Negotiating Identity in Transnational Spaces: Consumption of Nollywood Films in the African Diaspora of the United States

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ABSTRACT The consumption of Nollywood films in the United States is a site of complex translational engagements and a location of disjunctured processes that illuminate how Diasporas are imagined, created and performed. This study focused on how three major groups in the African Diaspora community located in the New York Metropolitan area negotiate identity within the historical, political, and socio-cultural circumstances of their locality. African-Americans, Caribbean migrants, and African migrants who interact with each other via the consumption of the popular African video films, articulate an intricate and layered understanding of each other, as well as their group's meaning of blackness. These articulations show that blackness is a concept that differs inter-ethnically and intra-ethnically.

INTRODUCTION

The day Barack Hussein Obama was inaugurated as the first African-American president of the United States (US) I watched his swearing in on a small television in New Jersey's main train station. While waiting in the depot, located in the predominantly black city of Newark, a crowd quickly assembled in the main foyer to witness this event as well. In the midst of our to-and-fro's, the audience stopped to catch a glimpse of this historical moment.

Most of us were people of African descent, but differed in ethnic makeup. As an African-American reared in Los Angeles, with parents from the Southern region of the country, and a mother who teaches several languages, I distinguished several accents from the audience being West Indian and African. As we watched the events, I noticed an African taxi driver silently weeping. To my right, I overheard an African-American man declare to his boss that he was going to be late because he would not miss the

inauguration. When he detected I was listening and now looking at him, he smiled at me and told me, "Shit, I wouldn't miss this moment for nothing."

After Obama was sworn in, everyone began to hug, shake hands or pat each other on the back—especially the black folks. At that instant, we all were in unison. Then in the blink of an eye, the crowd dispersed and rushed to their different destinations by train, bus and on foot. Along with this scattering, we all settled back into our coded and marked identities of blackness in America.

This personal experience operates much like the African Diaspora in the US, a group that is mostly comprised of African-Americans, Caribbean immigrants, and African immigrants. Much like the improvisational black audience at the train station, the physical operation and location of the train station is metaphorically akin to the Diaspora it transports. The movements and structure of the station accommodate constant departures and arrivals as they occur on various modes of transportation, while entering multiple terminals at a designated headquarter.

This process illuminates how Diasporas perform cohesion, but within a disjointedness that nuances the imaginations and creations of a Diaspora and complicates the identities of its corresponding group. In the case of the African Diaspora in the US, it must be executed within a white mainstream that assumes black people are all the same. For that reason, this essay argues that there are sites at which members of the Diaspora identify as a unified whole, but these locations are rarer when compared to the degrees of difference at which members' identities become disjointed when ethnic specific codes and perceptions of authenticity signal their distinction, especially around notions of blackness.

This argument becomes more complicated when studying identity and ethnicity against the back drop of an American infrastructure that has historically disenfranchised people of African descent. Taiwo (2003) states that "'being black' in the United States is not a given, an ontological, factitious category, but a historical construct," seeped in a process of dehumanization (p.42). Along with a corresponding mass media system that disseminates long-standing media representations of derogatory images of black people, the complex positionality of being a minority and the social-cultural political baggage it carries, makes constructing identity a daily, complex, and conscious process.

According to Labennett (2006), the construction of identity through the consumption of a cultural product has a political significance. To further this supposition, the political significance in how one consumes point to the salience of culture, ethnic-racial ties, and economic positioning. These dynamics within a Diasporic group lend explanation as to how identity is tied to the definition and subsequent manifestation of a perceived authenticity within, and outside of its designated group. In case of this essay, it is linked to an authentic blackness.

The main objective of this essay is to examine how members of the African Diaspora negotiate identity in transnational spaces through its negotiation of the Diaspora and the assertions of blackness, or lack there of, vis-à-vis the consumption of an African video film industry designated as "Nollywood," or Nigerian films.[1] This study uses the definition of transnational space proffered by Jackson et al. 2004) who define it as "complex, multidimensional and multiply inhabited" spaces that encompass "all of those engaged in transnational cultures, whether as producers or consumers." This explanation

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[1] Films are not only Nigerian, but since Nigerian video films dominate the market, moves from other countries, especially Ghana, get subsumed in title.

includes "people from various backgrounds who enter into the space with a whole range of investments and from various positionalities," whether it is "momentarily . . . or for a lifetime" (p.3). Also, this research operates from the definition of blackness as being a site where the contestation around racial authority in deploying the signifiers around "produced and reproduced . . . understandings [in the] different interests identified, defined, involved and/or emerging" by members of the black, African Diaspora (Hintzen and Rahier, 2003; p.2) in the United States.

The theoretical explanation is based on interviews and ethnographic data gathered from fieldwork in the New York metropolitan area that include areas in the New York City area and northern New Jersey.

NOLLYWOOD ABROAD

In 1992, Kenneth Nnebue, an Igbo businessman, figured out a way to get rid of forty-thousand VHS tapes that were imported from China.[2] He borrowed a concept from local videographers in Ghana and Nigeria[3] by recording his own film in Igbo language (with English subtitles) on a handheld camera. He then dubbed it onto the excess VHS tapes and packaged the movie called, "Living in Bondage," in colorful slip covers and advertised the movie on vivid posters throughout Onitsha, a city in Eastern Nigeria. Since most Nigerians who owned televisions possessed VCRs, the selling of VHS tapes were a marketable technological product that proved to be lucrative. Nnebue fused the creative video film industry that had been attempting to launch in both countries with a serious marketing plan. This is recognized as the birth of Nollywood.

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[2] Asian countries, especially China and Japan dump millions of old technology at inexpensive rates into Africa in order to introduce the latest technology for their countries.
[3] Ghana is credited as creating this video filming process several months before Nigeria in the late 80s.

Nollywood is a film industry based on video film and digital film recordings as opposed to the celluloid film industry of Hollywood and Bollywood. The term "Nollywood" was coined by a New York reporter in 2002, ten years after Nnebue's explosive video film success. Though the designation was originally used by a New York journalist to describe to an American audience how the film industry was beginning to make waves in the US, [4] it is a common, but not exclusive reference. However, the name was and still is rejected by some groups of Nigerian (and Ghanaian) video filmmakers; yet, it subsumes the smaller Ghanaian video film industry,[5] films in the languages of Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, including those made in Kano, a northern region in Nigeria that is largely strict Orthodox Muslim.[6] Though Nollywood is not a connotation that infers Nigeria's efforts to imitate Hollywood, by Nigerians, it being the third largest film industry suggests that it is competing for global eminence.

The rise of the Nigerian film industry coincides with a tumultuous journey of African nations rebuilding from European colonialism and the political and economic backlash of the subsequent independence movements throughout the continent. It's launching reinvigorated African popular culture (Okome, 2007), and produced a generation of Nigerian and Ghanaian filmmakers; thus sparking a viable market in a crippled Nigerian economy, and throughout the African continent. Moreover, the rapidly

[4] Matt Steinglass, "Film; When There's Too Much of a Not-Very-Good Thing," *New York Times*, 26 May 2002.

