cultural fare from ‘the Hollywood juggernaut,’” Nigerians were not among them.¹²⁸ This absence contrasted sharply with Nigeria’s prominent role, two decades earlier, in the efforts of “Third World” nations to outline, via UNESCO, a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The movement may have been “impaled on the sword of neoliberalism wielded by the United States and Britain” (both of which would withdraw from UNESCO in the 1980s). But it clearly signaled the activist orientation of the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime, with its stated interest in restructuring the IMF, the World Bank, and GATT.¹²⁹ Charles R. Acland writes, “It is not hyperbole to suggest that we continue to live in the shadow of decisions made by the Reagan Justice Department”—decisions whose underlying logic was

swiftly “exported as the ‘unavoidable’ conditions of globalization.”¹³⁰ The shadows currently cast on the landscape of commercial theatrical exhibition in Nigeria have even older sources—among them the post-independence efforts of AMPECA to secure the national market.

IMAX’s particular expansion policy led the corporation, perhaps inevitably, to Nigeria, where it has helped establish the viability of various projection sites. Yet as Keil points out, IMAX’s “possession of a salable/marketable technology could easily override the national/regional base of a theater chain’s ownership.”¹³¹ If IMAX, a Canadian company based in Ontario but closely associated with Hollywood features (as in its exclusive showing of Disney’s *Fantasia 2000* at the start of the new millennium), has helped secure the survival of theatrical film projection around the world, including in Nigeria, it has just as surely played a part in the obsolescence of the concept of national cinema. Just how much of an “indigenous victory” is Murray-Bruce’s “retail revolution” when brand names like IMAX and Coca-Cola saturate the field of film exhibition in Nigeria today? Large-screen cinema may have returned to the country in the twenty-first century, but at what cost?

The following chapter considers these questions in some detail, tracing the emergence and development of the multiplexes in Nigeria. In his account of contemporary India, Nitin Govil argues that, since the turn of the twenty-first century, “the multiplex has assumed a prominent place in the Indian theatrical landscape, transforming film production and distribution.” Citing “the new economic cultures of corporatization and multinational investment” as both drivers and beneficiaries of the multiplex revolution, Govil suggests that oligopoly conditions are inevitable. All over the world, multiplex cinema is “dominated by a handful of companies positioned to benefit from international investment.” “The multiplex theater,” Govil maintains, “has become both a monument and a portal to the world of conspicuous consumption in late modern India,” and the same can surely be said of its presence in post-Abacha Nigeria. “Multiplexes are ‘abstract’ spaces that facilitate and imagine consumer mobility with global commodity culture,” writes Govil.¹³² In Nigeria today, they are nothing less than the symbols of cinema’s rebirth—projection sites that have made possible the return of theatrical film.

Exhibiting Nollywood (and Hollywood)

Multiplexes, Amusement Parks, and the Economy of Experiences in Today's Nigeria

“In its facilitation of easy consumption, the multiplex resembles the fast-food restaurant; in its seating it recalls both the high-end suite and the aircraft cabin. Part sanctuary and part spaceship, the multiplex prioritizes design, utility, cleanliness, order, and rationality—in short, all those things that are supposed to be absent in the chaotic world of everyday life in the Global South.”

—NITIN GOVIL, *ORIENTING HOLLYWOOD*, 116

In Nigeria today, multiplex density is greatest in Lagos, where the disproportionate presence of large screens is unmistakable. Concentrated in that coastal city, such screens are perhaps the most obvious products of differential attention to Nigeria's theatrical promise—of, that is, the sort of “Lagos bias” that led the Eastern Region to so aggressively pursue collaborations with Hollywood companies in the 1950s. Indeed, the provisioning of select urban zones with large screens and plush seats is part of a broader investment in Lagos and other major cities at the expense of rural areas rendered hopelessly “backward,” a process that has been underway for a long time. Furthermore, if an elite enclave like Victoria Island can boast multiplexes, it is precisely because such a location is singularly equipped to meet the challenges posed by the privatization of public goods and services. In other words, if the lights come on at FilmHouse Landmark, across from the Hard Rock Cafe, that is because the cinema itself provides the power via privately owned generators. (Despite its name, LightHouse Cinemas, a four-screen theater located in a shopping mall in Warri, in Nigeria's Delta State, has a somewhat harder time keeping its projectors running.) Yet with density comes redundancy. Consider, for instance, the fact that FilmHouse Landmark, itself a model of opulence, is but a short distance from the same chain's massive, showpiece IMAX venue (FilmHouse IMAX Lekki). Such multiplication of theatrical form is merely the infrastructural

reflection of a certain stability of screen fare: the same films play at both locations, often with identical showtimes.

Cinematic ambitions have always been part of the metropolitanization of Lagos, but more recent accounts of the city have tended to overlook this reality, often for the sake of painting a particularly dark, even dystopian portrait of a crumbling, overcrowded wasteland. As Babatunde Ahonsi points out, “a quick reading of the fairly large and growing academic literature on Lagos reveals an almost exclusive preoccupation with the urban pathologies that are prevalent within the metropolis.” Various “mechanistic accounts of spatial disorder, de-beautification, organized violence and crime, inter-ethnic strife, civil disorder, overcrowding, flooding, air and noise pollution, unemployment, widespread poverty, traffic chaos, and risk-bearing sexual practices” serve as reliable distractions from the fact of foreign investment (however compromised and compromising), and they cultivate considerable skepticism regarding the actual relevance of Lagos to capitalist modernity.¹ Writing in 2002, Ahonsi stressed that the common “prediction that Lagos is about to implode as a result of its explosive growth seems to be blocking creative and critical assessment of where Lagos is, has been, and is heading.”²

Indeed, anyone who has read American press coverage of Lagos might be surprised to discover that Hollywood actually does business there, or that this port city in fact has several state-of-the-art multiplexes, including a “true” IMAX screen to rival any found in the United States.³ With George Packer asserting in the pages of *The New Yorker* that “all of Lagos seems to be burning,” it is little wonder that film scholars have been reluctant to accept that so lustrous an enterprise as Hollywood has, in a variety of forms, long been present there.⁴ When the Dutch architect and urbanist Rem Koolhaas described Lagos in terms of “a strange combination of extreme under-development and development,” he offered an important rhetorical alternative to the single-minded focus on the city’s shortcomings. He recognized certain “infrastructures of modernity” even as he seemed to overstate—and fetishize—the capacity of the average Lagosian to “conquer” underdevelopment via improvisation and other modes of “creative resistance.”⁵

Matthew Gandy’s view of Lagos as epitomizing “anti-planning” similarly underestimates the organizational acumen and infrastructural successes of Hollywood majors and their local collaborators.⁶ In offering an important rebuttal to Koolhaas and those equally committed to celebrating an informal economy of poverty, Gandy disregards precisely those incursions of foreign capital that, by the time his article was published in 2005, had already transformed Lagos into a place with multiplexes.⁷ My purpose has not been to deny that Lagos, like Nigeria in general, is a place of tremendous adversity, but rather to identify and explore a productive middle ground between “the most Pollyannaish conception of economic take-off [and] the starkest view of underdevelopment,” to quote Frederick Cooper.⁸ As Charles R. Acland points out in his own account of the global multiplex, the “discourse of underdevelopment . . . explains only so much.”⁹



FIGURE 25. On the ruins of the movie house: the Queens Cinema repurposed as a retail outlet. Image by Oseheye Okwuofu.

In twenty-first-century Nigeria, Hollywood has devised ingenious, albeit strictly consumer-oriented, solutions to some of the aforementioned obstacles in close collaboration with its local partners, as when Fox, in a show of support for Nollywood, helped FilmHouse chauffeur carless patrons from mainland Lagos to Victoria Island for special screenings of FilmHouse's own *The Wedding Party 2: Destination Dubai* (Niyi Akinmolayan, 2017).¹⁰ This is hardly the sort of improvised, low-cost "overcoming" of underdevelopment that Koolhaas has celebrated. It is, rather, an example of capital-intensive corporate ingenuity—and a form, moreover, of "corporate social responsibility" designed to elicit praise and to deflect from Hollywood's monopolization of Nigerian theater screens.¹¹ Writing at the dawn of Nigerian independence, W. Alphaeus Hunton noted that "it is not being cynical to ask whether such help when given is for the benefit of the general population or in the interest of some economic venture."¹² Billed as philanthropy, Fox's car service should be seen as little more than a promotional gimmick, a Lagos-specific successor to the games, contests, and giveaways that American theater owners employed throughout Hollywood's Golden Age, particularly on slow nights.¹³

Like any purpose-built edifice whose purpose lives or dies by weekly receipts, the movie theater is an inherently unstable object of study, and its speedy

transformation into something else, some other enterprise, is not always perceptible. It is not at all obvious, for instance, that many places of worship, whether in Nigeria or the United States, used to be movie theaters. One cannot necessarily discern the past lives of these buildings simply by entering them, much less by scrutinizing their exteriors. Such commercial morphologies are inextricably linked to capitalist demands. The high cost of exhibition—of rent, of heating and cooling, of upkeep, of petrol to power private generators—is always prohibitive. It is the self-interested investment of private, Hollywood-connected companies, not ticket or concession sales, that keep Nigeria’s multiplexes alive today.

Consider, as well, the poetics of the multiplex, a building that is constructed less to meet a pronounced demand than to signal Nigeria’s modernity and capacity to accommodate additional imports (like Disney movies).¹⁴ More modest facilities, such as single-screen “neighborhood cinemas” at which locally produced films could be shown at affordable prices, would clearly serve the needs of a greater number of Nigerians, but these are not being built, despite their likely sustainability. They are far less glamorous—and far less likely to attract foreign capital—than the multiplexes into which investors are disproportionately pouring their much-desired funds. It is on such magnetic venues that I focus in this final chapter.

MULTIPLEXING NIGERIA

At one point in the Nollywood film *Couple of Days* (Tolu “Lord Tanner” Awobiyi, 2016), the six Lagosian protagonists, spending a holiday weekend in Ibadan, decide to go to the movies. Having thrilled to the sights of one recently refurbished galleria—the Heritage Mall in Dugbe, the city’s commercial center—they simply repair to another, but only after a fun-filled excursion to the vast, state-of-the-art waterpark at Agodi Gardens. The second shopping center, like the first, is flanked by a massive multiplex, part of Nigeria’s FilmHouse theater chain, into which the characters cheerfully spill after hours of bowling in the mall’s cavernous arcade. “This,” one character proclaims with promotional panache, “is the new Ibadan”—a place where one’s every consumer need can be met, and quickly. Indeed, the close, convenient proximity of waterpark, mall, and multiplex is what allows the protagonists to squeeze so many exciting activities into a single day.

Their culminating experience, a Saturday-night visit to the multiplex, is about more than just watching a film. It is also about consuming a variety of snacks, all of them readily available in the multiplex’s pristine lobby, and even observing the spectatorial habits of fellow filmgoers. With DJ Klem’s celebratory “Hands in the Air” monopolizing its soundtrack, *Couple of Days* lingers, for several minutes, on the multiplex’s plush stadium seating, its huge screens and bountiful concessions. All six of the film’s protagonists eat popcorn from bags advertising the franchise films *Jurassic World* (Colin Trevorrow, 2015) and *The Transporter Refueled* (Camille Delamarre, 2015)—both of which FilmHouse was about to exhibit when *Couple of*

Days was shot on location in one of its facilities. Bottles of Coca-Cola rest in their respective cup holders.

If this description suggests less a narrative film than a commercial advertisement, that is because, at this very moment—a montage sequence set to a pop song—*Couple of Days* is selling something: not just the general experience of commercial theatrical exhibition but also the perks and practices of a specific multiplex chain, FilmHouse Cinemas, whose actual Ventura Mall location is shown in instructive long shot (as in a television commercial) at the end of the sequence. Like a growing number of Nollywood films, *Couple of Days* was produced in collaboration with FilmOne Distribution and FilmHouse Cinemas, two segments of a single, vertically integrated enterprise that has come to typify a new, rarefied phase in Nollywood's development.

With its promotional attention to large-screen cinema as a source not merely of spectatorial but also of gastronomic and broadly social pleasures, *Couple of Days* suggests a deliberate effort to encourage Nigeria's growing middle class to abandon its presumed attachment to Nollywood as a direct-to-video enterprise and model of domestic exhibition—to, in other words, leave the living room and go out to the movies. *Couple of Days* is invested in undoing the assumption that Nigerian cinema is a sign of the country's "backwardness," its confinement to a different order of time, rather than of its coevalness with the United States and other major democracies. After all, Americans are, like the protagonists of *Couple of Days*, presently being persuaded to go (back) to the movies, with enticements that include refurbished theaters (complete with power recliners and seat warmers), subscription-based apps that promise more cinematic bang for the buck, and all manner of refreshments.

Couple of Days is committed to detailing how Nigerian cinema fits into the so-called "economy of experiences," with multiplexes, amusement parks, and other sources of entertainment and leisure gaining ground (quite literally) in the much-hyped "new Nigeria."¹⁵ The country did not acquire its first multiplex until 2004, when Silverbird unveiled its flagship galleria in Lagos, but that date should not be viewed as egregiously late in a global context. As Tejaswini Ganti points out, the vast majority of multiplexes in India were not built until after 2002.¹⁶ Prior to the emergence of FilmHouse, Silverbird was by far the largest regional theater chain in West Africa, with more than fifty screens in Nigeria and Ghana. At the same time that Silverbird, with revenues from the Miss World and Miss Universe franchises, was building up its own exhibition empire, Nigeria was becoming newly attractive as a place in which American firms might conduct business. "Despite growing alienation between the Nigerian people and their increasingly impotent government, by 2004 Nigeria had become crucial to the long-term well-being of the United States," argues John Campbell, the former US ambassador to Nigeria. "Nigeria is currently the locus of the greatest U.S. investment in Africa."¹⁷

Such investment must be seen as including the work of US multinational film companies that, in order to ensure that their properties will be consumed in Nigeria (and often in ways that suit their blockbuster dimensions), pursue partnerships with the country's established and emergent firms, becoming participants in various African multiplex chains. Full ownership of these chains is certainly possible today, though it is perhaps seen as unseemly: too obvious an instance of Hollywood imperialism even for Disney (which had, of course, no qualms about swallowing up Fox, FilmHouse's Hollywood partner). Full ownership hardly comports with the philosophy of "corporate internationalism" by which "international managers are called upon to neutralize the tendency towards ethnocentrism in [transnational corporations] and to consolidate the culture of the parent company with that in other countries."¹⁸ That may well be what is happening with the current Hollywood-Nollywood partnerships: multinational film companies perhaps rely on the likes of FilmHouse and Silverbird to enhance their cosmopolitan brands, to "give them some local flavor," as one FilmHouse manager put it.¹⁹ But this process also represents business as usual: the seemingly inexorable penetration of global markets by ever-expanding brands.

While FilmHouse and other Nigerian companies are ostensibly allowed to make their own financial and managerial decisions, they are obliged to sign rather restrictive agreements with Hollywood studios. As exhibitors, they are always contracted for "locked bookings"—meaning that they "must open [an imported] picture on [a] specific date, regardless of how well [a] current film may be doing."²⁰ They are also reliant on foreign firms for projection hardware, particularly given the demands of the relatively recent transition to digital delivery and projection (a process that plainly deskills workers, as automation leads inevitably to job loss—automatic platter systems require considerably less labor than mechanical projectors).²¹ Nitin Govil has written of the "MBA-dominated culture of multiplex operation, staffed by leisure and hospitality executives," noting that the multiplexes represent "a lucrative market for foreign equipment manufacturers: German Kinton projectors and Schneider lenses; American Strong projectors; Christie projectors and platters; Belgian Multivision Screens; Xenon lamp houses . . . and JBL and Australian Monitor speakers."²² For countries in the global South, this technological dependence is the crux of what Govil calls "symbolic forms of proximity": the "idea of co-presence, which approximates the forms of interaction deemed crucial to maintaining the intimate sociality of modernity."²³ Yet what this also means, for Govil, is that the multiplex, whatever its location, is very much "a transit point for Hollywood."²⁴ In 2007, in direct response to the rise of multiplexes in India, Sony Pictures Imageworks acquired a majority stake in the Indian effects studio FrameFlow. In 2008, Warner Brothers Motion Picture Imaging partnered with India's Prasad Corp. to provide postproduction services for Indian filmmakers; that same year, NBC acquired a substantial stake in NDTV Networks, while Disney acquired an equally sizable stake in UTV Software Communications.²⁵

Such developments raise the question of whether they are presently being duplicated in Nigeria, a country that, like India, has become multiplexed in the twenty-first century. While IMAX has widely publicized its activities in Nigeria, its counterparts have been less forthcoming, even as their logos and products saturate the country's multiplexes. Before Disney took its place, Fox was, theater manager Damola Layonu told me, FilmHouse's principal Hollywood partner. For almost a decade, the studio assigned "local country managers" (also known as managing directors and general managers) to Nigeria, where they collaborated with FilmHouse's own managers in order to develop the release strategies of various Fox films.²⁶ Such "intermediaries between local operations and studio priorities" have apparently survived Disney's acquisition of Fox.²⁷ Disney now, Layonu said, dispatches its own "experts" to FilmHouse.²⁸

Layonu's comments suggest the importance of distinguishing between managerial control and proprietary control. The former is, in this instance, indisputably local—Nigerian—while the latter is, more ambiguously, a matter partly of Hollywood capital, copyright, and design. The economist Michel Aglietta has warned against conflating these two types of control, partly because to do so is to fundamentally misrecognize power asymmetries and how they play out on the ground. In the context of multiplexing in Nigeria, to confuse managerial control and proprietary control might well be to mistake the impact of Hollywood firms (from Disney to IMAX) and related brands (Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Cold Stone Creamery) for something much more autonomously Nigerian.²⁹ The home pages of the multiplexes' websites feature the IMAX and Coca-Cola logos at least as prominently as those of FilmHouse and Genesis Deluxe, thus suggesting that these Nigerian theater chains are nothing if not delivery systems for specific soft drinks and projection technologies. The same is true of the theaters' screens themselves, on which ads for Coke and IMAX bracket the (mostly American) feature films that patrons have ostensibly paid to see.

The idea of an extensive Nigerian media system—and the ongoing (if never quite "complete") materialization of this idea—has always been a product as well as a practice of the world economy of capitalism. Today, Disney, IMAX, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and other giants dominate commercial theatrical distribution the world over, controlling the flow of their own all-important products (including but hardly limited to feature films). As one Nigerian theater manager told me, describing the behind-the-scenes power of American corporations, "Coca-Cola was my employer; Coca-Cola made the calls." While he felt that he was well compensated, and that his job afforded him opportunities to "get creative," he was forced to concede that Coca-Cola set at least some of the boundaries for the operation of those Nigerian multiplexes that "partnered" with the corporation, thereby falling firmly within its coercive ambit.³⁰ A growing number of Nollywood films reflect this influence. Adapted from a story by Chris Ihidero, *The Bling Lagosians* (Bolanle Austen-Peters, 2019), which focuses on that rarefied socioeconomic echelon of

what one character proudly calls “the one percent of the one percent,” directly depicts the “branding” of moviegoing in twenty-first century Nigeria. Coca-Cola makes a much-ballyhooed appearance in *The Bling Lagosians*: avidly consumed by a former Asaba marketer and the well-connected young woman he has hired as a screenwriter, “cold Cokes” symbolize the pair’s commitment to breaking into the multiplexes of Lagos, including those that—like *The Bling Lagosians* itself—are contractually attached to the Coca-Cola Company.³¹

Simply put, Coca-Cola, whose “conviction that synergies could be obtained between movies and soft drinks” led to its acquisition of Columbia Pictures in 1982, is more than just a source of refreshments for Nigerian theater chains.³² In those instances in which the corporation is *not* a participant in commercial theatrical exhibition in the country, Pepsi, its rival, is. For several years, beginning in 2004, when Ben Murray-Bruce’s Silverbird Group opened the first multiplex in Nigeria, Coca-Cola enjoyed a partnership with the Nigerian corporation, subsidizing its steady expansion and ensuring its viability as an exhibitor of Hollywood films. Many of these films, of course, were products of Coca-Cola’s “embedded marketing” strategies, in which the corporation’s manifold brands strategically appear as incitements to (further) consumption. Eventually, however, Pepsi began, rather shrewdly, to cultivate relationships with other arms of Silverbird Group, sponsoring its beauty pageants (including Miss Africa World, Silverbird’s annual contribution to the Miss World franchise) and comedy shows. Coca-Cola failed to similarly “diversify” its relationship with Silverbird, restricting itself to the corporation’s exhibition branch. When Coca-Cola’s contract with Silverbird expired, Murray-Bruce’s corporation, which was still working with Pepsi in other arenas, gave the two soft-drink giants the opportunity to bid for participation in its exhibition sector. Pepsi (long an engine of product placement for Hollywood, as the 1963 Jackie Gleason film *Soldier in the Rain*, directed by Ralph Nelson, so vividly illustrates) had the clear advantage. It was already committed to treating Silverbird as a diversified enterprise—to pursuing ever greater “synergy”—and, just as importantly, the corporation offered more money than Coca-Cola. So Pepsi won the bid, replacing its rival as a significant influence on Silverbird’s growing theater chain.³³ Where the Coke logo once suffused the Silverbird multiplexes, Pepsi’s insignia now dominates.

THE COMPULSION TO REPEAT

Heralding Nollywood as a force to be reckoned with on the global stage, a number of significant developments have sought to redefine the industry as multiplex-ready, and to tout Nigeria’s role in staving off the death (or securing the rebirth) of theatrical film. In 2011, as part of its Growth and Employment in States initiative, the World Bank pledged \$25 million to the Nollywood industry—an industry that it could not, of course, quite define.³⁴ A year later, the American

performance-management consulting company Gallup, in collaboration with the Broadcasting Board of Governors (an independent agency of the US government), carried out a study that placed television penetration of Nigerian households at an unprecedented 79 percent. The study, which credited Nollywood with this televi-sual renaissance (citing the proliferation of channels showing the industry's films), was intended not only to further encourage American businesses to take advantage of Nigeria's liberalized broadcasting sector, but also to inspire investments in multiplex construction and outfitting.³⁵

Even PricewaterhouseCoopers, the multinational professional-services network arguably best known for its longtime involvement with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (in addition to tallying votes for the Oscars, PricewaterhouseCoopers oversees the academy's elections, prepares its financial documents, and files its taxes), got into the act in 2017, releasing a report entitled "Entertainment and Media Outlook, 2017–2021: An African Perspective." The report positioned Nigeria as one of the world's fastest-growing countries in terms of media-industry revenues, predicting that these would reach a whopping \$6.4 billion in 2021.³⁶ However striking these studies may seem, with their high figures and focus on communicating, as PricewaterhouseCoopers put it, "the vibrancy of Nigerian cinema," it is important to contextualize them in relation to Hollywood's earlier struggles to gain access to—and shape—Nigerian consumers. Simply put, these studies, reports, and pledges are part of a longer history of American efforts to gauge the size of the Nigerian market for moving images.

When I first spoke with FilmOne manager Damola Layonu in the spring of 2018, Disney had not yet acquired Fox, and one of Layonu's responsibilities was to oversee FilmOne's account with the latter company. FilmHouse employees, who are not unionized, have often been called upon to perform double duty, responding to conditions on the ground (which of course include the infrastructural problems that abound in Nigeria, and that often require workers to fetch expensive diesel fuel for power generation) while simultaneously doing Hollywood's bidding. Layonu told me that, in his opinion, "both employees and employers have a joint role to play" in preventing exploitation, including by Hollywood firms, but he added, plaintively, that change is unlikely. The multiplex may, as Tejaswini Ganti suggests, be "associated with niche audiences and social exclusivity," and it may be both generative and symbolic of a certain discourse of progress, but subtending these developments is a corporate way of working that consists of some particularly onerous demands.³⁷

That Disney, having swallowed up Fox (previously taken over by Australia's News Corp. in 1985), is now a major participant in FilmHouse exhibition is perhaps unsurprising. After all, as Charles R. Acland points out, Disney has long provided important blueprints for multiplexes. In the 1980s, Disney vice president Richard Cook proposed what he called the "Disneyland model" of multiplexing, one that has, in the years since, served to cement the multiplex's association

with shopping malls and theme parks, reinforcing the impression of the inexorable “Disneyfication” of popular cinema.³⁸ It would be a mistake to assume that Nigeria has somehow managed to escape Disney’s influence. In 1994, the Nigerian Film Corporation set up a National Film Archive consisting, in part, of American multiplex designs and other “imported exhibition plans”—including Cook’s.³⁹ As Acland writes, “it is indisputable that Disney had been held up as the template for the reconfiguration of the site of cinemagoing,” and “evidence of the continuing power of Disney as a model for out-of-home leisure” continues to accrue, including in Nigeria.⁴⁰ In the summer of 2020, FilmOne struck yet another deal with the American conglomerate, becoming the sole distributor of Disney-owned films in Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia. “What the deal means is that we are exclusive marketers and distributors of Disney titles in the English-speaking West African countries that have studio-licensed cinemas,” explained Moses Babatope, a co-founder of FilmOne. “We will distribute the films to all those cinemas in the territory.”⁴¹ In 2019, before reaching its first deal with Disney (via the firm’s takeover of Fox), FilmOne partnered with the Chinese conglomerate Huahua Media to make *30 Days in China*, which remains in production at the time of writing. Billed as the first major Chinese-Nigerian co-production, the project is also an extension of Ayo Makun’s “Akpos” franchise of fish-out-of-water comedies (*30 Days in Atlanta* [Robert Peters, 2014], *10 Days in Sun City* [Adze Ugah, 2017]), which self-consciously recall Old Nollywood’s *Osuofia in London* even as they embody powerful intersections between Nigerian and foreign capital.⁴²

“Going corporate” may represent a “mode of distinction”⁴³ for Nigerian producers, distributors, and exhibitors long burdened by negative stereotypes. But for those who labor at less glamorous echelons of the Nollywood industry, the corporatization of filmmaking—widely seen (and celebrated) as introducing order and discipline, where previously Nollywood was viewed as a fount of informality and even corruption—is a source of considerable stress, not least of all because it has failed to raise wages, improve working conditions, and eliminate precarity. Moviegoing has, for some, become a gated experience in Nigeria.⁴⁴ The country’s multiplexes, like their counterparts in India, are marked by what Ganti terms “an aesthetic of intimidation”—by the systematic admission and exclusion of individuals according to various markers of class.

Connor Ryan has carefully described such protocols, revealing the multiple engines that delimit the social lives of Nigeria’s multiplexes. Private security guards populate one such system; ticket and concession prices, which are not negotiable, comprise another. Ryan writes of the details of guards that, in Nigeria, police the “boundar[ies] between . . . chaotic streetscape[s] and the [multiplexes’] highly controlled interior[s].”⁴⁵ His observations call attention to certain exclusionary and otherwise intimidating conditions, which represent a far cry from Nollywood’s foundational democratic appeal. As Ganti puts it, “Multiplexes ensure that a ‘better atmosphere’ for socially elite viewers involves the complete erasure of

poorer and working-class viewers from the space of the movie theater.”⁴⁶ Damola Layonu stressed to me that multiplex workers—who themselves belong to the so-called “poorer classes”—are often called upon to perform the labor of exclusion, whether as security guards tasked with policing the multiplexes’ entrances or as box-office attendants forced to monitor the behavior of those who have managed to gain entry.⁴⁷ As Govil argues, the multiplexes are clearly productive of “elite urban sociability,” thus recalling colonial goals for cinema as a source of betterment for “native” populations.⁴⁸ Ryan’s perceptive account of contemporary Nigeria echoes Govil’s contention that the multiplex “provides a space ‘free’ from the urban crowd, creating a sociability predicated on the exclusion of diversity.”⁴⁹

The multiplex is thus a “space of social exclusion,” “simultaneously *of* the city and *outside* the city.”⁵⁰ If, in Nigeria today, it marks the long-awaited return of theatrical distribution, it can scarcely be said to signify cinema’s rebirth as a *mass* medium. Yet the multiplex is not uniquely generative of social discrimination. In 1994, ten years before the first multiplex opened in the country, the Nigerian critics John Mfon, Stephen Akintunde, and Julna Selbar observed a “growing elitist attitude towards cinema.” “The average Nigerian elite,” they argued, “hates to rub shoulders with those he considers as society’s dregs. It is offensive to him to be classified together with every Tom, Dick and Harry who can pay the price of a ticket to watch a film in the cinema hall.”⁵¹ As these remarks indicate, Nigeria’s multiplexes did not invent the elitist or otherwise exclusionary practices with which they have come to be associated.

