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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 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 chauffer 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 alientation 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 Kinoton 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 televisual 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 longawaited 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 Olúfẹ́mi 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 Penninsula, 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 Uzoechi), 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 Afripolitans 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 Adejunmobi suggests, "the global dimensons 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 invisiblity" 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 FilmOne (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 paeans 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 Durosinmi 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 Mkparu 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: Mkparu'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.