[5] Ghanaian actors are also stars in the Nollywood industry and co-production projects between Ghanaians and Nigerians are frequent.

[6] Haynes 2007 explains in the dilemma in naming with the following quote. "Perhaps some of the objections one hears to the term "Nollywood" are less important than they may seem. One is that it was invented by a foreigner-it apparently first appeared in an article by Matt Steinglass in the New York Times in 2002-and that it continues to be imposed by foreigners. This situation resembles the coining of the name "Nigeria" by Lord Lugard's girlfriend, which is still resented in some quarters, though for most Nigerians of the last couple of generations its origin has ceased to matter and the name functions the way the name of a country should. If one studied the usage of the term "Nollywood," doubtless it would turn out that it is overwhelmingly Nigerians who use the word" (p.108)

increasing video film industry out of Nigeria has transcended its national borders, thus

attracting wider audiences that also include multilingual spectators and peoples of

African descent on other continents (Ajubade, 2007; Haynes, 2007; Marston et al., 2007).

Though the name Nollywood can infer that the video film industry of Nigeria[7] is

an African replica of the Hollywood industry, or directly modeled from the Hindi,

Bollywood film production, scholars posit that Nollywood is a distinctive media genre

crafted around the socio-cultural and economic dynamics of Anglophone West Africa in

general, and Nigeria specifically (Ebewo, 2007; Haynes, 2007; Kumwenda, 2007; Esan,

2008; Haynes, 2000). However, those who have shaped the Nigerian video film market

do not deny the influences of Hollywood or Bollywood. As well, Nollywood pulls a

portion of its blueprint from Latin American telenovelas that saturated Nigerian media for

over a decade (Ebewo, 2007; Haynes, 2007; Haynes, 2000). Additionally, the cinematic

form has strong roots in Yoruba traveling troupes that toured Nigeria and dominated

much of the earlier formats of Nollywood films (Haynes, 2007; Olayiwola, 2007;

Ogunleye, 2004).

Nollywood is part folk opera, soap opera, melodrama, cultural tradition with a

dash of film.There is no doubt that Nollywood embodies a hybridized cultural product

(Okome, 2007). Nevertheless, Nollywood maintains a unique brand that caters to the

local audience (Okome, 2007).[8] This local focus is seen in major themes of Juju and

cults, postmodern desires of the African cities, an imagined African past, and romances

that swing between traditional relationships (such as polygamy) and contemporary

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[7] Haynes stresses that Nollywood is the dominating film industry of Nigeria, but not the only one, the
[8] Eghagha (2007) remarks, that Nollywood directors reject the notion of using western movies or the
superiority framework of the West, as a template to "satisfy the whims and caprices of the international
movie industry" (p.75).

intimacies of multiple affairs and complex romances (Haynes, 2007; Kumwenda, 2007; Okome, 2007).

The explosion of the video film industry quickly crossed Nigerian borders. As Haynes notes, that Nollywood video films move in the suitcases of Nigerians. He expounds on this statement in the following:

> The export of Nigerian films has been remarkable, even if most of the profits do not end up in the right hands. They are on television in Namibia and on sale on the streets in Kenya. In Congo, they are broadcast with the soundtrack turned down while an interpreter tells the story in Lingala or other languages. In New York, their biggest consumers are now immigrants from the Caribbean and African Americans, not Africans, and Chinese people are buying them too. In Holland, Nollywood stars are recognized on the streets of Suriname, and in London they are hailed by Jamaicans." (Haynes, 2007; pp.106-107)

This passage acknowledge the transnational flows and diasporic junctures that occur with the flow of the Nigerian video film industry, but as Nollywood is rapidly being distributed and sold in the African diaspora, the research that focuses on understanding its audiences inadequately studies this rapid growth. In the United States, Nollywood films are being purchased by Caribbean migrants, African-Americans, European immigrants, white Americans, Chinese-migrants, along with African migrant groups, yet the local market in Nigeria does not acknowledge these audiences as producers of power or knowledge in shaping the film's content or influencing the operations of the industry.

The African Diaspora audience in the United States is purchasing these films at a rate that is said to generate US $200 million for vendors. The sales made to Caribbean and African-American communities are beginning to surpass the selling to African

migrants.[9] One business at one of the largest distribution shops said that Caribbean

migrants and those in Caribbean countries are buying films at a rate that is edging out

African migrants. The availability of seeing or buying these videos is scattered

throughout black business communities in cities in Northern New Jersey and three

boroughs of New York City, Brooklyn, Harlem (located in the borough of Manhattan),

and the Bronx. In some sections of the areas, you will see videos on almost every corner

you turn in a commercial area that house black ethnic businesses. Due to the ethnic

diversity of the black African Diaspora and the history of black ethnic group relations,

this region of the country is ripe for research.

DEFINING THE BLACK AFRICAN DIASPORA IN THE US

It is important to define the three "ethnic" groups that were investigated. The

study looked at the three major black diasporic groups in the country as the following:

black/African-American, black/African migrants, and black/Afro-Caribbean migrants.

This research uses black when initially defining all of the groups along with geographical

connections in order to acknowledge that there is a diverse racial composition for people

who identify as an African-American, a Caribbean immigrant or an African migrant. For

instance, some white South Africans call themselves African-American, while there is a

significant population of Chinese descendants who thrive in the Caribbean, along with

Portuguese, Dutch and other non-black populations. As well, the African migrant can

consist of Lebanese descendants who have lived in Ghana since the early twentieth

century. Though it has been documented that these groups participate in the distribution

and consumption of Nollywood in Africa, this study chooses to focus on those of

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[9] Notes taken from a panel discussion that Bond Emeruwa, President Directors Guild of Nigeria provided information on the growth of Nollywood in the Americas and Europe on 14 May 2009, at Nollywood and Beyond: Transnational Dimensions of An African Video Film Industry.

black/African descent to explore the rich complexities in their interaction. As a result, this research is looking at populations that are direct descendants of indigenous African peoples.[10]

The term black/African-American is designated to the populations that trace their ancestral lineage as direct commodities of the slave trade in the United States that went on from the early 1600s to 1865.[11] This group of Africans were displaced from their ancestral homelands then brought to the New World, hence settling in the United States during the era of chattel slavery. They are the first wave of Africans to arrive and stay in contemporary history.[12] This re-routing and re-rooting resulted in the shaping of traditions and various cultural practices in surviving and navigating their "new" social status and geographical location (Gomez, 1998). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that I follow Pierre (2007) and Gomez who insist that black/African-Americans create and perform cultural and traditional practices that are considered "ethnic" as Kasintz (1992) and Waters (1999) argue for black Caribbean immigrants in the United States. This is a necessary part of the research because many ethnic and immigrant scholars discount the "ethnic" practices that black/African-Americans employ, thus removing them from discourse that takes into account the intricate survival strategies and identity negotiations that have grown from their experiences in the United States.