If multiplex attendance enjoys a high status value in Nigeria today, multiplex employment surely does not. Digital projection and delivery have even reduced the number of employees required to run theaters. Few if any facilities in Nigeria are currently equipped to project on film—a major problem for New Nollywood filmmakers who turn to 35mm for both shooting and distribution. If the multiplex is metonymic of membership in the modern world, it is also, for many, metonymic of job loss, as well as an agent of class-determined cultural consumption.⁵² Such harsh realities contradict the cheerful rhetoric of the multiplex companies themselves (as well as of the Disney that pushed *Black Panther* as an agent of Pan-Africanism), clarifying the need to peer beyond official pronouncements. “Higher production values will not only increase the international appeal of Nigerian films, but will create longer-term job opportunities,” announced Silverbird’s Ben Murray-Bruce in 2013.⁵³ But such opportunities have not materialized, as many in the industry—and many more who have labored at its peripheries, from laid-off box-office attendants to unemployable projectionists—insist.⁵⁴

Exhibition is more than a matter of brick-and-mortar retail outlets. It is also, as *Couple of Days* suggests, a state of mind, one that, in Nigeria today, pivots around the multiplex’s association with elite consumers. Like their forerunners in the American exhibition sector, including the nickelodeon (1905–1914), Nigerian multiplexes are firmly committed to attracting middle-class audiences. Indeed, their

ticket prices, combined with less codified strategies for excluding the undesirable (such as the aforementioned policing of theater entrances by private security details), prohibit just about everyone else. The nickelodeon's early popularity was premised on its appeal to slum dwellers, to whom exhibitors catered out of economic necessity at a time when middle-class audiences appeared to favor vaudeville and the "legitimate" stage. Eventually, however, nickelodeon operators, many of them upwardly mobile immigrants eager to shed their association with "ethnic" blue-collar workers, sought to lure the so-called "family trade" in their search for respectability (both for themselves and for their exhibition sites).⁵⁵ Committed to enhancing Nollywood's local as well as global reputation, multiplex chains invoke such foreign precedents in order to suggest that Nigeria is now "ready" for what has long been experienced in Europe and the United States—namely, state-of-the-art large-screen exhibition.⁵⁶

Such "readiness" is premised, in large part, on the reappearance of the Nigerian middle class, the rapid expansion of the number of millionaires in the country, and the sense of national achievement occasioned in 2014 by Nigeria's much-celebrated surpassing of South Africa as the largest economy on the continent.⁵⁷ As this list suggests, however, class prejudice frequently subtends celebrations of multiplexing, at least in Nigeria. In the United States, shantytown nickelodeons were known for refusing admittance to certain audience "types" (including enlisted men), while striving to enforce standards of dress and behavior—often inviting pushback from state governments enamored of the ideal of the nickelodeon as "democracy's theater."⁵⁸

Nigerian multiplexes have something that these five-cent theaters lacked, however: professional security guards who can deny admittance to vagrants and other "undesirables" while claiming merely to be "protecting" mall patrons—safety being a convenient watchword in the era of Boko Haram and other militant organizations, and a longstanding concern in the country. Anyone who has ever attempted to enter a major Lagosian galleria has most likely had to submit to a handheld metal detector, wielded like a magic wand capable of separating the "good" consumers from the "bad"—or, rather, the "safe" from the "dangerous." Possession of a knife or firearm is hardly the only disqualification for entry, however, and private security details serve to unofficially uphold the heavily classed, even elitist aspirations of the multiplexes, as Ryan makes clear. What Michael Schudson calls "the aesthetic of capitalist realism," which "glorifies the pleasures and freedoms of consumer choices in defense of the virtues of private life and material ambitions," arguably underwrites multiplex discourse in Nigeria today.⁵⁹ Indeed, Nigerians are increasingly addressed as consumers—increasingly enfolded into a neoliberal logic by which they are viewed as representatives of the nation, indices of how far it has come since the ostensible restoration of civilian government in 1999. As Leela Fernandez argues in her study of advertising in India, consuming subjects, constitutive of the urban middle class, are understood to be the *only*

national citizens under neoliberalism, and there are important parallels between the India that Fernandez describes and the Nigeria where multiplexes are beginning to proliferate.⁶⁰

The imperative to attract elite audiences has proved costly, as exhibitors have invested in all manner of amenities meant to appeal to moneyed Nigerians, from “premium” seating to “deluxe” lobbies adorned with 4K TVs used to promote current releases (as well as to provide pleasurable distractions for customers). And then there are the specifically Nigerian contingencies: the perpetual power problems that require multiplexes to buy or rent massive commercial generators (as well as to pay for the huge quantities of fuel required to run them), and the flash-flooding and sea-level rise that increasingly threaten the delta city of Lagos, where the vast majority of multiplexes are located. These low-lying establishments, built around a lagoon, like everything else in the city, are especially vulnerable to climate change, which invariably drives up operating costs and places a considerable burden on low-wage, short-term workers who must do what they can to counteract the effects of flooding and storm surges. Even the fanciest multiplexes on Victoria Island are hardly protected by the city’s infrastructure; the streets around them are prone to flooding, which poses its own threats to theater attendance. Climate change, then, must be taken into account in efforts to map the future of theatrical film, particularly in Nigeria. The hopes currently being pinned on that country’s coastal multiplexes are plainly imperiled by rising seas.

Deeply classist, efforts to preserve a degree of habitability for Lagos often trumpet the promise of film exhibition. Take, for instance, the notorious case of Eko Atlantic, described by its developers as “a dynamic new city that is rising from the Atlantic Ocean.” Adjacent to Victoria Island, Eko Atlantic is both a lived reality—currently a growing platform composed partly of dredged silt, on which gated sales offices are flanked (like the multiplexes themselves) by elite security details—and a planned city, meant to encompass three square miles of new land, where up to 300,000 “prosperous and technologically sophisticated people will live in sleek modern condos, fully equipped with fiber-optic Internet connections, elaborate security systems, and a twenty-five-foot-high seawall protecting them from the attacking ocean.”⁶¹ Instructively, this “shiny new appendage to a megacity slum” will, developers never tire of saying, offer multiple cinema screens, including a dazzling IMAX—a “real” IMAX meant for the exhibition of Hollywood blockbusters.⁶² The Chagoury Group, the Nigerian conglomerate behind Eko Atlantic, specializes in construction and civil engineering, and one of its companies, ITB Nigeria, built the Silverbird Galleria Mall in Abuja, which includes a twelve-screen multiplex. The Chagoury Group’s vast construction division stands to benefit from Eko Atlantic, which has already secured a deal with ever-expanding IMAX.

Nigeria’s relatively recent emergence as a multiplex-friendly country is part of a broader transformation of consumer habits. It both reflects and benefits from the porting of solvent Nigerians toward strip malls and other gallerias constructed to

showcase the products and practices of transnational corporations—the fruits of global capitalism—as well as Nigeria’s embeddedness therein. Such adjacency is, of course, nothing new: in Jean Rouch’s *Jaguar* (1967), for instance, a movie theater abuts the aptly named Hollywood Bar, which itself abuts a general store where Pall Mall, the American cigarette brand, is sold. It is to this strip that one character, an immigrant from Niger, returns every Sunday in order to marvel at the many advertisements found there—from Hollywood film posters to Pall Mall paintings. For their part, Nigerian multiplexes are not located in quiet neighborhoods but, as a rule, in bustling commercial districts, where they adjoin (or exist within) sprawling shopping centers.

The new multiplexes themselves look like megamalls: those featured in *Couple of Days* are three- and four-story establishments that take up over two blocks, and that furnish more than just filmed entertainment. These facilities are not, technically speaking, megaplexes—a term intended to signal scale (a megaplex boasts more screens than “traditional” multiplexes, at least sixteen), in addition to the availability of activities like bowling, gaming, and dining.⁶³ As of this writing, the largest FilmHouse location—part of the Leisure Mall in Surulere, a middle-class neighborhood in Lagos—has a total of eight screens, while the smallest—the massive Ventura Mall add-on that appears in *Couple of Days*—has only three. That the latter is so capacious has everything to do with the expansiveness of its trio of auditoria, each featuring stadium seating that spans multiple stories.

The FilmHouse facility in the Leisure Mall, like the chain’s other locations, is marked by a multiplicity of major sponsors, their logos and products on abundant display. Coca-Cola, MasterCard, and Disney are the three most prominent, and they are joined by a smattering of local brands. Indeed, one of the definitional aspects of the multiplex is that its spaces are very much for sale to brands; the multiplex serves as a diverse and adaptable platform for advertising.⁶⁴ “The most noticeable feature of the multiplexes,” writes Ganti of the facilities in India, “is their sheer dazzling splendor, with immaculately maintained lobbies, cornucopia-like concession areas, and plush-carpeted auditoriums, with wide velvet or leather seats.”⁶⁵ In taking seriously the multiplex’s typical status as an anchor business within a shopping mall, Ganti seeks to account for “how changes in the material properties of the spaces of [film] exhibition can engender new patterns of production and consumption.”⁶⁶ The interdependence of mall and multiplex—a symbiotic relationship premised, in part, on moviegoing’s relationship to various modes of consumption, from the gastronomic to the sartorial—is all but inescapable in Nigeria today.

CITY OF MULTIPLEXES

“Abuse is not sanctified by its duration or abundance; it must remain susceptible to question and challenge, no matter how long it takes.”

—CHINUA ACHEBE, *HOME AND EXILE*, 46

Despite the persistence both of unsettling realities (chronic poverty, food insecurity) and negative stereotypes (“rowdiness,” “corruption”), Lagos epitomizes the promise of urbanization on the African continent. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs predicts that Africa will be 50 percent urban by 2030 and 60 percent urban by 2050. The continent also boasts a much-discussed “youth bulge”—the world’s fastest growth rate for a cohort long prized in the field of commercial theatrical exhibition. This “exponential growth of urban youth” is reliably driving the expansion of domestic consumer markets, feeding belief in a coming consumer boom.⁶⁷ Africa displays, in fact, the fastest rate of urban growth in the world, a reality that stands in stark contrast to the popular and even scholarly “tendency to depict Africa as a vast, underdeveloped and essentially rural continent.”⁶⁸ “After a decade of neglect, sub-Saharan Africa’s largest metropolis has suddenly found itself under intense critical scrutiny,” wrote Matthew Gandy in 2005, one year after the opening of Nigeria’s first multiplex in Lagos.⁶⁹ Amid this urban renaissance, FilmHouse, Silverbird, and Genesis Deluxe have effectively revived theatrical distribution in Nigeria—no small feat. They have also fueled the New Nollywood movement, giving a growing number of Nigerian filmmakers the opportunity to develop projects with large-screen exhibition—previously a near-impossibility—very much in mind.

This significant Nigerian victory requires some qualification, however. It must be understood in relation to a system of urban management inherited from colonialism and designed for the protection of narrow “elite” interests, both foreign and domestic.⁷⁰ Colonial planning laws remain entrenched, and the long history of using these laws (and their post-independence descendants) to justify gentrification has culminated in land-development plans that are decidedly not in the public interest, but that are pursued by firms eager to acquire new (and ever fancier) real estate. Nollywood has hardly shied away from acknowledging such thorny realities. In fact, the industry’s representational strategies have always been alert to the causes and consequences of “creative destruction.” The fate of Maroko, the Lagos slum neighborhood that was leveled in the summer of 1990 in order to make way for luxury housing, is memorably referenced in Tade Ogidan’s film *Owo Blow* (1996). A boy in his early teens, rendered houseless by the forced evictions and “urban renewal” for which the Lagos State government was partly responsible, inspires the protagonist to ask, “Why allow a community to evolve, only to demolish it? They waited for [Maroko] to become a community before they destroyed it!”

Though a glitzy, relatively big-budget New Nollywood production that played in FilmHouse multiplexes, Toka McBaror’s *Merry Men: The Real Yoruba Demons* (2018) shares these concerns about expropriation, referencing *Owo Blow* at almost every narrative turn. The title characters—wealthy, Abuja-based bachelors who take it upon themselves to fight government corruption and protect the powerless—discover a multibillion-naira scheme to displace an entire village in order to make way for a vast, multiplexed shopping mall, and they immediately take action

with the goal of preventing “another Maroko.” The proposed megamall is designed as a six-story building with forty shops, underground parking for up to three hundred vehicles, and, instructively, a ten-screen cinema on the top floor. It is set to be constructed in Garki Village, an Abuja slum that one character describes as “a dead zone” and “an eyesore [that] bears no social relevance to the economy, none at all”: “Where else would they go and demolish properties without worrying about the people fighting back?” The fate of those who live in Garki Village, who “don’t have people to represent them,” is much on the minds of the Merry Men. “Are they now going to render those guys homeless?” cries one. “Because they want to build an ultra-modern shopping mall?”

Eventually, the Abuja bachelors defeat the scheme, whose instigator—a two-time governor and one-time finance minister, Chief Edmund Omole (Jide Kosoko)—is described as having “chewed every piece of sliced national cake” (an amusing reference to Mama G’s hit 2007 song “National Moi-Moi,” whose lyrics, written by Stanley Okorie, exhort the government to “divide the national cake”). Advocating on behalf of the denizens of Garki Village, Ramsey Nouah’s character explains the purpose of the Merry Men: “We steal from people who steal from us. Who turn public office into ATM. For every road they don’t build, for every hospital they don’t build, they own private jets, buy homes in Dubai. To me, we’re simply creating equilibrium.” The film makes clear that the threat of violent expropriation in the name of “urban renewal” is, in fact, ongoing. The Merry Men must worry not just about the Garki crisis but “the one after, and the one after that.” Gentrification—here epitomized, ironically enough, by a ten-screen cinema—is a constant danger, a matter of “profit upon expropriation.”⁷¹

Capitalism’s “production of space”—literally in the case of reclaimed land, like that of Eko Atlantic—is thus an inherently destructive, displacing process, and conspicuously so in Nigeria.⁷² Historically, as Stephen Berrisford has shown, planning legislation in the country has been “unable to check excessive developments driven by the private sector.” Planning law and other mechanisms that have effectively “excluded the citizenry from participating in the benefits of urban planning” have also functioned to make multinational film companies key stakeholders, thereby consolidating and expanding existing privileges.⁷³ Regulatory hurdles are either nonexistent or easily cleared by the likes of IMAX, which has invested even in the controversial Eko Atlantic.

Given the “spasmodic, boom-and-bust cycles” of an oil-dominated economy, perhaps it is most accurate to view Nigeria’s relevance to Hollywood as cyclical in nature—not altogether consistent but, rather, subject to many stops and starts.⁷⁴ But there is little reason to see this cycle as timeless and inevitable, particularly given the upheavals associated with climate change, whose impact on low-lying areas like Lagos and the Niger Delta region has already been considerable. As early as 1979, Sanya Onabamiro was issuing warnings about coastal erosion and flooding as threats to Victoria Island, Onitsha, Warri, Brass, and Calabar, among other

locations. Shortly thereafter, an NTA building and several commercial movie theaters were severely damaged in the flooding of Bar Beach, the very land whose reclamation Eko Atlantic represents. “The danger is at hand now,” wrote Nigerian journalist Louisa Aguiyi-Ironsi in 1985, “[and] we really should not sit back and take chances.”⁷⁵

In Nigeria today, Hollywood and allied interests are actively fighting climate catastrophe, albeit in ways that, paradoxically, promise only to exacerbate it. The less tenable the geographical specificity of mainland Lagos becomes due to climate change, the greater the capitalist imperative to create new geographies like Eko Atlantic, rather than abandon Nigeria altogether. Nigeria, then, is both creating and being recreated by exhibition-oriented forms of Hollywood capital. The country remains a key testing ground, helping to define the limits of theatrical exhibition in an era of accelerated climate change. As Joshua Comaroff and Gulliver Shepard put it in 1999, “many of the trends of canonical, modern, *Western cities can be seen in hyperbolic guise*” in Nigeria; “Lagos is not catching up with [the United States]. Rather, [the United States] may be catching up with Lagos.”⁷⁶ But this co-creation has a longer history than the authors acknowledge, one that stretches back to the colonial era—to Hollywood’s so-called classical period—and includes not just Lagos but also Enugu, where the artificial shaping of the entire Eastern Region through the introduction of cocoa and other cash crops eventually enabled the local production of *The Mark of the Hawk* in 1957.

Hollywood’s investments in Nigeria are therefore both cyclical and cumulative, with current work on Eko Atlantic building upon the earlier efforts of the Hollywood imperium. Indeed, the exportation to Nigeria of IMAX and associated big-screen technologies—their efficient transplantation from the global North to the global South—recalls Wole Soyinka’s remarks about the National Theatre in Surulere, where Hollywood monopolized screens even during the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977. “The theater of which nation, by the way?” Soyinka asked of the edifice. “Of Nigeria? Or of Bulgaria, from where the concrete carbuncle was lifted, then grafted onto Lagos marshlands? What, in that general’s cap or Christmas cake of a structure, constitutes even a fragment of Nigerian or African architectural intellect, modern or traditional?” Following Soyinka, one might ask, as I do throughout this book: what, if anything, is Nigerian about certain sites of commercial film exhibition—or, for that matter, what remains of the natural world after Hollywood’s imperialist endeavors?⁷⁷

With sea-level rise already imperiling certain Lagos neighborhoods and those communities currently populating the Niger Delta’s mangrove swamps, plans are well underway to revive coal mining in the hills above Enugu (once dubbed “Coal City”)—the very places depicted in *The Mark of the Hawk*.⁷⁸ Thus if Hollywood-specific forms of exploitation are returning to Nigeria in the twenty-first century, so too are those associated with even older extractive regimens. As Andreas Malm puts it, “The thermometer can be legitimately suspected as a barometer of the

rolling invasion of the past into the present.”⁷⁹ What foreign capital, in collaboration with various local actors, is currently doing to Nigeria is not an invention of the present. It is a form of exploitation—of capital accumulation premised on environmental and social transformation—that, to borrow again from Malm, “did not fall from the sky in this moment but was built up *over time*, eventually amassing such weight and inertia that,” in the context of commercial theatrical exhibition, Marvel movies are now inescapable options, Coke and Pepsi the only “appropriate” soft drinks.⁸⁰ It is a phenomenon that could be called “Hollywood lock-in”: Nigerian exhibition systems are designed to work within an existing one—Hollywood’s.⁸¹ Yet as Olúfemi Táíwò observes, “the cost of being like the West will be unbearable for our planet.”⁸²

Denialism is central to the neoliberal project: the notion that “nothing’s the matter” with the present system, except perhaps for its inadequate “inclusion” of particular social actors, so often masquerades as common sense, preempting critiques of corporatization.⁸³ The idea that behemoths like Disney can do no wrong, especially in the wake of *Black Panther* and other representational “landmarks,” is popular even—perhaps especially—in the field of film and media studies, populated as it is by scholars guilty of “endorsing the worst commercial products, on the grounds that if they are popular, then they are, *ipso facto*, good.”⁸⁴ But no independent filmmakers forced to accept FilmHouse’s Hollywood-dictated terms would agree with so cheerful an assessment. One has only to ask them, and to endeavor to understand their responses in the context of debates that scholars of film and media have tended to overlook. As the American political scientist Nicholas John Spykman put it in 1942, “our so-called painless imperialism has seemed painless only to us.”⁸⁵

What Edward Said terms a “radical falsification”—a presentation of corporations as fundamentally beneficent—is, regrettably, far more conspicuous, even in scholarly accounts. Through this largely celebratory process, culture “is exonerated of any entanglements of power, representations are considered only as . . . images to be parsed and construed as so many grammars of exchange, and the divorce of the present from the past is assumed to be complete. And yet,” Said continues, “far from . . . being a neutral or accidental choice,” this form of scholarly boosterism is an “act of complicity, the humanist’s choice of a disguised, denuded, systematically purged textual model over a more embattled model, whose principal features would inevitably coalesce around the continuing struggle over the question of empire itself.”⁸⁶

American culture may, as Jean Baudrillard once put it, “fascinate . . . those very people who suffer most at its hands,” but that does not mean that such fascination should be allowed to subsume the suffering, or that impressive box-office returns should be used to disable political-economic critique.⁸⁷ However “active” and “empowering” audience responses might be, they simply cannot prevent Disney from doing whatever it wants in a national context like Nigeria, with a federal

government plainly unwilling to involve interpretive communities in regulatory processes, or to pursue any kind of protectionism whatsoever. As S.J. Timothy-Asobele argued in 2003, protectionist policies, even if firmly in place in Nigeria, would be unlikely to actually prevent the use of the country as “a dumping ground for foreign films,” owing both to the sheer export power of Hollywood studios and to the “ignorance” and susceptibility to bribes of Nigerian “security agents” and other import specialists, who routinely permit the illegal importation of goods.⁸⁸

Throughout this book, drawing inspiration from the work of David McNally, I have employed a “hermeneutics of suspicion” rooted in a “mistrust of the self-satisfied narratives of bourgeois culture.”⁸⁹ I was forced to confront such narratives, with their distinctly closed logic, when those representing the major Nigerian exhibitors responded dismissively to a critical piece that I wrote for the blog *Africa Is a Country*. Calling vertical integration a “myth”—even as the prominent Nigerian filmmaker Mildred Okwo joined me in identifying its dampening effect on Nollywood—these individuals (FilmHouse partners and their lawyers) sang a familiar market-fundamentalist tune, presenting monopolization as mere “trade facilitation,” and generally euphemizing the coercive presence in Nigeria of major Hollywood interests.⁹⁰

Efforts to sow doubt regarding the deleterious effects of Disney are continuous with ongoing attempts to discourage attention to climate change. If Marvel movies increasingly displace Nollywood at the Nigerian multiplexes, so too do they function, via the vast and complex corporate matrix of which they are a part, to expel the poor and pollute the land. Hollywood internationalism has always had a wide array of material results. But as Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar argue, the globalization of American interests is so often presented as an agentless process: the circulation of American-style capitalism “becomes the logic of the global structure itself: a sort of second nature making critique difficult.”⁹¹ George Yúdice has similarly critiqued the stubborn belief, rooted in cultural studies, that “the new transnational world order has made one-way cultural imperialism obsolete, together with its contestatory counterdiscourse of anti-imperialism.”⁹²

Hollywood’s post-2004 participation in the urban land market in Nigeria has important precedents, among them the efforts of Lloyd Young & Associates to infiltrate Enugu in the 1950s and the establishment in Lagos of local offices for United Artists and five other major studios in the following decade. That IMAX is willing to invest in Eko Atlantic is troubling, however, because, as planned, the latter promises to constitute a near-hermetic haven for the rich on land reclaimed from the rising ocean. The IPCC’s 2001 report predicted that the effects of climate change would be harshest in African cities located south of the Sahara, and Lagos has, in the years since, certainly substantiated such a forecast.⁹³ But the multiplex companies seem undeterred. “Successive governors of Lagos State [have] undertaken to make Lagos a major hub of African development and a node of the global

economy,” notes Jonathan Haynes. Before this process could commence, Haynes suggests, “the city’s reputation as urban apocalypse had to be overcome.”⁹⁴

This is perhaps why Niyi Akinmolayan’s New Nollywood science-fiction film *Kajola* (2010)—which remains, as of this writing, the only Nigerian film to be unceremoniously “ejected” from and subsequently “banned” by the multiplexes after just a few screenings and despite healthy ticket sales—proved so upsetting. The film offers a chilling vision of a future Lagos in which social inequality is even more extreme, a downright dystopian portrait of corporate autonomy over life and death. Akinmolayan, who does not like to speak about *Kajola*, seemingly learned his lesson: his later film *Falling*, released in 2015 and set in and around the Nollywood industry, earnestly suggests that major corporations are saviors, always heroically stepping in with much-needed charity; two years later, he was directing *The Wedding Party 2* for FilmOne/FilmHouse. The Lekki Peninsula, east of Victoria Island, is now an “enormous enclave for the prosperous,” as Haynes puts it, and one of a growing number of symbols of the “rehabilitation” of Greater Metropolitan Lagos.⁹⁵ Fittingly, FilmHouse has a five-screen, IMAX-equipped multiplex there, as does Silverbird and, at the Palms Shopping Mall, Genesis Deluxe.

“UPDATING” IBADAN

That FilmHouse’s *Couple of Days* is set in Ibadan, a major inland city, and not Lagos, the crowded coastal metropolis, is significant in a number of respects. To begin with, it bucks the representational trend in which Lagos is celebrated as a major entertainment hub on a par with London and Los Angeles—a cosmopolitan place where everyone is wealthy and well connected. Setting a Nollywood film in Ibadan, eighty miles northeast of the industry’s de facto capital, remains a rare gesture. Taking for granted that Lagos is synonymous with the contemporary media “scene,” *Couple of Days* is self-consciously committed to depicting Ibadan as a rapidly modernizing city that replicates the dazzling entertainment options of other major metropolitan centers. That these options are here epitomized by multiplexes speaks not merely to the self-serving, self-publicizing aims of the film’s primary funding source (the FilmHouse theater chain), but also to the broader goals of an industry that, at its most capitalized echelons, is aggressively centralizing theatrical distribution, including at the expense of home video.

Depicting Ibadan as a media-rich city, *Couple of Days* draws upon discourses of “Afropolitanism” to suggest that its characters are, to quote the Ghanaian writer Taiye Selasi’s influential definition of the term, “Africans of the world.”⁹⁶ Instructively, Selasi cited Ibadan as one of the cities to which Afropolitans may proudly remain tethered while plying their fancy, remunerative trades in Western Europe and North America. Over the course of a single weekend, the elite Lagosian protagonists of *Couple of Days* must be converted to this view of Ibadan as eminently conducive to the Afropolitan imagination. They must come to understand

that Lagos and Ibadan are really “not that different,” at least in terms of leisure pursuits—that Ibadan has, as one character puts it, “really stepped up its game,” evoking a Lagos that has long since mirrored the “multiplexification” of European and North American cities. The FilmHouse-friendly message of *Couple of Days* could not be clearer. Multiplexes are now Nollywood’s “home” and “even Ibadan” has them.

In turning its touristic gaze on Ibadan, deliberately shifting Nollywood’s center of gravity away from Lagos and toward what it frequently describes as a “vacation destination” for the elites of Victoria Island, *Couple of Days* depicts a “weekend home” that is staffed by a bumbling, toothless gatekeeper—a source of comic relief deeply familiar from Old Nollywood—and a demure young maid who is constantly fending off her colleague’s sexual advances. The estate itself is a stunning testament to the wealth of its owner, Jude (Enyinna Nwigwe), a higher-up at a large, Lagos-based corporation. The obscurity of Jude’s business, which the film never specifies, leads his gatekeeper to naïvely believe that all Lagosian roads lead to immense wealth and power. Having never been to the city, he simply assumes that its grandeur alone has conferred riches upon his employer. “I want to follow you to this Lagos!” he says to Jude upon the latter’s arrival in Ibadan, an undervalued location that must be “redeemed”—its exciting offerings carefully revealed—in the wake of dismissive comments from Dan (Okey Uzoечи), one of Jude’s closest friends, who makes the mistake of complaining, “This is Ibadan—nothing happens here!” It falls upon Jude’s wife, Cynthia (Lilian Esoro), to explain that “a lot has changed” in Ibadan in recent years—that Dan will be “pleasantly surprised” by what he finds there. She proceeds to give her friends a tour of “the new Ibadan,” one that unfolds in a rapid montage of some of the city’s many attractions (most of them in Dugbe, Ibadan’s main commercial district), including the eye-catching Kokodome restaurant and nightclub, Mapo Hall, Radio Nigeria Ibadan, the Cocoa House (Nigeria’s first skyscraper), and a series of more generic locations: the obligatory local branch of the United Bank for Africa, a well-scrubbed ShopRite, and the sprawling Heritage Mall.

There follows the aforementioned sequence set and filmed at Agodi Park and Gardens, a 150-acre tourist attraction that features a massive waterpark, a source of considerable delight for the film’s central characters. “This is really impressive!” proclaims Dan, finally convinced of Ibadan’s assets. “Agodi is really stepping up! I am blown away! Great stuff!” “This place is lovely,” agrees Nina (Adesua Etomi), Dan’s wife. The stiltedness of these lines serves the film’s blatantly promotional function as a valentine to Ibadan. This love letter to the city might seem arbitrary, or a mere function of the impulse to move away from overrepresented Lagos and toward other Nigerian locations. In fact, it is tied to the demands of the film’s sponsor and distributor, FilmOne/FilmHouse, which required a positive representation of its Ibadan multiplex.

After spending the afternoon at Agodi, the protagonists decide to go bowling at Ventura Mall. The film reverts to a promotional, music-video aesthetic, offering

a montage set to original songs by DJ Klem, as the characters help themselves to the wonders of the mall, culminating in the spectacle of the FilmHouse multiplex. If these members of the Victoria Island elite become tourists in Ibadan—and especially at Agodi—they remain so at the movies. And if, at Agodi, the characters model stereotypically touristic behavior, lounging by the pool, playing “water football,” and—one by one—screaming their way down serpentine waterslides, at FilmHouse they demonstrate how to be “proper” cinema spectators, a process that, instructively, includes the consumption and enjoyment of an array of products.

