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# 'Osuofia Don Enter Discourse:' Global Nollywood and African Identity Politics

The scholarly discourse about Nigerian "home videos," "video films," "Nollywood,"– or whatever you choose to call it – is beginning to move away from defending the phenomenon against critiques from the celluloid industries on the continent, and also away from a certain kind of analysis that places western-European "art films" at the apex of global cinematic evolution. Like the industry itself, the criticism is coming into its own. Nevertheless, much of the theorizing about video film still pays too little attention to the actual films. A few scholars, e.g. Jonathan Haynes, Onookome Okome, and Hyginus Ekwuazi, have spilled much ink analyzing specific films, but more and more of the articles we find scattered throughout various journals, of various disciplines, make a whole lot of noise about the realized and potential power of the industry, both culturally and economically, without turning to a single film to make their case. This perpetuates, I believe, a certain amount of scholarly skepticism about the ways that the industry is characterized. There is a disconnect between the economic significance of a thriving, local film industry and what many consider the deleterious content of the films themselves. I want to revisit a few stands of the discussion about what sets Nollywood apart from other identitarian discourses on the African continent, but I want to do so by looking at a particular film. I contend that the 2003 release, *Osuofia in London*, which is generally considered Nollywood's most successful and furthest traveling film, and which is also popularly characterized as an unfortunate and negative portrayal of African people, is actually engaged in a redefinition of on-screen African identity construction.

The popular Nigerian film industry receives critical attention from a number of sources, including newspaper and magazine articles, internet blogs and forums, and academic scholarship. The increasingly transnational character of Nollywood, has prompted quite a few critics to question the various ways that Nigeria is portrayed on screen. In one ironic case, Omo'Noba Erediuwa, the traditional ruler of Benin, called for the elimination of "fetish practices" from films, because, he said, "every film maker had a responsibility to create a good image for Nigeria."[48] His criticism no doubt stems from the often sensationalized and inaccurate images of traditional religion, popularly referred to as "juju," that are found across Nollywood film genres. The tone for such images was set by *Living in Bondage*'s shocking and outrageous portrayal of secret societies, human sacrifice, and witchcraft. Nevertheless, the fact that a traditional king, a practitioner of many traditional religious rites, calls for the elimination of "fetish practices" rather than accurate portrayals of them, highlights the urgency with which the situation is regarded. In an article titled "The near nullity of Nollywood," penned for the Lagos-based newspaper *Vanguard*, poet Unoma Azuah writes that, "Most Nigerian films present an unsophisticated and inhumane image of Nigerians because they lack literary merit, and promote the demonisation of women, occultism, homophobia and fundamentalist Christianity."[49] Azuah thus calls for a "total overhaul" of the industry, claiming that, "Nollywood [...] needs to work towards credibility and erudition in order to be where it is supposed to be in the world map of movie production."[50] Though few cinematic traditions anywhere in the world might be characterized as credible or erudite, Azuah sees in Nollywood the opportunity to cast Nigeria in a flattering light. The article's purpose, it seems, is to promote internationally acceptable themes, regardless of the fact that video film thrives in Nigeria despite the ways it portrays Nigerians, and perhaps even because so. Azuah's stance is shared by many intellectuals who would like to see more Nigerian films engaged in the brand of learned social criticism associated with "Third Cinema" directors like Ousmane Sembene and Djibril Diop Mambety, among others. Yet the works of art for which these directors are known have rarely been distributed in Africa, nor been major commercial successes. Nollywood, on the

other hand, survives only on its ability to sell Africans those images for which they are willing to pay.