The second classification, black/Afro-Caribbean migrant, is the demarcation of a group of people who were also displaced and forced into the process of American

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[10] This paper uses black when speaking of all groups in unison as Jemima Pierre points out that these groups are constituted as such in the mainstream United States categorizations.
[11] Though 1865 was the "official" end of slavery it did not end all chattel slavery hence the African-American celebration Juneteenth that celebrates blacks in Texas discovering two years after the Emancipation of black/Africans was made legal in the United States.
[12] This paper acknowledges Ivan Van Sertimah's work that shows evidence of an African presence before the arrival of Christopher Columbus and any other European expedition.

enslavement, but were settled in what is known today as the Caribbean or the West Indies.[13] They too formed cultural practices and traditions in the Caribbean, but engaged in two-step dispersal, by first crossing "the middle passage from Africa and [then] the journey from [their island] colony to America" (Stephens, 1998: p.597).[14] They represent the second largest wave of peoples of African descent to settle in the United States with a population of about 1.5 million (with approximately 567,000 alone live in New York) and comprise of four percent of the black population.[15] This group also includes those who were not born or reared in the Caribbean, but have Caribbean parents and are insulated by Caribbean communities in the United States due to the fact that nearly two-thirds of the black/Caribbean population is foreign born (Mwakikagile, 2007).

The last grouping, black/African migrants, identifies a group who were born, reared, or who have parentage from an African country.[16] These members are part of the contemporary dispersal of Africans that began traveling outside of their national and continental border since the late nineteenth century.[17] Additionally, this group significantly increased in their re-settlements to the United States starting in the 1950s and 60s, a time period that initiated a post-colonial Africa. According to Akyeampong (2000) "political, economic, and social turmoil and decline in post-colonial Africa underpin the current global dispersion of Africans from the African continent". This

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[13] This also includes Guyana, Suriname, Panama and Belize, while not geographically located in the Caribbean Island chain, their cultural heritage, interaction, and travels similar to and with West Indian peoples link them to these ties.

[14] Black/Caribbean migrants also include people with black/Caribbean born parentage as Kasintz (1992) points out that Caribbean migrants stress that children either born or predominantly reared in the United States maintain various ties to their national origins, especially cultural.

[15] This study incorporates Caribbean migrants who identify as Latino or Hispanic, but also acknowledge that they too are of African descent and are underreported as black immigrants by the US Census (Hintzen and Rahier, 2003).

[16] Zaleza describes the geographical region as, "My Africa is the Africa of the African Union (AU) — the 54 states that make up Africa and its islands" (p.52).

[17] As Jemima Pierre (2004) stresses, Africans who were not traveling as slaves, were moving as freepersons, back-and-forth to the United States, during and after American slavery.

resulted in several countries consisting of the main flow of African immigrants in the United States. Those being, Nigeria, South Africa,[18] Liberia, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea (Arthur, 2000). Nigerian migrants dominate as the highest numbers, making up approximately seventeen percent of African migrants (ibid). According to the 2000 US Census, there are about 600,000 Africans living in the United States, with approximately 74,000 residing in New York. According to Mwakikagile, (2007) nearly eighty percent are foreign born and they make up roughly two percent of the black population.

Admittedly, these categorizations seem finite and appear to exclude instances of which group members do not neatly fit into designations. On the surface, these categories do not account for the cross-cultural fertilization and the inter-familial marriages that have been occurring in the United States since these groups have interacted with each other. However, this study attempts to recognize the complex interactions and relationships that have been produced in the years that have seen the intersecting and joining of political ideologies to kinship ties across all three groups. Nevertheless, these distinctions are necessary to explore the differences and similarities, as well as the separations and overlapping identities—especially when looking at them through their consumption habits of Nollywood.

PROBLEMATIZING THE BLACK AFRICAN DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES

> Diaspora, I would suggest simultaneously refers to a process, a condition, a space and a discourse: he continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade, the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself, the places where it is moulded and imagined, and the contentious ways in which it is studied and discussed. . . . Diaspora is simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of

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[18] Most of these are white South Africans.

voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings. It is a mode of naming, remembering, living and felling group identity moulded out of experiences, positionings, struggles and imaginings of the past and the present, and at times the unpredictable futures . . ." (Zaleza, 2005; p.41)

This section begins with a definition of Diaspora from Zaleza who provides a context of the difficulty to conceptualize, define, and study the complexities of formations of diasporas or begin to understand the heterogeneous dispersals and intersecting relationship it experiences over time and throughout the world. In speaking about diasporas, the complexities of the African diasapora are embodied in the New York metropolitan area.

Cumberpatch (2009) explains that the growing numbers of black African and Caribbean migranting into the United States offer these populations the ability to maintain an identity that is rooted in individual heritage. At the same time, the African-American population has cultivated an identity based on their historical and socio-cultural roots of the local, as well as the national dealings with citizenship. Nevertheless, the ethnic immigrants become invisible members of black communities, a group that is already homogenized by mainstream culture (p.164).

Problematization, as defined by Bratich "takes a variety of practices, habits, and experiences and isolates them into an object of concern or discussion" (p.244). In investigating the historical, political and socio-cultural context in each major African diasporic group's evolution as citizens and residents of the United States, and in particular, in the New York metropolis, evidences their distinctive processes in transnational practices and in diasporic activities. This examination also explicates the overarching similarities of historical, political and socio-cultural from a "minority" group

that are experienced in a country entrenched in and operating from an institutionalized racial hierarchy.

Peach (1999) points out that "New York is a city of immigrants and minorities." Also, it is a city of intra-American migrants that include African-Americans and Caribbean migrants that have relocated and settled in the largest metropolitan area of the country since the antebellum and colonial era. There are several major themes that are identified in exploring the streams of migratory patterns among peoples of Africa in the United States.

The first theme is the geographical connection to land or lands. African-Americans are settled on one land, whereas Caribbean and African migrants are connected to two or more lands. A Caribbean person can identify with their links to their ancestral displacement of the West Indies, the location of the colonial power in Europe, and their resettlement site of the United States. African migrants can do the same as well, and even incorporate that their land connection in Africa is theirs through ancestral inheritance.

The connection to land is very critical in this argument because African-Americans are left to imagine of a belonging to a land in America where they seek recognition of a full citizenship, while the other groups can imagine as well as identify to a land mass outside of the United States and travel there (as they have been doing) to reconnect or re-establish and actual physical link. Additionally, the identification that African-Americans to America is tied to a citizenship that is racialized. In other words, black skin is embedded in their struggle for humanity and nationality. On the other hand, Caribbean immigrants and African immigrants, with exception of South Africa,

nationality consciousness is deracialized (Hintzen and Rahier). Furthermore, the linkages of homelands are also tied to physical people due to Caribbean and African migrants sending remittances to kin in their native countries and directly attached to their home country's economy.

The second theme is a link and expression of a distinctive culture. Scholars posit that African migrants and Caribbean migrants come to America with a distinct set of cultural expressions that are maintained and carried out in the United States (Pierre, 2004; Arthur, 2000; Waters, 1999). These cultures and traditions have been identified as "ethnicities" and have been argued as survival tools used for the refusal of cultural assimilation and an instrument of success. On the other hand, African-Americans have been repeatedly identified as being a low-culture or cultureless people, thus equating their lack of mobility in the United States as an indicator of poor culture (Rong and Brown, 2002; Waters; Kazintz). The perpetuation of a high versus low culture has created a stereotypical black pathology among African-Americans, and a perception of an inferior subjectivity by black immigrant ethnic groups has become a site of contesting racial authority (Hintzen and Rahier) that has caused group members in migrant groups, in instances, to distance themselves from African-Americans. However, Pierre (2004) elucidates, it also undermines Caribbean and African migrants because of the inextricable racial link that binds them in the United States thus keeps all blacks at the bottom of racial hierarchy.