The FilmOne production *New Money* (Tope Oshin, 2018) also, in a similarly self-referential fashion, depicts the company’s exhibition branch. At one point in the film, young, hip Toun (Jemima Osunde), the new CEO of Audere Holdings (a fictional outfit whose assets include food and textile companies), turns to fellow CEO Ganiyu Osamede (Daniel Etin Effiong) and asks if he would like to join her for a date. The cheeky Ganiyu immediately suggests that the two repair to his house. “I have this really sweet home system,” he explains, “and it connects to Hollywood, so we can watch whatever movie we want.” Toun has other ideas, however, and she informs Ganiyu that “connecting to Hollywood” is hardly their only option. “How about we go to the cinema instead?” she asks, naming a FilmOne production—*The Wedding Party 2*—as the film she most wants to see. The out-of-touch Ganiyu is forced to admit that he has not heard of the film; Google, accessed on his smartphone, quickly fills him in. “What?” he blurts, baffled. “It’s a Nollywood film?” Toun explains that Nollywood is now a theatrical phenomenon, a fact that she illustrates by taking Ganiyu to FilmHouse’s massive IMAX theater in Lekki. In the aptly titled *New Money*, big-screen Nollywood is better—more exciting, more of a novelty—than small-screen Hollywood. Yet if this blatant advertisement for FilmHouse focuses on the theater chain’s exhibition of Nollywood films like *The Wedding Party 2* and *New Money* itself, it also indicates that FilmHouse, like Ganiyu’s spurned home entertainment center, “connects to Hollywood.” An establishing shot of the actual FilmHouse Lekki, included toward the end of *New Money*, makes clear that while the Nollywood film *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* (Ishaya Bako, 2017) is playing there, so are multiple Hollywood movies, among them *Black Panther*, whose poster, in duplicate, lines the entrance to the cinema.⁹⁷

Whatever their “true” identities, both Lagos and Ibadan are characterized by a marked contrast between rich and poor, skyscrapers and slums. “As much as the Africa of Afropolitans is emerging,” notes Obadias Ndaba, “it is still a tiny island in a vast, untidy, and messy ocean of slums and shacks and corrugated iron sheets.”⁹⁸ American businesses have long endeavored to normalize such contrasts in their efforts to introduce cutting-edge film technologies in Nigeria. In 1962, the trade journal *American Exporter* circulated a newsletter that addressed the country’s capacity to accommodate contradiction. “NIGERIA: Not one, but four television stations! And throw a stone from any one of the transmitting towers and I’ll bet you may hit someone practicing juju (voodoo),” wrote Richard G. Lurie, who praised

Nigeria as exhibiting “more potential than any other country I have ever visited.” Cinerama exhibits and other state-of-the-art Hollywood exports were, Lurie said, “shooting up in the midst of slums”; so were “[t]all, modern skyscrapers,” marking Nigeria as a media-rich “place to watch.”⁹⁹

Lurie’s ethnocentrism notwithstanding, his comments about the contrasts characteristic of the Nigerian urban landscape are instructive. He predicted that American media companies would have to pay an “extra price” in order to conduct business in Nigeria, but that this surplus expenditure would be well worth it. His predictions proved correct, of course, at least inasmuch as they pointed toward costly state failures and infrastructural lacunae that have only grown in the years since. Take the sharply rising cost of diesel fuel, particularly following the reduced fuel subsidies of 2012, and the need for the multiplexes to supply power in a notoriously blackout-prone country. Multinational media firms like IMAX have recognized that it is in their best interests to help expand and enhance municipal capacity in Nigeria, whether through the provision of high-end generators or through collaboration with state and local governments to “upgrade” such services as sanitation, refuse collection and disposal, and the maintenance of parks and other open spaces (key elements of the so-called “Disneyland model,” which, inherited from Richard Cook, *Couple of Days* directly depicts). In the case of Eko Atlantic, IMAX is hoping to help develop municipal capacity from scratch, ensuring that this planned community, should it ever materialize, will be a true “film town.”

IMAX is not the only corporation influencing the style of FilmHouse locations. The exhibitor’s design and mode of operation were further standardized through partnerships with the Dubai-based iScream café brand (which operates stands at all FilmHouse locations) and various video-game companies, among many others. The lobby of FilmHouse’s Leisure Mall location, which is reachable by escalator only (one enters each of the eight theaters at the highest row of stadium seating, via the lobby), boasts a marble floor, several dining tables, and an iScream stand and Soul Food Café kiosk opposite the main concession stand, which offers the expected popcorn, Coke, and candy. FilmHouse’s local development partners include Integrated Leisure Company Limited, the Cross River State Tourism Bureau, Alpine, Carthage, SIO Group, Odu’a Investment Company, Bank of Industry Nigeria, Smoodypod Group International and STOA. Its international partners—the sources of some of its most conspicuous features, from large screens to the movies projected onto them—include IMAX and Coca-Cola. As this list attests, the ambiguous indigeneity of FilmHouse derives not from the homogeneity of its partners but rather from the profound power imbalance that characterizes their relationship. Nigerian firms are not absent from FilmHouse’s planning; but they cannot possibly compete with the likes of Coke and IMAX, which, Nigerian filmmaker Chris Ihidero told me, have enabled FilmHouse to “move the needle,” inexorably “expanding the space for cinema exhibition in Nigeria.” With FilmHouse enjoying joint partnerships with both corporations, the chain has,

Ihidero surmises, “done more in the few years since [it] came on board than Silverbird [its main rival and the oldest Nigerian multiplex chain] has done in all its years,” though Silverbird has some of the same corporate partners.¹⁰⁰

Like many other filmmakers working in Nigeria today, Ihidero points to the vertically integrated nature of FilmHouse—to, that is, the exhibitor’s fusion with a production and distribution company (FilmOne) whose titles it inevitably screens, often at the expense of those Nigerian movies produced beyond its ambit. FilmOne, Ihidero told me, “is taking advantage of an industry that’s poorly regulated.” Citing the May 3, 1948, US Supreme Court decision in *U.S. v. Paramount Pictures*—the so-called *Paramount* decision, which decreed “that the studios were indeed trusts and that the only available remedy was a forced divestiture of studio holdings in film exhibition”—Ihidero reasoned that “studios should not own theaters; FilmOne Productions should not exist.”¹⁰¹ Ideally, Ihidero said, FilmHouse would “leave production to other [companies and] hold on to exhibition.” The problem—the factor limiting the commercial prospects of so many “New Nollywood” films made with a commitment to the theatrical market—is that of vertical integration. “By producing and reserving the juiciest spots for their own films,” Ihidero said, “[FilmHouse] is undermining the industry greatly. This should not be allowed.” While FilmHouse, in its collaborations with multinational capital, clearly reflects what the Nigerian academic Augustine-Ufua Enahoro has referred to as “complicity on the part of the peripheral cinema,” it is also a vertically integrated Nigerian firm that merely reproduces, on its own scale, the restrictive trade practices of the major Hollywood studios.¹⁰²

FilmHouse, the Silverbird Group, Globacom, Gabosky Ventures, and other Nigerian media companies are, strictly speaking, second-tier media firms—nationally and even regionally powerful corporations, in contrast to the largest media multinationals—and, as such, they are “hardly ‘oppositional’ to the global system.”¹⁰³ Strategic collaborations between first- and second-tier media firms abound in twenty-first-century Nigeria. These joint ventures enable Hollywood’s continued market power while simultaneously permitting a firm like FilmHouse/FilmOne to mimic, on a much smaller scale, American multinational models. Such mimicry is not merely the means by which second-tier media firms like FilmHouse/FilmOne aspire to and express their membership in the modern world (as in James Ferguson’s formulation).¹⁰⁴ It is also a consequence of capital investments made by US multinational film companies that contract with these Nigerian firms, and that, in the process, not only provide mentoring (including to individual managers via Hollywood representatives) but also blueprints and operational guidelines (especially for the use of proprietary technologies like IMAX equipment).¹⁰⁵ As Robert McChesney points out, “the second-tier media firms in the developing nations tend to have distinctly pro-business political agendas and to support expansion of the global media market, which puts them at odds with large segments of the population in their home countries.”¹⁰⁶ This is certainly true

of FilmHouse/FilmOne, which, through its heavily capitalized commitment to “upscale” (and thus, by Nigerian standards, prohibitively pricey) theatrical exhibition, is seen by many as requiring supplementation in the form of “small community cinemas in popular neighborhoods,” to quote Jonathan Haynes—venues that would serve as affordable alternatives to the glitzy multiplexes.¹⁰⁷

Such shiny facilities as the FilmHouse, Silverbird, and Genesis Deluxe theaters have reliably attracted an array of foreign investments, from the billion-dollar “fund for Africa” announced in 2012 by the Brazilian megabank BTG Pactual to capital commitments to the Nollywood industry from DSTv and Nilesat.¹⁰⁸ Crucial here is the status of the multiplex as a profit center unto itself—a site of convergence of retail brands and consumer activities. Multiplexing as a process of standardization relies upon a confluence of seemingly discrepant products and practices, reinforcing the longstanding relationship between shopping and cinema while also introducing new and exciting affordances. In his work on Indian multiplexes, Amit S. Rai examines what he terms “the lobby experience,” writing, “The [multiplex] lobby is the nexus of desire and population flow that has come to be the central moment-space from the point of view of the exhibitor.”¹⁰⁹ Rai cites the “fast-paced collage of advertising, promotions, trailers, television, video games, and Internet” enabled, in part, by the growing affordability of flat-screen monitors, which have become fixtures in the multiplex lobby, where they reliably serve many of the practical as well as ideological functions for television in public space that Anna McCarthy has documented.¹¹⁰ He suggests that, in some cases, the labor of purchasing and participating in “new media assemblages” extends no farther than the multiplex lobby, or the broader shopping center in which the multiplex is strategically embedded.¹¹¹ “Malls,” argues Rai, “allow for the convergence of competitive and profit-driven commerce with the ideological narrative of national unity.”

This narrative is, however, far harder to sustain in the context of contemporary Nigeria, in which multiplex attendance is very much a minority activity, and in which North American firms like IMAX collude with the Nigerian government in shaping such planned spaces of exclusion as Eko Atlantic.¹¹² As Jeanne Allen suggests, “access to film viewing was a highly visible manifestation of participation in a rich consumer environment” in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Allen argues that “the physical conditions of film exhibition fostered a liaison between film viewing and consumer behavior,” with “national chains, proximity to shopping districts, the splendor of the theater, [and] the material splendor on the screen in a darkened hall” all contributing to a distinct experience of modernity.¹¹³ As Acland puts it, theaters “play a special role as a point of initiation in the life of cultural commodities, and the release of a major motion picture into commercial cinemas is also the introduction of a set of commodities and artefacts.”¹¹⁴ Acland’s reminder that the “public film experience [often] involves other forms of media consumption”—from the playing of video games to the viewing of television screens in multiplex lobbies—is useful for considerations of

the Nigerian theatrical market in the twenty-first century, as chains like Silverbird and FilmHouse showcase everything from ice cream brands to massage chairs.¹¹⁵

Multiplexes serve other, less glamorous purposes, as well. In Nigeria, they are often places in which people (particularly those just ending their work shifts) wait for traffic to become less congested before they attempt the always-onerous drive home. It is in this sense that the multiplex perhaps acquires a specifically Nigerian character that distinguishes it from its counterparts in other countries, despite the standardization of colors, equipment, and concessions.¹¹⁶ If, as Moradewun Adejumo suggests, “the global dimensions of [Old Nollywood’s] technologies are frequently moderated by the fact of their prominent intervention in constructions of ‘locality,’” a similar argument might be made about the “Nigerianness” even of those multiplexes that look (at least on the surface) a lot like those in London or Los Angeles.¹¹⁷ Yet standardization conspires to subsume even the distinctly Nigerian experience of collectively outwaiting (and complaining about) Lagos traffic, encouraging time-killing patrons to participate in all manner of recreational activities, from bowling to playing air hockey to testing their luck with a claw crane.

If *Couple of Days* lingers on the multiplex’s close, mutually supportive connection to what one character calls “other entertainment options,” it also acknowledges the exhibitor’s fierce commitment to its own films, including at the expense of other Nigerian productions. *Couple of Days* thus confirms (as does the exhibitor itself, outside of the text) Acland’s point that the global “upscaling of the multiplex”—the addition of screens and show times in standardized facilities around the world—has not resulted in the breaking of those barriers that have long prevented various national cinemas from reaching the biggest, most capitalized theaters.¹¹⁸ FilmHouse may, to borrow Acland’s terms, strategically “don the garments of nationalism,” but it invariably does so “while finding rationales for the dismal invisibility” of those Nollywood films in which it does not have a stake as producer-distributor.¹¹⁹

Vertical integration—“whenever the ‘seller’ and the ‘buyer’ [are] in fact ultimately the same firm”—has long been, as *Variety* put it in 1987, “a safe haven for exhibition of a producer-distributor’s own product.”¹²⁰ Revenues and interest remain in-house when FilmHouse exhibits FilmOne movies, a way, perhaps, of making up for contractual arrangements that otherwise favor Hollywood films and Hollywood firms. Silverbird, FilmHouse, and other Nigerian exhibitors allow Hollywood studios to exercise considerable control over bookings and marketing strategies not because the latter have necessarily earned any goodwill from the former but simply because they are powerful, and clearly understand that the threat of withholding their films is an effective one, especially in a country where such a threat was once (at least partially) carried out.¹²¹ If the major Hollywood studios dominate distribution in Nigeria—a state of affairs that Nigerian filmmaker Hubert Ogunde eloquently condemned in 1987—it is partly because, as Edward Jay Epstein puts it, “the multiplex owners who book movies believe that [these

studios] alone have the wherewithal not only to open a movie . . . but to create a national audience for it.”¹²²

The Hollywood studios have, through their solely owned distribution arms and the circulation of films that their parent companies finance, established a vertically integrated template for the Nigerian firms that do business with them. Like other national contexts outside of the United States and Western Europe, Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s provided an important testing ground for Hollywood’s maintenance of vertical integration in the wake of the Justice Department’s (partially and temporarily) successful efforts to break up the studio trusts as they operated domestically. As Jon Lewis points out, Hollywood’s “failure to make peace with the feds at home was accompanied by a strategic and harmonious relationship abroad,” including in Nigeria, where cartelization was ably assisted by Lebenese entrepreneurs.¹²³ Yet even the fabled *Paramount* decision was, Lewis makes clear, “focused on fairly narrow issues with regard to industry ownership and collusion in [domestic] theatrical exhibition.”¹²⁴ By forcing the major studios to sell off valuable real estate, the suit merely stripped them of their much-needed collateral, compelling them, however indirectly, “to find other sources of capital through arrangements (mergers, for example) with better-capitalized, better-diversified companies.”¹²⁵ Such companies have been drawn inexorably to Nigeria, and they are arguably among the reasons for the multiplexing that has taken place there since 2004.

The logic of vertical integration is hardly novel in the Nollywood economy. In a vast majority of cases, the industry’s powerful marketers, as small-scale distributors operating out of Idumota and Alaba Markets in Lagos and Aba Market and Iweka Road Market in Onitsha, have long controlled “each part of the value chain, including financing, production, and distribution.”¹²⁶ The logic also, of course, predates Nollywood: in the 1970s, Sanya Dosunmu denounced vertical integration, which he was forced to confront upon the completion of his film *Dinner with the Devil* (1975), as “a classic example of a racket which makes a victim of the [independent] producer” struggling to gain a foothold in a seemingly closed market.¹²⁷ If Nigerian filmmakers like Chris Ihidero are, in the current national theatrical market, finding it difficult to compete with those in the employ of Film-One (whose productions are guaranteed exhibition at FilmHouse theaters), they are also obliged to make way for Hollywood exports, which play in all of the country’s major movie houses. Given this context, it is scarcely incidental that Disney’s *Black Panther*, in its early (and inescapably anti-Muslim) citation of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls, suggests the need for foreign capital to save Nigerians from themselves. Depicting Nigeria as a darkened, improbably underpopulated jungle, the film rejects a vision of Pan-African liberation in favor of preserving the political and economic status quo established and supported by American capitalism (here embodied by a benevolent CIA agent) and its allies. Thus if Wakanda—a thriving, technologically advanced empire concealed within a desperately poor country

of the same name—seems distinctly analogous to Victoria Island and other elite enclaves in Nigeria, *Black Panther*, which screened extensively in those enclaves, is itself illustrative of Disney’s need to preserve and extend its own hegemony, particularly in the face of Nollywood’s advancements. “It’s Disney imperialism,” the Nigerian filmmaker Abba Makama told me on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of *Black Panther*’s premiere—and in response to a tweet from the film’s star, Chadwick Boseman, who proudly said of the American blockbuster that it “took over . . . the rest of the world.”¹²⁸ For many Nigerians, Boseman’s imperialist language was a little too on the nose. As of this writing, *Black Panther* remains FilmHouse’s highest-grossing film, at just over 600,000 tickets sold. Makama’s comments serve as a rather striking reminder that Nigeria, too, has been living in the “shadow of a mouse,” to take the title of Donald Crafton’s history of the Disney enterprise.¹²⁹ Competing with the rodent requires considerable ingenuity.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT

The heavily capitalized restructuring of Nigerian exhibition spaces and cinemagoing habits has also entailed the transformation of Nigerian film content. The vast majority of the local productions that make it to the multiplexes, where they share screen space and showtimes with Hollywood blockbusters, focus on wealthy characters, and they tend to carefully exclude any evidence that many Nigerians are, in fact, desperately poor.¹³⁰ Solvent Nigerians who patronize the multiplexes are, in a fundamental sense, placed in the position of Western tourists, “protected” from the “undesirables” so assiduously denied entry. Such protection might also be seen as extending to screen representations themselves, which, as critics of New Nollywood consistently point out, tend to make Lagos look like Beverly Hills.¹³¹ “Reveling in the culture of business and success is nothing new for Nollywood,” Jonathan Haynes points out. “What is new is the consolidation of a Potemkin Village version of the country in which the private lives of the privileged fill the screen, their apparently autonomous reality obscuring much of what the old Nollywood knew”—including about corporate malfeasance.¹³²

Some films, like the aforementioned *Merry Men*, manage to escape such pressures, at least at the narrative level, but the imperatives of advertising and marketing are now so strong as to dictate entire plots. The occasional Old Nollywood film would be steeped in brand names (the *BlackBerry Babes* series [Ubong Bassey Nya, 2011–2012] comes immediately to mind), but these were largely satirical depictions of consumerism and “brand loyalty.” Their trenchancy was sharpened not by formal licensing arrangements (which would almost certainly have disabled satirical critique) but by illicit uses of registered trademarks and by outright copyright infringement.¹³³ By contrast, the landscape of New Nollywood seems altogether tamer, conditioned as it is by formal agreements to prominently feature, and flatteringly depict, any number of branded items, from soft drinks to streaming services.¹³⁴

It is perhaps unsurprising that the rivalry between Coke and Pepsi is currently playing out on the terrain of commercial theatrical exhibition in Nigeria, despite Coke's claim that, since its 1989 sale of Columbia Pictures, it has not been "in show business."¹³⁵ After all, the two soft drink giants have long battled for hegemony in Nigeria, their methods often pivoting around the sponsorship of arts and entertainment. The first leg of Louis Armstrong's twenty-seven-city tour of Africa, which took place in October 1960, brought the jazz musician to Nigeria, where he was sponsored—quite conspicuously—by Pepsi in its efforts to compete with Coca-Cola for the Nigerian soft-drink market. The Nigerian leg of the tour was even dubbed "a Madison Avenue Mission for Pepsi," and it marked the company's efforts to bring Nigeria into the ambit of its growing sense of "corporate social responsibility" and commitment to "cause-related marketing."¹³⁶ Frantz Fanon critiqued Pepsi's attempt to connect political freedoms (Armstrong's visit to Nigeria was timed to coincide with independence celebrations) to market freedoms, but Pepsi persisted in ways that are readily evident in its "winning" of Silverbird, the first Nigerian multiplex chain, in 2018.¹³⁷ Even prior to Armstrong's visit, on the eve of Nigerian independence, the Pepsi-Cola Group established four "gigantic" plants in the country—in Kano, Onitsha, Ibadan, and Mushin. General manager John P. Stanton announced Pepsi's Nigerian ambitions at a special press conference in Lagos. Flanked by no fewer than eleven Pepsi executives, he outlined plans to make Pepsi "Nigeria's soft drink."¹³⁸ In the spring of 1960, Donald Kendall, president of Pepsi-Cola International, declared with pride that the company constituted "a new and rich market for Nigeria's kolanut"—"the major ingredient required for manufacturing the drink."¹³⁹

If, as Jonathan Haynes has suggested, Old Nollywood films are "not at home" in "fancy places" (including "gleaming multiplexes"), the task of New Nollywood is to make their flashier descendants seem well suited to such venues.¹⁴⁰ Product placement is one way of achieving this semblance of belonging, and it often reflects a hierarchical network of control, one in which Coke and Pepsi help to dictate multiplex policy, along with media companies like IMAX.¹⁴¹ Product placement has a long history in Nollywood: Haynes draws attention to a camera that "repeatedly returns to the label on a bottle of wine" in Kenneth Nnebue's groundbreaking production of *Glamour Girls 2: The Italian Connection* (Chika Onukwafor, 1996).¹⁴² In Nollywood today, however, product placement extends well beyond beverages. Produced by The Entertainment Network and distributed by FilmOne, Ishaya Bako's *Road to Yesterday* (2015) was also sponsored by Land Rover. The film is a prototypical New Nollywood affair. Its opening sequence was shot on location at Murtala Muhammed International Airport, a sure sign of a healthy budget, given the well-known, often prohibitive expenses associated with shooting there. Additionally, drone shots proliferate, including those that show the Eko Bridge Marina, and the film is in the widest widescreen.

Very much an extended commercial for Range Rover, for which the film's star, Genevieve Nnaji, has long served as an ambassador, *Road to Yesterday* is full of

paean to the brand. At one point, the male protagonist, Izu (Oris Erhuero), joins his friends at a Lagos bar, where they get a table and talk about cars. “You have to admit, BMW has dropped the ball a bit over the last couple of years,” says one of Izu’s friends, who confidently asserts that “Range [Rover] is better.” (The scene was shot on location at Sip Bar & Restaurant on glamorous Victoria Island.) This spoken tribute to the Range Rover brand extends into largely visual territory as the film’s Lagosian protagonists take their SUV (whose logo-adorned grill is never far from view) on a road trip to Izu’s natal village, Amba. Victoria (Nnaji) wears Louboutins, their trademark red soles starkly visible in a number of shots. This is not, however, the entirely sanitized Nigeria familiar from so many New Nollywood films: Victoria, stopped at a checkpoint, reluctantly gives a police officer bribe money before driving off in that much-admired Range Rover.

MULTIPLEX TECHNOLOGY

The technologized “upgrading” of the Nigerian theatrical experience, envisioned by AMPECA as early as 1961, and temporarily actualized by Cinestar a few years later, was also achieved with IMAX’s widely publicized partnership with FilmHouse. Intended to allow IMAX-friendly Hollywood companies to further benefit from distribution in Nigeria while lending the country a high-tech, elite-oriented flair, this particular corporate partnership is exemplary of the longstanding efforts of European and North American firms to at least partially determine the economic, infrastructural, and cultural contours of the Nigerian cinematic experience. Few Hollywood executives have been more candid about their Nigerian plans than Andrew Cripps, the president of IMAX’s operations in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. A former top executive at Paramount Pictures, Cripps frequently points to Nigeria as “the biggest economy on the [African] continent,” albeit one that, in his estimation, has not yet been properly “exploited” by Hollywood studios. Arguing that the Nigerian market was, when IMAX first partnered with FilmHouse in 2015, “extremely under-screened,” Cripps called for a multiplex revolution of the sort that FilmHouse co-founders Moses Babatope and Kene Okwuosa, his close associates in this endeavor, had in mind for the country.

In announcing IMAX’s desire to “seize the mutual growth opportunities that exist in Nigeria,” Cripps suggested that his corporation would benefit alongside and not in place of Mkparu’s.¹⁴³ In his own statements, Mkparu indicated that IMAX, rather than prohibiting the profitability of FilmHouse through the licensing of proprietary technologies and exhibition practices (such as the use of IMAX’s Digital Media Remastering process), would in fact dramatically boost the exhibitor’s chances of success in a market “starved” for innovation. “Our mission,” Mkparu said, “is to establish the best movie-going experience in Nigeria.” He continued:

IMAX will help us realize this goal by delivering an immersive and differentiated experience previously unavailable to Nigerian moviegoers. As we continue our

aggressive expansion plans, IMAX will serve as an anchor attraction in our multiplex in Lagos, redefining the premium cinema experience in Nigeria. We are proud to be the first to introduce IMAX in the country and look forward to broadening its reach.¹⁴⁴

In such accounts, IMAX and FilmHouse are depicted in terms of their shared commitment to “updating” and “upgrading” entertainment options in Nigeria. Rectifying the unevenness of global cinematic development is the stated goal, the enrichment of Hollywood studios a mere side effect of such progress.

This promotion of Nigeria’s multiplex revolution as a win-win situation for Nigerian and North American corporations is extremely common—an engine for the production of “common sense” about the transformation of Nigeria from an egregiously “under-screened” country into one “finally” endowed with state-of-the-art exhibition facilities. According to this logic, Nigerians are the principal beneficiaries of IMAX’s expansion into the country. The filling of Hollywood coffers, if acknowledged at all, is seen as merely incidental, or a small price to pay for enhanced “convenience” and the overdue ushering of Nigeria into the multiplex era.

The global regularities of the multiplex format are strikingly evident in the urban and suburban retail outlets of relatively young firms like Silverbird, Genesis Deluxe, and FilmHouse. Stadium seating, proximity to or containment within shopping malls, dependence on concession sales, exhibition of the latest Hollywood films, ubiquitous advertising (including in the form of pre-show commercials), and relatively high ticket prices are defining features of all three theater chains, as of their counterparts the world over. The global uniformity of the multiplex experience is partly attributable to the promotion of certain exhibition standards via widely circulated theater management manuals and other how-to guides, but it is also a result of the influence of those corporations that, like IMAX, are at the forefront of multinational “pacting.” As part of this process, a major firm joins forces with local companies in order to build and operate multiplexes, often while buying majority stakes in those companies, which, as a result, cease to be local in any meaningful sense.¹⁴⁵

Long before partnering with FilmHouse, the IMAX Corporation was in the business of “pacting” with local companies in “developing” theatrical markets in Asia, opening the first commercially operated IMAX theater in the People’s Republic of China in 2004. Multiplex uniformity is thus reinforced by the global presence of proprietary technologies and associated strategies, such as IMAX’s Digital Media Remastering process, whereby films are “retooled” to fit the precise technical specifications of the IMAX exhibition system.¹⁴⁶ At the time of writing, FilmHouse, which was founded in Lagos in 2010, operates fourteen multiplexes in seven Nigerian states. These include, among other locations, the aforementioned eight-screen venue at the Leisure Mall in Surulere, Lagos, which opened in 2012; a five-screen venue off Bisola Durosini Etti Drive, on the Lekki peninsula east of Lagos, where conversion to the IMAX system commenced in 2015; a four-screen

venue at the Marina Resort in Calabar, which opened in 2012; a five-screen venue near the Oda roundabout in Akure, which opened in 2015; the four- and three-screen venues depicted in *Couple of Days*, at the Heritage Mall and the Ventura Mall, respectively (the former opened in 2013, the latter in 2014); a five-screen venue in the Port Harcourt Mall, near Government House, which opened in 2014; and a six-screen venue at the Ado Bayero Mall in Kano, which opened in 2014. In addition, FilmHouse operates a three-screen theater in Ugbowo, Benin, at the Voen Mall, opposite the main campus of the University of Benin.

In 2011, FilmHouse signed a spate of deals with various shopping-center developers, agreeing to lease enviable exhibition spaces on heavily trafficked commercial thoroughfares. A year later, it began to act on its long-nurtured plan to “roll out” twenty-five multiplexes over a six-year period—a project that was not fully realized by 2018, despite crucial assistance from IMAX, and in part because of FilmHouse’s time-consuming and politically fraught efforts to reserve space in Eko Atlantic. IMAX, as mentioned, also wants in on Eko Atlantic, and it is already paying for advertisements that tout its technology as emblematic of what this planned city promises to offer its wealthy future residents. If FilmHouse eventually begins construction on Eko Atlantic, it will be with IMAX’s generous backing.