Still, a kind of double-consciousness pervades Nigerian conceptions of Nollywood, especially in contexts beyond Nigerian borders. While Azuah is concerned with "the world map of movie production," she nevertheless realizes that Nollywood's Western audiences remain largely composed of "Nigerian immigrants who are likely to identify with anything from their homeland, and as a way of cushioning their loneliness in a foreign land."[51] Whether or not it is true that Nollywood's audience in the West consists largely of Nigerians—and by all accounts it is true—Azuah complicates her argument by focusing not directly on the way that Nigerians seem themselves, but how they see themselves as refracted through Western sight. To whom, this begs the question, does Nollywood "present an unsophisticated and inhumane image of Nigerians?" Azuah quotes a Nigerian woman raising children in the United States, Joy Oreke-Arungwa· who says that, "For us parents, it becomes a reference book ... Our kids, when they get here, they get lost, too Americanised ... These movies show them the other side."[52] For Oreke-Arungwa, then, the value of Nigerian films is that they do not conform to "the world map of movie production," but that they reflect uniquely Nigerian perspectives, some of which might include Nigerian forms of Christianity or Nigerian attitudes towards sexuality. A London-based research project called *The Nollywood Film Industry and the African Diaspora in the UK* notes that, "The consumption of Nollywood films by immigrant and minority groups in Western countries is one (among many others) indexes [sic] of how such groups negotiate their place in their chosen countries of abode."[53] So for the project, researching Nigerian popular film consumption in the UK is a way of understanding how immigrants view themselves, rather than how UK "indigenes" view immigrants through their films. From the perspective of W.E.B. DuBois's now famous notion of "double-consciousness," however, the two views can hardly be separated. The ways that non-dominant minorities see themselves, according to DuBois, are mediated through the ways that dominant society sees them. Even when the dominant gaze is imagined, it nonetheless affects self-consciousness. Sandra Adell, a scholar of African-American literature, reads DuBois in

conjunction with Hegelian notions of consciousness to reveal that:

"The otherness with which the Negro seeks to reconcile himself is one of the elements that constitutes his essence as a social and psychological being. As the hyphenated nomenclature *African-American* implies, one of the Negro's two points of reference is America. The Negro, Black American, Afro-American, African American is an American. As such, the "other world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" is, in fact, the Negro's world. And the irreconcilability of the Negro with that world is an essential part of the Negro's being-in-the-world."[54]

The result of Adell's analysis is that black consciousness in Western contexts is thoroughly embedded in, yet irreconcilable with, the ways that black consciousness is understood by – and she quotes DuBois here – the "other world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." As such, black cultural production in a largely non-black society, whether music, food, or home videos, cannot be understood only as it is seen by black consumers of culture, but as it might be seen by non-black society, which, furthermore, also constitutes a part of black culture. This is why Bekeh Utietiang, a Nigerian reverend and author living in Washington DC, reads the role of Nollywood as one embroiled in the construction of global black identity. In his response to *Osuofia in London*, Utietiang writes:

> Most Europeans and Americans still have the knowledge of Africa depicted in the racial shows of the 60's. This image has not been helped by foreign charitable and religious organizations working in Africa who continue to present Africa in a bad light to the West in order to gain financial support for their humanitarian work in Africa. It is thus the place of Africans to legitimately defend her identity and seek equality for Africans with the rest of the world.[55]

For Utietiang, the film's broad commercial success is less laudable than lamentable, because, he writes, "The African of the 21st Century deserves a better image than this."[56]

I will return to Utietiang's specific criticisms shortly, as they address discrete elements of the film that should first be described. But Utietiang's claims raise important questions about the relationship between the contents of Nigerian popular film and the

place of the Nollywood in global discourses. If Africa – and, as he implies, its diaspora – "deserves" better images than those found in *Osuofia in London*, then what images does the film contain, and how do they engage with concepts germane to identity construction in diasporic spaces? Amazingly, a close reading of the film reveals that this absurd farce about Nigerians in London goes straight to the heart of what is at stake in Nollywood's explosion, growth, and transnational journey.