A third theme is the intangible investments of citizenship in the United States. African-American citizens historically have struggled for full-fledged citizenship void of racism and other prejudices that are residues of the racially-based slave system. Migrant

groups seek to establish a citizenship that is removed of the baggage of African-American life; thus carry out a citizenship that highlights ethnicity and rejects United States assimilation that is bound to a white, mainstream acculturation that sees their assimilation parallel to becoming African-American. This theme also provokes the sub-theme of intergenerational conflicts that arise out of citizenship desires. Whereas generations of younger African-Americans are seen as the producers and consumers of a cultural legacy that is entrenched in low values, the younger generations of Caribbean and African migrants are guided to maintain ethnic ties to steer away from an unproductive citizenship such that as their African-American peers (Pierre, 2004).

The last theme is the overarching conflict of racism. The racial hierarchy in the United States has systemically lumped people of African descent together (Cumberbatch, 2009; Pierre, 2004; Arthur, 2000). Resultantly, African-American stereotypical pathology represents all black people, at the same time, the illusion of a different and better Caribbean and African migrant community has been used as a device of division, and a tool to neglect the institutionalized racism that undercuts all groups. As well, the focus on conflicts between the group remain the main staple in studying the Diasporic communities rather than looking at the complex identity configurations occurring in response to a racially inequitable society.

The most salient forms of racial hierarchy in the "West," are best seen in the repeated representations of all three groups in the media. Most notably, the legacy of minstrel shows that originated in the United States has carried a debasing history in media for African-Americans, Caribbeans and Africans. Minstrel shows and the black-

faced performers, who parodied black life, were a popular cultural form in the United States for over fifty years (Lowen, 1996).

Out of negative portrayals of blacks, the West also created the images of blacks in the Caribbean. These images were those of the exotic savages who were hypersexual and necessary exploits for the British Empire (Byerly and Ross, 2006). Africans, who received the same fate, were represented as primal beings, uncivilized heathens who were untrustworthy, unintelligible and animalistic at best. Nuancing these images is the participation of famous African-American actors and comedians reifying these caricatures in television and major motion pictures that degrade African-Americans, and other Diasporic members. For example, popular actor/comedian Eddie Murphy simulated the character pickaninny in historic comedic television series "Saturday Night Live;" and then transitioned to the stereotypical spear-chucking, primitive African caricature in popular film, "Coming to America." Likewise, Will Smith and Martin Lawrence's multimillion dollar movies, "Bad Boys" stigmatized Haitians and Jamaicans as drug dealers and thugs

The black African diaspora still deals with images that unfavorably present a deviant population, but history shows the consistent response of the communities to provide another viewpoint. From a filmmaking movement in the early and mid-twentieth century where black American directors, producers, and actors created their own films for black audiences who could not go to mainstream theaters in a segregated United States, to the African film industry that has produced powerful images that reject colonial caricatures, there has been a cultivation of the voice from within borders that speaks with a peripheral vision. More importantly, black film festivals, Pan-African Film Festivals,

and African-Film festivals that are ripe in the metropoles of the United States, and are not constructed for the benefit of a privileged eye, but are sometimes housed in black urban areas, and in black theaters that have mostly black and mostly working class viewers. The interest in studying an industry such as Nollywood in the African Diaspora of the US has become the inevitable.

In summary, the complicated junctures of the three groups are critical in understanding how configuration of identity is performed in the consumption of a video film industry like Nollywood.

AUTHENTIC BLACKNESS IN TRANSNATIONAL SPACES

New York City and its surrounding metropolitan area[19] encompass a continuous flow of transnational spaces, frequent intersections and overlapping Diasporas from around the world. Therefore this paper attempts to use a conceptual framework that considers the highly complex intersections that occur in the interactions of the African Diaspora via a specific medium. The conceptual framework is guided by transnational spaces (Jackson et al., 2004), with minor, but equally important references to "transnationalism from below" (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998) and looking at transnationalism as a commodity culture (Adejunmob, 2007; Crang et al., 2003) that are marked by authentic blackness (Jackson, 2005; Butterfield 2004; Hintzen and Rahier, 2003).

Szanton-Blanc et al. (1995) supposes that the discourse of transnationalism should focus on "the processes and the theoretical implications" of the field to allow the multiple understandings of the phenomenon. Jackson et al., appropriate this argument to

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[19] This includes the five boroughs surrounding New York City, and what is called the tri-state area, which encompasses Philadelphia, Connecticut and New Jersey.

transnational spaces by concentrating on spatiality as a means to induce researchers to open up and understand "ways of exploring transnational experiences and relations" (p.3-4) and the nuances of space and place. This is a deviation from an approach that solely concentrates on the phenomenon as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement . . . [thereby] build[ing] social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (Yeoh et al., 2003: p.208). According to Jackson et al., the "complex, multidimensional and multiply inhabited" sites of transnational space can be occupied by members outside of an immigrant, but it is a site that can carry deterritorialization or unboundedness (Appadurai, 1990), as well as a territorial specific, local meaning-making (Guarnizo and Smith). In this case, African-Americans who are several generations removed from their distinct dispersal to the United States, they still engage in transational experiences and relations.

Transnational space broadens discourse around transnational practices and subsequent identities configured around Diasporic performances by acknowledging that there are points in transnationalism where the experiences are found in the local. It recognizes the complexities in a heterogenous Diasproa, and the various methods individuals use to navigate hegemony in everyday practices. Transnationalism from below grounds transnational practices and creates transnational spaces by decentering major political and cultural institutions through acts of local resistances (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998). In the case of consumption of Nollywood, resistance is seen as a conscious and active consumption of a media that sits outside of US media, and in many ways on the periphery of what is considered alternative media. To consume Nollywood means

you have to physically travel to certain localities to access the video films, or you have to have an established relationship with someone who has access to them.

The framework looking at transnationalism by following it as commodity culture (Crang et al., 2003) uses Paul Zaleza's (2005) challenge to scholars to rewrite the African Diaspora in a critical and public discourse that incorporates the multiple streams of dispersal throughout history. Crang et al. suggest using commodity culture as a way to look at transnational spaces. They argue that this approach eliminates the ambivalence and contestation that has stifled the development of transnational studies (Schiller, 2005). Also, they argue that "transnationality [is] a multidimensional space that is multiply inhabited and characterized by complex networks, circuits and flows" (p.441). Moreover, Crang et al. posit that researchers can follow the commodity circuits occurring in transnationalism in order to study "all who inhabit the spaces of transnationalism" beyond ethnic specifications, but not excluding the ethnic commodification that occurs in the processes.