In 2013, FilmHouse began the conversion to digital cinema at all of its locations, a process greatly abetted two years later by IMAX’s involvement. Initially, FilmHouse promoted its compatibility with Nollywood’s much-publicized 35mm productions, such as Kunle Afolayan’s *Phone Swap* (2012), but this strategic affection for celluloid has all but vanished, for at least two reasons: conversion to digital cinema is seen as a means of keeping up with global exhibition standards (American multiplex chains began the large-scale conversion to digital in 2012, a year before FilmHouse commenced its own efforts in this area), and the process has allowed FilmHouse to lay off a number of employees previously needed as projectionists.¹⁴⁷ “All our cinemas are digital,” a FilmHouse operations manager told me in the spring of 2018. “We use DCP projectors and . . . we have contracts with IMAX and contacts with IMAX reps, having the first IMAX cinema in West Africa. . . . Generally, FilmHouse has been a pacesetter in the industry in terms of infrastructure and technology.”¹⁴⁸

A 2014 advertorial in a Nigerian magazine linked FilmHouse to the aims of “major Hollywood studios” in its estrangement from celluloid and embrace of digital cinema: “Thank God, Nigerian cinemas can now finally say they have joined the big players internationally with . . . Digital Cinema Technology.” As of 2021, Nigeria has at least sixty cinemas that are compliant with specifications set by Digital Cinema Initiatives (DCI), a joint venture of Disney, Paramount, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Universal, and Warner Bros. Studios. FilmHouse was the first Nigerian company to adapt to the standards that DCI established in 2002. Today, it boasts 3D offerings as well as a 7.1 digital surround-sound system, high-frame-rate capability, and a proprietary digital laboratory that “has made it very easy for Nigerian

filmmakers, content producers and corporate advertisers to enjoy the highest grades in Nigeria at reduced costs.” FilmHouse’s Digi-lab can even convert films to the “international-standard-cinema-compliant” DCP format: in 2014, FilmHouse “reworked” Rukky Sanda’s romantic drama *Gold Diggin’* (2014) from a “regular HD feature” to a “high-grade DCI-compliant DCP feature with an upgrade to 7.1 Surround Sound.” As Kene Mkpuru put it, “We can comfortably say that cinemagoers in Nigeria are in for a whole new world of digital experience.” Tellingly, he added, “The days of low-quality Nollywood films are soon to be a thing of the past.”¹⁴⁹ “A *new* and *serene* kind of entertainment,” read a banner advertising the unveiling of FilmHouse’s multistory Ventura Mall location, where doors opened at noon on Sunday, May 25th, 2014. Medium specificity does not seem to be a concern: Mkpuru’s FilmHouse is committed to the convertibility of its theaters, suggesting that, if the feature film should “die,” the big screen certainly will not.

The centrality of such a screen to all manner of productions was powerfully demonstrated on February 22, 2018, when the first three episodes of the latest season of MTV’s *Shuga Naija* (2013–) were previewed at FilmHouse’s Lekki location. Bottles of Fanta were distributed, and cast and crew members gathered to glimpse the results of their labor. Projected onto the massive IMAX screen, the program, MTV’s own “Nigerian” series, served as a somewhat unexpected advertisement for the primacy of the cinema screen, reinforcing FilmHouse’s assumption that there will always be a need for such a screen, even, perhaps, after the “death” of cinema itself.

MONEY POWER

The emergence of the multiplexes represents the latest materialization of Nigeria’s cinema-specific narratives of progress, which have always pivoted around the introduction of new technologies and the cultivation of symbolic capital, social respectability, and professional distinction.¹⁵⁰ The coalescence of the industrial formation known as New Nollywood suggests something similar to what Tejaswini Ganti calls the “gentrification” of Hindi cinema, whereby films, filmmakers, and spaces of exhibition all conform to perceptions of middle-class taste and achievement. Such gentrification is, Ganti argues, “articulated through a discourse of quality, improvement, and innovation that is often based upon the displacement of the poor and working class from the spaces of production and consumption.”¹⁵¹ Ganti observes gentrification’s material as well as textual effects, arguing that the latter can be seen in “a growing concern with wealthy protagonists and the near-complete erasure of the working class, urban poor, and rural dwellers once prominent as protagonists/heroes in Hindi films.”¹⁵² Among major Hindi filmmakers, Ganti notes considerable disdain for the alleged cinematic illiteracy and purportedly poor taste of the so-called “mass audience.” Among my respondents, by contrast, such disdain was almost entirely reserved for a system of exhibition

that, whatever its claims to respectability and indigeneity, is hardly premised on a commitment to Nollywood in all the industry's diversity. Ganti's respondents seem, to her, heavily invested in "efforts to recast filmmaking into the mold of a modern high-status profession."¹⁵³ The Nollywood filmmakers I observed in the course of my research were not, however, interested in transforming cinematic production into something "respectable"; discourses of Afropolitanism—not to mention decades of African art films—have already accomplished much of that work.

Mkparu and other executives have boasted of their extensive experience in commercial exhibition in the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and the United States. According to an official release, FilmHouse is "committed to ensuring that an appropriate standard of corporate governance is maintained throughout the company. Our values: Integrity, Respect for people, Trust, Professionalism and Passion in what we do."¹⁵⁴ But the values of individual members of the FilmHouse team matter very little in the context of organized corporate finance. They are certainly insufficient to militate against conditions that many filmmakers view as unfair. Justice William O. Douglas, who wrote for the Court in the so-called *Paramount* decision, noted the irrelevance of "specific intent," pointing out that individual personality is immaterial if "monopoly results." Douglas continued, "Size is itself an earmark of monopoly power, for size carries with it an opportunity for abuse."¹⁵⁵

As Richard Trainor observed in 1987, over a year after the Justice Department announced that it "would not oppose the [Hollywood] studios' move back into the movie theater business": "Representatives of the new Hollywood may insist that monopoly is the last thought on their minds, but many independent producers and exhibitors remain skeptical."¹⁵⁶ For his part, the American businessman Kirk Kerkorian, onetime owner of MGM, complained in 1996, "People call me a raper and a pillager, and that's not how I want to be thought of."¹⁵⁷ Even Will Hays, publicly addressing the export power of American cinema in 1928, insisted, "Ours is not a foreign invasion at all. Our pictures go abroad by invitation. The people of the world want them, despite the activities of foreign governments to lessen the effectiveness of the American film industry by practically subsidizing indigeneous film production."¹⁵⁸ Helped along by the Nigerian government, including through various funds set up to support the entertainment industry, Nigeria's multiplexes can hardly be said to "lessen the effectiveness" of Hollywood. In fact, the capital and other forms of assistance that these chains receive from the state are not even needed. They already have Hollywood, which is still, as a leading exporter, Will Hays's Hollywood, in their corner, propping them up to further enrich itself.¹⁵⁹

Part of the point of taking Nollywood seriously as a capitalist enterprise—and of undoing the work of those who have claimed for African economies an impossibly untimely, anachronistic, "primitive" or "indirect" status—is to interrogate the extent to which African corporate objectives mirror broader processes of expropriation, intimidation, and neglect. This is not to reduce all of Nollywood to the

corporate model of the multiplexes, but rather to emphasize the disproportionate power of that model, supported as it is by the Nigerian state and international capital markets alike. The desire to honor and protect those whose entrée into the global economy is seen as both regrettably belated and impressively entrepreneurial—to guard against efforts to conflate the relatively small-scale capitalist activities of a few ambitious Nigerians with those of major multinationals—is understandable. But it merely reproduces, in a more laudatory and protective register, the condescending rhetoric of primitivism, whereby African capitalists are seen as “not really” capitalists at all, their activities mere imitations or misunderstandings of properly corporate power plays familiar from a global North whose existence is allegedly more impactful, more determinative, anyway.

Reducing complex political-economic matters to personal triumphs (of talent, taste, or morality) is merely the “heartwarming” flipside of the familiar (and equally banal) search for individual scapegoats. But taking FilmOne at its Afro-optimist word is not merely naïve. It is also a way of obscuring asymmetries of power. Indeed, FilmOne’s close ties to a number of corporate interests—its contractual obligations to the companies that advertise with FilmHouse, including Coca-Cola—mean that its Nollywood projects are at least as laden with embedded marketing as any uninspiring Hollywood production.

Couple of Days, parts of which were shot at FilmHouse’s Ventura Mall location, features characters who drink Coca-Cola while ensconced in the multiplex’s massive, cushioned seats. The unmistakably promotional aesthetic that the film achieves at this particular moment, as at others, was at least doubly strategic. Intended to help “sell” FilmHouse and the singularly pleasurable experience of theatrical exhibition, it was also designed to be excerpted by the multiplex itself, and run as an ad for the availability of Coca-Cola at the concession stand. *Couple of Days* thus epitomizes the corporatization of Nollywood, but this is far from a totalizing process. “This tendency to move upscale,” writes Jonathan Haynes, “is strong but not dominant,” owing, ironically, to some of the very demands of corporatization.¹⁶⁰ Satellite broadcasters and streaming services—two of the tech-heavy expressions and ongoing agents of corporate capitalism—require a steady supply of content, a surplus of the sort that only Nollywood’s low-budget, fast-paced Asaba model can presently provide. My goal here is not to imply qualitative distinctions between independent films and those produced or distributed by powerful corporations. I happen to enjoy *The Wedding Party* at least as much as *Ojukokoro*, the film that it displaced on its way to breaking box-office records in a rigged exhibition system. My purpose is, rather, to focus on power asymmetries, trade imbalances, and various anti-competitive actions. Just as a “nice” CEO can promote unfair practices, a “good” movie can symbolize the insidiousness of corporate power. For its part, FilmHouse has come to dominate even the streaming sector. It is, at the time of writing, the largest supplier of Nollywood content to Netflix and other major streamers.

In *Couple of Days*, the central characters' consumption of media does not cease with the FilmHouse screening but extends into their habits at the "weekend home" of Jude, the young, successful CEO. Back in Jude's huge, well-appointed living room on the outskirts of Ibadan, the close friends decide to "supplement" the theatrical release they've just enjoyed with yet another movie, one that they can watch on Jude's "smart" flatscreen TV, mounted on the wall and "hooked up" to the internet. Jude votes for *Jupiter Ascending* (Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, 2015), which he can stream with his Netflix subscription, but the women want to watch a tear-jerking Nollywood romance on the Africa Magic network, and they prevail. After everyone else has gone to bed, Jude remains on his giant leather couch, staying up to watch the James Bond film *Spectre* (Sam Mendes, 2015) on a satellite channel. Cutaways show *Spectre* on Jude's screen, and they are followed by similar shots of the television set in one of his guest bedrooms, where Lanre (Ademola Adedoyin), a struggling financial advisor whose money troubles keep him up at night, sits watching a series of Indian films.

Unable to sleep amid her husband's insomniac consumption of satellite TV, Joke (Kiki Omeili) slips away to the living room, where she engages Jude in a serious conversation about the challenges of married life. As they chat, the familiar James Bond theme can be heard in the background: *Spectre* continues to unfold in the media-rich environment of Jude's "weekend retreat." When the Hollywood film finally ends, Jude merely changes the channel to Africa Magic, James Bond giving way to Jim Iyke. Nollywood, the film seems to say, has finally arrived to share a stage (or a TV screen) with the illustrious likes of a major theatrical hit. If the latter has migrated via satellite to the smaller dimensions of Jude's home theater, the big screen is not far away—not even in Ibadan, where, *Couple of Days* makes abundantly clear, FilmHouse and other homegrown multiplex chains have restored the hallowed experience of going to the movies.

Conclusion

“Affective Ambience”: New Nollywood and the Persistence of Disneyfication

“[African filmmakers] must say that Africa is the center of the world and that others, regardless of their race, border Africa. First, Africa.”

—OUSMANE SEMBENE IN *BEHIND THE SCENES* (PAULIN SOUMANOU VIEYRA, 1981)

“How we tell stories of our past, and how we respond to the challenges of the present, are intimately connected.”

—JASON W. MOORE, *CAPITALISM IN THE WEB OF LIFE*, 5

In 2018, the US Mission in Nigeria announced, as part of its plan to “support Nigeria’s vibrant film community through capacity-building workshops,” a partnership that would bring cinematic “know-how” to the country via the University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts. Recalling the arrangements through which UCLA furnished Enugu (and Lloyd Young) with moviemaking expertise in the late 1950s, this particular collaboration was the brainchild of the US Department of State, which worked with USC to “forge connections” with “Nigeria’s film industry.” That same year, the US Embassy in Abuja invited three American filmmakers, including Doug Blush (co-owner of Los Angeles-based MadPix Films and a lecturer at USC), to Nigeria, where they met with local filmmakers, while Ishaya Bako, a Nigerian student of film, was sent to the United States to attend a ten-day workshop at USC.

This was no simple exchange program. It was a “mind-molding” initiative with a specific geostrategic goal and a bluntly articulated theme: “Film as a Tool for National Security and Patriotism.”¹ “As a longtime friend and ally of Nigeria, the United States is always looking for creative ways to promote social cohesion and national unity,” asserted an American diplomat in the spring of 2018. “A new and inspired effort by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) . . . taps into the vast platform of Nigeria’s entertainment industry with support for

a new television drama that tells a story underrepresented by ‘Nollywood’—the struggle to live, love, and survive in the embattled Northeast.” Funded by USAID, the series in question, entitled *In Love and Ashes* (2018), is set in Maiduguri and depicts the factors “fomenting radicalization and insurgency” in that northeastern city. Offering the “moral message” that “all Nigerians must rise above ethnic and religious differences” in order to “overcome extremism,” the series is, in many ways, the twenty-first-century televisual heir to the strategies of “containment” of *The Mark of the Hawk*.² Translating the earlier film’s anticommunism into a moral tract against Islamist extremism, the series is an expression of the US state’s commitment to stanching the spread of such radicalism, whether in Afghanistan or Nigeria. As W. Stuart Symington, the United States Ambassador to the latter country from 2016 to 2019, put it at the gala launch of the series, “We’re here today to make sure this message gets out, to make sure *this* story becomes *your* story. It is a universal story about love bringing people together.”³

Symington’s contradictory remarks can themselves be traced back to *The Mark of the Hawk* and an era in world history in which the United States exported anti-communism in ways both specific—with carefully selected regional targets like Enugu—and “universal.” For all the production’s exploitation of Nigeria, *The Mark of the Hawk* is set in an unnamed country and trades in generalities, political and religious clichés readily transferrable to other cultures and contexts. Still, the film was a measure of American determination to shape Nigeria’s postcolonial reality. Making sure *this* story—a distinctly United States-friendly story—becomes *Nigeria’s* story remains, as Symington’s words suggest, an explicit goal of diplomatic relations that play out on the terrain of screen media. On another occasion, Symington spoke of “the partnership between creative Nigerians and Americans,” and he made special mention of the constructive potential of fantasy: “When ideas become intellectual property, they literally create new fields from dreams and grow enterprises that no walls can contain, creating new jobs out of imagination and new opportunities at the speed of inspiration.”

It is hardly surprising that, in offering these remarks, Symington cited Walt Disney as the progenitor of such “Imagineering.” The field of film and media studies might not recognize Disney’s incursions into the African continent, but Symington surely does. Throughout 2018, the ambassador publicly praised the initial efforts of Disney (and secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and Charles W. Robenson) to “penetrate” Nigeria in the 1970s. In Symington’s view, those efforts had finally come to “natural” fruition with the release of *Black Panther* in 2018. In recognition of Black History Month, the US Consulate in Lagos hosted a private screening of the Disney juggernaut at FilmHouse’s IMAX theater in Lekki.⁴ Echoing many another American visitor to Nigeria, Symington proudly declared, “I have met Nigerians who are living proof that Nigeria’s greatest resource is the Nigerian people, not oil or gas, soil or minerals, water or sunlight.”⁵ But Hollywood has always used that line: people mean tickets sold and theaters occupied.

Just two years later, the coronavirus pandemic forced Nigerian multiplexes to close temporarily. Writing a few years before the pandemic, Moradewun Adejumo recognized “increases in the rate of theatrical exhibition of commercial films” in Nigeria, and wisely noted that “there is room for both speculation and informed judgment.” Her conclusions, which neither posit a theatrical renaissance nor reject the significance of the big screen, are worth quoting in full:

If, in particular, ready access to the highest number of cinema theatres per capita in the world has not prevented an upsurge in streaming in the United States and Western Europe, there is little reason to think that the construction of additional theatres in a few African countries will reverse the general trend towards growing consumption of African movies on small screens in a part of the world with much lower levels of disposable income for leisure activities. Instead then of a zero-sum game where one form of film spectatorship displaces other forms, spectatorship on small screens at home and on larger screens outside the home will very likely continue to shape the relative status of both types of screens and feature films watched on either screen.⁶

The pandemic has certainly further complicated matters, but it has not created a zero-sum game. While some Nigerian venues have gone out of business, victims of quarantines and curfews, many are responding with ingenuity to the crisis, introducing social-distancing measures, instituting temperature checks, and acquiring special air-filtration systems, much as their predecessors, spurred on by American manufacturers and trade publications, embraced roofs and cooling systems. In the late 1970s, Disney defined the “problem” as the “lack of [a] suitable number [of] movie theaters,” but the conglomerate also expressed considerable optimism, declaring that, in due time, that “problem” would be “overcome.”⁷

Disney did not, of course, anticipate a global pandemic. Nigerian cinemas were forced to close for seven and a half months during COVID’s first year—from March until October 2020 (though some reopened as late as November). Through the efforts of the Cinema Exhibitors Association of Nigeria (CEAN), a trade organization representing theater owners, companies like FilmHouse and Silverbird were able to put pressure on the government to safeguard the big screen through tax breaks and other subsidies. “You let the cinemas die, and one of the biggest, loudest voices of the industry is dead,” said Moses Babatope, a co-founder of FilmHouse. CEAN’s exhaustive lobbying efforts helped to keep cinemas alive even through the “second wave” of COVID that struck Nigeria in late 2020. As the pandemic gained ground in Nigeria, so did End SARS, a campaign to combat police brutality in the country. To some, the concurrence of mass protests and a deadly pandemic spelled doom for theatrical film. As mentioned, a few cinemas went permanently out of business in 2020, but none of those were FilmHouse locations.

2019 was FilmHouse’s most successful year in terms of box-office revenue, with over five million tickets sold. While the pandemic ensured that the company would not be able to maintain, much less surpass, such high numbers, Babatope is optimistic. He even credits the pandemic with at least temporarily reversing

the typical split between Hollywood exports and “homegrown” Nigerian films. He estimates that, in 2020, that split favored Hollywood properties at 55 percent of screen space to Nollywood’s 45 percent. But, according to his calculations, in 2021 Nollywood took up a whopping 65 percent to Hollywood’s unprecedentedly meager 35 percent. “Local films have really, really come to the aid of Nigerian cinemas,” Babatope said in the spring of that year. “Without local films in the Nigerian cinema spaces . . . a lot of companies would have gone bankrupt” amid the pandemic-induced halting of Hollywood exports.

Still, his enterprise remains tethered to the familiar paternalist language of Hollywood internationalist “uplift.” For even as he celebrates Nollywood’s capacity to keep the multiplexes afloat during a global pandemic, he also expresses his hope that “Hollywood will encourage more cinemagoing, more appetites”—that the Marvel imprimatur, among others, will magnetize aspirational Nigerians. Whether Babatope “really” believes this statement is immaterial. Because his company is the exclusive licensee of Disney and Warner Bros. properties in Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia, it is a statement that he is clearly obliged to make.⁸

NETFLIX NOLLYWOOD

“Developing” Nigeria has long been an *idée fixe* of Hollywood, however one chooses to define the industry. If the notion of Nigeria as a significant market for Hollywood was seemingly held in abeyance during the last decades of the twentieth century, it has returned with an astonishing force in the twenty-first, spurring the emergence of a vast and ever-expanding “economy of experiences,” at the practical and symbolic center of which is multiplexing. This most recent period of excitement needs, however, to be incorporated into a longer history that stretches back at least to the late colonial period. This *longue-durée* approach, encompassing the temporal extremes of decolonization and the more recent explosion of interest in Nollywood as a source of revenue for Disney, IMAX, Amazon, Netflix, and others, is essential for a firmer understanding of Nigeria’s current, past, and possible future positions in the global capitalist grid. This is particularly so amid the belief that the United States “should throw off any restraint on its ability to retaliate against economies that it consider[s] to be discriminating against it.” The MPAA made a show of penalizing Nigeria in 1981, via an embargo (of sorts) that lasted over two decades, during which time, and hardly coincidentally, Nollywood emerged as a significant media industry.⁹ Hollywood, which, as this book has shown, had a major hand in the “rigging of the decolonization process,” continues to impose its own economic paradigms on Nigeria and Nigerians.¹⁰

My interest has been in the “particular visions of global relation” that are “lost in Western theorizations of Africa,” especially those theorizations that originate in the field of film and media studies, and that tend to ignore Africa altogether.¹¹ Western competitive interests have, in fact, never overlooked the African

continent, which has always been implicated in “idioms of capitalist ascent.”¹² To put it in more specific terms: Nigeria has never been beyond Hollywood’s global consciousness, and my goal has been to examine this history, “tracing out the lines of interrelation” that demand a fresh approach to Hollywood historiography and a deeper sense of the longstanding “multidimensionality of global integration.”¹³ *Cinematic Independence* is the story of, to borrow from Moses E. Ochonu, “seemingly contradictory entwinements and symbioses that are rarely acknowledged.”¹⁴

The field of film and media studies is arguably still stymied by the perceptual legacies of racist epistemologies and ethnocentric methodologies—by a sense of Africa as a source of “picturesque alterity” and a “confirming distance,” “a world of strange difference largely disconnected from time.”¹⁵ Recall, for instance, Dudley Andrew’s influential insistence that Nigerian films are “‘movies-that-are missing,’ movies that circulate outside our discourse,” and that are “significant by virtue of being insignificant to us.” Andrew’s essay ends with a universalizing justification for its own myopia—its own refusal to take seriously Nigeria’s constitutive role in the development of media industries both at home and abroad: “Ultimately, the vitality . . . of [Nollywood] attests to a force before which philosophy and criticism stand hopelessly in awe.”¹⁶ Such hopelessness may be a condition of certain parochial philosophical approaches and critical practices, but it is hardly a reason to shy away from the serious, committed study of media produced in, by, and “for” Nigeria, whatever the Nigerian state’s configuration at a given time. The task of understanding Nigeria’s role in the liberal political economy of capitalist imperialism is not a “hopeless” one, or remotely “scary,” as Andrew described it in 2016.¹⁷ It simply requires hard work.

I have endeavored to demonstrate how a focus on Nigeria—ignored by film theory and historiography in inverse proportion to its industrial importance to American capital—demands new approaches to Hollywood history. Hollywood has long played a part in efforts to pull Nigerians “into the flow of ‘real time’ and instill in them proper economic postures.”¹⁸ It has thus been a significant engine of broader political efforts most commonly associated with but hardly reducible to Cold War cultural diplomacy. In acknowledging some of the salient points of intersection between Hollywood and Nigeria, I am indebted to the work of Jeremy Prestholdt, who proposes that “global relations consist of reciprocities that trouble unilinear accounts of global integration.” To deny these reciprocities is, as Prestholdt puts it, “to dispossess ‘peripheries’ of their global historical relevance.”¹⁹ It is to continue to act as if Nigeria doesn’t matter—or as if it matters only “indirectly.”

Nollywood’s growing orientation toward corporate modes of financing, production, distribution, and exhibition means that business is restricted by more than just Hollywood trade practices and US trade law. Local powerhouses like FilmHouse and EbonyLife TV are effectively reproducing, on a smaller scale, the asymmetrical arrangements established and maintained by American giants.

Exhibition requirements dictate the form of New Nollywood films, and streaming services further shape the realms of possibility. Asked what Netflix means for Nollywood, director Daniel Oriahi said bluntly, “Not money”—at least, not in the short term—“but exposure. It means that, when you visit the United States, people will say, ‘Oh, I saw your film on Netflix.’”²⁰ Oriahi’s association of Netflix with the United States is telling. It evokes not merely the protracted period during which Netflix was not available on the African continent (despite the company’s much-publicized foray into the distribution of “African” cinema with *Beasts of No Nation*), but also the continued difficulty of streaming feature-length films in relatively bandwidth-poor places like Nigeria.²¹

Notwithstanding its foundational association with the convenience of at-home spectatorship and its often antagonistic relationship with traditional exhibitors, Netflix, Oriahi surmises, has the cachet in the United States that the multiplexes enjoy in Nigeria. This lofty status is linked to the (obviously false) perception that a certain curatorial discernment leads as much to a film’s streaming as to its exhibition at, say, Silverbird’s Victoria Island multiplex. Ironically, Netflix is embracing Nollywood films at the very moment that the streamer’s own original content is multiplying at an astonishingly rapid pace. This deluge of “Netflix originals”—inescapable on any Netflix account, regardless of geographic location or algorithmic “personalization”—conceivably evokes Old Nollywood’s legendary productivity, its awesome annual output of “bad” straight-to-video films. Nollywood is becoming more like Hollywood, in terms of corporate financing and production values, just as Hollywood, exemplified by Netflix and its steady stream of substandard films, is becoming more like Nollywood. The two industries seem locked in an embrace presaged by nearly one hundred years of American capitalist incursions into Nigeria.

Oriahi’s *Taxi Driver: Oko Ashewo* (2015), a feature-length dark comedy that the director made in just eleven days, opened on a total of 150 screens in thirty cinemas throughout Nigeria—impressive figures that suggest just how far the country had come, by the fall of 2015, from the low point of the immediate pre-2004 period, when there were no multiplexes to be found there. However impressive, such figures are still, of course, dramatically short of those that characterize cinemagoing in the United States, which has tens of thousands of indoor screens, a tiny minority of which have ever featured Nollywood films (and never for longer than a couple of weeks at a time). The relationship between Hollywood and Nollywood is therefore hardly what is known in US trade discourse as a “reciprocity regime”: Hollywood’s access to the Nigerian theatrical market is not and has never been contingent upon the availability of US theater screens for Nigerian films. Nigerian government quotas have never imposed the kind of exchange requirements that would guarantee American theatrical real estate for Nigerian movies.

Still, a certain protectionist impulse persists among some Nigerian filmmakers, and it is occasionally dramatized in their work. Take, for instance, Kayode Kasum’s

Oga Bolaji (2018), which, the director maintains, was intended as a principled corrective to the kind of big-budget Nollywood film that focuses exclusively on the wealthy, glamorous denizens of Victoria Island and other elite enclaves. Kasum's lively melodrama is a breath of fresh air—both a throwback to such Nigerian classics as Amaka Igwe's *Rattlesnake* (1995–1996) and Tade Ogidan's *Owo Blow* (1996–1998) and emblematic of the New Nollywood style of immaculate widescreen cinematography. Frequent aerial shots show not the glitz of Victoria Island but the congestion of the mainland marketplaces. This, the director maintains, is his tribute to the “99 percent”—to precisely those struggling masses strategically excluded from the sanitized likes of Biyi Bandele's *Fifty* (2015) and other feature-length commercials for Amen Estate, the posh development on the Lekki Peninsula, where all the mansions look alike and where IMAX screens await the affluent. The Nigerian writer David Hundeyin refers to such New Nollywood films as “Island Opulence porn,” calling attention to the genre's relationship to classism as well as to sheer fantasy: “Watching these movies is like either watching how poor people imagine rich Nigerians live, or watching rich Nigerians depict how they want people to think they live.”²² As Hundeyin points out, the wealthy communities of Victoria Island, Ikoyi, and Lekki are subject to some of the worst effects of climate change and suffer from some of the same public-sector failures as their less privileged counterparts. Banana Island, the artificial atoll that *Forbes* magazine has hailed as the most expensive neighborhood in Nigeria, regularly floods and often reeks of raw sewage.²³ Parkview Estate, the luxury suburb of Ikoyi, is riddled with giant potholes, though none of these are ever framed by the films set and shot there. Realism, then, is not necessarily the goal of New Nollywood filmmakers committed to particular corporate visions that call for the careful exclusion of such unseemly elements.

Kayode Kasum, who was only in his mid-twenties when he made *Oga Bolaji*, admires the Nigerian filmmakers who came before him. He understands Old Nollywood as an emphatically local enterprise untouched by corporate pressures, whether imported or “homegrown.” At one point in *Oga Bolaji*, the title character, a forty-year-old former highlife musician played to perfection by Ikponmwoosa Gold, delivers a monologue that powerfully expresses the stakes of globalization and the importance of supporting the local economy: “Buy made-in-Nigeria products!” he urges his audience of friends and coworkers. “When you buy from abroad, you help *them* to grow *their* industries. You make foreign companies—and foreign countries—rich. Buy Nigerian!”