The character Osuofia – a bumbling, loquacious Igbo village man – is the invention of comedian Nkem Owoh, one of Nollywood's most successful personalities. Owoh cut his teeth acting and writing for Nigerian television while the video film industry was taking shape, then got his first major Nollywood role in the 1993 Kenneth Nnebue film *Circle of Doom*. Since then, Owoh has been a Nollywood mainstay, appearing in more than 70 dramas, thrillers, and comedies. The dynamic Kingsley Ogoro wrote, directed, and produced *Osuofia in London*, in which Owoh's character is obliged to make a sudden and life-changing trip to the United Kingdom. He is visited one day by the village school teacher and a courier who brings news and documents pertaining the death of Osuofia's brother Donatus. Rather than grief, Osuofia displays contempt for his brother and berates both the teacher and the courier until he learns that Donatus has left behind a sizeable fortune. The courier produces travel documents and Osuofia is told that he must claim his brother's wealth in London. Then, with little warning, in one of the most memorable scenes of the film, Osuofia wails for the brother he now knows was rich, and demonstrates for his family how to grieve in like manner. The rest of Part I chronicles Osuofia's departure, arrival, and misadventures in London. He struggles with public transportation and infrastructure, marvels at technology, attempts to order Nigerian food at McDonalds, and misinterprets a range of social codes, all of which are brilliantly and hilariously improvised by Owoh. Audiences learn that Donatus has left behind a white, English fiancée named Samantha, played by Mara Derwent. She is warm to Osuofia, but turns out to be in league with Ben Okafor, the Nigerian-descended lawyer played by Charles Angiama who manages the affairs of Donatus, and who plans to steal Osuofia's inheritance. Ever stubborn, Osuofia frustrates each attempt that

Samantha and Okafor make. When it becomes clear that the scheme is going to fail, Samantha betrays Okafor, runs off with Osuofia, and resigns herself to marrying this strange, unassimilated African man and living in Nigeria. In Part II, Osuofia and Samantha are treated to a hero's welcome in the village. The plot quickly becomes a comedy of Nigerian manners as Samantha assumes the role of Osuofia's second wife and plans new ways to con Osuofia out of his fortune. Meanwhile, Osuofia scatters his newfound wealth all over town, establishing himself as the newest "big man" on the block. Eventually, Samantha's last ditch effort to kill him by poisoning is thwarted by one of Osuofia's daughters. In a long polemical speech, as Osuofia sits on his hospital bed, Samantha reveals that she has "learned to see with her heart." Osuofia forgives Samantha, writes her a check, and sends her back to London, asking for nothing in return but an occasional letter or phone call.

*Osuofia in London* exhibits many of Nollywood's notorious hallmarks. Scenes are often long and overflow with interminable improvised dialogue. At times, the soundtrack employs conspicuous effects and keyboard melodies that overdetermine the film's emotional content. And the moral that Samantha learns, as well as its sermonic delivery, is quintessentially Nollywood. The film seems a frivolous comedy, but not so claims Utietiang. "There is a danger to argue that the message of a movie does not really matter if the movie is a fiction," he writes, "True fiction is based on some reality."[57] He continues:

> The fictional comedy "Osuofia in London" is unpatriotic to Africa. The movie portrays Osuofia as being more interested in the brother's wealth rather than the brother himself. Africans are presented in this movie as timid and uncivilized people who have no idea of what it means to use a rest room, a confirmation of what the West believe already about Africans. Mr. Okafor the London based solicitor of Donatus is seen as a corrupt man, another Euro-American image of Africans. Osuofia is portrayed as a dumb idiot who would sign off every of his brother's property for a kiss from a white lady. To show the producer's willingness to sell this false African identity to the West, the movie is produced with a Western audience in mind. This is seen clearly in the narrations before and at the end of the movie.[58]

The essential argument here is that *Osuofia in London* perpetuates stereotypes about Africans that do a disservice to the defense of African identity. As Utietiang notes, these stereotypes, though part of a fiction, are representative of real Western misconceptions about the African "Other." Acknowledging the truth of this observation, I maintain that the film problematizes the relationship between popular stereotypes and the paradigm of globalization by engaging in a counter-discourse to the normative assumptions of double-consciousness.

