

AFRICAN MEDIA IN AN AGE OF EXTRACTION



Nollywood Geographies

Amsterdam
University
Press

Noah Tsika

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Introduction

Nollywood's Spatial Frames

Abstract: Extraction represents one way of framing Nollywood's place in the world. As such, it can be broken up into smaller frames based on the specific natural resources profitably mined and harvested in Nigeria and elsewhere. From tin to petroleum, those resources are powerful political, economic, and aesthetic objects. They are also useful interpretive devices and objects of discourse, as mobile as the films that represent and embody them. Like Nollywood's, their genealogies are multiple, their past trajectories, whether in animist practice or violent conflict, vividly depicted in African films that attend to nature and the object world. *African Media in an Age of Extraction* proposes ways of "placing" Nollywood that attend to multiple scales—the local, the national, the regional, the continental, the planetary—as well as to natural environments and their continuous transformation by capital.

Keywords: Nollywood; Hollywood; extraction; natural resources; capitalism; globalization

"One can no more write world economic and political history properly without considering Africa than one can write African history as a pristinely indigenous story." — Frederick Cooper¹

This book began as a series of conversations with some of the members of Nollywood's youngest generation of filmmakers, with whom I initially met in order to better understand the industrial formation known as "New Nollywood," with its unprecedentedly high production budgets and pronounced

¹ Frederick Cooper, *Africa in the World: Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 10.

(though not exclusive) orientation toward theatrical distribution and exhibition.² I noticed that, rather than focusing on narrative and stylistic elements (so often centralized in elitist coverage of New Nollywood as a source of allegedly “superior” films), most of my interlocutors were emphasizing the present political economy of Nigerian media, calling attention to production, distribution, and exhibition strategies that, billed as reflections of a “free media system” marked by healthy capitalist competition, are actually, it would seem, anything but.³ Many, like Mildred Okwo (whose award-winning films include 2012’s *The Meeting*), brought up the matter of vertical integration, tying current oligopoly conditions in Nigeria (where local firms like FilmHouse and Silverbird dominate theatrical distribution and exhibition while remaining heavily involved in production) to the characteristic business practices of Hollywood’s so-called studio era, with its five “major” companies (Paramount, Fox, Warner Bros., MGM, and RKO) operating at all scales and in all sectors of the business of motion pictures, both at home and abroad. In countless hours of conversation and correspondence, I never brought up Hollywood’s pioneering studio system; I never had to.⁴ Everyone, it seemed, was eager to remind me about US film

2 Alessandro Jedlowski has succinctly described New Nollywood as “a movement that intends to promote higher production values for Nollywood films while targeting the global film market.” Alessandro Jedlowski, “Exporting Nollywood: Nigerian Video Filmmaking in Europe,” in *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, ed. Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 171–185 [179]. For more on “New Nollywood,” see Moradewun Adejunmobi, “Neoliberal Rationalities in Old and New Nollywood,” *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (2015): 31–53; Jonathan Haynes, “New Nollywood: Kunle Afolayan,” *Black Camera* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 53–73; Connor Ryan, “New Nollywood: A Sketch of Nollywood’s Metropolitan New Style,” *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (2015): 55–76; and James Yékú, “In Praise of Ostentation: Social Class in Lagos and the Aesthetics of Nollywood’s Ówàmbè Genres,” *African Studies* 80, no. 3–4 (2021): 434–450.

3 These respondents thus anticipated the claims of Brian Larkin in his 2019 essay “The Grounds of Circulation.” Larkin is strongly in favor of “plac[ing] systems of distribution and the material structures of film at the center of analysis,” and he argues that the “roots of nationalist African cinema lay in political economy, in the analysis of an economic system of dispossession and the role of cinema ... in that dispossession.” Whether tweeting about the effects of monopoly capital or the constraints that individual streamers place on creativity, today’s filmmakers are effectively extending this tradition of critical political economy. Brian Larkin, “The Grounds of Circulation: Rethinking African Film and Media,” *Politique africaine* 153, no. 1 (January 2019): 105–126.

4 Tejaswini Ganti saw something similar in her interactions with Bollywood producers. As she reports, “I usually did not have to actively solicit comparisons from filmmakers, for in the course of talking about filmmaking, Hollywood usually came up in some sort of fashion—either as an object of admiration or a site of contrast.” Ganti continues, “The awareness Hindi filmmakers exhibit about Hollywood—or Western modes of filmmaking—and the contrast they draw with

history. Nigeria's FilmOne, they convincingly insisted, was like the MGM of 1934 or the Columbia of 1987—a producer and distributor with its very own theater chain (FilmHouse), operating in a political economy free of any explicit (or enforced) injunctions against the bundling of manufacturing, wholesaling, and retailing. Yet FilmHouse, however much it dominates the large-screen exhibition sector in Nigeria, is also a distinctly Hollywood-dominated theater chain: it is, through FilmOne, the exclusive regional distributor of Disney and Warner Bros. properties, filling theaters from Kano to Benin City with Marvel movies and the latest entries in various DC Comics franchises.⁵ Its very solvency—and thus its capacity to fund the production of certain Nigerian films—depends on its serving as a wholesaler for Hollywood.

While much could be said about the educational backgrounds of the young Nigerian filmmakers with whom I spoke—about, that is, their exposure to American film history in universities in West Africa, Western Europe, and North America—I look at their recurrent references to the US Supreme Court's 1948 *Paramount* decision (and to its decisive Reagan-era reversal) less as anthropological objects indexing time spent at institutions of higher education than as honest appraisals of certain global historical continuities in the complex and ever-challenging business of film exhibition. Tejaswini Ganti observes a similar phenomenon in her work on the contemporary Hindi film industry, noting Hollywood's "constant symbolic, metaphoric, and narrative presence in Bombay."⁶ That Hollywood remains a central point of reference in the remarks of Nigerian filmmakers suggests, first and foremost, an awareness of the industry's continued capacity to structure the theatrical marketplace in Nigeria, both via its own practices of block booking and as a source of corporate inspiration for local, vertically integrated firms like

their own working style, can also be understood as an expression of their cosmopolitanism." Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 237, 241.

5 As Manthia Diawara observes, "An equal partnership is always a myth because of the power relation imbedded in the terms of the partnership: as long as there is a donor and a receiver, there will be an unequal power balance." Manthia Diawara, *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 80–81. As I have detailed elsewhere, Nigeria's biggest exhibitors are recipients of IMAX technologies (including IMAX's Digital Media Remastering Process, which allows for the projection of certain Nollywood films) and other systems associated with Digital Cinema Initiatives (and thus with Disney, Paramount, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Universal, and Warner Bros. Studios, all of which then require the booking of their own films at their own rates). Noah Tsika, *Cinematic Independence: Constructing the Big Screen in Nigeria* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 19–20, 136, 147, 164–165, 171–173.

6 Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*, 14.

Silverbird and FilmHouse, which efficiently do Hollywood's bidding while bolstering their own oligopolistic power.

The periodic attempts of foreign capital to shape and profit from Nigerian media have not always been coercive. As modernization theorist Daniel Lerner put it in the late 1960s, "The long era of imperialism (subordination) is recently ended: the campaign for international development (equalization) has just begun." Lerner continued, "Under the new conditions of globalism, [international communication] has largely replaced the coercive means by which colonial territories were seized and held."⁷ Yet it remains necessary to emphasize the extent to which these "new conditions of globalism" have, in fact, entailed and even required varying degrees of coercion, violence, and especially extraction and appropriation. Media expansion has, for example, always been coextensive with military expansion; the US Departments of State and Commerce, along with various lobbying bodies (including the Motion Picture Export Association [MPEA], founded in 1945), pursue both in tandem, and for overlapping capitalist reasons.⁸ Reinhold Wagnleitner has written of the way in which imperial ambitions, including Hollywood's, are often "wrapped in a rhetorical veil of terms" that include "disinterest" and "nonintervention"—"set phrases" that are as pervasive as they are patently unconvincing. "Evidence of an American pivot to Africa is almost everywhere on the continent," observes Nick Turse. "Few, however, have paid much notice."⁹ US military projects abound in Nigeria, but they are not always recognizable as such. In fact, they are often camouflaged by commercialization—by, for instance, the use of commercial freight vendors to deliver troops, armaments, and other supplies—as well as by US military partnerships with Nigeria's armed forces.¹⁰ A similar pattern of camouflaging occurs in Hollywood's pursuit of so-called "joint ventures," the flashy results of which some see as examples of strictly indigenous enterprise. This is, perhaps, but one example of the broader phenomenon that Rachel Harvey describes in terms of "the global in the particular": the

7 Quoted in Jonathan Hardy, *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2014), 158.

8 For an account of how the US Department of Commerce envisioned Nigeria in the wake of independence, see "Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa," *Printers' Ink*, January 13, 1961, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

9 Nick Turse, *Tomorrow's Battlefield: US Proxy Wars and Secret Ops in Africa* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 40.

10 The US military has an agreement to regularly use, among other airfields, Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Nigeria. *Ibid.*, 48.

global of Hollywood is embedded in, and partly constitutes, the particular of FilmHouse or Silverbird, with their national (Nigerian) and regional (West African) aspirations.¹¹

Still, it remains controversial to claim that Hollywood and Nollywood, no less than Western capitalism and postcolonial African economies, are co-constituting—that we cannot adequately understand one without addressing the other. After delivering a public lecture on my book *Cinematic Independence: Constructing the Big Screen in Nigeria* (2022), I was asked by several audience members to “address the informal economy.” Where, these respondents wanted to know, was the “informality” that they had been trained to expect as an emblem of Africanity and a powerful cultural counter to foreign intervention? Why, in other words, was I talking about government contracts and the well-oiled, indeed rule-bound, operations of global capital? Why wasn’t I, as one person put it in a telling gloss on the work of Ramon Lobato, “searching the shadows”?¹² I had a simple answer: multiplex exhibition, which represents a major real estate investment requiring extensive acreage, is not, and has never been, a “shadow economy”; one cannot run a modern multiplex “informally,” beyond the ambit of powerful state and private interests, especially if one is to show big-budget productions in a manner compliant with Digital Cinema Initiatives (DCI). A joint venture of Disney, Paramount, Universal, Warner Bros., and Sony Pictures Entertainment, DCI has a veritable stranglehold on modern exhibition. Much of what makes multiplexing technologically possible, anywhere in the world, is proprietary—the brainchild and lifeblood of various North American corporations, such as IMAX and MediaMation. This is not to deny the predominance of the informal economy in places like Nigeria, or to efface the local specificities that mark transnational corporate forms. Indeed, even the precise configuration of concessions in the lobby of a Nigerian multiplex, though clearly conditioned by foreign megabrands (including Coke and Pepsi) and various transnational pacts, includes some unique products and services. (You aren’t likely to find an iScream stand or a Soul Food Café kiosk in an AMC in New York or Los Angeles, but these are among the staples of the Nigerian multiplex experience, as “localized” as Fanta or BlackBerry.) Multiplexing nevertheless offers a powerful indication of “the

11 Rachel Harvey, “The Persistence of the Particular in the Global,” in *Framing the Global: Entry Points for Research*, ed. Hilary E. Kahn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 182–205 [183].

12 Ramon Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* (London: Palgrave, 2012).

limits of informality,” to borrow a phrase from Connor Ryan.¹³ It is hardly alone. In fact, no spaces of professional film projection stand apart from Euro-American capital for the simple reason that their essential technologies, including lenses, lamphouses, and shutters, are European and American—a metropolitan provenance that the digital turn has not displaced. German projectors, Belgian screens, and American platters are currently in use in digital cinemas all over the world, including in West Africa (which does not manufacture any of its own). Brian Larkin suggests that, prior to the rise of “international-standard” multiplex chains like Silverbird and FilmHouse, going to the movies in Nigeria was not based in any way on “the technical, political, and social formation of the urban West,” and that the habit has, in fact, “lain largely outside of [the Euro-American] purview.”¹⁴ This may be true, to a certain degree, of makeshift viewing centers where Nollywood videos could be watched in the 1990s, at a time when Nigeria was a pariah state, and it may similarly describe the distinctly Lagosian phenomenon of streetcorner spectatorship, wherein commuters pause and congregate around demo televisions on display in electronics shops (though even this practice is hardly unique to Nigeria, as anyone who has ever been to a Best Buy can attest). But if we are to take infrastructure seriously, as Larkin has long advocated, then we must attend to its materiality—to what it is and where it comes from—and not simply to the adaptations that it is made to undergo as it travels. Usability may be altered or transformed by social, political, and religious contingencies that arise far beyond the point of invention, development, and manufacture, but it is certainly not inaugurated by them. At the same time, technicity is unimaginable without natural resources. The so-called silver screen contained actual silver sourced from numerous countries. (Manufactured in New England, upstate New York, and the American Midwest, Glowmeter’s Magniglow Astrolite screens, which, beginning in the early 1950s, used an abundance of pure silver to enhance brightness and reflectivity, were installed in thousands of movie theaters the world over.) These are, plainly, global interdependencies. If it makes little sense to disentangle Nigerian cinemas from Indian and American movies, it makes even less sense to act as if African natural resources are not at the operational core of most media technologies, from projection screens to smartphones. A monolithic perspective on Nollywood, or Nigeria, risks

13 Connor Ryan, “Nollywood and the Limits of Informality: A Conversation with Tunde Kelani, Bond Emeruwa, and Emem Isong,” *Black Camera* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 168–85.

14 Brian Larkin, “The Cinematic Milieu: Technological Evolution, Digital Infrastructure, and Urban Space,” *Public Culture* 33, no. 3 (September 2021): 313–348 [328].

perpetuating tired dichotomies of global and local, center and periphery. Matters are always more complicated, and more affiliated, than they may appear.¹⁵

The Formal Turn in a Warming World

A crucial component of Nollywood's early claim to fame was its sheer self-determination—the fact that it wasn't answerable to European governments, American corporations, or the various norms regulating global theatrical exhibition. What is happening to the industry now—its partial absorption by transnational corporate capital and its growing orientation toward “lifestyle” brands and “cosmopolitan” content—suggests, perhaps, Tim Wu's theory of “the Cycle,” understood as the “typical progression” of media forms “from open to closed system.”¹⁶ This is not to deny that restrictive, even exclusionary deal-making practices have been employed by the “mafia” of local marketers (or traders)—the original sources of financing and distribution for direct-to-video Nollywood films, as oligopolistic in their own way as the Nigerian multiplex owners. But it is clear that an aspect, an echelon, of the industry is being reborn, and not just for the big screen but also to serve the interests of various brands. “The Nigerian film industry provides a dramatic example of Africa's long history of unequal and unstable insertion into the structures of global capitalism,” notes Jonathan Haynes. “Rapid developments in the period from 2007 to 2015, tied to the global economy, are reshaping [Nollywood] and challenging its original popular, grassroots character as transnational corporations have come to dominate the international distribution of Nigerian films and have begun to produce their own original films and television serials.”¹⁷ Tunde Kelani's musical biopic *Ayinla* (2021),

15 It is possible even to view Nollywood as exercising a certain cultural imperialism, though few have been as vituperative in making this claim as Olivier Barlet, who writes of the industry “invading and destabilizing practically all the sub-Saharan markets with its aggressive dumping and marketing practices.” Nollywood, for Barlet, “spills beyond its borders, crushing artists in other countries.” Olivier Barlet, *Contemporary African Cinema* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 365–366.

16 Tim Wu, *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 6.

17 Jonathan Haynes, “Neoliberalism, Nollywood, and Lagos,” in *Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscapes of Film and Media* (London: Wallflower Press, 2016), 59–75 [59]. In an earlier essay, Haynes explains of Nollywood's early years, “The ‘video boom’ arose on a commercial basis: not the corporate, capitalist commercialism of Hollywood, but the commerce of the African market—an enormous energy of exchange, but without large capital formations, bank loans, or

though set in the historical past (the film's subject, the great Apala musician Ayinla Omowura, died in 1980, at the end of Nigeria's oil boom), reflects on these present industrial conditions, allegorizing them through the story of Ajala Promotions, whose founder and CEO (played by New Nollywood director Kunle Afolayan) pushes formal contracts on performers who are not accustomed—and who are perhaps constitutionally averse—to signing them.¹⁸ He also looks to create opportunities abroad, announcing, "They say there's no room for Apala music in Europe, but we're going to take Apala to London!" "As a matter of fact," he adds, "we won't stop at London. We'll go to other parts of Europe! We'll take it to America!" Ajala's vision is global in scope, his attachment to formality a means of leaping over prejudice and presumption in pursuit of international exposure and heightened profits. *Ayinla* itself benefited from such formality, such "extraversion": Kelani's film was supported by First Bank of Nigeria, and it was later licensed to Netflix. (The director himself appears in *Ayinla* as what he once was: a cameraman for Western Nigeria Television in Ibadan.) There is something oddly moving, searching, and self-reflective about Kelani's exuberant musical biopic, which seems to use the past to comment on the present—an allegorical operation activated, in part, by the casting of today's top auteurs in acting roles. At one point in the film, Afolayan's promoter tells a young reporter (played by Ade Laoye), "All we're trying to do is protect the image and the legacy of the Yoruba. And we plan to take Yoruba culture around Africa and the world." Back in the journalist's bedroom, next to framed portraits of Che Guevara and other revolutionary leaders, is a poster for the Hollywood film *The African Queen* (John Huston, 1951), which was shot largely on location in Uganda and Congo. In *Ayinla*, inspiration for Nigerian cultural production comes from a variety of sources, including Hollywood. The results—Apala music, filmed theater, casual attire—enjoy a range of far-flung outlets. It is clearly no longer the case that, as Haynes once put it, "no big corporations make money from the [Nollywood] industry or exploit it to train audiences

much relationship to the formal sector at all. This business is a matter of bundles of unconvertible and more or less untraceable currency rapidly changing hands ..." Haynes concludes this earlier essay by observing, "Large corporations and banks are circling around Nollywood, trying to figure out how to get involved, seeing enormous potential profits if the considerable problems of interfacing with Nollywood's unruly business culture can be solved." Jonathan Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination* 4, no. 1 (2011): 67–90 [67–68, 85]. See also Alessandro Jedlowski, "African Media and the Corporate Takeover: Video Film Circulation in the Age of Neoliberal Transformations," *African Affairs* 116, no. 465 (October 2017): 671–691.

18 In Kelani's 2014 film *Dazzling Mirage*, Afolayan plays the founder, president, and CEO of PDR Media, a real-life company based in Ikeja.

to be consumers in a capitalist economy,” and *Ayinla*, albeit indirectly, expresses some ambivalence about this development. If Nollywood can hardly be quarantined from the “international neoliberal regime of an open media environment,” it need not be crushed by it, either.¹⁹ A visionary like Ajala can make all the difference, and Nollywood has more than a few such hype men.

At my talk in early 2022, I was accused of employing an ethnocentric frame—of, that is, seeking to render Nigeria “intelligible” through recourse to Hollywood history. But I did not need to impose Hollywood on Nigeria: Hollywood had already done that, except where it had been invited by various Nigerian government bodies and private entrepreneurs to participate in the development of film and media in the country. One audience member shot back that, when he was growing up in northern Nigeria several decades ago, he only saw Egyptian and Lebanese films in Nigerian cinemas. “That does not mean,” I replied, “that Hollywood was not involved in getting those films to Nigeria—MGM and Paramount, to take just two examples, operated out of Cairo and Beirut after 1945, including as international distributors of ‘local’ films.” Indeed, as I attempt to document in the book, Lebanese middlemen, their ambitions centered on Nigeria, were in many cases obtaining all manner of prints directly from Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) member companies eager to dump B Westerns and other subsequent-run attractions on African audiences. However ostentatious, Hollywood is also canny enough to camouflage itself, setting up shell companies on the global stage or simply renaming its far-flung offshoots to meet cultural expectations and reflect market realities on the ground. (In this sense, peripatetic Hollywood companies, which successfully resisted Nigeria’s indigenization efforts through disguised compliance during the oil-boom era, are not unlike the American oil tankers that sail under Panamanian and Liberian flags of convenience, the better to impede prosecution for their many violations of maritime safety laws.)²⁰ Speaking at the 1986 Conference on Communication at Bayero University Kano, Brendan Shehu, another northerner and, at the time, the general manager of the Nigerian Film Corporation, addressed “damaging foreign cultural influences [that] envelop the minds of our youths.” But he omitted mention of Hollywood imports, reserving his scorn, strangely enough, for what he characterized as “the Chinese and Japanese culture of self-immolation,

19 Haynes, “African Cinema and Nollywood,” 75.

20 On oil tankers, see Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57.

hara-kiri, kamikaze, and the martial arts,” as well as for the popularity of Indian fashions among Nigerian women (who “want to be more Indian than Nigerian,” he complained).²¹ Just a few years later, however, Shehu was warmly greeting Kodak representatives in Jos, where he cheerfully identified “investment prospects for Americans interested in Nigeria” and even celebrated “the genesis of a healthy business relationship” between the NFC and Hollywood.²² Yet Hollywood, represented by Kodak, was there primarily to assess (or reassess) Nigeria’s natural resources—including its lakes, rivers, trees, and cotton—for their roles in the production and processing of celluloid film. Hoping that Hollywood would do more than simply conduct comparative chemical analyses of the groundwater in Lagos and Jos, Shehu attempted to tout his country’s forests and streams as visual attractions unto themselves, “cinematic” in their natural splendor. Of course, the very extractions that Kodak was on hand to test and promote—the very depletions of water, minerals, and fibers necessary for celluloid film, as confirmed in the company’s feasibility studies—risked distorting and diminishing such tropical grandeur.²³

21 Brendan Shehu, “The Nigerian Film Corporation: Functions and Prospects,” in *No ... Not Hollywood: Essays & Speeches of Brendan Shehu*, ed. Hyginus Ekwuazi and Yakubu Nasidi (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1992), 1–9 [2]. When Eric Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Export Association of America, visited Nigeria in the summer of 1960, he was struck by the fact that subtitled Indian films outnumbered American films by a factor of more than two, and that they “appear[ed] to be the favorites” among Nigerian moviegoers; he also observed the presence of “films of other nations” on the country’s commercial screens. “Johnston Finds Opportunities in Nigeria for Theatres and Films,” *Motion Picture Daily*, September 9, 1960, 1, 3 [1]. Later, Johnston wrote that “Africa is becoming the film-crossroads of the world. Indian films ... are very popular there. The tendency of Indian films to run long adds to their popularity, rather than reducing it. Moreover, African audiences feel they can identify with the hardships and hazards and hopes of Indian life as they see it in these films.” Eric Johnston, “Africa in Not-So-Slow Motion,” *Variety* 221, no. 6 (January 4, 1961): 17. The numerical dominance of Indian films was a relatively new factor in 1960. Just over two decades earlier, the Motion Picture Division of the US Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce noted that films screened in Nigeria were “chiefly British and American,” with the latter being especially well-received. Nathan D. Golden, *Review of Foreign Film Markets During 1937* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Commerce, 1938), 216. A follow-up report, prepared the next year, registered the presence in Nigeria of “several Arabic films produced in Egypt.” Nathan D. Golden, *Review of Foreign Film Markets During 1938* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Commerce, 1939), 363. For a later, French-language account of the exportation of Arabic-language Egyptian films to Nigeria, see G. Turquan, “Le Grand succès des films en langue arabe,” *La Cinématographie française*, no. 1451 (January 19, 1952), 5–6 [5]. The article, somewhat misleadingly, classifies Nigeria as an “Arabic-speaking country,” and it does not specify where, exactly, Egyptian films were exhibited.

22 Shehu, “*On the Occasion of the Visit of American Businessmen to the NFC Headquarters*,” in *No ... Not Hollywood*, 157–159 [157].

23 Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller have provided one of the most thorough accounts of Kodak’s reliance on natural resources in *Greening the Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Extraction has both facilitated and obstructed filmmaking in Nigeria. For every project that depicts the injurious search for metals, minerals, and hydrocarbons (such as Kunle Afolayan's Netflix-distributed 2023 drama *Ìjògbòn*, parts of which were shot at an active mine near Nigeria's border with Benin), many others must try to sidestep the habitat destruction that they do not seek to thematize. When Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*—a period piece, set prior to the rise of Eastern Nigeria's coal economy—was adapted for Nigerian television in the mid-1980s, cinematographer Yusuf Mohammed had to be careful to avoid framing the gaping, dormant mines and other scars of modern extraction still evident throughout the hills of Enugu, where the program was shot on location in an attempt to capture something of area's landscapes as they might have looked before 1917, when the journal *West Africa* excitedly declared Udi “one of the world's great coal fields.”²⁴ Reconstructing pre-conquest Udi required scrupulous avoidance of post-conquest collieries. Essential to film's functionality, extraction also spoils the scenery for filmmakers looking to shoot outside—unless, like Afolayan, they intend to depict precisely such spoilage.²⁵ The open-pit mine where *Ìjògbòn* was shot, its toxic tailings threatening to seep across the Beninese border (thus recalling the Franco-German co-production *Kameradschaft*, G. W. Pabst's classic 1931 account of transborder excavation), is located near Afolayan's KAP Film Village and Resort, a movie studio and tourist center in Oyo State. In Nigeria, as in the United States, film-production hubs often double as holiday destinations; the line between an active lot and a leisure park can be thin or nonexistent. And just as urban oil derricks (camouflaged or not) are visible from Hollywood's studio tours, signs of extraction are abundantly evident from the vantage of Nigeria's film villages, offering a conspicuous index of cinema's entwinement with resource removal. Whether the illegal mining of minerals carried out by the citizens of Oyo State (as seen in *Ìjògbòn*) or the “legitimate” drilling of oil by Shell in the Delta region where so-called Asaba films are made, prospecting is never far from Nollywood's diverse sites of production. Such sites are Nollywood geographies—social and natural landscapes that the industry makes

Shehu's earlier descriptions of celluloid's climate costs confirm the arguments of Maxwell and Miller while relating Kodak's consultative fieldwork in Lagos and Jos to the company's extensive footprint in its home base of Rochester, New York.

24 *West Africa*, February 24, 1917: 76.

25 Of course, location shooting is itself destructive, given, among other factors, the transportation of equipment via three-ton grip trucks on roads often built and paved expressly for the purpose. See LeMenanger, *Living Oil*, 101.

visible as local phenomena reflecting, initiating, opposing, or standing in ambivalent relation to global trends.²⁶

There are Nollywood films that assume audience knowledge of resource extraction and its often-destabilizing effects. In the pointedly titled *Dark October* (Toka McBaror, 2023), which takes place in and around Port Harcourt, oil production occurs entirely offscreen and is alluded to only sporadically, as when the mother of a university student exhorts her son to “graduate First Class, then get a job at Shell.” The film, based on the 2012 lynching of four geology students accused of theft in Rivers State, centers on social discontent and mob justice in South-South Nigeria, a geopolitical zone with a unique extractive history, one that may not be readily discernable to outsiders, despite decades of international press attention to Shell’s corporate actions there. When I screened *Dark October* in my course on the cinemas of West Africa, my undergraduate students found it altogether perplexing—until I reminded them of the devastating impact of oil drilling on the Niger Delta region, at which point the film’s representation of social disorder suddenly made sense. As Stephanie LeMenanger’s work on petroleum culture has made clear, we tend to forget the risks of extraction when not directly confronted with its violence, and we do so as a condition of living in the modern world. (LeMenanger recognizes a “strange transience” in journalistic and other accounts even of catastrophic oil spills that wreak environmental havoc for years on end.)²⁷ Accustomed to depictions of Metropolitan Lagos, my students were unprepared for a film that shows only the devastating aftereffects of oil capitalism in a far different part of the country. *Dark October* purposely omits views of oil pollution, petro-piracy, and climate change, leaving the viewer to fill in the extractive gaps. The film is about the brutal actions of a community forced to fend for itself amid the ongoing depredations of Shell. Is it really any wonder that the community’s members make scapegoats of university students set to join the company’s payroll? One such student dreams of being “the man with the biggest oil company in Port Harcourt,” his aspirations almost entirely conditioned by petrocapi-talism. He cannot escape the oil-centered dreams of previous generations of Nigerians, even as he rejects the music, styles of speech, and general conservatism of his elders, who, for their part, recoil at his adoption of African American Vernacular English. Nigeria’s oil economy is the one constant here, as enduring as it

26 Connor Ryan provides an especially fruitful theorization of ambivalence as a condition of urban life in a Lagos conditioned but not entirely defined by Nollywood. Connor Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils: Nollywood and Nigerian City Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023).

27 LeMenanger, *Living Oil*, 22.

is disastrous. The young man and three of his friends have the profound misfortune to set foot in explosive Aluu, whose horizons have also been circumscribed by oil and gas, albeit in entirely negative ways, with no modern jobs available to local residents and traditional occupations like fishing and farming rendered all but impossible by the combined effects of pollution and climate change. The community, exploited and underserved, has reached its breaking point, and it is into this cauldron that the film's main characters so ingeniously step, with tragic results.

Still other films seem to ignore extraction altogether even as they linger on the high standard of living that the energy economy has made possible for some. Extraction's absence is especially conspicuous in the wildly successful *Wedding Party 2: Destination Dubai* (Niyi Akinmolayan, 2017), which cuts back and forth between two oil-producing countries without ever addressing the specific resource connection. An early, almost offhand reference to the oil wealth of one Nigerian family is the film's only allusion to petroculturalism, and it is followed by lavish views of the sort of development that resource extraction has underwritten in both Lekki and the Emirates. This frothy sequel sold even more tickets than its smash-hit predecessor; it was marketed as pure, uncomplicated escapism, like so many New Nollywood films. Yet its ignorance of oil seems almost willful. It places the human and urban beneficiaries of oil revenues and infrastructures on display in strangely sterile geographies stripped of all signs of organic life, save for the occasional, cosmetically situated palm tree.

To deny that foreign capital and transnational extraction have been salient factors in Nigeria's cultures of the moving image is to naively insist on precisely the sort of "pristinely indigenous story" that Frederick Cooper critiques, and to revert to the very dichotomization of "tradition" and "modernity" that scholars of African cinema have done so much to contest and supplant.²⁸ As Haynes points out, "Nollywood embraces and absorbs transnational media forms"; the films that it and other African industries produce "are in large part a response to Hollywood, Bollywood, and Hong Kong and do not spring immaculately from some pristine African authenticity." African filmmakers, whatever their national locations and individual dispositions, can hardly escape (to quote one of Haynes's more revealing environmental metaphors) "the floods and torrents of transnational media commerce and transnational media forms."²⁹ Nor can they avoid the causes and effects of

28 See, for instance, Jude Akudinobi, "Tradition/Modernity and the Discourse of African Cinema," *Iris*, no. 18 (Spring 1995): 25–37.

29 Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," 74.

climate change—the literal floods and actual torrents that threaten the very existence of Nigeria’s coastal multiplexes, and that, at a minimum, often make going to the movies difficult for both drivers and pedestrians who can generally afford to do so. (Like New York City, Lagos has been expanding into flood zones for a long time.) As Birgit Meyer has made clear, Pentecostalism offers a sort of portal to the global for hundreds of millions of Africans.³⁰ But the global has a way of making itself felt irrespective of spiritual or economic congress. Climate change and associated environmental concerns offer their own, albeit alarming, engines of parity.³¹ They are among the “powerful commonalities in the history of cinema across Africa” (and, indeed, the world).³² Latent (though sometimes quite explicit) in the celluloid tradition, these rather ominous wellsprings of worldliness now connect Hollywood and Nollywood in ways that we would do well to investigate. In his work on the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico, Michael Watts refers to such connections as “family resemblances.”³³ They are “frontiers” that not only mirror one another but also interact and overlap in ways that film makes tangible. I am interested, then, in taking literally another of Haynes’s scalar metaphors, and drawing out the climatic implications of the idea that, in studying cinema in the twenty-first century, we are in fact “dealing with an art form that is produced and consumed in a flood.”³⁴ Perhaps the late anthropologist Fernando Coronil was right to advocate, as Jennifer Wenzel so succinctly puts it, “a shift from political economy to political ecology.”³⁵ Defining the latter as “a discipline concerned with the political, economic, and cultural aspect of conflicts over natural resources,” Wenzel

30 Birgit Meyer, “The Power of Money: Politics, Occult Forces, and Pentecostalism in Ghana,” *African Studies Review* 41, no. 3 (1998): 15–37; Birgit Meyer, “Praise the Lord: Popular Cinema and Pentecostalist Style in Ghana’s New Public Sphere,” *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 1 (February 2004): 92–110; Birgit Meyer, “Religious Revelation, Secrecy, and the Limits of Visual Representation,” *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 4 (December 2006): 431–453.

31 James McCann, “Climate and Causation in African History,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32, no. 2–3 (1999): 261–279.

32 Haynes, “African Cinema and Nollywood,” 68. For more on the centrality of environmental degradation to these cinema histories, see Jennifer Lynn Peterson, *Cinema’s Ecological Past: Film History, Nature, and Endangerment Before 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

33 Michael Watts, “Oil Frontiers: The Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico,” in *Oil Culture*, ed. Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 189–210 [190, 206].

34 Haynes, “African Cinema and Nollywood,” 81.

35 Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Jennifer Wenzel, “Petro-Magic-Realism Revisited: Unimagining and Reimagining the Niger Delta,” in *Oil Culture*, 211–225 [214]. See also Michael Watts,

has persuasively insisted that Nigerian literary history be read in relation to extraction.³⁶ Might Nigerian film history be similarly positioned? That question was implicit in *Cinematic Independence*, as I sought to account for the morphology of the movie theater in a country where even artificial atolls have IMAX screens—where sands dredged from the Atlantic create literal platforms for Hollywood and Nollywood. Here, I want to draw out some of the linkages between the two industries as they intersect on the literal and conceptual terrains of extraction.

At its inception, the project of a postcolonial African cinema had as one of its central aims the elucidation of the international economic order. Political economy was understood to operate on a global scale, and even nationalist African cinema was expected to enter a dialectical relationship with it. African culture was, according to an influential manifesto produced in Algiers in 1969, “a living expression in the world.”³⁷ Rejecting the sort of polemic that has reified difference and elided important continuities, Brian Larkin calls for a more expansive definition of “film in Africa” that would account for “a much broader cinematic ecology,” one necessarily inclusive of Hollywood titles and of colonial and postcolonial educational forms.³⁸ But I cannot share Larkin’s assertion that Nigeria’s spaces of film exhibition, however impoverished or idiosyncratic, have fallen beyond the West’s commercial and conceptual horizons despite relying on the West’s technological systems, from video projectors to flatscreen TVs.³⁹ The open-air cinemas of northern Nigeria may well have been distinct from the West’s roofed movie theaters (though Larkin is careful to note their general resemblance to drive-ins and other outdoor arrangements well known in the Global North), but they also served as negative inspiration for American architects, Hollywood studios, and other Western agents interested in constructing hardtop cinemas in rainy Lagos. In its specific modernization push, initiated even before Nigerian independence, the MPAA repeatedly cited what it did *not* want to see in Nigeria—namely, more of the same. “Frankly, Nigerian theaters aren’t the best in Africa,” noted

Petro-Violence: Some Thoughts on Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology (Berkeley: Berkeley Workshop on Environmental Politics, Institute of International Studies, 1999).

36 Wenzel, “Petro-Magic-Realism Revisited,” 212. See also Jennifer Wenzel, “Petro-Magic-Realism: Towards a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature,” *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006): 449–464.

37 “Pan-African Cultural Manifesto,” *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 13, no. 1 (Fall 2021): 19–31 [22].

38 Larkin, “The Grounds of Circulation,” 107.

39 Larkin, “The Cinematic Milieu,” 343.

the association's 1960 report, which bemoaned the "open-air affairs" that "show only one program nightly ... when it doesn't rain."⁴⁰ Even the lowliest Nigerian exhibition centers were never "outside of [the West's] purview," as Larkin puts it.⁴¹ If anything, they motivated Western companies to complain, conspire, and construct.

"How could I have known that something called 'the Washington consensus' could be responsible for the poor quality of the movie being shown inside a theater in a Lagos neighborhood?" asks Akin Adeşokan, recalling his filmgoing experiences in early-1980s Nigeria. Adeşokan's conception of "global aesthetics" firmly situates Nollywood in relation to forms of cultural production that span Africa and the Atlantic world, without saddling the industry "with the burden of 'representativeness.'"⁴² The celebrated mirror scene in the Nollywood blockbuster *Osuofia in London* (Kingsley Ogoro, 2003) supports Adeşokan's point, vividly recalling a similar moment in Melvin Van Peebles's 1968 film *The Story of a Three-Day Pass*, which opens with a Black American soldier, stationed in France, mercilessly interrogating his own reflection. The "Uncle Tom syndrome" that so troubles Van Peebles's protagonist, and about which he repeatedly berates his mirror image, becomes the "coconut problem" that plagues *Osuofia's* Ben Okafor. A Nigerian film shot in England shares with an American film shot in France a mordant depiction of DuBoisian double-consciousness: the mirror reflection, with all its surface "reality," simultaneously serves as a projection screen for a Black man's racial self-imagination. "[D]eeply invested in ideas as they transcend their national or geographical provenances," Adeşokan powerfully communicates his "conviction that the fate of the African continent and the fate of the rest of the world are inextricably linked."⁴³ Cinema has sometimes sought to expose the lack of sophistication of those who would believe otherwise. "There'll be no worldly associations in the bush," predicts Audrey Hepburn's naïve Belgian novice before embarking for Central Africa in Fred Zinnemann's *The Nun's Story* (1959), a film that, shot on location along the Congo River by a second-unit director who had just made a feature-length docudrama about Nigerian timber, forcefully undoes her parochial assumptions, showing the complex interpenetration of seemingly distant continents. In the compellingly titled *Everything Is Sampled*, Adeşokan makes a strong case

40 "Johnston Finds Opportunities in Nigeria for Theatres and Films," 3.

41 Larkin, "The Cinematic Milieu," 328.

42 Akin Adeşokan, *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), xi, xiii.

43 Adeşokan, *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics*, xv.

for “coappearance” as a condition of media’s global circulation, one that is by no means unique to the digital age, with its promise of far-reaching forms of liveness and simultaneity. “The coappearance of diverse elements of social, creative life within the spatial and temporal scopes of the [African] continent,” Adeşokan observes, “is already an unimpeachable argument for worldliness, for all history as relational, and for our earth as all people.”⁴⁴ In her magisterial history of coal mining in Nigeria, Carolyn A. Brown considers the labor of extraction as a specific experience uniting spatially dispersed and racially divided workers. Brown is especially attuned to the global reproduction of a particular workplace—the coal pit—whose common materiality links the Udi escarpment to the South Wales Coalfield, despite important political, social, and climatic differences.⁴⁵ In describing the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico as yoked “oil frontiers,” Michael Watts makes a similar point, noting that his coinage “should not imply only the technical relations of resource exploitation” but should instead be understood as encompassing shared social practices, modes of representation, and acts of imagination, in addition to scientific knowledge and technological invention.⁴⁶ I heed Watts’s warning by considering the representational capacities and cultural impact of films made about, and in, the cradles and crucibles of extractive capitalism.

Still, for all their resistance to the idea of Nigeria as a magnet for foreign media companies, my more dogmatic interlocutors—those who angrily dismissed my claim that Hollywood has been an active presence in the country—had a point: why focus on Hollywood and not, say, South African, Indian, and Chinese capital? Are there not multiple national and transnational participants in Nigeria’s media sector—power players beyond just Nollywood and Hollywood? (*Cinematic Independence* has been criticized for appearing to imply that American media companies have operated in Nigeria to the exclusion of films from India and Hong Kong, and I am certainly sensitive to such objections, recognizing as I do the longstanding heterogeneity of the country’s screen fare. And is *The Nun’s Story* not itself limited in adducing just two mutually constituting geographies—the one

44 Akin Adeşokan, *Everything Is Sampled: Digital and Print Mediations in African Arts and Letters* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2023), xiii–xiv. See also N. Frank Ukadike, “African Cinema: Digital Media and Expanding Frames of Representation,” in *Global Cinema Networks*, ed. Elena Gorfinkel and Tami Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 141–158.

45 Carolyn A. Brown, *“We Were All Slaves”: African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).

46 Watts, “Oil Frontiers,” 194.

Belgian, the other Congolese?)⁴⁷ FilmHouse, to take just one example of a giant Nigerian media firm, has, as of this writing, 14 multiplexes in 7 Nigerian states, as well as partnerships with such North American tech companies as IMAX and MediaMation (famous for MX4D, a film-presentation system that simulates various climatic effects, including rain, fog, smoke, and wind). But it also has important distribution arrangements with South Africa's Empire Entertainment and China's Huahua Media, and it is the single largest supplier of Nollywood content to streamers all over the world, starting with Netflix. Clearly, then, South African and Chinese capital cannot be ignored. But it is difficult to adequately account for all players in this complicated transnational game, at least in a single work of scholarship. One way of explaining my attention to the specific imbrication of Nollywood and Hollywood is to point to the latter's "money power" (itself inextricable from robust political support, including from the US Departments of State and Commerce), as well as to its longstanding capacity to set terms of trade all around the world. But Hollywood is not without competitors, and its imperialism, however pronounced, is far from the only factor at work on the global stage. So perhaps a more convincing answer would be to acknowledge that Hollywood and Nollywood happen to be my two main areas of research and teaching—the two media industries that I have been trained to study (while also attempting to account, as I do throughout the present book, for independent, noncommercial, and nontheatrical film production, distribution, and exhibition). While I acknowledge the growing presence in Nigerian mediascapes of China's StarTimes and South Africa's MultiChoice (of which NBCUniversal owns a sizable percentage),⁴⁸ I am choosing to place limits on my own analysis, to restrict the scope of my discussion, and to contribute to a "grounded global studies," one with particular "entry points" that, while reasonably specific, may still serve those who wish to study, say, the role of Huahua Media in Lagosian infrastructures.⁴⁹ To argue that Hollywood and Nollywood are mutually reinforcing is not to write China out of the equation,

47 Brian Larkin has provided a detailed examination of the distribution of Indian films to Nigeria. Brian Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities," *Africa* 67, no. 3 (1997): 406–440. See also Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Abdalla Uba Adamu, *Transglobal Media Flows and African Popular Culture: Revolution and Reaction in Muslim Hausa Popular Culture* (Kano: Visually Ethnographic Press, 2007).

48 Georg Szalai, "Comcast's NBCU and Sky Partner with MultiChoice on Showmax Streaming Service in Africa," *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/nbcuniversal-sky-multichoice-showmax-streaming-africa-partnership-1235339351/>.

49 Hilary E. Kahn, "Introduction: Framing the Global," in *Framing the Global*, 1–17 [5].

or to efface South Africa as an important continental power player. As the sociologist Zsuzsa Gille argues, “we as scholars ... have to be explicit about how we frame ‘our’ global. That is, we need to be upfront about our reasons for following certain entanglements and not others, and about the political implications of our frames.”⁵⁰ Mine is, in other words, just one possible point of entry, shared, to varying degrees, by a number of other scholars and meant to help illuminate only some of what can be found in and around the vast and heterogeneous Nollywood industry. Just as no reasonably competent scholar could possibly claim to tell the whole story of Hollywood (whose industrial boundaries are in flux, anyway, and semantically conditional), none of us working in the field of African film studies would ever purport to offer a holistic picture of Nollywood. The industry is simply too sprawling and spirited to be fully captured in a single study.

“Placing” Nollywood

A growing number of Nollywood scholars are addressing South-South collaboration and competition, building on the insights of Moradewun Adejunmobi (who has extensively theorized Nollywood as a “minor transnational practice”), Jane Bryce (who has considered Nollywood’s material and ideological presence in the Caribbean), and Matthias Krings (who has studied Nollywood’s translations in Tanzania).⁵¹ Alessandro Jedlowski, for example, has looked at various media flows between Nigeria and Ethiopia, and at the paradigms that the two countries’ production cultures share.⁵² Such

50 Zsuzsa Gille, “Transnational Materiality,” in *Framing the Global*, 157–181 [177].

51 Moradewun Adejunmobi, “Nigerian Video Film as Minor Transnational Practice,” *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 2 (2007), 1–16; Moradewun Adejunmobi, “Evolving Nollywood Templates for Minor Transnational Film,” *Black Camera* 5, no. 2 (2014), 74–94; Jane Bryce, “‘African Movies’ in Barbados: Proximate Experiences of Fear and Desire,” in *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, ed. Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 223–244; Matthias Krings, “*Karishika* with Kiswahili Flavor: A Nollywood Film Retold by a Tanzanian Video Narrator,” in *ibid.*, 306–326; Matthias Krings, *African Appropriations: Cultural Difference, Mimesis, and Media* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 150–171. See also Moradewun Adejunmobi, “Major and Minor Discourses of the Vernacular: Discrepant African Histories,” in *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 179–198; and Monica Dipio, “Ugandan Viewership of Nigerian Movies,” in *Africa Through the Eye of the Video Camera*, ed. Foluke Ogunleye (Manzini, Swaziland: Academic Publishers, 2008), 52–73.

52 Alessandro Jedlowski, “Avenues of Participation and Strategies of Control: Video Film Production and Social Mobility in Ethiopia and Southern Nigeria,” in *Production Studies, The Sequel!: Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*, ed. Miranda Banks, Bridget Conor, and Vicki

work resonates in complex ways with research on North-South exchanges, as Jedlowski's own scholarship on Nollywood's Italian itineraries attests. In the twenty-first century, Nollywood has increasingly interacted with European sites of media production and consumption. Kenneth Gyang's second feature, *Blood and Henna* (which dramatizes the notorious clinical trial that Pfizer carried out in Kano during an epidemic of meningococcal meningitis in 1996), was one of Nigeria's official "showcase films" at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. With support from the tellingly named New World Nigeria Investment Campaign, as well as from Nigeria's Bank of Industry, the production of *Blood and Henna* represented some of the capital requirements, investment opportunities, and "external" logics broadly associated with New Nollywood, and the finished film's exhibition in London marked a significant milestone for the industry.

Five years later, Gyang's *The Lost Café* (2017) became the first Nigerian-Norwegian co-production. Shot in Calabar and Drammen, the film premiered in Nigeria at a special independence-month celebration sponsored by the Norwegian embassy.⁵³ Despite a few technical flaws (which include imperfectly synchronized dialogue), *The Lost Café* offers a striking depiction of parallel modernities: interspersing aerial shots of two great rivers (the Calabar and the Drammen), Gyang suggests a certain geographical equivalence between Africa and Europe. Located in the southeastern portions of their respective countries, the cities of Calabar and Drammen are equally shaped by large rivers that carry commerce to and from the sea. Showing these global(izing) flows from above, in elegant high-angle shots, Gyang offers a topographical correlative to the scholarly claims of the film's main character, a Nigerian cineaste whose taste indicates a certain kinship between African postcolonial art and Italian neorealism—between Sembene and De Sica. Invoking the formal as well as thematic similarities between *Mandabi* (1968) and *Umberto D.* (1952), each of which attends to the quotidian rituals of a "forgotten" man forced to grapple with an indifferent bureaucracy (the one postcolonial, the other post-Fascist), *The Lost Café* makes a rhetorical case for Africa's cinematic modernity while simultaneously mapping the continent's geographical and thus commercial resemblance to Europe. This

Mayer (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 175–186. Jedlowski has also studied Nollywood's presence in Europe. See, for instance, Alessandro Jedlowski, "Exporting Nollywood: Nigerian Video Filmmaking in Europe," in *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, ed. Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 171–185.

53 Gyang originally wanted to shoot the film in Barcelona, but the city proved too expensive. Production of *The Lost Café* was eventually enabled, in part, by a Nigerian expatriate in Oslo, Regina Udalor, who, like Gyang, had graduated from the National Film Institute in Jos, Nigeria.

comparative approach is in keeping with certain Hollywood travelogues of the mid-twentieth century, such as Cinerama's *Seven Wonders of the World* (Tay Garnett et al., 1956), which uses state-of-the-art widescreen technology to convey spatial similarities between North America's Niagara Falls and Africa's Victoria Falls. Thus visualized, the natural world's own parallels prove the inadequacy of labeling Africa the "dark continent of long dramatic legend" (as Lowell Thomas, narrating *Seven Wonders of the World*, initially does). For if the freshwater crossroads of Central, Southern, and East Africa can be filmed in such a way as to suggest the US-Canada border, then entire assumptions about the former (as well as, for that matter, the latter) must be undone. With high-definition drone cinematography standing in for Cinerama's elaborate helicopter shots, *The Lost Café* shares this powerful connective strategy, using paired landmarks to de-exoticize Africa and Africans while illustrating some shared extractive initiatives. Gyang's frequent river views reveal the common presence of freighters that carry, among other cargoes, the natural resources harvested from the interiors of Nigeria and Norway. Its many rivers and tributaries functioning as reliable "highways of imperialism," Nigeria offers a rich and instructive history of profit-oriented flows.⁵⁴ Across the nearly one million square kilometers that the country now covers, riverine cartographies have been imbricated with European commercial interests since at least the rise of the palm-oil trade in the nineteenth century. Gyang is alert to such networks of nature and commerce, and it is clear from *The Lost Café* that more than mere waterways link Calabar and Drammen: Nigeria and Norway are both oil-rich countries, further connected by their shared dependence on petroleum extraction. Indeed, when *The Lost Café* was made, Nigeria and Norway were (as they remain) neck-and-neck on the list of the world's top oil producers. Like Nigeria's, Norway's economy hinges on fossil fuels; like Nigeria's, Norway's oil and gas extractions are largely exported and supply the lion's share of government revenues; and, like Nigeria's, Norway's political scene is strongly conditioned by petroculturalism. Nigeria is Africa's largest producer of oil and gas; Norway is Europe's.⁵⁵ Though not explicitly about such mirroring, *The Lost Café* nevertheless powerfully registers it, building on Zinnemann's *The Nun's Story* by showing some of the maps that oil prospecting has made.