If Kasum hoped that Nigerians would have the opportunity to do just that by purchasing tickets to see his small independent film on the country's largest theater screens, he found himself stymied by some of the political-economic conditions that this book has detailed. Yet Kasum is hardly alone. Nollywood icon Genevieve Nnaji, attempting to book her directorial debut *Lionheart* (2018) in Nigerian cinemas, soon discovered, as she put it, “that the very people who pose as

Nollywood supporters . . . are the very same people frustrating the efforts of filmmakers.” In December 2018, she complained that “FilmOne, one of the major film cinema distributors, has categorically refused to distribute *Lionheart*, primarily because they have no stake in it. They are currently invested in a couple of [their own] movies showing in the cinemas and want to protect their assets at all costs. Monopolizing the market . . . is their strategy. . . . The sheer audacity.” There can be no better illustration of the anti-competitive character of vertical integration than FilmHouse’s refusal to book a big-budget Genevieve Nnaji film. In this case, the exhibitor could not possibly claim that it was responding to consumer tastes; what consumer doesn’t want to see Genevieve Nnaji? When Silverbird, FilmHouse’s chief rival, agreed to exclusively exhibit *Lionheart*, its competitor proceeded, as Nnaji put it, “to arm-twist Silverbird [into] backing out of our agreement by threatening to boycott them in the future.” That Netflix eventually acquired *Lionheart* did little to diminish Nnaji’s rage regarding the state of the theatrical market in her home country. As she herself pointed out, Netflix penetration remained minimal in Nigeria in 2018. “I am aware of the challenges of streaming in this region, so bringing this home to you was important,” she added ruefully. Nnaji did not mince words:

It is clear to me that the interest of the consumers is not of utmost priority as advertised. These cinema chains are only here to make money off of struggling artists while protecting their investments in the films they are affiliated with. The major reason cinema chains [should] not produce their own movies is to avoid bias. Competing with the very people you are supposedly a distributor for is downright ridiculous and shameful to say the least. It is not enough that they buy out their own tickets and manipulate the numbers and time slots to keep up this false imagery of making box-office hits. They prevent filmmakers from releasing their products to manipulate foot traffic as well. Thereby forcing consumers to watch only that which is available to them. Not what they actually want to see. It sickens me to think that if this could be done to me (twice if I may add), then I can only imagine what many struggling independent filmmakers must be passing through in the hands of these industry vultures. I call them vultures because they are a bunch of opportunists, and they prey on the weak. If the only success stories you can boast of as a distributor are movies you invested in, then how are you a supporter for the industry at large?²⁴

Nnaji’s words echo those of several significant reports prepared by and for the Canadian government in the late 1980s, all of which concluded that “the dominant market position of the Hollywood majors is a result of their vertical integration and anti-competitive practices.” The reports went on to show how “the dominant US majors are able to foreclose opportunities for [outside] productions,” and they each pointed to vertical integration—widely if mistakenly assumed to have been decisively ended for Hollywood studios by the Justice Department’s successful 1948 antitrust suit—as the principal culprit, both symbol and agent of hegemony.²⁵ If Nigerian multiplex chains behave like the Hollywood majors, it is not merely

because the latter are their corporate partners. It is also because Hollywood’s business model, with all its malpractices, has long been aggressively exported as the *only* model, a precondition for constructing the big screen. While FilmOne, conveniently omitting mention of vertical integration and other anti-competitive practices, alleges that it is uniquely equipped to generate blockbusters, Nigerian filmmaker Chris Ihidero firmly disagrees. “It is a lie that you need the muscle of a FilmOne to make tent-pole movies like *The Wedding Party*,” he told me, employing a term (“tent-pole”) familiar from Hollywood discourse, and that refers to “event” films whose box-office success and commercial tie-ins (soundtrack albums, music videos, television specials, action figures, and so on) can be sufficient to prop up entire studios. “You could make them if only you knew that the owners of the cinemas . . . weren’t invested in similar films for which they’ve already reserved the juiciest slots.”²⁶

Turned down by the multiplexes, Kayode Kasum was forced to settle for screenings of *Oga Bolaji* at the “boutique” seventy-seat cinema at HappyLand/HappyWorld, an entertainment complex modeled (as its name suggests) on Disneyland and Disneyworld, and located in mainland Lagos, over a dozen miles northwest of the shiny multiplexes on Victoria Island. Yet even this opportunity—a chance for a Nigerian film to be exhibited on a big screen in Nigeria—had to be secured by American capital. Kuumba Media, a distribution company based in New York and founded by Ghanaian-American entrepreneur Freda Afia Frimpong, acquired the American and Nigerian streaming and exhibition rights to *Oga Bolaji*, booking it at HappyLand/HappyWorld after FilmHouse and the other major theater chains rejected it.²⁷ Premiering on Easter weekend in 2019, the film was shown on HappyLand/HappyWorld’s single screen—the only big screen within a six-mile radius—where it was flanked by a beauty salon and all-purpose “entertainment center” hosting snooker and table-tennis tournaments, karaoke, and wedding parties, among other events.

Near the building’s entrance stands an inflatable castle, a “bouncy house” for children that, in its size, materiality, and association with film exhibition, recalls the inflatable plastic-and-nylon CineDomes that once played host to Cinerama screenings in this part of Lagos, even as it obviously evokes all things Disney. The latter’s influence pervades HappyLand/HappyWorld, whose mascot, Rikky Rabbit, is an amalgamation of Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny (a Warner Bros. property). Such feel-good associations may or may not mask the imperialism embedded both in the obvious inspiration of Disney and in the dominance of Hollywood blockbusters like *John Wick* (Chad Stahelski, 2014) and its sequels on the HappyLand/HappyWorld screen, despite the claim that the cinema serves “independent African films.”²⁸ American capital was thus doubly implicated in the theatrical exhibition of *Oga Bolaji* in Kasum’s native Nigeria. Facilitated by American investment, as Kuumba Media paid for access to the HappyLand/HappyWorld screen, renting it for a fixed period, the film’s run was further conditioned by the persistent

influence of Disney, recalling Richard Cook's "Disneyland model" of multiplexing and proving the staying power of that model across four decades and many thousands of miles.²⁹ In other words, even when Disney is not directly involved in the management of cinemas in Nigeria, the corporation still haunts the landscape of theatrical exhibition in a country that has periodically borne witness to Hollywood's ambitions.

What, then, is the future of African cinema in this era of increasing encounters with corporate capitalism? As Ousmane Sembene says in *Behind the Scenes* (1981), Paulin Soumanou Vieyra's short documentary on the making of Sembene's *Ceddo* (1976), "The future of African cinema depends on the future of the cultural policy of the African continent. If Africa wants to have its own culture, it has to develop it. Cinema by itself has no future. . . . African governments have the opportunity . . . to guide their cinemas." Vieyra's voice-over narration concurs, culminating in an impassioned plea for the establishment and enforcement of policies guaranteeing African films access to African screens: "Alas, it is not enough to write a good script, master film language, fight to find resources to make the movie. African movies must also find a place in cinemas—starting with African cinemas."

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Declan Eytan, "Nigeria: Africa Gets Ready for its First Luxury E-Commerce Platform," *Forbes*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/declaneytan/2017/02/16/africa-gets-ready-for-its-first-luxury-e-commerce-platform/#165099a73115>, accessed February 22, 2020; for a popular account of Nigeria as "the Hollywood of Africa," see Peggien Bartels and Eleanor Herman, *King Peggy: An American Secretary, Her Royal Destiny, and the Inspiring Story of How She Changed an African Village* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 128. This analogical approach has a long history. Pathé Exchange's 1923 short *Roughest Africa*, directed by Ralph Ceder and starring Stan Laurel, parodies the production of "African" travelogues, purporting to show, as an opening text puts it, that "African wild game pictures are given to the public at a staggering cost, and terrifying sacrifice of human energy." In the film, American explorers have established an "outpost of civilization" in northeastern Nigeria, and they have named it "Hollywood."

2. John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 25.

3. Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

4. Jonathan Haynes, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Jade L. Miller, *Nollywood Central* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Paul Ugor, *Nollywood: Popular Culture and Narratives of Youth Struggles in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2016).

5. Among the innovators of the multiplex were American Multi-Cinema (formerly Durwood Theatres) and Canada's Cineplex theater circuit.

6. Daniel Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 211.

7. Mikael Karlström, "Imagining Democracy," *Africa* 66, no. 4 (1996): 485–505.
8. Quoted in "TOA Convention Report," *Film Bulletin* 25, no. 24 (November 25, 1957): 16, 18 [16].
9. Quoted in "They Made the News," *Film Bulletin* 25, no. 4 (February 18, 1957): 6.
10. "Skouras Moves Forward," *Film Bulletin* 19, no. 17 (August 13, 1951): 5.
11. Jonathan Haynes, "Mobilizing Yoruba Popular Culture: *Babangida Must Go*," *Africa* 73, no. 1 (2003): 77–87.
12. Barbara Stones, *America Goes to the Movies* (North Hollywood, CA: National Association of Theatre Owners, 1993), 231.
13. John E. Twomey, "Some Considerations on the Rise of the Art-Film Theater," *Quarterly Review of Film, Radio and Television* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1956): 240.
14. "Facts About Films," *The Film Daily*, Monday, April 9, 1934, 2.
15. "Johnston Finds Opportunities in Nigeria for Theatres and Films," *Motion Picture Daily*, September 9, 1960, 3.
16. John Darnton, "Cultural Renaissance Is Under Way in West Africa," *New York Times*, January 17, 1977, 3.
17. Quoted in Pierre Barrot, "Video Is the AIDS of the Film Industry," in *Nollywood: The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria*, ed. Pierre Barrot (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 3. At around the same time, three Nigerian critics "diagnosed" theatrical film as suffering from a new disease that they dubbed "Videomiasis." Derived from "myiasis" (infection with a fly larva), the neologism was meant to emphasize video's invasive nature and capacity to blight the big screen. John Mfon, Stephen Akintunde, and Julna Selbar, "Cinema—Cracks on the Mirror—Suffers from 'Videomiasis,' Society Hunch and Lack of Personnel," *Film & Video* 2, no. 1 (1994): 20–23.
18. Quoted in Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 106.
19. Michael Cramer, *Utopian Television: Rossellini, Watkins, and Godard Beyond Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 212.
20. To take one prominent example, Zeb Ejiro's melodrama *Domitilla: The Story of a Prostitute* (1996), shot on videotape, was shown theatrically in a series of special events in February 1997. See Afolabi Adesanya, "From Film to Video," in *Nigerian Video Films: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Jonathan Haynes (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), 37–50.
21. Jonathan Haynes, "Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films," *Africa Today* 54, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 136–37].
22. Melita Zajc, for instance, writes, "The exclusion of celluloid is an essential part of the Nigerian video film cultures. Historically, so was the decline of the culture of going to the cinema. The austerity measures of the early 1980s increased the level of poverty. Widespread street violence and curfews made cinema-going virtually impossible. The few cinema houses existing either had to close down or were taken over by religious communities" ("Nigerian Video Film Cultures," *Anthropological Notebooks* 15, no. 1 [2009]: 71). For his part, Haynes notes that "Nollywood was created at a moment when there were virtually no functioning cinemas in Nigeria." See Jonathan Haynes, "Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism: Transformations of Nollywood," in *A Companion to African Cinema*, ed. Carmela Garritano and Kenneth W. Harrow (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 246.

23. Philippe Dubois, "Présentation," in *Extended cinema: Le cinéma gagne du terrain* (Paisan di Prato: Campanotto, 2010), 13, translation my own.

24. Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times*, February 25, 1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/25/magazine/the-decay-of-cinema.html>, accessed March 1, 2020.

25. Air France was not the first carrier to establish a relationship with Nollywood. In 2013, a Nigerian airline, Arik Air, sponsored Niyi Towolawi's *Turning Point* (2013), a feature film in which Arik is prominently represented.

26. Moses Babatope, "Filmhouse and Filmone," *Endeavor*, <https://endeavor.org/entrepreneur/moses-babatope>, accessed March 4, 2020.

27. FilmHouse Operations Manager, speaking on condition of anonymity, interview with the author, June 15, 2018; Damola Layonu, manager at FilmOne Distribution, interview with the author, June 16, 2018.

28. Damola Layonu, manager at FilmOne Distribution, interview with the author, June 16, 2018. For more on "Fox's corporate positioning in Africa," see Ross Melnick, "Salisbury Stakes: Twentieth Century-Fox, Segregated Cinemas, and the Making of an International Crisis in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1959–1961," *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 3 (Spring 2016): 90–116.

29. Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: 7 Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 110. As Jonathan Haynes points out, "Capitalism must keep colonizing new territories (or intensifying its exploitation) in order to keep up its rate of profit, and the enormous potential profits of Nollywood attracted its attention" ("Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism," 256).

30. Kate Douglas, "Domino's Pizza Aiming to Be the Big Cheese in Nigeria," *How We Made It in Africa*, January 20, 2014, <https://www.howwemadeitinafrica.com/dominos-pizza-aiming-to-be-the-big-cheese-in-nigeria>, accessed January 18, 2019.

31. Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

32. *Ibid.*, 147.

33. Quoted in Walter A. Cutter, "Psychology of the Theater," in *The Motion Picture Theater: Planning, Upkeep*, edited by Helen M. Stote (New York: Society of Motion Picture Engineers, 1948), 20.

34. James Frank, Jr., quoted in *ibid.*, 21.

35. Quoted in *ibid.*, emphasis added.

36. Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece, *The Optical Vacuum: Spectatorship and Modernized American Theater Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Ariel Rogers, *On the Screen: Displaying the Moving Image, 1926–1942* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

37. "Johnston Finds Opportunities in Nigeria for Theatres and Films," *Motion Picture Daily*, September 9, 1960, 3.

38. Annual editions of *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, a major trade paper, offer abundant references to these arrangements and their impact on film distribution and exhibition in Nigeria. See, for instance, *The 1967 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, 429, 430.

39. Courtney Brannon Donoghue, *Localising Hollywood* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 14.

40. *The 1965 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 631.
41. *The 1967 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, 430, 377, 398. Fox was particularly active in Nigeria in this period. As Ross Melnick points out, by the late 1950s, “exhibitors in much of sub-Saharan Africa were forced to work with—or reckon with—Fox” (“Salisbury Stakes,” 101).
42. “Nigeria,” *The 1963 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 662. See also Oladipo O. Olubomehin, “Cinema Business in Lagos, Nigeria Since 1903,” *Historical Research Letter* 3 (2012): 4.
43. Peter Kilby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy: Nigeria, 1945–1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 64; “Nigerian Urges Better U.S. Films,” *Broadcasting*, August 14, 1961, 83.
44. “7 Companies United in Plan to Service West Africa,” *Boxoffice*, May 22, 1961, 17. Later, AVCO-Embassy Pictures would join AMPECA and set up an office in Lagos. American Embassy, Lagos, to Secretary of State, Washington, DC, “Legal Interpretation on Private American Business Property: American Motion Picture Export Co. (Nigeria) Ltd,” December 16, 1978, Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, Access to Archival Databases (hereafter AAD), National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).
45. Consulting engineer Dwight D. Kimball, an American, also worked on the installation of air conditioning in the region. See Dwight D. Kimball, “Motion Picture Air Conditioning,” in *The Motion Picture Theater: Planning, Upkeep*, ed. Helen M. Stote (New York: Society of Motion Picture Engineers, 1948), 101–18.
46. American economic intelligence was closely monitoring the situation. Nearly one year before the war ended, an American “fact-finding mission to Nigeria” confirmed the dearth of opportunities in the fields of film distribution and exhibition, blaming the conflict for having “driven off” so many US firms. United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report of Special Fact-Finding Mission to Nigeria*, February 7–20, 1969, by Hon. Charles C. Diggs, Jr., Michigan, and Hon. J. Herbert Burke, Florida, March 12, 1969 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969).
47. Gregory A. Waller, “Introduction to Part IV,” in *Moviegoing in America*, ed. Gregory A. Waller (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 235.
48. Cinerama was an ultra-wide-screen format employing three 35mm projectors and a curved 146-degree screen. See John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Michael Allen, “From *Bwana Devil* to *Batman Forever*: Technology in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema,” in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), 109–11.
49. George N. Gordon, Irving Falk, and William Hodapp, *The Idea Invaders* (New York: Hastings House, 1963), 153.
50. Waller, “Introduction to Part IV,” 235.
51. Paraphrased in Hyginus Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1987), 200.
52. “Boom for Foreign Television?,” *Broadcasting*, October 15, 1962, 79.
53. Moses E. Ochonou, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 13.
54. James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 41.

55. Kenneth M. Cameron, *Africa on Film: Beyond Black and White* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 12. See also Richard A. Maynard, *Africa on Film: Myth and Reality* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden, 1974).

56. Michael Curtin, "Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows," *International Journal of Cultural Studie* 6, no. 2 (June 2003): 202–28.

57. For more on Thurman's suit, see Aida A. Hozic, *Hollyworld: Space, Power, and Fantasy in the American Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 74.

58. "Nigeria," *The 1938 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures* (1938), 1247–48.

59. *Retail Price Comparisons for International Salary Determination*, Volume 14 (New York: United Nations Statistical Office, 1971), 119.

60. Moradewun Adejunmobi has offered a provocative account of this dialectic of disappearance and return, one that attends to the capacity of African markets to both confirm and subvert expectations regarding what "counts"—and what is currently available—as cinema spectatorship. "Detheatricalization of film viewing is the current order of the day, and in general, African commercial 'cinema' owes its circulation more so to pay television . . . and to streaming than it does to theatrical exhibition," she argues. Still, Adejunmobi recognizes that "recent developments in countries like Nigeria and Ghana might lead attentive observers to call into question claims about detheatricalization of film viewing in Africa. In particular, cinema culture appears to be experiencing a gradual and slow re-birth in Nigeria." She rightly cites "luxury cinema theatres located in malls in cities like Lagos and Abuja" but is careful to offer some important caveats: "First, the total number of available big screens is still low, perhaps no more than 35 in all of Nigeria [as of 2016]. Second, it seems likely that a majority of Nigerians and Ghanaians will continue watching local films on pay television or purchasing VCDs for the very same reasons that film viewers in Europe and North America have taken to streaming: namely, for convenience and relative cost. Third, and while a growing number of locally produced films are now debuting in cinema theatres and avoiding the straight to video format, the majority of films shown in these new cinema theatres are still Hollywood blockbusters." See Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Streaming Quality, Streaming Cinema," in *A Companion to African Cinema*, ed. Carmela Garritano and Kenneth W. Harrow (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 220–21].

61. Noah Tsika, *Nollywood Stars: Media and Migration in West Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). On "foreign interests" (section epigraph) see also Augustine-Ufua Enahoro, "Discourse on the Cinema as a National Signifier," in *Cinema Discourse*, edited by Augustine-Ufua Enahoro (Jos, Nigeria: Positive Education Publishers, 2002), 19–20.

62. Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 10–11.

63. Recent exceptions include Szczepaniak-Gillece, *The Optical Vacuum*; William Paul, *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); and Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

64. Eric Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 52.

65. *The Film Daily*, Tuesday, June 29, 1948, 3.

66. Sam F. Lucchese, "Hollywood Foreign Image Not So Bad, USIA Says," *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 25, 1963, 13D.
67. Steven Bach, *Final Cut: Dreams and Disaster in the Making of "Heaven's Gate"* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985), 128.
68. Moradewun Adejunmobi, *Vernacular Palaver: Imaginations of the Local and Non-Native Languages in West Africa* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), 36.
69. Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra*, 75.
70. W.L. Russell, "Today's Trends," *The Pittsburgh Press*, July 10, 1960, 78.
71. US Deputy Secretary of State to US Embassy in Lagos, July 7, 1976, RG 59, AAD, NARA.
72. Claude Ake, "Introduction," in *Political Economy of Nigeria*, ed. Claude Ake (London and Lagos: Longman, 1985), xi–xiii; Claude Ake, "The Nigerian State: Antinomies of a Periphery Formation," in *Political Economy of Nigeria*, 9–32; William D. Graf, *The Nigerian State: Political Economy, State Class and Political System in the Post-Colonial Era* (London: James Currey, 1988); Sayre P. Schatz, *Nigerian Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
73. Clement Crystal, "Foreign Theater Operation," in *The Motion Picture Theater: Planning, Upkeep*, ed. Helen M. Stote (New York: Society of Motion Picture Engineers, 1948), 52.
74. Campbell, *Nigeria*, 18, 19.
75. Ivan Turok, "Linking Urbanization and Development in Africa's Economic Revival," in *Africa's Urban Revolution*, ed. Susan Parnell and Edgar Pieterse (London: Zed Books, 2014), 67.
76. IMAX's press releases have, for instance, consistently linked Mkpuru to top Hollywood executives, in implicit contrast to Nollywood's earliest promoters. See "IMAX Signs First Agreement in Nigeria with Filmhouse Cinemas," June 24, 2015, <https://www.imax.com/content/imax-signs-first-agreement-nigeria-filmhouse-cinemas>.
77. Adejunmobi, "Streaming Quality, Streaming Cinema," 221.
78. AbdouMaliq Simone, "On the Worlding of African Cities," *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (September 2001): 36.
79. For more, see Oluwakemi Monsurat Balogun, *Contesting Nationalisms: Gender, Globalization, and Cultural Representation in Nigerian Beauty Pageants* (PhD diss., University of California–Berkeley, 2012).
80. Jeff Goodell, *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Shrinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017), 214.
81. Dayo Olopade, *The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 184.
82. Goodell, *The Water Will Come*, 214. Eko's town planners and sales reps even sound like Hollywood producers. Goodell quotes one as saying of "middle-class people, working professionals": "That is our target audience" (217).
83. Quoted in Scott Bukatman, "Zooming Out: The End of Offscreen Space," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 264.
84. Ruth Maclean, "Taking On Big Oil, and a Dirty Legacy, in Nigeria," *New York Times*, July 25, 2021, A1; Ann Laura Stoler, "Preface," in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, edited by Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), ix–xi [ix].

85. Richard Grusin and Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece, eds., *Ends of Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).
86. Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 34.
87. Ibid.
88. For more on these transformations, see April Wright's 2019 documentary *Going Attractions: The Definitive Story of the Movie Palace*, <https://www.goingattractions.com>. See also Ben M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961); Ross Melnick and Andreas Fuchs, *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters* (St. Paul, MN: MBI, 2004); Matt Lambros, *After the Final Curtain: The Fall of the American Movie Theater* (Versailles: Jonglez Publishing, 2016).
89. Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta, "Introduction: Temporality, Politics, and the Promise of Infrastructure," in *The Promise of Infrastructure*, ed. Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 26.
90. Karen Lury and Doreen Massey, "Making Connections," *Screen* 40, no. 3 (1999): 231.

1. "THE NIGERIA SOLUTION": CREATIVE DESTRUCTION AND THE MAKING OF A MEDIA CAPITAL

1. Nick Turse, *Tomorrow's Battlefield: US Proxy Wars and Secret Ops in Africa* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015).
2. François Chesnais, *Finance Capital Today: Corporations and Banks in the Lasting Global Slump* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017 [2016]), 156–57.
3. Ibid., 148.
4. Ibid., 164–65.
5. Quoted in Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: FSG, 1999), 177.
6. "Johnston Will Urge MPA Africa Effort," *Motion Picture Daily*, September 16, 1960, 1, 5.
7. W. Alphaeus Hunton, *Decision in Africa: Sources of Current Conflict* (New York: International Publishers, 1960 [1957]), 84.
8. *Television Digest*, December 28, 1959, 6.
9. "Positions Open for AV Work Abroad Under ICA Auspices," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide* 40, no. 11 (November, 1961): 586–87.
10. "John Tyo Named Advisor to Nigeria; Resigns as Treasurer," *Business Screen*, December 30, 1962, 41.
11. Gene Hinton, "Audio-Visual Society at Indiana U.," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide* 40, no. 3 (March, 1961): 124.
12. Ibid.
13. Wilhelm Röpke, "Unentwickelte Länder," *Ordo* 5 (1953): 105, quoted in Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 149.
14. Mary Finch Tanham, "Washington Film Commentary," *Business Screen*, December 30, 1961, 19.
15. Ibid.
16. William Sellers, "Films for Primitive Peoples," *Documentary News Letter* 2, no. 9 (September 1941): 173–74.

17. Noah Tsika, "Soft Power Cinema: Corporate Sponsorship, Visual Pedagogy, and the Cultural Cold War in West Africa," *The Velvet Light Trap* 73 (Spring 2014): 51–65.
18. Leonard N. Cohen to Robert Fleming, April 18, 1961, Record Group 5: West Africa Program (hereafter RG 5), Series 2, Box 23, Folder 188, RBF.
19. "Nigeria," *Documentary News Letter* 1, no. 11 (November 1940): 13.
20. Ibid.
21. Quoted in Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 163; Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Introduction: Globalizing American Studies," in *Globalizing American Studies*, edited by Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 37.
22. Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1966 [1965]), 12–13; 35–36.
23. Quoted in "Opportunities in African Market," *The Film Daily*, Monday, October 16, 1944, 7. Golden had been providing such "film export reports" for the Department of Commerce since the 1920s. For more on the Department of Commerce and its steadily strengthening Motion Picture Division, see Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907–1934* (London: BFI, 1985).
24. *Business Screen: The 11th Annual Production Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1961): 152.
25. Gordon, Falk, and Hodapp, *The Idea Invaders*, 153.
26. Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 49.
27. John Belton, "Glorious Technicolor, Breathtaking CinemaScope, and Stereophonic Sound," in *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (London: Routledge, 1990), 190–93.
28. Quoted in "SHELLARAMA," *Monthly Film Bulletin* (London), January 1, 1965, 141.
29. "The Sponsored Field," *Back Stage*, September 29, 1967, 12.
30. "SHELLARAMA," 141.
31. "Broadway," *Boxoffice*, October 2, 1967, E-5.
32. "Nigeria," *The 1963 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 662–63. For more on Shell's involvement in media production, see Toby Miller and Marwan M. Kraidy, *Global Media Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 138–40.
33. Jonathan Miller to Sir Mobolaji Bank-Anthony, March 5, 1963, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF; Cinestar publicity (ca. 1963), RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF. Mary Ann Doane's description of IMAX, which she aptly compares to the earlier Cinerama and CinemaScope processes, suggests one way of understanding CineDomes: "IMAX emerged from and originally found a home in world fairs and expositions as a performance of the capabilities of image technologies." See "Scale and the Body in Cinema and Beyond," in *Ends of Cinema*, ed. Richard Grusin and Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 8. See also Charles R. Acland, "IMAX Technology and the Tourist Gaze," *Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (July 1998): 429–45. Cinestar's efforts to introduce Cinerama to Nigeria (via CineDomes) preceded Montreal's Expo '67 (out of which IMAX grew) by over four years. In the spring of 2021, the Hollywood trade press announced that the Cinerama Dome would close permanently, along with all other Arclight Cinemas venues, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. See Brent Lang, "Arclight Cinemas, Pacific

Theatres Will Close Permanently,” *Variety*, April 12, 2021, <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/arclight-cinemas-pacific-theatres-covid-1234949832/>, accessed April 12, 2021.

34. Edward Shalala, “Memorable Year . . . Africa in 1960,” *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures, 1960*, 824.

35. *Ibid.*, 825.

36. The MPEA had previously complained of South Africa’s “excessive and burdensome” import duties, which were usually computed on the basis of the length and weight of film prints. The Motion Picture Export Association, “Trade Restrictions on U.S. Motion Pictures,” *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures, 1960*, 781.

37. Edward Shalala, “Confidence in South Africa,” *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures, 1961*, 814. For more on Hollywood studios’ growing attention to the reissue market, see Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries Before Home Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

38. *The 1967 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 433; *Motion Picture Herald* 222, no. 12 (April 1961): 10.

39. For more on the Motion Picture Export Association of America and its extensive global network, see Suzanne Mary Donahue, *American Film Distribution: The Changing Marketplace* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 145–46.

40. Hiroshi Kitamura, *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 28. Also known as “the American film industry’s State Department,” the MPEA handles studio foreign relations. See James Mauceri, “MPAA and MPEA,” *The 1960 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 76.

41. Kitamura, *Screening Enlightenment*, 29.

42. “Retrospect: MPAA and MPEA in 1960,” in *The 1960 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 77.

43. George Padmore, quoted in Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 39. Liberia was a site of considerable American business interests, chief among them Firestone, whose employees were conspicuous targets of Hollywood capital. “The virtual ruler of Liberia,” the company had long imported American films for nontheatrical screenings in and beyond Monrovia. See Arthur Ingram Hayman and Harold Preece, *Lighting Up Liberia* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1943).

44. Kwate Nee Owoo, “Caught In a Cultural Crossfire,” *West Africa*, December 19–25, 1988, 2373.

45. *Ibid.*; Carmela Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires: A Ghanaian History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013), 28; Birgit Meyer, *Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 42.

46. Tino Balio, *United Artists, Volume 2, 1951–1978: The Company That Changed The Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 222–23.

47. *Ibid.*, 4.

48. Hyginus Ekwuazi and Yakubu Abdullahi Nasidi, *Operative Principles of the Film Industry: Toward a Film Policy for Nigeria* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1992), 180.

49. *The 1965 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 631. On the globalization of financial markets after the late 1950s, see Eric Helleiner, *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance: From Bretton Woods to the 1990s* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

50. John Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World: U.S. and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920–1950* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 27; Will H. Hays, *The Memoirs of Will H. Hays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 334.