Beginning with Utietiang's insightful reading of the film's narrative framing, I want to establish the genre category into which *Osuofia in London* falls. Both parts I and II are framed by the voice-over narration of what seems to be an English man. Part I opens with a digitally-enhanced shot of the Earth from space, which then tightens over the African continent before fading to a silhouette shot of "village life." As the voice-over begins, a series of bucolic images, including mountains, waterfalls, flying birds, men in canoes, a palm wine tapster, elephants, and baboons, illustrate the following narration:

> The planet Earth: a solid mass of land and water mysteriously afloat in a vast and unknowable universe. In fact, some days became quite complex and confusing, like today, a day when a man might be anything else, but a hunter.[59]

As the camera pans down the length of Osuofia's rifle, viewers realize that he is being propped up against a tree by four young women, his daughters, as he fixes his sights on an antelope. The voice-over claims that Osuofia might have wished he were not a hunter on this particular day, and, as Osuofia fires, he comes crashing to the ground while his quarry bounds away. Then Osuofia mocks and chastises his daughters, mumbling comically about the family's lack of fortune as he follows them down a forest path. To juxtapose this complex life with another kind of complexity, the screen fades to a series of shots of famous London landmarks. The voice-over continues, "But true enough, elsewhere on this planet, other people build large jungles of concrete and steel, where life was tense and often very sad." A young white woman, Samantha,

is shown exiting a white stretch limousine in black funeral attire. Cutting back to the forest, and a low shot of Osuofia's daughters carrying water, the voice-over concludes: "However, in our small and peaceful village, big cities and fast lifestyles never entered their wildest dreams. Politics and confusion remained unknown."

This series of establishing shots, first from the perspective of the planet, then in the forest and in London, together with the patronizing British voice-over, bear a striking resemblance to opening of Jamie Uys's 1980 film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.[9] Uys's film was a huge international success, but has also been heavily criticized for its portrayal of a Sho family living in the Kalahari Desert. As far as film genres are concerned, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* is a unique and innovative contribution to the form known as *docufiction*. It combines an irreverent, comedic approach to the nature documentary – exemplified by Uys's 1974 film *Animals are Beautiful People* – with slapstick narrative fiction. The documentary characteristics of the film are most prominently featured during the opening scenes. Like *Osuofia in London*, the initial shot is a reproduction of the Earth from space, this time centered over southern Africa, which then dramatically zooms in to the Kalahari and instigates a series of animal shots, including elephants and baboons. A voice-over describes the climatic conditions of the region, aspects of animal behavior, and the fact that "humans avoid the deep Kalahari like the plague," that is, except for the "little people," who are also described as one might describe wildlife: "pretty, dainty, small, and graceful." Life in the Kalahari and Sho culture are described as "gentle," but as the film cuts to chaotic images of skyscrapers, freeway traffic, and a large grocery store, the voice-over introduces viewers to "civilized man," who live, the film notes, just 600 miles away. The ensuing portrayal of life in Johannesburg depicts the city as complex and paradoxical. Only after returning to the Kalahari and completing the documentary-style introduction, does the plot take off. The rest of the film is a farcical portrait of Xi, a Sho man who travels through the "civilized" world of South Africa on his quest to discard a Coke bottle – the overt symbol of Western modernity.

The intertextualities between Uys's *The God's Must Be Crazy* and Ogoro's *Osuofia in London* mark the Nigerian film as a rearticulation

of the docufiction genre. *The Gods Must Be Crazy* has elicited vehement criticism – it was even banned in Trinidad and Tobago – because of the stereotypical, if romantic, ways it paints Africans. Despite the sympathetic tone it takes toward Xi and his plight, it is a model of the imperialist penchant for laughing at "others," especially their seemingly insurmountable distance from Western modernity. So by following the docufiction format, *Osuofia in London* enters into a preexisting cinematic discourse on race and Western perceptions of the African. Utietiang claims that the narrative framing of the film is a device aimed at Western audiences. In part, this is an acceptable reading of the framing device – as it works in tandem with the fact that Samantha's are the only thoughts provided via voice-over – but such patent appropriations of cinematic idioms might be more effectively read as parody or satire. Ensconced in the fabric of docufiction, *Osuofia in London* proceeds to develop a complex and playful relationship with the Western image of Africa. It announces its double-consciousness, but it also undermines Western subjectivity by undermining Western claims to the discourse of film. And since the film not only depicts Africa, but shifts between Africa and the Western metropole, it creates a sense of conflated space, a sense of the myriad ways in which social agency is determined by and destabilizes the concept of location.