Craig et al. emphasize that one must follow the consumer, or things that are consumed to deal with the "hype of hybridity" which assumes that when cultures "mix and match" this is occurring as if all cultures are interacting on equal terms. They argue that "a focus on commodity culture . . . allows us to trace the leakiness of commodity culture beyond the confines of specifically defined communities without employing that we are all equally and in the same way transnational" (p.447). According to the authors, this form allows researchers to move away from 'abstract cultural discourse' and grounds transnationality as a lived social field where researchers can concretely analyze real lives, and look at how constructions of cultures and identity are being produced, circulated and

consume "through specific material forms and through variable economically motivated social practice" (p.451). This concept helps researchers address the complexities as to how Nollywood travels, but also how its consumption shapes identity, negotiates power, and intersects social realities.

Adejunmodi (2007) expands Crang et al by arguing that "under certain conditions such commercial forms [of transnational cultural productivity] offer greater opportunity for autonomous voices from globally minoritized populations to emerge, in dialogue with local publics, and outside the dominant centers of cultural production" (p.1). Adejunmobi goes on to recognize Nigerian video film as a cultural production that is conscious of the global centers of domination, but continues to disconnect from the systems of domination. Combining Crang et al. and Adejunmobi, employing Nollywood as a fluid commodity culture relieves researchers from strict transnational parameters in studying the heterogeneous populations of people of African descent in the United States.

The aim of this conceptual framework is to apply how the routes that Nollywood travels in the US explain how identities are formed and negotiated. This discourse of transnationalism opens the understanding of the complicated interwoven social realities that occur in New York metropolis where people of African descent consistent redefine themselves, re-imagine homelands, remember homes and rework linkages as they are interrelating and interacting at cultural intersections. Therefore, the exploration of transnational spaces and its flow as a commodity culture are particularly important when sites or points in these locations and on these routes are marked with specific identity codes around performance and perception of an authentic blackness.

Authentic blackness or authenticity in performing blacknesses is based in discourse around an African Diaspora that struggle for an essentiality and positioning within a hegemonic thrust around American identity politics (Jackson, 2004). More specifically, black ethnic groups must politically situate themselves around conservative, racial and ethnic xenophobic dialogue that establishes what a real American is, and what are the distinctive markings of American citizenship (ibid). As pointed out by Hintzen and Rahier, blackness, and the contestation over asserting racial authority carries cultural, historical, and ultimately political components that waver between black ethnic groups imagining their racial positioning, and performing it as well.

The range of performing and imagining authentic blackness postulates Hall's concept around articulations. This word employs a double-meaning suggesting that on one hand, "carries the sense of . . . expression," while on the other hand, it possesses the meaning that "two parts are connected to each other . . . [but are part of] a linkage which is not necessary, determined, and essential for all time."[20] According to Hall, the term can be used to enable scholars "to think of how specific practices articulated around contradictions which do not all arise in the same way, at the same point, in the same moment can nevertheless be together."[21] In the case of blackness, this nuances understanding how black ethnic groups can articulate a blackness that serves as establishing cohesiveness, while simultaneously undermining their positioning as American, a black group, and a collective identity.

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[20] Lawrence Grossberg (ed.), "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. Stuart Hall, David Morley and Kuan Hsing-Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), p.141.
[21] Stuart Hall, 1980 p.69

For that matter, identity is presumed as a collective coherence of memory and corresponding existence that refers to an idea that a structure of a person is constituted within the sameness of a whole (Friese, 2002). African-American identity positioning is centralized in a struggle between Americanness and blackness as pointed out by Dubois' double-consciousness. This identity has been flexible and incorporates movements that attempted to reify a Pan-African consciousness; however, this global black unity was projected within a political struggle of African-Americans that often saw other blacks in the world from a lens that was classed, raced and gendered (Mahon, 2008; Olaniyan, 2004). Butterfield points out how Caribbean children were seen as "foreigners" by African-American children who marked their accents as excluding them from blackness, while Olaniyan points out that African-Americans perceptions of Africans being connected to poverty and primitive underscore their understandings of the heterogeneity of Africans who immigrate to the country, let alone discount that they are the most educated group in the US.

Butterfield (2004) points out black Caribbean immigrants in the US identify as blacks, yet there is an emphasis that their blackness is rooted in regional, national, and class linkages that distinguish them inter and intra-ethnically. As well, some black Caribbean and African ethnic groups acknowledge current institutional racism and the historical struggle of African-Americans that allowed all people of color in the United States a comfort of upward mobility that is less raced (Noguera, 2003; Butterfield 2004; Olaniyan, 2003), in particular, black males of all ethnicities come together in discussions around their interactions with law enforcement (Butterfield, 2004; Pierre, 2004). Nevertheless, the idea of hardwork and education as key factors in upward mobility are

seen as elements that distant certain groups from others, and operates as social capital

that transcends one from America's racial hierarchy.

The contradictions that occur between moments of cohesion become points that

will be illuminated when using Nollywood films as the route to which these junctures

become articulated in complex ways.

FIELD SITE, INFORMANTS AND METHODOLOGY

The research data I am drawing from is based on seven months of fieldwork in the

New York borough, the Bronx, and downtown Newark, New Jersey, as well as

interviews gathered from a snowball sample from participants I met during my

ethnography. Interview respondents lived in Irvington and East Orange New Jersey, as

well as Harlem and Brooklyn. Irvington and East Orange are predominantly black cities

in Northern New Jersey that host a very visible black immigrant population like the more

popular sites, Harlem and Brooklyn.

Ethnographic data was through multi-sited visits of seven shops (four were

general stores, one distribution center, and two were African braiding salons) owned and

operated by African migrants in downtown Newark, NJ and the Bronx. During these

visits I struck up conversations with shopkeepers and patrons, and also observed shop

activity while I looked for Nollywood films to purchase.

As a resident of downtown Newark, I often walk past these shops and have

entered several prior to the launching of this investigation. However, after the launching

of this investigation, I visited each shop four times in a three-month period (with the

exception of the distribution shop) and stayed approximately fifteen minutes with each

visit. Several months following, I visited shops briefly, picking up videos or talking to

the owners who have come to know me as a patron. Most of my conversations were with

shop owners, salespersons, and I spoke to seven patrons (two were African-American,

five were African migrants). In Newark, all the shops are in close proximity of each

other, ranging at approximately a two-to-five minute walk, but are owned by different

African nationalities that were not Nigerian. Also, my approach was to focus on locations

of consumption, and how these localities configured identity. During and after fieldwork,

I conducted interviews with mostly women who ranging in age from 18 to mid-forties.

All with the exception of one of my interviews with men were salesmen at local shops.

FINDINGS

Informal interviews with shopkeepers and patrons of an African shop showed that

the distribution process is inextricably linked to consumption that is as multi-stranded as

how the films are circulated. The film distribution process flows through formal and

informal economic structure. As shown in the figure 1.1, once a film is produced in

Nigeria, copies are sold to major distribution centers in the United States via online or by

way of shipment through a number of formal and informal sources. The video films are

reproduced in mass by distributors who sell them in bulk or individually at their stores.