54 Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 123.

55 For more on Norway's extreme dependence on oil and gas production, see Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective, *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism* (London: Verso, 2021), 118–132.

Seen from above, slow-moving freighters transport the riches of African and European sites whose economies are equally reliant on petroleum exports.

Still other New Nollywood films suggest Nigeria's equivalence with the United States, though not necessarily in terms of river flows or fossil-fuel production. Lekki and Ikoyi, two of the wealthiest areas in Nigeria, are often shot to look like Miami and Beverly Hills.⁵⁶ This orientation toward American urbanism isn't simply imitative or aspirational, however. Some New Nollywood companies, like Nevada Bridge Productions (which made Seyi Babatope's 2021 romantic comedy *Fine Wine*), are actually based in Atlanta. Indeed, Georgia's dynamic capital has been an important node of New Nollywood since at least the production in 2008 of Stephanie Okereke's *Through the Glass*. (Atlanta-based financiers provided part of that film's \$200,000 budget.) The local chat show *Talk Time Africa* has offered a significant promotional forum for Nollywood's biggest stars since its premiere in 2010. Perhaps most famously, the American city—home of the theme restaurant Nollywood Café and Lounge, located in the diverse Buford Highway community—is the setting of the 2014 blockbuster *30 Days in Atlanta*, directed by Robert O. Peters.⁵⁷

"Placing" New Nollywood is not, then, a simple matter. It is not enough to point to the most expensive and exclusive neighborhoods in Lagos, as if those sites, so crucial to New Nollywood both physically and conceptually, were somehow fixed locations cleanly separated from surrounding areas as well as from the wider world. Written and directed by Lagos-born, Calgary-based Kathryn Fasegha, the romantic drama *2 Weeks in Lagos* (2019) was financed in part by Balm in Gilead Movie Productions, a New Nollywood studio incorporated in prestigious Victoria Island in 2019. But additional support came from True Vine Productions, a faith-based company that, headquartered in the UK, seeks to "connect a global audience" and "influence the global culture for Christ through the media."⁵⁸ Postproduction on *2 Weeks in Lagos* was carried out at Sparrow Studios in Accra, Ghana. Yet rather than displacing or diluting the significance of Nigeria, such internationalism

56 Connor Ryan astutely notes that an impression of parity is equally conveyed through "dark and gritty" films that frame Lagos in terms of a "global" noir style derived as much from classical Hollywood (via Quentin Tarantino) as from Britain's Guy Ritchie. Examples include Walter "Waltbanger" Taylaur's *Gbomo Gbomo Express* (2015) and Daniel Oriahi's *Taxi Driver: Oko Ashewo* (2015). Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils*, 195.

57 For more on Nollywood's relationship to Atlanta, see Noah Tsika, *Nollywood Stars: Media and Migration in West Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015).

58 <https://truevineproductions.co.uk/>.

served to foreground it. Indeed, even the plot of *2 Weeks in Lagos* concerns the tendency of international venture capital to advance inexorably toward the titular megacity: after ten highly remunerative years on Wall Street, a young banker returns to his native Nigeria to “look for businesses to invest in.” Exploring well beyond his home base in elite Ikoyi, he and two of his associates visit a humble *buka*, a roadside restaurant featuring low-cost local fare. One of the men hatches a plan to establish “a bukateria par excellence.” His objective, which resonates with certain conceptions of New Nollywood, is to “blend the local, traditional *buka* with a modern-day fast-food joint.” Similarly, the teenage protagonists of Taiwo Egunjobi’s *All Na Vibes* (2021) profess their appreciation for “what is global now.” Like the film’s own soundtrack, they are steeped in Afrobeats, and they hope to further integrate “homegrown” and “imported” musical styles.

Such hybridity is succinctly expressed in the green-for-Nigeria jumpsuit that the child protagonist dons in Kunle Afolayan’s *Mokalik* (2019), and that is adorned with logos for Toyota, Total, Bugatti, Ford, and Forte Oil (an indigenous energy group headquartered in Lagos). The parade of brand names continues via a memorable motif involving Murtala Muhammed International Airport, located so close to the film’s single setting—an open-air auto repair and mechanic shop—that aircraft landings are impossible to ignore. Young Ponnile (Toni Afolayan), the apprentice mechanic, dutifully registers each arrival, noting the procession of planes from domestic to international carriers: Arik, Aero, and Imo are followed in quick succession by KLM and Air France. (Afolayan’s longtime partnership with Air France led him to feature one of its planes in a distinctive shot suggestive of a commercial advertisement; the low-angle, documentary-style images of the other carriers are far less flashy.) Tensions between nationalism and cosmopolitanism play out in *Mokalik*, with characters expressing their contrasting geographical imaginations. A boastful “been-to” dubbed “Obama” (boisterously played by Damilola Ogunsi) insists that Africa, not France, won the 2018 World Cup, given the national team’s reliance on players of African descent. An impassioned debate ensues, and it pivots around questions of extraction and relocation (in this case, of Black bodies from the continent—skilled athletes who may or may not bring “Africa” along with them). Smuggled into the United States under Barack Obama but deported under Donald Trump, the “repat” embodies apparent disjunctions between place and behavior: “You were out of the country for a day but won’t stop acting like a foreigner,” complains a caterer at the canteen where “Obama” takes his lunch.

As such examples suggest, New Nollywood’s relationship to Nigeria is not uncomplicated. The art historian Nomusa Makhubu has gone so far as to

question “the reductionist idea that Nollywood is ‘essentially Nigerian.’” For her, it “seems inappropriate to define Nollywood as a national cinema,” since the industry is “produced and consumed globally” (though Makhubu concedes that individual films “draw largely from social and cultural practices that are specific to the Nigerian context”). Makhubu recalls encountering, at the 2010 International Workshop at Nigeria’s Kwara State University in Ilorin, the curious claim that “if Nollywood is so ubiquitous in the global marketplace of cultural commodities, there is a need to discipline it so that it does not misrepresent ‘us’ as a ‘nation.’”⁵⁹ Such concerns are not exclusive to those self-appointed “cultural mediators” who, in Onookome Okome’s account, loudly and patronizingly (if from a familiar postcolonial and decolonial perspective) protest Nollywood’s popular appeal and allege its lowbrow nature.⁶⁰ They are also generated by the cross-cultural encounter itself. Consider, for instance, the case of Stepping Stones Nigeria, a UK-based NGO that purports to defend the rights of children in the Niger Delta. Gary Foxcroft, the charity’s founder, was drawn to the area because of its oil deposits, but he quickly became a crusader against Nollywood films about witchcraft, which he interpreted as direct threats to the lives of Nigerian children.⁶¹ (One such film, Teco Benson’s *End of the Wicked*, from 1999, depicts, among other things, Pentecostal efforts to counter the demonic possession of children.) For a charity registered in the UK, Nollywood’s occult melodramas seemed more dangerous than oil spills, and they served the unintended purpose of distracting outsiders from the urgency of the Niger Delta’s environmental situation. Abstract spaces superseded actual ones in the eyes of an international NGO.

Like the Calgary-based Kathryn Fasegha, Rogers Ofime was born and raised in Lagos but now lives in Canada, where he set up his own production company. Incorporated in Winnipeg in 2013, after Ofime had completed a four-year run as a producer of the Nigerian television series *Tinsel* (2008–), Theatron Media aims for “a fusion of Western culture and Africa’s unique content,” and to “produce transnational feature films ... with a strong focus

59 Nomusa Makhubu, “Charting Moral Geographies: Nollywood and the Concept of the Nation,” in *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation: Nollywood and National Narration*, ed. James Tar Tsaiior and Françoise Ugochukwu (Abuja: Adonis & Abbey, 2017), 241–256 [241, 243–244, 254].

60 Onookome Okome, “Nollywood and Its Critics,” in *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, ed. Mahir Şaul and Ralph A. Austen (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 26–40.

61 Françoise Ugochukwu, “Changing Nigerian Cultures: Two Films Against Witchcraft and an Impossible Dialogue,” in *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation*, 73–92.

on cultural diversity across the globe.”⁶² The company’s inaugural production, 2016’s *Oloibiri*, was directed by Curtis Graham, whose Florida-based Greyhouse Films provided additional backing. *Oloibiri* offers a fictionalized history of petroleum extraction in Nigeria. It draws attention to oil spills and other environmental calamities. But it was sponsored by several Nigerian oil companies and purports to represent their commitment to “responsible” extraction. Nollywood’s “worldliness,” then, sometimes entails conscious participation in globally intelligible strategies of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) and “cause-related marketing.” This process of accommodation is directly dramatized in Udoka Oyeka’s 2021 film *The Razz Guy*, in which a merger between Nigerian and North American publishing houses inspires executives to speak excitedly of “CSR programs for rural development.” Nigeria’s federal government, via Project ACT Nollywood (a “capacity-building” fund pledged by then-president Goodluck Jonathan, intended, in part, to “improve” Nollywood’s global image),⁶³ helped broker the deal that brought together Nigerian and North American personnel, and that resulted in *Oloibiri* being, for all its denunciations of environmental mismanagement, very much an advertisement for local extractive interests, including Capital Oil & Gas, Oranto Petroleum (part of Atlas Petroleum International, a Nigerian firm that boasts “an extensive footprint across the African continent”), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.⁶⁴

Topographies, political economies, national identities, and natural resources are entwined in ways that cinema makes intelligible, and that carry the potential to transform the way we see the medium itself. The title of Ola Balogun’s documentary *Nigersteel*, shot in Enugu in 1975, enacts a fusion of country and commodity in its naming of an actual company engaged in extraction and production. Iron ore mined in Nigeria lent the country a commercial identity as a steel capital, with Nigersteel becoming its first steel-fabrication plant in 1962, in a joint venture between the Eastern Region Government and a Greek trading firm. A jewel in Enugu’s crown, the plant was completely destroyed during the Biafran Civil War. Balogun’s short film shows the successful rebuilding of Nigersteel with technical assistance and equipment from West Germany—a major rebirth of extractive enterprise, an effort so large that it required international input. But the triumphal

62 <https://theatronmediainc.com/about-us/>.

63 For more on Project ACT Nollywood, see Ryan, “Nollywood and the Limits of Informality.” See also Oluwaseun Tella, *Africa’s Soft Power: Philosophies, Political Values, Foreign Policies and Cultural Exports* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

64 <https://atlas-oranto.com/>.

tone of Balogun's government-commissioned film obscures the sobering ecological consequences of extraction, even as *Nigersteel* offers visual evidence of extensive land degradation. Subjected to aerial bombardment during the war, the terrain of Eastern Nigeria was violated all over again, its biophysical wounds reopened in the name of economic progress, as the revived Nigersteel stood ready to produce at least 24,000 metric tons of steel reinforcing rods annually.⁶⁵

In offering a comparative account of historical cosmopolitanisms—including what has been called a “clear-cutting, strip-mining multinational cosmopolitanism”—I hope to provide a richer account of the terrain (both literal and figurative) that Nollywood shares with other industries, and that structures screen media more broadly.⁶⁶ Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò has admonished those “weaned on a diet of treating Africa and African phenomena as if they were *sui generis*. The result is that many African scholars think that they do wrong if they affirm any similarities between African and other phenomena from other parts of the world, especially those parts that we call the West. Thus we have repeated affirmations of African *difference* and an almost uncritical embrace of an ahistoricity.”⁶⁷ If I continue to insist that Hollywood is an important presence in Nigerian mediascapes, it is not because I “ethnocentrically” prefer its products. Far from it, as anyone who actually knows me, and who has had to listen to me denounce Disney and its adult disciples, can readily attest. It is rather because Hollywood, one of the objects of my research, has had a complicated, and often misunderstood, relationship to Nigeria—and because *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018), that Marvel Studios juggernaut, remains, as of this writing, the country's highest-grossing theatrical booking.

More recently, the economic and infrastructural support provided by China—whatever the motivations for such support—has provided, among other social and technical affordances, important platforms for Hollywood's ongoing visibility in Nigeria. In 2014, the Chinese corporation StarTimes—the second-largest satellite broadcaster on the African continent, after South Africa's DStv—won the bid to digitize Nigerian television and has since worked to dub Chinese media into a variety of African languages, broadcasting these sonically altered versions while subsidizing “skillfully

65 US Department of Commerce, *Nigeria: A Survey of US Business Opportunities* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), 137.

66 Sheldon Pollock, “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000), 591–625 [617].

67 Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 15, emphasis in original.

produced local [Nigerian] content,” as StarTimes president Pang Xinxing puts it, promising that “StarTimes will vigorously engage competitors for the ‘hearts and minds’ of African customers.”⁶⁸ That Pang employs the language of US military policy in Vietnam is telling. Indeed, such language is repeatedly repurposed for descriptions of Africa’s “cultivation,” as when Captain Rick Cook, chief of the Engineer Division at the United States Africa Command, speaks of “winning hearts and minds of folks” on the continent.⁶⁹ As part of its premium satellite bouquet, StarTimes carries television channels from the United States as well as Europe and Africa; as a media pipeline, it provides a steady stream of Hollywood content, as do other Chinese corporations with designs on the Nigerian market.⁷⁰

Under fire from human rights activists in Uganda, who charge that the firm’s development activities have emitted unhealthy dust and otherwise negatively affected neighboring communities, the aptly named China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), which has been conducting business in Lagos since at least 2007, has also been creating spaces for Hollywood’s penetration, political tensions and economic competition between China and the United States notwithstanding.⁷¹ To take just one example: as majority funder of Eko Atlantic, the controversial planned community being built from land “reclaimed” from the Gulf of Guinea, CCCC not only partners with the Lagos State Government (which has had the blessing of Nigeria’s federal government in this particular endeavor) but also explicitly promises to provide literal space for IMAX, Warner Bros., and Disney. If it is difficult to disentangle even Chinese firms from Hollywood’s Nigerian ambitions, particularly as the latter come to be conditioned in advance by the mere existence of the former (and, of course, by China’s vast and ever-growing moviegoing audience), it is perhaps equally hard to identify unequivocal

68 Disbook #5 (press release), “StarTimes – Celebrating Digital Advancement in Africa,” November, 2014, www.nxtbook.fr/newpress/BasicLead/Disbook_5_November_2014/index.php?startid=67. For more on StarTimes in Nigeria, see Alessandro Jedlowski, “Studying Media ‘from’ the South: African Media Studies and Global Perspectives,” *Black Camera* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 174–193. See also Noah Tsika, “Constructing the Videofilm: Corporatization, Genrefication, and the Blurring Boundaries of Nigerian Media,” in *Rethinking Genre in Contemporary Global Cinema*, ed. Silvia Dibeltulo and Ciara Barrett (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 137–150.

69 Quoted in Nick Turse, *Tomorrow’s Battlefield: US Proxy Wars and Secret Ops in Africa* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 88.

70 Jedlowski, “Studying Media ‘from’ the South”; Tsika, “Constructing the Videofilm.”

71 Christopher Mbazira, “Uganda’s Hybrid Constitutional Protection of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” in *The Protection of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Africa*, ed. Danwood Mzikenge Chirwa and Lilian Chenwi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 447–475 [471–472].

resistance to those ambitions on the parts of Nigerians who, quite simply, enjoy American entertainment even as they desire opportunities for indigenous cultural expression and economic gain. Anti-imperialist Nigerian filmmakers like Eddie Ugbomah and Ola Balogun may have disdained the country's National Theatre, with its state-of-the-art projection rooms, as an elitist, aspirational, ultimately Hollywood-oriented deterrent to a truly Nigerian cinema ("Every time you apply [with] a Nigerian film [they] give you the excuse that [they are] booked," Ugbomah complained), but they were almost certainly among the crowds that eagerly gathered there for screenings of Hollywood blockbusters like Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), the National Theatre's showpiece selection for Christmas 1978, a date secured well in advance by Columbia Pictures.⁷² Attending such screenings was, in part, a means of keeping up with global developments in film as both an artistic and a commercial form—a way, in other words, of staying competitive for ambitious Nigerian filmmakers who also happened to be diehard Spielberg fans. The pleasures that Nigerians have repeatedly derived from Hollywood imports have not necessarily disabled anti-imperialist thought, despite the imports' reputation as prophylactics against socialism and other modes of political dissent.⁷³ Fandom is not necessarily incompatible with critique, and Nigerian opposition to colonial and neocolonial domination has often (though not always) coexisted with considerable affection for Hollywood films.

Such direct engagements with American media are hardly senseless or coincidental. When, for example, producer-director Zeb Ejiro was searching for additional music for his 1996 film *Domitilla: The Story of a Prostitute*, he turned to David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*—both the television serial (1990–1991) and the film prequel (1992's *Fire Walk with Me*) that followed—sampling Angelo Badalamenti's famous instrumental theme song partly for its association with the fictional prostitute Laura Palmer. When, on a date with the hopeful Domitilla, an officious businessman learns that she is a sex worker and subsequently denounces her, the purloined score points up her social dilemma, which is nearly as dire as that of the desperate Laura (whose cruel and gruesome fate is later echoed in the brutal murder of Kate Henshaw's Jenny, beheaded in a Lynchian night scene that is at once a

72 Quoted in S. J. Timothy-Asobe, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria* (Lagos: Upper Standard Publications, 2003), 61; for more on Columbia's relationship to Nigeria, see Tsika, *Cinematic Independence*.

73 Consider, for instance, the portrait of Alice Walker that hangs on a character's wall in the Nollywood classic *Dangerous Twins* (Tade Ogidan, 2004), a film that includes numerous approving references to Hollywood cinema.

reference to Nigeria's then-recent and much-mythologized history of ritual decapitations and an evocation of sheer Hollywoodian horror). As the slick pimp puts it in *Domitilla's* opening sequence, surveying "his" sex workers as they stand at the center of a Lagos pleasure district dubbed "The Big Apple," "You're beyond local now—you're international!"⁷⁴ Born Ngozi Ebe, Domitilla has acquired not just the new, Italo-Latin name but also "clean, expensive English" (which she deploys on special occasions, preferring Delta Pidgin for casual interactions with her girlfriends) and a cosmopolitan flair that the film's soundtrack itself approximates through borrowings from global Hollywood (including a rather lengthy sample of Carter Burwell's score for the 1995 epic *Rob Roy*, about the impoverished, much-sinned-against Scottish outlaw). *Domitilla* ends with a resounding expression of liberal humanism, as the wrongly accused title character (a victim of circumstance, like Rob Roy) receives assistance from the president of the Women's Rights Project, who says of her, "First of all, she's a human being ... and our society is responsible for what has happened to her." Much as the sampled Hollywood scores fill holes in the film's soundtrack, supplementing the original music composed by Abay Esho, the West's conceptual terrain, from the urbanism of "The Big Apple" to the liberal policy programs influenced by various feminist movements, is assiduously mapped onto Nigeria, lending Nollywood a worldliness that in no way displaces or effaces its local specificities. Here, Burwell and Badalamenti meaningfully complement Esho. Lynch meets Ejiro on the syncretic streets of Lagos.

Also included in Ejiro's idiosyncratic citational practice is an important reminder that the transnational recycling of scores is not unique to Nollywood. While the practice dates to the silent-cinema era of live instrumental accompaniment and was well entrenched by the establishment of the Hollywood studio system, with its self-referential house composers and generally retentive music departments,⁷⁵ *Domitilla* relies heavily on a plaintive Ennio Morricone composition—"Chi Mai"—that had been developed across multiple films, from the 1968 spaghetti Western *The Great Silence* to the 1971 Italo-Yugoslav co-production *Maddalena* to the 1981 French thriller *The Professional* (partially set in a fictional African country where Jean-Paul Belmondo's secret service agent, having failed to assassinate the postcolonial

74 For more on the film's relationship to place, see Onookome Okome, "Nollywood: Spectatorship, Audience and the Sites of Consumption," in *The Screen Media Reader: Culture, Theory, Practice*, ed. Stephen Monteiro (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 395–416.

75 Kathryn Kalinak, "Resettling the Score: Musical Recycling in the Hollywood Studio System," in *Resettling the Scene: Classical Hollywood Revisited*, ed. Philippa Gates and Katherine Spring (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021), 49–58.

president, is subjected to a corrupt judiciary and sentenced to penal servitude on a chain gang). But the melody is perhaps best known to Nigerians through its use in two BBC serials—1978's *An Englishman's Castle* and 1981's *The Life and Times of David Lloyd George*—which is to say that Ejiro was undoubtedly aware of its periodic recycling. His political message, in *Domitilla*, is implicit but resounding, at least to those who recognize the Morricone music and can recall its extensive history of reuse: far from bastions of originality and transparency against which the “corrupt” Nollywood must be judged, Western media are self-cannibalizing, plagiaristic, prone to reiteration and redundancy. “Poor cinema”⁷⁶ may steal, but so do its better-capitalized counterparts in the Global North, where a single composition may make its way from country to country, from film to television, and even from “low” to “high” and back again—a durable commodity, a renewable resource.

Resource-Specific Historiographies

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson famously suggests that constructions of nationhood are inevitably utopian, whatever tone they purportedly take—that cultural texts, in specifying a national identity or consciousness, tend to exhibit a desire for unification and coherence that is ultimately conservative, fulfilling a distinctly straightjacketing function.⁷⁷ Paul Willemen has elaborated on this point in his description of nationalism as “the range of institutionalized practices seeking to define and impose a particular, reductive, politically functional identity.” Nationalism, in other words, “seeks to bind people to identities.” Subjectivity, by contrast, “always exceeds identity.”⁷⁸ It serves as the idiosyncratic point of departure for the “possible lives” of which Arjun Appadurai writes in *Modernity at Large*, eluding nationalism's grasp to produce the very syncretism that, in Karin Barber's influential terms, is characteristic of African popular arts. For Appadurai, screen media—particularly American cultural exports like Hollywood films—“compel the transformation of everyday discourse,” becoming “resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons.”⁷⁹ This is not to deny or forgive their imperialist

76 Humberto Solás, “Poor Cinema Manifesto,” *Black Camera* 13, no. 1 (2021 [2004]): 491–492.

77 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

78 Paul Willemen, “The National Revisited,” in *Theorizing National Cinema*, ed. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (London: BFI, 2006), 29–43 [30].

79 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

power, but rather to attempt to understand how that power is experienced individually, and against totalizing theories of nationalism or “cross-cultural” exchange. In my book *Nollywood Stars*, I tried to unsettle assumptions about transnational media circuits by showing how, in many parts of the world, Nigerian performers like Genevieve Nnaji and Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde are, in fact, far more famous than the Hollywood luminaries they are sometimes said to resemble (as, that is, subaltern facsimiles)—and how their specific, carefully constructed personae are the products not of an imitation attributable to American cultural imperialism but of a far more complicated process of invention and appropriation, one in which consistent figurations of nationhood are remarkably difficult to sustain, even for Nigeria’s most patriotic talents. This book continues that work in an effort to account for “historical geographies of extraction” and their idiosyncratic relationships to screen media.⁸⁰ If considerations of European and North American products and practices repeatedly creep into the text, it is not simply because the Global North is so heavily involved in the business of extraction but also because it is important to, as Cajetan Iheka puts it, “resist the urge to ghettoize African media studies.”⁸¹ Africa’s metal, mineral, and hydrocarbon resources are not confined to the continent, and neither is Nollywood.

At first glance, this may seem a simple, even self-evident proposition. On closer examination, however, it suggests the need to make sense of African terrain by attending to the paths that lead in and out. It requires, to quote Melody Jue, “balancing a consideration of media representations, media infrastructures, and media materiality” in order to offer a grounded understanding not only of Nollywood but also of resource extraction.⁸² Where we place Nollywood has important consequences. Such locations are not just spatial metaphors but tangible geographies with material connections to extractive economies. For Nollywood’s spaces of film production are also spaces of oil prospecting, timber harvesting, and mineral extraction. One of my main purposes in this book is thus to link such absolute spaces—of reclaimed land, razed forests, abandoned coal mines collecting moss, vast tin fields inspiring illegal dredging by populations locked out of the licit economy—to the conceptual and lived dimensions of film villages, shooting locations, and exhibition centers.

80 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), xii.

81 Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 11.

82 Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media: Thinking through Seawater* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 4.



Forest clearance in Nigeria (likely Calabar). Photograph by Edward Harland Duckworth. Date unknown. Courtesy of Northwestern University Libraries.

Chapter 1, “Resource Cinemas: Sites, Symbols, and Specters of Extraction,” examines the concept of “Nollywood geographies” in greater detail, further outlining the book’s central objectives. Nollywood’s status as a national (and “natural”) resource is not unrelated to that of Nigeria as a historically significant source of tin, coal, timber, and petroleum. How might the industry be understood through the lenses of the extractive enterprises that preceded, surround, and suffuse it, and to which it responds in various ways? What insights into extraction does Nollywood provide? What bearing does the planetary scope of climate change have on these linkages? Can the histories of African cinemas (including Nollywood) be profitably rethought in relation to resource extraction and the climate crisis? Where is Nollywood heading—both physically and conceptually—as rising seas threaten to overtake its coastal hubs? As chapter 1 makes clear, *African Media in an Age*

of *Extraction* seeks to build on the insights of Tiago de Luca, who writes in *Planetary Cinema* of the need to “examine, historicize, and theorize the role of cinema and related media in both shaping and responding to a planetary consciousness.”⁸³ I argue that African cinemas are particularly germane to “conceptualizations of disappearance and human-induced change on a global scale.” At the same time, the lasting value of Africa’s natural resources—the persistent (indeed, increasing) global demand for them, including for use in media technologies—shows how (to quote de Luca again) “colonial tropes, techniques, and tools of globality have survived” into the postcolonial (or neocolonial) present.⁸⁴

Chapter 2, “Breaking African Ground: Location Shooting and the Search for Resource Enclaves,” looks at the relationship between location shooting and extractive industry. Approaching these interrelated phenomena from historical and theoretical perspectives, the chapter offers an overview of the Euro-American exploitation of African locations before centering on the mining of tin and coal in Nigeria and on the cinematic forms and practices that such mining has inspired, enabled, and informed. From romantic melodramas filmed in the tin fields of the Middle Belt to historical epics made in the collieries of Enugu, cinema has long benefited from the distinctive shooting locations (literally) opened up by extractive activities. Films reliably transform extraction into aesthetic experience. But while exploiting the photogenic aspects of extraction, the film medium has also directly participated in the degradation of Nigeria’s landforms, embodying and advancing their plunder for much of the past century, since at least the production of the British film *Palaver: A Romance of Northern Nigeria* (Geoffrey Barkas, 1926) on location in the Jos Plateau region. Filmmaking, too, is a form of harvesting. The choice of shooting location is never politically neutral or environmentally inconsequential.

Chapter 3, “Dredging Nollywood: Corporations, Land Reclamation, and the Lure of Neoliberalism,” considers specific formations of capital as key resources informing (and splintering) the development of Nollywood and its relationship to investor nations as well as to the specific sites of production and consumption examined in chapter 2. Focusing on Central Asia, Andrew Barry has addressed the importance of uncovering “the historical construction of particular political and economic spaces and the specificities of the materials, practices, and locations which they transform, connect,

83 Tiago de Luca, *Planetary Cinema: Film, Media, and the Earth* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 45.

84 de Luca, *Planetary Cinema*, 40.

exclude, and silence.”⁸⁵ In scrutinizing what Barry calls “technological zones,” chapter 3 further reveals the overlapping character of cinema and extraction, and it suggests ways of mapping their imbrication. Significantly, the capital formations that circulate within neoliberal frameworks are themselves products (and engines) of resource extraction. As such, they are not entirely detached from state formations. Rather, they depend on various instantiations of state power to enable their mobility and ensure their embeddedness. Similarly, films that appear to reflect and advance a neoliberal agenda—particularly those that focus on resource extraction as a means of self-enrichment—also convey what Jennifer Lynn Peterson calls a “state ideology of nature,” inevitably underscoring bounded, differentially governed geographies of prospecting, drilling, and digging.⁸⁶ Through an analysis of the relationship between “Old Nollywood” (the industry’s original, and enduring, direct-to-video model of low-budget filmmaking) and “New Nollywood” (the heavily capitalized industrial assemblage currently oriented toward multiplex exhibition and transnational corporate capitalism), chapter 3 explores the intersections of space and capital.⁸⁷ Nollywood’s discrepant, competing structural iterations shed light on, and themselves partly constitute, the cultures of capital in twenty-first-century Nigeria. Chapter 3 argues that the industry’s increasingly diverse aesthetic forms are intimately related to the transformation of the country’s physical and economic landscapes via large-scale extractive practices.

Cinema powerfully exemplifies the creative and institutional processes by which the development of the Global South “was imagined ... as a mirror of the European and North American historical experience of industrialization.”⁸⁸ Films about the global timber trade—the subject of chapter 4, “Twilight Forests: Cinema and Deforestation”—shed light on this way of mapping Africa as continental inheritor of products and practices perfected (and exhausted) elsewhere. Western timber films tend to present Africa’s forests not only as sites of extraction but also as saviors

85 Andrew Barry, “Technological Zones,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 2 (2006), 239–253 [250].

86 Jennifer Lynn Peterson, “Conservation and the State: Film and the US National Park Service,” paper presented at the 2021 Visible Evidence Conference, Wednesday, December 15, 2021, Frankfurt am Main.

87 For more on these links, see Alexander Bud, “Squandermania or Nigerian Urban Renaissance?: Houses, Hotels, and Nollywood in an African Creative Economy,” *Anthropologie & développement* 52 (December 2021): 29–49.

88 Stephan F. Miescher, Peter J. Bloom, and Takyiwaa Manuh, “Introduction,” in *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa*, ed. Peter J. Bloom, Stephan F. Miescher, and Takyiwaa Manuh (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1–16 [3].

of an industry that has simply run out of trees to cut in Europe and North America. Films about the depletion of the Global North are thus directly relevant to those that depict actual timber concessions in Nigeria and that attempt to radically transform the social meanings of the dense forests of Yorubaland (and, for that matter, of the imagined woodlands of Igbo lore). Through close readings of various films, from industrial shorts to fiction features, chapter 4 considers the complex relationship between the global timber trade and moving images in Nigeria.

The country's abundant oil reserves have been broadly relevant to the energy humanities, but they have also informed more focused scholarship on Nollywood. Jonathan Haynes has pointed to the fundamental (if not entirely causal) relationship between Nigeria's petroleum riches, with their pronounced vulnerability to global fluctuations in demand and prices, and the "video boom" of the early 1990s, writing that Nollywood "insinuated itself into the Nigeria that billions of dollars of oil money have built, ruined by the bust that followed the oil boom [of the 1970s]: a Nigeria where more families had VCRs than had refrigerators or potable tap water, where streets were so dangerous that staying home to watch a video was preferable to going out at night to a cinema."⁸⁹ A number of Nollywood films offer direct representations of petrocapi-talism. Jeta Amata's *Black November* (2012), a revised and reissued version of Amata's 2011 film *Black Gold*, participates in an ongoing project of rendering oil infrastructure visible to the world beyond the Niger Delta—beyond, that is, spaces where the materiality of petrocapi-talism is both inescapable and often deadly.⁹⁰ To varying degrees and from a range of national, historical, institutional, and political perspectives, all of the films discussed in this book share Amata's goal of evidencing extractive capitalism, and their interpretation is certainly relevant to the energy humanities, infrastructure studies, and eco-criticism.⁹¹ Chapter 5, "Bad Fuel: Oil Consciousness from Hollywood to Nollywood," considers cinema's relationship to petroleum, offering a partial history of this entwinement and how it has played out in Nigeria from the colonial period to the present.

89 Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood," 68.

90 Michael Watts, "Antinomies of Community: Some Thoughts on Geography, Resources and Empire," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29, no. 2 (June 2004): 195–216. See also Michael Watts, "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity," in *Violent Environments*, ed. Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 189–212.

91 Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Jennifer Fay, *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Extraction has physically shaped Nollywood's environments. It has also fed the popular imagination on which the industry draws and to which it reliably contributes. This is, in many ways, what David Harvey calls "a distinctively geographical imagination," one constructed through complex spatial experiences.⁹² Its roots include the histories of extraction that have molded Nigeria itself, with significant local and planetary consequences. Resource extraction, which displaces populations, engenders violent conflict, transforms and pollutes the natural environment, and advances global climate change, requires that we engage the material and the absolute. It demands that we think geographically about an industry that, like the resource-rich continent from which it derives, remains in dialectical tension with Hollywood and "the West" (whose industrial and representational practices themselves shed light on extraction and its consequences). This book embraces a "rigorous global framework," one that recognizes physical, political, and aesthetic geographies.⁹³ Extraction represents just one point of entry into Nollywood, just one way of framing the industry and its place in the world. As such, it can be broken up into smaller frames based on the specific natural resources profitably mined and harvested in Nigeria and elsewhere. From tin to petroleum, those resources are powerful political, economic, and aesthetic objects. They are also useful interpretive devices and objects of discourse, as mobile as the films that represent and embody them. Like Nollywood's, their genealogies are multiple, their past trajectories, whether in animist practice or violent conflict, vividly depicted in African films that attend to nature and the object world. *African Media in an Age of Extraction* proposes ways of "placing" Nollywood that respond to multiple scales—the local, the national, the regional, the continental, the planetary—as well as to natural environments and their continuous transformation by capital.

92 David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2019 [2005]), 148.

93 Kahn, "Introduction," 3.

1. Resource Cinemas

Sites, Symbols, and Specters of Extraction

Abstract: This chapter examines the concept of Nollywood geographies in greater detail, further outlining the book's central objectives. Nollywood's status as a national (and "natural") resource is not unrelated to that of Nigeria as a historically significant source of tin, coal, timber, and petroleum. How might the industry be understood through the lenses of the extractive enterprises that surround it? What insights into resource extraction does Nollywood provide, and what bearing does the planetary scope of climate change have on these linkages? Can the histories of African cinemas, including Nollywood, be profitably rethought in relation to extraction and the climate crisis? Where is Nollywood heading—both physically and conceptually—as rising seas threaten to overtake its coastal hubs?

Keywords: African cinema; Nollywood; Hollywood; climate change; natural resources; fossil fuels

"A whole history remains to be written of *spaces*—which would at the same time be the history of *powers* ... from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat." — Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography"¹

"Americans today are much more dependent upon Africa, much more involved in African affairs, than most of us realize." — Ford Foundation pamphlet on Nigeria, 1952²

1 Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Random House, 1980), 63–77 [69].

2 Ford Foundation pamphlet "Nigeria," 1, Ford Foundation records (hereafter FF), Special Collections Publications, Series 3, Box 53, Folder 577, Rockefeller Brothers Fund (hereafter RBF), Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

Since embracing videotape in the 1980s, Nigerian filmmakers have enjoyed a distinctly global reach. Their earliest avenues were largely informal, as videos produced in southern Nigeria were invariably shared with friends and family members in such diasporic locations as London, Bridgetown, Brooklyn, and Atlanta. VHS cassettes travel well—far better, and less expensively, than their celluloid predecessors (though both celluloid and videotape are potentially vulnerable to the scanning devices used in modern airports, which can corrupt analog media). By 2010, Manthia Diawara could write, “Everywhere, within and beyond the borders of Nigeria, people have appropriated [Nollywood] videos and become addicted to their plots, which they use as a way of seeing and commenting on reality.”³ Gift exchange remains, of course, a reliable mode of transit for media in the digital age, when downloads—whether licensed or illicit—can be shared across oceans at the click of a button. Social media, too, serve as their own global outlets for film clips (and even, in some cases, entire feature-length movies, as on Facebook). It is by now axiomatic that Nollywood, the media giant generated by those early, video-based entrepreneurs, is far more than “just” a local enterprise produced and consumed within the narrowest geographic ambits of southwestern Nigeria. One groundbreaking academic anthology, published in 2013, bears the powerful title *Global Nollywood*. Intended as a provocation, that title has since become common sense, thanks in no small part to the anthology itself. Like Hollywood (arguably its main competitor), Nollywood is both everywhere and nowhere, both rooted and boundless, both national and post-national.⁴ As S. J. Timothy-Asobele put it in 2003, a year before the construction of the first modern, “internationally compatible” multiplex in Nigeria, “It is high time the [Nigerian] government recognized the film industry as an economic product which is a component of the competition between Nigeria and the rest of the world.”⁵ Nollywood is, in other words, part of a broader network of media forms and practices—an increasingly essential element in the “bundling” of goods and services, as on Netflix and satellite television. Nigeria has long been a resource state, and Nollywood is among its most exportable assets—a valuable commodity whose cultivation is inevitably bound up with older extractive practices.

Just as we can (and should) understand Hollywood as a true US enterprise even as it doggedly pursues international co-productions, foreign subsidies,

3 Diawara, *African Film*, 168.

4 See *Nollywood in Global Perspective*, ed. Bala A. Musa (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

5 S. J. Timothy-Asobele, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria* (Lagos: Upper Standard Publications, 2003), 43.

and far-flung (even “stateless”) financiers, we must recognize that Nollywood remains distinctly Nigerian while subject to some of the same ambiguous market forces. Justifiably, those working in environmental studies, like most critical political economists of media, are quick to balk at the idea of cultural production as placeless, weightless, spectral. They see media as deeply material forms, and rightly so, for even films stored and shared through cloud computing rely on energy-depleting server farms and other “sited” mechanisms, other “grounded” technologies. Simply put, media pollute even when watched on our smartphones, via the seemingly immaterial files that have mostly replaced the sturdy plastics and light polycarbonates of VHS, DVD, and VCD. If, like television sets, VCRs, and other such “limited” technologies of playback, the latter have invariably ended up in Ghanaian dumping grounds and other designated repositories of yesterday’s e-waste, streaming media have their own environmentally injurious effects on the Global South (and, by extension, the entire planet). If Nollywood is indeed global, and indeed material—both environmental product and environmental polluter—it is well worth investigating the industry’s relationship to the natural world and to the economies that seek to exploit and deplete its resources.

What remains understudied, then, are Nollywood’s links to other industries that have also, for better and for worse, “put Nigeria on the world map.” These links are multiple, historically situated, and reflective of the colonial and neocolonial legacies that continue to shape both Nigeria’s natural environment and Nollywood’s status on the world stage. “Nollywood” names the industry (or industries) that video production wrought. But it also names a great deal more. Understanding its increasingly global itineraries requires reaching back into what is technically the pre-Nollywood period. For the geographies in which Nollywood has become visible, the roads through which it has traveled, have been taken before. Forged under British colonial rule, maintained by European and US capital, and retraced by Nigerian entrepreneurs, such trade routes have always inspired cinematic representation. A vast number of films, ignored in previous scholarship, visualize, and otherwise advance, Nigeria’s connectedness to the wider world. From the commercial to the noncommercial, and from the theatrical to the nontheatrical, such works resonate with Yvonne Zimmermann’s account of the “process film”—a nonfiction genre that takes a step-by-step approach to industrial production—as an inescapably colonial form.⁶ Advertising

6 Yvonne Zimmermann, “Early Cinema, Process Films, and Screen Advertising,” in *Advertising and the Transformation of Screen Cultures*, ed. Bo Florin, Patrick Vonderau, and Yvonne Zimmermann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 77–111.

resource extraction, certain process films literalize and illuminate the imbrication of screen media and the forceful withdrawal of materials from the natural world.

This book contributes to the study of colonial cinema, ecomedia, “films that work” (and “films that sell”), and the ongoing extraction of global natural resources.⁷ It does so primarily through an examination of how Nollywood travels—how Africa encounters the world, and how the world (especially Western capital) encounters Africa. Nollywood may be relatively young, but its itineraries—corporate and otherwise—rest on longer histories of extraction, exploitation, and extraversion that merit sustained analysis. There are no easy or obvious correspondences between Nollywood and various resource sectors. Even narrowly defined (as a strictly southwestern-Nigerian media practice), Nollywood employs far more Nigerians than the oil industry, yet the latter dramatically exceeds its revenues. Nevertheless, this book proposes that the industry and its antecedents (and contemporary cognates) can profitably be studied in relation to resource extraction.

Colonial cinema, produced in Nigeria from the 1920s on, was itself a cinema of extraction, one that frequently lavished visual attention on various resource enclaves while simultaneously embodying and advancing some of the material gains of mining, farming, and refining. Scholars of colonial cinema have long explored its racist, paternalist mandates and methods. Less understood, however, is how colonial modes of film production, distribution, and exhibition both abetted resource extraction and helped establish lasting logics of environmental depletion, economic “development,” and international “cooperation.” Pierre Boulanger, in his 1975 book *Le Cinéma colonial*, provided important yet relatively narrow interpretive frameworks for the study of colonial cinema, largely limiting his analysis to the category’s perpetuation of myths of white supremacy and nonwhite dependence. In Boulanger’s influential reading, colonial films engender ignorance; they deceive. On rarer occasions, they apologize. But they always contribute to the mystification of European mechanisms of conquest, domination, and exploitation.⁸

Such critical frameworks are certainly useful, but they are partial. They cannot account for the extent to which colonial and corporate films

7 *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); *Films That Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising*, ed. Bo Florin, Nico de Klerk, and Patrick Vonderau (London: Palgrave, 2016).

8 Pierre Boulanger, *Le Cinéma Colonial: De “L’Atlantide” a “Lawrence d’Arabie”* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1975).

articulate extractive logics that are anything but mythic or provisional. Such films convey, in fact, far more than mere metropolitan chauvinism; they sustain more than just white supremacy (however expansive and influential). They also assiduously catalogue those techniques of resource identification, extraction, and transportation that have proved remarkably durable and increasingly destructive and divisive. Employed on a planetary scale, those techniques are, like “global Nollywood” itself, also rooted in African environments and experiences. This is not to deny that there is a complex and ever-shifting interplay of fabrication and reflection—of simulation and actuality—at work in such films. Certainly, it would be difficult, and downright naïve, to argue that any of them offer direct and unmediated access to the coal mines, oil fields, and other spaces of extraction that operated during (and irrespective of) their on-location production. Yet I follow Philip Rosen in questioning the legacy of film theory’s antirealist critiques, which, in so aggressively promoting a sense of the constructed and conventional (if not necessarily “artificial”) nature of all profilmic content, has since at least the 1960s discouraged attention to urgent questions of materiality and indexicality.⁹ For to dismiss out of hand the physical reality and tangible consequences of the extractive objects selected for the camera would be just as naïve as proclaiming the complete denotative transparency of location shooting. As Kenneth Cameron once asked, “[I]s racism the only thing to be seen in these films?” Cameron’s answer—that colonial films also “reveal things other than racism in the societies that produced them”—stops short of considering colonial cinema’s relationship to the natural environment, though his intervention offers key accounts of class and gender.¹⁰ For his part, Femi Shaka differentiates between “instructional cinema” and “colonialist cinema,” though the two categories were often one and the same, the former functioning within the latter in an overtly “useful” or otherwise functional capacity. For Shaka, such functionality—distinct from, say, the Crown’s aggrandizing generalities—served the salutary purpose of inculcating Africans in “modern” methods, lending their primary addressees a “positive” sense of belonging to the wider, technologically advanced world.¹¹

Climate change, of course, complicates, if not invalidates, this binary, for it is by now impossible to avoid recognizing processes of environmental

9 Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 155.

10 Kenneth M. Cameron, *Africa on Film: Beyond Black and White* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 13, 14.

11 Femi Okiremuete Shaka, *Modernity and the African Cinema: A Study in Colonialist Discourse, Postcoloniality, and Modern African Identities* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004).

degradation and their broadly calamitous consequences even in cheerful films that initially functioned to promote a specifically African modernity. Indeed, it was impossible even at the time of their production—and even for the films themselves. Unilever's *The Twilight Forest* (1957), for instance, uses the term “climate change” to describe the deleterious results of land mismanagement in Nigeria and analogous resource enclaves. Made by Unilever primarily for the instruction of company employees, the film forcefully denies Western responsibility for the drastic transformation of climates and habitats the world over. In fact, it imputes such problems to “untutored” Nigerians—to “unsophisticated natives” whose distinctly sustainable practices are presented, inaccurately, as anything but. Yet the film cannot avoid naming climate change (even if, admittedly, it employs the term in a “neutral” or merely descriptive manner distinct from its current, politicized usage). It must, even in the course of proclaiming the wholly beneficial character of Unilever's stewardship of Nigerian forests, envision the crises that extraction can wrought. In positing the very “positive” inclusion of Africans in modernity that Shaka reads as an important anticolonial corrective, the film also shows the environmental breakdown that Unilever's Nigerian technicians leave in their wake, from floodwaters caused by deforestation to the pollution of entire ecosystems by industrial waste.

The environmental frame, which demands attention to resource extraction and its consequences, allows for an illustration of Senegalese filmmaker Khady Sylla's claim that Dakar is “more or less everywhere”—that to represent Africa is to represent the world.¹² (As Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas argue in their critical account of oil capitalism, “the Niger Delta is the world ... If the Niger Delta dies, Nigeria dies too. The world dies too.”)¹³ If, to quote Melis Behlil, “Hollywood is everywhere”—if, that is, there is such a place as “Hollywood,” to borrow a term from Aida Hozic—it is equally worth considering the spatial reach and planetary relevance of Nollywood and of African resources more broadly. This global terrain bears the marks of the many extractive processes that have made both Hollywood and Nollywood possible, and that the two industries routinely represent on the screen. African cinemas in the twenty-first century are particularly responsive

12 Quoted in Dan Moshenberg, “The Monologue of Her Silence,” *Africa Is a Country*, December 27, 2013, <https://africasacountry.com/2013/12/khady-sylla-made-films-out-of-the-impossible-and-the-untranslatable>.

13 Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta* (London: Verso, 2003), 95, 205.

to questions of climate change, owing, no doubt, to the broadening scope and increasing frequency of drought, famine, and other environmental catastrophes on the continent. In Sylla's film *Monologue of the Mute* (2008), Amy, a young Serer woman working as a maid in Dakar, recalls her natal village, describing in voice-over the river where, as a child, she would bathe and wash her clothes (thus evoking the Niger as described, and shown, in René Vautier's anticolonial documentary *Afrique 50* [1950]). Yet the image track contradicts Amy's claims, revealing that the recollected river is, in the twenty-first-century present, bone-dry—nonexistent. It has vanished; the desert has taken over. From urban Dakar, Amy looks back on the eucalyptus trees of her childhood, but they, too, have since disappeared, as she eventually concedes on the soundtrack, saying of her once-verdant birthplace, "I never go back there. My father's garden doesn't exist." Ostensibly a reference to the immateriality of memory—to the spectral character of that which is merely recollected and no longer tangibly experienced—Amy's declaration also carries the weight of the literal, signifying the destruction and depletion of the natural world. Her father's garden no longer exists for the urbanized Amy, confined as she is to crowded servants' quarters in downtown Dakar, far from the countryside. But it no longer exists for anyone else, either—or even for itself. "It's too easy to blame nature," concludes a voice on the soundtrack, late in the film. "To point your finger at the sky and call it destiny, while you dry your crocodile tears." Over high-angle shots of abandoned mining sites, the voice continues, "Desertification doesn't explain everything. We need to question the rules that govern the global economy." Senegal's underdevelopment, and the persistence of extreme poverty despite a GDP growth rate exceeding that of France or the United States, is thus linked to environmental degradation, with *Monologue of the Mute* simultaneously denying that there is anything remotely "natural" or inevitable about widespread habitat loss. Desertification has a human cause, and human consequences. The film's title, which underscores its genealogical relation to Sembene's *La noire de ...* (like Sembene's Diouana, Amy speaks only an inner monologue, rendered in voice-over), also articulates the plight of the environment, a voiceless victim whose devastation can yet be enunciated cinematically, in shots of dried-up rivers, scorched farmlands, and deserted quarries. The planetary scale of such destructive processes is made clear in a closing voice-over: "This story took place in Dakar, but it could happen anywhere."