In gender and diaspora studies, the politics of conflated location, both geographical and psycho-social, may be referred to as "multi-axial locationality." When a change of location simultaneously takes place across multiple subjectivities – such as Osuofia's change in geographic location, class status, and, as I am arguing, the film's shifting politics of identity construction – then the point at which these axes intersect becomes the site of what Avtar Brah calls "diaspora space." She *defines* it as a "confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes," but she *describes* it this way:

> It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and were the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition.[61]

It is this description, this phenomenological account of what transpires within diaspora space, which is most relevant to Osuofia's trip to London. While the film proclaims its genre, it simultaneously disavows the objectives of that genre. It uses slapstick and farce to pit the permitted and the prohibited, of two cultures, against one another, while disclaiming any notions of authenticity or the myth of any tradition. Take for instance Osuofia's departure from his village. A crowd of men are gathered, discussing the vagaries of global geography, as Osuofia's daughters ceremoniously bring out his luggage and some preposterous provisions, including two large African yams and a pot of stew. His "real" luggage consists of a single plaid, plastic, zipper bag on which the camera focuses just enough attention to mark it as significant. In Nigeria, such bags are commonly known as "Ghana must go" bags, referencing the nationalist response to worsening economic conditions in the 1980s. In 1983, illegal Ghanaian immigrants living all over Nigeria were gathered up and taken to the borders; many were forced to quickly pack their belongings into similar bags; and that image has become solidified in Nigerian visual culture. The fact that Osuofia carries a "Ghana must go" bag around for a considerable chunk of the film, refusing even to relinquish it to his late brother's English butler, emphasizes the multi-axial politics of geographic and class location that inform conceptualizations of the migrant, the nationalist, and the exile – both in Nigeria and in London. Osuofia can be read as the downtrodden immigrant, or as the wealthy business traveler. Nigeria can be read as the mythical homeland, or as the hostile hostland. In the character of Osuofia, these multiple axes of location merge.

As the scene continues, Osuofia emerges from his front door clad in a ridiculous combination of at least three Western-style shirts and a neck tie, all overlaid by a beige single-breasted suit. One man notes that Osuofia is sweating, and asks him why so many clothes, to which Osuofia responds, "You people, you are what we call a bushman, you wouldn't understand." The man is shocked, as Osuofia has clearly transgressed social boundaries of age and class. Osuofia then tells the crowd that, because winter in London is so cold, men who dress in African attire would freeze solid in seconds or would be called "nincompoop" by small boys on the