51. *The 1963 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 489–90.
52. *The 1965 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 631.
53. Mauceri, “MPAA and MPEA,” 76.
54. Ekwuazi and Nasidi, *Operative Principles of the Film Industry*, 102.
55. “Liberia,” *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures, 1961*, 759.
56. “Senegal,” *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures, 1961*, 759. See also “Attendance Up in Fr. Africa, Johnston Says,” *Motion Picture Daily*, August 30, 1960, 2, 4.
57. Hyginus Ekwuazi and Yakubu Nasidi refer to AMPECA’s “huge profits.” See “Introduction,” in *No . . . Not Hollywood: Essays & Speeches of Brendan Shehu*, edited by Hyginus Ekwuazi and Yakubu Nasidi (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1992), 15.
58. Patrick Vonderau, “Introduction: On Advertising’s Relation to Moving Pictures,” in *Films That Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising*, ed. Bo Florin, Nico de Klerk and Patrick Vonderau (London: BFI, 2016), 1–18. See also Patrick Vonderau, “Kim Novak and Morgan Stairways: Thinking about the Theory and History of the Tie-in,” in *ibid.*, 209–20.
59. *Sponsor*, January 1, 1962, 48.
60. Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 11.
61. Michelle Hilmes, “Who We Are, Who We Are Not: Battle of the Global Paradigms,” in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York and London: NYU Press, 2003), 56.
62. *Sponsor*, January 1, 1962, 48.
63. “Foreign TV-Radio Delegation,” *Weekly Television Digest*, June 29, 1959, 9.
64. “Nigerian Urges Better U.S. Films,” *Broadcasting*, August 14, 1961, 83.
65. “Foreign Broadcasters Honored in D.C.,” *Broadcasting*, September 4, 1961, 60.
66. Nathan D. Golden, “Legislative Restrictions in Foreign Film Markets,” *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures, 1960*, 769.
67. “Johnston Leaves on Trip to Africa Today,” *Motion Picture Daily*, August 12, 1960, 2.
68. U.S. State Department, quoted in John A. Ayam, “The Development of Nigeria-U.S. Relations,” *Journal of Third World Studies* XXV, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 118.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Weekly Television Digest* January 8, 1962, 10.
71. “Johnston Finds Opportunities in Nigeria for Theatres and Films,” *Motion Picture Daily*, September 9, 1960, 3.
72. *Ibid.*, 3.
73. “Overseas Program Sales Hit \$52 Million,” *Broadcasting*, October 15, 1962, 81.
74. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 61.
75. Ministry of Economic Development (Stanford Research Institute) to Edward Prentice, October 26, 1960, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.
76. WABC-TV memorandum, “WABC-TV TO PRESENT DOCUMENTARY ON ‘NOW: NIGERIA’ ON CHANNEL 7, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11: PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN NATION DISCUSSED,” February 1, 1961, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.

77. "One-Shots Can Put Regional Clients in the TV Limelight," *Sponsor*, April 10, 1961, 45, 60.
78. "Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa," *Printers' Ink*, January 13, 1961, 53, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.
79. "The Arthur D. Little Industrial Development Program in Nigeria: Remarks by William A.W. Krebs, Vice President, Arthur D. Little, Inc., before the Nigerian-American Chamber of Commerce, University Club, New York, N.Y., Thursday, March 29, 1962," 1, RG 5, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 32, RBF.
80. "Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa," *Printers' Ink*, January 13, 1961, 53, 55, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.
81. Helen Lund Callaway, "Nigeria's Young Elite," *Mademoiselle* 52 (1961), 77, 109, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.
82. "Meet Some New Members," *Motion Picture Herald*, July 29, 1933, 65; editorial note with O.R. Geyer, "Winning Foreign Film Markets," *Scientific American*, August 20, 1921, 132.
83. "Here Are More New Club Members," *Motion Picture Herald*, November 11, 1933, 68.
84. *The Film Daily*, Monday, April 9, 1934, 2.
85. "Meet Some New Members," *Motion Picture Herald*, July 29, 1933, 65.
86. "Favor Hollywood Films in Sparse African Market," *Motion Picture Herald*, October 21, 1944, 25.
87. Astrolite ad, *Motion Picture Herald*, special issue "Better Theatres," January 9, 1954, Section 2, 5. For more on Astrolite's attractiveness to Twentieth Century-Fox, see Murray Horowitz, "CUT OF \$1,000 FOR CINEMASCOPE LENS," *Motion Picture Herald*, August 12, 1953, 1, 5. See also "An Important Statement from 20th Century-Fox Regarding the Miracle Mirror and Magniglow Astrolite Screens for CinemaScope," *Variety*, Wednesday, September 30, 1953, 12-13.
88. Cinestar was also headquartered in New York, with an office on East 42nd Street. Cinestar publicity, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.
89. "A Multi-Lingual System for Training Films," *Business Screen* 28, no. 7 (1967): 70.
90. Quoted in *ibid*.
91. Alan Williams, "Historical and Theoretical Issues In the Coming of Recorded Sound to the Cinema," in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge, 1992), 135. See also Ginette Vincendeau, "Hollywood Babel: The Multiple Language Version," *Screen* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 24-39.
92. Nataša Đurovičová, "Translating America: The Hollywood Multilinguals, 1929-1933," in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge, 1992), 140. See also Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey, "The International Language Problem: European Reactions to Hollywood's Conversion to Sound," in *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*, ed. David W. Ellwood and Rob Kroes (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 68-93.
93. Cinestar contract, 1963, 1, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF; *Education Recaps* 5, no. 8 (Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1966), 214.
94. Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film As Vernacular Modernism," *Film Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (Autumn, 2000): 12. The case of Multitrax also supports Donald Crafton's argument that sound technologies have "enabled the American film industry to solidify its power as the leading exporter of entertainment." Like the equipment that Western Electric subsidiary Electrical Research Products,

Incorporated (ERPI) licensed to European and Asian companies in the late 1920s, Multitrax rode, and was seen as a means of advancing, the export power of American movies. Writing of the era of ERPI's creation, Crafton observes that "Americans quickly devised strategies to extend their sound monopolies. Their statements ring with the rhetoric of cultural imperialism, complete with military terminology"—rhetoric that Multitrax clearly attempted to moderate through a celebration of Nigeria's multilingual character. See Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926–1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 418, 423.

95. Abé Mark Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 140.

96. *Ibid.*, 178.

97. Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 52–53.

98. Jonathan Miller to Sir Mobolaji Bank-Anthony, March 5, 1963, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.

99. *Ibid.*

100. Cinestar publicity (ca. 1963), RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF. The CineDome had also been brought to India in 1959 for screenings of *The Atom and the Farm* (1959), which the Jam Handy Organization (a Detroit-based company) produced for the Atomic Energy Commission, and which purported to show how atomic research had improved agricultural methods and yields. The film was screened "to India's teeming multitudes" as part of the World Agriculture Fair, one section of which was given over to a CineDome whose curved screen was said to enhance the "ultra-realism" of *The Atom and the Farm*, which opened "with spectacular views which [gave] the audience the sensation of being 'inside the atom,' with electrons spiraling around the nucleus and around the spectators." See "U.S. Shows Atom in CineDome at First World Agriculture Fair," *Business Screen* 20, no. 8 (1959): 34.

101. Jonathan Miller to Sir Mobolaji Bank-Anthony, March 5, 1963, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.

102. See Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown*, 13.

103. See "Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa," *Printers' Ink*, January 13, 1961, 55, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF. Erika Balsom provides an account of the global circulation of 8mm reduction prints, stressing the ideal of accessibility with which they were so often promoted, particularly as a counterpoint to the supposed purity of the theatrical experience (*After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2017]).

104. Thomas P. Hughes, *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 3; quoted in Eric Smoodin, "Introduction: How to Read Walt Disney," in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 3.

105. Richard G. Lurie, "WHAT ARE THE REAL OPPORTUNITIES IN NIGERIA AND GHANA?," *American Exporter Publications: Newsletter*, May 1, 1962, 4–5, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.

106. *Ibid.*

107. Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century," in *The Africa Reader: Independent Africa*, ed. Wilfred Cartey and Martin Kilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 180.

108. "Pharmaceutical Firm to Manufacture in Nigeria," *West African Pilot*, Monday, February 22, 1960, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, RBF.
109. "Exports to Nigeria," *Daily Times* (Lagos), Wednesday, May 18, 1960, 20, Record Group 5: West Africa Program (hereafter RG 5), Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, RBF.
110. Quoted in Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 149.
111. Arnold Rivkin, "Nigeria: A Unique Nation," *Current History* 45, no. 268 (December 1963): 329–34; Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 173.
112. Quoted in Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 177.
113. *Ibid.*, 149.
114. Alan Pifer, quoted in *ibid.*, 155.
115. *Ibid.*, 153.
116. *Ibid.*, 150.
117. David H. Price, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 61.
118. Joan Roelofs, *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 20.
119. Peter Hopkinson, *The Screen of Change: Lives Made Over By the Moving Image* (London: UKA Press, 2008), 320. Hopkinson offers an instructive account of the longstanding utility of "corporate social responsibility" and "cause-relating marketing" to corporations that fund "Nigerian" films, such as Hopkinson's own *African Awakening*: "Unilever paid for that film of the Black awakening, in the belief that its sponsorship would enhance its image and assist in its survival in Africa" (406).
120. "New York Sound Track," *Variety*, Wednesday, August 24, 1966, 20.
121. Jerome Christensen, *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 245.
122. Rupert Emerson, "The Character of American Interests in Africa," in *The United States and Africa*, ed. Walter Goldschmidt (New York: Praeger, 1963 [1958]), 5. The idea that an agent as powerful as Hollywood manages to "constantly reconstitute" the world-economy comes from Terence K. Hopkins, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Associates, "Patterns of Development of the Modern World-System," in *World-Systems Analysis: Theory and Methodology*, ed. Terence K. Hopkins, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Associates (London: Sage, 1982), 72.
123. Robert W. McChesney, "Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism," *Monthly Review* (March 2001), 11.
124. *The Kinematograph Year Book 1940*, 86.
125. "The Behind-the-Scenes Story of a Missile-Tracking Network," *Business Screen* 22, no. 6 (1961): 32.
126. *The Kinematograph Year Book 1940*, 86.
127. Bankole Bello, "Discourse on the Cinema of Television Commercials in Nigeria," in *Cinema Discourse*, ed. Augustine-Ufua Enahoro (Jos, Nigeria: Positive Education Publishers, 2002), 62–76.
128. J.M. Burns, *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 109.
129. Onookome Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria: The Colonial Heritage," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 24, no. 2–3 (1996): 51–52.
130. Cinestar circular (circa 1963), "Partial List of Equipment and Supplies Provided by Cinestar," RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.

131. Theodore O. Prounis to Robert Fleming, April 8, 1963, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.
132. Cinestar contract, 1963, 1, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.
133. Victoria Cain, "'An Indirect Influence upon Industry': Rockefeller Philanthropies and the Development of Educational Film in the United States, 1935–1953," in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 245.
134. Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria," 44–45.
135. "Omaha," *Boxoffice*, June 25, 1962, 100.
136. *Weekly Television Digest*, January 8, 1962, 10.
137. Lewis Stone in the promotional film *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's Big Parade of Hits for 1940* (1940).
138. *Ibid.*
139. *Ibid.*
140. "Johnston Finds Opportunities in Nigeria for Theatres and Films," 1, 3.
141. "Attendance Up In Fr. Africa, Johnston Says," *Motion Picture Daily*, August 30, 1960, 1.
142. "World Theatre Facilities Up," *Motion Picture Daily*, Sunday, November 21, 1960, 3. Drawing on sources that include *The United Nations Statistical Year Book*, *The USIA Communication Data Book for Africa*, and the *British Film Institute Dossier on Africa*, Hyginus Ekwuazi would later write that there were fifty-two theaters in Nigeria in 1955; sixty-seven in 1960; 112 in 1973; and three hundred in 1987 (*Film in Nigeria*, 197). Ekwuazi's estimates seem conservative: AMPECA, for its part, counted 172 cinemas in Nigeria upon its establishment in 1961 (Owoo, "Caught In a Cultural Crossfire," 2373).
143. Richard F. Shepard, "Eliza Doolittle, Ex-Urchin, to Start New Career," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1964, 56.

2. ENUGU IN TECHNICOLOR: INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION IN LATE-COLONIAL NIGERIA

1. For more on the history of Christian filmmaking, see Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke, *Celluloid Sermons: The Emergence of the Christian Film Industry, 1930–1986* (New York: NYU Press, 2011). In a brief passage on the film, Lindvall and Quicke call *The Mark of the Hawk* a "religious potboiler" that "exhibit[s] noticeable political overtones" and "challenges British colonial policies," ultimately "soar[ing] beyond private devotion in its concern with racial equality and social justice" (103). Though he does not mention *The Mark of the Hawk*, Malcolm Boyd, in his 1958 book *Christ and Celebrity Gods* (Greenwich, CT: The Seabury Press), offers a perceptive account of Hollywood's attempts to tap into the religious market for motion pictures. A publicist and advertising executive who became a pastor (he was ordained in 1955), Boyd furnishes key insights into cinema's intersections with organized religion in the middle of the twentieth century, writing, "The whole range of mass media, we find, tends towards religiosity amid a climate marked by both religious motivation and finance power motivation" (26).
2. Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10, no. 2 (June, 1981): 140.
3. Joseph E. Evans, "The Lumumba Myth," *Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 1961, 10.
4. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Zik: A Selection of Speeches from Nnamdi Azikiwe* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 62.

5. CIA, "The Break-Up of the Colonial Empires and Its Implications for US Security," [Confidential] CIA Report, September 3, 1948, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78-01617a003200020001-3>, accessed April 18, 2021.
6. Price, *Cold War Anthropology*, 6–7.
7. Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 484.
8. See "Ike's Pastor Touts U's 'Mark of Hawk,'" *Variety*, November 26, 1958, 1.
9. Price, *Cold War Anthropology*, 119, 128.
10. Lester J. Keyser and André H. Ruszkowski, *The Cinema of Sidney Poitier: The Black Man's Changing Role on the American Screen* (San Diego: A.S. Barnes, 1980), 43.
11. Herbert I. Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 92.
12. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 4.
13. Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, translated by Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 49–50.
14. Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 33.
15. Stella Affah-Attoe and S.O. Jaja, *Margaret Ekpo: Lioness in Nigerian Politics* (Abeokuta: ALF Publications, 1993), 38.
16. *Economic Rehabilitation of Eastern Nigeria: Report* (Enugu: Government Printer, 1955), 2.
17. Brendan Shehu, "The Nigerian Film Corporation," in *No . . . Not Hollywood: Essays & Speeches of Brendan Shehu*, ed. Hyginus Ekwuazi and Yakubu Nasidi (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1992), 3.
18. *Ibid.*, 6.
19. *Ibid.*, 6–7. See also Cinestar, "Questionnaire: Information Required for Application for Non-Resident Capital Investment" (circa 1963), RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF. For more on the Eastern Region's decision to "vigorously pursue the development of its human capital after the Second World War," see Edmond J. Keller, *Identity, Citizenship, and Political Conflict in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 54.
20. Brendan Shehu, "The Role of the Film Industry in a Developing Country," in *No . . . Not Hollywood: Essays & Speeches of Brendan Shehu*, ed. Hyginus Ekwuazi and Yakubu Nasidi (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1992), 13.
21. Alexander Bud, for instance, has convincingly contested the popular notion that Nollywood's development has been entirely beyond the state's influence. "Nollywood did not rise to prominence on the world stage *despite the lack of* government involvement, but rather *because of the hyperactivity of its involvement*," Bud argues. See "The End of Nollywood's Guilded Age? Marketers, the State, and the Struggle for Distribution," *Critical African Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014): 92, emphasis in original.
22. Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 57.
23. Abou B. Bamba, *African Miracle, African Mirage: Transnational Politics and the Paradox of Modernization in Ivory Coast* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 4.
24. *Ibid.*, 4.
25. Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1956), 30.

26. Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 260, 261.
27. V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 1.
28. Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism & Social Classes: Two Essays by Joseph Schumpeter*, translated by Heinz Norden (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1955 [1919, 1927]), 69, 73.
29. Grover Clark, *The Balance Sheets of Imperialism: Facts and Figures on Colonies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).
30. Bamba, *African Miracle, African Mirage*, 189.
31. *Ibid.*, 189.
32. Irene L. Gendzier, *Development Against Democracy: Manipulating Political Change in the Third World* (Hampton, CT: Tyrone, 1995), 2.
33. Shehu, "The Nigerian Film Corporation," 6.
34. "Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa," *Printers' Ink*, January 13, 1961, 54, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.
35. Here I am paraphrasing Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2001 [1999]), 4.
36. For more on the concept of a "facilitative state," see David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 95.
37. The marketability of this approach remains pronounced, as films from Kim Nguyen's *War Witch* (2012) to Netflix's *Beasts of No Nation* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2015) attest. Unfolding "somewhere in Africa," such films suggest precisely the sort of racialized placelessness parodied in Keenan Ivory Wayans's *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* (1988), set, an opening title announces, in "Any Ghetto U.S.A." The Nollywood film *Couple of Days* (Tolu "Lord Tanner" Awobiyi, 2016) offers its own, equally satirical spin on this device, superimposing the words "Somewhere in Lagos" over aerial shots of what is clearly Victoria Island.
38. Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood "British" Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 38.
39. "U-I Acquires 'Hawk,'" *Motion Picture Daily*, December 12, 1957, 3.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Harry Belafonte with Michael Shnayerson, *My Song: A Memoir of Art, Race, and Defiance* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 163.
42. "Editorial," *International African Opinion* 1, no. 1 (July 1938): 2, quoted in Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019), 334.
43. "The Mark of the Hawk," *Film Bulletin*, February 17, 1958, 10.
44. "This is Your Product: Universal-Int'l," *Film Bulletin*, January 6, 1958, 23; "This is Your Product: Universal-Int'l," *Film Bulletin*, November 10, 1958, 23.
45. Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 156; Frederick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," in *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America*, ed. Frederick Cooper, et al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 141; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, new edition (London: Routledge, 2014), 113.
46. Brian Larkin, "Circulating Empires: Colonial Authority and the Immoral, Subversive Problem of American Film," in *Globalizing American Studies*, ed. Brian T. Edwards

and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 157.

47. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Routledge, 2016 [1999]), 33, 156.

48. Edward Said, "Secular Interpretation, the Geographical Element, and the Methodology of Imperialism," in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 33.

49. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 56.

50. "CDC Will Be Shut Out of Nigeria in 1960—But Many Schemes Still in the Air," *West African Pilot*, Friday, June 5, 1959, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, RBF.

51. Martin Thomas, "Albert Sarraut, French Colonial Development, and the Communist Threat, 1919–1930," *Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 4 (December 2005): 919. See also Maxim Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian-Soviet Relations, 1960–1961* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003).

52. G. Udegbumen Meniru, *African-American Cooperation: A Study in Tropical Development; A Survey of the Natural Resources and Industrial Potentialities of Nigeria* (Glen Garden, NJ: Libertarian Press, 1954), 91–92.

53. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 9.

54. Meniru, *African-American Cooperation*, 91–92.

55. Sidney Poitier, *This Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 189; Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 8. It is Poitier who plays the priest in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Zoltan Korda, 1951), the actor's second film, set in South Africa and featuring the sort of Christian liberalism that recurs in *The Mark of the Hawk*.

56. As Walter Rodney puts it, "there is no doubting the fact that missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense." See *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018 [1972]), 308. In 1900, W.E.B. Du Bois noted that the "cloak of the Christian missionary enterprise" concealed "the ruthless economic exploitation and political downfall of less developed nations." See "Address to the Nations of the World by the Pan-African Conference in London, 1900," in *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa 1856–1970: Documents on Modern African Political Thought from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. J. Ayodele Langley (London: Rex Collings, 1979), 738–39.

57. Chinua Achebe, "The Education of a British-Protected Child," in *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 16.

58. Chinua Achebe, "Africa's Tarnished Name," in *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, 92–93.

59. *Eastern Nigeria Today*, published by the Office of the Commissioner in the United Kingdom for the Eastern Region of Nigeria (London: September 1956), quoted in Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 187.

60. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44.

61. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Frederick Cooper, *Africa in the World: Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 56.

62. Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Nigeria* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 44–45.

63. *Ibid.*, 45, 46.

64. Akweke Abyssinia Nwafor Orizu, *Without Bitterness: Western Nations in Post-War Africa* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1944), 97.

65. *Ibid.*, 97.

66. *Ibid.*, 101.

67. For more on the “extraversion” of African states, see Steven Pierce, *Moral Economies of Corruption: State Formation and Political Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 212–13. The concept was earlier developed by Jean-François Bayart, “Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion,” *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (2000): 217–67.

68. Vested on July 1, 1956, its leadership consisted of a chairman, E.U. Eronin (soon to be replaced by J.B.C. Okala); Chief J.A. Otutubuike; N.N. Mbile; Dr. O.N. Egesi; Chief J.O. Nwanolue; and Chief H.T. Amabeoku. See “Eastern Region Cinema Corporation,” in *Nigeria Year Book 1957* (Lagos: Daily Times/Nigerian Printing & Publishing Co., Ltd., 1957), 175. See also Nerijs Namaso Mbile, *Cameroon Political Story: Memories of an Authentic Eye Witness* (Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2011), 252–57.

69. Gyan Prakash, “Introduction: After Colonialism,” in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 9.

70. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 37.

71. “U-I Acquires ‘Hawk,’” 3.

72. Hollinger, “West Africa, Under New Nationalism, Aims for Own Film Industry in Nigeria,” 4.

73. Tom Rice, *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 206.

74. Quoted in *ibid.*, 184.

75. Cowie, *Capital Moves*, 101.

76. “U-I Acquires ‘Hawk,’” 3.

77. Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 174.

78. *Ibid.*, 175.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Robert I. Fleming, Rockefeller Brothers Fund pamphlet, “Rockefeller Brothers Fund: Advisory Services for Economic Development,” 1957, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 4, RBF.

81. James N. Hyde to G.C. Ashibuogwu, December 16, 1963, RG 5, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 33, RBF.

82. John Camp to Dana Creel, April 20, 1957, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, RBF; John R. Camp, “Report on a Trip to Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria with Recommendations for Consideration by Rockefeller Brothers Fund,” 30, RG 5, Series 1, Box 2, Folder 9, RBF.

83. Stacy May to Nnamdi Azikiwe, March 4, 1957, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, RBF.

84. John Camp to Dana Creel, April 20, 1956, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, RBF; John R. Camp, “Report on a Trip to Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria with Recommendations for Consideration by Rockefeller Brothers Fund,” 30, RG 5, Series 1, Box 2, Folder 9, RBF.

85. Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 176.

86. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 25; Slobodian, *Globalists*.

87. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 14.
88. Oladipo Onipede, "Hollywood's Holy War Against Africa," *Africa Today* 3, no. 4 (Jul.–Aug., 1956), 5. For an analysis of how this paradox played out in postwar Europe, see Hozic, *Hollyworld*, 95.
89. Onipede, "Hollywood's Holy War Against Africa," 5. By 1950, MGM had standardized the onscreen acknowledgment of African governmental assistance, noting, in the opening credits of both *King Solomon's Mines* (Compton Bennett and Andrew Marton, 1950) and *Mogambo* (John Ford, 1953), the "limitless cooperation" of various colonial state formations and officials.
90. Hozic, *Hollyworld*, 101.
91. Cinestar, "Questionnaire," 2.
92. Jan C. Jansen and Jurgen Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short History*, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 137. See also Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*.
93. "East Spends £55m. on Its Industry," *Morning Post*, Wednesday, February 21, 1962, 7, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.
94. *The 1951 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 728.
95. Thomas H. Guback, "Government Support to the Film Industry in the United States," *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law*, ed. Bruce A. Austin (Norwood: Ablex, 1987), 3:88–104. For additional examples, see Grant and Wood, *Blockbusters and Trade Wars*, 292–314.
96. *Economic Rehabilitation of Eastern Nigeria*, Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1955 (Enugu: 1955), 5; Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 163. See also E.O. Akeredolu-Ale, *The Underdevelopment of Indigenous Entrepreneurships in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975).
97. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 164.
98. For accounts of Hollywood's "tax holidays," see "Investor Interest Growing in Eastern Nigeria"; see also "Note on Income Tax Relief under the Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Ordinance," RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, RBF.
99. S.J. Timothy-Asobe, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria* (Lagos: Upper Standard Publications, 2003), 33. See also Dele Morakinyo, "Filmmaker Complained Inadequate Government Support," *The Guardian*, February 12, 1986, 11.
100. Ranald S. May, "Direct Overseas Investment in Nigeria, 1953–63," *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 12, no. 3 (November 1965), 252. Sidney Poitier does, however, allude to such purchases in his autobiography (*This Life*, 189).
101. "'Mark of the Hawk' Stars Poitier, Kitt," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, December 13, 1958: 10.
102. *Ibid.*
103. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 207.
104. *Ibid.*, 208.
105. *Ibid.*
106. Poitier, *This Life*, 190, emphasis added.
107. Daniel Steinhart, *Runaway Hollywood: Internationalizing Postwar Production and Location Shooting* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).
108. Hy Hollinger, "Nigerian Film Industry," *The Crisis* 64, no. 8 (October 1957): 497.
109. *Ibid.*

110. Elizabeth F. Thompson, "Scarlett O'Hara in Damascus: Hollywood, Colonial Politics, and Arab Spectatorship during World War II," in *Globalizing American Studies*, ed. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 185.
111. Hollinger, "Nigerian Film Industry," 497.
112. Poitier, *This Life*, 189.
113. *Ibid.*
114. *Ibid.*
115. Hollinger, "Nigerian Film Industry," 497. I borrow the phrase "The Enugu Tangle" from Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 207.
116. At the same time, the Eastern Region was in the process of establishing a new two-thousand-acre Industrial Park in Port Harcourt ("Investor Interest Growing in Eastern Nigeria").
117. Hollinger, "Nigerian Film Industry," 497.
118. *Ibid.*
119. Rice, *Films for the Colonies*, 141.
120. "'Mark of the Hawk' Now Screening," *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1958: C2.
121. "Native Boy Makes Good In Film," *The New Mexican*, July 6, 1960, 6.
122. "'Mark of the Hawk' Now Screening."
123. John Gregory Dunne, *The Studio* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998 [1968]), 64.
124. Advertisement: Lloyd Young and Associates, Ltd, *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 6, 1958, 4.
125. Barry Keith Grant, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (London: Palgrave, 2010), 41. Superscope was less expensive than other widescreen processes and was no studio's proprietary technology (meaning that no royalties/fees needed to be paid for its use).
126. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 8.
127. Larkin, *Signal and Noise*.
128. Young's use of Superscope and Technicolor on *The Mark of the Hawk* recalls Orson Welles' unfinished *It's All True*, for which Welles, in Catherine Benamou's words, "stressed the novelty and artistic potential of applying Technicolor and location sound recording to the Brazilian subject matter" (*It's All True: Orson Welles's Pan-American Odyssey* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007], 235).
129. Belton, *Widescreen Cinema*, 142.
130. For more on the dynamics typical of the so-called "public-private partnerships," see Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, 27.
131. John M. Ostheimer, *Nigerian Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 24.
132. Ukandi G. Damachi, "Nigerian Development Path," in *Development Paths in Africa and China*, ed. Ukandi G. Damachi, Guy Routh, and Abdel-Rahman E. Ali Taha (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976), 153.
133. May, "Direct Overseas Investment in Nigeria, 1953-63," 252.
134. Eme O. Awa, *Federal Government in Nigeria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 34.
135. Shehu, "The Nigerian Film Corporation," 3.
136. Awa, *Federal Government in Nigeria*, 274.
137. United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report of the Special Study Mission to Africa, South and East of the Sahara*, September

3, 1955–December 10, 1955, by Hon. Frances P. Bolton, Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on the Near East and Africa, April 5, 1957 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957), 27–33.

138. Poitier, *This Life*, 189.

139. Some press accounts claimed that another American, H. Kenn Carmichael of Los Angeles, wrote the screenplay under the sponsorship of the Presbyterian Church (with additional support from the Methodist Church). Carmichael, who held a PhD in speech and drama, was a Presbyterian fraternal worker in Nigeria before moving on to a post in Beirut, Lebanon (“Mission Worker Speaker Here,” *Pittsburgh Press*, January 8, 1966, 4). *Los Angeles Times* film critic Geoffrey Warren claimed that Carmichael had written the “huge screenplay” for *The Mark of the Hawk*, and the paper also published a glowing profile of the man, identifying him as “an active elder of Los Angeles’ Immanuel Presbyterian Church” and the author of several “religious shorts” routinely distributed to places of worship. The *Los Angeles Times* obscured Lloyd Young’s authorship, effacing him entirely in its coverage of a film allegedly “conceived, financed, written and directed by ministers and church leaders.” Toward the end of the article, however, it contradicted even this claim, declaring that Carmichael alone had directed the film. No mention was made of Michael Audley, Universal-International, or Associated British Picture Corporation. See Geoffrey Warren, “Mark of the Hawk’ Drama of African Ferment,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1958, B6; Richard Mathison, “Theaters Will Present Church-Based Film: ‘Mark of the Hawk’ Touching on Race Problem Made Into Feature-Length Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1958, B2. Reviewing *The Mark of the Hawk* for the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther wrote that the film “was directed by Lloyd Young” (“From Far and Near: New Films From Every Place but Hollywood,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1958, X1). The film’s opening credits identify Lloyd Young as sole author of the original story and Carmichael and Young as coauthors of the original screenplay; Young is credited as producer and Audley as director; Carmichael is additionally credited as unit manager in Enugu.

140. Tino Balio, “New Producers for Old: United Artists and the Shift to Independent Production,” in *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (London: Routledge, 1990), 171.