Circulation ranges from bulk video sales to African, Caribbean and African-American

owned stores in the United States, and shipments to Caribbean and Anglophone countries

in South America such as Guyana and Suriname.

Individual distribution is also a very important part of the process. Films are

exported from all parts of Africa in the suitcases of travelers (Haynes), shipped in general

mailings to avoid custom regulations, and downloaded from online businesses in order to

make it to the United States. However, it is the exchange of video films through informal

borrowings of relatives and friends that is the most utilized. These examples show the creation of a network or trail of consumption that migrates like human bodies, also showing parallels of Nollywood being a site of transnational cultural engagement.

Figure 1.1. Distribution Chart of Nollywood Films
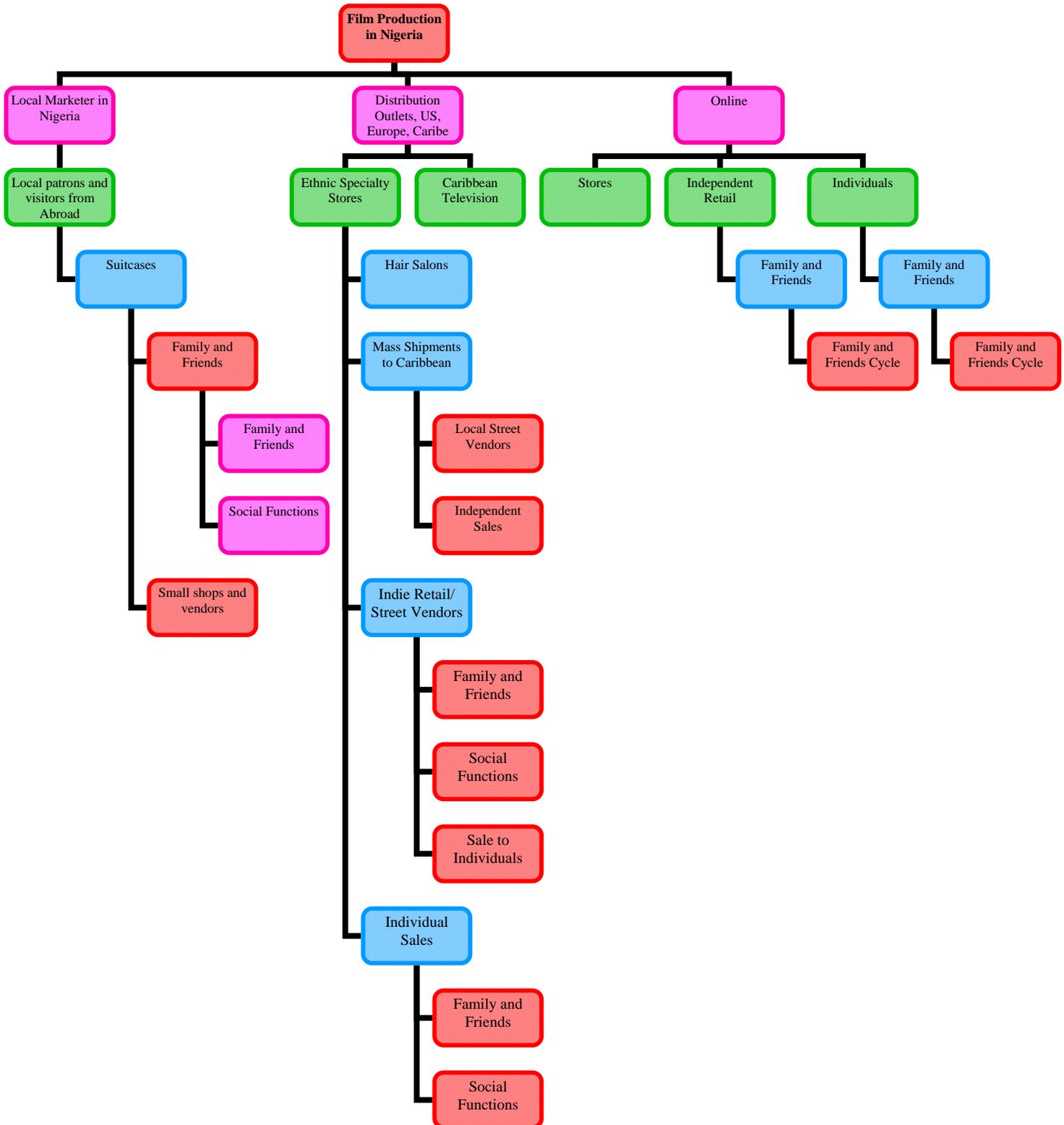
However, the distribution centers and ethnic shops do not monopolize the bulk distribution of Nollywood video films. Small shop owners pirate copies and sell them individually or in bulk to the community they serve, as well as ship them abroad to countries who demand Nollywood video films. As one shopkeeper indicated, he and his wife make thousands of copies from the supplies they purchase from a distribution center and ship them to St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Jamaica and Guyana. The husband remarked, "They love Nollywood down there." This shows the continuum found in Africa creating an informal economy that pirates original copies to re-engage in the formal and informal markets in the Americas.

In terms of gender and distribution the process is separated by individual sales and bulk sales. At the individual levels, the video films are mostly purchased by women of all age ranges. At the bulk level, the gender distribution is male and female.

Lastly, in the area of distribution there have been two itemizations on the volume of Nollywood films that are purchased by various communities. In the Bronx, the shopkeepers listed African migrants as the top purchasers, with a very close Caribbean population next, then followed by African Americans, then Europeans.[22] In downtown Newark, four shopkeepers agreed with the itemization of the Bronx distribution, but one said they received a lot of business from Caribbean migrants and businesses located in the Caribbean.

Consumption was situated in the local, usually through "local households, kin networks, elite functions, and other emergent local formations" (Guarnizo and Smith, p.7) such as hair salons, taxi cabs, and social gatherings of various ethnic groups. One

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[22] This was only white Europeans as blacks who were from Europe were listed in either the African or Caribbean categories by shopkeepers.

African-American respondent from Newark who attended a birthday party of her former high school student who was Nigerian and lived in East Orange, "There were African movies playing on every television in the house, although no one else was paying any attention, I was." She also added that after that day she noticed the increase of African shops "popping up on Main and Central Avenue" with banners advertising African videos for sale.

Consumption marked by ethnicity, gender and class. Findings showed that most respondents watched Nollywood in private spaces with same ethnic groups. While other groups admitted that same sex consumption was encouraged more than a co-ed audience, the private space became a place where the movies were worked through various ethnic coding and behaviors of each group.

In the case of Africans, private spaces were homes of family members and friends who were usually from the same tribal origin, nation, or, at the very least, region. All African respondents between the ages of 18 and 28 either attended a university, or worked in a professional setting. An African female respondent who is a second-generation migrant admitted to rarely purchasing video films. Rather she had access through an informal distribution network that consisted of kin and African friends.