African experiences of climate change, expressed through cinema and other cultural forms, cannot be adequately understood without reference to systems of extraction that operate all over the world. This is partly because

representations of those systems, whether they originate in Lagos or Los Angeles, have always been encountered on the African continent. They have played important roles in the environmental imagination, influencing African approaches to climate change as a global problem that demands global solutions. If, as Brian Larkin notes, “Africans have always been engaged in a dynamic exchange with other places,” it is well worth framing that exchange as a series of extractions—whether of crude oil from the Niger Delta or of the instrumental theme from *Twin Peaks*.¹⁴ I am not suggesting that by pirating Hollywood content, Nigerian filmmakers are somehow akin to oil companies and other industrial extractors, either morally or in practical terms. I do, however, wish to indicate that resource extraction and climate change are more than mere backdrops to such borrowings. When Kenneth Gyang pays homage to the aerial cinematography of Fred Zinnemann’s *The Nun’s Story*, which Warner Bros. released in 1959, and which takes a comparative approach to the geographies of Western Europe and Central Africa, he is citing footage that was shot in colonial Congo by second-unit director Sam Zebba, who was selected for the job on the basis of his earlier depictions of timber harvesting in Nigeria. Scratch the surface of such “cinephiliac intertextuality” and you are sure to discover shared histories of extraction.¹⁵

Extractive capitalism leaves a wounded world in its “civilizing” wake, and the wounds are made visible even in films that, like *The Twilight Forest* and Shell-BP’s *The Search for Oil in Nigeria* (1961), insist on the sustainability of certain advanced harvesting methods and purport to offer visual evidence of healthy land management. Such films tend either to entirely exclude views of Europe and North America—of, that is, the ultimate metropolitan destinations of timber, crude oil, and other materials—or to tendentiously omit glimpses of long-depleted Western forests when visualizing Euro-American splendor. The Global North thus emerges as a space strictly of plenitude, where an abundance of consumption conceals—papers over—the disruption of entire ecosystems. Exceptions exist, however, even in classical Hollywood cinema. In the 1930s, Warner Bros. produced a cycle of

14 Brian Larkin, “The Grounds of Circulation: Rethinking African Film and Media,” *Politique africaine* 153, no. 1 (January 2019): 105–126 [122].

15 Following David Desser, Connor Ryan uses the term “cinephiliac intertextuality” to characterize an important aspect of New Nollywood. Connor Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils: Nollywood and Nigerian City Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023); David Desser, “Remaking *Seven Samurai* in World Cinema,” in *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film*, ed. Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 17–39. Gyang, who went to film school in Jos, knows film history well.

films critical of large-scale corporate logging and attentive to the dangers of deforestation—films that the studio remade in subsequent decades, reiterating their quasi-conservationist arguments and emphasizing the need to protect at least some of North America's forests. Yet there is also, in these studio films intended partly for export, a fascinating dialectical tension between the conservationist ethic and a spirit of imperialist adventurism that calls for the identification and exploitation of foreign lands—for, that is, the sacrifice of Africa's natural wealth. At no point do these films suggest that the American demand for lumber will ever abate, or that it should. Instead, African forests are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) presented as saviors of American woodlands. The former fall so that the latter may live, capitalism itself being ineradicable, consumer demand impossible to ignore or redirect.

Today, prominent economists continue to insist that "Africa's natural resource endowment is less thoroughly prospected and exploited than that of other regions." If "most of Africa's natural resources are yet to be developed," this is, they claim, surely a "failure of discovery" that demands the immediate relocation of capital, infrastructure, and personnel. The goal of extractive enterprise is thus to accelerate the rate of discovery of natural resources, including off the coast of West Africa. Given both the depletion of the rest of the world's valuable reserves and the alleged "under-exploitation" of Africa (a claim that echoes Lawrence Summers's notorious assertion that the continent is "vastly *under-polluted*"), economic geographers generally agree that "natural resources will be of increasing importance to Africa in the coming decades."¹⁶ Implicit in such pronouncements, as in films like *The Twilight Forest* and *The Search for Oil in Nigeria*, is the essence of ecological racism: conservation, so crucial to a Global North whose inhabitants are deemed capable of appreciating the beauty of the natural world (and who are presumably in need of such a "healthy" distraction, a pastoral counterbalance to their evolutionary advancement and modern industrial sophistication), is simply inapplicable to the Global South (where, *The Twilight Forest* falsely asserts, the "natives" simply leave trees to rot, anyway). The claims of sustainability that course through *The Twilight Forest*, far from plausibly indexing Unilever's actual practices in Nigeria, are simply further reflections of this racialized principle—of, that is, the West's capacity to comprehend and deploy a discourse of conservation within the context of

16 Anthony J. Venables, "Managing Natural Resource Booms," in *The Oxford Companion to the Economics of Africa*, ed. Ernest Aryeetey, Shantayanan Devarajan, Ravi Kanbur, and Louis Kasekende (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 388–393.

commercial cinema. Belied by the film's own image track, the voice-over commentary of *The Twilight Forest* rehearses the merely rhetorical function of environmentalism in the idiom of corporate advertising.

The British-Dutch Unilever, one of the earliest and largest global corporations, has always been an “enterprise with a planetary appetite,” to quote Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Müller, whose groundbreaking book *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations* was first published in 1974.¹⁷ Yet Unilever is also, of course, an enterprise with planetary effects—deleterious consequences for the natural environment. Climate change is plainly “a problem which in one way or another exists everywhere,” to borrow a line from Harry Belafonte’s onscreen introduction to Sam Zebba’s 1957 docudrama *Fincho*, shot on location in the fast-disappearing forests of Yorubaland. Though Belafonte is referring to the challenges of modernization—of adapting to rapid industrialization and capitalist acceleration—his words speak to the planetary scale of phenomena whose human causes are clearly marked in this film that offers an early glimpse of large-scale corporate logging in Nigeria. The extractive practices that *Fincho* records were not, in 1957, unique to that decolonizing country. Rather, they represented the conscious replication of processes of depletion that had long since stripped Europe and the Americas of indigenous trees and other carbon-sequestering plants. What *Fincho* shows—namely, the transformation of southern Nigeria through land clearing, road construction, and the draining of natural wetlands—is certainly, as Belafonte puts it, “of great importance to all of us.” “Africa is the subject of Flora Gomes’s *Tree of Blood*,” writes Olivier Barlet, “but its theme is the world. The crisis that forces the entire [Bissau-Guinean] village onto the road of exile, while the loggers destroy the forest that harbors *everyone’s* tree of life, is at the same time cultural, ecological, and economic.”¹⁸ Whether in the form of an industrial film like *Fincho* or of a postcolonial tragedy like *Tree of Blood*, cinema has often demonstrated that what occurs within Africa’s natural landscapes is of truly global consequence.

Far from perpetuating a sense of Africa’s exoticism, the environmental frame in fact encourages contemplation of the continent’s material connections to the rest of the world. As David Murphy has noted, debates about “the nature of African cinema have too often been trapped within a reductive

17 Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Müller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 21.

18 Olivier Barlet, *Contemporary African Cinema* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 2, emphasis added.

opposition between Western and African culture.”¹⁹ Indeed, it would be difficult to sustain such an opposition in the face of growing global interdependence (though the international flow of Africa’s resources has never prevented certain self-interested parties from claiming that the continent is somehow outside of history). The global character of the COVID-19 pandemic, which shut down even the world’s capitals of high finance, certainly challenged long-cherished assumptions about “exotic” communicable diseases. The Ebola epidemic of 2013–2016—the most widespread outbreak of the disease to date—was effectively stopped at West Africa’s shores, perhaps reinforcing a sense of the subregion as uniquely pitiable and “naturally” quarantined. Ebola’s successful containment, in other words, conceivably fortified the myth of Africa’s geographical isolation (despite the deployment of thousands of US troops to the countries most impacted by the epidemic). Just a few years later, however, the novel coronavirus—plausibly a product of accelerated climate change, habitat destruction, land degradation, and urbanization—undermined such assumptions, forcing a truly planetary frame on popular conceptions of infectious disease. Indeed, contagion—understood not simply in epidemiological but also in cultural, social, political, and economic terms—has, amid enhanced global interdependence, “become a powerful tool for transmission of a crisis from one country to another,” to quote Benno Ndulu.²⁰ Africa’s insertion into the global economy has rendered the continent susceptible to problems that originate far from its borders, “infecting” its populations with what Marxist-Leninists like to call (quoting Joseph Stalin) “the incurable diseases of capitalism.”

A focus on natural resources provides insights into the points at which African cinemas intersect with those from other parts of the world, including Hollywood. Extractive economies—and their climatic effects—are shared variables with specific cinematic resonances. As early as 1900, film screenings were used throughout the African continent both to attract potential laborers to various spaces of extraction, such as mining compounds and rubber plantations, and to secure workers’ continued service through the provision of entertainment. Films also, of course, provided job training and other informational functions as corporations embraced documentary’s pedagogic potential.²¹ As James Burns has suggested, cinema was from the

19 David Murphy, “Africans Filming Africa: Questioning Theories of an Authentic African Cinema,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (December 2000): 239–249 [241].

20 Benno Ndulu, “The Challenges of Sustaining African Growth in an Interdependent Global Economy,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Economics of Africa*, 160–165 [162].

21 Charles Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976).

very beginning central to the cultural and educational lives of African miners, and the European (and, later, American) mining companies themselves treated it as such, often fostering a love of movies among their laborers.²² Mining firms even helped fund the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment, a major initiative that spanned several colonial territories.²³

Efforts to imagine precolonial plenitude often posit an extreme climatic divergence from the extractive present. Gaston Kaboré's *Wênd Kûuni* (1982), a historical epic produced in Upper Volta, features an omniscient voice-over narrator who briefly intrudes on images of the distant past. Reflecting on the Mossi Empire's "days of splendor ... before the white man came," he says, "The rivers were overflowing, and there was much grain. No one went hungry." According to the narrator, the Mossi people then living in the Volta River basin experienced no drought, and their crops flourished. Though Kaboré carefully avoids idealizing the precolonial past (his intention was to depict, as he put it, "an autonomous society with its own oppressive forces and inner contradictions, a community which I did not regard as an ideal African society"), *Wênd Kûuni* insists on the ecological stability of the preindustrial era.²⁴ Social discord may abound, with women bearing the brunt of intolerance and a rigid traditionalism, but the land, because carefully tended, is forgiving. A state of equilibrium characterizes the environmental systems in which the Mossi Empire is geographically situated. For all its social flaws, that empire lives in deliberate harmony with nature. *Wênd Kûuni* thus offers an implicit critique of colonial land management, white stewardship of Africa's natural resources, and the environmental degradation that ostensible social progress can conceal or disguise. The film may, as Manthia Diawara suggests, "deconstruct the stereotypical view of precolonial Africa as a stagnating place or a primitive paradise," but its direct, retrospective references to the natural world suggest a critical environmental consciousness attuned to the climatic gaps between past and present.²⁵

22 James Burns, "The African Bioscope—Movie-House Culture in British Colonial Africa," *Afrique & histoire* 5, no. 1 (2006): 65–80. See also Gregg Mitman, *Empire of Rubber: Firestone's Scramble for Land and Power in Liberia* (New York: The New Press, 2021), 97–100, 181–183, 201.

23 Glenn Reynolds, "The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment and the Struggle for Hegemony in British East and Central Africa, 1935–1937," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 29, no. 1 (2009): 57–78.

24 From a 1985 interview conducted by Françoise Pfaff, quoted in Françoise Pfaff, "Africa from Within: The Films of Gaston Kaboré and Idrissa Ouédraogo as Anthropological Sources," in *African Experiences of Cinema*, ed. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 223–238 [228].

25 Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 75. Still, as Kathleen R. Smythe points out, "recent dramatic

Such examples indicate that African filmmakers like Gaston Kaboré, rather than having to “catch up” with Western environmentalist perceptions, were already preoccupied with climate change by the 1980s. African cinemas were thus in productive conversation with African print cultures that consistently sounded alarms about the state of the natural environment. In 1979, for instance, the Nigerian biologist and statesman Sanya Dojo Onabamiro began publishing dire warnings about coastal erosion in which he predicted (accurately) that Victoria Island, Onitsha, Warri, Brass, and Calabar would face major flooding.²⁶ Sea-level rise was very much on the minds of coastal Nigerians around the time that *Wénd Kúuni* was made, in the wake of the catastrophic flooding of Bar Beach in Lagos, an event that would become recurrent, claiming lives and property, including historic facilities long operated by the Nigerian Television Authority. As the Nigerian journalist Louisa Aguiyi-Ironsi put it in the mid-1980s, commenting on the growing destruction, “The danger is at hand now.”²⁷

It is perhaps axiomatic that climate change is a planetary problem with uneven effects, and that the African continent will likely bear the brunt of collective inaction. The pace of desertification is especially swift in the Sahel. Elsewhere on the continent, deforestation continues apace—at twice the speed of the world average—along with a broader loss of flora and fauna and a sharp reduction in biodiversity. The Horn of Africa has endured some of history’s worst droughts. Marine and coastal ecosystems are at risk, and water scarcity is a growing concern. African countries, many agree, are disproportionately impacted by climate change, the existence and acceleration of which are plainly attributable to the “developed world.” Recognizing the continent’s extreme dependence on exogenous factors, economists have long since raised “the question of [Africa’s] resilience to shocks originating in crises in systemically important economies and financial powerhouses.” They have lamented that Africa, like other parts of the Global South, is repeatedly asked “to weather the storms originating from outside its borders.”²⁸ Yet the very banality of such insights, so redolent of metropolitan guilt and hollow solicitude, threatens

examples of climatic change have longer histories than commonly thought, such as the shrinking of Lake Chad. Peoples of the Sahel and Sudan region of Africa have been responding to dramatic climate changes for millennia due in part to their geographic location.” Kathleen R. Smythe, *Africa’s Past, Our Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 67.

26 Sanya Dojo Onabamiro, *Philosophical Essays* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1980).

27 Louisa Aguiyi-Ironsi, “At the Mercy of Waves,” *Newswatch*, May 26, 1986, 9.

28 Ndulu, “The Challenges of Sustaining African Growth in an Interdependent Global Economy,” 162.

to obscure even thornier questions. Though surely vulnerable to certain forces beyond the control of its over 200 million inhabitants, Nigeria is one of the world's biggest polluters, with a pronounced ecological footprint and some of the unhealthiest air on the planet (owing to, among other factors, widespread reliance on diesel-powered generators and the lack of adequate regulation of vehicle emissions). Nigeria has long been a world leader in gas flaring, and the extensive operations of Shell and other oil majors make it a major contributor to global warming.²⁹ As the journalist Tom Burgis points out, "Few countries can claim to be so vital a source of the basic ingredient of the world's oil-fired economy."³⁰ Nigerian filmmakers have long implicated the federal government—and not just its foreign partners—in the perpetuation of environmental degradation. In Udoka Oyeka's *The Razz Guy* (2021), the protagonist's sister, a superstitious "bush woman" struggling to succeed in high-toned Lekki, has a vernacular (and vaguely Biblical) explanation for sea-level rise: "When sins are too much in a country, the water can be a flood." Chuko Esiri's short film *Besida* (2018) similarly adopts an aphoristic approach to the problem of climate change, beginning and ending with the ominous maxim (delivered in voice-over) "When the fish die, all that's left is the city." This gnomic line could be read as an agnostic commentary on the tenacity of urbanization, and on the idea of the city as the last best hope for those stripped of their traditional income sources. The elimination of freshwater and marine life may not mean the loss of Lagos and other megacities constructed on the ruins of complex ecosystems, but it surely means destitution and starvation for fishing communities. Images of deliberate environmental destruction frame *Besida*, which features repeated shots of the protagonist hacking away at the undergrowth of Abraka's mangrove forests, in Delta State. (His actions suggest preparations for seismic surveys—the geological analyses conducted by oil companies whose crews use machetes to cut lines through areas of dense vegetation.) Nigeria, then, is no innocent preindustrial victim but a significant source of carbon emissions, which places it, if not on a par with China and the United States, then at least on their environmentally unfriendly path.³¹

29 Okonta and Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 67.

30 Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Oligarchs, Corporations, Smugglers, and the Theft of Africa's Wealth* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 63.

31 Carmela Garritano makes a similar point in her work on "African energy worlds" and the "energy paradox" in which the continent currently finds itself. See Carmela Garritano, *African Energy Worlds: Film, Media, and Art for an African Anthropocene* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

Such negative equivalences between Africa and the developed world are sardonically acknowledged in Jean Rouch's *Moi, un noir* (1958), as when Oumarou Ganda's "Edward G. Robinson," surveying Abidjan's automobile graveyards and noting the frequency of vehicular accidents on the city's busiest roads, says in voice-over, "We're like the Americans."³² Shots of leaking engines, flat tires, and overturned motorcycles suggest that the intercontinental correspondence is one of material excess and environmental contamination. The transcultural consistency of car cemeteries, motor vehicle collisions, and automotive waste has its roots in a capitalist acquisitiveness that even Treichville's migrant workers have managed to internalize, though they are of course confounded by uneven development, as well. As Ganda's character points out, their handed-down cars only last about two months before piling up in "all this mess," though Africans too may wish to clog the roads with motor vehicles (and, consequently, their own lungs with exhaust emissions); they too may hope to stay in fashion, and on an experiential level with affluent Americans, by thoughtlessly discarding yesterday's model of automobile. Successfully exported from the imperial center, capitalist fantasy joins the material reality of planned obsolescence to create a surfeit of detritus and death. Auto carcasses and human corpses pile up—global consequences of the profit motive.

Anticipating Jean-Luc Godard's apocalyptic vision of automobility in *Weekend* (1968), *Moi, un noir* also exceeds Godard's critique by foregrounding Africa's status as global capitalism's dumping ground. There is also the implicit link, still nascent in the late 1950s, to the ailing infrastructures of oil capitalism, particularly in Nigeria, where Shell's reliance on "substandard and environmentally unfriendly equipment and methods" has always resulted in catastrophic oil spills and equally injurious exhaust emissions and acid rains.³³ (BP logos abound in Rouch's Abidjan, attesting to the penetration in this French colony of a British multinational oil and gas company.) Ecological racism clearly underpins the global distribution of both car culture and oil extraction: Abidjan receives obsolete automobiles that pollute at rates far higher than those of their counterparts in Europe and North America, while Nigeria, as home to Shell's shoddiest drilling rigs, also experiences a sizable percentage of the company's worldwide oil spills. Still, Rouch's

32 Along similar lines, Dipesh Chakrabarty has identified "a universal that arises from a shared sense of a catastrophe," and that "calls for a global approach to politics without the myth of a global identity." Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 45.

33 Adebayo Adedeji, *The Curse of Berlin: Africa After the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 134. See also Okonta and Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*.

film suggests that environmental destruction is the kernel of a certain congruence between Africa and the United States, however uneven its effects. Amid extreme economic inequality, the challenges of pollution, technological breakdown, and the sheer dangerousness of road transport generate a sense of parity: “We’re like the Americans.”

Postcolonial Connections

Cinema and other moving-image media not only metaphorize but also materialize resource extraction. They are among the forms that natural resources—from silver to tungsten—take. Africa, as Cajetan Iheka writes, “remains marginal to discussions of materiality in media studies and in the subfield of ecomedia studies, yet the fossil fuels and ore crucial to media’s workings, like oil and coltan, are mined on the continent, and castoff electronic devices end up there.” In other words, all screen media are, to varying degrees, African in their reliance on the continent’s natural resources. Iheka’s groundbreaking analysis of “the ecology of images and images of ecology” covers a wide range of media forms and practices. If *African Media in an Age of Extraction* adopts a much narrower approach to focus almost exclusively on film, it nevertheless shares Iheka’s interest in tracing the transnational “ecological footprint of media,” and thus in understanding how “Africa’s extractive objects and agricultural products ... position Africa in the world.”³⁴ The book turns to the “significant visual archive produced in and/or about Africa,” mining it (so to speak) for insights into the historical operations and possible futures of extractive capitalism.³⁵

My research has lately come to center on some of the many intersections (both material and representational) between Hollywood and Nollywood. To be sure, Hollywood films are not the only sources of images of extraction, and this book offers, in addition to close considerations of African cinema, analyses of important European fiction and nonfiction films that equally participate in attempts to make sense of the exploitation of natural resources. Yet this book’s partial focus on Hollywood is far from arbitrary. Indeed, films shot on the African continent have long attested to the powerful penetration of that broadly defined industry and to the plainly imperialist character of so many of its products and practices. (Consider the abovementioned *Moi*,

34 Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 3–4.

35 Iheka, *African Ecomedia*, 6.

un noir, with its visual attention to Hollywood reissues in Abidjan, and with its more general thematization of the absorption of certain Hollywood styles and personae into the daily lives of working Africans.) Hollywood films about oil prospecting and timber harvesting, whether screened for Shell employees in Port Harcourt, Unilever executives in London, or ordinary moviegoers in Lagos and Los Angeles, resonated with, and perhaps even influenced, actual extractive practices, contributing to their legibility and thus, arguably, to their legitimacy. This book takes for granted that industrial films interacted with their fictional counterparts on colonial and postcolonial terrain, informing the development of resource states and participating in Africa's insertion into the global economy.

If there are exceptions to the cinematic configuration of extraction as a unidirectional flow away from African lands, they tend to center on the representation of automobility as a "universal" affordance of modernity—industrial capitalism's gift to the world. As *Moi, un noir* indicates, car culture is a structuring influence on daily life in Abidjan: imported automobiles, however imperfect or obsolete, speed down the streets, creating the major sights, sounds, and smells of the city. ("I'll be happy with any car," declares a character in Kunle Afolayan's 2021 film *Swallow*, "as long as it's from overseas.") If Africans, having surrendered their cocoa and timber to foreign corporations, cannot enjoy the fruits of their own extractive labors—cannot, that is, readily purchase fine chocolates and fancy furniture—they can at least ride a bus or an okada (a motorcycle taxi, perhaps the most common mode of motorized conveyance in Nigeria). Such is the premise of those industrial films that, departing from convention, center on the alleged universality of car culture. The short film *Shellarama* (Richard Cawston, 1965), a collaboration between Shell and the Cinerama Corporation, opens with oil drilling in the Niger Delta and ends with a montage of some of the many automobiles powered therefrom—a montage that, instructively, includes several glimpses of Nigeria's emergent road networks, thus marking a certain "return to the source" (in this case, of crude oil). Selling Shell (along with the Cinerama format), the film also served as an advertisement for Nigeria's post-independence road-development schemes. According to *Shellarama*, the mechanical power that Nigerian petroleum makes possible also demands the opening of multi-lane expressways, the raising of posted speeds, and the expansion of carriageway widths. Yet if the montage makes Lagos and Ibadan look as modern as London and Paris, it also calls to mind the negative equivalences to which *Moi, un noir* alludes. The global visibility of fast-moving automobiles stands in stark and distracting contrast to the (relative) invisibility of greenhouse

gas emissions, lending the celebratory *Shellarama* a distinctly ominous undercurrent.

Withholding chocolates and exporting automobiles are simply two sides of the same imperialist coin. Equally ideological (though said to be premised on a reputedly neutral market logic), they represent particular metropolitan assumptions: Africans don't need chocolates; Africans do need cars. The products of European cabinetry, though made of wood from Nigerian forests, are deemed less exportable to Africa than utilitarian automobiles powered by Nigerian crude. In both cases, as *Moi, un noir* indicates, Africans are left with considerable environmental damage. Already mined for highly prized wood—wood that will never be returned to the continent in the form of high-end furniture—Africa's forests and other landforms are further depleted for the sake of road expansion. Practical necessities exported in inverse proportion to luxury items like Belgian truffles and German timber frames, European and American automobiles emit the very greenhouse gases that merely compound the effects of industrial harvesting. Gaseous insult is added to extractive injury.

Produced by *Présence africaine*, the era's premier organization of African cultural activists, the 1953 short film *Les statues meurent aussi* examines this dialectic of removal and insertion. As the film's voice-over narrator puts it, addressing extraction from a European perspective, "That which we make disappear from Africa doesn't count for much compared to what we have in store for Africa." The latter provisions include, of course, environmental degradation and attendant catastrophes bequeathed to otherwise depleted lands. Resources disappear, but they leave behind more than a mere void. According to *Les statues meurent aussi*, a "new form of art shows up" in the age of extraction: it is an "art of the provisional, whose ambition is not to last" (as, indeed, natural resources cannot last when so aggressively plundered). "Here," the narrator continues, "the problem of the subject is not posed," for the art of extraction (as both industrial process and representation thereof) is premised on the dehumanization of labor, the mechanization of mere bodies. To underline the point, the film's image track offers documentary footage of African laborers hammering away at rocks and performing various other extractive functions, all under the close supervision of European managers: drilling, digging, sawing, and severing. "The subject," the narrator explains, "is this naturally ungrateful earth, this naturally troublesome climate," which, under an extractive regime, requires "work at an unfathomable scale, the rhythm of the factory confronting the rhythm of nature: Ford meets Tarzan." Directed by Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Ghislain Cloquet, *Les statues meurent aussi* stands, like Vautier's *Afrique 50*, as a complicated

late colonial precursor to the classics of African cinema. Alain Kassanda's 2023 film *Coconut Head Generation* powerfully suggests the lasting salience of such films among Nigeria's youth, for whom Nollywood has never seemed outside of or antithetical to the celluloid traditions of "quality" and "engagement." Documenting a weekly film club at the University of Ibadan, Kassanda highlights the intellectual sustenance that students derive from the decades-old work of Hondo, Kaboré, Sembene, Sylla, and others. In so doing, he illustrates Iheka's claims about the "network forms" that African media tend to employ, and that are discernable "in their entanglement of time past, present, and future," as well as "in their interconnection of spaces across boundaries."³⁶ In *Coconut Head Generation*, old films remain relevant, their postcolonial critiques mapping easily onto current concerns, including about resource extraction and climate change.

New Nollywood films frequently reference such classics. *The Razz Guy* updates Sembene's *Xala* for the Lekki set, showing what happens when the officious Temi, who constantly complains about "low-class" Nigerians, is cursed with a particular linguistic affliction, one that forces him to speak (but not think) exclusively in Pidgin. Like Sembene's El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, who is so snobbishly devoted to "proper" French that he recoils from his daughter's principled use of Wolof, Temi loudly denounces the "razz" style wherever he sees it, attempting in vain to expunge all traces of what he disparagingly terms "local behavior." In the end, Temi learns the error of his elitist ways; the curse is lifted, the Queen's English is restored to his tongue, and he even brokers a rapprochement between city and "bush" (here represented, somewhat improbably, by the outskirts of Ibadan).

Shared environmental concerns form an important core of New Nollywood's Pan-Africanism. In Walter "Waltbanger" Taylaur's *Jolly Roger* (2022), a young Lagosian woman called Najite (the name evoking that of her home country) reads *Le fou du carrefour* by the Ivoirian playwright Hyacinthe Kakou. As Najite describes the 1994 play to her date, the film visualizes her words in a remarkable animated sequence by Toluwalase Seriki and Abayomi Lawore II. "It's about an industrialized African city, overrun by waste," Najite says, recounting the plot of *Le fou*, a Pidgin version of which was staged in Lagos in 2001, under the title *Madness Junction*, by the Cameroonian multi-hyphenate Binda Ngazolo.³⁷ "Everyone complains about it, but no one ever does anything about it. So, one day, a not-so-jolly

36 Iheka, *African Ecomedia*, 3.

37 Binda Ngazolo, "Fela's Stories: Confusion Break Bone," *PAM: The Pan-African Music Magazine*, October 15, 2019, <https://pan-african-music.com/en/felas-stories-confusion-break-bone/>.

citizen decides that enough is enough, and he's going to clean up all of the waste. They nickname him 'The Madman.' ... He successfully cleans up all of the waste, and everyone is happy. Then, all those who profited from the waste become broke and jobless and of course very upset. So they throw The Madman out of the city, and the waste starts to build up again." The animation emphasizes smokestacks, oil slicks, and other emblems of fossil capitalism (along with the trash heaps to which Kenneth Harrow's scholarship is so productively attuned).³⁸ Seriki and Lawore even sneak in a rendering of Nigeria's National Theatre, complicating Kakou's resolutely placeless approach. In "Nigerianizing" *Le fou*, Tylaur's film points to the country's oil tycoons and other moguls committed to polluting the land, water, and air. Where Kakou's original implicates the heavy industries of the Global North, whose extractive activities inevitably befoul the Global South, *Jolly Roger* suggests that Nigeria has long since joined their game, becoming a significant contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions.

The theme of environmental degradation, as expressed in *Le fou*, has been a profoundly connective force in African popular cultures, linking Ivoirian, Cameroonian, and Nigerian artists, and infiltrating even the "Ikoyi way" of a New Nollywood blockbuster. Alain Kassanda, the director of *Coconut Head Generation*, was born in Kinshasa, and his film both embodies and depicts important South-South exchanges that are at once cinematic and ecological.³⁹ Such exchanges implicitly critique the inter-African projects of European colonialism, in which cinema was understood as a means of promoting more productive extractive activities. Take, for instance, the case of 1927's *Black Cotton* (aka *Cotton Growing in Nigeria*), which British Instructional Films made for the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation. Shot in and around Kano, Nigeria, *Black Cotton* was distributed to audiences throughout East Africa, where it served to cultivate cross-cultural consciousness of specific techniques of harvesting and ginning, and to suppress or preempt awareness of the deleterious social and environmental consequences of extraction, commodification, and exportation.⁴⁰

38 Kenneth W. Harrow, *Trash: African Cinema from Below* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

39 In Tunde Kelani's *Dazzling Mirage*, the vice president of Ikeja-based PDR Media plans a luxury weekend in Accra.

40 Julian Huxley, who advised the Colonial Office on education in British East Africa, recounts the film's intercontinental circulation in *Africa View* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 1968). See also Matthew H. Brown, *Indirect Subjects: Nollywood's Local Address* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021), 58–60.

West Africa has also, on occasion, stood in for other parts of the Global South, its specific geographies made to seem representative of all resource states, including those located many thousands of miles away. Shot on location in Dahomey (now Benin), which plays the part of Haiti under Papa Doc, MGM's *The Comedians* (Peter Glenville, 1967) uses the absolute space of West Africa (as, specifically, an "accommodating" shooting location) to re-inscribe an expansive Black Atlantic context. At the same time, it underscores the instability of Haiti (the film's very subject, and the reason that it could not be shot on Hispaniola) and the contrasting postcolonial stability of Dahomey—a stability further bolstered (or so MGM liked to claim) by direct Hollywood investment. Indeed, a promotional documentary—MGM's ten-minute *The Comedians in Africa* (1967), which covers the making of the film on location—acts as a kind of travelogue promoting tourism to Dahomey, where stars Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, among others, are shown enjoying some downtime between takes.

Resource extraction has long been at the center of such exchanges. Teco Benson's big-budget *Blood Diamonds* (2004), about the illegal trade in the titular minerals and their role in the perpetuation of armed conflict, was filmed on location in Sierra Leone, where, Paul Richards has shown, VHS cassettes of the Hollywood hit *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982)—a Rambo film shot in the Pacific Northwest—helped cultivate forest consciousness and associated strategies of bushcraft among insurgents.⁴¹ In Djibril Diop Mambety's *Hyènes* (1992), the VHS cassettes for rent in Draman Drameh's store suggest another set of collective environmental (and economic) experiences. Displayed behind the counter, they indicate not merely the worldliness of the store but also Mambety's subtle articulation of ecological themes. For the two films-on-cassette are, like *Hyènes* itself, about the complex relationship between climate and economy—between absolute space and commercial possibility: Alain Tanner's *No Man's Land* (1985), a co-production of Switzerland, France, West Germany, and the United Kingdom, concerns the smuggling of contraband (including gold mined in Africa) across the largely unguarded, watery border between Switzerland and France; and Jacques Baratier's *La Ville-bidon* (1971), in which an ambitious deputy mayor (anticipating the mayor in *Hyènes*) endeavors to construct luxury housing on land occupied by the poor, who live, essentially, atop the

41 Paul Richards, "Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone," in *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, Second Edition, ed. Roy Richard Grinker, Stephen C. Lubkemann, and Christopher B. Steiner (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010), 543–554.

state's unwanted excavation materials and other industrial waste. Both films speak powerfully to some of the experiences that Mambety is dramatizing in *Hyènes*. (*La Ville-bidon* even foreshadows Nigeria's own contributions to slum clearance, particularly the infamous removal of the Maroko settlement by the Lagos State government, which promptly erected luxury housing in its place.) The visual presence in *Hyènes* of these VHS cassettes (admittedly more conspicuous—more readable—in the recent 2K restoration of the film than in previous transfers) calls to mind Manthia Diawara's point about the posters (including of Charlie Chaplin) displayed on the bedroom walls of the central characters in Sembene's films: "They are there more for thematic concerns than for *mise-en-scène* decoration."⁴² Advertised on the sleeves of cassettes located just behind Drameh's counter, *No Man's Land* and *La Ville-bidon* both track, in their radically different ways, some of the political, economic, and ecological terrain that so concerns Mambety.

The community at the center of *Hyènes* is experiencing a climate crisis. "The drought hasn't turned us into savages yet," insists the hapless mayor of Colobane (played by Mamadou Mahourédia Guèye, the star of Sembene's *Mandabi* [1968]). But climate change has clearly exacerbated the economic slump in which Colobane finds itself. When Linguère Ramatou arrives, wealthier than the World Bank and trailed by the finest imported commodities, Colobane's desperate residents reveal just how buyable they are. Instructively, two of the town's most eminent sons (including the mayor), beg Ramatou to underwrite all manner of extractive industries, explaining, "There is oil in the soil ... and minerals ... like nowhere else." But Ramatou already knows that Colobane is (or at least was) rich in such natural resources: she owns the town and is responsible for its depletion. The suggestion here is that she has long since overseen the extraction of Colobane's natural wealth—an environmentally damaging process that continues to wreak havoc, including in the form of a much-lamented drought. "The temperature is rising because Linguère Ramatou has arrived!" cries a carnival barker, in what is not just a figure of speech but is also, as the barker himself makes clear, a reference to climate warming (since part of the point of the carnival, which doubles as a trade fair, is to sell imported air conditioners—decidedly hot commodities during a stifling drought). The barker, who wants simply to move product, *celebrates* the rising temperatures; his listeners, suffering under the extreme heat, hasten to purchase the imported instruments of their relief (which, as energy guzzlers responsible for the emission of yet

42 Manthia Diawara, *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 47.

more carbon dioxide, only stand to perpetuate the problem). “Everything behind me comes from abroad!” the barker proudly announces, pointing to state-of-the-art items that require a great deal of energy to run properly, and that emit highly destructive refrigerant molecules, besides. The claim that Colobane is “like nowhere else” is thus belied by its imports—a point that Ramatou underscores when she voices her desire to “make the whole world a whorehouse.”

In an echo of *Moi, un noir*, Mambety’s film also emphasizes Colobane’s environmentally destructive car culture. Like Amílcar, the hopeful little boy in Flora Gomes’s *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* (1991), Dramaan Drameh, the object of Ramatou’s vengeance, speaks of universal car ownership, saying of his personal automobile, “All the children of Colobane have one.” While Drameh’s statement appears to be as fanciful as that of the Amílcar who imagines France to be impossibly plush, it is clear that Colobane aspires to a condition of extreme automobility. This, then, is Mambety’s mordant vision of globalization, one that he shares with so many other African filmmakers committed to interrogating the social as well as environmental and economic impact of imported consumer goods. Such commercial products are common phenomena. They are among the shared affordances of modernity—agents and symbols of Africa’s worldliness. Such belonging is very much a measure of the universal(izing) ambitions of extractive enterprise. Indeed, the scene in *Hyènes* in which Ramatou is asked to underwrite extractive activities derives directly from the Friedrich Dürrenmatt play on which the film is based.⁴³ That European source—1956’s *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, set in a fictional Germanophone town called Gullen—thus supports the film’s suggestion that extraction is a truly global phenomenon, its effects universally deleterious, both for the natural world and for national economies. Indeed, Dürrenmatt’s Gullen, its resources depleted, is every bit as depressed as Mambety’s Colobane. Written during the decade that witnessed the worldwide popularization of Joseph Schumpeter’s theories of creative destruction, *Der Besuch* points to emergent conditions of globalization that would become impossible to ignore by the time *Hyènes* was produced in the early 1990s. Through their intertextual relationship, the two works suggest a particular historical process involving the geographical movement of capital from one landscape of extraction to another. The process is circular: depleted spaces, whether in Europe or Africa, are later reimagined as sites of extraction. In

43 Dayna Oscherwitz, “Of Cowboys and Elephants: Africa, Globalization and the Nouveau Western in Djibril Diop Mambety’s *Hyenas*,” *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 223–238 [234].

both play and film, town leaders, apparently unaware of any other path to enrichment, implore the female protagonist to reinvest in mining and quarrying—to reopen the earth.

None of this is to deny the specificities of the African context—the particular forms of underdevelopment of the continent—but rather to point to some essential, resource-specific and extractive connections between the Global North and the Global South. As Greg Thomas astutely observes in his analysis of *Hyènes*, “the planet itself [is] not excluded” from Mambety’s exploration of consumerism.⁴⁴ It is from the North that Ramatou arrives as a possible agent of re-excitation; hers is the very trajectory traced in the 1965 film *Coast of Skeletons*, a European-South African coproduction directed by Robert Lynn (whose previous film *Mozambique* [1964], shot on location in Durban, depicts an international narcotics trade that links the eponymous country to Zanzibar via Portugal and the United States). A sequel to Zoltán Korda’s *Sanders of the River* (1935), which centers on the title character’s efforts as colonial administrator in Nigeria, *Coast of Skeletons* shifts to the post-independence period and has Sanders relocating to London to work for an insurance company. As soon as he arrives at that center of global finance, however, the company requests that he return to Africa to dredge for diamonds. Already responsible for much of Europe’s wealth, Africa is recast in the role of supplier now that new offshore sites have been located and new technologies of excavation perfected. Political independence is not a deterrent. Nor is Britain the only participant in this neocolonial “return to the source” of Western wealth: *Coast of Skeletons* features an American businessman who, having exhausted opportunities in his native Texas (where the extraction of petroleum made him a billionaire), turns his attentions to foreign lands. As one character so succinctly puts it, the Texan “started in oil, prospected for gold in New Guinea, and finally moved to Africa.” Familiar to Europeans, the African continent represents a new frontier for Americans who nevertheless benefit from the knowledge and experience of former colonial powers.

Financed entirely by state agencies in Guinea-Bissau, Flora Gomes’s *Mortu Nega* (1988) offers a particularly complex depiction of the achievement of independence (in this case, from decades of Portuguese rule). In the film, the ostensible aftermath of colonialism is not, as expected, an entirely joyous experience. The spirited cheers of small children (who, up to this point, have been playacting guerilla warfare with equal abandon) register

44 Greg Thomas, “Hyenas in the Enchanted Brothel: ‘The Naked Truth’ in Djibril Diop Mambéty,” *Black Camera* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 8–25 [20].

the victory over Portugal, but these are fleeting expressions of collective triumph, soon to be replaced by widespread anxieties about the worsening condition of the natural world. Simply put, nature does not cooperate with newly independent Guinea-Bissau—does not, that is, reward the country's emergent autonomy with much-needed atmospheric affordances; climatic and political timelines are not in sync. As one character worriedly points out, “it rains less and less” since the end of the war of liberation. All the wells run dry. The earth begins to crack.

In *Mortu Nega*, climate change accompanies a seismic political shift. It is, perhaps, a cosmic joke, darkly ironic and altogether unwelcome. Yet it is also, implicitly, a consequence of the very colonialism that Bissau-Guineans have so recently vanquished. *Mortu Nega* thus invokes colonialism's specifically climatic legacy—the environmental degradation that is both symptom and agent of imperialism's persistence. (The film's very title, which connotes the refusal of Bissau-Guineans to lie down and die in the face of Portuguese aggression, may also suggest a different sort of tenacity—that of climate change.) “We mustn't let the drought separate us,” cautions Soko (Tunu Eugenio Almada), a veteran of the armed struggle for independence, adding, “Everywhere it's the same.” Though he means to indicate the shared struggle of all Bissau-Guineans (the confrontation with recalcitrant nature echoing the protracted fight against colonial control), Soko's words ring false from a global perspective, as the film itself implies. For environmental degradation is certainly not the same everywhere; it is a planetary problem with specific effects—like drought—that are unevenly distributed. Though newly politically independent, Bissau-Guineans cannot grow their own food; they cannot be agriculturally self-sufficient, despite their deep knowledge of subsistence farming. Guinea-Bissau's dependence on agricultural and other imports—whether from Europe, the United States, China, Cuba, or the Soviet Union—inhibits the country's political autonomy, imperiling the very independence so recently won.

Gomes visualizes a direct link between colonialism and climate change in a remarkable dream sequence that takes place late in the film, while Soko's wife, Diminga (Bia Gomes), lies fitfully sleeping, a victim of unprecedented drought conditions. Superimposed over her anxious image are shots of what has become an emblem of climate change: a dry, cracked lakebed, its fractures honeycombing the barren land. The parched earth then dissolves into shots (seen earlier in the film) of villages bombed and burned by the Portuguese. One form of destruction precipitates, and is also indistinguishable from, another. Sustainably made with natural materials, the villagers'

huts are ultimately torched; entire communities are razed; and even the lakes are depleted.

If colonialism wages war on the natural world and its human and nonhuman inhabitants, the natural world surely bears the scars of such hostility, and it is not quick to forgive. Yet Gomes refrains from offering an entirely uncritical view of the pre-colonial period as a time of necessarily sustainable practices and careful environmental preservation. He may, in fact, gesture toward a more ambivalent stance when he shows the environmentally destructive consequences of revolutionary action. Throughout the first, combat-centered half of *Mortu Nega*, the natural world is collateral damage, as when guerillas shoot down a Portuguese helicopter, forcing it to crash in a previously tranquil palm forest. (The film's production is itself implicated in this despoliation: Gomes shows a real tree falling, revolutionary sacrifice apparently requiring, for its adequate representation, a cinematic equivalent—the staging of environmental destruction.) In such instances, Gomes, whose nuanced approach to the question of “tradition” Akin Adeşokan has compellingly explored, suggests that environmental degradation is not a one-sided process with a single national culprit.⁴⁵

At the climax of *Mortu Nega*, Diminga's sobering dream occasions a ritual ceremony during which an urgent question is posed: “Who desires the death of the baobab, the kapok, and the red tree?” Though Gomes chooses to end *Mortu Nega* on a note of hope, showing the rains returning at last, he bluntly answers the ceremony's central question at the very start of his next feature film, *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, which opens with a timber truck passing through Bissau. At one point, the vehicle must break for a group of children gathered to commemorate key events in their country's postcolonial history. Gomes complicates the visual joke (wherein the present, in the form of extractive industry, nearly collides with the past) by having the children use rubber tires as agents of commemoration. This is not, then, a neatly dichotomous encounter but a messy, mutually implicating one that calls into question the ostensible separation between past and present, tradition and modernity. For the rubber tires are no less extractive objects than the massive logs bundled atop the timber truck; they, too, come from the African earth. As in *Moi, un noir*, however, the tires are surplus products left to pile up in the African sun—recycled symbols of the profligacy of Firestone and other companies committed to the ceaseless exploitation of the continent's natural resources. (Exactly contemporaneous with *Moi, un noir*,

45 Akin Adeşokan, “Flora Gomes, Filmmaker in Search of a Nation,” *Black Camera* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2011), 31–53.

the American industrial film *The Tire That Conquered Africa* [1958] celebrates the success of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in extracting African natural resources, dominating Liberia's economy, and influencing "ways of doing business" in population-dense Nigeria, described as "the continent's giant."⁴⁶ Amílcar, one of the boys engaged in the commemorative ritual, later claims that even children own multiple cars in Europe, so awash is the West with internal combustion engines and the gas to power them. The bundled logs are bound for that West, never to shade Guinea-Bissau again. Clearly, the postcolonial state is complicit in extraction—a contributor to "pervasive decay."⁴⁷

A kind of sequel to *Mortu Nega*, *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* suggests the inexorable liberalization of the Bissau-Guinean economy, which has come, by the early 1990s, to rely on the exportation of the country's natural resources, in sharp and sobering contrast to the sort of socialist self-containment imagined during the revolution. (At one point in *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, a schoolteacher refers to 1991—the film's year of production—as marking the culmination of Guinea-Bissau's "political liberalization.") "Today, a truckload of timber can't wait," explains Vicente, a former revolutionary now in charge of the local fishing industry. "Timber means money, and money's the weapon now." The film depicts his growing disillusionment, which, in an echo of *Mortu Nega*, is exacerbated by the gradual degradation of the natural world. "The huge mango trees along the streets are gone," Vicente laments to his ancestral mask, Nha Padidor. Among the culprits, he claims, is "the army of cars reaping your past, and sowing modernity." (It is little wonder, then, that young Amílcar, Vicente's frequent interlocutor, has visions of extreme automobility.) In his essay on Gomes, Adeşokan situates the filmmaker's work in relation to Nollywood, arguing that it points toward that industry's hard-won capacity to occupy conceptual terrain equally marked by art (specifically, the cultural-nationalist aspirations of an "authentic" African cinema) and commerce (understood in terms of "the kinds of [genre] films African audiences prefer").⁴⁸ Yet Gomes has also complained of his lack of access to Nollywood's massive audiences, suggesting that Nigeria's population density represents an enviable condition enabling media sustainability and growth.⁴⁹

46 The film was made for Firestone by Ace Williams Tembo Productions, which was based in New York. For more, see *American Cinematographer* 40, no. 1 (January 1959), 86.

47 Adeşokan, "Flora Gomes," 42.

48 Adeşokan, "Flora Gomes," 41.

49 N. Frank Ukadike, "In Guinea-Bissau, Cinema Trickles Down: An Interview with Flora Gomes," *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1995), 179–185. Gomes does not, in this

From Gomes's perspective as an African filmmaker working in one of the continent's least populated countries, Nollywood's vast geographies are also impossibly crowded and, as such, self-sustaining. As Nigerian filmmaker Ola Balogun put it in the mid-1980s, "In spite of the myriad problems facing [cinema] in Nigeria, the prospects are excellent because the basic element (i.e., the audience) is there."⁵⁰ Nigeria is simply, perhaps, too populous for Nollywood to fail; Guinea-Bissau, by contrast, lacks the "basic element" necessary for the establishment of a viable national film industry. Yet the country is also lacking in other, even more fundamental fibrous and mineral elements—namely, the cotton and silver that were the main ingredients of cellulose nitrate film, the stock that prevailed for over six decades starting in 1889. Ironically, cellulose nitrate was first marketed as a substitute for ivory, including in the manufacturing of billiard balls—as, that is, a means of limiting the global commercial reliance on one of Africa's most precious natural resources—yet its more enduring use in film stock increasingly required African exports. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, Eastman Kodak consumed some five million pounds of cotton the year *Black Cotton* was made in Kano, and the company's cotton needs would only grow over the coming decades. At the same time, Kodak was becoming one of the world's top consumers of pure silver bullion, and Nigeria a not-insignificant exporter of the mineral.⁵¹ Long after the company ceased manufacturing cellulose nitrate film, Kodak remained a major purchaser of silver, and its elemental link to Nigeria was highlighted when, in the 1980s, the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) had it conduct comparative tests of the water in Lagos and Jos. Kodak's chemists found extremely high concentrations of dissolved minerals in the water in Victoria Island, but they encouraged the NFC to relocate to Jos, where, they concluded, film processing would be far more viable, despite the decades of tin mining that had tainted the area's rivers with sedimentation from toxic tailings. Kodak's visit to Nigeria thus forged (or merely confirmed) an important geographic connection between Rochester and Jos—between Western New York (itself heavily polluted) and Nigeria's Middle Belt.⁵²

Despite his country's relatively resource-poor status, and despite his suggestion of South-South competition, Gomes's oeuvre exhibits some palpable

1995 interview, use "Nollywood," but the word would soon be coined to describe the Nigerian films whose huge audiences he invokes.

50 Quoted in Hyginus Ekwuazi, *Film in Nigeria* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1987), 200.

51 Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening the Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 71–75.

52 Aristarkus Yohanna, "Film Corporation to Set Up Headquarters in Jos," *Nigerian Standard* (Jos), July 1, 1987.

connections to Nollywood, delineating many of the less rarefied geographies that the massive industry inhabits. The power outages that punctuate *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* are, like Bissau's potholed streets, infrastructural failures that Nollywood, however large and responsive its audiences, knows all too well. There is an amusing moment in Akay Mason and Abosi Ogba's 2021 Nollywood film *Day of Destiny* when two boys, magically transported back to the year 2000 and the first anniversary of Nigeria's ostensible restoration of democratic rule, chuckle while listening to a taxi driver confidently describe the Fourth Republic's capacity to correct the problems associated with the infamous National Electric Power Authority, or NEPA. The boys, having experienced the future, know that NEPA—Never Expect Power Always—will simply become the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, or PHCN—Problem Has Changed Name. In Gomes's film, such failures precipitate further environmental crises. Cars guzzle ever more gasoline in a losing battle with the forest-clearing roads. With refrigeration impossible amid the blackouts, the fish harvest goes bad and has to be burned. Gomes shows a large pile of snappers going up in flames, like the villagers' huts in *Mortu Nega*. Extraction does not merely enrich the Global North but can also be self-cannibalizing, begetting its own waste and destruction.