141. “The Mark of the Hawk,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 14, 1958, 94.

142. Mildred Martin, “Mark of the Hawk’ Tells Vivid Story of Africa,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 10, 1958, 46.

143. Poitier, *This Life*, 189.

144. Cooper, “Africa and the World Economy,” 141.

145. *Ibid.*, 22.

146. Hozic, *Hollyworld*, 112.

147. Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 156.

148. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 113.

149. “First Documentary for African Gold Coast,” *The Film Daily*, December 18, 1947, 7.

150. Awa, *Federal Government in Nigeria*, 273.

151. “Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa,” *Printers’ Ink*, January 13, 1961, 53.

152. Quoted in Evans, “The Lumumba Myth,” 10.

153. “Investor Interest Growing in Eastern Nigeria.”

154. Quoted in *ibid.*

155. “We need foreign capital’—Okwu,” *Daily Times*, February 21, 1962, 10.

156. “Investor Interest Growing in Eastern Nigeria.” Here, I am indebted to William E. Connolly, *The Fragility of Things: Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 58.

157. “Church Unit Told of Work in Nigeria,” *The Courier-News*, December 5, 1962; “Speaker to Show Unitarian Work Aiding Nigerians,” *Burlington Free Press*, December 6, 1963, 9; “Channel 12 Airs Film on Africa,” *The Evening Press*, January 30, 1964, 4.

158. Vijay Prashad, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (London: Verso, 2012), 1; Damachi, “Nigerian Development Path,” 161.

159. Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2011); Judith Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots’ or Igbo ‘Women’s War’? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, ed. Nancy C. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 59–85, 287–90.

160. Damachi, “Nigerian Development Path,” 161.

161. Noémi Tousignant, *Edges of Exposure: Toxicology and the Problem of Capacity in Postcolonial Senegal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 66.

162. Onipede, “Hollywood’s Holy War Against Africa,” 4.

163. *Ibid.*, 2.

164. *Ibid.*, 3.

165. *Ibid.*, 5.

166. May, “Direct Overseas Investment in Nigeria, 1953–63,” 92.

167. The Eastern Region was the site of heavy fighting during the Biafran Civil War. The conflict crippled the region’s manufacturing sector, which had previously accounted for about a quarter of Nigeria’s total manufacturing capacity. As the war dragged on, manufacturing ceased in the Eastern states; plants were destroyed or abandoned. See Damachi, “Nigerian Development Path,” 158.

168. *Ibid.*, 162.

169. “Report on the National Film and Video Censors Board Workshop/Interactive Forum with Stakeholders in the Film and Video Industry on October 29, 2003, at the National Arts Theatre, Lagos,” in *Film & Video Directory in Nigeria, Volume II*, 123. See also Moyo Ogundipe, “The Nigerian Film Industry in Search of an Ideology,” *The Guardian*, May 12, 1984, 6; Longinus Chukwuike and Ifeanyin Nkennor, “Ade Love: Film Industry Can Be a Major Source of Revenue,” *Guardian Express*, May 3, 1986, 2; Segun Ogun, “Film Industry and National Identity,” *New Nigeria*, November 19, 1984.

170. John Quiggin, *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk Among Us* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 47. For a contrasting statement of faith in the private sector—one that depends upon the erasure of the Eastern Region’s experiences with Lloyd Young & Associates—see Hyginus Ekwuazi, who writes that film “distribution, like exhibition, is a purely private sector affair—and is best left to the private sector” (*Film in Nigeria*, 191).

171. Quoted in Timothy-Asobe, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, 63.

172. Goodell, *The Water Will Come*, 219.

173. “Eartha Kitt Stars at Paramount,” *New York Herald Tribune*, February 23, 1958, D4.

174. H.H.T., “‘The Mark of the Hawk’ at Paramount,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1958, 32.

175. William K. Zinsser, "Factual Satchmo, Fictional Tahiti," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 9, 1958, D1. In his full review of *The Mark of the Hawk*, Zinsser wrote, "The men who made this film obviously know Africa well" ("The New Movie: 'The Mark of the Hawk,'" *New York Herald Tribune*, March 6, 1958, 15).
176. "Kitt, Poitier Star in Nigerian Picture," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 15, 1958, 2C.
177. "Film Festival at Apollo for Week," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 19, 1959, 17.
178. "Poitier-Kitt Film Plus Show at Apollo," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 3, 1958, 14.
179. Bosley Crowther, "From Far and Near: New Films From Every Place but Hollywood," *New York Times*, March 9, 1958, X1.
180. Win Fanning, "The New Film," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 14, 1958, 22.
181. "Protestants at Work," *Newsweek*, December 16, 1957, 70.
182. Richard L. Coe, "Unique Study at Playhouse," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 14, 1958, D6.
183. "Ike's Pastor Touts U's 'Mark of Hawk,'" 1.
184. Mary G. Hundley, "Left a Mark," *The Washington Post*, November 20, 1958, A20.
185. Quoted in "Dr. King Praised 'Mark of the Hawk,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 14, 1958, 15.
186. *Ibid.*
187. "'Mark of the Hawk' Now Screening," *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1958, C2.
188. Geoffrey Warren, "'Mark of the Hawk' Drama of African Ferment," *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1958, B6.
189. "Rev. Haas, Wife Tell of Trip to Africa," *Plainfield Courier-News*, March 12, 1958, 34.
190. Richard L. Coe, "Unique Study at Playhouse," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 14, 1958, D6.
191. Kate Cameron, "'Mark of the Hawk' a Drama of Africa," *Daily News*, March 6, 1958, 126, emphasis added.
192. "'Mark of the Hawk' Will Be Shown," *The Daily Home News*, January 23, 1960, 2.
193. Esther B. Jones, "Pasadena Jottings," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 14, 1960, A7.
194. Statistics according to searches of the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database conducted on January 12, 2021. See also "'Mark of Hawk' Made Available for Churches," *Presbyterian Outlook*, November 30, 1959, 9.
195. "Individualized Campaign Sells U-I's 'Hawk' to Special Groups," *Film Bulletin*, March 17, 1958, 29.
196. Quoted in *Film Bulletin*, March 17, 1958, 29.
197. *Ibid.*
198. *Ibid.*
199. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Part II* (Philadelphia, PA: Office of the General Assembly, 1965), 142.
200. *Ibid.*, 78, 134–35. As an aggressively promoted "Protestant" film, *The Mark of the Hawk* was no anomaly. Universal-International carried out a similar series of promotional campaigns for the exactly contemporaneous *Battle Hymn* (Douglas Sirk, 1957), in which Rock Hudson plays Reverend Dean Hess, the real-life pastor who, in 1951, famously

airlifted Korean orphans to safety on Jeju Island. Working with the United Council of Church Women, the Protestant Motion Picture Council, and the editor of *The Christian Herald*, Universal distributed tens of thousands of promotional kits to churches across the country. 16mm reduction prints of *Battle Hymn* soon became Sunday-school staples. And while not quite as enterprising as Universal would be with *The Mark of the Hawk* and *Battle Hymn*, Twentieth Century-Fox scored a significant hit among Protestants, and the general moviegoing population, with *A Man Called Peter* (Henry Koster, 1955). See Boyd, *Christ and Celebrity Gods*, 40, 47.

201. "Motion Picture Export Association of America," *The 1967 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, 619.

202. *The 1961 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, ed. Chester B. Bahn (New York: Film Daily, 1961), 759.

203. Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 22.

204. Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 43; Aristatkus Yohanna, "Film Corporation to Set Up Headquarters in Jos," *Standard*, July 1, 1987; Omololu Kassim, "The State of Nigeria's Film Industry," *National Concord*, July 30, 1987, 5; Mohammed Shamoosideen Adeiza, *The Cradle of Film: Landmarks of the Nigerian Film Corporation* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1994).

205. Brendan Shehu, "On the Occasion of the Visit of American Businessmen to the NFC Headquarters," in *No . . . Not Hollywood*, 157.

206. *Ibid.*, 158.

207. *Ibid.*, 159.

208. NTA-Benin was in charge of overseeing location shooting, which inevitably spilled over into Enugu State. Chuks Iloegbunam, "The World of Chinua Achebe," *News-watch*, March 24, 1986, 11.

209. Cinestar contract, 1963, 1, 2, RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.

210. Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, 71.

211. "UniFilms, Inc.," *Business Screen* 22, no. 1 (1961): 118–19.

212. *Ibid.*

213. *Business Screen: The 11th Annual Production Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1961): 121.

214. "Young, Daff Plan Film on the Life of Ghandi [sic]," *Motion Picture Daily*, June 16, 1960, 5.

215. "Young, de Wilde Set 2," *Motion Picture Daily* May 26, 1960, 3. In 1962, Kitt was in talks to return to the Eastern Region for the proposed film adaptation of Cyprian Ekwensi's 1961 novel *Jagua Nana*. The film was to be produced by Alberto Lattuada for Delpha Films of Rome; distribution was to be handled by Lux Films (of Italy) and United Artists, which at the time had a regional office in Lagos. Dorothy Dandridge, Pearl Primus, and Katharine Dunham were also approached to work on location in Onitsha, but the film was never made. "Mull Filming Nigerian Novel in Native Land," *Variety*, March 14, 1962, 2.

216. Hollinger, "West Africa, Under New Nationalism, Aims for Own Film Industry in Nigeria," 4. Young's 1957 estimate lies between that of Hyginus Ekwuazi, who would later write that there were, at the time, fifty-two theaters in Nigeria, and that of AMPECA, which counted close to two hundred by the start of the 1960s. See Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 197; Owoo, "Caught In a Cultural Crossfire," 2373.

217. Bamba, *African Miracle, African Mirage*, 11.
218. Quoted in "On the Spot," *West Africa*, June 29, 1957, 615.
219. Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam, "A Law to amend the Incorporation (Ministry of Finance) Law, 1960, to repeal the Cinema Corporation Law, 1955 . . .," in *Laws, Eastern Nigeria: Containing the Ordinances of Eastern Nigeria and Subsidiary Legislation Made Thereunder—Volume I* (Enugu: Government Printer, Eastern Nigeria, 1961), 23–25; "Public Notice: The Nigeria Town and Country Planning Ordinance (Cap. 155)—The Uwani Central Layout (Enugu State)," in *ibid.*, 308.
220. Eastern Region Ministry of Economic Planning, *Eastern Nigeria Development Plan, 1963–1968* (Enugu: Government Printer, Eastern Nigeria, 1964), 35.
221. Such ads were often placed in British publications. See, for instance, "Classified Ad 48—Ministry of Information, Eastern Nigeria: Vacancy for Film Director/Cameraman," *The Guardian* (London), May 10, 1960, 14.
222. Lawrence Van Gelder, "From the Boer War Bruce Beresford Turns to Texas Life," *New York Times*, February 27, 1983, 22.
223. Brian McFarlane, "From Ockers to the Oscars: An Interview With Bruce Beresford," *Metro: Media & Education Magazine*, November 2007, 112. In his autobiography, published in the same year, Beresford places the blame on Nigeria for being "a seriously corrupt country"; he praises "the Western democracies" as "liberal and efficient, overall" (*Josh Hartnett Definitely Wants to Do This . . . : True Stories from a Life in the Screen Trade* [Sydney: HarperCollins Publishers Australia, 2007], 182).
224. "Billy Graham," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 9, 1960, 14; "35,000," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 9, 1960, 5.
225. "A Dream Fulfilled: 'Mark of the Hawk,'" *The Record*, March 8, 1958, 36.
226. Timothy-Asobele, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, 61.
227. *Ibid.*, 43.
228. Quoted in Connor Ryan, "A Populist Aesthetic: Ola Balogun's Commercial Films and Cultural Politics," in *The Magic of Nigeria—On the Cinema of Ola Balogun* (Frankfurt: Filmkollektiv, 2016), 165.
229. Nikolaus Perneczky, "Form, Colour, Light, Movement: On Ola Balogun's Extant Feature Films," in *The Magic of Nigeria—On the Cinema of Ola Balogun* (Frankfurt: Filmkollektiv, 2016), 160.
230. Quoted in Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 364.
231. Grant and Wood, *Blockbusters and Trade Wars*, 306–7.
232. Pierre Jalée, *The Pillage of the Third World*, trans. Mary Klopper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 84; Melnick, "Salisbury Stakes," 98.
233. "Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa," *Printers' Ink*, January 13, 1961, 53, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.
234. Jalée, *The Pillage of the Third World*, 97.

3. ENDS AND BEGINNINGS: REBUILDING THE BIG SCREEN

1. Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 187.
2. Ostheimer, *Nigerian Politics*, 157.
3. Slobodian, *Globalists*, 270–71.

4. For an excellent gloss on Shagari's relationship to the IMF, see James Raymond Vreeland, *The IMF and Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36–37.

5. Shagari's National Party of Nigeria, formed in the late 1970s, had deep roots in the country, tying its message of democratic progress to the earlier rhetoric of decolonization. See Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 122–25.

6. Robert Pollin, *Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity* (London: Verso, 2005), 131.

7. For more on the MPAA's punitive efforts after 1978, see Donahue, *American Film Distribution*, 123.

8. Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 191.

9. Cinestar contract, 1963, 2 (emphasis added), RG 5, Series 1, Box 13, Folder 109, RBF.

10. Ibid.

11. U.S. Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy in Lagos, 9 March 1976, Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, Access to Archival Databases (hereafter AAD), National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).

12. Henry Kissinger later summarized the visit for the US Embassy in Lagos. US Secretary of State to US Embassy in Lagos, July 20, 1976, RG 59, AAD, NARA.

13. US Deputy Secretary of State to US Embassy in Lagos, July 7, 1976, RG 59, AAD, NARA. In any case, the planned "Disneyfication" of Lagos did not come to pass—though some might argue that it is indeed evident on Victoria Island and in other "elite," ostensibly tourist-friendly enclaves, with their flashy multiplexes (which are themselves like theme parks, complete with all manner of recreational outlets). For more on Disney's relationship to technology and town planning, see J.P. Telotte, *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

14. Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001), 222.

15. For more on Disney's contributions to "international amusement park culture," see J.P. Telotte, *Disney TV* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 81.

16. US Secretary of State to US Embassy in Lagos, January 19, 1979, RG 59, AAD, NARA; US Embassy in Monrovia to US Embassy in Dakar, June 18, 1979, RG 59, AAD, NARA.

17. Bamba, *African Miracle, African Mirage*, 7.

18. For more on the series and its later incarnations, see Telotte, *Disney TV*.

19. Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, 174–75.

20. US Secretary of State to US Embassy in Lagos, January 19, 1979, RG 59, AAD, NARA.

21. Pierce, *Moral Economies of Corruption*, 18, 214.

22. This is not to suggest that the concept of corruption is foreign to Nigerians—that it is only ever imposed from the outside. In his compelling account of the "profound critical collective self-consciousness that Nigerians share about corruption in their society," the anthropologist Daniel Jordan Smith puts it bluntly: "Nigerians routinely complain about corruption. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is the national pastime" (*A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007], 4, 8).

23. Theodore A. Nelson, "That's Entertainment . . . !," *Business America*, January 7, 1985, 20. *Business America* ("The Magazine of International Trade") is a publication of the International Trade Administration, US Department of Commerce.

24. Peter Niesewand, "Concrete Jungle," *Guardian*, October 17, 1975, cited in Pierce, *Moral Economies of Corruption*, 130; John Darnton, "African Woodstock Overshadows Festival," *New York Times*, January 29, 1977, 6.

25. "A few gleaming multiplexes have appeared recently," Jonathan Haynes wrote in 2007, "but they show American films" ("Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films," 136).

26. John Darnton, "Cultural Renaissance Is Under Way in West Africa," *New York Times*, January 17, 1977, 3.

27. Iris Kay captured this contradiction between Nigerian austerity and American abundance in her report from FESTAC Village: "It was unfurnished, to be sure; the plumbing did not always work; and there were sheets on some beds, pillows on others, but both on very few. We would run out to the street when the toilet-paper truck came by like children for ice cream. Many roads were merely tracks in the loose sand, which buses kept in continual suspension. But there was Coca-Cola . . . without limit. . . ." ("FESTAC 1977," *African Arts* 11, no. 1 [October, 1977]: 50).

28. Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 191, 194–95. See also Don Taylor, "The National Theatre: Unique in Africa," in *FESTAC '77: A Preview of the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture* (London: Progress International, 1977), F2.

29. Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 56. Fittingly, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* concludes with a discussion of "Black capitalism," with one character observing, "Black people are thinking about taking over white businesses." Adds another, "It seems to me that there's a whole lot of money in just being Black these days."

30. "Music, Dance, and Films: Deadlines, Facilities," *Festival News*, April/May 1976, 6.

31. Carmen McCain, "FESPACO in a Time of Nollywood: The Politics of the 'Video' Film at Africa's Oldest Festival," *Journal of African Media Studies* 3, no. 2 (2011): 241–61.

32. "Music, Dance, and Films," 6.

33. *General Programme: FESTAC '77, 15 JAN–12 FEB 1977*, International Theatre Institute/Martha W. Coigney Collection (hereafter ITI/MWCC), *T-Mss 2002–032. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Box 10–131, Folder 9. See also "The Venues," *FESTAC '77*, F23. The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation (CBAAC), located on Broad Street in Lagos, does not contain copies of the original English-language programme; only the French-language programme is archived there.

34. The others were *From These Roots* (1974), which was produced and directed by William Greaves for the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (a documentary history of Harlem as "the capital of Black America," the film touches on "the growing significance of Africa to Black people"); *Don't Make Me Over* (Gary Keys, 1968), a documentary about Dionne Warwick; *A Silent Rap* (Collis H. Davis, Jr., 1973), a short drama about an interracial romance, featuring a music track composed and performed by members of the "rhythm & blues-African-jazz-funk" band Oneness of Juju; *Ujima: Modupe and the Flood* (Todd Flinchbaugh, 1975), an animated short based on the East African folktale "Modupe and the Flood"; *Let the Church Say Amen!* (St. Clair Bourne, 1972), a documentary feature that follows a Black man's progress in the contemporary Black church from seminary to pastorate; *El Hajj Malik el Shabazz* (Gil Noble, 1965), a documentary about Malcolm X; and two films (included in FESTAC's documentary shorts program) about which I have not been able to locate any information, but which screened in the National Theatre's Cinema Hall I on Sunday, January 23, 1977: *The Strike*

and *Kwanza* (possibly a misspelling of “Kwanzaa”). *General Programme*, ITI/MWCC, Box 10–131, Folder 9. *The Strike* does not appear in the list of FESTAC screenings included in Timothy-Asobe’s *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, but *Kwanza* does. See “Appendix XIV: FESTAC 77 Films,” in Timothy-Asobe, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, 111.

35. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, “Introduction: Emancipating the Image: The L.A. Rebellion of Black Filmmakers,” in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*, ed. Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 27, 29–35.

36. While *Cooley High* features a protagonist who dreams of becoming “a big-time Hollywood writer” and ends with a title celebrating his ascension to industrial success, *A Luta Continua* powerfully implicates Hollywood capital in American imperialism (and vice versa), carefully explaining that U.S. material and ideological support for Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and Angola derived from the fact that Portugal was “acting as [the] agent” of “a growing number of American corporations” whose investments in southern Africa required protection from anticolonial uprisings.

37. Jonathan Munby, *Under a Bad Sign: Criminal Self-Representation in African American Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 124.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 278.

40. *Ibid.*, 201. Gordon Parks clashed with Paramount over the marketing of *Leadbelly*, publicly accusing the studio, which had sole distribution rights, of racism (Barbara Kevles, “The Marketing of *Leadbelly*,” *Cineaste* 28, no. 4 [Fall 2003]: 34–35).

41. “FESTAC Scandal Probe,” *Daily Sketch* (Ibadan), May 25, 1977, 3, quoted in Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 16, 201.

42. Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 16, 201.

43. *Ibid.*, 55; “FESTAC ‘77: The Official Statement of the USA/FESTAC Committee,” *Black Books Bulletin* (Summer 1977): 52.

44. Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 115, 211.

45. *Ibid.*, 211.

46. Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 162–63.

47. Jonathan Haynes, “Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustments,” *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 99–100; *General Programme*, ITI/MWCC, Box 10–131, Folder 9. 43. The historical significance of at least three of these films—*2,000 Years of Nigerian Art*, *Shehu Umar*, and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*—was missed by many who reviewed FESTAC for the American and even African press. The critic for the African Cultural Institute complained, “In the anglophone [African] zone, film-making seems to be stammering. . . . Thus, the anglophone participation [in FESTAC] did not include any worthy fiction film nor any significant producer.” This particular critic, while claiming that “cinema was undoubtedly a centre of attraction in Lagos,” also asserted that the “films shown were of unequal value and, no doubt, the major film productions from Africa and the Black Diaspora were absent.” This is hardly true—the blockbuster *Uptown Saturday Night* was a “major film production” by most measures, and *Shehu Umar* was a federally sponsored epic. Sembene’s monumental *Xala* also screened at FESTAC. See “The Cinema at FESTAC,” *ICA Information: Special FESTAC ‘77* (Dakar: African Cultural Institute, 1977), 10.

48. Denise Mann, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 8.

49. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, updated and expanded 5th ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 210, 227.

50. While the *New York Times* suggested that this “48-page glossy program of events was left behind in a rush of last-minute changes and has become a mere curio” (Darnton, “African Woodstock Overshadows Festival,” 6), archival sources confirm that the promised lineup of films remained stable. See the mimeographed copies of the updated program of events (which list *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* as screening at the National Theatre’s Cinema Hall II on the evening of Wednesday, February 2, 1977) included in ITI/MWCC, Box 10–131, Folder 9.

51. For more on Columbia’s relationship to *Buck and the Preacher*, see Keith Corson, *Trying to Get Over: African American Directors After Blaxploitation, 1977–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 68–70; for more on Paramount and *Leadbelly*, see L. Roi Boyd III, “*Leadbelly*: Thirty Years Later: Exploring Gordon Parks as Auteur Through the *Leadbelly* Lens,” *Black Camera* 21, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2006): 18–21.

52. See, for example, the assertions made to this effect in Michael T. Martin, David C. Wall, and Marilyn Yaquinto, eds., *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse in The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

53. “Blacks Put *Spook* Back Behind Theater Doors,” *Jet*, August 26, 1976, 62. For an influential source of misleading assertions about the film, see Christine Acham and Clifford Ward’s 2011 documentary *Infiltrating Hollywood: The Rise and Fall of The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, in which Greenlee claims, “There were fifty prints—all of them disappeared. . . . So much for the First Amendment!” For an additional record of the film’s presence in Lagos in 1977, see “Cinema,” *Black Books Bulletin* (Summer 1977): 54. See also “Appendix XIV,” in Timothy-Asobele, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, 111.

54. “Music, Dance, and Films,” 6.

55. Wole Soyinka, “Twice Bitten: The Fate of Africa’s Culture Producers,” *PMLA* 105, no. 1 (January, 1990): 110.

56. “The Cinema at FESTAC,” 10. The critic also complained about the use of subtitling over dubbing.

57. James Pringle, “Searching for Black Roots,” *Newsweek*, February 14, 1977, 40.

58. Suzanne Enzerink has suggested that such diversity was viewed by the North American zonal committee as a means of subverting expectations of Black ideological homogeneity. Suzanne Enzerink, “Global Black Culture: Celebrating Americanness at Festac 77,” *Black Perspectives*, January 13, 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/global-black-culture-celebrating-americanness-at-festac-77/#fnref-15406-1>, accessed July 5, 2019.

59. Pierce, *Moral Economies of Corruption*, 131.

60. Jemima Pierre, *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 186.

61. Fred L. Block, *Capitalism: The Future of an Illusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 158.

62. It was also amid the emergence of allegations that ₦2.8 billion had disappeared from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (to end up, some said, in Muhammadu Buhari’s personal bank account). See Pierce, *Moral Economies of Corruption*, 108.

63. Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 252.
64. Charlie Keil, “‘American’ Cinema in the 1990s and Beyond: Whose Country’s Film-making Is It Anyway?,” in *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*, ed. Jon Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 58.
65. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 252.
66. Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 66.
67. Editorial, “Home Rule for Britain,” *World Film News*, November 1937, 5, quoted in Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 2.
68. Andrew Ross, *Creditocracy: And the Case for Debt Refusal* (New York: OR Books, 2013), 47.
69. Stuart Hall, “A Sense of Classlessness,” *Universities & Left Review* 5 (1958): 26.
70. See, for instance, “Editorial,” *The Penguin Film Review* 6 (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1948), 7–9.
71. For more on the underreporting of box-office grosses in Nigeria during this period, see Ekwuazi and Nasidi, *Operative Principles of the Film Industry*, 164.
72. Oversight on International Copyrights (hereafter OIC): Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Patents, Copyrights and Trademarks of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-eighth Congress, Second Session (hereafter SS), on how to Protect the Nation’s Creativity by Protecting the Value of Intellectual Property, September 25, 1984 (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 1985), 96, 131, 133. For a later account, published in Nigeria in response to problems plaguing the Nollywood industry, see “Violating the Laws Governing Film and Video in Nigeria: The Police Perspective,” in *Film & Video Directory in Nigeria, Volume II*, 171–75.
73. Okome, “The Context of Film Production in Nigeria,” 55.
74. Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 33.
75. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 100.
76. Graf, *The Nigerian State*, 57, 56.
77. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 101.
78. Quoted in *ibid.*, 103.
79. OIC: SS, 131. For more on the MPAA’s antipiracy drive, see Donahue, *American Film Distribution*, 168.
80. Smith, *A Culture of Corruption*, 1.
81. Pierce, *Moral Economies of Corruption*, 145–46.
82. Timothy-Asobebe, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, 39.
83. OIC: SS, 131.
84. Yash Tandon, *Trade is War: The West’s War Against the World* (New York: OR Books, 2015), 35.
85. Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 33. A decade later, in 1997, the Nigerian Film Corporation would wryly note that the name change “did not make the task of distributing and exhibiting their films [any] easier for the subsequent Nigerian film makers.” Nigerian Film Corporation, “Film Distribution and Exhibition in Nigeria,” *Film & Video: Nigeria’s Authoritative Film & Video Journal* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation) 4, no. 6 (1997): 8.
86. Unsigned editorial, “Let Nigerians Distribute the Film,” *Daily Times*, May 17, 1979, 16.
87. Timothy-Asobebe, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, 47. As Eddie Ugbomah put it, “Some of these Indians . . . play tricks by getting Nigerian nationality. So if you tell them, ‘Oh . . .

You are supporting [foreign] films, he will tell you, 'Oh, but I am a Nigerian.' So they use this Nigerian nationality to cover up" (quoted in *ibid.*, 31).

88. Jesse Salah Ovidia, "Indigenization Versus Domiciliation: A Historical Approach to National Content in Nigeria's Oil and Gas Industry," in *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment in Africa*, ed. Toyin Falola and Jessica Achberger (New York: Routledge, 2013), 52.

89. John Jennings interviewed by Nevine Mabro, "Interview: John Jennings, Dangerous Liaisons," *Index on Censorship* 26, no. 4, issue 177 (July/August 1997): 54.

90. Paul Bennel, "Foreign Direct Investment in Africa: Rhetoric and Reality," *SAIS Review: A Journal of International Affairs* XVII, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 132; Ayam, "The Development of Nigeria-U.S. Relations," 124–25.

91. OIC: SS, 96.

92. Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria," 52.

93. *Nigerian Hotel and Travel Guide* (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 1985), 157.

94. Jon Lewis, "The End of Cinema As We Know It and I Feel . . . : An Introduction to a Book on Nineties American Film," in *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*, ed. Jon Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 1–2.

95. *African Concord*, January 3, 1994, 30.

96. United States Trade Representative, *2004 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2004), 354.

97. Stan McCoy, "How the Film and TV Industry is Reimagining and Reinventing the Content Marketplace," April 25, 2016, <https://www.mpa.org/how-the-film-and-tv-industry-is-reimagining-and-reinventing-the-content-market-place/#.Wf3Rh7Y-LjA>, accessed February 29, 2020.

98. Toyin Falola and Julius Ihonvbere, *The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979–1984* (London: Zed Books, 1985), 159.

99. Leslie Lindsey, "Mexico: Labor Strikes Recur," *The Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, Issue 47 (1965), 558. See also Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, *Screening Neoliberalism: Transforming Mexican Cinema, 1988–2012* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014).

100. Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 222.

101. For more on Transerve, see Miller, *Nollywood Central*, 50–51.

102. Lebanese businessmen interested in becoming film exhibitors in Nigeria applied to the British colonial administration as early as the 1930s. See Brian Larkin, "The Materiality of Cinema Theaters in Northern Nigeria," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 323. Eventually, Lebanese entrepreneurs would run the Rex Cinema chain, with locations in Kano and Apapa, Lagos.

103. For an in-depth account of these efforts, see Connor Ryan, "New Nollywood: A Sketch of Nollywood's Metropolitan New Style," *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (December 2015): 55–76.

104. Quoted in "Thrill of the New," in *The Report: Nigeria 2010* (London: Oxford Business Group, 2010), 203.

105. *Ibid.*

106. Much of the information included in this section of the book derives from my firsthand experiences in West Africa and Western Europe as well as from interviews with Izu Ojukwu that I conducted in New York City on April 21, 22, and 23, 2016.