When I asked her if she watched them in her dormitory, she said that she rarely did, but when it occurred it was with two or three Nigerian female students she met on campus. Though she did not consider this a private space like her home, she said that the dorm allowed her and her friends to imitate the language, behaviors and noise expressions that are frequent in the video films and remind them of their parents and older family members. I then asked her if it was okay if she watched movies at parents'

home with any of her African-American friends and she started laughing and covering her mouth when she said, "My family tell me [to] not to associate with Johnsons. They tell me to watch out because they are 'no-good.'" When she says "no-good" she uses her fingers in quotation marks.

I asked her to explain why she referred to African-Americans as "Johnsons" and "no-good," and if Johnsons were linked to the term "acata" a name that loosely translates to nigger. Her mouth opened and she covered it and shook her head stating that she was shocked I knew the word "acata," and emphasized that a lot of the older people use the term and not the younger ones that understand African-Americans better because they are around them more. Also, the Nigerian respondent replied that the first term is a generic derogatory name that many Nigerians call African-Americans, taking a common surname of African-Americans and connecting with unfavorable qualities such as criminals, bad influence, and lazy which points to the suggestion that they are "no-good."

All African female respondents said that their parents pressured them to marry within their tribal specific ethnicities. The watching of Nollywood transferred culturally ideologies, but affirmed marriage and moral codes that operate as an "extension of work or 'productive' activity" designated for "respectable" females who opted to stay home at night rather than attend a social clubs or step outside of ethnic mores (Esan, 2008). As well, Esan notes that Nollywood is mostly consumed by women in African communities, and the films are used as pleasurable tools that reinforce the moral codes of "home culture," or African culture specifically. In particular, Esan notes African immigrants use the film "to learn culturally appropriate positions to adopt or negotiate," and also it is utilized as assisting in the instruction of "the younger generation . . . who have a greater

need to be realigned with the home cultures lest they become subsumed in the culture of their host community as they adopt less appropriate aspects of the Western culture."[23] These coded behavior models that occur in domestic spaces engender the private viewing of Nollywood to a site of feminization, but also illuminate how immigrant females, especially second generation, are more restricted in their families than males (Butterfield; Espiritu).

Mother and daughter respondents who invited me to watch movies with them identified as Cuban. They said they mostly watch Nollywood together and with other immigrants who lived in the predominantly black neighborhood of Irvington. The mother, a working class migrant from Cuban has phenotypes that would situate her as a black person in the United States. She informed me that she is a Cuban and a Latina and not black; however, she admitted that she was of African ancestry. When I asked her the difference of black and have African ancestors, she said the black meant, "black American."

Her daughter described herself as being both black and Latina because her father is African-American. She also mentioned that she identifies with both, even though her mother pushes her to identify as "Latina," exclusively, but added that her mother was a hypocrite because she said she doesn't like to live around Hispanics who are white or very fair skinned. I asked her why, and she replied that Latinos who look like she and her mother are harassed and discriminated against because of their dark color.

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[23] Oluyinka Esan, "Appreciating Nollywood: Audiences and Nigerian Films." Particip@tions; found online 30 March 2008 at: http://www.participatiosn.org/Volume%205/Issue%201%20-%20special/5_01_esan.html.

I asked them if they watched them with a black person and the both said they had not before I was invited, but they admitted that I was the first black American to inform them I watched Nollywood. When I asked about the other immigrants they told me it was mostly Haitians, and then Jamaicans and some Africans. The daughter who is a college student says she talks about the movies between her and her Caribbean and African friends and trade movies and tried to explain them to her African-American boyfriend who said he did not like them. Her friend, a second-generation migrant from Guinea, admitted that she was perceived as African-American by the Cuban respondent because she did not have an accent and spoke American.

When I interviewed the Guinea respondent who is friends with the Cuban/African-American college student, she reported that she did not watch the movies often, but her parents watched movies from Guinea as well as Nollywood. When she did watch them it is at her parents' home or over the house of relatives. I asked her if her father watched them as much as her mother, but she said that her father just watched them because her mother had the movies playing and refused to allow anyone to watch something else. She explained that movies either had the same story line or she could not understand the language. This reoccurring theme of disruption of an intra-ethnic connection was frequent with second generation immigrants.

Also, the Guinea migrant self-identified as an African-American, but not a black American, and emphasized that even though people tell her she talks "white" has "good hair" and her mother is "fair skinned," she is 100 percent African. I asked her why she stressed her hair and her mother's color. She responded that Africans at her school and job insisted she was not African because she did not have an accent and her language.

When she began speaking Malinké to a Nigerian co-ed the female peer told her she was making the language up and was not African. The respondent expressed discontent that she was not considered an authentic African, and black by her African-American and Caribbean friends. This informant shows how belonging is localized in very specific terms that can alienate and even oust group members.

An African-American female patron at a store in downtown Newark explained that she got "hooked" on Nollywood by first being exposed at the African hair braiding salon she frequents. Similary to Ajibade's description of "Tie-in" spaces are service businesses[24] that incorporate Nollywood viewings while servicing its patrons in another field. In the New York area, African stylists often watch African films as they style the hair of customers. She said that after seeing several videos at the salon she wanted to see more. After expressing her interest of the films to an African co-worker, her colleague gave her ten DVDs and they began discussing the storylines while at work. Soon after, her husband began watching the movies with her and shopping for the films together. The day I interviewed them, they purchased twenty films at an African shop owned by an African immigrant from Ivory Coast who emphasized he was Malian due to his paternal origins. These examples show the creation of a network or trail of consumption that migrates like human bodies, also showing parallels of Nollywood being a site of transnational cultural engagement.

The African-American male patron that was part of the couple who were interviewed informed that the movies were fascinating and they made him think about Africa in other ways. He did admit that he did not understand all that they were saying, but he and wife always laughed during these awkward times as they would rewind films

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[24] He lists the following: hair salons, eateries, barbershops, and beer bars.

to understand certain phrases or noise gestures such as grunts or sucking of the teeth by actors. They also reported that they viewed most of their films at home, but the woman always asked her African co-worker to explain things she did not understand such as words. This negotiation of being included and feeling alienated in the process of watching the films shows a negotiation of cultural citizenship, as well as using the films as a site of cultural appropriation and instruction. Moreover, this showed an attempt of the participant to engage in transnational social activity, as well as reconstitute themselves as members of a Diaspora they did not fully understand, but imagined to be closely connected.

All shopkeepers said they have a significant patronage of Caribbean-Americans and migrants, followed by African-Americans. The two patrons I interviewed who were African-American said that they pass their movies onto family and friends and talk about the films after each has viewed them. They said that the films were different, but it reminded them of the Gospel Stage Plays or black movies that are considered low budget.