street. When pressed for the meaning of "nincompoop," Osuofia replies that it is a type of "rejected tree" in London. He then displays a shallow grasp of British social codes, about which the local school teacher must educate him. At the end of greetings, for instance, Osuofia must be sure to add "Sir," a point he comically over-rehearses. Throughout all of this well-timed and executed banter, the location of authority shifts between Osuofia and members of the crowd. So-called "traditional" markers of authority, such as age, class, and education are trumped by Osuofia's status as eminent/imminent traveler. As the scene closes, Osuofia calls the crowd's attention to his new way of walking, which he calls "moving according to the London." He struts, cane in hand, as a medium shot completes the revelation of how absurdly Osuofia interprets British culture – his suit pants are tucked into knee-high black socks, which culminate in white running shoes. Paul Gilroy writes in *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'* that, "he is redeemed by his suit, the signifier of British civilization."[62] Gilroy writes not about *Osuofia in London*, of course, but about a conservative political poster from 1983 – the same year as "Ghana must go"– which attempts to promote the Tory ideology of color-blindness. Pictured is a young black man in a slightly oversized and unfashionable suit – which Gilroy reads as "connotations of a job interview"– and a caption that reads, "Labor say's he's black. Tories say he's British."[63] In Gilroy's interpretation of the young man's suit, "Blacks are being invited to forsake all that marks them out as culturally distinct before real Britishness can be guaranteed."[64] Osuofia's suit, on the other hand, marks him out as neither African nor British, nor, it should be noted, as a hybrid of the two. As a farcical rogue, more like Charlie Chaplin's "Tramp" character than any African or British stereotype, Osuofia becomes a unique and unclassifiable figure. The multi-axial politics of location therefore coalesce around a performance of identity, complete with costume and movement, which allows Osuofia to place his body in an imagined version of London. This, in turn, affords him transgressive authority in Nigeria. The result is supposed to be ridiculous and outrageous – "rejected tree," "moving according to the London," hah! Who does he think he is? – but the irony is that when Osuofia arrives at Heathrow, he is greeted by a chauffeur and escorted to a beautiful white stretch

limousine. Once in Nigeria, Osuofia is, in spite of his dress and manner, a very rich man.

The outlandish ways in which Osuofia imagines London – he is, after all, an outlander – are not necessarily countered by his experiences there. As already noted, he becomes a rich man in London, like his brother before him, and because Osuofia is unaware that his auspicious welcome is not the London norm, he has no reason to forsake his cultural distinctions, dissemble, or assimilate. He points out the opening and closing of a bridge to passers-by, hunts pigeons in the park before stunned onlookers, and generally makes, for the sake of the film's viewers, a complete fool of himself. But Osuofia is absolutely unencumbered by double-consciousness. The ludicrous performance of class status that began in Nigeria continues unabated throughout his time in London. In contrast, Ben Okafor, the only other Nigerian character to appear in the London scenes, is unable to remain consistently invested in his performance of identity. When Osuofia meets him, Okafor rises from a large chair behind a large desk looking every bit the successful London solicitor. Osuofia ups the anti, however, by entering dressed as a village chief, which of course he is not, and pats Okafor with one of those ox-tail whisks emblematic of and reserved for chiefs. When Okafor speaks, it is with an aristocratic English accent to which Osuofia responds with incredulity:

> Are you talking to me? You are talking like Queen Elizabeth. Look at you. My friend, come down home and talk to me. Look at the fellow black man like me, my brother. I know you are trying to pretend. Speak a language that I will understand. Open your mouth when you want to talk to me. I am your brother.

The accent, as viewers later learn, is Okafor's Achilles' heel. He tries to persuade Osuofia to sign a stack of papers, but Osuofia has come only to collect bags and bags of currency, he reports, not to sign anything. Okafor escapes to the bathroom where, through the overt symbolism of a mirror, he looks into the camera and engages his double-consciousness. Speaking to the audience with a(n inauthentic) Nigerian accent, Okafor pleads:

> What kind of stubborn goat is this? Why is he being so difficult? I hate these semi-illiterate foreign clients. They get me so annoyed and give me problems and *wahala*.[65] When I get annoyed, I start to lose my British accent.

Then slipping back into his original accent, he continues: "My cultivated, English, natural accent. And I start to speak like my father." Finally, directly addressing the audience, Okafor wonders, "Are you laughing at me? You think I have a problem? You think I have a coconut problem?" The coconut problem, of course, is the most insidious consequence of double-consciousness. It is the problem of being dark on the outside, but white on the inside – with special reference to the tropics. Evident from his schizophrenic vacillation between Britishness and Igboness, we know that Okafor is more than just a coconut, but a coconut that has been split. Later in Part I, Okafor's car breaks down as he races to stop Osuofia and Samantha from leaving the country. He rants in his now uncontrollable Nigerian accent and, as two police officers approach him, belligerently declares that he is a lawyer and pushes them away, though to little avail. Being a lawyer, one of the officers reminds him, Okafor should know better than to confront the police. Therefore, unlike Osuofia, Okafor is unable to sustain his performance of identity – of either his Englishness or his lawyerlyness. When he yells at the police, he undergoes a complete performative breakdown, losing control of both class and cultural identification strategies and, in the process, losing his chance to steal Donatus's money. As Okafor is carried away, Osuofia and Samantha coast to the airport in their white limousine, holding glasses of white wine.