Elemental Connections

As the industrial history of Eastman Kodak makes clear, Balogun's use of the word "element" is apt. Resource-rich Nigeria has always been part of the Hollywood imperium, and its inclusion in the geographies of capitalism should be understood as elemental in both senses of the term—as, that is, at once basic and telluric, as much an inescapable experiential reality as a matter of the less immediately perceptible, quite literally underground extraction of oil, silver, tin, copper, coltan, lithium, and other natural resources vital for the invention, perfection, and circulation of screen media. Given these and other factors involved in the global development of media technologies and practices, it is hardly hyperbolic to suggest that Hollywood is, in several crucial respects, a Nigerian phenomenon—or, to put it another way, that the industry has been made up, both materially and imaginatively, of various resources identifiable as Nigerian. James Ferguson captures the material constitution of "global media" by African natural resources when he writes, "The copper wire bars produced by Zambian refineries literally did connect the world, via telephone and power cables that were forming a rapidly ramifying net across the globe." Africa's mineral and petroleum products

have, in other words, both symbolized and facilitated “a specifically modern form of world connection.”⁵³

Though perhaps less galvanizing a source of copper than the Zambia of the 1960s, Nigeria has long exported the mineral, along with many others. In 1955, a US congressional report concluded, “Nigeria’s mineral production is increasing in importance. For example, 14 percent of the world’s tin supplies come from there; gold, lead, and zinc are also being mined extensively ... Nigeria looms large in the making of steel because it is the world’s foremost producer of columbite, a mineral in demand for special steel used in turbines.”⁵⁴ The public report merely spelled out what private industry already knew. “FAR-AWAY PLACES GET MORE IMPORTANT EVERY DAY,” announced an advertisement in a 1951 issue of the trade paper *Broadcasting Telecasting*. Placed by the American Iron and Steel Institute, the ad touts decolonizing Nigeria as a key source of columbite ore. “America has so many new electric furnaces that suppliers of scarce alloying ores can’t keep up,” the ad continues. “That’s why more alloy steel scrap is so badly needed.” Much as it would go on to fulfill some of the urgent oil and timber needs of the Global North, Nigeria in the wake of the Macpherson Constitution proved a crucial supplier of columbite. “Natives of Northern Nigeria use head-pans to carry columbite ore from paddocks (surface excavations),” reads the caption for one photograph, which shows a long line of laborers marching down the low hills of what appears to be the Jos Plateau region. “Columbite yields

53 James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 242.

54 United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report of the Special Study Mission to Africa, South and East of the Sahara*, September 3, 1955–December 10, 1955, by Hon. Frances P. Bolton, Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on the Near East and Africa, April 5, 1957 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1957): 30. The report went on to single out Ibadan as “the largest Negro city in the world,” its massive population of would-be consumers ripe for the plucking by American companies—including film companies. “Particularly praiseworthy seemed to be the efforts of the United States Information Service insofar as the Southern and Eastern Regions were concerned,” the report noted. “In addition to the regular publications of books which were made available to the larger towns, films concerning the President of the United States and his press conferences seemed to have greatly interested the people. Films of an informational nature were being lent to mission societies and were also used by mobile units in touring the countryside” (33). Agricultural produce did not go unmentioned: “Nigeria is one of the largest producers of the world’s cocoa with about 24 percent of the world’s need being supplied from this area. All cocoa is sold through a single selling agency in London, namely the Nigerian Produce Marketing Co., Ltd.” (30). The report did not sugarcoat the challenges that American business faced in preparing to penetrate the decolonizing country: “The racial, linguistic, and cultural patterns of Nigeria are complex even by African standards” (27).



Separating tin oxide at a mine on the Jos plateau. Date unknown. Photograph by Edward Harland Duckworth. Courtesy of Northwestern University Libraries.

columbium, used in making stainless and heat-resisting steels. Sources of scarce alloying metals are scattered around the world.” Yet Nigeria was, in the 1950s, fast becoming the world’s top producer of columbite, and these boom years (before the demand for the mineral dropped significantly on the world market) saw the country facilitating the nascent jet age through the provision of its mineral riches.⁵⁵ Columbite also had a role to play in the manufacturing of radio and television sets—hence the appearance in *Broadcasting Telecasting* of an advertisement for Nigerian ores.

Such texts complicate the racist script of African backwardness while seemingly advancing it. They imply “the differential progress of the races” at the same time that they highlight the centrality of Africa and Africans to industrial modernity. A specific international division of labor generates a sense of “the world’s discontinuous cultures,” as Anne McClintock terms them. Working to extract and transport what they themselves will never consume, Africans are made to appear primitive—separate—at the very moment at which they are said to be at least partially responsible for the jet age. “The axis of time was projected onto the axis of space and history became global,” writes McClintock of the imperial project. “Time became a geography of social power, a map from which to read a global allegory of

55 B. W. Hodder, “Tin Mining on the Jos Plateau of Nigeria,” *Economic Geography* 35, no. 2 (April 1959): 109–122 [112n3].

‘natural’ social difference.”⁵⁶ McClintock’s insights resonate with Althusser’s notion of “peculiar time”—a temporal level that is “relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence, of the ‘times’ of the other levels.” “Peculiar time” aptly describes Nollywood’s emergence as a straight-to-video industry, unique as a specifically Nigerian replacement for commercial theatrical exhibition but still embedded in global circuits of commodity exchange (such as the international trade in VHS cassettes and, later, VCDs and DVDs) and coexisting with flourishing if denigrated straight-to-video industries in Europe and the United States.⁵⁷ The notion of Nigeria as oddly “untimely” finds expression in the Hollywood film *The Real McCoy* (Russell Mulcahy, 1993), which depicts the country as, in the words of one character, “the Betamax capital of the world”—Betamax being something of an obsolete technology by the time of the film’s release. The supreme paradox of Nigeria—it is both central, even dominant (a certain “capital of the world”), and, at the same time, “backward” (a boom town for Betamax long after the format’s obsolescence in the West)—is thus at the heart of the film, which cannot, in however offhanded a fashion, escape Nigeria’s imbrication with corporate media.

Such narratives also challenge the fashionable invocation of “post-national” landscapes. While acknowledging “the fragility of any territorial or geographical classification,” Alexie Tcheuyap has offered a powerful critique of the artistic and intellectual impulse to leave the nation behind—to deny its utility as an explanatory framework.⁵⁸ As Tcheuyap points out, continental categories are, for some scholars, equally suspect. Indeed, the climate crisis may, like similarly broad experiential realities, suggest some of the limitations even of “Africa” as an analytic. Yet Africa, as absolute space, is where a wide range of crucial natural resources are located. As such, it cannot be dismissed or subsumed. One cannot ironize it away. “The continent that we call Africa is as much a space as an idea,” write Dorothy L. Hodgson and Judith A. Byfield in the introduction to their edited collection *Global Africa*. “The deep history, vast geography, and complex local, regional, and global entanglements of people, ideas, and goods within and beyond the continent place Africa at the center of global historical processes rather than on [the] periphery.” Hodgson and Byfield, and the various contributors to

56 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge 1995), 37.

57 Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), 99.

58 Alexie Tcheuyap, “African Cinema(s): Definitions, Identity, and Theoretical Considerations,” *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (2011): 10–26 [26].

their collection, “challenge those narratives that contain African history and cultures within the continent.” They also emphasize the need to “complicate conventional narratives of Africa as [merely] a place and space that other people, states, and organizations act on and steal from.” While recognizing ongoing processes of dispossession and underdevelopment, *Global Africa* highlights some of the understudied itineraries of products, practices, and theories that both originate and terminate on the continent.⁵⁹

African Media in an Age of Extraction is indebted to such scholarship, as well as to recent work in environmental studies (especially environmental media studies). It is inspired, in part, by eco-materialist analyses, including of a digital turn so often touted as “clean,” low-impact, and even spectral. “This distancing,” writes Richard Maxwell, “reinforces unthinking technophilia by making it easy to forget the industrial origins of so-called post-industrial goods. They come to us all shiny and new—so clean you could eat off of them. The true story is that they’re born from a toxic and unsustainable process that begins in mines around the world—primarily Africa and Latin America—where the copper, gold, tin, coltan, lithium, and other elements that go into smartphones and computers come from.”⁶⁰ Maxwell’s work underscores some of the limitations of theories of electronic colonialism and cultural imperialism. “Whereas mercantile colonialism sought cheap labor, electronic colonialism seeks minds,” writes one scholar, as if workers—whether in Nigeria or elsewhere—were somehow external to the production, distribution, and reception of electronic media. “[Electronic colonialism] is aimed at influencing attitudes, desires, beliefs, lifestyles, and consumer behavior,” he adds, making no mention of the extractive economies on which media empires rest—of, that is, the exploitation of workers (particularly on the African continent) and the concurrent degradation of the natural environment. Instead, most scholars, at least in media studies, have been trained to focus on “the cultural forces influencing [the] individual’s attitudes and behaviors in foreign countries.” Enjoined to “separate the different nations of the world,” they miss (or undervalue) important material connections.⁶¹

59 Dorothy L. Hodgson and Judith A. Byfield, “Why Global Africa?,” in *Global Africa: Into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Judith A. Byfield (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 1–6 [1–2].

60 Richard Maxwell, “Social Liabilities of Digitizing Cultural Institutions: Environment, Labor, Waste,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries*, ed. Kate Oakley and Justin O’Connor (New York: Routledge, 2015), 392–401 [397].

61 Thomas L. McPhail, *Global Communication: Theories, Stakeholders, and Trends* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), 14, 45.

How, then, do the specificities of Africa—or, to adopt a narrower frame, of Nollywood, the continent’s most prolific media producer—relate to global categories? In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai famously lamented that “most writers who have asserted or implied that we need to think postnationally have not asked exactly what emergent forms compel us to do so, or in what way.”⁶² In the years since, an environmentally informed scholarship has taken up Appadurai’s challenge, positing supranational (and even supracontinental) continuities of resource depletion, habitat destruction, and climate change.⁶³ Such spatial fields, with their powerful perceptual and material linkages, indeed complicate more familiar national and continental frames, forcing us to consider previously unacknowledged connections, including between the Global South and the Global North. In the field of media studies, a spatial approach to Hollywood has, for instance, generated important insights regarding that industry’s hardly unique position within “spaces of flows,” to take Manuel Castells’s term. It has also sought to interrogate the longstanding claim that Hollywood represents a state of mind only tentatively connected to the absolute spaces of Southern California. Yet if Hollywood has been global from the beginning—both despite and because of its connections to a particular place—then so has Nollywood.

This book proceeds, then, from two premises. One premise is that Nollywood, though inescapably Nigerian, is global; another is that it can be studied in terms of spatial relations that pivot around the extraction of natural resources. Manthia Diawara rightly stresses “the global exposure of the Nollywood brand name,” but he also notes that the industry is particularly interested in how characters relate to their environments, both physical and social.⁶⁴ His spatial analysis of Nollywood’s output suggests the centrality of urban features (and imaginaries) that place Lagos and Abuja on a par with London and Washington.⁶⁵ Shot in New York and Lagos, the Nollywood film *Gone* (Daniel Ademinokan, 2021) cuts directly from the Manhattan Bridge to the Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge—a breathtaking graphic match that emphasizes some of the physical, social, and infrastructural geographies that the two megacities share despite a

62 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 158.

63 See, for instance, Patrick D. Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009).

64 Diawara, *African Film*, 173, 178.

65 Diawara, *African Film*, 180.

distance of some 5,000 miles.⁶⁶ *African Media in an Age of Extraction* is based on a related methodological presupposition—namely, that a shared reliance on Nigerian natural resources often generates a joint commitment to representing those resources onscreen, and that such equivalences should be drawn out rather than discarded in the name of cultural difference. Thus even as it seeks to honor Nigerian specificities, this book “assumes that cultural analysis, to achieve depth, must move beyond the restrictive framework of the blinkered narcissisms of nation-states,” as Robert Stam so memorably put it in the late 1990s. Stam’s admonition has only grown more urgent amid the acceleration of the global climate crisis, and I am inspired by his still-resonant calls to “make connections in spatial and geographical terms”; to refuse to “segregate historical periods and geographical regions into neatly fenced-off areas”; and to adopt “a transcultural and multidisciplinary perspective.” Like Stam’s comparisons between Brazilian films and Hollywood blockbusters, my own comparisons (namely, between Nollywood productions and Western industrial, advertising, and narrative fiction films) “are intermittent and provisional rather than sustained and systematic”; at the same time, I hope to show that, like the Brazil-US connection that so concerns Stam, the South-North connection at the center of my own analysis “is not only a metaphorical one of comparison and analogy” but is “also metonymic, a question of concrete historical links.”⁶⁷ The substantiality of those links is perhaps best demonstrated through attention to specific natural resources and to the cinematic (and paracinematic) practices that have promoted, critiqued, or otherwise registered their extraction.

Nollywood is especially ripe for the kind of comparative approach that Stam undertakes, which, in addition to its spatial dimensions, “makes connections in temporal terms, between past and present, both within and between countries.”⁶⁸ (In this sense, Stam’s work anticipates Achille Mbembe’s theorization of the geographies of Blackness, which, as a “buoyant and plastic” force, is “capable of living in the midst of several times and

66 Such bridge-centered comparatism stands in stark contrast to the editing techniques of earlier films that sought to place Africa in a global context. See, for example, the Italian documentary *World by Night No. 2*, which Warner Bros. distributed in 1961, and which features a shock cut from a fixed view of San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge to a slow pan of a dense forest in Kenya, an incongruity that the voice-over commentary underscores with the words “another continent, a very different spectacle—this is Africa!”

67 Robert Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 17–26.

68 Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*, 18.

several histories at once.”)⁶⁹ Investigating Nollywood’s literal and metaphorical access to the global requires expansive temporal as well as geographical frames. At the same time that he gestures toward the universality of some of Nollywood’s thematic features, Diawara identifies the industry’s development of “a unique political genre in African cinema,” one attuned especially to “land appropriation” and other attempts by the state to remake the natural environment in the name of capital.⁷⁰ Yet the clearing of Maroko (the violent displacement of a Lagos slum), which is so bitterly referenced in everything from Tade Ogidan’s 1996 epic *Owo Blow* to Toka McBaror’s New Nollywood hit *Merry Men: The Real Yoruba Demons* (2018), is also part of a more general process of capitalist usurpation that equally animates Baratier’s *La Ville-bidon*, a fake documentary about Parisian gentrification in the early 1970s, referenced by Mambety in the 1990s.⁷¹ More recently, in Lagos and elsewhere, land has been cleared, and communities displaced, for the construction of state-of-the-art IMAX facilities, in just one example of how cinema both precipitates and materializes—and does not simply depict—environmental transformation.⁷² If, as Diawara puts it, “Nollywood enables Nigerians to enter the capitalist system of consumption and erases the differences between the West and Africa,” it does so in part through an imaginative process that frequently emphasizes geographical equivalences, and in part through its material participation in extractive economies.⁷³

The colonial roots of such economies require explication. *African Media in an Age of Extraction* is, then, also the story of how a specifically colonial globality became something looser, larger, and more enduring. Cinema, whether in the form of short promotional films or of star-studded fiction features, has been a key participant in the perpetuation of extractive logics, shedding light on resource zones, advancing the material interests of mining companies, and generally benefitting from the ongoing exploitation of metal, mineral, and hydrocarbon assets. Colonial authorities, missionaries, and other European travelers to the African continent were, beginning in the late nineteenth century, determined to “harness the power of the moving image to the imperial project,” as James Genova puts it. Less understood is how cinema persisted in making sense of the extractive enterprises

69 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 6.

70 Diawara, *African Film*, 183.

71 For more on this process, see Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

72 Alastair Leithead, “The City That Won’t Stop Growing: How Can Lagos Cope with Its Spiraling Population?,” *BBC News* (August 21, 2017), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/lagos>.

73 Diawara, *African Film*, 185.

that the imperial project put in place, and that survived the transition to independence. “Despite the growing literature on colonial film,” notes Genova, “this important pivotal period in the history of cinema in West Africa has been largely overlooked by scholars or glossed over in a rush to get to the works of postcolonial African filmmakers who sought to ‘correct’ the record in the representational arena.”⁷⁴ Genova is right to draw attention to moments of ostensible transition and to interrogate cinema’s relation to them, whether as neocolonial agent, nationalist observer, or in some other capacity or configuration. The point is to engage histories of global circulation that include colonial, corporate, and cultural-nationalist or Pan-Africanist vehicles, and to attend to the affective dimensions, material affordances, and environmental consequences of these multiple exchanges, these diverse mechanisms and modes of contact that both represent and embody resource extraction. From the forced impositions of colonial rule to the voluntary appropriations of postcolonial economies locked into a reliance on hydrocarbons (gas, petroleum, coal) and metals and minerals (copper, gold, silver, tin), the matrices of capitalist extraction have been informed by, and have themselves shaped, “cinemas in different geopolitical locations and constellations,” to borrow a phrase from Miriam Hansen.⁷⁵ What Brian Larkin describes as “the politics and poetics of infrastructure” are thus equally relevant here—the politics of petrochemical dependency, say, and the poetics of tin mining, as conveyed in and through cinema, starting with colonial forms of extraction, representation, and circulation.⁷⁶

This is a project of “tracing transnational relations,” as Hansen puts it, but also of asking “questions about how films can be understood as engaging with modernity—more precisely, distinct, highly uneven and unequal formations of modernity—and about how film practices interrelate across the borders of national cinemas.” An emphasis on resource extraction and environmental change “contributes ... to the project of transnational film history, by bringing into view junctures between, and heterogeneities within, national film histories.” Hansen highlights “the heuristic potential” of the concept of vernacular modernism “as a relational framework for mapping film practices—not only vis-à-vis Hollywood

74 James E. Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 49.

75 Miriam Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism: Tracking Cinema on a Global Scale,” in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Nataša Đurovičová and Kathleen Newman (London: Routledge, 2010), 287–314 [305].

76 Brian Larkin, “The Poetics of Infrastructure,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327–343.

(and other foreign cinemas) but also on regional and local scales that complicate nationally defined film cultures.” Hansen’s intention is not to devise a “globally valid” or otherwise universal(izing) notion of vernacular modernism but to employ the concept “as a more reflexive framework capable of generating new lines of inquiry and revising itself in view of the empirical formations it explores.” Hers is “not an argument about a general and structural, let alone a causal, relationship between cinema and modernity.” Rather, she questions “how particular film practices can be productively understood as *responding*—and making sensually graspable our responses—to the set of technological, economic, social, and perceptual transformations associated with the term modernity.”⁷⁷ I am interested in taking up Hansen’s challenge in an effort to better understand the cinematic resonances of large-scale extractive projects that connect Africa to the rest of the world via the continent’s natural resources. As Cajetan Iheka makes clear, extractions quite literally fuel the motor forces of cinema’s modernity, making it difficult to ignore the medium’s entanglement with raw materials (and thus with the resource-rich African continent). This “commodities consensus” (Maristella Svampa’s term), like the extractivist dynamics that undergird it, adds an important dimension to Daniel Boorstin’s famous account of a “consumption community,” its members linked despite differences in racial identity and geographical location: all are consuming the same natural resources, mined in much the same manner and with comparable environmental, social, and physical effects (which is just one of the many messages conveyed in Rouch’s *Moi, un noir*, where choking on exhaust gas makes “sensually graspable” the links between Abidjan and Detroit).⁷⁸ Extractive logics are complicated. They combine material extractions (oil, coal, tin, timber) and immaterial extractions (style, technique, branding, affect) within aggressively globalizing frames. Raw materials allow me to set certain parameters for the examination of such logics. At the same time, they open new horizons of interpretation for film and media studies.

77 Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism,” 292–294. The Africanist anthropologist Donald Donham used the term “vernacular modernisms” to describe “attempts to reorder local society by the application of strategies that have produced wealth, power, or knowledge elsewhere in the world.” See Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xviii.

78 Maristella Svampa, “Commodities Consensus: Neoextractivism and Enclosure of the Commons in Latin America,” translated by Liz Mason-Deese, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (January 2015), 65–82; Daniel Boorstin, “Welcome to the Consumption Community,” in *The Decline of Radicalism: Reflections on America Today* (New York: Random House, 1969), 20–39.

Nollywood as National/Natural Resource

“The term [Nollywood] is here to stay because it expresses the general Nigerian desire for a mass entertainment industry that can take its rightful place on the world stage, but both the term and the phenomenon need to be read as signs that the global media environment has become multipolar, rather than that Hollywood’s example is unavoidable.” — Jonathan Haynes⁷⁹

If Hollywood has long mined African cultures and exploited African economies, Nollywood has exhibited its own set of appropriative tendencies, drawing on everything from Latin American telenovelas (including through complex corporate partnerships) to American-style science fiction in order to furnish a distinct impression of cosmopolitan modernity.⁸⁰ Nollywood’s far-flung geographies are both literal and affective, elite and popular. They contribute to, and comprise, “globalizing vernaculars” as much as they reflect and constitute national cultures.⁸¹ I am therefore interested in exploring some of the broader implications of the term “Nollywood” itself. This book’s subtitle is intentionally provocative and, given my expansive timeline, intentionally anachronistic, at least in relation to developments that preceded the turn of the twenty-first century. I take inspiration from Tiago de Luca, whose *Planetary Cinema* evinces “a commitment to parallelisms and even anachronisms that can rekindle our understanding of film and media history away from linear determinisms and neat evolutionisms,”⁸² and from Bo Florin, Patrick Vonderau, and Yvonne Zimmermann, who write in their introduction to *Advertising and the Transformation of Screen Cultures*, “[A] guiding principle for our work was to abandon the conventional delineation of the field by medium, country, or period. Instead, our research moved laterally, shedding light on advertising’s specific objects, screens, practices, and intermediaries.” Searching for “recurrent rhetorical forms” thus requires one to “trace genealogies and connections across media, countries, and periods that may otherwise be

79 Jonathan Haynes, “Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films,” *Africa Today* 54, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 130–150 [132].

80 Noah Tsika, “Miracles from Mexico: Christianity, Corporate Restructuring, and the Telenovela in Nigeria,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 31, no. 2 (June 2019), 212–225; Noah Tsika, “Projected Nigerias: *Kajola* and Its Contexts,” *Paradoxa* 25 (2013): 89–112.

81 Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism,” 295.

82 Tiago de Luca, *Planetary Cinema: Film, Media, and the Earth* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 37.

hard to observe.”⁸³ My goal in *African Media in an Age of Extraction* is to expand the “heuristic and historical range” of a label that has always signaled a certain cosmopolitanism—a word coined on the pages of *The New York Times*, no less!⁸⁴ Indeed, applying it retroactively—anachronistically—is something that we already do in scholarship on Nigerian media. (As James Tar Tsaaior suggests, “locating Nollywood” requires that we look for “the past in the present and the present in the past.”)⁸⁵ If “Nollywood,” with its twenty-first-century coinage, can nevertheless be used to effectively describe, say, 1992’s *Living in Bondage*, then the artistic, economic, and national-cultural ambitions that the term instantiates can surely be found in even earlier historical moments. This is, in part, what Matthew H. Brown means by “the long Nollywood century,” a bold, beautifully suggestive term that became the title of his 2014 PhD dissertation.⁸⁶ “Nollywood,” for all its contentiousness, is useful shorthand for Nigerian cultural production, as well as for an even broader industrial imaginary. The latter, with its transnational reach, allows Netflix, an American company, to rebrand itself as the global “home of Nollywood,” though it only began to make its streaming service available in Nigeria in 2016.⁸⁷ As it confronts the loss of subscribers in the United States, Netflix is turning to Nigeria (along with South Africa, Kenya, and a growing number of other countries on the African continent) for desperately needed customers, much as Blackberry did before it.

Simply put, there is no popular or even scholarly agreement as to what Nollywood’s precise industrial contours are or ought to be. However loudly some critics insist that the term best describes only English-language productions that spring from southwestern Nigeria, others, with even louder voices

83 Bo Florin, Patrick Vonderau and Yvonne Zimmermann, “Introduction,” in *Advertising and the Transformation of Screen Cultures*, ed. Bo Florin, Patrick Vonderau, and Yvonne Zimmermann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 7–19 [12–13].

84 The phrase “heuristic and historical range” comes from Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism,” 296.

85 James Tar Tsaaior, “Introduction: Filmic Texts and Their Social/Cultural Contexts—Nollywood as Site for Transnational Narrativization,” in *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation: Nollywood and National Narration*, ed. James Tar Tsaaior and Françoise Ugochukwu (Abuja: Adonis & Abbey, 2017), 17–46 [20].

86 Matthew H. Brown, “The Long Nollywood Century: Colonial Cinema, Nationalist Literature, State Television, and Video Film,” PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2014. Regrettably, the term does not appear in the book that Brown adapted from this dissertation, which favors a somewhat different theoretical approach. See Brown, *Indirect Subjects*.

87 Ramon Lobato, *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution* (New York: NYU Press, 2019).

and a far more powerful reach (including major media outlets like CNN and the BBC) repeatedly use it to refer to just about anything of Nigerian origin. “Nollywood,” then, also functions as a theoretical metaphor, in Miriam Hansen’s sense, and it is well worth exploring the term’s proverbial resonance, even at the risk of apparent chronological error. I also take inspiration from Lindiwe Dovey and Estrella Sendra, whose recent scholarly project “proposes the term ‘screen worlds’ as a heuristic device to take us beyond the concept of ‘world cinema,’ which has dominated Film Studies and the curation of film festivals ... and which often instills an inherent difference and hierarchy between the ‘West’ and the ‘rest.’” The authors’ invocation of a “pluriverse” is “intended to highlight the rich complexity of our planet” and to facilitate critical resistance to “singular or binary narratives.”⁸⁸ In a similar fashion, I intend the term “Nollywood geographies” to serve as a heuristic device for better understanding the global interconnectedness of screen media in an era of intensifying extractions. While the territorial and industrial boundaries of Hollywood are at least as expansive and debatable as those of Nollywood, I am concentrating on the latter term in order to draw attention to the ongoing centrality of African natural resources to the production, dissemination, and exhibition of screen media. I hardly wish to suggest that Nollywood should stand in for all forms of media production on the African continent (or even within Nigeria), but I do want to embrace the immense scale of a multi-sited phenomenon that intersects with, and itself forges, a growing number of pathways in the global media economy.

This is not, in itself, a novel observation. Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome open *Global Nollywood* by remarking that the industry “has become the most visible form of cultural machine on the African continent.”⁸⁹ Indeed, as Boukary Sawadogo notes, Nollywood is all but inescapable on African televisions; whether dubbed into French for broadcast in Guinea or shown in original English-language versions in Uganda, Nollywood movies constitute a significant percentage of all televisual experiences on the continent, the industry’s “channelization” (Jonathan Haynes’s term) a major engine of its globalism.⁹⁰ In Udoka Oyeka’s *The Razz Guy* (2021), the

88 Lindiwe Dovey and Estrella Sendra, “Toward Decolonized Film Festival Worlds,” in *Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Antoine Damiens (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 269–289 [270].

89 Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome, “Nollywood and Its Diaspora: An Introduction,” in *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, ed. Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1–22 [1].

90 Haynes has used this term in conference presentations and in conversations with me, but he has yet to commit it to print.

protagonist's brother watches *The Forbidden Kingdom* (Rob Minkoff, 2008), an American-Chinese co-production starring Jet Li and Jackie Chan, on television in a Lekki living room. But a mere flick of the channel reveals a rich selection of Nollywood movies. In a nifty instance of embedded marketing, all of these movies—including *The Encounter* (Tolu Ajayi, 2015), *Las Gidi Vice* (Udoka Oyeka, 2017), and *Three Thieves* (Udoka Oyeka, 2019)—were produced by Trino Motion Pictures, which made *The Razz Guy*. (A short film about the Biafran Civil War, *The Encounter* was the company's inaugural production—its cinematic calling card, and an important historiographic intervention, besides.) Promoting awareness of Trino's brand, *The Razz Guy* also—accurately—illustrates the availability of Nollywood on an array of television channels. As Sawadogo points out, Nollywood is not alone in powering “the cultural vibrancy of Nigeria on the global stage”; it is abetted by bestselling novels and blockbuster albums.⁹¹ But its “model of filmmaking,” as Ikechukwu Obiaya terms it, is a powerful force, attracting consumers (and investors) all over the world.⁹²

This understanding of Nollywood as a multiply magnetic phenomenon offers a useful heuristic and analytic framework for comprehending the imbrication of African and non-African—and particularly Nigerian and North American—forms of media capital. Yet it is perhaps equally important to contest the familiar, almost axiomatic separation of “Western” and “non-Western,” and even of Hollywood and Nollywood, in scholarship on screen media, as Dovey and Sendra suggest. Hansen, too, has written of the need “to complicate binary conceptions of global and local, as of Hollywood hegemony and non-Western national cinemas.” She rightly cautions against “placing cinema outside a forcefield of asymmetrical power relations and market conditions.” “But the question,” she continues, “is *how* filmmakers have appropriated Hollywood (along with other foreign cinemas as well as their own cultural pasts) in creative, eclectic, and revisionist ways to forge aesthetic idioms, and to respond to social conflicts and political pressures, closer to home.” Through the concept of vernacular modernism, Hansen provides a means of understanding the mutual constitution of cinemas whose relationships are typically—if they are acknowledged at all—relegated to rather tired models of center and periphery. None of this

91 Boukary Sawadogo, *African Film Studies: An Introduction*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2023), 131.

92 Ikechukwu Obiaya, “Nollywood as Decoloniality,” in *Routledge Handbook of African Media and Communication Studies*, ed. Winston Mano and Viola C. Milton (New York: Routledge, 2021), 245–255 [246]. See also Matthias Krings and Tom Simmert, “African Popular Culture Enters the Global Mainstream,” *Current History* 119, no. 817 (May 2020), 182–187.

is to deny asymmetries of power or the stubborn persistence of imperialism, whether cultural or economic. However, as Hansen points out, it remains possible to “find resonances across violent divisions and asymmetrical conditions of wealth and power.”⁹³ Hollywood hegemony is both “enabling” and “destructive,” both local and global.⁹⁴ Indeed, its awesome power derives, in part, from its entwinement with “foreign” cultures and economies. If it has long been the world’s leading exporter of theatrical film, Hollywood has also been mutually constitutive with the markets that it dominates.

Hollywood films made on the African continent, and with the material and discursive support of African states, are also examples of “African media.” Onookome Okome has convincingly called *Kongi’s Harvest* (1970) “the Nigerian film industry’s first feature,” though it was shot under the auspices of a transnational company and was directed by Hollywood star Ossie Davis.⁹⁵ Tracing transnational relations between and within Japanese and Chinese film practices of the 1930s—including against the backdrop of Hollywood hegemony—Hansen suggests that the concept of vernacular modernism “could be made productive for cinemas in other parts of the world as well.”⁹⁶ Indeed, Nollywood’s “efforts to forge idioms of [its] own,” to extend Hansen’s language to that industrial context, have always been “crucially inflected by a larger vernacular-modernist culture at once cosmopolitan and local.” Resource extraction helps render concrete this “volatile process of negotiation,” illuminating the relationship between resource-based economies and screen media—between forms and practices as familiar in Nigeria as in the United States.⁹⁷ My goal is to engage the diverse terrain on which something recognizable as “Nollywood” has emerged. Crucially, this terrain is marked by various sites of extraction—by resource enclaves—that condition the production, dissemination, and reception of media, and that are both literal and conceptual, material and ideological. As Ramon Lobato notes, geography entails, at once, “spatial patterns and logics”—strategies of mapping and ways of thinking.⁹⁸ The concept of Nollywood geographies is related to what Matthias Krings and Tom Simmert see as the “Nigerianization” of African popular culture, a process that entails not only the inexorable spread of Nigerian production beyond the physical borders of the country

93 Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism,” 305.

94 Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism,” 295.

95 Onookome Okome, “The Context of Film Production in Nigeria: The Colonial Heritage,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 24, no. 2–3 (Fall 1996): 42–62 [44].

96 Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism,” 305.

97 Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism,” 295.

98 Lobato, *Netflix Nations*.

but also the ever-broadening affective penetration of all things “Naija.” It resonates with Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan’s term “the globally familiar,” which refers to “the technological infrastructure that facilitates connection across place and time as well as the diversity of media these technologies can be made to conjure.” “Perhaps more importantly,” Dattatreyan adds, “the globally familiar is a feeling of connectedness made possible through media-enabled participation and practice and the affective economy and structure of aspiration this feeling produces.”⁹⁹ The globally familiar, then, is about more than just the physical circulation of transnational popular culture, the commercial flows that carry products and practices from place to place. It also encompasses broader frameworks of experience, from the environmental to the ethical.

If Nollywood is a global phenomenon, it is worth considering how its status as such rests on, or is otherwise related to, earlier efforts to incorporate Nigeria into the capitalist world-system. My goal is to read Nollywood in relation to a longer *durée* of transnational capital in Nigeria. Doing so demands attention to resource extraction and to the geographies—and representations—of metals, minerals, and hydrocarbons. As the resource geographers Gavin Bridge and Tomas Fredriksen point out, “modernization is a *geographical project*” involving the “re-working [of] spatial and socio-natural relations.”¹⁰⁰ Nigeria did not, in other words, become a resource state merely through acts of discovery (of mining and hydrocarbon assets) but also through a complex process of imaginative and material reconstruction. “Producing” Nigeria as a collection of “zones of commercial opportunity” in fact “took a good deal of work,” above and beyond the basic labor of prospecting. Bridge and Fredriksen examine some of the salient strategies by which the Jos Plateau became a thriving tin field—a magnet for extractive capitalism—in the early twentieth century. In so doing, they offer a model for thinking about the “political, economic, and cultural processes that transformed parts of the periphery into extractive economies.”¹⁰¹ *African Media in an Age of Extraction* adds cinema to their inventory of historical interventions in Nigeria’s socio-ecologies, asking what roles the medium—itsself dependent, at a material level, on many of Nigeria’s most prized natural resources, from cotton to tin to petroleum—has played in this process.

99 Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan, *Digital Hip Hop, Masculinity, and Urban Space in Delhi* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 3.

100 Gavin Bridge and Tomas Fredriksen, “Order out of Chaos: Resources, Hazards, and the Production of a Tin-Mining Economy in Northern Nigeria in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Environment and History* 18, no. 3 (August 2012), 367–394 [377], emphasis in the original.

101 Bridge and Fredriksen, “Order out of Chaos,” 394.

I have elsewhere considered how the exportation of the multiplex—a North American invention—has impacted Nigeria and been bound up with the corporatization of Nollywood, introducing (or re-inscribing) the sort of discourses of respectability that Tejaswini Ganti has observed in the contemporary Hindi film industry.¹⁰² “Multiplexes,” writes Ganti, “represent the entry of organized industrial and finance capital, with its associated regimes of financial transparency and accountability, into the film industry.” With their computerized systems of ticketing and data collection, their airtight contracts with tech companies, soft-drink giants, and megastudios, multiplexes “operate as sites of financial discipline and empirical visibility,” imposing organized corporate finance and “metronormative” styles on all manner of film cultures, even as they may underreport box-office earnings and otherwise misrepresent themselves to seemingly predatory partners, including major Hollywood distributors.¹⁰³ As Charles Acland notes, “What we witness [in such contexts] is the fortification of paths of cultural and economic circulation and a delimitation of who benefits.”¹⁰⁴ In the early 1960s, the Motion Picture Export Association of America facilitated the ongoing construction of Lagos as a cosmopolitan center by making it one of Hollywood’s official, permanent international outposts, alongside London, Paris, Frankfurt, Rome, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, and Jakarta. The association’s purpose was to privilege the interests of the Hollywood majors in international markets.¹⁰⁵ One of its offshoots, the American Motion Picture Export Company, Africa (AMPECA), had offices in both New York City (at 522 Fifth Avenue) and Lagos (in Apapa, to the west of Lagos Island and in close proximity to the most important departure point for Nigeria’s exports), thus anticipating, in its transatlantic business operations, the binational match cut that opens the Nollywood film *Gone*.¹⁰⁶ In 2016, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) announced that the North American market for theatrical films had “plateaued” at approximately \$11 billion, while African markets—particularly in Nigeria, where multiplexes

102 Noah Tsika, *Cinematic Independence: Constructing the Big Screen in Nigeria* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

103 Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 347–348.

104 Charles R. Acland, “Opening Everywhere’: Multiplexes and the Speed of Cinema Culture,” in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, ed. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, and Robert C. Allen (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 364–382 [377].

105 For an account of the association’s Tokyo outpost, see Hiroshi Kitamura, *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 28.

106 *The 1967 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, 433.

may be relatively few but where ticket prices and per-screen attendance are both high—remained sources of steady growth and objects of heightened attention.¹⁰⁷ Such theater-specific statements echo the more familiar assertion that, while the West has been thoroughly excavated, Africa remains to be mined for natural resources. In both scenarios, Africa is presented as under-exploited. “Great new areas of production await opening up,” reads an intertitle in 1927’s *Black Cotton*, and the claim is still being made nearly a century later, by economists breathlessly calling for a more thorough prospecting of the African continent and its coastal waters.

In the process of partnering with Hollywood behemoths, FilmHouse, Silverbird, and other Nigerian exhibitors remain technologically and discursively dependent upon their North American counterparts. On-site management methods perfected in the United States are frequently exported to Nigeria, but a reverse trajectory is also possible, particularly as multinational corporations test new strategies on terrain provided by their foreign contract vendors. Around 2010, for example, Pepsi began experimenting in Nigeria with ways of marketing reduced-sugar options while also emphasizing “female power”—and “strong Black women” in particular—in its flashy ads, and it was eventually able to unseat its rival, Coca-Cola, as Silverbird’s official corporate partner. Pepsi’s sponsorship of Miss Africa World, Silverbird’s annual beauty pageant, has provided some of the inspiration behind the company’s efforts to appeal to women of color around the globe.¹⁰⁸ Such “offshore” experiments have a long history, one stretching all the way back to the mid-1910s, when, as Kristin Thompson puts it, “the American film industry emerge[d] as a dominant presence internationally,” establishing the sort of global permanence encapsulated in the tagline “Always Coca-Cola” (aptly captured in a 1997 Robert Lyons photograph of the exterior of a bar in Elmina, Ghana).¹⁰⁹ Hollywood’s efforts

107 Courtney Brannon Donoghue, *Localising Hollywood* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 1.

108 For more on Pepsi’s growing emphasis on women of color in its global marketing strategies, see “Pepsi Celebrates ‘Pop and Fizz’ of Cola as It Shifts Brand Positioning,” *Marketing Week*, January 8, 2019, <https://www.marketingweek.com/2019/01/08/pepsi-unveils-new-marketing-platform-in-overhaul/>. For an extended discussion of how the “Cola Wars” have played out on the terrain of commercial theatrical exhibition in Nigeria, see Tsika, *Cinematic Independence*.

109 Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907–1934* (London: BFI, 1985), 1; *Another Africa: Photographs by Robert Lyons* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1998), 40. In 1926, the US Department of Commerce established a Motion Picture Section “to track the link between Hollywood and the sale of US consumer goods,” including Coca-Cola. See Brian Larkin, “Circulating Empires: Colonial Authority and the Immoral, Subversive Problem of American Film,” in *Globalizing American Studies*, ed. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 155–183 [162].

to “prepare the ground for importation of American films” (to quote a 1914 issue of the trade paper *Moving Picture World*) extended to Nigeria almost immediately—folded the country, however partially and imperfectly, into its global ambitions.¹¹⁰

That Hollywood’s foreign market was “truly global” by the 1920s has become all but axiomatic in scholarship on American film, though without any sustained effort to account for Nigeria’s role in this vision of internationalism.¹¹¹ As early as 1928, the British educationalist L. Richmond Wheeler could describe the global circulation of commercial cinema in terms of a “huge Yankee monopoly” that threatened to undermine the aims—or at least the means—of the British Empire. While Wheeler’s focus was on Southeast Asia, his claims about the globalization of Hollywood were carefully calibrated to encompass other colonial contexts, including Nigeria, whose “development” he believed to be imperiled by the sort of American imperialism that he saw Hollywood films as epitomizing.¹¹² In 1932, Stephen Tallents, secretary of Britain’s Empire Marketing Board, complained that Hollywood had “turned *every cinema in the world* into the equivalent of an American consulate,” and his expansive rhetoric was deliberately inclusive of Nigeria, a colonial context of which he had some knowledge.¹¹³ Hollywood cinema embodied what Brian Larkin calls a “new decentralized mode of control,” one that presented clear economic as well as discursive alternatives to colonial systems, and that was so powerful a presence in contexts dominated by the latter—including Nigeria—that it generated a moral panic premised on concerns regarding crass and otherwise “negative” depictions of whiteness.¹¹⁴ Hollywood cinema—what the former governor of Northern Nigeria, Henry Hesketh Bell, called in 1930 a “most mischievous influence ... in the tropical world,” one that had, according to Bell’s calculations, begun to coalesce as such around 1915—threatened colonialism’s self-representations, particularly given its embrace of

110 Quoted in Brannon Donoghue, *Localising Hollywood*, 14.

111 Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood “British” Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 9.

112 L. Richmond Wheeler, *The Modern Malay* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928), 175, 282.

113 Quoted in Larkin, “Circulating Empires,” 162, emphasis added.

114 Larkin, “Circulating Empires,” 155–156. Hollywood films were perhaps equally problematic to other colonial regimes: In 1945, Belgium banned them for Congolese audiences, citing their capacity to foment anticolonial rebellion. John Trumbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World: US and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920–1950* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10.

free-market dogma.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Hollywood's visibility in Nigeria and other British colonies was so pronounced by 1930 that Bell could write of the "hundreds of thousands of unsophisticated natives" affected by its products, all of them multiply metonymic of capitalist modernity. "It is hardly too much to say that nothing has done more to destroy the prestige of the white man and to conduce the general revolt of the colored races against the government of the European ... than the spread of these deplorable [Hollywood] pictures," Bell wrote.¹¹⁶ Yet histories of resource extraction require a rethinking of this resentment as but one expression of the many intersections between American media and British colonial governance. Other, more harmonious manifestations of these relationships included the arrival of American filmmakers in various Nigerian resource enclaves (the forests of Yorubaland, the tin fields of the Jos Plateau area, the coal mines of Enugu, the cotton fields of Kaduna) at the express invitation of British companies that, with the tacit approval of colonial authorities, requested the production of all manner of aggrandizing movies, including dramatic features like *Fincho*.

Cinema has long been an important source of ecological knowledge. In documenting oil and mineral discoveries—in directly representing the exploitation of mining and hydrocarbon assets—it has also highlighted various ecological zones. Cinema encodes, embodies, and advances extractive processes even as it cultivates appreciation for natural environments and recognition of planetary scales. This paradox is well expressed in Vinzenz Hediger's reminder that "ecological consciousness requires, and is bounded by, technology."¹¹⁷ By the early 1950s, Nigeria was by far the largest producer of columbite, supplying a whopping 95 percent of the world's industrial requirements, and the sixth largest producer of tin.¹¹⁸ While prices and demand for particular resources on the world market have certainly fluctuated, at times quite dramatically, Nigeria has remained steadily committed to large-scale extraction. David Harvey's theory of a "spatio-temporal fix" is especially germane here, in that it seeks to take stock of how, in the pursuit of accumulation, capital becomes "literally fixed in and on the land

115 Quoted in Larkin, "Circulating Empires," 156.

116 Quoted in Larkin, "Circulating Empires," 156.

117 Vinzenz Hediger, "Chance Wrote the Screenplay, Reality Directed the Film: The Exploration Films of Hans Hass," in *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice*, ed. James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati (New York: Routledge, 2021), 91–106 [104].

118 Ukandi G. Damachi, "Nigerian Development Path," in *Development Paths in Africa and China*, ed. by Ukandi G. Damachi, Guy Routh, and Abdel-Rahman E. Ali Taha (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976), 152–185 [156].

in some physical form for a relatively long period of time.”¹¹⁹ Extractive economies centered on Nigerian natural resources, including the oil, cotton, tin, limestone, and silver so historically central to cinema and other media, powerfully illustrate Harvey’s point. Capital is embedded in the land, but the land is also embedded in capital. (“There isn’t a rock we haven’t drilled through,” said a Chevron executive in 1997, in reference to the company’s penetration of Nigeria.¹²⁰) “Fix,” for Harvey, has two meanings: it is at once a fastening—a latching onto the land—and a proposed panacea, and it is precisely by ironizing the term that Harvey suggests the signal work of fantasy. For this “‘fix’ ... is a metaphor for a particular kind of solution to capitalist crises through temporal deferral and geographical expansion.”¹²¹ Hollywood, like all manner of extractive industries, keeps staving off its own demise—keeps preempting its own obsolescence—by turning to African lands.

Nollywood Knowledge

The plot of Udoka Oyeka’s feature film *The Razz Guy*, which debuted on Nigerian multiplex screens in the spring of 2021, pivots around questions of space and scale. Temi Johnson (Lasisi Elenu), an ambitious senior associate at a Lekki consulting firm, is brokering the high-stakes merger of two major publishing houses, one based in Nigeria and the other in the United States. As a junior associate named Pere (Ibrahim Suleiman) puts it, the main goals of this international merger include “growing business scale” and “mutual expansion of global reach.” “Development” demands cross-cultural collaboration. The American publishing house is interested in “gaining entry to the Nigerian market,” which it understands (correctly) to be vast, and a portal to the rest of the African continent. Temi notes the “added value Nigeria can bring to the table,” but he also acknowledges the need for Nigerians to “up their game beyond the local level.” One of the owners of the Nigerian publishing house wants to be assured “that it will not, in fact, be compromised” by the merger, particularly given its stated commitment to “local development.” Temi’s boss, the head of the consulting firm, has a simple, effective answer: an international merger

119 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 115.

120 Quoted in Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: FSG, 1999), 177.

121 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 115.

will benefit everyone, promoting “both domestic and foreign development.” Invoking “*oyinbo* power”—the putative strength and sheer magnetism of white-identified capital—he manages to satisfy the Nigerian publisher, who agrees that “a partnership with *oyinbo* can be very influential both at home and abroad.” There is a near-obsessive emphasis, throughout *The Razz Guy*, on the importance of international collaboration and exchange. Nigerians, Temi maintains, should “consolidate product upgrades from the Americans with our own content”—which, perhaps not incidentally, describes the very political economy of multiplex exhibition in the country, which saw *The Razz Guy*, a distinctly Nigerian film, projected via state-of-the-art American equipment in venues that also carry Disney and Warner Bros. properties. FilmOne, which booked *The Razz Guy* in its own domestic theater chain (FilmHouse), also licensed it to Netflix for streaming abroad. The film was thus “appropriately positioned,” as Temi says of the Nigerian publisher within the fiction, “for both the domestic and foreign markets” (even if most Nigerians may be unable to afford multiplex prices).

Pere’s climactic presentation, in which he addresses representatives of the American and Nigerian companies (together for the first time in the physical space of a Lekki boardroom), temporalizes this fusion of domestic and foreign capital—of the global and the local. “This merger,” he announces, “is a reflection of the richness of our multicultural present, and it’s also a very good vision of what a more integrated future will look like.” He continues, “This merger will cut across geographical zones ... providing content that will cater to everyone.” What Pere’s polished speech does not mention is exactly who stands to benefit financially from this “integrated” arrangement. “Obviously,” observe the international-management scholars Winfried Ruigrok and Rob van Tulder, “one can call two actors interdependent whenever one wishes, but it is misleading and inappropriate to refer to a relationship between two actors as ‘interdependence’ if one actor has more influence over the other.”¹²² Having alluded to such asymmetries through the mention of a decisive, domineering “*oyinbo* power,” *The Razz Guy* is finally able to depict them in visual terms, as an American businesswoman, fresh from a New York boardroom, breezes into Lekki to talk animatedly about “CSR [corporate social responsibility] programs for rural development” in Nigeria—philanthropic initiatives meant to conceal the ongoing plundering of the country, to disguise it in the language of aid, conservation, and “betterment.”

122 Winfried Ruigrok and Rob van Tulder, *The Logic of International Restructuring* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 73.