Sites of consumption that structure and disrupt collective identities between and within each ethnic group. At first, the researcher assumed that Nigeran shops only sold the videos. One day, I asked a male shopkeeper what part of Nigeria was his home. After sucking his teeth, he said, "I speak French, I am from Cote d'Ivoire." I decided to ask every shopkeeper and all gave me other a non-Nigerian nationality. Another shopkeeper who owns a West African restaurant, grocery store, and a shipping business replied in surprise and disgust when I asked for a movie, "You watch those Nigerian things? They do all those juju and things?" I told him yes and asked if he watched them, he said no, but told me he makes money from them. This showed a disruption within

ethnic-groups, which further breaks down more nuanced identity codes of immigrants based in religion that are also displayed in Caribbean and African-American groups.[25]

All the shops in this study sold more than Nollywood DVDs, with each carrying various selections African items. One shop that was operated by two males from the Ivory Coast sold African video films from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali and the Ivory Coast, as well as African music and African clothes and hats for males. Two shops that were operated by husband-and-wife teams sold African food with one of the shops, owned by a Ghanaian couple, specialized in popular African food stuffs and Nollywood; while the other, managed by a couple from the Ivory Coast, sold food, clothes and Nollywood. The last two shops were female-run; one that was Liberian-owned specialized in bulk food items, clothes and body and hair care products, and the other female operator from Burkina Faso sold Nollywood and Maliwood[26] video films with body and hair care items, clothes, hats and wigs for women.

The major distribution center in the Bronx is operated by two salespersons who were Ghanaian males, but the origins of the storeowner are unknown at the time of the writing of this paper. This was the only shop that sold Nollywood and the only one that employed outside of its national borders. Though the shops retailed various products, Nollywood video films were emphasized at all locations. This was evidenced in the positioning of the DVD sections that was always located on the side and at the store's entrance to provide a view for patrons to see the display of DVDs and CDs from the outside. There was also a television in every shop, but the distribution center and one

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[25] Caribbean immigrants distance themselves from Haitians who are stigmatized due to their history of voodoo. The same thing for African-Americans that distance themselves from people in Louisiana due to the states reputation and legacy of voodoo and other folk spiritual systems such as mojo and hoodoo.
[26] This designates the video film industry of Mali that models from Nollywood.

shop were the only ones that had a Nollywood film playing during both of the site visits. Additionally, it must be mentioned that I have not located any video stores that rent videos, but only specialize in selling the movies.

Absent are the street video stalls Okome (2007) observes in Nigeria, Ajibade (2007) investigates in Lagos and Douala, and Omoera (2009) looks at in Ghana. In fact, the "bootleg" video stalls trading American films operate much like the African video stalls; with movies playing on a small DVD player or the device being used to show the quality of a film as vendors hawk those who pass by. Okome asserts that in Nigeria the *street corner* audience is created in public spaces that are sites for social engagement of the poor, working class. Similar to the US, one walking the crowded streets of Newark or the Bronx during rush hour find working class peoples buying their videos from stalls. These "junctures of improvisational" engage in a transnational discourse in a democratic space.[27]

Though one of the shopkeepers at the major distribution shop indicated that they run the videos primarily for promotional purchases, he did speak of the video showings as sites that spark discussions by patrons who never saw a Nollywood video film, or any African film, or any media image outside of the negative representations transmitted by North American media. He mentioned that he frequently speaks to Caribbean migrants and African-Americans who admit that they did not know Africa had cities and "nice" homes and cars. Also, he said that his regular talks with one Jamaican-American female patron contributed to her decision in vacationing in Ghana with a Ghanaian female coworker.

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[27] Okome demarcates two geographies where he observed street audiences in Lagos. Divided by Lagos Lagoon, on one side, there are the affluent residential and commercial areas of Lagos Island. On the other side of the Lagoon is Lagos mainland where poverty is more visual and the chaos with more street vendors.

Consumption that is marked by re-imagining or recreating belonging to a Diaspora. An African-American woman who has been married to a Cameroonian man said she watched Nollywood at her home with her step-daughter and African female relatives who frequently visited. She also recounted with a laugh that when she visited her in-laws, Nollywood was always on. A college graduate and mother of two (one from a previous relationship and one from her current marriage) the informant admitted that she could not understand much of the dialogue and cultural references in the beginning, but has started to make sense of the movies upon the information received from her husband, step-daughter, in-laws, and even her husband's first wife who is also from Cameroon. She says her first son who is nine and has an African-American father, comprehends the movies and is beginning to understand the tribal languages and their meanings better than she.

Within this consumption, the respondent says she attempts to connect with the movies and has even volunteered to play a part in a film that was shot in Philadelphia by Nigerian filmmakers. She says she looks at the fashion and the protocol of the couples to compare to her own situation, but sometimes she says she strongly disagrees with some of the cultural patterns such as what she described as "the man can do anything and get away with it." The respondent also has encouraged her mother and friends from her community to watch the movies. She says she has African-American friends from various classes and sexual orientations, but the reception in watching them varies. This conscious bi-directional (Butterfield, 2004) exchange of cultures shows how there is a conscious flow of cultural markers between black ethnicities that is not one directional implying American assimilation or vice-versa.

Another respondent with Canadian citizenship, but who has lived in England reported that her parentage is comprised of a Ghanaian father and Caribbean (St. Lucian) mother. She informed that she mostly watched the films with her father and younger sister. Her father who received films from relatives and friends who visited Africa would explain sections of films she could not understand due to language or cultural themes that were unknown she or her sister. The respondent said she preferred to watch films that were based in contemporary, city settings, but her father liked the "village movies that were more cultural." The respondent also commented that her father insisted she and her sibling watch the movies to learn about Ghanaian culture. Her reply to when she was asked if she felt more Ghanaian she said, "no" and that the movies did not help her when she went to Ghana because she still felt out-of-place.

African-American step father and Caribbean step daughter consume Nollywood together when he puts the videos in her hand after buying them in Harlem or Brooklyn. An East Orange native, the African-American father says he doesn't watch them, but buys them for his wife and 18-year-old step daughter who are from Trinidad. Though the father does not watch them, he must directly engage in consuming the videos which indicates that he is also participating in a cultural exchange between his West Indian family members, African shopkeepers that suggest movies, and his African-American heritage. This lends to Butterfield's assertion of Caribbean and African-Americans engage in a bidirectional cultural exchange where both sides are influenced by each other's culture. In this case, the cultural exchange is multi-directional.

The step-daughter stated that she is obsessed with the movies and watches them as much as possible with her mother and Caribbean friends. The Trinidad teen migrated

to the US in 2008, and was still adjusting; however, she was no stranger to Nollywood because she told me they are broadcast on the island's television stations. To her watching Nollywood movies is "fascinating because the culture is so rich and the language is beautiful." I asked her to explain what she meant, she said that she loved the African accents and she admired the fact that women wore flip flops and were true to themselves. I further inquired about why flip flops were important, she explained that in Trinidad, females imitated American culture so much that they wore Ugg Boots in 80 degree weather. Interestingly, researchers (Espiritu, Waters, Butterfield, Kasinitz) show the concern by immigrant parents who attempt to ensure that the Americanization process does not occur with second-generation migrant youth, yet globalization suggests that the process occurs before one relocates to America.

SUMMARY

The notion of how one arrives and leaves, and the individuation that takes place in the journey, provokes the notion of a homeland serving as a base, while the idea of a collective functions as a construction of the now to carry out one's imagination; however, this imagination is not based in an unreality, but an identity and subsequent space placed in the a localize meaning-making (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998). To identify as a Diaspora signifies that movement of identity is an ongoing process and one that occurs at sites that are also connected to moments, thus reconstituting a selfhood in a fluidity that constantly redefines identity.

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