All of this whiteness, and the fact that Osuofia is performing an identity not exactly his own, might suggest that Osuofia is also a victim of double-consciousness. That identity performance began, however, in Nigeria, for the sake of other Nigerians, and continues when Osuofia returns to Nigeria in Part II. While Samantha flounders in Igbo society, Osuofia establishes himself as a "big man." Furthermore, docufiction genre tactics parody and undermine many of the problematic paradigms with which the film engages. Those tactics are revitalized in Part II as the voice-over begins:

> Africa, a vast, still largely unknown land of more people, languages, and cultures than anyone has ever been able to count. Well, all things being considered, maybe true civilization is what Osuofia and his bride will find in Africa.

So as Samantha nears her epiphany, according to the film, she is finding a kind of civilization available nowhere but in Africa. The simplistic irony of this insinuation is, of course, doubly conscious, but it plays out in a mischievous and convoluted way. Rather than counter neocolonial claims about Nigeria by portraying it as a paradise, or a land of perfect tolerance, the film deposits Samantha amongst a swarm of mocking and derisive characters. Osuofia's first wife, Ure, and her daughters, collude against Samantha, while many of the jokes they make fly right over her head. Indeed, they fly over the heads of many audience members as well. For instance, when a fight breaks out over a bucket, Ure calls Samantha "*ashawo*." Osuofia tells Samantha that she is being praised, that the term means "someone god created during the rainy season." In fact, *ashawo* is used all along the West African coast to mean "prostitute." Driving the nail in further, Osuofia claims that when Queen Elizabeth came to Nigeria the people gathered and sang "Queen Eliza, *ashawo*. Queen Eliza, *ashawo*." The joke, however, remains untranslated in the world of the film. Neither the message, nor the medium, is meant for Western audiences. Moreover, the relationship between various villagers and Samantha reflects, or twists, the relationships between Western host nations and immigrants, which are conventionally conceived of as welcoming on the surface, but hostile and derisive underneath. This is the reason that Samantha cannot stay in Nigeria after her epiphany. She preaches:

> We make judgments of people without really knowing them, and I'm guilty of that too. But now I know better. I heard so many things about your country, your people – so many horrible, negative things and I thought it was all true. I came here and I saw, I met loving people who don't sit in judgment on you, who aren't bothered about where you come from, or the color of your skin, how much money you have or don't have, but from the first time they met me, they opened open up their hearts with true love. I just wish

> more people could experience this and learn to see with their hearts, before they judge.

As she speaks, however, a doctor shakes his head and Ure frowns. During her time in Nigeria, Samantha has missed nearly everything that happened around her. She missed the fact that people judged her on the basis of her origin and skin color, and that they changed their relationships with Osuofia based merely on his new-found wealth. Her head, it seems, is not in the real Nigeria around her and she can therefore no longer stay. When Osuofia puts her in a car and watches it drive away, he seems to be relieved. Rather than bask in her gaze, he wants to be free of that gaze altogether.