The corporate mise-en-scène of *The Razz Guy* is a fixture of a certain type of Nollywood film. Tunde Kelani's *Dazzling Mirage* (2014), for instance, similarly focuses on media professionals and includes scenes set in spotless boardrooms where the central characters give high-stakes presentations to visiting dignitaries and other difficult-to-please power brokers. Funmi (Kemi "Lala" Akindoju), Kelani's fictional protagonist, is a public-relations expert working for PDR Media Services, a real-life company based in Ikeja (where it was incorporated in 2008). Suffering from sickle cell disease, Funmi endures eruptive obstacles to success in the rarefied world of strategic communications. Such interruptions take a farcical turn in *The Razz Guy*, where boardrooms become, incongruously, sites of "ajepaco" (rather than "ajebutter") behavior. Just as the rawest Pidgin suddenly and inopportunistically infects Temi Johnson, preventing him from successfully executing an international merger, the excruciating symptoms of sickle cell disease strike the ambitious Funmi in *Dazzling Mirage*, forcing her to flee the pristine PDR boardroom in severe pain and, in true melodramatic fashion, just as she is about to complete a major, deal-sealing pitch to a potential client. In each instance, a distinctly African condition—a genetic mutation, a creolized dialect—violates corporate norms and expectations, punctuating the bland "international" atmosphere of the boardroom with unwanted "local" realities. The latter persistently impinge on a lofty, fast-paced world of aggressive initialism: in *Dazzling Mirage*, PDR is trying to clinch an account with RLG, and the VP speaks of CSR (as do the American clients in *The Razz Guy*). Yet Kelani carefully plants clues that point to an ultimate rapprochement, a principled fusion of "bush" and big business: throughout the sleek modern hospital where Funmi periodically seeks treatment, the television sets are all tuned to Africa Magic Epic, with its steady stream of Asaba films—a realistic enough sight, to be sure, but one that serves a distinct thematic purpose, foreshadowing the way that Funmi will broker a blending of tenses and terrains. (Kelani shot these sequences on location at St. Ives Specialist Hospital in Ikeja, a state-of-the-art facility that indeed shows Nollywood movies via satellite television feeds.) Sickle cell disease may tether Funmi to a country where the condition is most common, but it does not mean that she is doomed to occupy an isolated position of abject Africinity.

In *Dazzling Mirage*, as throughout New Nollywood, the Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge offers a solution of sorts, affording Nigerians smooth and efficient access to local geographies dense with global brands. Eventually, Funmi takes it to a sickle-cell conference sponsored by various corporations. Surrounded by international trademarks on terrain that feels like home, she realizes that health consciousness can benefit from the very public-relations tools

that she has long used to build brand awareness. Consequently, she puts her professional skills to work helping sickle cell sufferers (not least of all herself), lending even this underrecognized “African” disease the qualities that have made select consumer goods world-famous. Described as “the queen of PR,” Funmi ends up on the cover of *PR Today* and even wins an award for “Africa’s Best Marketing Campaign.” In the end, empowered by her own cosmopolitanism, she wins PDR the big account with RLG Communications (another real-life ICT company that lent Kelani permission to use its name and image).

The categories and concepts so closely associated with CSR (such as “sustainability,” “local development,” and “community enrichment”), which functioned to justify extraction in colonial and neocolonial cinemas, continue to be used in commercial speech in the twenty-first century. As Anna McCarthy puts it, “If you have ever come across an advertisement for an oil company avowing its commitment to saving the planet rather than destroying it, you have been exposed to institutional advertising.”¹²³ I hope to show that such utterly implausible “conservationist” assurances are not just coerced responses to political agitation and the growing environmental consciousness of everyday consumers but have always been central to the cinemas of extraction, evident from the very beginning.¹²⁴ Indeed, the first films made about the late colonial discovery of oil in Nigeria promised sound stewardship of the Niger Delta and implied the inability of indigenous populations to properly care for their own lands. The first films produced by timber companies in Owo promised much the same, and they accused Yoruba communities of being unable or unwilling to tend to the area’s forests, which, they claimed, would wither and die as a direct consequence of “native” inaction. The first films about tin mining made plateau residents appear wholly ignorant of the metal and desperately in need of commercial (and not just colonial) oversight.

The list goes on. It is elaborated across the following pages.

123 Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 32.

124 On the colonial origins of certain conservationist attitudes, see Jeremy Swift, “Desertification: Narratives, Winners, and Losers,” in *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment*, ed. Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 73–90.

2. Breaking African Ground

Location Shooting and the Search for Resource Enclaves

Abstract: This chapter looks at the relationship between location shooting and extractive industry. Approaching these interrelated phenomena from historical and theoretical perspectives, the chapter offers an overview of the Euro-American exploitation of African locations before centering on the mining of tin and coal and on the cinematic forms and practices that materialized around such extractive enterprises in colonial Nigeria. From romantic melodramas filmed in the tin fields of the Middle Belt to historical epics made in the collieries of Enugu, cinema has long benefited from the distinctive shooting locations (literally) opened up by extractive activities. But while exploiting the photogenic aspects of extraction, cinema has also directly participated in the degradation of Nigeria's landforms, embodying and advancing their plunder for much of the twentieth century.

Keywords: coal; tin; columbite; colonialism; labor; unions

When it comes to film production, there is perhaps no more familiar spatial frame than that of location shooting. Yet the long history of Hollywood's efforts to identify and exploit African shooting locations remains understudied. This chapter examines that history and its inevitable entwinement with resource extraction. Since the turn of the twentieth century, film companies have followed paths forged by miners and oil prospectors. They have set up camp in locations rich in natural resources, filming those awe-inspiring assets while simultaneously facilitating their extraction. Colonial and neo-colonial methods of land identification and use have set precedents even for Nollywood, particularly in the industry's corporatization. Colonial planning laws remain firmly in place in postcolonial Nigeria, conditioning the land-development schemes of foreign and domestic companies. As early as the 1950s, "film villages"—designated spaces of indigenous production—were

designed in careful consultation with mining interests. Though justifiably derided as “white elephant villages”¹—as, that is, essentially useless for actual filmmakers—they effectively re-inscribed various resource zones, and they have experienced a remarkable resurgence in the twenty-first century, as Nollywood stakes its claims to Nigerian lands. Corporate deforestation has made it possible to envision vast plots as potential film villages in formerly lush parts of Nigeria, thus disproving the specious, cynical claims of Unilever’s *The Twilight Forest* (1957) and other process films that promised, in the brisk idiom of the global timber trade, that Nigeria’s cleared trees would in fact grow back. At the same time, spaces of cultural production and consumption have had to steer well clear of sites either claimed or ruined by the oil industry and other large-scale extractive enterprises.

If Nollywood has a natural body, it is perhaps best seen in, and as, the industry’s proliferating film villages, places where both surface and subsoil speak to the past, present, and possible future of resource extraction in Nigeria. Kunle Afolayan’s KAP Film Village and Resort, located near the photogenic open-pit mines of Oyo State, is the latest example of a Nollywood hub that both abuts and benefits from extraction, as evidenced in Afolayan’s 2023 film *Ìjògbòn*, with its memorable aerial shots of illegal (or “artisanal”) mining. Nollywood’s film villages operate within extractive regimes both new and old. If KAP is in close proximity to forms of manual labor that have enabled surface and underground excavation for millennia, the Asaba Leisure Park (also known as the Nollywood Film Village), located some three hundred miles to the east, sits atop rich mineral deposits that inspire increasingly technologized interventions amid the global resurgence of industrial mining. KAP’s opulent modern affordances, which include a fully soundproof stage and a digital cinema that seats one hundred and twenty, neighbors the quainter work of hammers, chisels, and pickaxes, while the Asaba Leisure Park, with its model village replicating ancient African huts made of mud and clay (ideal for the filming of Nollywood’s historical epics), is in earshot of state-of-the-art prospecting.

Such far-flung film villages are spatialized expressions of Nollywood’s pan-Nigerian character—of the industry’s ties to cultures and customs well beyond metropolitan Lagos. But they are equally the products of Nigeria’s specific and ongoing histories of resource extraction, a reality that *Ìjògbòn* vividly illustrates through location shooting as well as through Afolayan’s shrewd thematization of mining. Transforming the resource curse into a

1 Ola Balogun, quoted in S. J. Timothy-Asobele, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria* (Lagos: Upper Standard Publications, 2003), 63.

tale told by moonlight, the film interweaves the African oral tradition with industrial modernity. As an elder narrates the story of Oyo being endowed with mineral riches, she offers the lesson that such wealth is “not a blessing.” Reading the resource curse back into Yoruba mythology, Afolayan also dramatizes a contemporary conflict over uncut diamonds discovered by a group of Oyo youths. Once in possession of the much-desired minerals—of wealth extracted from the African soil—the youths immediately think of iPhones, so closely (and so correctly) do they associate their continent’s natural resources with the latest media technologies. (A later scene shows them dutifully shopping for smartphones in Ibadan.) But because diamonds, so precious and so fabled, are not actually found in Nigeria, Afolayan is careful to include images of what is in fact mined there, including iron ore, tantalite, columbite, cassiterite, gold, granite, and red clay. His film also features a Chinese character from Beijing, a mysterious man who stands to obtain a mining contract after edging out the local competition. The mining imagery in *Ìjògbòn* is multivalent, pointing to all manner of minerals and imaginaries, products and peoples. That the film was shot on location—on a backlot that abuts a mining site—lends such imagery the force of the real.

Hollywood’s Landgrabs

African locations were crucial to the development of nonfiction film beyond single-shot actualities, helping it “graduate” from the realm of live performance and scholarly lecturing. *Paul J. Rainey’s African Hunt* (1912), which documents a safari led by the eponymous explorer, precipitated a boom in expedition and nature films. A sequel, *Rainey’s African Hunt*, was released in 1914. Views of Africa “went straight to movie theaters rather than to the lecture circuits,” cementing the connection between the absolute spaces of the continent and the representational spaces of the cinema.² In his work on early nonfiction film, Tom Gunning draws attention to what he terms the “view” aesthetic, in which “the camera literally acts as a tourist, spectator or investigator, and the pleasure in the film lies in this surrogate of looking.” From at least 1906 on, “place films” offered, Gunning argues, “a rich and varied sense of locale”: “While the imagery may capture either natural landscapes, man-made structures or a combination of both, the

2 Rick Altman, “From Lecturer’s Prop to Industrial Product: The Early History of Travel Films,” in *The Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16–26 [23–24].

selection of shots serves to develop a variety of sights—much like a tourist album—and to articulate an aesthetic that would remain remarkably consistent in travelogue films of future decades.³ African locations did not so much transform this “view” aesthetic as underscore its imperial character. American films shot on location on the African continent closely resembled those colonial works that lavished visual attention on the natural environment, the better to map its plundering and prepare for its surveillance. Developing such representational strategies within or alongside European colonial frameworks, American films reinforced the links between nature shots and economic imperialism.

Landscapes fit for filming were also ripe for extraction. In such instances of location shooting, “the environment moves beyond mere setting to become an important theme,” to quote Cajetan Iheka.⁴ “Film and media,” notes Stephanie DeBoer, “are often used to promote locations toward developmental futures and global vistas. These mediated locations are equally sites of struggle, as they are produced across a fraught and differentiated geometry of film and media technologies, cultural geographies, and transnational processes.”⁵ Classical travelogues, including those produced by MGM, reveled not simply in the visual splendor of natural formations but also in the equally dazzling—and definitely unnatural—technologies imported for their plucking.

Yet while retaining many of the basic features of the early “view” aesthetic, twentieth-century travelogues increasingly reflected a sense of the crowdedness and depletion of familiar geographies and expressed an urgent need to discover and exploit new ones. Narrated by James A. Fitzpatrick, the “TravelTalks” entry *Los Angeles: “Wonder City of the West”* (1935) explores, from the corporate perspective of MGM/Loew’s, the absolute space of Hollywood (i.e., southern California) while simultaneously articulating some of the “conceptual and lived dimensions” of the industry as a global, and globalizing, enterprise.⁶ As the image track surveys greater

3 Tom Gunning, “Before Documentary: Early Nonfiction Films and the ‘View’ Aesthetic,” in *The Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16–26, 52–63 [56].

4 Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 17.

5 Stephanie DeBoer, “Film and Media Location: Toward a Dynamic and Scaled Sense of Global Place,” in *Framing the Global: Entry Points for Research*, ed. Hilary E. Kahn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 137–156 [137].

6 David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (New York: Verso, 2019), 133.

Los Angeles through an insistently mobile frame, often panning from left to right, Fitzpatrick's voice-over narration attempts to make conceptual sense of this "fanciful realm"—no simple task, "for there is no place in the world that dwells in the realm of fancy comparable to that of Hollywood." Hence Hollywood, whose absolute space consists of "the mighty mansions of cinema" (glimpsed in a montage sequence showing all the major, collusive studios—both the "Big Five" and the "Little Three"), is uniquely equipped to reconceive, and actively reshape, the rest of the world. After all, as Fitzpatrick's narration points out, Hollywood—understood as both organic space and globe-spanning political-economic formation—is where "the vast majority of the world's motion pictures are produced." Filmed and edited to suggest the boundedness of absolute space (tracking and panning shots often begin and end at entrances, exits, and other well-defined boundaries in what is shown and said to be a densely populated metropolitan center, the fifth largest city in the United States), *Los Angeles* makes clear that the eponymous area, vast as it is (and ever-spreading), cannot possibly contain all of Hollywood's ambitions. The narrator remarks upon "the tremendous architectural range that is covered by the production of motion pictures, for here, within a comparatively small area, one may find a replica of practically every style of architecture known to man. A tour of movieland is virtually a tour of the world." Such comments celebrate the ingenuity of art directors, set decorators, and other creative personnel while stressing the spatial limitations of a "comparatively small area." Hollywood's local approximation of "the world" is merely imaginative—"virtual."

The need to overtake other spaces, to colonize other countries, is clear from the disjunction between material and conceptual dimensions—between, that is, the tangible geographies of southern California and the perceptual and symbolic expansiveness of the Hollywood imperium.⁷ It is then given a missionary spin, as the narrator announces the benevolence of the industry's incursions into other lands. "High tribute should be paid to an industry that dedicates itself to the entertainment and enlightenment of mankind," Fitzpatrick intones in his lofty celebration of an "international medium" through which "life itself is brought to the peoples of the world in a language that all can appreciate and understand." The film's logic thus collapses the business interests of Hollywood and the geographical reach and emotional impact of "the motion picture screen." Yet Hollywood's normativity—its "universal" character—is inseparable from the colonizing

7 I take many of these terms from David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 129–133.

urges that the narration elsewhere expresses, as in a concluding segment on the Hollywood Bowl. “Nothing determines the progress of a community so much as the development of its cultural arts,” Fitzpatrick says over shots of the great amphitheater carved into a hillside—a striking example of media’s literal embeddedness in the natural environment. Yet such embeddedness is only ever partial, incomplete. The Los Angeles metropolitan area is bounded. Rather than remaining “concentrated within its boundaries,” Hollywood will, the film concludes, need to strike out for other, more exotic destinations.

Self-styled as “the voice of the globe,” Fitzpatrick, with his long-running TravelTalks series for MGM, sought to cultivate an impression of the intimate relationship between the United States and the rest of the world, even as his films seemed to emphasize the distinctiveness of foreign lands.⁸ Produced eighteen years after *Los Angeles: “Wonder City of the West,”* the TravelTalks entry *Johannesburg: City of Gold* (1953) details the complex, labor- and capital-intensive processes through which a vast area is transformed into a true mining town. The film’s spatial frame encompasses not towering Hollywood studios but the mountainous mine dumps by which Johannesburg is divided, yet it also acknowledges the global replication of processes of excavation familiar from tales of the Old West, with its intrepid prospectors and other “pioneers.” Here, Johannesburg is the specifically colonial focal point, a material as well as conceptual pivot of global capital. The film’s narrator (Fitzpatrick again) notes that “in population, wealth, and influence, the center of the Union of South Africa has moved more and more towards the southern portion of the Transvaal, where lie the world’s richest gold fields—the Witwatersrand. The name means ‘the ridge of white waters,’ and it is derived from the long range of hills down the sides of which the first settlers could see streams of running water.” He continues, “Thousands of gold miners work beneath the surface in this area, and indisputable evidence of their labors for the past seventy years is revealed in the numerous mine dumps that have risen around Johannesburg.” The image track features a high-angle pan of the dumps. Moving slowly from left to right in the familiar style of the series—in its signature visual idiom—the pan reveals the iconic similarity of natural and man-made mounds, the simulation through extraction of mountain formation and other geological processes. In a caricature of orogeny, gold mining has created great heaps of its own

8 For more on this long-running series, see Liz Czach, “Traveling the World with a Smile: James Fitzpatrick’s Traveltalks,” in *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice*, ed. James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati (New York: Routledge, 2021), 125–142.

waste—towering piles of sand, slime, and other residue produced in the course of excavation.

The film proceeds to show how the mine dumps, which, from the image track's aerial vantage, suggest so many massive anthills, are formed through human workers. "Most of the physical labor for the mines is recruited from native territories throughout South Africa," Fitzpatrick explains, "and here we see a number of natives who have qualified for mine work jubilantly leaving their crawls en route to the mines, where they hope to earn enough money to return to their native haunts and live like gentlemen of leisure." A dialectic of concealment and exposure—of inside and outside—is thus mapped onto that of tradition and modernity, as the film shows workers marching toward the gold fields. Much as the earth's bowels must be gouged, entire human populations must be displaced—removed from their "crawls" and other "native haunts" and deposited along the Witwatersrand. The latter process is, in fact, the chief condition of the former, for it takes considerable human labor to extract gold on an industrial scale. To drive the point home, the narrator turns to quantification: having "migrated" from the "interior," the "natives" reside in segregated company compounds for "periods of service" that, by contract, run from six months to two years. Over 330,000 such workers are required at any given time. The image track offers a visual analogy between the extraction of gold and the "mining" of laborers: shots of ore being pulled via elevators are linked to those of the long lines of migrant workers being "drawn," as if by a magnetic force, from their "crawls" into the deep mines—from one "hole" into another. Fitzpatrick explains, "Their contact with life and labor in the outside world may change their plans about returning, for it is not unusual for men who are recruited from native territories to serve their contracts with the mines and then seek employment in the cities as detribalized natives." The permanent consequences of extraction are not simply geological. They are also social and economic.

In *Johannesburg*, gold mining radically alters the absolute space of South Africa, turning it into a series of gold dumps that resemble nothing so much as giant anthills. But it also transforms significant conceptual and lived coordinates, turning indigenous populations into foreigners on their own natal lands. Like the corporatized Niger Delta region, the Witwatersrand hosts a parallel state that, while deriving power from the "legitimate" (political) state, also produces exclusion and dispossession. Intensive training programs allow "internal" migrants to "emerge as full-fledged miners," a process greatly abetted by new technologies of extraction. As Fitzpatrick explains, "Man has discovered many methods for extracting gold from the

earth, but the cyanide method, which is used by the South African mines, has proved to be the most efficient. Rocks containing gold ore are loosened by miners working at varying depths—as far [down] as 10,000 feet. These rocks are then sent to the surface in fast-moving elevators.” The film shows part of this process as it plays out at the entrance to one of the mines, whose steady elevators deliver massive quantities of minerals. Yet the abundance of extracted rock belies its actual mineral value: “Over 5,000 tons of ore have to be treated in order to produce 1,000 ounces of bullion gold.” Those portions of the earth that are deemed worthless are simply transported to the mine dumps, adding to their great height. It is at this point that the film offers a curious analogy between the static dumps—inert sites of sheer waste, where even decomposition is impossible—and the men who “retire” from mining, all of them first-generation urban settlers who, Fitzpatrick claims, fail to remain “productive” outside the ambit of the mining companies: “Unfortunately, after leaving the mines and becoming detribalized, many of them lose their former pep and appear to be more contented with easygoing, sedentary life.” Like the waste rock, sand, and other leavings that make up the mine dumps, the former workers—human residue—are considered worthless, economically sterile.

Lamenting their migration from rural mine to urban center, Fitzpatrick echoes the contradictory claims of Frederick Lugard, governor-general of Nigeria between 1914 and 1919, the years during which the coal industry was established in Enugu. A proponent of the “civilizing” impact of modern coal mining on Udi indigenes, Lugard also strongly believed that Africans needed to “remain socially rooted in their rural communities away from the ‘dangerous’ temptations of urban life.”⁹ Because located in the so-called hinterlands, coal mines and other subterranean spaces of extraction were ideal sources of “restricted modernization” for African populations—“tropical” places where they could learn to embrace colonial education and wage labor without having to expose themselves to urban distractions (associated, for Lugard as well as for Fitzpatrick, with indolence and economic “unproductiveness”). As Enugu grew into a large city, however, such premises were hard to sustain, though colonial officials tried their best. Workers’ quarters clustered around mine entrances and in close proximity to the railway station were dubbed “bush camps” and viewed as rural enclaves within the colonial urban. The colonial city of Enugu was shaped by racial divisions that played out across spatial extremes, with white officials and their families residing high atop

9 Carolyn A. Brown, *We Were All Slaves: African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 93.

the Udi escarpment overlooking the labor camps.¹⁰ Fitzpatrick's *Johannesburg* does not, of course, mention apartheid, in keeping with Fitzpatrick's famously sanitized (or blinkered) approach to social history. Yet even his sunny persona finds room for a pointed complaint about ex-miners, whose distance from extractive activities is understood to index their (lack of) value. It is precisely as a counter or corrective to "easygoing, sedentary life" that resource extraction is presented in *Johannesburg*, as in so many other films about mining, from Universal's *Pittsburgh* (Lewis Seiler, 1942), in which John Wayne's character regains his masculine virtues by returning to the Western Pennsylvania coal pits in which they were first forged, to Columbia's *Bad for Each Other* (Irving Rapper, 1953), in which Charlton Heston's ambitious surgeon finds true fulfillment in fictional Coalville. (The latter's title, which ostensibly refers to the betrothal of a humble miner's son to the mercenary daughter of a mine owner, might also be taken as a concise commentary on the relationship between fossil fuels and the natural world—between humans and hydrocarbons.) But if Fitzpatrick, in *Johannesburg*, is ignorant of (or simply unwilling to acknowledge) apartheid, so too is he seemingly unaware of the active threat that the massive mine dumps pose despite their merely ornamental appearance. For they contain traces of copper, lead, cyanide, arsenic, and even radioactive uranium—all dangerous pollutants that threaten surrounding communities, whose inhabitants include, of course, the very settlers Fitzpatrick claims are not only detribalized but also cleanly divorced from the business of mining (and thus inactive, valueless). Even today, the mine dumps—towering relics of more than 600 abandoned mines—remain health hazards, proving that it is not so easy to escape the consequences of extraction.¹¹

Distributed in the United States by Allied Artists, the British film *Gold* (Peter Hunt, 1974), adapted from the 1970 novel by Wilbur Smith, suggests some of these toxic entanglements. Set—and, controversially, shot—in South Africa, the film follows the efforts of a cabal of businessmen-cum-terrorists who intend to "shake up the market" by flooding a major gold mine. According to these villains (one of whom is derided as a "doctor of economics"), the African continent has become *too* productive—too generative of wealth for a growing number of individuals—and they hope, through their murderous actions, to cut world gold production by 30 percent

10 Brown, "We Were All Slaves," 100–101.

11 Oliver Balch, "Radioactive City: How Johannesburg's Townships are Paying for Its Mining Past," *The Guardian* (London), July 6, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jul/06/radioactive-city-how-johannesburgs-townships-are-paying-for-its-mining-past>.

and thereby “free” the metal’s price for their own enrichment. *Gold* thus dramatizes the paradox at the heart of neoliberalism—the “contradiction between the universalizing tendency that drives capital and the restrictive barriers it erects.”¹² The villainous businessmen are sufficiently wealthy to pursue the “rescuing” of the market—the “defense” of the world economy “against the excesses of democracy” (or, in this case, of an apartheid state that awards contracts to a growing number of white-owned firms)—and their obviously oxymoronic use of the term “free” (they plan to “free the price of gold” by artificially restricting its production) points to some of the central inconsistencies of market fundamentalism, chief among them the concept’s capacity to deflect attention away from the active “redesigning [of] states, laws, and other institutions to protect the market.”¹³ Though deeply critical of extractive capitalism (and with a theme song that spells out such resistance, denouncing “this lust for gold” and promising that “there is more to life than gold”), the film features a closing dedication to actual mining companies, under which appears a textual reminder that the “events and characters in this photoplay are fictitious”—boilerplate that here functions to assert that it is only the film’s made-up firm that is corrupt, while its real-life counterparts are deserving of acclaim: “We wish to thank the Management of the GENERAL MINING & FINANCE CORPORATION and the staff and personnel of BUFFELSFONTEIN GOLD MINE and WEST RAND CONSOLIDATED GOLD MINE for their help and co-operation in the making of this film, without which it would not have been possible.”

Like *Johannesburg*, with its play-by-play account of the cyanide method, *Gold* is partly a process film, albeit one that offers a distinctly docudramatic account of extraction. Star Roger Moore made it directly after debuting as James Bond in *Live and Let Die* (Guy Hamilton, 1973), and it certainly shares the Bond series’ affection for international intrigue. Yet it also features the actual workings of Buffelsfontein and West Rand, two of the largest mines in the world, which permitted the filmmakers to shoot even at a depth of 10,000 feet—the lowest depth identified in the earlier *Johannesburg*. Gunning notes that process films tend to feature the “recurring narrative patterns” through which industrial capitalism becomes intelligible to mass audiences: “The most fully developed narrative pattern is the transformation of raw material into consumable goods. In many of these films the narrative

12 Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 71.

13 Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 267, 6.

process moves from opening scenes of raw material through the various stages of production to culminate in a scene of delighted consumption."¹⁴ *Johannesburg* and *Gold* both fit this description, tracing the movement of gold bullion from mining site to bank vault.

Films shot entirely in Nigeria, however, typically omit this final act—this “culmination in consumption” that scholars like Gunning have long taken to be an essential part of the process film.¹⁵ Indeed, films shot entirely in Europe (and white settler colonies like South Africa) reliably exhibit the narrative patterns that Gunning describes; they invariably “end with scenes of pleasurable consumption of manufactured good[s] within comfortable or even glamorous bourgeois interior[s].”¹⁶ These spaces of consumption are simply not present in such works as 1927’s *Black Cotton* (aka *Cotton Growing in Nigeria*), which British Instructional Films made for the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation, and *Palaver: A Romance of Northern Nigeria* (Geoffrey Barkas, 1926), which was shot on location in and around the tin fields of the Jos Plateau. As Walter Rodney explains in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, “The international division of labor brought about by imperialism and colonialism insured that there would be the maximum increase in the level of skills in the capitalist nations. It took mainly physical strength to dig the minerals from and to farm the African soil, but the extraction of the metals from the ores and the subsequent manufacture of finished goods in Europe promoted more and more technology and skills.”¹⁷ Accordingly, the Crown was committed to emphasizing metropolitan over colonial consumption, underscoring the inevitable conveyance of extracted resources out of Africa and into the imperial center for processing, sale, and personal use. In the case of Nigeria, mineral and agricultural riches “were exported raw to Britain

14 Gunning, “Before Documentary,” 57.

15 See also Yvonne Zimmermann, “Early Cinema, Process Films, and Screen Advertising,” in *Advertising and the Transformation of Screen Cultures*, ed. Bo Florin, Patrick Vonderau, and Yvonne Zimmermann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 77–111; Yvonne Zimmermann, “Advertising and Film: A Topological Approach,” in *Films That Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising*, ed. Bo Florin, Nico de Klerk, and Patrick Vonderau (London: Palgrave, 2016), 21–39; Frank Kessler and Eef Masson, “Layers of Cheese: Generic Overlap in Early Non-Fiction Films on Production Processes,” in *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 75–84; Ernest A. Dench, *Advertising by Motion Pictures* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 47. As Yvonne Zimmermann notes, early process films “addressed cinema audiences worldwide and provided a common base of shared experiences [and] reference points.” They cultivated, I would add, a shared awareness of extraction—a shared cognizance of natural resources and their value, uses, and effects. Zimmermann, “Early Cinema, Process Films, and Screen Advertising,” 44.

16 Gunning, “Before Documentary,” 57.

17 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018 [1972]), 213.

to be processed and turned into finished products, which were in turn brought back to Nigeria to be sold to the local people at exorbitant cost ... Nigerians, right from the onset, were coerced through a variety of colonial policies to produce what they did not consume and consume what they did not produce.¹⁸ (Even distribution was out of the hands of Nigerians, in keeping with precedents established in the late nineteenth century by the Royal Niger Company, which prevented the people of Brass and other ports from shipping their palm oil directly to England.)¹⁹ Process films present the construction of resource-rich Nigeria as a strictly extractive economy, one that, while certainly integrated with capital and commodity markets in the Global North, is made to lack the North's experience of the "social proliferation" of metals and minerals. The resource geographers Gavin Bridge and Tomas Fredriksen, writing about the industrialization of tin mining in northern Nigeria in the early twentieth century, describe the forced transition from small-scale trading to rentier and extractive capitalism in terms of "the creative-destructive energies of modernization": forging Nigeria's incorporation into the global economy meant, under conditions of colonial and neocolonial rule, obliterating or disallowing local traditions of extraction and sale and precluding indigenous access to certain consumer products. Commercial mining thus "produced novel juxtapositions of people and resources—i.e., new socio-ecological relations."²⁰ In order for the British to thoroughly control tin mining in Nigeria, indigenous smelting concerns had to be defeated.²¹ Visible only in the metropole, which remains resolutely offscreen in both *Black Cotton* and *Palaver*, modern consumer culture is the unseen but implicit beneficiary of Nigerians' extractive labors.

While Nigerians are shown modeling their own textiles in *Black Cotton*, the film's emphasis is on the country's growers and their hard physical labor in the fields of Kano. Among extractive industries, cotton represents something of an exception in that its fibers can be processed entirely by hand—an "old method" whose "laborious" nature the film's intertitles plainly disdain as primitive.²² *Palaver*, on the other hand, accurately indicates that, while tin

18 Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta* (London: Verso, 2003), 27–28.

19 Okonta and Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 13–14.

20 Gavin Bridge and Tomas Fredriksen, "Order out of Chaos: Resources, Hazards, and the Production of a Tin-Mining Economy in Northern Nigeria in the Early Twentieth Century," *Environment and History* 18, no. 3 (August 2012), 367–394 [371, 386].

21 J. H. Morrison, "Early Tin Production and Nigerian Labor on the Jos Plateau, 1906–1921," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 11, no. 2 (1977), 205–216 [207–208].

22 As Tom Rice puts it, the film "emphasizes the 'native workers' throughout"; it "highlights the colonial workforce and the need for [British] investment in new transport infrastructure and

ores and concentrates abounded in the Nigeria of the 1920s, state-of-the-art smelters, refineries, and fabricators could only be found elsewhere, though the film, like the colonial economy that it represented, is at pains to avoid acknowledging longstanding and resolutely local practices of smelting; halting indigenous mining meant foreclosing its cinematic representation.²³ Location shooting, with its exclusive attention to Nigerian mining sites, could thus emphasize the one-sidedness, the unidirectional or purely export-oriented nature of resource extraction, a nonreciprocal process of removal and enrichment. Reduced to this logic in films shot there, Nigeria was decoupled from manufacturing, distribution, and consumption in a manner that would prove persistent in both its cinematic imaging and political economy.

For much of the twentieth century, the tin ore cassiterite was especially abundant in Nigeria's Middle Belt, and conveniently present close to the surface of the plateau. The high grade of Nigerian cassiterite attracted filmmakers as early as 1924, when Lever Brothers sponsored the production of *Tin Mining in Nigeria*, an observational account of the eponymous process. Henry Mulholland, who served as an Agricultural Officer in Nigeria in the 1950s, filmed the extensive alluvial tin deposits of Jos.²⁴ In 1956, Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, visited Jos, with the latter traveling all the way to the plateau's tin fields, where he posed for a British Pathé newsreel that suggests the sheer scope of extractive activities in the Middle Belt. Shot after shot shows Prince Philip surveying vast areas of alluvial mining. Panoramic reverse angles offer glimpses of the labor of Africans in the employ of British firms.

Earlier in the decade, British Pathé had released the ten-minute documentary *Nigeria: Its People and Produce* (1951), which British Instructional

machinery." Tom Rice, *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 20. For more on *Black Cotton*, see Matthew H. Brown, *Indirect Subjects: Nollywood's Local Address* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021). Brown's analysis focuses, in part, on the film's specious claim that Nigerian cotton growers have simply "*chosen ... to remain on the periphery of the liberal world order*" and thus require the intervention of British capital (58, emphasis added).

23 At the same time, as Gavin Bridge and Tomas Fredriksen point out, European firms were dependent on these "old methods": "In many respects ... European tin mining had a decidedly pre-modern character that belied its self-identification as the leading edge of socio-economic modernization." Bridge and Fredriksen, "Order out of Chaos," 383. Cinema, whether in the form of a process film like *Black Cotton* or of a melodrama like *Palaver*, was a key tool for communicating, and embellishing, this aspirational self-identification—and, of course, for concealing its spurious character.

24 Bristol Archives currently holds this footage from the Mulholland Collection, along with other mid-twentieth-century films (including from the Gaskell Collection) that document tin mining in the Jos Plateau region.

Films made in an effort to place tin mining in a broader, national frame. The film opens with an image of a world map. Slowly, the camera zooms in on Nigeria, and a voice-over narrator, speaking with a distinctly Nigerian accent, says, "My home is in Nigeria, and I wanted to show you how my people live, and how we produce things to help you in other lands." There follows a breakdown of agricultural and extractive activities by type and region. We are told, for instance, that the climate in the north is ideal for growing groundnuts, while cocoa beans flourish in the south. "The chief mineral that we mine in Nigeria is tin," notes the narrator, as the image track surveys the Jos Plateau. "These tin deposits are alluvial, and they are mined by the open-cast method. As you can see, much of the work is done by hand." The sequence shifts from a long shot of a dragline excavator—a piece of heavy equipment operated by a single person—to closer views of dozens of workers shoveling gravel. The film culminates in an account of Lagos and its capacity, as both federal capital and international seaport, to pull together all the resources extracted from the vastness of Nigeria. Lagos, "the largest port on the coast of West Africa," is where "most of our products are loaded for shipment to other countries," the narrator explains over images of the bustling activities along the city's docks. The container cranes hoisting goods onto ships form a striking visual rhyme with the earlier shot of the plateau's dragline excavator; mined ores become packages to be loaded, the seamlessness of the process ensured by the sameness of the heavy machinery involved. "The products of my people in Nigeria," the narrator continues, are "cargoes which are valuable both to you and to us." Yet the film's final image, in keeping with the rhetorical reduction of natural resources to mere freight, is unmistakably one of exportation: Nigeria's riches, beginning with tin, are bound for London and Liverpool. Nigerians will not get to taste their own cocoa.

Later documentaries reiterate the claims of *Nigeria: Its People and Produce*, including by recycling that film's footage of the plateau's tin fields. Sponsored by the Central Office of Information (the UK government's marketing and communications agency), the 1960 film *Nigeria: The Making of a Nation* offers a nearly identical account of the country's resources, though it boasts a commentator whose Received Pronunciation stands in stark contrast to the Nigerian-accented narrator of the earlier film. The shift from Nigerian speech patterns to BBC-style cadences signals the later film's commitment to addressing the achievement of independence from a self-flattering British imperial perspective. Yet this shift also underscores a common variable: the reliance on extractive activities that makes the new era of independence (or neocolonialism) so consistent with the preceding period of formal colonial



Open-pit tin mining,
Jos Plateau area.
Photograph by Edward
Harland Duckworth.
Date unknown. Cour-
tesy of Northwestern
University Libraries.

rule. The posh-sounding narrator of *Nigeria: The Making of a Nation* speaks of “the mineral hills of the central plateau” as the image track borrows the earlier film’s shot of a dragline excavator. Describing newly independent Nigeria as “a land of modern thought and modern progress,” the narrator details the national goal of “developing overseas trade.” Nigeria is said to be “preparing the ground for the giant strides to come.” The metaphor is literalized in subsequent images of extraction, as the narrator insists that “the wealth of the country is in the land.” In a powerful indication of Nigeria’s outsize ambition, “exports have risen fast”; “modern processing equipment backs the extra efforts of the farmers” of palm oil; “pyramids of groundnuts await transport overseas”; and “cotton is also exported.”²⁵ The narrator continues,

25 On the trade in palm oil, see Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); and Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic*

“Government research into better crops has produced a higher-quality crop acceptable in world markets. Regional development boards are encouraging industry from overseas to set up factories to manufacture from the home-produced raw materials.” Alluvial mining, however, still requires considerable manual labor. Reusing footage from *Nigeria: Its People and Produce*, the film proceeds to document how “tin is found in the mountainous district near Jos in the northern region. The mining industry is well established and produces a valuable export commodity.” As the emphasis on export value implies, the film is interested in tracing tin’s routes not only out of the earth but also out of Africa. To this end, it offers yet another recapitulation of the claims of *Nigeria: Its People and Produce*, though it adds rivers to the mix, showing how they reliably carry goods down to the busy seaports. “Modern industry and modern methods demand modern transport,” the narrator points out. “The rivers—the Niger and its tributary, the Benue—serve Nigeria well,” including by taking tin to ships bound for Europe and the United States. Nigeria’s specific geographies are not simply rich in mineral resources but also facilitate the movement of those same resources.²⁶

Set against the backdrop of tin extraction, *Palaver*, another production of British Instructional Films, is of interest partly for its director, Geoffrey Barkas, who would go on to complete second-unit photography for the Cecil Rhodes biopic *Rhodes of Africa* (Berthold Viertel, 1935), shot on location in Southern Rhodesia, and *King Solomon’s Mines* (Robert Stevenson, 1937), an adaptation of H. Rider Haggard’s 1885 novel. For *Rhodes of Africa*, Barkas filmed comprehensive reconstructions of the diamond rushes of the late nineteenth century, along with footage of copper, coal, and gold mines, all of which, initiated in Rhodes’s day, remained in operation at the time of the film’s production several decades later. As second-unit director, Barkas was thus able to offer filmic evidence of the persistence of mineral and hydrocarbon extraction across nearly three quarters of a century of British settlement in southern Africa. For *King Solomon’s Mines*, Barkas shot all African exteriors. (Interiors were shot at Shepherd’s Bush in London, and the film frequently features rear projections of Barkas’s “exotic” footage.) These locations included the Drakensberg, the eastern portion of the Great Escarpment in South Africa, where the film, like its many remakes, situates

Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁶ With its emphasis on how waterways enable trade, *Nigeria: The Making of a Nation* recalls the 1924 film *Down the Niger River and Delta to the Coast*, which was sponsored by Lever Brothers and shot by Frederick Wilson.

an abundance of mineral riches.²⁷ (“The diamonds belong to the mountain,” insists an African character in the fourth film adaptation of Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* [J. Lee Thompson, 1985], but the white protagonists abscond with them anyway, and the film celebrates this as their hard-won reward.) The extensive footage that Barkas shot for *King Solomon’s Mines* is strikingly similar to his second-unit work on *Rhodes*. The physical geographies of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, as captured by Barkas’s cameras, closely resemble one another. Indeed, Barkas’s specific shooting locations, for these two films produced practically back-to-back, were contiguous and overlapping. But they also, at the time and after, shared extractive enterprises whose actual industrial activities Barkas’s cameras carefully recorded.

King Solomon’s Mines is particularly revealing in this regard: it opens with brief glimpses of antiquated maps showing the “vast, unexplored interior” of Africa, then dissolves to a long shot of the Kimberley diamond fields operated by De Beers, as the voice-over narrator recalls the start of the area’s mineral revolution. Barkas shot the vast, open-pit Kimberley mine from multiple angles, and the finished film incorporates many of his views, moving briskly from one vantage point to another. Some of Barkas’s shots are static, while others pan slowly across the pit, its walls a series of step-like zones, in a manner reminiscent of the visual style of Fitzpatrick’s *TravelTalks*. Together, the shots comprise a panoramic portrait of diamond prospecting and mining in South Africa, showing hundreds of laborers engaged in this backbreaking work. (Most of these indigenous workers are equipped with iron pickaxes; some carry shovels; still others crank pulleys.) The documentary value of *King Solomon’s Mines* is therefore not limited to the usual wildlife or safari imagery but extends, in the sober manner of a process film, to the step-by-step labor of industrial extraction, from discovery to hauling. Shovels and pickaxes give way to large dragline excavators and other pieces of heavy equipment. (To more accurately indicate the historical setting of this introductory sequence—the late nineteenth century—close-ups of ox-wagons conceal the presence of diesel-powered dump trucks on the haul roads of 1937, when the sequence was shot.) Barkas’s aesthetic and historiographic contributions as second-unit director were considerable: the films in which he was involved offer invaluable records of the extraction of Africa’s natural resources.

When it came to location shooting on the continent, the in-demand Barkas cut his teeth on Nigeria, moving fluidly from the tin fields of that country to the diamond mines of southern Africa. His *Palaver* stresses the British

27 Bruce Allan, “In the British Studios,” *Motion Picture Herald* 127, no. 4 (April 24, 1937): 82.



Coal country, Nigeria (likely the Udi escarpment). Photograph by Edward Harland Duckworth. Date unknown. Courtesy of Northwestern University Libraries.

Empire's extensive appetite for Nigerian minerals. The film, which includes footage of the Jos Plateau's many extraction sites, dramatizes the pressures that a British miner, Mark Fernandez (Reginald Fox), faces as he works (or, rather, oversees) this watershed where granites abound. At one point, a sternly worded letter, sent from company headquarters, informs Mark, "Your Tin returns have been decreasing steadily without adequate explanation, and failing substantial increase within the next three shipments, I shall have to replace you." The problem, from the company's perspective, is not that tin is an exhaustible resource but that men like Mark may be poorly equipped to locate it (or to compel indigenous workers to swiftly extract it). Rather than acknowledge the possibility of tin's depletion, the company simply warns Mark that he is replaceable. Confidence in the limitless availability of African natural resources is expressed in the ominous letter that Mark receives, its words of warning quoted in an intertitle, but it is also evident in images of Nigeria's actual tin mines, most of which had, by the time *Palaver* was shot in 1926, been in operation for nearly two decades, steadily producing thousands of tons of tin in the Jos-Bukuru-Ropp area of the plateau. In 1884, European traders finally learned that the tin used by Hausa populations to lightly coat (and thus prevent the corrosion of) their copper products came not from North Africa, as previously suspected, but rather from the Jos Plateau (then known as the Bauchi Plateau) and surrounding areas. (Whether

these European travelers paid as much attention to the non-Hausa peoples of the broader Jos Plateau region is another matter, though all the region's tribes initially resisted commercial and colonial incursions.) Rather than deriving from trans-Saharan trade, as the British had long assumed (perhaps in recognition of Hausa's status as a language of commerce), the tin was actually being extracted from ores found in the hills and rock formations of what was soon to become the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. In fact, tin extraction, facilitated by the presence of ore close to the earth's surface, had been a small-scale local activity for millennia.²⁸

Palaver traces this imperial process of discovery and expansion, depicting it as not without intrigue (and thus anticipating *Gold* and other films that dramatize the business of extraction). To begin with, "Mark Fernandez" is not even the character's real name. Born Matthew Simmons in Britain, Mark later relocated to colonial Nigeria, where he worked for a mining company until authorities deported him for reasons that the film does not specify, though it is implied that he was prone to violence as well as to drink (and was thus a dangerous representative of the white race, threatening constantly to undermine its "prestige" in the eyes of indigenous populations). Six years later, Mark has returned to the colony under an assumed name. When the film begins, he is operating the (fictional) Sura Valley Mine on the Jos Plateau. Participating in Britain's great tin rush, he requires considerable local labor. At one point, he approaches a traditional ruler with a complaint: "Listen, King Dawiya," he says. "The men you send me for my mine are not enough. I must have more." Mark's demanding tone incenses the king, who snaps, "Am I a magician that I should make men spring from the ground?" Mark, who suspects that the king is lying (and simply withholding laborers out of spite), decides to bribe him with alcohol. The king becomes a drunk, Mark sees his workforce replenished, and the mining of tin accelerates on and around the Jos Plateau. But Mark, who has romantic problems, lashes out at his workers. He strikes one of them while inebriated and is penalized by the colonial authorities, in an implicit reprise of the scandal that precipitated his 1920 deportation.

Though fictional in name, the Sura Valley Mine is played by a number of actual extraction sites operated, at the time the film was shot, by private

28 A. F. Calvert, *Nigeria and its Tin Fields* (London: Edward Stanford, 1912); Godfrey Fell, "The Tin Mining Industry in Nigeria," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 38, no. 151 (April 1939), 246–258; B. W. Holder, "Tin Mining on the Jos Plateau of Nigeria," *Economic Geography* 35, no. 2 (April 1959), 109–122; Morrison, "Early Tin Production and Nigerian Labor on the Jos Plateau"; Michael J. Alexander, "Reclamation after Tin Mining on the Jos Plateau Nigeria," *The Geographical Journal* 156, no. 1 (March 1990), 44–50.

British firms working in collaboration, and in tension, with the colonial state. These included the Bisichi Tin Company, Ropp Tin Mines, and the bluntly named Jos Tin Area. In fact, so many firms were operating in the region (some with far larger concessions than others) that the film's Sura Valley Mine should be seen as a composite rather than a stand-in for any single operation. With over 80 companies and syndicates producing tin in the Jos Plateau region, *Palaver* responded to the challenge of representing such a proliferation of industrial activity by inventing the vast Sura Valley Mine, an amalgam whose name accurately identifies one of the region's ethnic groups. Yet the name also, in its very "indigenicity," obscures the colonial suppression of tin smelting and other sources of resource competition among native populations. Tin, whatever its local utility, was to be reserved for European enterprise—for the leading holders of prospecting and mine claims.

Other strategies of deflection are discernable in *Palaver*. Mark is plainly a "bad apple," able to return to the Nigeria from which he was once so punitively deported only under a false identity—only by carefully deceiving the "upstanding" colonial authorities. His sadistic treatment of indigenous laborers is thus meant to conceal broader and more durable practices of exploitation. An "honorable" district officer uncovers Mark's deceptions and ultimately thwarts his nefarious plans. The drunken Dawiya is brought to (colonial) justice after he kills Mark for having tricked him. The film ends with an English nurse accepting the district officer's proposal of marriage. All is well again on the hills and plains of the Jos Plateau. Stability reigns.

It is easy to dismiss the tidiness of the film's ending as a bit of wishful thinking, the product of a hopeful (or simply complacent) colonial imagination. Yet for all its melodrama, *Palaver* offers the sort of documentary value that Barkas would later bring to *Rhodes of Africa* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Shot by cinematographer Stanley Rodwell, the mining areas of the vast plateau highlands reveal a certain stability of extractive enterprise that exceeds any narrative posturing. In other words, the constancy that the film proclaims through its stabilizing conclusion—through its obscenely "happy" ending—is redundant in view of the many glimpses of actual mining operations, which show no signs of slowing down, much less of disappearing altogether. Indeed, the continuous history of tin extraction up to 1926, referenced in Mark's backstory, suggests a durability that has only been borne out over the subsequent century, despite occasional slowdowns and the formal withdrawal of most foreign companies following the collapse of the International Tin Agreement in 1985.

New Nollywood, which shares a certain melodramatic flair with *Palaver*, also attests to the persistence of extraction, offering a kind of corroboration

of the earlier film's claims. This is not to suggest that New Nollywood expresses any distinct affection for the colonial era, but rather to indicate the ongoing evidentiary promise of location shooting, particularly as it pertains to resource extraction. Tope Oshin's New Nollywood film *Up North* (2018), for instance, was shot on some of the very same grounds as *Palaver*, and it shows, in aerial footage that resembles the camerawork of Rodwell and Barkas, the ongoing presence of extractive activities on and around the Jos Plateau region, as it follows a Lagosian's national service in adjacent Bauchi State. (At one point, the drone footage, shot by a second unit operating throughout Nigeria's Middle Belt, captures a line of off-highway haul trucks transporting materials out of a mining site.) Tin production may have slowed since its peak in 1943, but the mining of the mineral ore has shown a definite tenacity in Nigeria, one that is discernable in the return of artisanal and small-scale extraction throughout the plateau region, where local communities have taken over mining sites abandoned by the big companies.

Like Afolayan's *Ìjògbòn*, Oshin's *Up North* indirectly documents Nigeria's active mines even as abandoned (and soon-to-be-reopened, or "undead") mines haunt the images. Classical Hollywood cinema offers precedents for such an approach. Consider, for instance, RKO-Pathé's *Ghost Valley* (Fred Allen, 1932), which opens with a text that reads, "The roaring mining camp of yesterday has become the weird, windswept Ghost City of today." Superimposed over images of a desolate Western scene, the words serve as a warning: resources are finite; extraction cannot continue indefinitely; boom times eventually beget ghost towns. Hollywood's hauntology of extraction would form a durable subgenre of the Western, with such works as the John Wayne film *Haunted Gold* (Mack V. Wright, 1932), a remake of First National's *The Phantom City* (Albert S. Rogell, 1928), and Monogram's *The Haunted Mine* (Derwin Abrahams, 1946) dramatizing the spectral threat of mineral interests. The ghostly persistence of extraction still figures in less macabre films, such as Don Siegel's *Edge of Eternity* (1959), shot on location in the Grand Canyon and other sites in Arizona. A murder mystery that pivots around two overlapping forms of extraction—illegal gold mining and sanctioned guano mining—*Edge of Eternity* depicts the demoralizing aftermath of a mineral boom. The ghost town where the action unfolds was once a "wonderfully noisy place," as one character wistfully recalls, "when the mines were going full-steam" and ten thousand people were living there. The cacophony of extraction—"the clatter of the big mills and the whine of the conveyor belts, and every now and then a great big, beautiful explosion"—has been replaced by the whisper of the wind. But the area's gold has not been depleted; its mining has simply been paused.