107. For another take on this process, see Haynes, “Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism.”

108. Nollywood’s crisis of overproduction was compounded by the build-up of films that, made during the efforts of the National Film and Video Censors Board to establish its New Distribution Licensing Framework, went unreleased for many months, only to flood the markets as soon as their distributors were able to meet the Board’s reduced licensing requirements. The sudden acceleration of the rate of licensing in 2008 had disastrous consequences for an already-oversaturated market. See Bud, “The End of Nollywood’s Guilded Age?,” 109–10. For more on the crisis, see Haynes, *Nollywood*, 215–26, 285.

109. I consider this history in more detail in *Nollywood Stars*, treating Okereke’s *Through the Glass* as a case study.

110. Tino Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium* (London: BFI, 2013), 6.

111. James Schamus, “To the Rear of the Back End: The Economics of Independent Cinema,” in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), 94. Moses Babatope, a co-founder of FilmHouse, offers a somewhat different reading of release windows, one that speaks to the changed circumstances of the digital present. “Actually,” he says, “the number of Nigerian films coming on Netflix has also validated the quality perception of Nigerian films and therefore there has been more of a willingness to see Nigerian films in the cinema in the first window” (“DEMYSTIFIED: African Theatrical Distribution,” *NollywoodWeek ONLINE* 2021, May 6, 2021). This decision to flatter Netflix—to suggest that it helps rather than hinders the big screen—is also a reflection of Babatope’s contractual relationship to the brand: FilmHouse supplies Nollywood content to the streamer.

112. For more on iROKOTv, see Moradewun Adejunmobi, “Evolving Nollywood Templates for Minor Transnational Film,” *Black Camera* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 74–94; Adejunmobi, “Streaming Quality, Streaming Cinema.”

113. See, for instance, John J. Lee, Jr. and Anne Marie Gillen, *The Producer’s Business Handbook: The Roadmap for the Balanced Film Producer*, 3rd ed. (New York: Focal Press, 2010), 78.

114. Antoine Compagnon, “Le déclin français vu des Etats-Unis,” *Le Monde*, November 30, 2007, quoted in Jonathan Buchsbaum, *Exception Taken: How France Has Defied Hollywood’s New World Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 8.

115. IMAX CEO Richard Gelfond has spoken at length about “underpenetrated” markets in Africa. Gelfond is quoted in, for example, Wendy Mitchell, “Andrew Cripps Named IMAX’s President, EMEA,” *Screen Daily*, February 22, 2012, <https://www.screendaily.com/andrew-cripps-named-imaxs-president-emea/5038382.article>.

116. Quoted in Mitchell, “Andrew Cripps Named IMAX’s President, EMEA.”

117. Keil, “‘American’ Cinema in the 1990s and Beyond,” 58–59.

118. Quoted in Mitchell, “Andrew Cripps Named IMAX’s President, EMEA.”

119. *The Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures, 1961*, 759.

120. For more on the concept of “technocrat-guardians, see Alasdair Roberts, *The Logic of Discipline: Global Capitalism and the Architecture of Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

121. In the summer of 2018, for example, Senate President Bukola Saraki pledged to assist the Actors Guild of Nigeria Foundation (valued at approximately 500 million naira) and oversee the pursuit of a legislative framework that would “protect and develop”

Nollywood, including with an eye toward foreign investment. See Nsikak Nseyen, “Saraki Meets Actors Guild of Nigeria, Reveals Plan for Movie Industry,” *Daily Post* (Nigeria), September 13, 2018, <http://dailypost.ng/2018/09/13/saraki-meets-actors-guild-nigeria-reveals-plan-movie-industry/>, accessed February 29, 2020. Another example is the Lagos State government’s Nollywood Upgrade Project, which was launched in 2012, and which offers grants and training to aspiring filmmakers.

122. Oxford Business Group, *The Report: Nigeria 2013*, 282.

123. Campbell, *Nigeria*, 85.

124. The World Bank, “Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit of SDR 102.5 Million (US \$160 Million Equivalent) to the Federal Republic of Nigeria for a Growth and Employment in States Project (GEMs)” (Washington, DC: The World Bank, February 17, 2011), 74, 75.

125. *Ibid.*, 74.

126. *Ibid.*, 72, 74.

127. In the same document, the USTR provided the qualifying claim that, while “U.S. products do not appear to be subject to extraordinary or discriminatory restrictions or regulations,” Nigeria’s propensity toward “corruption” (exemplified by “the widespread use of fraudulent documentation by non-U.S. exporters”) “may put U.S. exporters at a competitive disadvantage.” See United States Trade Representative, *2004 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2004), 355, 352.

128. McChesney, “Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism,” 6.

129. *Ibid.*, 15; Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 109.

130. Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 95.

131. Keil, “‘American’ Cinema in the 1990s and Beyond,” 259.

132. Nitin Govil, *Orienting Hollywood: A Century of Film Culture Between Los Angeles and Bombay* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 116.

4. EXHIBITING NOLLYWOOD (AND HOLLYWOOD): MULTIPLEXES, AMUSEMENT PARKS, AND THE ECONOMY OF EXPERIENCES IN TODAY’S NIGERIA

1. Babatunde A. Ahonsi, “Popular Shaping of Metropolitan Forms and Processes in Nigeria: Glimpses and Interpretations from an Informed Lagosian,” in *Under Siege: Four African Cities: Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* (Hatje Cantz, Kassel Art Fair Documenta 11, Platform 4, Kassel, 2002), 130.

2. *Ibid.*, 131.

3. For more on the built environments of IMAX, and the concepts that subtend them, see Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums, and the Immersive View* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

4. George Packer, “The Megacity: Decoding the Chaos of Lagos,” *The New Yorker*, November 13, 2006, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/13/the-megacity>, accessed December 10, 2018.

5. Quoted in Abosede A. George, *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 228.

6. Matthew Gandy, "Planning, Anti-Planning, and the Infrastructure Crisis Facing Metropolitan Lagos," *Urban Studies* 43, no. 2 (2006): 371–96.

7. Writing in 2005, a year after the first Hollywood-sponsored multiplex opened in Lagos, Gandy argued that "the very extremity of Lagos's deterioration over the past quarter century has been linked, in inverse proportion, to the capital accumulated in Chicago, London or Los Angeles" ("Learning From Lagos," *New Left Review* 33 [May/June 2005], 52).

8. Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," 85.

9. Acland, "'Opening Everywhere': Multiplexes and the Speed of Cinema Culture," in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, ed. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, and Robert C. Allen (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 376.

10. Wilfred Okiche, interview with the author, March 31, 2018; Imoh Umoren, interview with the author, May 4, 2018.

11. Rem Koolhaas, *Lagos: How It Works* (Amsterdam: Lars Müller, 2007).

12. Hunton, *Decision in Africa*, 82.

13. Richard B. Jewell, *The Golden Age of Cinema: Hollywood, 1929–1945* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 89.

14. I am building here on what Brian Larkin has called "the poetics of infrastructure" ("The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 [2013]: 327–43).

15. The term "experience economy" is typically attributed to B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

16. Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 10. The first multiplex theater—built by the American Multi-Cinema Corporation—opened in 1963 in Kansas City, Kansas. See David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 197.

17. Campbell, *Nigeria*, xix, xx.

18. A.Z. Astapovich, *The Strategy of Transnational Corporations*, trans. Jenifer Warren (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983 [1978]), 176, 179–80.

19. Damola Layonu, interview with the author, June 16, 2018.

20. Donahue, *American Film Distribution*, 136.

21. Damola Layonu, interview with the author, June 16, 2018.

22. Govil, *Orienting Hollywood*, 151

23. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

24. *Ibid.*, 116

25. *Ibid.*, 106–7.

26. Damola Layonu, interview with the author, June 16, 2018.

27. Donoghue, *Localising Hollywood*, 63.

28. Damola Layonu, interview with the author, June 16, 2018.

29. Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015 [1979]), 252.

30. These statements are from an exhibitor-focused Nigerian account manager for Coca-Cola and were offered on the condition of anonymity (interview with the author, June 14, 2018).

31. The film's closing credits make this contractual arrangement abundantly clear. For more on Coca-Cola's global market model, see Amanda Ciafone, *Counter-Cola: A*

Multinational History of the Global Corporation (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019). Ciafone provides a particularly trenchant account of Coke's pursuit of the worldwide "negro market" since the 1960s, arguing that the company has long "used race and counter-cultural aesthetics as signifiers of authenticity and hipness to . . . changing times" (131).

32. Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980–1989* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 50.

33. Anonymous Coca-Cola account manager, interview with the author, June 14, 2018.

34. The World Bank, "Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit of SDR 102.5 Million (US \$160 Million Equivalent) to the Federal Republic of Nigeria for a Growth and Employment in States Project (GEMs)," February 17, 2011.

35. *The Report: Nigeria 2013* (London: Oxford Business Group, 2013), 288.

36. PricewaterhouseCoopers, "Entertainment and Media Outlook, 2017–2021: An African Perspective," <https://www.pwc.co.za/en/assets/pdf/entertainment-and-media-outlook-2017.pdf>, accessed on April 13, 2019.

37. Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 25.

38. Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 92, 203. See also Constance Balides, "Jurassic Post-Fordism: Tall Tales of Economics in the Theme Park," *Screen* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 139–60.

39. "The Nigerian Film Corporation," *African Concord*, January 3, 1994, 27.

40. Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 203, 175.

41. Disney Africa's Christine Service helped to broker the deal. See Aisha Salaudeen, "Disney Partners With Nollywood to Bring American Movies to English-Speaking West Africa," *Marketplace Africa*, September 18, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/18/africa/disney-partners-with-nollywood/index.html>, accessed April 26, 2021.

42. For more on this particular Nollywood genre, see Jonathan Haynes, "The Nollywood Diaspora: A Nigerian Video Genre," in *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Industry*, ed. Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 73–99. Huahua Media did not bypass Hollywood on its way to Nigeria. In fact, the conglomerate was a major investor in such Hollywood productions as *Transformers: The Last Knight* (Michael Bay, 2017) and *Star Trek Beyond* (Justin Lin, 2016). See Aisha Salaudeen and Stephanie Busari, "China and Nollywood Have Signed Up For Their First Major Film Collaboration," *Marketplace Africa*, November 22, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/21/africa/china-nigeria-film-partnership/index.html>, accessed April 27, 2021. FilmHouse also has distribution arrangements with South Africa's Empire Entertainment.

43. Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 259, 263.

44. Haynes, "Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism"; Alessandro Jedlowski, "Avenues of Participation and Strategies of Control: Video Film Production and Social Mobility in Ethiopia and Southern Nigeria," in *Production Studies, The Sequel: Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*, ed. Miranda Banks, Bridget Conor, and Vicki Mayer (London: Routledge, 2016), 175–86.

45. Ryan, "New Nollywood," 60.

46. Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 332, 339. "Entertainment becomes not just a commodity to be sold, but a vehicle for developing new tastes and marketing other commodities," notes Moradewun Adejunmobi, who cautions against "attempts to establish one-to-one correspondences between individual cultural forms and particular social classes." She emphasizes the importance of recognizing "audiences that cut across class lines," and her words remain relevant even in the face of the multiplex's many barriers to entry

(*Vernacular Palaver*, 112, 110). See also Brian Larkin's discussion of the Marhaba cinema in Kano, a theater constructed specifically to "create a more 'upmarket' viewing experience, one with higher prices and better quality films. Inside the theater, attendants patrol, making sure that no one is smoking Indian hemp or starting a fight" (*Signal and Noise*, 157).

47. Damola Layonu, interview with the author, June 16, 2018.

48. Govil, *Orienteering Hollywood*, 151.

49. *Ibid.*, 151.

50. *Ibid.*, 135, italics in the original.

51. Mfon, Akintunde, and Selbar, "Cinema—Cracks on the Mirror—Suffers from 'Vid-comiasis,' Society Hunch and Lack of Personnel," 20.

52. Here, I am building on the arguments of James Ferguson, who writes, "Tolerance, like democracy, [is] a metonym of membership in the modern world" (*Global Shadows*, 142).

53. Quoted in *The Report: Nigeria 2013* (London: Oxford Business Group, 2013), 285.

54. Anonymous FilmHouse employee, interview with the author, June 14, 2018; anonymous Silverbird employee, interview with the author, June 15, 2018; anonymous former Silverbird employee, interview with the author, June 16, 2018. See also Haynes, "Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism"; Jedlowski, "Avenues of Participation and Strategies of Control."

55. Russell Merritt, "The Nickelodeon Theater, 1905–1914: Building an Audience for the Movies," in *Exhibition: The Film Reader*, ed. Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 2002), 21–30.

56. <https://filmhouseng.com/about>, accessed April 14, 2019.

57. Jonathan Haynes, "Neoliberalism, Nollywood, and Lagos," in *Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscapes of Film and Media* (London: Wallflower Press, 2016), 63. For an equally trenchant account of Nollywood's relationship to neoliberalism, see Ugor, *Nollywood*. Especially valuable is Ugor's description of Nollywood's "illumination of the increasingly esoteric character of the current international economic order" (99).

58. Merritt, "The Nickelodeon Theater, 1905–1914."

59. Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 218.

60. Leela Fernandez, "Nationalizing 'the Global': Media Images, Cultural Politics and the Middle Class in India," *Media Culture and Society* 22 (2000): 611–28.

61. Goodell, *The Water Will Come*, 214.

62. *Ibid.* As currently conceived, Eko Atlantic also recalls Walt Disney's original plans for the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT). At the very moment that his company was making major inroads into Nigeria, Disney "envisioned a city of twenty thousand residents with a fifty-acre central hub enclosed in a glass dome that would keep out rain, heat, cold, and humidity. Skyscrapers and a thirty-story hotel would rise through the dome. A series of transportation spokes were to carry inhabitants and visitors to outlying residential or industrial complexes. [EPCOT] was to have schools, churches, apartments, offices, stores, restaurants, clubs, theaters, parks, tennis courts, golf courses, and marinas" (John Taylor, *Storming the Magic Kingdom: Wall Street, the Raiders, and the Battle for Disney* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1987], 33). If movie theaters were central to Disney's (unrealized) vision of EPCOT, they are equally essential to ongoing efforts to sell Eko Atlantic. For more on the relationship between technological marvels like IMAX and

the cultural-industrial idea of the blockbuster film, see Charles R. Acland, *American Blockbuster: Movies, Technology, and Wonder* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

63. Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 126; Acland, *American Blockbuster*, 281–87.
64. Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 332.
65. *Ibid.*, 329.
66. *Ibid.*, 328–29.
67. Edgar Pieterse and Susan Parnell, “Africa’s Urban Revolution in Context,” in *Africa’s Urban Revolution*, ed. Susan Parnell and Edgar Pieterse (London: Zed Books, 2014), 1–17; Turok, “Linking Urbanization and Development in Africa’s Economic Revival,” 61.
68. Pieterse and Parnell, “Africa’s Urban Revolution in Context,” 15; Susan Parnell and Ruwani Walawege, “Sub-Saharan African Urbanization and Global Environmental Change,” in *Africa’s Urban Revolution*, ed. Susan Parnell and Edgar Pieterse (London: Zed Books, 2014), 44; Melnick, “Salisbury Stakes.”
69. Gandy, “Learning From Lagos,” 37.
70. Pieterse and Parnell, “Africa’s Urban Revolution in Context,” 12.
71. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 13 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 14; Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 41–43.
72. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007), 215.
73. Stephen Berrisford, “The Challenge of Urban Planning Law Reform in African Cities,” in *Africa’s Urban Revolution*, ed. Susan Parnell and Edgar Pieterse (London: Zed Books, 2014), 167.
74. Graf, *The Nigerian State*, 220.
75. Louisa Aguiyi-Ironsi, “At the Mercy of Waves,” *Newswatch*, May 26, 1986, 9.
76. Quoted in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 14, italics in original.
77. Soyinka, “Twice Bitten,” 110.
78. John Campbell and Matthew T. Page, *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 66, 48.
79. Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016), 10.
80. *Ibid.*, 7.
81. Here, I am indebted to Jaron Lanier’s concept of “lock-in.” See Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 7.
82. Olúfẹ̀mi Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 259. See also Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening the Media* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2012.
83. Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013), 343.
84. David Morley, “Where the Global Meets the Local: Notes From the Sitting Room,” in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 288. See also Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London: Routledge, 1992).
85. Nicholas John Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 64. In 2015, commenting on corporate and governmental attempts to “develop” Nollywood, Peace Anyiam-Osigwe and Dayo Ogunyemi rightly complained of the “undue deference in strategy

and policy development given to international players” (“Nollywood and the Creative Industries: A Tale of Two Possibilities,” *TNS*, June 7, 2015, <http://tns.ng/nollywood-and-the-creative-industries-a-tale-of-two-possibilities>, accessed August 4, 2021).

86. Said, “Secular Interpretation, the Geographical Element, and the Methodology of Imperialism,” 34–35.

87. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1988), 77.

88. Timothy-Asobele, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, 33.

89. David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 16.

90. FilmHouse partners and their lawyers were responding—largely via Twitter—to my article “Nollywood 3.0,” which examines the anti-competitive practices of the multiplexes. See Noah Tsika, “Nollywood 3.0,” *Africa Is a Country*, March 31, 2018, <https://africasacountry.com/2018/03/nollywood-3-0>, accessed January 31, 2019. Their dismissive attitude is encapsulated in the remarks of FilmOne partner and New Nollywood filmmaker Naz Onuzo, who told me, in the normative terms so familiar from decades of neoliberal discourse, that conflicts of interest are “just business”—even as he denied that his vertically integrated company engaged in any anti-competitive practices (conversation with the author, March 31, 2018).

91. Edwards and Gaonkar, “Introduction,” 28.

92. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 241. Yúdice is here drawing on the work of Shifra Goldman. See Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, Richard Maxwell, and Ting Wang, *Global Hollywood 2* (London: BFI, 2004), 60–110.

93. “Africa,” in *Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, ed. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 489–525.

94. Haynes, “Neoliberalism, Nollywood, and Lagos,” 63.

95. *Ibid.*, 64.

96. Taiye Selasi, “Bye-Bye Babar,” *The LiP*, March 3, 2005, <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>, accessed April 12, 2019. See also Obadias Ndaba, “Afropolitanism and Its Discontents,” in *Global Africa: Into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Judith A. Byfield (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 366–75.

97. *New Money* also features a scene set at EbonyLife TV’s studio, as well as a recreation of the company’s daily talk show *Moments*.

98. Ndaba, “Afropolitanism and Its Discontents,” 373.

99. Richard G. Lurie, “WHAT ARE THE REAL OPPORTUNITIES IN NIGERIA AND GHANA?,” *American Exporter Publications: Newsletter*, May 1, 1962, 1, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.

100. Chris Ihidero, interview with the author, December 30, 2017.

101. Jon Lewis, *Hard-Boiled Hollywood: Crime and Punishment in Postwar Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 15; Chris Ihidero, interview with the author, December 30, 2017.

102. Enahoro, “Discourse on the Cinema as a National Signifier,” 21.

103. McChesney, "Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism," 9.
104. Ferguson, *Global Shadows*.
105. Anonymous FilmHouse manager, interview with the author, June 15, 2018; anonymous Coca-Cola account manager for Silverbird, Genesis Deluxe, FilmHouse, and Kada Cinema (Benin), interview with author, June 14, 2018.
106. McChesney, "Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism," 9.
107. Haynes, "Neoliberalism, Nollywood, and Lagos," 73.
108. Olopade, *The Bright Continent*, 148. See also *The Middle of the Pyramid: Dynamics of the Middle Class in Africa* (Tunis-Belvedere: African Development Bank, 2011).
109. Amit S. Rai, *Untimely Bollywood: Globalization and India's New Media Assemblage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 155.
110. Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
111. Rai, *Untimely Bollywood*, 156.
112. *Ibid.*, 160.
113. Jeanne Allen, "The Film Viewer as Consumer," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1980): 482.
114. Acland, "Opening Everywhere," 365.
115. *Ibid.*, 371.
116. In India, filmgoing is commonly referred to as "time pass," a colloquialism that, derived from the middle-English word "pasetyme," highlights a form of "absolutely unproductive expenditure"—a way of killing time. As Amit S. Rai puts it, "Time pass is about pleasure in killing time, a practiced art that consists in feeling time's passing so as not to feel its accretion. This desire transforms the malltiplax into a space with no outside" (*Untimely Bollywood*, 163–64). FilmHouse (particularly as depicted in *Couple of Days*) suggests something different, perhaps—a subset (heterogeneous on its own) of a broader experience of commercial life, continuous with, and an outgrowth of, other everyday activities.
117. Adejunmobi, *Vernacular Palaver*, 103.
118. Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 176.
119. *Ibid.*, 187.
120. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 29; Lawrence Cohn, "New Economy of Scale in Hollywood: Majors' Buys Wide-Reaching," *Variety*, January 14, 1987, 44.
121. Edward Jay Epstein, *The Hollywood Economist: The Hidden Financial Reality Behind the Movies* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010), 126.
122. Jide Orintunsin, "Ogunde Condemns 'Overexposure of Foreign Films,'" *National Concord*, January 5, 1987; Epstein, *The Hollywood Economist*, 125–26.
123. Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle Over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 52.
124. *Ibid.*, 56.
125. *Ibid.*, 57. See also Harold L. Vogel, *Entertainment Industry Economics: A Guide for Financial Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
126. Bud, "The End of Nollywood's Guilded Age?," 92.
127. Quoted in Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria*, 195. For a later example, see David Acha, "Cinema Owners Flayed," *Nigerian Observer*, December 28, 1985, 1. In both instances, the

vertical integration under discussion was a matter of Hollywood studios flexing their muscles via Lebanese surrogates.

128. Abba Makama, conversation with the author, February 16, 2019; tweet by Chadwick Boseman (@chadwickboseman), February 16, 2019, <https://twitter.com/chadwickboseman/status/1096884228627808256>, accessed February 16, 2019.

129. Donald Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

130. William Paul has written of the conspicuous influence of certain exhibition standards on the production of feature films, and while his focus is on American multiplex cinema, his insights are broadly applicable to the business of exhibition: "In effect, exhibition has become the tail that wags the dog as it inescapably makes demands for product that can most appropriately fit new modes of exhibition" ("The K-Mart Audience at the Mall Movies," in *Exhibition: The Film Reader*, ed. Ina Rae Hark [London: Routledge, 2002], 78).

131. Ryan, "New Nollywood"; Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Neoliberal Relationalities in Old and New Nollywood," *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (December 2015): 31–53; Haynes, *Nollywood*; Haynes, "Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism."

132. Haynes, "Neoliberalism, Nollywood, and Lagos," 70–71.

133. For more on the *BlackBerry Babes* series, see Tsika, *Nollywood Stars*. See also Noah Tsika, "Nollywood Chronicles: Migrant Archives, Media Archaeology, and the Itineraries of Taste," in *A Companion to African Cinema*, ed. Carmela Garritano and Kenneth W. Harrow (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 269–89.

134. "This changes the logic of media markets radically," Robert McChesney remarks, "since the interests of consumers must be filtered through the demands of advertisers" (*The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004], 189).

135. Jay Moye, "The Reel Thing: Coke's Brief-Yet-Profitable Foray into Show Business," *Coca-Cola Journey*, June 24, 2013, <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/the-reel-thing-inside-cokes-brief-yet-profitable-foray-into-show-business>, accessed June 19, 2019. Coca-Cola acquired Columbia in 1982 in a deal valued at more than \$800 million. For more on Coke's ownership of Columbia, see Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980–1989* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 50–56. See also Bernard F. Dick, "The History of Columbia, 1920–1991: From the Brothers Cohn to Sony Corp.," in *Columbia Pictures: Portrait of a Studio*, ed. Bernard F. Dick (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 2–64.

136. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 67.

137. Frantz Fanon, "This Africa to Come," in Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 178.

138. "4 Pepsi-Cola Plants for Nigeria," RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, RBF.

139. Pepsi, he added, was "one of the few things you drink in the world without fears of danger." Quoted in "Pepsi-Cola: Nigeria's Kola Finds New Market," *Daily Service* (Lagos), April 12, 1960, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, RBF.

140. Haynes, "Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films," 136–37.

141. Coca-Cola account manager for Silverbird, Genesis Deluxe, FilmHouse, and Kada Cinema (Benin), interview with author, June 14, 2018.

142. Haynes, "Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films," 140.

143. IMAX press release, “IMAX Signs First Agreement in Nigeria with Filmhouse Cinemas,” June 24, 2015, <https://www.imax.com/content/imax-signs-first-agreement-nigeria-filmhouse-cinemas>

144. Ibid.

145. Rai, *Untimely Bollywood*, 141. This practice has a long and far-flung history. Thomas J. Saunders has examined Hollywood’s infiltration and dominance of Weimar Germany, and his conclusions are instructive—and, I would argue, descriptive of what is happening in Nigeria today. Via a number of strategies, including “pacting,” Germany was “belatedly but thoroughly integrated into the network of international cinema culture of which Hollywood was capital” (11). Saunders considers some of the consequences of this integration, arguing, “What remains indisputable is that America was the dominant partner in the encounter between Hollywood and Berlin.” He continues, “Contemporaries already perceived that internationalization and Americanization were dangerously close to synonymous. There was an extremely fine line between a national cinema which enjoyed international recognition and absorption by Hollywood.” See Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 249. See also Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell, and Wang, *Global Hollywood 2*, 54–60.

146. Rai, *Untimely Bollywood*, 141.

147. Silverbird, for its part, has followed much the same pattern. Silverbird manager, interview with author, June 16, 2018.

148. FilmHouse operations manager, speaking on condition of anonymity, interview with the author, June 15, 2018.

149. “Kene Mkpuru’s Filmhouse Redefining Nollywood,” *Yes International! Magazine*, February 17, 2014, <http://theyesng.com/kene-mkparus-filmhouse-redefining-nollywood>, accessed April 16, 2019.

150. For more on this process and how it has played out in the context of the Hindi film industry, see Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 2.

151. Ibid., 4.

152. Ibid., 4–5.

153. Ibid., 7.

154. <https://filmhouseng.com/about>, accessed April 14, 2019. Jonathan Haynes also draws attention to the overseas experiences of this new generation of Nigerian executives, noting that “iROKO’s polished vice president of monetization, Oluchi Enuha, . . . went from Harvard to Merrill Lynch and then home to Nigeria as a business development analyst, getting a Gates Foundation grant for a project to bring mobile banking to rural areas” (“Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism,” 260). See also Douglas Gomery, “Hollywood Corporate Business Practice and Periodizing Contemporary Film History,” in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), 47–57.

155. Quoted in Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core*, 65.

156. Ibid., 71; Trainor, quoted in *ibid.*, 71. In 1986, the year a devastating Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was formally introduced in Nigeria (where, designed to promote privatization and the widespread adoption of free-market policies, it cultivated conditions for the eventual return of MPAA member studios), Hollywood producer-distributors “negotiated theater purchases worth over \$1.5 billion” (Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video*:

The Hollywood Empire and the VCR [Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001], 136). Not for nothing has 1986 been dubbed “the year of the deal.” It was in 1986 that Columbia Pictures purchased a series of theaters in New York City, prompting Paramount, Warner Bros., and MCA (the parent of Universal) to buy or acquire stakes in other theater chains across the country. Tino Balio has rightly cited “the *laissez-faire* attitude of Ronald Reagan’s administration towards anti-trust issues,” yet it is equally important to underscore the relative limitations and weaknesses of the original *Paramount* decrees (“A Major Presence In All of the World’s Important Markets’: The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s,” in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith [New York: Routledge, 1998], 61). See also Acland, *American Blockbuster*, 139–40; “‘Sick’ Screen Given Senatorial Advice,” *New York Times*, August 5, 1953, 19; and US Congress, Senate Select Committee on Small Business, *Problems of Independent Motion Picture Exhibitions*, Report of the Select Committee on Small Business, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., Aug 3, 1953. For more on Hollywood studios’ large-scale return to the business of exhibition in the 1980s, see Prince, *A New Pot of Gold*, 84–89. See also Jonathan Hardy, *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2014), 82.

157. Quoted in Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core*, 72.

158. Quoted in “Hays Says 250,000,000 Is Weekly Attendance,” *The Film Daily*, Thursday, June 21, 1928, 3.

159. Haynes, “Between the Informal Sector and Transnational Capitalism,” 255.

160. Haynes, “Neoliberalism, Nollywood, and Lagos,” 71.

CONCLUSION: “AFFECTIVE AMBIENCE”: NEW NOLLYWOOD AND THE PERSISTENCE OF DISNEYFICATION

1. Ola Aworinde, “The Indisputable Power of Film,” *Crossroads* 24, no. 2 (May/June 2018): 7.

2. Zack Taylor, “US-Supported Drama Sends Nigerians Message of Unity,” *Crossroads*, 24 no. 2 (May/June 2018): 17–18.

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26. Chris Ihidero, interview with the author, December 30, 2017.
27. Freda Afia Frimpong, interview with the author, June 1, 2019.
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