According to Sandra Adell, however, the outside gaze of double-consciousness is not something of which one can so easily be relieved. The "other world," the world of the non-black, as she puts it, is "in fact, the Negro's world." But what if the conflation of the black and non-black worlds was understood as a process to engage in productively, rather than some kind of original sin that forever mars self-consciousness? The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah takes just this kind of stance when he makes the case for "cosmopolitan contamination." For him, contamination is the mixture of cultural elements fostered by those who embrace multiplicitous cultural paradigms. It is the counter-ideal to "cultural purity," which is an unrealistic invention of identity politics. The diffusion of modern media images and material products, which in some contexts is often described as "cultural imperialism," can therefore be virtuous rather than vile. As Appiah writes:

> Talk of cultural imperialism structuring the consciousness of those in the periphery treats [...] people [...] as tabulae rasae on which global capitalism's moving finger writes its message, leaving behind another homogenized consumer as it moves on. It is deeply condescending. And it isn't true.[66]

Here, Appiah implies that Western depictions of others do not necessarily construct the ways that others see themselves. He adds that, "Cultural consumers are not dupes. They can resist."[67] If so, then double-consciousness need not determine the kind of

Nollywood images that, as Utietiang writes, Africans "deserve." What they deserve, it seems, is a film industry that is willing to both engage in the politics of identity construction, and laugh at those politics. The industry might be able to effectively cooperate in the construction of African and African diaspora self-consciousness, not necessarily by producing great works of Sembene-like social criticism – as valuable as those may be – but merely by catering to African audiences, and avoiding the trap of self-censorship that is based on double-consciousness. Rather than Samantha's utopian vision, which hangs like a useless appendage on the end of the film, *Osuofia in London*'s real contribution to the discourse of African identity politics is found in its juxtaposition of the self-confident Osuofia and the insecure Okafor. While Osuofia gets the money, and the power to dole it out as he sees fit, Okafor gets a ride in a squad car. He who laughs last, it seems, laughs best.

## Notes

1. The Pidgin-language song "Osuofia Don Enter London," was written and recorder for the 2003 Nigerian popular film *Osuofia in London*. A music video was made, using clips from the film interspersed with images of singing musicians who are also dressed as various characters from the film. It was followed up by the less-successful "Osuofia Don Come Back O," recorded for Part II of the film. As of 10 December 2008, the "Osuofia Don Enter London" music video is available on Nollywood.com: <http://www.nollywood.com/video/Osuofia_don_enta_London>.
2. "Erediuiwa urges film makers to portray Nigeria positively," *Nigeria Films*, 10 Dec. 2008 <http://www.nigeriafilms.com/content.asp?contentid=1904&ContentTypeID=6>.
3. Unoma Azuah, "The near nullity of Nollywood," *Vangaurd Online* 23 Feb.2008, 10 Dec. 2008 <http://www.vanguardngr.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3552&Itemid=0>.
4. Azuah
5. Azuah
6. Azuah
7. "Project Outline," *The Nollywood Film Industry and the African Diaspora in the UK*, ed. Françoise Parent-Ugochukwu, 2008, Open University, London, 10 Dec. 2008 <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/nollywood-uk/documents/project-outline.htm>.
8. Sandra Adell, *Double Consciousness/Double Bind* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 19, her emphasis. While the context here is clearly an American one, the framework proposed by DuBois is applicable across

the Atlantic. Paul Gilroy, in his seminal treatment of race in Britain *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Black'* invokes DuBois in the first sentence of his introduction.

9. Bekeh Utietiang, "*Osuofia in London*: A Philosophical Perspective," *Nigerians in America* 10 Dec. 2008<http://.nigeriansinamerica.com/articles/572/1/Osuofia-In-London-A-PhilosophicalPerspective/Page1.html>.
10. Utietiang
11. Utietiang
12. Utietiang
13. *Osuofia in London*, dir. Kingsley Ogoro, perf. Nkem Owoh, Martha Derwent, and Charles Angiama, Kingsley Ogoro Productions, 2003.
14. *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, dir. Jamie Uys, perf. Marius Weyers, Sandra Prinsloo, and N!xau, CAT Films, 1980.
15. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 1996): 208.
16. Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 59.
17. Gilroy 58 and 59.
18. Gilroy 59.
19. *Wahala*: Hausa for "trouble." Used throughout Nigeria.
20. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006): 111.
21. Appiah 110.