Reserves valued at an estimated \$20 million remain in the ground, tempting unauthorized extraction in the wake of the government's wartime decision to shut down the mines and appropriate their manpower. Now that the war is ostensibly over, the state is simply waiting for the price of gold to go up before permitting the resumption of mining. In the meantime, all manner of illegal activities converge on the area, where the harvesting of bat guano offers a licit contrast that lends the film a fleeting documentary quality, for *Edge of Eternity* was made, as an end title duly notes, with the assistance and equipment of the United States Guano Corporation, a subsidiary of New Pacific Coal & Oil. Removing accumulated bat excrement from the Grand Canyon's caves, the United States Guano Corporation, whose parent company itself signals extractive interdependence, churns on where gold mining has temporarily ceased. The film's vision of plenitude—its fanciful refusal of the realities of depletion—was, however, belied by at least one of its shooting locations: Oatman, Arizona, where nearly all gold production had ceased by 1943, leaving, as in the Jos Plateau area pictured in *Up North*, or the Oyo-Oke of Afolayan's *Ìjògbòn*, "only sporadic, small-scale leach operations and re-processing of mine tailings."²⁹ Like *Up North* and *Ìjògbòn*, the Columbia-distributed *Edge of Eternity* offers a visual record of extraction as both exhausted and reanimated, industrial and artisanal, dead and all too alive.

Also evoking *Up North*, but from a much different political perspective, Karimah Ashadu's short film *Plateau* (2022) returns to the sites where *Palaver* was shot and shows the area's residents, desperate to eke out a living amid the detritus of global capitalism, taking over flooded pits and manually sifting the earth across hundreds of square miles of degraded lands where mining was once done on an industrial scale. "What we do now," explains one laborer, "is just re-mine the mines the whites left behind." If this is not the precise mode of persistence that *Palaver* envisioned in 1926, it still substantiates the earlier film's prediction that the extraction of tin would continue. (It also suggests a return to the sort of backbreaking extraction-by-hand seen in the Barkas-shot footage of the Kimberley diamond fields in *King Solomon's Mines*.) Such staying power has many expressions, including bodily ones that derive from the always-hazardous work of digging pits, washing gravels, and carrying ore, as well as from exposure to all manner of

29 Ed DeWitt, Jon P. Thorson, and Robert C. Smith, "Geology and Gold Deposits of the Oatman District, Northwestern Arizona," in US Department of the Interior, *Epithermal Gold Deposits—Part II: U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1857-I* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), 1–28 [2].

dangerous pollutants. The waste materials, or “tailings,” from tin mining on the Jos Plateau contain high levels of uranium and thorium and are thought to be responsible for the accumulation of radionuclides in the bodies of area residents.³⁰ As for the body of the land itself: despite legislation requiring the formal restoration of areas degraded by mining, the damage wrought by dragline excavators, over decades of large-scale commercial activity, remains all too visible, and not simply in the form of abandoned pits.³¹ Indeed, massive dredge-spoil mounds, glimpsed in *Palaver* as well as in *Plateau* and *Up North*, are as enduring as the mine dumps that dot South Africa to this day.

From Tin Plateau to Coal City

If tin extraction can be linked to gold mining, it also shares qualities and consequences with the exploitation of coal, another significant driver of the Nigerian economy. In 1927, a year after the premiere of *Palaver*, the Kafanchan-Jos line opened, providing direct rail access to Port Harcourt, from which all tin was then exported. This important rail link also connected the tin fields of the Jos Plateau region to the major coal mines of Enugu, which had opened in the 1910s to provide the principal fuel source for locomotives in newly amalgamated Nigeria.³² Tethering two extractive industries, the line fed the energy needs of the increasingly mechanized tin mines, with their growing demand for coal.³³ Enugu's coal deposits were considerable, making the area a magnet for extractive capitalism. Like Jos, it was a “new town,” developed according to the designs of extractive industry. Coal made Enugu a cosmopolitan center—a site of migration, wage labor, and colonial administration.³⁴ The area's hydrocarbon resources were “discovered” not long after colonial authorities determined that the Jos Plateau contained tin in commercially viable quantities. By the second

30 I. Ibeanu, “Tin Mining and Processing in Nigeria: Cause for Concern?,” *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity* 64 (2003): 59–66; Bridge and Fredriksen, “Order out of Chaos,” 393.

31 Onimisi Alao and Hassan Ibrahim, “Plateau Bears Scars of Tin Mining,” *Daily Trust* (Abuja), January 1, 2014, <https://dailytrust.com/plateau-bears-scars-of-tin-mining/>.

32 B. W. Hodder, “Tin Mining on the Jos Plateau of Nigeria,” *Economic Geography* 35, no. 2 (April 1959): 109–122 [110].

33 E. S. Simpson, “Electricity Production in Nigeria,” *Economic Geography* 45, no. 3 (July 1969): 239–257 [241].

34 Akachi Odoemene, “Dynamics of Migration in the Founding and Development of Enugu City, 1915–1953,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 27 (2018): 64–95.

decade of the twentieth century, the Onyeama Coal Mines had opened, and extraction would soon commence at sites in Ogbete, Okpara, and the Iva Valley.³⁵

Though a source of entrepreneurial excitement, sub-surface mining posed distinct representational problems. How to film Nigeria's underground riches? Cameras could scarcely roll in the dark, steamy coal mines of Enugu, where the excavation of ore, however pivotal, was difficult to picture. As the Nigerian historian Agwu Akpala observed in 1965, "most of its operations, technical and human, are carried on underground and out of the light of day and out of the public eye."³⁶ The surface mining taking place to the north did not face this dilemma. Tin deposits in the open, grass-covered plains of the photogenic Jos Plateau area were easily and expressively captured in the panoramic images of *Palaver* and other films. Even British Pathé's 1956 newsreel was able to show the Duke of Edinburgh surveying the vast plains with their canyon-like open-air pits.

The coal lodged underground, down in Enugu, was another matter entirely. It was accessed largely via adits, or horizontal entrances burrowed into the sides of the hills around the town. These "drift portals" were (as they remain) eerie openings in the earth—shadowy doorways to coal seams, the stuff of horror films. Nevertheless, the ambitious Eastern Region government, whose administrative center was located in Enugu, wanted the world to see what the area's coal economy was achieving. It wanted, specifically, a cinematic account of coal mining as a major source of employment, town expansion, and regional power (both electrical and political). What it got was *The Mark of the Hawk* (Michael Audley, 1957), the calling card of the American independent company Lloyd Young & Associates. This star-studded feature film, whose exteriors were shot in Enugu, attempts to compensate for coal's subterranean location by lavishing visual attention on the surface outcrops of the coal beds, as well as on mining camps, pit railways, mine carts, waste rock, and other emblems of extraction.

Like *Palaver* before it, *The Mark of the Hawk* leavens its melodrama with evidentiary images of mining. Formally wanting, narratively shoddy, and ideologically appalling, the film is nevertheless a powerful testament to

35 There is scholarly disagreement regarding these dates (and locations). In her labor history of coal mining in Enugu, Carolyn A. Brown gives 1915 as the date of the opening of the Udi Mine (which, she writes, closed in 1936) and 1917 as the date the Iva Valley Mine began production, with the Obwetti Mine opening "[s]hortly [there]after." Brown, "We Were All Slaves," 98. Scholars agree, however, that all the area's major coal mines were fully operational by the 1920s.

36 Agwu Akpala, "The Background of the Enugu Colliery Shooting Incident in 1949," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 2 (December 1965): 335–363 [362].

location shooting. It contains invaluable footage of the Enugu coalfields, of the Udi lands as they looked at a particular historical moment. Offering low-angle shots of charismatic star Sidney Poitier (playing local labor leader Obam, who agitates for the independence from British colonial rule of his unnamed African country), the film also furnishes images of coal being quarried, of workers segregated in special mining camps, and of the physically demanding work of portage. It thus represents the sort of fusion of fiction and documentary—of fantasy and instruction—that the Crown Agents for the Colonies had once called for, and that *Palaver* had, much to their delight, appeared to accomplish.³⁷ Filmed on location in Enugu, *The Mark of the Hawk* captures images of Igbo laborers migrating to the Udi coalfields, of private mining syndicates operating in the area, and of metropolitan capital creating new social and economic experiences. Documenting the massive mine labor force employed in Enugu, the film is, in its own way, a record of demographic transformations actually taking place at the time of its production. It is also explicitly about a particular inter-capitalist rivalry—that between Britain and the United States—then playing out in and around the Udi coalfields. But this competition was also leavened by close cooperation and exchange. As Walter Rodney writes of so-called “reverse lend-lease” policies, “wartime United States loans to Britain were repaid partly by raw materials shipped from British colonies to the United States.”³⁸ Like the plateau’s high-grade cassiterite, Enugu’s coal helped connect a power on the wane with one on the rise.

The production of *The Mark of the Hawk* was partly the result of Enugu’s efforts to encourage foreign investment in its film sector as it sought to transcend the latter’s specifically British parentage while adding to the accomplishments of the Eastern Region Film Unit, which had been spun off from the more famous Colonial Film Unit. In 1955, the Cinema Corporation of Nigeria Law established a government-owned regional film body to be headquartered in Enugu. Committed to immediate expansion, one of the Cinema Corporation’s goals was to catch up with media-rich Lagos, long a magnet for movie companies. Decades before the production of straight-to-video films moved beyond Lagos to encompass sites in southeastern Nigeria, Enugu was envisioned as a welcoming alternative to the coastal metropolis.

37 Tom Rice, “One Family: The Movement of Educational Film in Britain and Its Empire,” in *The Institutionalization of Educational Cinema: North America and Europe in the 1910s and 1920s*, ed. Marina Dahlquist and Joel Frykholm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 55–79 [68].

38 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 204.

Jonathan Haynes argues that the eastward migration of Nollywood film-making in the late 1990s was precipitated in part by the emergence of the historical epic, a genre that could hardly flourish amid the modern trappings and near-inescapable urbanness of high-density Lagos, as well as by the lower cost of shooting on location in and around Enugu.³⁹ In the 1950s, the Eastern Region's coal economy was a major attraction, both for Nigerian migrants and American investors. Appealing to the latter, as Enugu did, reflected the advice of the US State Department, which confidently proclaimed of decolonizing African countries that "the best way to achieve their economic and political aspirations [lay] in ... cooperating with the Free World."⁴⁰ As that last, loaded term suggests, *The Mark of the Hawk* was mired in Cold War tensions and used as a cultural tool with which to attack Soviet communism.

The film's plot centers on the efforts of Poitier's Obam, who, representing local coal miners, helps ensure his country's incremental inclusion in postcolonial (or neocolonial) modernity. Tempted by the radicalism of his firebrand brother and other Soviet-influenced extremists, Obam eventually accedes to the "rational" council of two Christian ministers, one African (played by Juano Hernández) and the other American (played by John McIntire). *The Mark of the Hawk* suggests an augury of what Sharon Willis calls "the Poitier effect," in that it hitches the actor's screen persona—already some seven years old by the time of the film's production—to a fantasy of "racial reconciliation and reciprocal respect."⁴¹ Yet *The Mark of the Hawk* also inverts the terms of the racialized relationship that Willis rightly sees as characteristic of the cycle of Poitier films that began with Stanley Kramer's *The Defiant Ones* in 1958. For while that liberal cycle has Poitier (as both actor and character) on a "mission ... to educate well-intentioned white people to understand and accept racial equality," the earlier *The Mark of the Hawk* gives that mission to an actual missionary—a white American cleric who, with crucial assistance from Hernández's African minister, must educate Obam to accept and embrace incrementalism.⁴² Counseling the "fiery" labor

39 Jonathan Haynes, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 142.

40 Quoted in Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 149.

41 Sharon Willis, *The Poitier Effect: Racial Melodrama and Fantasies of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 5.

42 *The Mark of the Hawk* thus extends the ideological project of the British film *Nigerian Pattern* (Peter Buckmall, 1954), a ten-minute account of the relationship between missionary work and "Third World development." *Nigerian Pattern* was made by Ray Kinsey Productions, which would go on to make *Present Challenge in Central Africa* (Raymond Kinsey, 1959) for the

leader to exercise restraint, the clergyman (who purports to comprehend the evils of communism from the time that he spent in a Chinese prison), not only dampens the flames of trade unionism but also encourages Obama to reproduce this liberal pedagogy in his encounters with fellow colonial subjects. Obama's purpose, in contrast to Poitier's in films from *The Defiant Ones* to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967), is thus to "enlighten" Africans rather than white Americans. In Poitier's later films (in sharp contrast to his earlier *Something of Value* [Richard Brooks, 1957], which, shot on location in and around Nairobi in the summer of 1956, attempts to historicize the Mau Mau uprising), complex interracial encounters "never [tell] the story of the past that produced them." For Willis, the post-1958 "Poitier effect" seemingly "represents a dream of achieving racial reconciliation and equality without any substantive change to the 'white' world or to 'white' culture." It "functions as a defense, or a compensatory gesture, averting or deflecting the possibility of a kind of critical thinking that would involve a serious reciprocal interracial exchange, instead offering a fantasy of racial understanding and 'assimilation' that requires no effort on the part of white people."⁴³ Such ease is perhaps epitomized by the specific modernization script that saw American capitalists simply and efficiently succeeding British colonialists in resource-rich Nigeria. The coal production at the center of *The Mark of the Hawk* was, at the time the film was made, indeed expanding as Enugu applied US technical services and purchased US-made equipment (including from the Caterpillar, Bucyrus-Erie, and Euclid lines).⁴⁴ Yet the era was also marked by a massacre: the infamous Enugu colliery shooting of 1949, a brutal response to striking workers at the Iva Valley Mine and a major catalyst for the decolonization movement.⁴⁵

United Society for Christian Literature and *Treasure in India* (Bernard Tidball, 1964) for the British Foreign Bible Society. For more on *Present Challenge in Central Africa* (which focuses on Northern Rhodesia), see *Film User* 14 (1960): 149.

43 Willis, *The Poitier Effect*, 4.

44 US Department of Commerce, Domestic and International Business Administration, Bureau of International Commerce, *Nigeria: A Survey of US Business Opportunities* (Washington, DC: Bureau of International Commerce, 1976), 57. For more on the provision of US assistance in late colonial Nigeria, see Robert I. Fleming, Rockefeller Brothers Fund pamphlet, "Rockefeller Brothers Fund: Advisory Services for Economic Development," 1957, Record Group 5: West Africa Program (hereafter RG 5), Series 1, Box 1, Folder 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund (hereafter RBF). Advertising the RBF's office at Development House on Labinjo Lane in Lagos, the pamphlet noted, "The office is open from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily; but appointments can be made for other hours if these are not convenient."

45 S. O. Jaja, "The Enugu Colliery Massacre in Retrospect: An Episode in British Administration of Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 11, no. 3/4 (December 1982–June 1983): 86–106.



Sidney Poitier at the colliery in *The Mark of the Hawk*.

In *The Mark of the Hawk*, Christianity papers over much of this volatile history, equipping diverse characters with a means of recognizing their shared humanity.⁴⁶ Still, the film manages to dramatize key aspects of the struggle for workers' rights in post-1945 Nigeria, showing hundreds of miners forming a powerful collective with the capacity to strike. The film conveys the miners' solidarity in long shots that register their numbers. At one point, during their lunch break, they gather to hear Obam deliver a rousing denunciation of both the colonial seizure of the Udi coalfields and the abuse of managerial power that has followed. Addressing the vast crowd gathered on the grounds of the colliery, the union leader cries, "They have taken your wealth and what have they given you in return? Do you have more land? Those of you who once plowed your own fields now work the land of the white planter—for what? For a white man's salary? Do you have more wealth? Those of you who work in a white man's mine—what is your wealth? Is it the few coins you receive at the end of a week's hard labor? Is this your wealth? If you are Africans, listen to me! If this is your

46 As Jon Cowans observes, "Although sympathetic to the Africans, the film never shows their mistreatment." Jon Cowans, *Empire Films and the Crisis of Colonialism, 1946–1959* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 169.

country, listen to me! If this is your land, listen to me!" The speech anticipates the impassioned rhetoric of Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, in which Rodney notes, "The Nigerian coal miner at Enugu earned one shilling per day for working underground and nine pence per day for jobs on the surface. Such a miserable wage would be beyond the comprehension of a Scottish or German coal miner, who could virtually earn in an hour what the Enugu miner was paid for a six-day week."⁴⁷ Egregiously undercompensated while working their own expropriated lands, the miners increasingly turned to the type of trade unionism depicted in *The Mark of the Hawk*.⁴⁸ (In the 1940s, Enugu's Colliery Workers Union began pressing for a minimum wage of 5 shillings 10 pence per day.)⁴⁹ Addressing the collective, Obam continues, "What, then, shall we think of the white man? Shall we believe that he wants us to have our land? Shall we believe when he promises wealth? Shall we believe that he intends to set us free?" To each question, the miners shout, "No!" So unnerving is their solidarity that Juano Hernández's African minister, who has been listening to Obam's speech, decides to make his presence known. "Wait, my friends!" he pleads with the crowd. "Wait, you must listen to me. There's another side to this!" That he is very much a mouthpiece for the colonial perspective is telegraphed by cutaways to a white official who, in an attempt to ascertain what the labor unrest is really all about, has driven out to the colliery in his fancy car. "Listen to me, my people," the minister continues. "Much of what Obam has told you is true. Some of the white men *have* taken our land. But *others* have built our schools. Some have stolen our country's wealth. But others have helped us fight the tsetse fly. They have given us hospitals, and healed our bodies. It's true that some would deny freedom to us. But others have given us the word of God, that we may be freed from the jungle swamps of fear and sin. Obam has spoken truth, *but* it is *half*-truth." His concluding point is a homiletic one: "Those who achieve in violence are fit only for rule by force." At this point an air horn blares, signifying the end of the lunch break. The crowd disperses. The miners go back to work. The minister is left alone with the labor leader. Turning to him, he says in a paternal tone, "Obam, we must not become the kind of men we condemn. How do we justify ourselves if, hated because we are not white, we return that hatred simply because others are not Black? We are working for a better tomorrow

47 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 177.

48 Brown, "We Were All Slaves."

49 Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 165.



Juano Hernández and coal miners in *The Mark of the Hawk*.

than that. Today, some of our children—many of them—are being trained for that tomorrow, and they are being trained in schools that were founded by white men, and are maintained largely by white men.” He proposes that the indigenous community simply “keep pace with the changes about it.”

To the minister and his associates in the colonial government, the assembly of irate mine workers is difficult to explain, except as an expression of “reverse” discrimination—of “hatred for the whites.” Filmed in the Iva Valley—the site of the brutal massacre of 1949—the scene does not cite the history of colonial violence to which its shooting location had itself borne witness. Yet the massacre galvanized—even generated—the very nationalist sentiments that the film depicts, lending the decolonization movement a clear example of the inherent cruelty of British conquest.⁵⁰ The film creates a backstory devoid of such violence, even as its shooting locations reveal traces of resource conflict and labor strife. Viewable throughout *The Mark of the Hawk*, the coal pits carved into the Udi escarpment were paradoxical

50 Carolyn Brown’s labor history seeks to “retrieve Nigerian miners from the domination of nationalist historiography.” “As nationalist icons, the dead miners become but a backdrop for the more dynamic drama of nationalist politics,” she argues, offering by far the fullest and most focused account of the labor of coal mining in Nigeria. Brown, “*We Were All Slaves*,” 330.

modern workplaces, at once earthy and advanced, “animalistic” (like so many burrows) and well-ordered. Sites of industrial discipline, they were also safely “primitive”—steamy, muddy, and “tropical”—at least in the view of the colonial state, whose essentialist perspective African workers would increasingly challenge, their manifold labor actions evidence of collective resistance to British presumption.

Made by Westerners, *The Mark of the Hawk* betrays a fear of African labor that recalls the cautious liberalism of the British film *The Proud Valley* (Pen Tennyson, 1940), in which Paul Robeson’s African American seaman becomes a miner in the South Wales Coalfield where the film was shot. Overcoming the Welsh community’s racism, Robeson’s strapping laborer excels with a pickaxe but is killed when a fire causes the mine to collapse. A victim of one of Europe’s oldest extractive traditions, he is meant to represent the Black man’s inherent lack of suitability for mine work—an unfitnes that British colonialists hoped to disprove in Nigeria, especially as the Second World War (whose outbreak *The Proud Valley* depicts) placed great strains on Welsh coal reserves. Tensions between the Welsh way of mining and those employed in Enugu were often pronounced. Sub-bituminous Enugu coal was considered generally inferior to Welsh steaming coal, though it was easier to ignite and therefore ideal for locomotive boilers. Enugu’s “soft” coal, with its high carbon content, broke apart easily and was prone to spontaneous combustion, which discouraged its exportation. (Its volatility was also a handy metaphor for the African labor power that so concerned the colonial state.) In any case, Enugu’s coal economy was never a story of constant abundance. Carolyn Brown writes that its workers “were acutely aware of the constraints on reserves.”⁵¹ Yet Enugu’s coal was intimately tied to the extraction and exportation of Nigeria’s other natural resources, including tin, palm fruits and oils, and ground nuts. As the fuel that powered their transportation to the country’s coastal areas, it proved efficiently connective—a vital, indeed indispensable, link in world trade, and a conveniently local alternative to Welsh coal. The functional linkage between the coal and railway industries enabled other interconnections, as Brown makes clear. Enugu’s hydrocarbons brought inland resources into speedier contact with Nigeria’s ports. As a result, their extraction was a priority that even European participation in the Great War could not dislodge. (If anything, the war only proved the signal importance of coal, as well as the need to locate and exploit sources beyond the Welsh mines and other highly stressed European extraction sites—a distinct need that the Second World War

51 Brown, “*We Were All Slaves*,” 98.

would only underscore as the Allies, including American forces stationed in Nigeria, required swift access to African natural resources.) Having used up a strategic reserve of southern African coal by 1916, Nigeria's railway system demonstrated the extreme value of Udi's own. (Before the latter was mined in sufficient quantities, wood fuel was used temporarily.) More than simply serving Nigerian railways, Enugu's coal would come to power commercial and shipping operations throughout Britain's West African colonies.⁵² But it was precisely because they were at the center of West Africa's export economy, in a privileged position from which to form political collectives and contest colonial authority, that Nigerian miners were near-constant sources of disquiet for the British.⁵³ A reference to bituminous fuel, the title of RKO's 1954 documentary about coal mining in Appalachia—*Black Power*—equally describes the object of colonial anxieties in Enugu, where an African labor force consistently threatened to undermine official aims.⁵⁴

Shot throughout the valley near the Udi escarpment, *The Mark of the Hawk* vividly illustrates Enugu's status as a "coal city" combining urban and rural, mechanization and manual labor. ("Good morning, COAL CITY," announced the graphic that began each day's broadcast on ENBC-TV in Eastern Nigeria in the early 1960s, the words superimposed over photographic images of the very hills from which the resource was extracted.)⁵⁵ At the same time, the film repeatedly—and accurately—pictures the role of Asian intermediaries between British authorities and African miners. (An Indian expatriate even manages the mine whose workers Obam addresses, and he is physically present for the labor leader's speeches.) Yet it is Christianity that lubricates the transition from British colonialism to American "assistance." Long overlooked, *The Mark of the Hawk* merits inclusion among those fifties

52 Brown, "We Were All Slaves," 108–109.

53 Brown, "We Were All Slaves," 86.

54 Directed and photographed by William Deeke, *Black Power* describes coal as, in the words of voice-over narrator Peter Roberts, "the earth's greatest mineral treasure," found "in the earth's dark depths." "We'll tap the earth for black power!" the film promises. Yet it celebrates the job loss that automation brings, outlining "the modern miracle of mechanized mining, typical of American industrial ability. With three hundred thousand fewer miners than we had in 1917, we get out more coal than ever!" Automation is one, distinctly American, solution to the problem of labor power. Like the colonial state in Nigeria, *Black Power* aligns mine workers with animals, explaining that "both man and beast know their job, know every foot of that hole where they fit snugly." The film also confirms that, as in Nigeria, "the railroads are still one of coal's biggest customers," coal being "power—black, volatile, magical power, flowing, floating, rolling from mine to city, from hills to mills, smelters, furnaces, factories, to turn the wheels of the vast, complex mechanism of which you are a part."

55 Oluyinka Esan, *Nigerian Television: Fifty Years of Television in Africa* (Princeton, NJ: AMV Publishing, 2009), 65.

movies that, in Steven Cohan's persuasive analysis, "tended to assume that, as far as cold warfare was concerned, Americanism and Christianity were synonymous, particularly in representations of American global hegemony."⁵⁶ During the decade of the film's production and release, Congress added the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance and the words "In God We Trust" to US currency.⁵⁷ This equation between Christianity and capitalism would only be strengthened in Nigeria by Evangelicalism, with its "prosperity gospel" promoting possessive individualism. Writing in 2005, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie addressed this "new brand of Christianity," characterizing it as "intensely focused on material progress, with pastors quoting scripture that portrayed wealth as a spiritual virtue ... Religion has become our answer to a failed economy. Christian and business self-help books sell because they sustain the status quo: the former affirm that God wants you to make money while the latter teach you how to go about it."⁵⁸ Much has been written about the centrality of the prosperity gospel in certain Nollywood genres. Less understood, however, are its filmic antecedents, which tended to pivot around depictions of Africa's mineral wealth. Classical Hollywood cinema, for instance, abounds with representations of the relationship between capitalism and Christian "charity" (the latter so often, as in *The Mark of the Hawk*, simply clearing a path for the accumulation of profits). In MGM's *Kongo* (William Cowen, 1932), the ivory trade is explicitly tied to missionary work. "It takes [the missionaries] a lifetime to Christianize a native," observes one character (a demonic ivory trader who strongly suggests Conrad's Kurtz, and who is played to the hilt by Walter Huston), but such labor is understood as a necessary precondition for capitalist penetration. The line between capitalist and missionary is blurred throughout the film, as when a pious white woman notes that, "with the help of God," an American farmer is finally "fertilizing the [African] wilderness." Far from a distortive view of capitalism's exploitation of Christianity on the African continent, *Kongo* clearly evokes actual, religiously inflected "humanitarian" efforts to (sometimes literally) prepare the ground for profitmaking activities. Beginning in the 1890s, American evangelical campaigns to "save" Africa and Africans often prescribed specifically capitalist remedies, despite concerns regarding capitalism's deleterious effects in the United States. "In

56 Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 126.

57 J. Ronald Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Doubleday, 1990 [1986]), 321.

58 Quoted in Matthew Gandy, "Learning from Lagos," *New Left Review* 33 (May/June 2005): 37–52 [51].

Darkest Africa,” read an 1896 article in the *Christian Herald*, “countless acres of virgin, yet fertile soil await the arrival of the American farmer, who will transform that wilderness into fruitful fields ... Thousands of strong and untutored arms and hands await the American mechanic who will train them in the handicrafts of the more advanced civilization. Thousands of bright and eager, yet undeveloped, intellects await the American teacher ...”⁵⁹

Other Hollywood films critique the depredations of extractive enterprise only to introduce, and celebrate, more “humane,” Christian-inflected methods of extraction that, as in *The Mark of the Hawk*, evidence the transition from British colonialism to a US-guided “independence.” Set in West Africa, MGM’s *White Cargo* (Richard Thorpe, 1942) features a protagonist (played by Walter Pidgeon) who is at once the overseer of a rubber plantation and the region’s resident magistrate—a capitalist who, as such, “has the legal power of life and death.” (As one observer approvingly puts it, “Someone has to represent the law in these parts!”) Pidgeon’s character is openly contemptuous of the efforts of Christian missionaries to promote economic equality in West Africa, at one point confronting a reverend whose latest “convert” has stolen a rifle. “That’s what you get for pampering them—giving them fair wages instead of the whip!” he snarls. The film can hardly be said to endorse his harsh position, however. A present-tense framing device, unfolding against the backdrop of World War II (“With the Japs in Malaya, we need rubber—and more rubber!”), stages a rapprochement between capitalism and Christianity, as a rubber executive (a more “evolved” version of Pidgeon’s turn-of-the-century industrialist) proudly declares, “Fair treatment and good wages always attract good labor—go out in the bush and recruit them!” Africa’s riches are, the framing device implies, now firmly in the hands of “the good guys”—those fighting for “freedom from tyranny” on a truly global stage.

For all its references to decolonization, *The Mark of the Hawk* is fundamentally concerned with *market* freedom—the question of whether soon-to-be-independent Africans will permit foreigners to conduct business without restraint. Coal mining is the crux of the matter, as it was in the actual political and economic life of Enugu in the 1950s. As a labor leader, Obam must learn, as the actual Nigerian Coal Corporation had surely learned, that international trade is not to be stymied. The making of *The Mark of the Hawk* offered its own enactment of the principle. Throughout the 1950s, Enugu

59 “Sympathy for the Slaves,” *Christian Herald*, April 29, 1896, 343, quoted in Heather D. Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 205.

pursued no restrictions on the importation of American films—much to the delight of Hollywood majors and independent producers alike. At the same time that it was discovering just how extensively it could benefit from state subsidies for national film industries in Italy, Great Britain, and France (despite, or perhaps because of, those countries' restrictions on imports and the repatriation of profits), Hollywood was learning, through the making of *The Mark of the Hawk*, that Nigeria could be at least as accommodating as certain European governments—perhaps more so, given the absence of any kind of quota system at both federal and state levels. Far from an outlier—politically unintelligible and altogether irrelevant to the Hollywood imperium—Nigeria was an important part of an elaborate and expanding network of national governments supporting (however indirectly or paradoxically) American film production. National self-determination (and, in the case of Enugu, regional self-determination) would mean acceding to the aims of American capital, which, whatever its foreignness, was at least (and allegedly) distinct from British colonial interests. As Elizabeth F. Thompson argues, “American culture was not yet fully regarded as part of the hegemonic engine of ... European colonialism”—a misperception that only ensured continued exploitation.⁶⁰ Thus was film production, like resource extraction, implicated—and even imbricated—in the transition to neocolonial structures.

Rather than an admission of technical and artistic inferiority, Enugu's invitation to Hollywood should be seen as the cinematic correlative of the conscious, strategic appropriation of European representational traditions by some Nigerian artists active at the time. Identifying with Western artistic practices, such artists sought to fashion what Chika Okeke-Agulu has convincingly described as a specifically postcolonial modernism equally attentive to African experiences.⁶¹ However vividly *The Mark of the Hawk* reflected fears of a violent or otherwise “unruly” decolonization process, the film's production clearly required the sort of sovereign actor that Lloyd Young & Associates found in the newly self-governing, manifestly “modern” Eastern Region. Enugu's pronounced and competitive “commitment to maintaining a secure environment for runaway American production”—part of its overall goal of attracting international capital investment—lent

60 Elizabeth F. Thompson, “Scarlett O'Hara in Damascus: Hollywood, Colonial Politics, and Arab Spectatorship during World War II,” in *Globalizing American Studies*, ed. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 184–208 [185].

61 Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

itself to the anticommunist message of *The Mark of the Hawk*.⁶² As Chinua Achebe put it in a 1988 essay, “[t]he Igbo world is an arena for the interplay of forces.”⁶³ In the 1950s, colonial and neocolonial anxieties often centered on the possibility of communism entering this already-volatile admixture. The conviction that members of Enugu’s Colliery Workers Union were merely doing the bidding of nefarious communists was widespread among colonial authorities and a major precipitant of the 1949 massacre.⁶⁴ The colonial government firmly believed that the coal miners were willing “to fight for independence by blowing up government buildings and key installations.”⁶⁵ The equation between communism and violence only gained prominence in the years to come. In the United States, *The Wall Street Journal* rearticulated the colonial concern, as in a 1961 article on the riots in Nigeria that followed the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. Worrying over a so-called “Soviet pattern” in Nigeria, the *Journal* cited “Communist and pro-Communist infiltration into youth groups,” as well as “anti-white and anti-American” attitudes. The article also pointed out, however, that “many Nigerians seem pro-West and pro-American in their attitudes.” It sought to reassure American businessmen who were already installed in the country, as well as those disposed to be “pro-Nigerian”: “In foreign affairs generally ... the Nigerian government has been leaning rather strongly toward the West. When it seems to take an anti-West stand it is often because it cannot afford to appear in the eyes of other Africans as a Western puppet ...”⁶⁶ This was a reasonably accurate assessment, at least where Enugu was concerned.

62 Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market* (Buffalo, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 36. Hollywood films were key tools in the US government’s attempts to curb the spread of communism abroad: Ernst Lubitsch’s anticommunist comedy *Ninotchka* (1939), which ends with Russian characters capitulating to capitalism, was widely distributed in Italy in the early months of 1948—part of the propaganda campaign through which the US government endeavored to defeat the Italian Communists in that year’s parliamentary elections. Two years later, and for equally anticommunist reasons, *Ninotchka* was revived—“re-implemented”—in Austria in the wake of the trade union strikes of October 1950, screening to tens of thousands of Viennese filmgoers as part of the “psychological campaign” waged by the US Department of State under the auspices of the Smith-Mundt Act (also known as the US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948). Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, translated by Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 228, 229.

63 Chinua Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019 [1988]), 62–67 [62].

64 Brown, “*We Were All Slaves*.”

65 Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*, 165.

66 Joseph E. Evans, “The Lumumba Myth,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Monday, February 20, 1961, 10, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, RBF.

After 1957, the Eastern Region's Ministry of Commerce, in its negotiations with expatriate companies, followed the facilitative pattern established in its interactions with Lloyd Young & Associates, hewing closely to the pro-capitalist, anticommunist script.⁶⁷ Enugu was thus engaged in the creation and maintenance of policies "designed to pave the way primarily for *American* private investment," as Alphaeus Hunton, the Atlanta-born civil rights activist and executive director of the Council on African Affairs, observed in 1957.⁶⁸ The expansion of the Nigerian coal industry, like that of the Cinema Corporation, depended on American knowledge, equipment, and customers. But only coal production would thrive, reaching a peak of nearly one million tons in 1959.⁶⁹

Enugu's determinative relationship to moving images did not end with *The Mark of the Hawk*, however. The city would later rely on a public institution—the Nigerian Television Authority—to facilitate the development of "local stories," such as the NTA's adaptation of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which was filmed in 1986 on the very grounds once occupied by the makers of *The Mark of the Hawk*. The 13-episode miniseries, shot by cinematographer Yusuf Mohammed under the direction of David Orere, boasts breathtaking images of Enugu's landscapes, including the great escarpment along whose ridges coal had long been mined (though Mohammed and Orere were, for this period piece set before coal was "discovered," appropriately careful to avoid showing the abandoned yet unfilled and still-gaping adits that pitted the hills at the time of shooting, as they do to this day).⁷⁰ As is well known, Achebe endeavored to counter what he saw as Joyce Cary's misrepresentation of Nigeria in the latter's "African" novel *Mister Johnson* (1939). But he might also have been responding to *The Mark of the Hawk*, whose production in Nigeria coincided with the writing of *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's protagonist, Okonkwo, is not unlike Sidney Poitier's *Obama*: both men are "born leaders," charismatic and idealistic, and their fates are equally entwined with the efforts of colonial administrators to shape Nigeria and Nigerians. But where Okonkwo chooses violence (including self-destruction) as a rebuke to British rule—a victim, in Achebe's tragic framework, of colonial modernity—Poitier's character opts for Christianization, reverting

67 See A. H. N. Glew to R. I. Fleming, March 20, 1959, RG 5, Series 2, Box 25, Folder 206, RBF.

68 W. Alphaeus Hunton, *Decision in Africa: Sources of Current Conflict* (New York: International Publishers, 1960 [1957]), 85. For more on Hunton's experiences in Enugu, see Dorothy Hunton, *Alphaeus Hunton: The Unsung Valiant* (Richmond Hill, NY: D. K. Hunton, 1986).

69 US Department of Commerce, *Nigeria*, 52.

70 As Walter Rodney so succinctly puts it, "The mining that went on in Africa left holes in the ground." Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 216.



Conveying coal in *The Mark of the Hawk*.

to a “peaceful protest” of colonialism that doubles as an active embrace of American capitalism and the market freedoms that it promises. It is a specifically socialist revolution that Obam, operating under the influence of the ministers, must prevent in *The Mark of the Hawk*—a violent transfer of power from colonialists to anti-capitalists.

The film’s main theme—American capitalism versus European colonialism—was not new to Hollywood. Set in Tanganyika (and featuring at least one reference to Nigeria), Warner Bros.’ *South of Suez* (Lewis Seiler, 1940) stages a confrontation between America’s entrepreneurial spirit and the sheer stagnation of colonial rule. The aptly named John Gamble (George Brent), an American of Irish descent, works as an engineer at a diamond mine run by a tyrannical German, Eli Snedeker (George Tobias). *South of Suez* opens with Snedeker beating an African day laborer for failing to lubricate a pump—an incident that recalls Mark’s sadistic treatment of a tin miner in *Palaver*. “When you give orders around here, you expect to be obeyed!” screams the German, while the American, whose timely intervention saves the laborer’s life, proposes a “kinder, gentler” approach to employing Africans in the extractive economy. “He got off easy,” Snedeker later says of the “bad” African worker. “Years ago, if a boy would have done that, we could have cut off his hand!” Snedeker’s nostalgia for a crueller colonialism leads Gamble

to scoff, "You must have been a beautiful baby." Disentangling himself from Snedeker's Teutonic despotism, Gamble goes to work for the British owner of a rival diamond mine, where the American promptly "turns things around," transforming production methods, achieving an unprecedented level of efficiency, and treating "the natives" with a benevolence to which they are not accustomed. (He is especially diligent in honoring their daily lunch break.) Even the crusty Brit, Roger Smythe (Miles Mander), marvels at Gamble's ingenuity. Not only has the American revolutionized operations; he has also brought much luck to the mine. "We've found more stones in the few weeks you've been here," Smythe informs Gamble, "than in all the years I've had this claim." The message is clear: American innovation trumps colonial convention—and is good for "native" morale, besides. For his part, Gamble emphasizes the ultimate impotence of European colonialism, noting that it was he—the outsider, the lone American entrepreneur—who managed to finally "put a stop to some of the stealing going on around here." He even catches an African laborer attempting to abscond with a stone, and, demonstrating that his kindness does not preclude punishing "deviants," he drives the would-be thief off the company's grounds. When Snedeker murders Smythe, however, Gamble is falsely accused of the crime. "A fugitive from British justice," the American simply assumes a new name to become a smashing success in the world of high finance, executing what the daily papers describe as a "daring coup on the stock exchange."

The theme recurs in MGM's *The Power and the Prize* (Henry Koster, 1956), which marked the first time that the dazzling CinemaScope process was utilized for a black-and-white film. The story opens with George Salt (Burl Ives), the ruthless president of (fictional) Amalgamated World Metals, viewing "West African film" in a screening room in the corporation's New York headquarters. The footage—never shown to the viewer of *The Power and the Prize*—is said to reveal a major mining operation run by the (fictional) British firm Carew Ltd., which includes copper reserves, an earth-filled dam, and muddy water indicating a silting problem that Amalgamated alone can solve. Simply put, the American corporation covets the badly managed spoils of the British Empire. (The aptly named Salt goes so far as to assert that the British do not even know how to package cigarettes properly.) Carew Ltd.—"an old British metals house"—has had an extensive minerals concession in West Africa since the beginning of the twentieth century. The nickel and copper reserves are "proven," but Carew cannot adequately "exploit" them, in the critical words of Cliff Barton (Robert Taylor), Amalgamated's vice president. Carew, it turns out, lacks a sufficient fuel source to power its West African operation, but its engineering division has just perfected a revolutionary coal-smelting

process that makes Amalgamated take notice. Such was the dilemma that in fact led to the mining of coal in Enugu in the 1910s: tin, timber, cotton, ground nuts, and palm fruit needed to get to the ports and points beyond. The British had long been aware of the area's coal deposits, and they planned a vast, government-run colliery system well in advance of the moment when, in 1915, they first forced African workers to slice open the earth. Carolyn Brown's research reveals that many of the men who dug the first boreholes did so involuntarily, at the barrel of a gun. "As long as Britain needed Nigeria's resources," notes Brown, "the Nigerian Railway needed Enugu's coal."⁷¹ In *The Power and the Prize*, Amalgamated retraces precisely these steps, extracting West Africa's coal so that it can transport West Africa's copper.

Barton is dispatched to London in order to inspect Carew's pilot plant. The British firm wants 40 million dollars in working capital, in exchange for which Amalgamated will share in the profits of the West African operation. The scheming Salt, however, wants title in the concession vested in Amalgamated. He also wants a joint corporation with a majority of the stock in Amalgamated treasury. But he does not want Carew to know of his plans. Barton is to withhold Salt's terms while meeting with Mr. Carew (Cedric Hardwicke), the eminent director of the firm that bears his name. He is to trick the old man into handing over control of the West Africa concession to Amalgamated—a transfer of power from the dwindling British Empire to an ascendant United States. "This is the kind of job we know how to do, and they know we know how to do it," says Salt, who sees Amalgamated's acumen as a reflection of America's broader potency in the postwar world. "We can make more money for [the British] than they can make for themselves." Instructing Barton to "get West Africa safe in the New York bag," Salt adds a defense of America's "toughest" capitalists. "What would the world be like without men like us?" he asks. "Still rolling an oxcart, still grappling with famine and disease," he answers. The "world" of which he speaks, however, does not include West Africa (the "prize" of the title). At no point in the negotiations are Africans—those who actually live on the lands being plundered—consulted or even mentioned. The film itself ignores them; West Africa remains entirely offscreen—a natural treasure that inspires considerable inter-imperial tension. "The men who in truth have saved the world were never stopped by the Ten Commandments," Salt asserts at one point. It is the task of *The Power and the Prize* to disprove this particular statement, stressing not the sins of American capitalism (or even of British colonialism) but rather the missteps of the emotionally disturbed, childless

71 Brown, "We Were All Slaves," 272.

Salt—a villainous figure who must, by the end of the film, relinquish his lofty perch to the younger, more idealistic Barton.

The son of a Presbyterian minister, Barton understands how to be a “better” capitalist. Upon meeting the younger American in London, Mr. Carew says wryly, “What I can’t understand is how you people who are so preoccupied with the future can come over here and tolerate for a moment our smoky monuments, our chauvinism, our embalmed heroes ...” The quick-witted Barton wins the other man’s admiration by retorting, “They’re our heroes, too,” thus suggesting America’s political-ideological indebtedness to its former colonial master. Later, over lunch, Mr. Carew observes, “We’re all so aware of America these days. We’re jealous, we’re suspicious. Well, it’s natural, I suppose—our pride. We’re not accustomed to being paupers. Well, we shall never be beggars—not on this island.” His vanities and vulnerabilities thus exposed, Mr. Carew proceeds to spell out his “African ambition.” “I know West Africa,” he announces. “Our new process gives me an opportunity of going into West Africa and proving to a somewhat skeptical world that if Britain has erred, she has likewise learnt.” Such language is consistent with the logic of those economic development schemes that the British Empire actually pursued in the wake of World War II, partly as a public relations move meant to signal a kinder, gentler colonialism—an imperial contrast to Europe’s recently vanquished fascist regimes.

The Power and the Prize places support for American enterprise in the mouths of otherwise stodgy British colonialists. A pleased Mr. Carew proclaims that “all Americans are not unscrupulous,” while his associate avers, “I’m not among those who resent Americans every time they’re generous.” When Barton returns to New York, Salt shows him a mockup of the West African mine remade in Amalgamated’s corporate image. Spotlighted, occupying its own special room, the replica is an immaculate rendering of the Americanization of a British colonial concession. What disturbs Barton about the model, however, is that it bears a single flag—that of the United States. Twice isolated in close-up, the American flag symbolizes Salt’s vision of dispossession—his desire to “take over” from a dying British empire. It is the one detail to which Barton objects. Believing that the United States must collaborate with (rather than vanquish and replace) the British, he delivers a climactic sermon on the importance of interconnection: “When power comes to exist for itself alone, it becomes a losing proposition. When you leave no room for men—your enemies or your friends—when you can no longer recognize the dignity of plain human beings, it’s because you’re weak, not strong.” Yet Barton does not appear to recognize the rights of



Texaco service station, Lagos. Photograph by Edward Harland Duckworth. Date unknown. Courtesy of Northwestern University Libraries.

Africans, who are, apparently, not even “plain human beings” in his schema. Their humanity—to say nothing of their dignity—is never even mentioned.

Yet Barton prattles on about “total power being the world’s illusion.” He wants the United States and Great Britain—so recently allied in the fight against fascism—to join forces in the stewardship of Africa. To that end, he happily receives “colonial development reports,” while the ruthless Salt remains stubbornly committed to inter-imperial rivalries. Seeking to excuse his own outsize ambition, Salt suggests that the torch has simply been passed from one Western power to another—that it is now time for the United States to accept sole responsibility for the exploitation of Africa’s resources. Yet Salt’s cultural prejudices are revealed when he blurts of the British, “They invented swindling! They perfected swindling! They made swindling socially acceptable!” The film’s tagline—“A Challenging Drama of Today’s Changing Morals”—suggests its commitment to debunking Salt’s ungenerous claims, at the same time that it signals the sort of sensitivity encapsulated in the Production Code’s “national feelings” clause, which sought to preclude the possibility of offending any individual country. The film’s geographical focus—at least when it comes to Africa—is subregional rather than national: it is West Africa rather than, say, Nigeria. This is precisely the sort of strategic vagueness at play in *The Mark of the Hawk*, despite that film’s use of Enugu as

an easily identifiable shooting location. (Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that even Walter Rodney, in his trenchant account of the “economic repartition of Africa,” places this phenomenon in the very same subregional frame, noting that the “share of the USA in West Africa’s trade rose” steadily in the late colonial period, particularly as emergent national governments and parastatals began purchasing heavy machinery from American manufacturers.)⁷² Howard Swiggett’s novel *The Power and the Prize*, which had previously been adapted for television by Robert J. Shaw (it aired on May 24, 1954, as an episode of *Robert Montgomery Presents* [1950–1957]), features a British character who says of the subregion: “That portion of Africa has been under the Crown for over ninety years. British brains, blood and, I may add, a good deal of humanity and justice, have been expended there. This touches us very deeply.”⁷³ In the novel, an American character says of the British, “it isn’t easy for them to come over here and ask for money. I don’t see what we want with a lot of West African real estate, and we don’t do too badly as it is. It may be best to let them keep some of the prestige. It might be the sort of gesture that makes friends and attracts more business.”⁷⁴ It is the film’s task to make clear, partly through the sheer star power of actor Robert Taylor, that “a lot of West African real estate” can only enrich American enterprise, constant growth being very much a capitalist mandate. With African independence inevitable, cooperation with Britain—the solidification and expansion of specifically corporate, implicitly diplomatic ties—is the order of the day, and a measure of those “changing morals.”⁷⁵

Classical Hollywood cinema occasionally resorts to paradox in asserting the benefits of Euro-American penetration of the African continent. “Cape Town—like something out of the Arabian nights, full of strange people and sounds and color, a new world—our world,” says Susan Hayward’s European character in Fox’s *Untamed* (Henry King, 1955), adding, “Our very entrance seemed a good omen.” Such mixed spatial metaphors were, however, no match for the sheer nonsensicality of other cinematic pronouncements,

72 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 232.

73 Howard Swiggett, *The Power and the Prize* (New York: Ballantine, 1954), 117.

74 Swiggett, *The Power and the Prize*, 17.

75 As Walter Rodney observes in a passage that resonates with the representational strategies of *The Power and the Prize*, “American investment in Africa during the last fifteen years of colonialism was in some ways at the expense of the actual colonizing powers, and yet ultimately, it was in the interest of Western European capitalism.” The ascendant United States, Rodney continues, “had to assume active responsibility for maintaining the capitalist imperialist structure in all its economic, political, and military aspects.” While it may well have “edg[ed] out the other colonialists, they all stood to gain” from US penetration of the African continent. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 234–235.

particularly those that pivoted around questions of decolonization. When, in *The Mark of the Hawk*, Poitier's Obam speaks of the need to return to pre-colonial autonomy, he does so in the language of national sovereignty, as if Nigeria (the film's obvious if unnamed referent) had existed as such prior to amalgamation, rather than as hundreds of discrete polities. "Give us a timetable for independence," he implores the colonial authorities. "Set a date, any date at all, and we will work together toward the day when this country shall *again* be free." Today, a reversion of a different sort is being discussed as a means of boosting Enugu's economy. Many speak excitedly about a possible "revival of dormant mines in the hills above Enugu, still known as the 'Coal City.'"⁷⁶ The fossil capitalism that essentially created Enugu, and that shaped the city for decades, continues to exert its influence—a zombie idea to go with the equally undead infrastructures of the Iva Valley and other extraction sites where even overgrown brush cannot completely obscure the adits and ventilation shafts that dot the landscape.

Enugu's mines may have been too steamy and muddy to accommodate movie cameras, but other sites of subterranean extraction were able to host regular film screenings. Released in 1932, the seventh entry in Warner Bros.' *Believe It or Not* series of Vitaphone shorts has amateur anthropologist Robert Ripley, camera in tow, infiltrating an active lead mine in which films are regularly screened. "Motion pictures have reached into many strange and far-off places, but here is one of the strangest yet," narrates the chipper Ripley over silent footage of a row of "miners arriving for a movie show, which takes place in the underground auditorium of the Bonne Terre lead mine in Missouri. Eight hundred and forty feet below the surface, these hard workers pause the business of their digging to enjoy a comedy or a newsreel. The mine owners also take this opportunity to preach first aid and 'safety first' through the medium of pictures on the screen." These last words accompany a remarkable pan shot of some one hundred miners seated for the day's screening. Offering a sense of the depth and breadth of this "underground auditorium," the mobile frame also reveals a tight spectatorial formation—a packed audience whose helmeted members stare at Ripley's camera as if at the film screen said to be present (but never actually shown) in this major lead mine in the mineral-rich Ozarks. Taking the place of that screen, and substituting for a comedy short, a newsreel, or an instructional film, Ripley's recording apparatus makes visible cinema's twofold role, as medium of entertainment and instruction, in the economically vital Southeast Missouri Lead District.

76 John Campbell and Matthew T. Page, *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 48.

Less an interruption than a confirmation and extension of “the business of digging,” film, whether in diversionary or didactic form, has been fully integrated into the lead mine and is ultimately inextricable from the mine’s success. “MOVIE THEATER IN MINE PREVENTS ACCIDENTS,” proclaimed a headline in *Popular Mechanics*, whose breathless coverage of Bonne Terre preceded Robert Ripley’s by nearly a year. Describing “an underground movie theater hewn out of rocks, the lobby being the entrance to a shaft of a lead mine,” the magazine alerted its readers to the fascination of cinema’s fusion with industrial mining. “The audience is composed entirely of miners who, upon entering the amphitheater, first see a brilliantly illuminated screen on the ‘stage,’” the article explained. “Pertinent safety measures are thrown on this screen ... Occasionally, instead of accident-prevention news, a moving-picture health film is shown. The subterranean theater has helped reduce the number of accidents.”⁷⁷ By 1932, over 3,000 men were employed at the Bonne Terre Mine, which had not experienced a single fatal accident since 1929, a fact that Robert Ripley, like *Popular Mechanics*, would attribute to the use of educational film in its cavernous depths. In the seventh entry in his Vitaphone series, Ripley, who was also a renowned cartoonist, sketches a portrait of Christopher Columbus in chains, explaining how the explorer was apprehended, and sent back to Spain from the West Indies, for “excessive cruelty to the natives.” Ripley’s sketch of Columbus, with its emphasis on forced labor and the ruthless pursuit of gold, is a curious prelude to his cheerful account of contemporary lead mining. It raises the possibility that the Missourian workers glimpsed in Ripley’s footage of Bonne Terre are not as content as the man claims (a troubling interpretation also encouraged by his suggestion that comedies and newsreels serve a pacifying function for miners on their lunch breaks). Yet the Columbus anecdote, with its invocation of a grisly colonial past, also calls to mind Bonne Terre’s future, and with it the reality of extractive industry following Columbus’s own (forced) exodus from the New World. For the Bonne Terre Mine would close in the early 1960s, by which time American companies had joined in the lead bonanza in Kabwe, Zambia, a site of exploitation in every sense of the word.

But if lead mining could be exported from the Americas, so too could the film-centered lessons of Bonne Terre. Columbus’s “excessive cruelty”—his wasting native bodies by working them to death in squalid conditions that effectively prevented their reproduction as industrial labor—could now be countered by a cinematic assemblage tested in Missouri. In Liberia, for

77 “MOVIE THEATER IN MINE PREVENTS ACCIDENTS,” *Popular Mechanics* 55, no. 6 (June 1931): 962.

instance, Firestone followed the example of St. Joe Minerals (which ran the Bonne Terre Mine) by commissioning and screening safety films for its employees, the better to ensure their continued labor on its extensive rubber plantations. Firestone commissioned two films entitled *Medicine in the Tropics*, one in 1948 and the other nearly a decade later, in 1957. The first version, produced by Lewis Sound Films, was directed by Joseph Kohn and concerns the medical care of Firestone workers. Both versions cover Firestone's efforts to combat leprosy, yaws, onchocerciasis, Bancroftian filariasis, tuberculosis, keloids, ainhum, tropical ulcers, trypanosomiasis, and smallpox; and both show leprosy clinics, research laboratories, and health experts collecting carrier insects for study. As the voice-over narrator puts it in the 1948 version, "A healthy work force is necessary to the production of the raw materials which industrial nations want and the profit from which the supplier country is assumed to benefit." The 1957 film—twelve minutes longer and made by Vogue Wright Productions—is careful to credit the Liberian government with advances in public health. However disingenuous, Firestone's institutional humility is more pronounced in this later version, reflecting its moment of production amid extensive decolonization efforts in neighboring African countries. (The 1957 film also addresses the work of the Liberian Institute of the American Foundation for Tropical Medicine.) Another film shot on location in Liberia, 1956's *A Changing Liberia*—also made by Vogue Wright Productions for Firestone Rubber & Tire Co.—concerns "changes wrought by the exploitation of Liberia's natural resources," as *Business Screen* put it, adding, "An encouraging story for a world quarreling about 'Western imperialism' is documented in *A Changing Liberia*, a ... motion picture sponsored by the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company" in which "bulldozers clear the jungle, [and] highways stretch from the seaport to million-tree rubber plantations." At the time that *A Changing Liberia* was made, rubber accounted for a whopping 75 percent of Liberia's annual exports, but the film also documents extractions of cocoa, coffee, palm oil, and timber (particularly mahogany, teak, and cherry), as well as the discovery of iron ores—all of which must be transported out of the interior by trucks equipped with Firestone tires. "Firestone's enlightening public relations report on a country which demonstrates that two different worlds can enrich each other" also shows a certain extractive interdependence that recalls the entwined histories of hydrocarbon, metal, mineral, and agricultural extraction in Nigeria.⁷⁸ A country's carefully cultivated natural resources power further plunder by pouring into spacious engines and encircling steel wheels.

78 "What's New in Business Pictures," *Business Screen* 17, no. 7 (1956): 66.

Exhuming Extraction

By the end of the 1950s, even Hollywood's Tarzan series—previously a repository of synthetic Africana, a largely studio-bound compendium of the chintziest of clichés—had turned to location shooting on the African continent. A few years before this pivot to the “real” bush, however, the series yielded perhaps its oddest, most subversive entry. Produced by Sol Lesser's independent company (Lesser had purchased the rights to Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan character after MGM relinquished them in 1943) and distributed by RKO, *Tarzan's Hidden Jungle* (Harold Schuster, 1955) depicts the appropriation of humanitarian rhetoric by destructive transnational corporations, drawing attention to the strategic role that cinema has historically played in the facilitation of extractive enterprise. Set in an unnamed African country, the film's cast of characters includes an American doctor who is “sent by the United Nations to establish a clinic in this corner of Darkest Africa.” Aware of his UN-sanctioned presence in so resource-rich a region, two American poachers—employees of an extractive combine—pose as filmmakers eager to record his exploits. “Whom do you represent?” asks an American nurse (played by Vera Miles) upon meeting the men. “Actually,” one of the poachers responds, “we're being paid by an independent, commercial motion picture company—Afro-American Film Corporation. But Afro-American has a deal with the UN that they buy the footage we shoot.” “Yeah, the UN crowd sent us here!” says the man's cruder sidekick, whose casual, colloquial style almost gives the scheme away. “It'll be seen all around the world,” the other, more polished poacher promises—to which the ingenuous nurse replies, “I think a film of this sort is worthwhile, if for no other reason than to let the people know how the United Nations is spending the taxpayers' money.” Africa has “great stuff for motion pictures,” maintains one of the poachers, whose insistence on cinema's “development potential” is so readily intelligible—so downright believable, at least to the nurse—because it is anything but new. Indeed, the nurse instantly recognizes this rhetoric, proclaiming that it is of a piece with the doctor's stated intentions. Both filmmakers and physicians can be committed to “developing Darkest Africa,” the latter by superseding dangerous “witch doctors,” the former by publicizing such “modernization” via “exciting motion pictures.”

Itself an independent production, *Tarzan's Hidden Jungle* is self-consciously attuned to the rise of independent companies as well as to their frequent, strategic interest in Africa. In this sense, the film anticipates Lloyd Young's exploitation of Nigeria for his inaugural, calling-card production

of *The Mark of the Hawk*. Touting his work as an instrument of education and development, Young simply benefited from the largesse of the Eastern Region government (which likely saw no substantial material returns), as well as from the visual value of Enugu as a shooting location. In *Tarzan's Hidden Jungle*, the rapacious poachers similarly employ the language of filmmaking—of cinema as a form of “public education”—as a pretext for private accumulation. Ordered to obtain 2,000 barrels of animal fat, 100 lion skins, 200 antelope heads, and 3 tons of ivory, the poachers know that they can do so with impunity if only they couch extraction as UN-subsidized modernization, using cinema to help put over the liberal-developmental idea.

Four years later, *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* (John Guillermin, 1959) became the first Tarzan epic to be filmed on location in Africa. This “new ‘Tarzan’ concept,” as the trade papers called it, was marked by a fresh, “refined” Tarzan yell, the elimination of Jane as well as of Tarzan’s son, but most significantly—and saleably—by extensive location shooting. “Filmed in Technicolor for the first time against authentic backgrounds, the production crew of 65 men and equipment was shipped by plane from England’s Shepperton Studios, where interiors were shot, [to Kenya] to complete the feature,” reported the *Motion Picture Daily*. “Tarzan will prove he has grown up mentally, speaking everyday English.”⁷⁹ As the trade paper clarified in a later issue, this literate Tarzan “speaks *correct* English for the first time.”⁸⁰ The previously linguistically compromised character was thus made to embody ideals of modernization and development, in keeping with late colonial Kenya’s accommodation of the heavily capitalized Hollywood project. Tarzan’s newly fluent English would thus serve as the lingual counterpart of the production’s groundbreaking commitment to location shooting in the context of decolonization. Producer Sy Weintraub, after selling most of his TV interests and purchasing a controlling interest in Sol Lesser Productions, felt that motion pictures had reached “the great frontier,” and that there was “a great future for the independent producer,” provided he was willing to exploit “new” locations in Africa. This intimate link between independence and “frontier building”—between the achievement of autonomy (whether by a film producer or a former colonial possession) and corporate adventurism—had, of course, already been thematized in

79 “New ‘Tarzan’ Concept Seeks Wider Audience,” *Motion Picture Daily* 85, no. 77 (Thursday, April 23, 1959), 1–2 [2].

80 Warren G. Harris, “Independents’ Future Rosy, Weintraub Feels,” *Motion Picture Daily* 85, no. 100 (Tuesday, May 26, 1959), 5, emphasis added.

The Mark of the Hawk, but it reached vivid expression in *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*, the first feature film that Weintraub produced. The latter was to be Weintraub's cinematic calling card, much as *The Mark of the Hawk* had been Lloyd Young's. It was the most expensive Tarzan movie produced up to that time. Filmed principally in Kenya, this thirty-third Tarzan feature was said to "deviate[] considerably from the standard formula."⁸¹ *Modern Screen* stressed the novelty of the project, writing, "Gordon Scott, handsome star of *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*, stepped off the plane at Nairobi, Africa. Almost instantaneously, the powerfully-built man was surrounded by myriad lads of all ages and stature clamoring to carry his luggage."⁸² *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* would also prove to be the most financially successful film in the Tarzan series. (It broke house records in three Georgia theaters.)⁸³ Reviewers were enthusiastic in their praise, with one critic writing, "The action was shot on location in Africa and the authentic backgrounds are interesting and pleasing to the eye."⁸⁴ By contrast, the less successful *Tarzan, the Ape Man* (Joseph M. Newman, 1959), released later the same year, made "ample use of stock jungle footage from the MGM files" and offered none of the on-location excitement of its immediate predecessor.⁸⁵

Other productions would, like *The Mark of the Hawk*, highlight the specific natural-resource enclaves in which they were filmed, thus drawing attention to the very extractive conditions that made them possible in the first place. Shot on location throughout Southern Africa, *Coast of Skeletons*, the 1965 sequel to *Sanders of the River*, depicts an unnamed African country newly free from British colonial rule yet amenable to re-colonization by American interests. Sanders, a local police commissioner in the employ of the Crown, is rendered redundant by political independence. Departing with other Britons, he promises to return after a period of semi-exile in London. Eventually, having acquainted himself with the requirements of neocolonialism (which include collaboration with private US corporations, as in *The Power and the Prize*), he relocates to an African country that is described in terms of its colonial past. In keeping with the film's focus on the historical transition from colonialism to neocolonialism, this African country—which, one character points out, was once a German colony—is

81 Harris, "Independents' Future Rosy, Weintraub Feels," 5.

82 "Tarzan and the Kid," *Modern Screen* (December 1959), 57.

83 "'Tarzan' Sets Records," *Motion Picture Daily* 85, no. 122 (Friday, June 26, 1959), 2.

84 "'Tarzan's Greatest Adventure,' with Gordon Scott," *Harrison's Reports* 41, no. 25 (Saturday, June 20, 1959), 98.

85 "'Tarzan, the Ape Man,' with Denny Miller, Joanna Barnes and Cesare Danova," *Harrison's Reports* 41, no. 42 (Saturday, October 17, 1959), 167.

now being refashioned to resemble Texas. Stock footage of the Lone Star State reveals some of its topographical and economic similarities with the film's Southern African shooting locations. Such correspondences are, of course, partly the product of extractive enterprise—of the shared variables of oil prospecting and coal mining.

African filmmakers have addressed such connections from a range of perspectives. Djibril Diop Mambety's *Contras' City* (1968), for instance, is almost a parody of a travelogue—a biting postcolonial rebuke to the Fitzpatrick TravelTalks and other touristic artifacts. Yet it also, as Sada Niang points out, refuses to oppose Africanity to Euro-American experience. Instead, it opts for a subtle emphasis on reciprocal exchange—on the interlinked character of the globe's many resource zones, all of them subject to various forms of extraction and “development.”⁸⁶ Indeed, the presently planned reopening of Enugu's coalmines is already enacting the process of re-excitation explored in Mambety's *Hyènes* (as well as in that film's source, Dürrenmatt's *Der Besuch der alten Dame*): spaces exploited and abandoned are later made to serve their earlier purposes. Mining begins anew, even in the wake of apparent depletion—a sort of repetition-compulsion born of the perpetual promise of extraction (and, of course, of the capitalist pursuit of profit). Writing of Enugu's coal deposits in 1969, roughly a dozen years after the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* on location in the Iva Valley, the economic geographer E. S. Simpson insisted that “considerable reserves remain unexploited [and] untouched”—a recurrent claim in Nigeria's history, as in the histories of other African countries subject to continuous pillaging.⁸⁷ The desire to unearth ever more resources, including by exhuming some of the old infrastructures of extraction, seemingly knows no limits. Apparently, nothing short of the total destruction of the planet will prevent continued attempts to bore, gouge, and dig it.

While Enugu's extractive histories are being replayed on already-ravaged terrain, New Nollywood is seemingly replicating the touristic visions of colonial cinema. Film after film features guided tours of some of Nigeria's heritage sites and other hot spots. Directed by Tolu “Lord Tanner” Awobiyi, the romantic drama *Couple of Days* (2016) is partly a travelogue meant to introduce the viewer (whether a non-Nigerian or simply an elite Lagosian like the film's pampered protagonists) to historic Ibadan. Moving from Dugbe, the city's main commercial district, to an outlying zoo and water

86 Sada Niang, “The FEPACI and Its Artistic Legacies,” in *Nationalist African Cinema: Legacy and Transformations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 14–15.

87 Simpson, “Electricity Production in Nigeria,” 239.

park, the film's central holiday sequence shows the many attractions of Ibadan in a style reminiscent of the illustrated travel lecture and other colonial forms that once functioned to convey empire's mastery of space. Tope Oshin's romantic drama *Up North* similarly cedes its fictional plot, temporarily, to a travelogue-style segment that offers a stirring tour of Bauchi State and surrounding areas. As in *Couple of Days*, a wealthy, insulated Lagosian—a man who has previously left ritzy Ikoyi only to jog across the Lekki-Ikoyi bridge (as Mark Zuckerberg famously did on his heavily publicized 2018 trip to Lagos) and to attend MIT in the United States—provides the pretext for this momentary shift to the travelogue format, for the film, a fish-out-of-water story, is ostensibly about his transformative national youth service in “exotic” northern Nigeria. Yet the non-narrative tour of Bauchi State and its environs, which is reprised over the film's unusually lengthy closing credits, also suggests RKO's *Below the Sahara* (Armand Dennis, 1953) and other safari films, even as it evokes *Palaver's* more focused record of the region's tin fields.⁸⁸ Just as *Couple of Days* offers images of the IITA Forest Reserve (which represents what is left of the once-vast woods whose depletion is shown in *The Twilight Forest* and other industrial films) and the family-friendly zoo at Agodi Gardens, *Up North* lingers on the galloping giraffes and stampeding elephants of Yankari Game Reserve, mirroring any number of Western films that feature “African” vacations (including Hollywood's *Blended* [Frank Coraci, 2014], which was shot at the Sun City luxury resort in South Africa). In sharp contrast to the presence of elephants in the opening frames of Mambety's *Hyènes*, which Vlad Dima, Dayna Oscherwitz, and other scholars have read as a powerful postcolonial gesture—a sort of reclamation of safari imagery for political ends—the visual attention to wild animals in *Up North* suggests a simple restaging of zoological spectacle, a digital revival of *Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt* (1912).⁸⁹ At the same time, the film's image track, with its sweeping views of the Middle Belt, confirms that metal and mineral resources continue to be extracted from the Jos Plateau nearly a century after *Palaver* was shot there.

88 For a related account of the persistence of safari imagery, see Inga Pollmann, “Environmental Aesthetics: Tracing a Latent Image from Early Safari Films to Contemporary Art Cinema,” in *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice*, ed. James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati (New York: Routledge, 2021), 107–124.

89 Vlad Dima, *Sonic Space in Djibril Diop Mambety's Films* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017), 115; Dayna Oscherwitz, “Of Cowboys and Elephants: Africa, Globalization and the Nouveau Western in Djibril Diop Mambety's *Hyenas*,” *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 223–238.

Up North offers evidence of the transhistorical stability—the sheer persistence—of more than just resource extraction. As in earlier ethnographic films, the “natives”—Hausa-speaking Muslims whose un-subtitled words are utterly unintelligible to the Anglophone protagonist—are often viewed as if they, too, were exotic animals. (Non-Muslim ethnic-minority communities are completely elided.) The visitor, whose powerful father is in the process of orchestrating a major corporate merger back in urban Lagos, simply speaks for them, ventriloquizing their hopes and desires. His expedition to the north occasions an obsessive recording and dissemination of images of what he finds there, including Muslims performing their afternoon prayers near Tafawa Balewa’s tomb. When they discover what he is doing—photographing them without their permission and in defiance of Islamic injunctions—they confront him and demand that he delete the images now stored in his smartphone. Initially, linguistic barriers prevent him from comprehending their complaint. When a translator steps in, however, and explains the situation in “plain English,” the visitor flatly refuses to relinquish “his” content, which, in any case, he has already posted to social media. Enjoying “the sense of visual power inherent in seeing and consuming everything” (to quote Fatimah Tobing Rony’s influential account of early ethnographic filmmaking), he transmits that power to his millions of Instagram followers as well as to the viewer of *Up North*.⁹⁰ This “gleeful camera-toting tourist” (to take another expression from Rony) turns his national service into a means of generating visual content for his popular Instagram account.⁹¹ The ethnographer’s film camera, that exoticizing tool of anthropology, has become a smartphone; the scientific audience has turned into the hundreds of millions of daily active users of Instagram.⁹² In *Up North*, the protagonist’s videos of Bauchi go viral, prompting acclamatory user comments that, via superimposition, frequently become part of the film’s image track, attesting to the global desire for touristic content. These Instagram comments not only praise the protagonist’s documentative efforts but also demand more of the same, speaking to the ravenousness of touristic appetites. *Up North* is clearly on the side of its “ajebutter” protagonist, even

90 Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 213.

91 Rony, *The Third Eye*, 214.

92 There is an amusing moment at the beginning of Seyi Babatope’s *Fine Wine* when the daughter of a Nigerian billionaire enjoins him to be more active on Instagram, an app driven by images rather than text; his son disagrees, defending Twitter, a rival social media platform, as more appropriate to the loquacity of Nigerians—a far better forum for their famous love of language.

to the point of actively ignoring the concerns of its largely peripheral Muslim characters. The film ends with the visitor's decision to stay in Bauchi—a settler in a strange yet wondrous land worthy of global visual attention and abundant tourist dollars.

Just as their colonial predecessors sought to deny the invasive violence of imperialism, New Nollywood travelogues are clearly repressing something. Their wholly celebratory character depends on a careful displacement of poverty, political dysfunction, and ethnic conflict. *Up North* was filmed before devastating floods linked to climate change destroyed farmlands throughout Bauchi State, but not before the rise of Boko Haram and the escalation of that organization's activities. Touristic visions of Banana Island, so central to a number of other films, studiously avoid showing the flooded streets and blocked drains that are inescapable elements even of elite life in Lagos. Yet there are exceptions to this trend. In *U-Turn* (2022), his debut film, Gabriel Afolayan manages to refrain from reproducing a touristic gaze even as he makes frequent use of drone shots that track a halting journey along the rough back roads between Lagos and Ibadan. Kayode Kasum's *Soólè* (2021) also withholds tourist-friendly referents despite featuring the occasional drone shot of a bus ride from Lagos to Enugu. The road trip in *U-Turn* provokes raucous debates between driver and passenger: about the sorry state of Nigeria's infrastructure and how best to remedy it; about ethnic difference (the driver is Yoruba, the passenger Igbo); about wealth and how to obtain it in a society governed by corruption. Mostly, the film reflects, in a comic register, a distinctly Nigerian experience of road transport, in which poor infrastructure is rendered even riskier by reckless driving. It is not so much that the copious drone shots reveal some of Nigeria's worst roads (for they also show some of the country's most beautiful landscapes, stretching across four states and some sixty miles) but that they are not tethered to a particular destination, to a precise object of touristic attention. This is a slow road trip, one that proceeds in fits and starts, and while the aerial photography suggests a keen, indeed infectious, appreciation for Nigeria's natural ecosystems, there are no commercial locations on display, no vacation sites, and certainly no zoos. The driver and his passenger don't even reach Ibadan, and the bus in *Soólè* similarly falls short of its destination.

Despite depicting a young man's transplantation from bustling Lagos to comparatively tranquil Kaduna, Oluseyi Asurf's *Hakkunde* (2017), to take another example, is in many ways the antithesis of *Up North*. For one thing, the protagonist is no ajebutter but a poor, struggling university graduate unable to find employment. Played by Kunle Idowu as an extension of his

down-and-out Frank Donga (a comic persona particularly popular among chronically jobless Nigerian youth), Akande follows his sister from country to city but finds that he simply cannot earn a living in hypercompetitive Lagos. Eventually, he relocates to unfamiliar Kaduna in a desperate attempt to find work. Skillfully sidestepping the travelogue style, *Asurf* offers only the briefest of aerial images of the northwest's savanna woodlands. These fleeting glimpses would seem to preclude a touristic gaze, yet they effectively introduce Kaduna following Akande's twelve-hour bus trip. The film, whose production was supported by the Kaduna State Government as well as by the Ford Foundation, could easily have gone the way of the glossy *Up North* and shown such tourist attractions as Murtala Muhammed Square and the Ahmadu Bello Stadium. But *Hakkunde* tells a somewhat quieter story of perseverance, and it concludes with the main character, having made an effort to learn Hausa, expressing appreciation for Kaduna and its people.

Even at its costliest echelons, Nollywood is not homogenous. Unthinkable in the 1990s, Ford Foundation funding, with its technocratic associations, now generates Nigerian films as dissimilar as Stephanie Okereke Linus's *Dry* (2014), with its harrowing dramatization of child marriage and the high incidence of vesicovaginal fistulae among rape victims, and the modest *Hakkunde*.⁹³ If drone shots distinguish New Nollywood from Old Nollywood, reflecting the emergence since 2010 of relatively inexpensive, remotely operated aerial vehicles equipped with 4K video cameras, such shots are hardly unvarying, though they do indicate an important shift that lends itself to the imperatives of tourism—and, perhaps, to a replication of the “politics of visual domination from a distance” so familiar from colonial and ethnographic archives, with their “passion for the picturesque.”⁹⁴ In the

93 The Ford Foundation also lent its imprimatur to Tunde Kelani's 2014 film *Dazzling Mirage*, which concerns sickle cell disease. Anticipating Kelani's concern with safeguarding Yoruba culture, the Ford Foundation's 1964 film *New Images: Art in a Changing African Society*, made by Francis Speed and Ulli Beier, with cooperation from the University of Ibadan, examines everyday life in Oshogbo, Western Nigeria. The film highlights the tensions between tradition and modernity that play out in the evolving world of the Yoruba traveling theater, in which the relatively new technology of celluloid promises to preserve (or at least to temporarily reproduce and disseminate) live performances. The emergent phenomenon of “filmed plays” is at the center of the aptly titled *New Images*, in which “Yoruba tradition” is described as “a living force,” albeit one that, in Bazinian terms, may be “mummified” by the movies, its dynamism paradoxically captured—frozen—for posterity.

94 Rony, *The Third Eye*, 79. The rise of aerial cinematography is partly attributable to the formation of The James Amuta Company, which is headquartered in Ikeja. Amuta operates The Drone Guy (the moniker by which he himself is widely known), a specialty aerial video

next chapter, I turn to some of the tensions between Nollywood's low-fi past and its more technologically sophisticated present—tensions that play out on contested geographical terrain and against the ever-powerful backdrop of global capitalism.

and photography firm employing state-of-the-art civilian drone technology. Amuta's company is heavily involved in New Nollywood and helps this segment of the industry transcend the constraints that high-density Lagos has traditionally placed on more earthbound moviemakers. The city's notorious congestion represents a cinematographic problem that has been partly overcome by drone technology, though the unregulated preponderance of such aerial devices risks making the skies above nearly as crowded and chaotic as the streets below. (Imagine a drone-specific "go-slow" or "no-go"—or worse.)

3. Dredging Nollywood

Corporations, Land Reclamation, and the Lure of Neoliberalism

Abstract: Does Nollywood flow through global markets? The question remains controversial—a consequence, perhaps, of the rightful pride with which the industry’s first architects looked upon the autochthonous enterprise. For if Nollywood, a truly “homegrown” cultural practice, developed locally, without foreign subsidy or awareness, then how can it possibly suggest a space of global capitalism? This chapter considers specific formations of capital as key resources informing (and splintering) the development of Nollywood and its relationship to investor nations as well as to specific sites of production and consumption.

Keywords: high concept; multiplexes; product placement; branding; vertical integration; globalization

“It is quite safe to say that Nollywood owes its existence to globalization,” argue the Nigerian academics Ogochukwu C. Ekwenchi and Allen N. Adum.¹ But does Nollywood flow through global markets? The question remains controversial—a consequence, perhaps, of the rightful pride with which the industry’s first architects looked upon the autochthonous enterprise. For if Nollywood, a truly “homegrown” cultural practice, developed locally, without foreign subsidy or awareness, then how can it possibly suggest a space of global capitalism? Nollywood scholars, positing a lack of bank loans and bookkeeping, tend to position the industry as a non-capitalist commercial enterprise, one premised on strictly vernacular systems of exchange that operate far beyond the formal boundaries supposedly familiar

1 Ogochukwu C. Ekwenchi and Allen N. Adum, “Binaries and Ambivalence: An Analysis of Two Nollywood Actors’ Spatial Discourses,” in *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation: Nollywood and National Narration*, ed. James Tar Tsaaior and Françoise Ugochukwu (Abuja: Adonis & Abbey, 2017), 257–268 [257].

from businesses activities in the global North. (The latter, it is implied, are mostly free of corruption, disorganization, and violence.) But Nollywood was incubated within—not outside of or in opposition to—many of the key dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, and certain parallel developments are hardly coincidental. The industry’s gestational years were, in fact, marked by an “untrammelled proliferation of financial institutions.”² The number of banks in Nigeria tripled between 1986 (when structural adjustment was finally adopted at the behest of Ibrahim Babangida, the Nigerian head of state who initially claimed to be committed to market fundamentalism) and 1992 (when the groundbreaking *Living in Bondage* was made, effectively giving birth to what would later be known as Nollywood); 300 Nigerian finance companies were founded between the production of the first part of the *Living in Bondage* saga and the release of the second. Neoliberal capitalism has, of course, long functioned to ensure that “the financial circuit develops autonomously from the productive one.” By this logic, Nigeria has never needed a prolific *formal* film industry in order to attract the attentions of transnational capital. The extreme yet “informal” productiveness of Nollywood—generative of films that, however “bad,” can be bought and sold in bulk—is simply an unexpected dividend, one with a demonstrable appeal not merely to Africa-wide satellite television broadcasters but also to Netflix and Amazon, among other American corporations in the business of buying up the streaming rights to all manner of screen media.³ The “bundling” of Nollywood has long since commenced.

This chapter looks at Nollywood’s implications in global capitalism, from the industry’s earliest efforts to its more recent intersections with IMAX and Netflix. For whatever the industry’s origins—whatever its inaugural commercial composition—Nollywood has surely followed a trajectory of increased corporatization, thus illustrating the difficulty—even, perhaps, the impossibility—of any remotely successful enterprise remaining untouched by global capitalism. Having traced its own literal and conceptual geographies at the end of the twentieth century, Nollywood is, in the twenty-first, being annexed (and is willingly annexing itself) to even broader ones. Yet Old Nollywood is not (just) a transitional phase. It survives, often in direct competition with New Nollywood, on whose failures—including of representation, geography, and affordability—it plainly depends. Indeed,

2 David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 227.

3 Pádraig Carmody, “Constructing Alternatives to Structural Adjustment in Africa,” *Review of African Political Economy* 75 (1998): 25–46 [29].

Asaba films flourish in the east as market alternatives to Lekki or “island” films—costly productions that centralize the lavish lifestyles of “the one percent of the one percent,” to take the tagline of the aptly titled *The Bling Lagosians* (Bolanle Austen-Peters, 2019), a New Nollywood production that follows the fortunes of a former Asaba marketer who has “graduated” to luxurious Lekki, Coca-Cola contract and all. This shift from the “razz” markets of Old Nollywood to the ritzy corridors of New is thus a distinct geographical migration, a movement away from the absolute space of inland Asaba to the coastal glamour of peninsular Lekki (and the adjacent swank of Victoria Island). There is a certain contradiction, or tension, at play here, one that David Harvey has theorized as a defining feature of globalization.⁴ Asserting the mobility of capital in narratives of glamorous internationalism, and directly benefitting from such mobility in its funding and circulation, New Nollywood suggests a transcendence of mere location even as it remains tethered to a particular (and particularly pricey) place. Registered in 2016, Trino Studios, which made *The Razz Guy* (Udoka Oyeka, 2021) and *The One for Sarah* (Lyndsey F. Efejuku, 2022), is, like many New Nollywood companies, located in Ikoyi, perhaps the single most affluent neighborhood in Lagos.

New Nollywood soundtracks are full of snippets of audiobooks and other recordings by real and fictional self-help gurus who urge the films’ protagonists to make the socioeconomic transition from razz to rich. These voice-overs represent, perhaps, a more secular, more commercial and cosmopolitan form of the prosperity gospel so familiar from Old Nollywood, and they certainly resonate with Hollywood rom-coms in which insecure single women aspire to self-improvement. DJs and other radio announcers serve a similarly inspirational purpose in several New Nollywood films.⁵ “There is dignity to labor,” sings the Nigerian musician Kent Edunjobi in Kunle Afolayan’s *Mokalik* (2019), in a jaunty song that plays over the film’s opening credits. Becoming diegetic when a Lagos radio announcer identifies Edunjobi by name during a musical break between mundane traffic updates, the song effectively slips self-help discourse into an otherwise humdrum

4 David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

5 Gabriel Afolayan’s *U-Turn* opens with a curious kind of voice-off: over mock-satellite images of Ojota Motor Park in Lagos, two radio DJs introduce Adeyemi “Ade Love” Afolayan’s Hindi-inflected song “Taxi Driver” (which itself serves as a fitting introduction to this film about a hired driver and his mysterious passenger). Without naming him, the DJs describe Ade Love as “a theatre veteran, a man who understood the performing arts ... A very hardworking man with a great legacy.” That legacy includes, of course, his 1983 film *Taxi Driver*, to which *U-Turn*, directed by his son, bears a certain resemblance.

broadcast. (Edunjobi provided the original music for *Mokalik*.) For its part, *2 Weeks in Lagos* opens with the typical drone shot of the Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge (itself a relatively recent construction, contemporaneous with New Nollywood and a powerful architectural symbol of Nigeria's once-growing economy and global aspirations), over which a chipper broadcaster declares, "This is Lagos, where dreams are born every few seconds, and where dreams are crushed every few seconds. In Lagos, you've got to know what you want and grab it, because if you don't, there are twenty million others waiting their turn!" Reprised at the end of the film, over a rhymed shot of the same bridge, the broadcaster's message becomes more sanguine as he promises (in a nod to the film's title) that it takes but a fortnight for one's fortunes to change in fast-paced Lagos; one needn't wait very long. The DJ's motivational description thus frames a film that is at pains to plausibly suggest the possibility of class mobility. More than one bridge—and thus more than one Lagos—is glimpsed here.⁶ Others, shown overhead via drone and discussed casually by the main characters, connect Ikoyi's residents to the less enviable mainland. The female protagonist, a high-end wedding planner who boasts British citizenship, regularly shops at mainland markets. She is particularly loyal to a humble dressmaker from whom she repeatedly purchases garments for her island clients. When the lowly market woman complains that without connections it is impossible to get ahead in cutthroat Nigeria, the wedding planner tearfully replies that God is the only connection anyone needs.

For all its secular-cosmopolitan trappings, New Nollywood is not necessarily immune to the megachurch. *2 Weeks in Lagos* skillfully blends worldly and born-again forms of the gospel of success, and it features a climactic wedding at Banana Island's Redeemed Christian Church of God, Olive Tree Parish, a Pentecostal "house of prayer for all nations." The path from Enugu and Asaba to Lekki and Ikoyi is not unidirectional, even if the social trajectory typically celebrated in New Nollywood is one that leads inexorably toward the riches of peninsular districts. Even Oluseyi Asurf's *Hakkunde* (2017), which opens with the title character bemoaning Lagos in voice-over ("There's a lot of stress in this city"), ends with him delivering a motivational speech to a class there. Returning in triumph after two years in Kaduna, he tells what he instructively terms "the story of every startup founder," saying, "When life knocks you down, try and land on your back,

6 What James Tar Tsaaior terms "the *Lagosification* of Nollywood film" has extended to include such bridges, embellishing the "*Lagocentric* trajectory of Nollywood." James Tar Tsaaior, "Introduction: Filmic Texts and Their Social/Cultural Contexts—Nollywood as Site for Transnational Narrativization," in *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation*, 17–46 [39].

because if you can look up, you'll get up. And if you really want your dreams badly enough, you can make them happen. Because the biggest enemy that you have to deal with is yourself. If the enemy within doesn't kill you, the enemies without have nothing on you. Start saying yes to your dreams. Wake up with a zest in your heart. Tell yourself, 'I can do it.'" Instructively, the character's eventual success comes from his canny exploitation of one of Kaduna's most abundant natural resources: cow dung, which he sets about collecting, drying, and packaging as "manure tea" that he can then sell back to the local community. *Hakkunde* thus traces a circuitous route to Lagos riches, offering a protagonist who is discarded by the city only to make his fortune in the north, whereupon he returns to the scene of his earlier humiliation, \$500,000 loan in hand.

Nollywood's migration from mainland to island is not a unidirectional process, comprehensive and irreversible. Instead, it represents but one geographical move among many. It is worth remembering that Idumota, that fabled, piracy-fueled market—Nollywood's inaugural distribution center—is located on Lagos Island, and that one of its earliest rivals, Alaba, is in Ojo, across the lagoon to the west. When, in the 1980s, the Nigerian Film Corporation left Victoria Island (or V.I.) for Jos, it was because the Eastman Kodak Company had tested the water in both locations and found the latter to be more conducive to film processing. Despite its growing social glamour and commercial magnetism, V.I. was abandoned over the abundance of dissolved minerals in its water.⁷

Nollywood geographies are historically situated. Once little more than a sparsely inhabited sandbar where modest fishing boats might dock, the Lekki peninsula has, since the turn of the twenty-first century, been transformed into a showcase for luxury homes. It offers Nollywood new plots, in all senses of the word: more and more filmmakers live and shoot there, and it has Nigeria's finest multiplex, besides. Lekki and Ikoyi have also been expanding through land reclamation, sprouting artificial atolls and waging what is likely to be, in the long term, a losing battle with the powerful Atlantic Ocean. Many of Nigeria's newest geographies have been willed into existence, however temporarily, and Nollywood has certainly taken advantage of such spatial expansion. Despite boasting flourishing "old-style" sectors operating out of Enugu and other, less urbanized areas of Igboland, the industry, broadly defined, is not always resistant to gentrification, and

7 Jonathan Haynes, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 214; Aristarkus Yohanna, "Film Corporation to Set Up Headquarters in Jos," *Nigerian Standard* (Jos), July 1, 1987.

entrepreneurs have been “revitalizing” various Lagos neighborhoods for a long time now. (They paved Victoria Island and put up a multiplex.) Yet the pull of other, older geographies—even within the Lagos metropolitan area—is strong. However much it might suggest a closed community, the industry’s island opulence often, in fact, depends on material support from mainland facilities, a reality that Kunle Afolayan explores metaphorically in *Mokalik*. Ponnile, the young apprentice of Afolayan’s film, is said to be “from the island.” Born into a wealthy Lekki family, he has come to the mainland to work in a sprawling mechanic’s yard near the airport, a temporary escapee from the posh Halifield School. (With locations in Lekki and Ikeja, Halifield is known for its lofty “mix of British and Nigerian curriculum”—of “national and international standards.”)⁸ Ponnile’s grades have slipped, so his father has sent him to the mainland to try his hand at vocational training. But when she arrives at the mechanic’s yard to seek assistance with her imported automobile, a wealthy woman is horrified to find young Ponnile there, seemingly out of his island element and clad in functional coveralls. She assumes that he has been kidnapped and forced into a mainland apprenticeship when, in her elitist view, he ought to be abroad for the summer. But it is the mainland that here provides much-needed technical assistance: its auto experts fix the imported car. Such a proposition, perhaps intended to flatter the mass audience, contains a grain of truth that the film industry itself reflects. Indeed, even the most exalted New Nollywood firms, with their seemingly exclusive fixation on the more expensive side of Lagos Lagoon, often turn to Koga Studios and other post-production spaces located across the bridge in Ikeja, close to the airport. Headquartered in Victoria Island, EbonyLife Films routinely rents equipment, including cameras and lighting kits, from Klink Studios, a Surulere-based company with deep roots in Old Nollywood. Though it boasts its own, opulent post-production facility (the Lagos Post House, launched in V.I. in 2021), EbonyLife Films does regular business across the bridge, in the humbler heart of Old Nollywood.⁹

The mainland still matters to an industry that in certain echelons overwhelmingly depicts residential island life. In Walter “Waltbanger” Taylaur’s *Jolly Roger*, a corrupt police officer, harassing an SUV passenger at an impromptu checkpoint, paraphrases Fela Aníkúlápó Kuti’s song “Ikoyi Mentality Versus Mushin Mentality” (from Fela’s 1971 album *Why*

8 <https://www.halifieldschools.com.ng/>.

9 EbonyLife Films also utilizes the services of South African firms, including Beyond Sound (based in Johannesburg) and Two Tales Animation (based in Pretoria).

Black Man Dey Suffer): “Do you want to do this the Mushin way or the Ikoyi way—the mainland way or the island way?” As in the Fela song, Lagos is dichotomized into working-class and affluent, “local” and cosmopolitan, mainland and island. The officer is asking, essentially, if his victim, from whom he plans to extort several million naira, requires brutalization or a softer, more “civilized” touch, a style of bribing that would be quite at home in the boardrooms and banquet halls of the Global North. Fela’s lyrics suggest racialized distinctions between mainland and island: the Ikoyi resident, with his “big, big English,” wants to seem like a white man despite hailing from Ibadan, while the Mushin man is the uncorrupted, salt-of-the-earth African, and Fela’s political sympathies clearly lie with the latter, and with the entire “Mushin way.” But *Jolly Roger* undermines the dichotomy: the SUV’s wealthy passenger lures the policeman and a fellow officer back to his luxury property in Ikoyi, where he proceeds to torture them in increasingly elaborate ways, thus giving the lie to the idea that island life is necessarily “civilized.”

New Nollywood has responded to the globally recognized #EndSARS protests with a spate of films about police brutality that all, to varying degrees, and of necessity, address questions of income inequality. Bolanle Austen-Peters’ *Collision Course* (2021) recasts the acousmatic soundscapes described above, in which disembodied voices peddle personal empowerment, by relying entirely on radio bulletins, briefings, and even topical chat shows to describe Nigeria’s shocking histories of police violence. The voice of one newscaster spells out the institutional and social meanings of SARS, Nigeria’s Special Anti-Robbery Squad (1992–2020), which the film fictionalizes as “TARS”: “It would appear that the special unit, established to combat armed robbery, has been hijacked by some rogue elements, contrary to the laudable objectives for which it was set up. These have since been jettisoned, and TARS has become synonymous with unlawful extortions, killings, and torture.” Premiering more or less simultaneously with *Jolly Roger*, *Collision Course* has much in common with Taylaur’s gritty film: each is narrated by a corpse, in the mordant manner of the Hollywood dramas *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) and *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), and both feature police officers harassing a pregnant woman. Yet *Collision Course* gives such public corruption a backstory, one involving poor wages, abysmal living conditions, and chronic health problems. In so doing, the film straddles the line (or crosses the bridge) between mainland and island: its protagonist, Mide Johnson (Daniel Etim Effiong)—the eventual victim of police violence—was born into great wealth (his father resides in a gated estate in Ikoyi) but has renounced it to pursue a career in music.

Living humbly on the mainland, he commutes to the island to perform in a flashy nightclub. On the drive home one evening, he listens to his pregnant girlfriend opine from the passenger's seat. "The Third Mainland Bridge is more than just a link between the mainland and the island," she avers. "It's a metaphor for social stratification: on one side, you have a mecca for the bourgeois; for those on the other side, a symbol of success and aspiration. But we also have the hopeless and poor members of society that dwell in the slums *underneath* the bridge. I think these are the three sides of the Third Mainland Bridge." Mide laughs at her oratorical pretensions, asking, "Where did that monologue come from?" Another passenger, the couple's close friend, similarly ribs her from the back seat. But she has a point, one that the film duly visualizes, offering drone shots not simply of Ijeka and Ikoyi but also of the "third space" in between—Makoko and other informal settlements, Nigeria's impoverished, improvisatory "floating communities," the so-called "slums beneath the bridge." Eventually, her soliloquy exposed as mere sociology, Mide's girlfriend admits that she, too, feels the pull of the island, and dreams of owning "a beautiful house on the pretty side of the bridge." Before long, however, Mide's car is stopped at a police checkpoint in modest Ebute Metta, as if to prove that, as Mide puts it, "things on the island are so much more organized and decent." Hovering above the roadblock, in neon pink and royal blue, is a flag advertising the FilmHouse multiplex chain, itself a point of connection between mainland and island, with equally modern locations in both. "THE BIG SCREEN IS BACK!" screams the ad's caption, under images of smiling young Nigerians enjoying a night out at the movies, something that they simply could not do in the 1990s.

Nollywood, at an industrial level, also blurs distinctions, defying any easy geographical binaries. Koga Studios is located just six miles north of Mushin—uncomfortably close to that "lower-class" space, at least for some. Lagos is vast and heterogeneous even within seemingly well-defined boundaries, a point that Nigerian films repeatedly make. In Arie and Chuko Esiri's *Eyimofe* (2020), a Lebanese-American businessman, drawn to Nigeria by the promise of a high return on investment (and, it is implied, by his Levantine lineage), affords a young Lagosian a novel glimpse of her city, including from a rooftop restaurant whose panoramic views reveal an irreducible complexity. In the Nollywood-Bollywood co-production *Namaste Wahala* (Hamisha Daryani Ahuja, 2020), a Pidgin-speaking taxi driver (played by Samuel Animashaun Perry, aka Broda Shaggi) divides even Victoria Island, telling a visiting Indian mother that there is no single V.I., no essentialized social or even geographical location to which to take her. "Where in Victoria Island?" he asks. "You know Victoria Island is divided

into two. Is it the axis of Ajah or is it the axis of Lekki?" The visitor does not know, and the driver grows increasingly agitated at her ignorance. If the cross-cultural core of *Namaste Wahala* represents a high concept, broadly contoured and readily communicable ("Nollywood meets Bollywood"), the film also gestures toward a diversity that is more difficult to define, and that can be found even in V.I. and especially amid the seemingly constant morphological changes to the Lagos coast. New waterfront destinations are emerging with dizzying frequency, and it is easy to understand the taxi driver's frustration. Where, exactly, is V.I. today, and where will it be tomorrow?

Still, New Nollywood's center of gravity is surely somewhere on the island, if "the island" is understood to include the Lekki peninsula in addition to V.I. and Ikoyi. Physically situated there, with headquarters in some of the world's fanciest neighborhoods, it also perpetuates a particular vision of the good life that makes Amen Estate and other posh developments seem all but interchangeable with gated communities in the Global North. At the same time, such low-lying waterfront areas share a unique vulnerability to climate change, recalling the distinctly negative, despairing equivalences invoked in films from Rouch's *Moi, un noir* ("We're like the Americans") to Ogidan's *Owo Blow* (in which the razing of Maroko serves as a sobering reminder of the social and environmental horrors that forced evictions, gentrification, and land reclamation can bring about anywhere in the world). Like its counterparts along the coast of Florida, Parkview Estate, one of Ikoyi's luxury suburbs, may soon be underwater, a casualty of rising seas. Banana Island and other artificial atolls that lend New Nollywood its literal spaces and lofty imaginaries are, perhaps—like Miami—not long for this world.

Nollywood Capitalism

"Everything that counts in Nigeria is money!" — Franca Aernan as a pastor's daughter in *Computer Girls: The Black Market* (Chico Ejiro, 2002)

That Nollywood is now a major target for global capital, as evidenced by everything from the rise of Nigerian multiplexes to the acquisitive attentions of Netflix, requires some qualification. The notion that capitalism is somehow irrelevant to or "outside of" Nollywood has long been accepted without question. "Nollywood is whole-heartedly commercial, but it is not a capitalist industry," argues Jonathan Haynes, echoing John

McCall, who contends that, since capitalism “can only be mobilized under conditions of economic formality”—since “official records and documentation make capitalism possible”—“Nollywood is not capitalist.”¹⁰ The alleged formality of the Hollywood film industry is often used to support such assertions, but Hollywood is hardly marked by the reliable production of “official records and documentation.” In fact, Hollywood is fundamentally characterized by the kind of “creative accounting” and blackboxing of certain financial arrangements (and associated lobbying efforts) that render official records—if proffered at all—profoundly suspect.¹¹ Manthia Diawara has noted the Afro-pessimist tendency to “look to Nollywood as a major new *informal* source of income in a structureless and corrupt economic system”—as, that is, an emblem and agent of Nigeria’s “backwardness.”¹²

Nollywood may fail to generate reliable paper trails or otherwise document its activities for the scrutiny of “neutral” outsiders, but that does not mean that the industry is somehow antithetical to capitalist enterprise. The idea that Nollywood cannot approach Hollywood on the terrain of global capitalism is simply unsustainable in the face of Hollywood’s actual practices, which, as examples of what Claus Offe calls “disorganized capitalism,” are no less likely to militate against “formality.”¹³ Highly secretive hedge funds are major factors in the production and distribution of Hollywood films, and speculation in foreign exchange derivatives is an increasingly significant engine of studio activity. If anything, Nollywood’s nontransparency is, in part, its own index of the industry’s capitalist affinities with Hollywood. As Bruno Latour argues, blackboxing is the very symbol of capitalist success, its opacity a sign not of informality but of orderliness and strength. From this perspective, Hollywood, however capital-intensive and credit-dependent its wide-ranging operations, is no less an “occult economy”—no less the product of inscrutable, even mystical (or at least oral and flexible) forces—than the

10 Haynes, *Nollywood*, 47; John McCall, “The Capital Gap: Nollywood and the Limits of Informal Trade,” *Journal of African Cinemas* 4, no. 1 (2012): 9–23 [10, 11]. Both Haynes and McCall echo Max Weber’s insistence on the centrality of “methods of modern bookkeeping” to capitalism. Max Weber, *General Economic History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003 [1927]), 275.

11 For more on this phenomenon, see John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

12 Manthia Diawara, *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 175, emphasis added.

13 Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press).

Nollywood that seems so maddeningly oblique to many observers.¹⁴ Both are premised on the fundamental eccentricities of capital generation in an age of globalization. Local, “informal” marketing practices are, as Sara S. Berry argues of contemporary West African economies, not uniquely idiosyncratic but, rather, “manifestation[s] of the underlying ambiguity of commercial transactions” in general.¹⁵ As I have argued elsewhere, part of the importance of addressing histories of film distribution and exhibition in Nigeria lies in the way these histories reveal the longstanding entwinement of local and transnational capital, as well as the latency of neoliberal thought in contexts typically taken to be far beyond its market-fundamentalist ken.¹⁶

Emphasizing the shared opacity of Hollywood and Nollywood may, however, distract from the highly organized capitalist realities of Nigerian everyday life. As Kristin Peterson puts it in an implicit rejection of Rem Koolhaas’ celebrations of marketplace chaos, “business life in Idumota”—the vast market located on Lagos Island and one of Nollywood’s foundational pivots—“is anything but arbitrary.”¹⁷ Peterson thus echoes the anthropologist Sjaak van der Geest, who notes of the vernacular markets of Cameroon that “what appears chaotic and formless (in-formal) at first sight proves fairly structured when one looks more closely and starts to understand the commercial logic of the whole.”¹⁸ In overstating Nollywood’s non-, pre-, or proto-capitalist trappings, scholars risk appearing to welcome “New Nollywood”—the industry’s more contemporary, more insistently cosmopolitan, and bigger-budget iteration—as, to borrow a line from Mahmood Mamdani, “a much-needed bourgeois revolution.”¹⁹ Viewing Nollywood as (still) in need of modernization, many observers treat “Old Nollywood”—a term that in academic and popular writing refers to the production on VHS and VCD of multipart genre films for general distribution via Nigerian and diasporic marketplaces and for primary consumption in the home and in public

14 Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

15 Sara S. Berry, “Stable Prices, Unstable Values: Some Thoughts on Monetization and the Meaning of Transactions in West African Economies,” in *Money Matters: Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities*, ed. Jane I. Guyer (London: James Currey, 1995), 299–313 [308].

16 Noah Tsika, *Cinematic Independence: Constructing the Big Screen in Nigeria* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

17 Kristin Peterson, *Speculative Markets: Drug Circuits and Derivative Life in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 31.

18 Quoted in Peterson, *Speculative Markets*, 188n5.

19 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9.

video parlors—as if it were “only a temporary phase of maladjustment,” a vernacular detour on the road to full corporatization.²⁰

If Old Nollywood was never capitalist, then it hardly makes sense to say that it somehow “became” New Nollywood, the capitalist trappings of which would be rather difficult to deny. Old Nollywood did not pass into New by a simple process of growth.²¹ The latter formation represents not the removal of obstacles to industrial expansion but, rather, their imposition, including as a consequence of joint ventures with powerful Hollywood companies that pull many important strings, making space in Nigeria for their own products, including at the expense of Nollywood’s. (Hollywood firms are, in this sense, scarcely different from the foreign oil companies—Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Total, Agip—that operate via joint ventures or under joint production contracts with the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation.)²² If relatively few New Nollywood films get produced, in dramatic contrast to the “deluge” of VHS cassettes and VCDs associated with Old Nollywood, it is in part because there is so little room for them at the Hollywood-dominated multiplexes.²³ The consequences of these Hollywood-Nollywood “partnerships” clearly favor foreign capital, from the Disney that evidently benefits from association with indigenous creativity to the Netflix that presently enjoys exclusive streaming rights to select Nigerian films. Old Nollywood was (as it remains) comparatively “unfettered,” its surpluses reliably reinvested in further production, to the extent that, by 2007, a classic capitalist crisis—that of overproduction—would hit the industry, causing typical processes and practices to grind to a halt, at least momentarily.²⁴ Furthermore, Old Nollywood’s technological transitions—its

20 John Maynard Keynes, quoted in Geoff Mann, “Capital, after Capitalism,” in *After Capitalism: Horizons of Finance, Culture, and Citizenship*, ed. Kennan Ferguson and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 15–26 [17].

21 I am here paraphrasing Ellen Meiksins Wood’s critique of standard historiographic approaches to capitalism. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2016 [1999]), 49.

22 John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 66.

23 For a longer account of Old Nollywood’s “mushrooming tendency” and its relation to New Nollywood, see Adeshina Afolayan, “Introduction: Philosophy, (Neo-)Nollywood and the African Predicament,” in *Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspectives on The Figurine*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan (Ibadan: University Press PLC, 2014), 1–52.

24 Nollywood’s crisis of overproduction was—as such—prototypically capitalist; it was a crisis of capitalism, and hardly an unfamiliar one, recalling “structuralist theories of death by overproduction.” Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?: Essays on a Failing System* (London: Verso, 2016), 3. See also the concept of a “dilemma of accumulation.” Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 146. Nollywood’s crisis of overproduction was compounded by the build-up of films that, made during the efforts of the National Film and

steady shifts from VHS to VCD and from VCD to DVD—were part of a basic logic of capitalist competition. Having exhausted the product cycle of VHS, the industry sought to enlarge its market share by embracing new digital technologies. VCD and DVD emerged, in capitalist terms, as leading products enabling a further accumulation of profits. They were symbols of technological change that allowed Nollywood to grow.

To present Old Nollywood as an example merely of *potentially* capitalist private production—to offer a teleological construction of “primitive” economic formations as little more than warm-ups for corporatization—is to overlook these important histories. Writing of the “underutilization of capitalism as an analytical category in African Studies,” Jörg Wiegratz notes that “many African countries are ... capitalist societies and analytically need to be treated as such.” Lamenting that “the term [capitalism] has hardly ever made it into any main- or sub-title of an African Studies conference for years (and years),” Wiegratz implicates the reluctance of scholars to view Nollywood in capitalist terms (except, of course, when Western multinational corporations can be seen as having “brought the industry up to speed” via capital investment and “multiplexification”).²⁵ As Manthia Diawara observes, Old Nollywood is very much “about the collapse of the economy and the way of life of the middle class.”²⁶ (Tade Ogidan’s *Owo Blow* [1996] is memorably dedicated, as an opening title puts it, “to the struggling masses of this country and the gradually disappearing middle class.”) If Old Nollywood is largely concerned with economic collapse, New Nollywood often exults in the economy’s reconstitution, for a select few, via intricate financial flows. Indeed, New Nollywood films routinely thematize finance capitalism, illuminating some of the rarefied speculative systems that produced them and to which they inevitably contribute. In Walter “Waltbanger” Taylaur’s *Gbomo Gbomo Express* (2015), for instance, the high-powered owner of a record label courts a major corporate sponsor, and he sees his lines of credit multiply and expand almost immediately. The mere possibility of a sponsorship deal is sufficient to satisfy local as

Video Censors Board to establish its New Distribution Licensing Framework, went unreleased for many months, only to flood the markets as soon as their distributors were able to meet the Board’s reduced licensing requirements. The sudden acceleration of the rate of licensing in 2008 had disastrous consequences for an already oversaturated market. Alexander Bud, “The End of Nollywood’s Guided Age? Marketers, the State, and the Struggle for Distribution,” *Critical African Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014), 91–121 [109–110].

25 Jörg Wiegratz, “The Great Lacuna: Capitalism in Africa,” *Review of African Political Economy*, October 19, 2018, <http://roape.net/2018/10/19/the-great-lacuna-capitalism-in-africa/>.

26 Diawara, *African Film*, 177.

well as international lenders, and the executive, flush with the fruits of this speculative labor, begins to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on champagne alone. Asked how he manages to afford his lavish lifestyle, he replies, "Credit. It's all credit." *Gbomo Gbomo Express* opens, in fact, with the executive's voice-over commentary on the rise of credit systems and fictitious capital. His trenchant remarks are reprised at the end of the film: "A time will come when people will say, 'I remember the good old days, when money was really money.' See, nowadays, money's becoming more of an idea than a physical thing, and most of us really haven't noticed the switch." The film's plot pivots around precisely this "switch," which affects all characters, including—perhaps especially—the poor ones. Much is made of the offshore bank accounts of a woman worth nearly 3 billion dollars, for whom the fictional Capital Bank of Malaysia serves as a welcome tax haven. In a memorable flourish, *Gbomo Gbomo Express* twice adopts the visual perspective of an ATM, and the film is saturated with references to cash transactions that stem from speculative finance. The entwinement of intangible capital and hard currency is at the core of Taylaur's critical project, but other films are similarly attuned to finance capitalism. In a more modest register, with many an echo of Old Nollywood, the supernatural drama *The Duplex* (Ikechukwu Onyeka, 2015) depicts a speculative bubble powered by sheer greed, as a corrupt real estate agent pockets commission after commission from the illegal reselling of a single property, whose original owner, long deceased, comes back to haunt the new occupants.

Gbomo Gbomo Express alludes to cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin that are designed to sidestep central banks, do away with governmental middlemen and other third parties, and put transactions on an open ledger online. Introduced in the wake of the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, Bitcoin, an electronic cash system now worth billions of dollars, has been touted as the realization of the techno-utopian dream of decentralized value exchange. *Gbomo Gbomo Express* captures the fundamentally contradictory elements of Bitcoin, which is as finite as gold (only 21 million Bitcoins are programmed into the system), and other peer-to-peer electronic cash systems that, rooted in the "cypherpunk" movement, promise to be "good for remittances"—and thus, the narrative goes, good for Africa and Africans, who are so accustomed to receiving monetary gifts from family members living overseas. Proponents of Bitcoin often emphasize the fear of hyperinflation, citing Zimbabwe, whose prolonged period of currency instability began in the late 1990s, as a clear cautionary tale—a reason to embrace virtual currencies and, to quote *Gbomo Gbomo Express*, "make paper money obsolete." In the discourses surrounding Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, the centrality of Zimbabwe's

experience of hyperinflation—the insistence that Zimbabwe “proved” the obsolescence of traditional systems of value exchange and even “predicted” the global financial crisis of 2008—evokes the argument of Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, in *Theory from the South*, that the Global South should be seen as a sort of pacesetter for the rest of the world.²⁷ It is, moreover, precisely by relying so heavily on remittances that Africans are seen as trendsetters by those who tout Bitcoin’s “game-changing” potential. According to this interpretation, the reliance of contemporary African economies on “diaspora finance”—on “angel investors” and other sources of remittances from Europe and the United States—is an obvious sign that they will be the first to truly “need” Bitcoin, and thus to “prove” its practicality for the rest of the world (and, in particular, for inhabitants of a Global North conditioned to respect the regulating power of “tradition”).²⁸ As a “bank in your cellphone”—a “bank in your pocket”—Bitcoin purportedly allows for the elimination of Western Union and its various, often prohibitively high fees.

The notion that Bitcoin is “good for Africa” rests on the perception that smartphone penetration is increasing exponentially across the continent. Nokia’s billionth handset was famously sold to a Nigerian—an event whose symbolic significance has not been lost on those who see Bitcoin as a savior of African economies that, in this telling, operate in the absence of any regulatory systems and are thus eminently amenable to libertarian narratives.²⁹ What such accounts typically omit or misunderstand is the twenty-first-century explosion of big banking south of the Sahara, with Citigroup, Barclays, J. P. Morgan, Société Générale, Banco do Brasil, Bank of China, and many other financial-services companies having joined African commercial banks like Ecobank, UBA, Standard Chartered, and Absa Bank in efforts to “develop” African economies.³⁰ For its part, *Gbomo Gbomo Express*—fundamentally concerned with the obsolescence of the “real” economy and its replacement with speculation—emphasizes financialization as a strategy of wealth creation. Imagining various forms of synthetic liquidity, the film contributes to the global discussion of “offshore shadow banking, money laundering and assistance in large-scale tax evasion as the normal business of the biggest banks with the best addresses,” to quote Wolfgang Streeck.³¹

27 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

28 Dayo Olopade, *The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 154.

29 Olopade, *The Bright Continent*, 92.

30 Olopade, *The Bright Continent*, 147.

31 Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*, 70.

The volatility of global financial markets is at the center of *Couple of Days* (Tolu “Lord Tanner” Awobiyi, 2016), in which a Nigerian financial advisor fails to obtain a “great return on investment” for his wealthy Lagosian friends. In fact—unbeknownst to the latter—he has lost their money to what he describes as a “bad market,” and much of his particular subplot is devoted to the confusions and conflicts engendered by capital’s unpredictable motility. The financial advisor experiences such guilt over the mismanagement of his friends’ money that he is unable to perform sexually; his erectile dysfunction is a symptom of “troubled financial times” and, as such, familiar not only from Old Nollywood but also, of course, from Sembene’s *Xala* and Duparc’s *Bal poussière*. Another character, the financial advisor’s wife, “maxes out” her credit card buying high-end hair extensions from all over the world (echoes of Old Nollywood’s *Brazilian Hair Babes* and *Peruvian Hair Wahala*), while her close friend, struggling to start a perfume company, discovers that “getting distribution is a big challenge”: for her, “breaking into” a monopolized market is all but impossible, no matter the quality of her product or the size of her startup capital. Far from incidental, these references to financialization may, in fact, reflect many of the economic realities within which New Nollywood is obliged to operate. Cynthia (Lilian Esono), the housewife who aspires to be a perfume tycoon but is forced to confront the monopolistic barriers to her “merely” entrepreneurial entry into the market, is hardly critical of these prohibitive contingencies, however. She is simply disappointed, and perhaps envious of the dominant and domineering corporations that conspire to keep her in her “domestic” place. Cynthia’s calm acceptance of corporate hegemony is, perhaps, in keeping with the film’s general approach to monopoly power. Made in collaboration with FilmOne, *Couple of Days* offers a built-in commercial for FilmHouse (the producer-distributor’s very own exhibition chain), so it is difficult to interpret the film’s references to the stresses of corporate capitalism as being in any way (self-)critical. Like the resigned Cynthia, *Couple of Days* suggests a certain acceptance of the corporate order of things.

Rethinking Old Nollywood

One could argue that New Nollywood’s interest in monopoly power is not unprecedented. Old Nollywood had its *Big Boys Club* (Ikenna Ezeugwu, 2004), its *Power Brokers* (Andy Amenechi, 2005) and *Blood Money* (Chico Ejiro, 1997). Even before all that, Ola Balogun offered his aptly named *Money Power* (1982), a 35mm exposé of financial corruption. Furthermore, relatively big budgets

and theatrical distribution strategies were hardly unknown during the first two decades of Nollywood's development, though they were certainly rare. As Jonathan Haynes has documented, the cultural epic—a Nollywood genre that has sought, since its inception in 1996, to restage dramatic incidents from the (often pre-colonial) African past—has been characterized by considerable capital investment. In fact, the genre's inaugural film—Bolaji Dawodu's *The Battle of Musanga* (1996), produced by the wealthy businessman Gabriel Onyi Okoye (popularly known as “Gabosky”)—reportedly cost over \$100,000 (money that Gabosky singlehandedly supplied), even though it was shot using Nollywood's typical consumer-grade analog camcorders and distributed on VHS cassettes. (Much of the money went, Haynes reveals, to “a very large cast” as well as to “‘cultural’ display: costuming, traditional architecture, and generously proportioned performances by musicians, dancers, wrestlers, and masqueraders.”)³² The budget of *The Battle of Musanga* may seem low by New Nollywood standards, but it was nearly jaw-dropping in 1996, when “costly” productions were budgeted at roughly \$50,000 apiece (the average budget being considerably lower at the time—closer to \$25,000). The expenses associated with *The Battle of Musanga*—so widely publicized by the charismatic Gabosky—did not lead to theatrical exhibition for the film, which remained a “home video” in the familiar Nigerian sense, purchasable in the marketplace for domestic consumption, or screened in video parlors and other semi-public locations distinct from traditional movie theaters.

Other films produced in the mid-1990s, however, were brought to the big screen despite their modest budgets—and despite the fact that movie theaters were rapidly disappearing from both urban and suburban areas, victims of neoliberal reforms that not only reduced or eliminated state sponsorship of the arts but that also devalued the naira, thus limiting the affordability of imports, including filmic ones—a great many of which had, in any case, been banned for distribution to Nigeria by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in 1981. (The MPAA had cited piracy as a principal concern, thus contributing to negative stereotypes of Nigeria while also discouraging foreign investors—including the Lebanese expats who had long owned and managed local movie theaters—from continuing to conduct business there.) The predations of military rule, coupled with well-founded concerns about the dangers of darkened spaces of film spectatorship, had conspired to further render theatrical distribution a quixotic pursuit (at best) by the time of Nollywood's emergence in the

32 Haynes, *Nollywood*, 143.

early 1990s. But quixotic entrepreneurs have always been attracted to the industry, despite the mechanisms put in place (including by various “mafias” of marketers) to prevent outsiders from penetrating close-knit networks of Nollywood producers.³³

Early attempts to transform Nollywood into a bona fide big-screen phenomenon clearly prefigured New Nollywood, with its commitment to theatrical distribution for films said to “belong” to the fancy multiplexes by dint of their high budgets, timely subjects, and shared aesthetic qualities. The inexpensively produced *Domitilla: The Story of a Prostitute*, shot and distributed on consumer-grade videocassette, famously made its way to the big screen when producers rented a slew of theaters in and around Lagos in February 1997, a few weeks after the film had achieved its initial (and resounding) success in the traditional marketplace. These theater rentals were funded not by marketplace revenue (which would go, in standard Nollywood fashion, toward the production of the director’s next film) but by a Nigerian corporation—Daar Communications—that had agreed to publicize *Domitilla* in conjunction with Zeb Ejiro Productions. Owner of African Independent Television, a popular Nigerian TV station, Daar Communications rented 10 local cinema screens in exchange for a percentage of box-office receipts—an experiment designed to test Nollywood’s amenability to theatrical distribution. By most accounts, the experiment was a failure, despite the bells and whistles (including a private security detail hired to maintain order and protect moviegoers from petty crime) that Daar Communications had so proudly publicized in its extensive marketing campaign. As Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome put it, “The lamentable state of most of the cinema halls prevented this experiment from being an unalloyed success as far as the upper classes were concerned.”³⁴ Sprucely dressed security guards, a high-end catering service, and a much-admired film—the ostensible centerpiece of Daar’s scheme—could hardly make up for a crumbling physical infrastructure, especially among elite consumers conditioned to enjoy locally produced media in their comforts of their own well-appointed homes.

Over two decades later, however, Daar’s efforts appear downright prophetic—boldly predictive of the manner in which the new multiplex chains, owned by major African entrepreneurs, would attempt to appeal

33 Haynes, *Nollywood*, 97.

34 Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome, “Evolving Popular Media: Nigerian Video Films,” in *Nigerian Video Films: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Jonathan Haynes (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), 51–88 [74].

to an urban consumer class, including by hiring private security firms to police the entrances to individual theaters. While safety concerns are all too understandable in certain parts of Nigeria, the elaborate, even ostentatious deployment of guards and other security personnel at places like the Silverbird Galleria on Victoria Island suggests that the Nigerian multiplexes are, with the help of subcontracted labor, self-consciously performing a particular conception of opulence, projecting an image of wealth and power predicated on the policing of social boundaries.³⁵

As the case of Daar Communications attests, corporations were occasionally involved in the production, distribution, and marketing of Nollywood films during the industry's earliest years, but these were, in all cases, homegrown corporations, not multinationals. Founded in Lagos in the early 1990s, Klink Studios, which remains instrumental in the pre-sale of New Nollywood exhibition rights to African and European multiplex chains, has had a long and varied life in and around the Nollywood industry, even facilitating the work of Nigerian filmmakers who have not always welcomed the Nollywood label. In 1995, for instance, Klink supplied the sound mixing for Tunde Kelani's Yoruba-language film *Kòṣeégbé*, and the company's Surulere studios served as recording sites for the film's original music. The powerful Kelani—the Nigerian director “on whom the mantle of a film auteur fits most naturally,” in Haynes' estimation—hardly ceded complete post-production control to Klink, however.³⁶ In fact, Kelani's own company, Mainframe Productions (located not in trendy Surulere but in considerably less fashionable Oshodi, a neighboring suburb) covered the majority of post-production responsibilities: the editing of *Kòṣeégbé* was done at Mainframe Digital Studios, while Mainframe Video Services provided the English-language subtitling (crucial for the film's success beyond the Yoruba-speaking markets) and Mainframe Graphics took care of the jacket and logo design for the VHS cassette. Klink did not entirely recede after the sound mixing, though, and its consultancy arm helped Kelani secure distribution deals with the Lagos-based firms Alasco, Blessed J. O. Adeoye, and Afelele Bros. & Co., thus anticipating its future role as a “pre-seller” of exhibition rights to foreign and domestic multiplex chains.

Notwithstanding Kelani's self-conscious (and perhaps strategic) estrangement from the Nollywood label, the director's career has established some

35 Connor Ryan has also suggested as much, providing an extensive account of such security theater. See Connor Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils: Nollywood and Nigerian City Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023).

36 Haynes, *Nollywood*, 113.

important precedents for New Nollywood, his projects constituting high-concept affairs (albeit on a far smaller and less capital-intensive scale than those typically associated with the term).³⁷ Kelani's 1997 film *Oleku*, for instance, features twelve songs by the jùjú musician Ebenezer Obey, which were subsequently packaged as a soundtrack album entitled *Ebenezer Obey Megahits* (actually a collection of 10 audiotapes billed as both "the best of Nigeria's musical heritage" and a source of "the *Oleku* sound"). Marketed through Ebenezer Obey Music Company, the album was intended to facilitate sales of *Oleku* on videocassette, just as *Oleku*, whose closing credits provide information about the special, commemorative soundtrack album, was intended to facilitate sales of Obey's audiotapes. This early example of cross-promotion—relatively rare in 1995—has become the norm in New Nollywood, as filmmakers strive to integrate their efforts with those of the flourishing Lagos-based music industries, which have propelled a number of Nigerian pop stars to international acclaim. Kelani's commercial and cross-promotional partnerships with Ebenezer Obey, as well as with Oshodi-based Gbenga Music, are thus the forerunners of some crucial New Nollywood collaborations, including those between the singer-songwriter 2Baba and the director Dare Fasasi on the 2014 film *Head Gone*.

Other forms of cross-promotion pivot around the post-production services increasingly available to filmmakers working in Nigeria. Two films—Niji Akanni's *Heroes & Zeroes* (2012) and Olufunke Fayoyin's *The Visit* (2015)—were financed by the Nigerian corporation Koga Entertainment partly in order to publicize its subsidiary, Koga Studios, a state-of-the-art sound-recording facility in Ikeja. Koga Entertainment distributed *Heroes & Zeroes*, booking the film at a single theatrical venue—the Silverbird Cinema in Victoria Island—and covering all marketing costs. On the basis of the film's popularity at Silverbird, FilmOne agreed to purchase the distribution rights to Koga's subsequent production of *The Visit*, ensuring an extensive run for that film in a number of multiplexes (including, of course, FilmOne's own FilmHouse locations). Such facilities as Koga Studios, Anthill Studios, and the Lagos Post House serve more than just a practical function. Domestic alternatives to European editing and sound-mixing suites, they project a powerful sense of New Nollywood's (and thus of Nigeria's) technical sophistication and self-sufficiency. A filmmaker working on the African

37 In the New Nollywood film *Day of Destiny* (Akay Mason and Abosi Ogba, 2021), a magical portal transports two brothers back to the year 2000, where one of their first sights is a video parlor whose walls are plastered with posters for *Entrapment*, *The Mummy*, *The Matrix*, *Fight Club*—and Kelani's *Saworoide*.

continent need no longer travel to Paris or London to complete a project and need not forgo the final polish that a good post-production facility can provide. The Lagos Post House, which serves EbonyLife Studios, also rents its space and licenses its many services (which include editing, color grading, visual effects, and audio mixing) to third-party producers.

Such developments are hugely significant, but they should not be taken to represent an inward turn, a hermetic nationalism. Nollywood's horizons—its cultural and commercial ambitions—extend to the rest of the world even as it enjoys the convenience of local post-production suites. Such propinquity is admittedly missing for filmmakers who elect to work on celluloid: shooting *Eyimofe* on 16mm, Arie and Chuko Esiri had to have their footage shipped from Lagos to New York for processing, the reels placed in packages stamped “DO NOT X-RAY” (because airport scanners can ruin celluloid). Yet the Esiris maintain that theirs is a reverse migration story: having studied abroad (Arie at Columbia, Chuko at NYU), these “repats” returned to their native Nigeria to make their first feature film. Though financed outside of the markets of Old Nollywood, *Eyimofe* tapped funding streams that New Nollywood knows quite well. Certain wealthy Nigerians might disdain the mafia of marketers (Nollywood's original funders), but they are perfectly happy to invest in an art film like *Eyimofe*, a diptych whose halves bear the names of European countries (“Spain,” “Italy”), though no character is seen actually arriving at those foreign destinations.³⁸ Returned migrants like the Esiris, as well as expatriate Nigerians like Kathryn Fasegha and Rogers Ofime, complicate Nollywood's most familiar coordinates, calling into question what “counts” as a Nigerian film. (The same could be said of Andrew Dosunmu, who divides his time between New York and Lagos, and whose *Mother of George* [2013], for all its art-film trappings, intersects with Nollywood on the terrain of fertility—and borrows Bukky Ajayi, besides.) So contentious are such questions—and so uncertain the criteria by which a film might qualify for inclusion in a category that is large but not limitless—that Walter “Waltbanger” Taylaur has taken to labeling his films thus: “Shot entirely on location in Lagos, Nigeria, with an all-Nigerian crew. Made in Nollywood.” Evoking the “Made in Nigeria” labels that marketers manufacture to conceal their reliance on Chinese contraband (which is both symptom and cause of the decline of Nigeria's textile industry), Taylaur's screen credit is not nearly as uncomplicated as it reads, if only because the New Nollywood in which he works is anything but impermeable.

38 Such stagnation suggests, of course, the film's indebtedness to Mambéty's *Touki Bouki*, in which the male protagonist, dreaming of Paris, never actually leaves Dakar.

Distributed by Netflix, Taylaur's *A Sunday Affair* even features some of the fruits of Chinese investment in Nigeria, lavishing visual attention on the new, gleaming Lagos-Ibadan Railway, a product of the Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Corporation and its resources-for-infrastructure plan. Exactly where, then—and exactly what—is the Nollywood in which *A Sunday Affair* was made?

Ironized in *Eyimofe*, the desirability of European metropolitan destinations is perhaps less complicated in other Nigerian films. A character in EbonyLife's *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* (Ishaya Bayo, 2018) might well be describing a longstanding Nollywood strategy when he counsels the protagonist, a talented chef, to “start small, build a fan base, and one day expand to London”—which is precisely what Nigerian filmmakers from Izu Ojukwu to Jeta Amata managed to do during the first decade of the twenty-first century, moving from the markets of Idumota and Alaba to the multiplexes of the UK's Odeon chain. Though it opens in London, *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* eventually lampoons the UK fetish that persists among certain Nigerians, such as the protagonist's Yoruba mother, whose pet dog is named Churchill and who keeps a framed portrait of Queen Elizabeth II on her nightstand. Known for her “royal wave” (copied directly from the British monarch), the mother implores a Pidgin-speaking sous-chef, who has never left Nigeria, to “become international.” Her daughter, having returned from London to run the kitchen at the eponymous resort (which her father owns), similarly defers to “international standards,” forbidding the consumption of alcohol during working hours. (The “razz” sous-chef gets his revenge by pouring a cup of salt into her uziza sauce, effectively ruining her carefully prepared lamb dish.) A romantic comedy, *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* reaches its cheerful conclusion when the protagonist's boyfriend, a real estate speculator, updates her kitchen “to London standards.” Ironically, such foreign standards, which symbolize modernity and material success, permit the protagonist to, as she puts it, “make food that makes Nigerians proud to be Nigerian.” If, as she maintains, the titular hotel is “the best in West Africa,” that is because it so closely resembles its counterparts in the (former) metropole.

Aspiration, imitation, and importation are entwined in *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel*, which, in its repeated references to “London standards,” evokes various state initiatives to “update” Nollywood. In December 2006, Nigeria's National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) announced its New Distribution Licensing Framework, by which it sought to “regulate participation in film marketing” and “attract new corporate entrants whilst excluding many existing small-scale marketers through strict [and

relatively costly] licensing requirements.”³⁹ Obtaining a license from the NFVCB initially required payment of a hefty fee of over \$3,000 (which was inhibitory for many traditional marketers), the acquisition of a \$200 insurance bond, and—perhaps most prohibitive of all—the retention of both a lawyer and an accountant as part of an “international-standard” management structure. These strict entry requirements were tied to reforms in the Nigerian banking sector, which included the Central Bank’s decision to raise capital requirements for all banks beginning in 2004.⁴⁰ A prototypical example of “the intrusion of credit, debt and interest-payments into ever more spheres of social reproduction”⁴¹ (a process that *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* illustrates in its depiction of debt-exploiting venture capitalists), the attempt to support Nigerian banks by ensuring their incorporation into the Nollywood economy—both as storehouses for marketers’ profits and as effective lenders—is emblematic of broader efforts to “transform” Nollywood into something (more) recognizable to global capitalism.⁴²

Capitalizing (on) Nollywood

With their higher-than-average budgets, internationally famous stars, and expansive marketing campaigns, New Nollywood films are perhaps best defined by the term “high concept.” Describing a particular kind of commercial logic that calcified in Hollywood in the 1960s, high concept calls attention to the conditions of media conglomeration in which box-office revenues represent but one slice of a huge pie of potential profits. Purchased by conglomerates whose interests spanned (and were scarcely limited to) seemingly discrepant media industries, Hollywood studios came to rely on the marketing potential of commercial tie-ins such as soundtrack albums, music videos, and television specials, all of which remain practically mandatory in the world of high-concept filmmaking. Justin Wyatt describes high concept as a strategy of product differentiation rooted in the extreme intelligibility of plots, the formal encoding of consumerism (especially evident in the phenomenon of product placement), and, perhaps most importantly, a film’s careful “integration with marketing

39 Bud, “The End of Nollywood’s Guilded Age?,” 92–93.

40 Bud, “The End of Nollywood’s Guilded Age?,” 93.

41 McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 151.

42 Fittingly, *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* opens with the protagonist applying for a loan.

and merchandising.⁴³ For Wyatt, an awareness of high concept is particularly useful in historiographic terms—as, that is, a means of illuminating distinctions between the so-called “classical” and “post-classical” phases of Hollywood’s development (though there is considerable overlap, as with Old and New Nollywood). In the former phase, Hollywood was typified by major-studio ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exhibition. It was a vertically integrated system in which box-office revenues (both domestic and foreign) were of paramount importance, and in which the specificity of the film medium went largely unchallenged (despite early attempts at integration and cross-promotion, which included radio adaptations of films). In the latter phase, the same studios were, as Tino Balio puts it, “either subsumed into burgeoning conglomerates or became conglomerates themselves through diversification.”⁴⁴ Beginning in the early 1960s, following the rise of television and the spread of suburbanization and conglomeration, filmmaking became a minority activity of giant media concerns, its profits accounting for a relatively small percentage of a parent company’s total take.⁴⁵ Consequently, “synergy”—understood as, for example, the integration of a company’s film and music divisions via a particular “property” (such as a summer blockbuster fueled by an original soundtrack to be sold separately, each element functioning to promote the other) and the generation of related merchandise to be distributed across the retail sector—has become the principal goal of the legacy studios, complicating, if not entirely displacing, the familiar pursuit of mere box-office receipts.

High concept thus limns the newness of “New Hollywood” (epitomized, in this context, by Steven Spielberg’s merchandise-generating summer blockbuster *Jaws* [1975]), facilitating distinctions between industrial formations based not simply on temporal factors (for instance, the shift from the 1960s to the 1970s) but also on precise marketing strategies and styles of filmmaking. That is precisely how I am using the term here—as a way distinguishing between Old Nollywood and New Nollywood, so-called Asaba films and those bound for the multiplexes. For the point is not that the plots of Old Nollywood films are somehow too complex or old-fashioned to be considered marketable; it is, rather, that their marketing did not depend on the integration of film production, music-video production, and

43 Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 7.

44 Tino Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium* (London: BFI, 2013), 10.

45 Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium*, 10.

multipronged public relations efforts, though these activities were certainly, and in some cases simultaneously, pursued.⁴⁶

Scholarship on Nollywood often emphasizes the fact that the industry's dominant business model, which is not designed to generate a small number of masterpieces marketable as such, instead mandates the flooding of markets and the rapid turnover of products. Nollywood's traditional marketing is based on the popularity of stars and the intelligibility of genres, but also, quite simply, on the mass availability of films in various material forms (VHS cassette, VCD, DVD), all of them reasonably affordable. This is not to suggest that Nollywood fans have no aesthetic standards, but rather that the industry's basic logic—the apparatus through which the vast majority of its films reach consumers—is premised on a model that bears little resemblance to that which centralizes multiplex exhibition as a means of promoting a film to other, “ancillary” markets.

The work of Nollywood producers has always been integrated with other pursuits, from electronics retailing in the case of Kenneth Nnebue to equipment rentals and broadcast consulting in the case of Kingsley Ogoro. What makes New Nollywood different is the degree to which this integration is formalized—made “official” and mandatory—through the parentage of a local or transnational corporation. Product placement is particularly conspicuous in New Nollywood, which is driven by the imperatives of advertising in ways that link it to high-concept filmmaking in the United States.⁴⁷ As Wyatt notes, “Advertising is the key to the commercial success of [high concept] films, but, more basically, advertising as a medium of expression is fundamental to [their] very construction.” “Indeed,” he continues, “the style of the films reflects, in many respects, the graphic design and print layouts associated with contemporary consumer goods advertising.”⁴⁸ As Wyatt's description suggests, the advertising function of high-concept cinema also aligns the category with that of industrial films. In both cases, a sponsored film carries a particular set of commercial messages distinct from, but often absorbed into (or smuggled through), that film's artistic qualities and entertainment value. Put another way,

46 To take just two examples: the Nollywood stars Nkem Owoh and Patience Ozokwor (aka Mama G) generated bestselling theme songs (and popular music videos) to go with their direct-to-video films, though such activities were not, as in high concept, conditions of possibility for the films themselves.

47 For more on the history of product placement, see Jay Newell, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang, “The Hidden History of Product Placement,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* (December 2006): 575–594.

48 Wyatt, *High Concept*, 23.

a high-concept film like *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985), for all its star-driven narrative excitement, is very much a feature-length commercial for Nike and Pepsi (among other brands), just as *The Twilight Forest*, for all its poetics, is ultimately an ad for Unilever. *Back to the Future* is, among other things, a utility film, one that teaches audiences where and how to consume Pepsi (and what they can plausibly expect, both bodily and socially, from such consumption), and why and how they should wear Nike sneakers. *The Twilight Forest* has a similar utility, apart from but not unrelated to its status as a travelogue: it instructs Unilever employees on the management of Nigerian woodlands (and Nigerian laborers) and announces their relation to the corporation, their “place” in global capitalism, and their overall purpose in modernity. Such works, with their “different cultural logics and technological dynamics,” are nevertheless united as “films that sell.”⁴⁹ They are equally indispensable to the study of Nollywood, particularly as that industry enters its multiplex era. For instance, Pepsi—to take just one example of a brand whose globalization has depended, in part, on high-concept Hollywood films—has had a major influence on the development and execution of multiplexing in Nigeria. It is also conspicuously “placed” in Nollywood’s *Phone Swap* (Kunle Afolayan, 2012) as in Hollywood’s *Back to the Future*: at one point in the former, a bottle of Pepsi appears under a spotlight, at the dead center of a shot.⁵⁰ Part of the point of exhuming Nollywood’s “prehistories”—the genealogies (and geographies) to which it belongs—is to counter the tendency to view the industry as if it were somehow extrinsic to global capitalism or “innocent” of certain cultural and corporate practices.

While it would be misleading to suggest that New Nollywood films are necessarily stylistically different from their low-budget counterparts, certain distinctions are obvious. “In some cases,” Wyatt writes of high concept, “the style of the productions seems to seep through onto the narrative; issues of style or image become crucial to the functioning of the characters and the development of the narrative.”⁵¹ The same can certainly be said of New Nollywood, which, as Moradewun Adejunmobi observes, is overwhelmingly marked by an effort to “achieve congruence between ideology and narrative”—between, say, branding as a theory of marketing and branding as a

49 Thomas Elsaesser, “Archives and Archaeologies: The Place of Non-Fiction Film in Contemporary Media,” in *Films that Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 19–34 [19].

50 Based in Lagos, the Seven-Up Bottling Company, which produces and distributes Pepsi in Nigeria, was one of Afolayan’s sponsors.

51 Wyatt, *High Concept*, 17.



A Shell service station in Asaba, ca. 1950. Photograph by Edward Harland Duckworth. Date unknown. Courtesy of Northwestern University Libraries.

plot device.⁵² Improved production values, often deriving from corporate investment and embedded marketing, can have a sanitizing effect on stories. A fantastical staple of Old Nollywood, witchcraft acquires insistently secular explanations in New Nollywood. The latter's rationalizations thus extend, at times, to the occult territory previously exploited so unashamedly, albeit as a prelude, typically, to the ultimate triumph of Christian values. In *Hakkunde*, the central characters, like the film itself, understand that accusations of witchcraft are simply expressions of misogyny; an epidemiological dimension is added when it is revealed that a young widow's husbands all died from sickle cell anemia, an inherited blood disorder, rather than from a rumored connubial curse. Compare, for instance, Teco Benson's *Six Demons*, a 2004 drama of the supernatural, which opens with

52 Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Neoliberal Rationalities in Old and New Nollywood," *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (2015): 31–53 [32].

the following words superimposed over an image of the eponymous succubi: “The existence of Demons and their activities have remained a mystery to mankind for ages. Yet mankind continues to suffer many incredible physical and spiritual catastrophes from them.” In New Nollywood’s rationalist hands, such catastrophes, if they occur at all, are efficiently recast in worldly terms. Elucidations abound and are transformative: even the rigid imams of *Hakkunde* relent to the scientific version of events, drop all charges of witchcraft, and gain useful knowledge of genetic mutations in the process. This is a far cry even from Kunle Afolayan’s formative New Nollywood film *The Figurine* (2009), which famously ends with an open question: “What do you believe?” Strategically amenable to opposing (“modern” and “traditional”) interpretations of mysterious occurrences, *The Figurine* serves as a permissive bridge between Old and New Nollywood. Irrefutable in the former, the occult is foreclosed in *Hakkunde*, where wealth is generated not by blood rituals but by a bank loan.

New Nollywood’s epic depictions of recent public health crises, from the Ebola threat to the coronavirus pandemic, should be understood in this context, as extensions of the rationalizing tendencies through which modern science triumphs over “tribal” superstition. Shot with an urgency and documentary-style sobriety that suggest the American television series *ER* (1994–2009), such films make medical sense of a disordered world. Nigeria’s real-life victory over Ebola, a rare state triumph worthy of unqualified admiration, reaches expression in *93 Days* (Steve Gukas, 2016), while a fictional outbreak is at the technocratic center of the similarly themed *Lockdown* (Moses Inwang, 2021). In both films, trusted medical officials at once advance important public health measures and symbolize the specialization associated with New Nollywood itself, with its highly trained cinematographers and multiplex-compliant styles.

To the extent that New Nollywood reflects fantasies of global membership, it does so through a number of different registers—some representational, others technological. Many films seem estranged from such cosmopolitan imaginaries at the level of narration: Kunle Afolayan’s *October 1* (2014) and Izu Ojukwu’s *’76* (2016) are both historical epics exclusively attuned to crises of the Nigerian past—problems that, the films strongly imply, have major implications for the Nigerian present and future. The films’ shared nationalist fervor, the sense of patriotism that pervades them, appears to exclude considerations of the global context (notwithstanding Afolayan’s necessary allusion to the latter stages of British colonial rule). Their admirably detailed historiographic gestures may seem downright intimidating—and all but unreadable—to those unfamiliar with Nigeria’s precise political development.

Other New Nollywood films may seem to belong to globally intelligible genres while offering narratives that are firmly rooted in uniquely Nigerian sociocultural contexts, awareness of which is required to decipher their plots. For instance, Seyi Babatope's *Lunch Time Heroes* (2015) revolves around the experiences of a member of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a government-run organization established in 1973 that requires university graduates to complete one year of community service, preferably in unfamiliar cultural contexts. Like Tope Oshin's *Up North* (2018), in which a wealthy, jet-setting Lagosian completes his national service in picturesque Bauchi State (adjacent to and including the very area whose mineral deposits animate 1926's *Palaver: A Romance of Northern Nigeria*), the film assumes a basic understanding of the NYSC and of many of the debates surrounding it (particularly those pertaining to the training and compensation of its members). With its offhand references to "corpers," local government areas, and various secondary-school competitions, *Lunch Time Heroes* is a deeply Nigerian film, one that does not so much as allude to life beyond the country's borders, except, perhaps, through not-infrequent close-ups of various products manufactured by Honeywell, the American multinational conglomerate whose headquarters are in New Jersey but whose products are consumed throughout Nigeria. (Honeywell is, in fact, a not-insignificant—and not-infrequent—New Nollywood sponsor.) But the film was made with equipment from Brainbox, a boutique camera and lens rental house in Los Angeles, and FilmHouse swiftly licensed its streaming rights to Netflix.

Lunch Time Heroes thus reflects a kind of global membership at the levels not of plot and character but of production and distribution. To watch the film is to be confronted with some hyper-specific Nigerian conditions—of education, employment, and government sponsorship—and it would be difficult to conceive of it as anything other than a distinctly Nigerian affair. And yet its mode of production—rooted in Babatope's connections to various businesses in the greater Los Angeles area, where he grew up—suggests a more global set of circumstances, as does the fact of the film's availability on Netflix, which followed its run in select West African multiplexes. In its own way, and despite referencing some uniquely Nigerian sociocultural conditions, *Lunch Time Heroes* suggests the sort of aggressively deracinated, generalizing, "uplift"-centered approach to African development so characteristic of the neoliberal moment, when material gains in the form of urban infrastructure and rural production are habitually discredited and replaced by a deliberately vague "investment in human potential." Charles Piot cites "child sponsorship" and school enrollment—initiatives emblemized in Oprah Winfrey's widely promoted (and scandal-plagued) South African Leadership Academy for

Girls, founded in 2007—as being among the few projects that dependably “fill the development horizon today.” It is no accident that New Nollywood films like *Lunch Time Heroes* embrace this NGO-approved “development” scheme, with its eminently marketable “commitment to a youthful future” and its rootedness in the appealing idea that investing in education and “personal growth” might, in fact, “be the answer to Africa’s problems.”⁵³

Lunch Time Heroes addresses questions of class in its depiction of Excelsior Academy—a “school of the rich and respectable,” as the film’s protagonist, the idealistic corper Banke Adewumi (Diana Yekinni), proudly puts it as she prepares to work there under the auspices of the NYSC. The elite, exclusionary Excelsior has never accepted a corper before. Banke’s friends and fellow corporers deride it as “the school of the high and mighty,” even as they complain about having to teach two subjects to four classes at the other, “lesser,” “needier” schools to which they have been posted. As Banke soon discovers, however, Excelsior’s opulence is partly an illusion: the academy is experiencing a budgetary crisis that its principal (played by Dakore Akande) is struggling to contain. (Elegant and arrogant, the principal betrays her desperation when, thinking that no one is looking, she crouches to taste some of the food that the harried Banke has spilled on the floor.) At times, the film appears to propagandize on behalf of the NYSC, sanitizing it almost beyond recognition, as though its history were not fraught with controversies that include the nonpayment of corporers and their posting in undeniably dangerous places.⁵⁴ The film’s Nigerian specificity is thus complicated by a deracinated brand of New Nollywood optimism: characters casually claim that the NYSC never fails to offer an adequate “allowie” (or allowance) to each inductee, and even Excelsior (which, in any case, scarcely suggests a Nigerian Junior Secondary School, since it lacks a dean of studies and appears to cover just a couple of subjects) has problems that are rather easily solved through the entrepreneurial spirit of its students. When Banke first tries her hand at teaching, it is to offer a lecture on citizenship, and the film itself suggests a primer on how to profitably “be Nigerian” in the twenty-first century: one must “diversify,” acquiring any number of marketable skills, and subsequently compete for political favors.

53 Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 147.

54 Connor Ryan makes a similar observation in his analysis of Mildred Owko’s New Nollywood film *The Meeting* (2012), writing, “References to NYSC and civil engineering read like allusions to an ideal of citizenship and nationhood more than anything else. The film shows no hint of the general reluctance—and even resentment—that many young Nigerians feel about the compulsory year of service under the NYSC.” Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils*, 176.

Like most New Nollywood films, *Lunch Time Heroes* was promoted to audiences in multiple ways, including through its theme song, “Believe,” by Nigerian singer-songwriter Capital F.E.M.I, which was released as a single alongside a music video starring members of the film’s cast, shortly after the film’s theatrical premiere at the FilmHouse multiplex in Surulere. As Wyatt argues, such a strategy—understood in terms of “synergy” between the film and music industries—is a defining feature of the modern Hollywood blockbuster. Promotional music videos, Wyatt writes, “fulfill a double function: to promote the song for album sales ... and to promote the film which utilizes the song.”⁵⁵ The music video for “Believe,” which features the stars of *Lunch Time Heroes*, involves the sort of cross-referencing intended, as Wyatt puts it, “to maximize the audience’s points of contact with the film” and thus to maintain and extend its value in the marketplace. It emphasizes not only the themes of the film but also the New Nollywood brand more broadly, opening with a clip of *Lunch Time Heroes*—a scene in which Banke exhorts the Excelsior students to “think differently” and to prove their detractors wrong—followed by the logos of the film’s producer, PHB Films, and distributor, FilmOne, both prominently displayed against a black background. This example of branding thus serves to promote a number of important New Nollywood players simultaneously, reinforcing the aspirational plot of *Lunch Time Heroes* and self-consciously linking it to the high production values of the music video (a capital-intensive collaboration between PHB Films and 3Six Music, Capital F.E.M.I’s record label, which also functions as a public relations firm). Sung by Capital F.E.M.I and lip-synched by members of the cast of *Lunch Time Heroes*, the lyrics to “Believe” condense the optimistic message of the film: “It’s not an easy road, but I don’t need to worry / It’s not impossible, cuz I’m writing my story.”

The music video is nevertheless easily distinguishable from *Lunch Time Heroes* in its emphasis on ordinary Lagosians who look nothing like the film’s principal characters, and whose jobs are far removed from those so valorized in the rarefied realm of the Excelsior Academy, in which jet-setting parents—most of them successful CEOs—are casually discussed. Interspersed throughout the “Believe” video and contrasting sharply with the cast-inclusive bits (all of them filmed within the pristine white walls of 3Six Music’s modern studios) are documentary-style shots of real Nigerians attempting to make their living on the crowded, cluttered streets of Lagos. From shoeshiners to gas pumpers, barbers to mechanics, everyday laborers are depicted as potential beneficiaries of the song’s

55 Wyatt, *High Concept*, 44.

(and the film's) message about the importance of hard work. These men and women are hardly members of the sponsor-supported creative class so central to New Nollywood's success, however, and they cannot be glimpsed at all in *Lunch Time Heroes*, which was shot in comfortable homes rented by the producers. Street scenes are, in fact, entirely absent from the film, which has an oddly hermetic quality suggestive of a stage play. Realist touches are largely limited to the sartorial, and they include, perhaps most impressively, the costumes designed by the talented Eno Jerry, which give Banke in particular the look of an actual corper, one whose appetite for fashion is constrained by her current, limited means. (However reliable her "allowie," it cannot possibly cover the sort of expensive, eye-catching ensembles that Excelsior's principal favors, and that Banke herself covets.) In *Lunch Time Heroes*, the class spectrum runs from the modest Banke, who lives communally and hopes to be a teacher, to the powerful parents of the Excelsior students. Missing, of course, are those who live beneath even Banke's means, and who make up the vast majority of Nigeria's population. The actual street merchants who appear in the music video for "Believe" are hardly, then, reflections or extensions of the plot of *Lunch Time Heroes*. Instead, their appearance suggests vernacular alternatives to the film's class-specific approach, broadening its potential meanings and thus recalling Wyatt's argument that the typical music video "functions not just as an emblem/icon of the film, but also as a method which complicates the narrative," extending and enhancing its social value.⁵⁶

"Believe" is thus the sort of tie-in that further links New Nollywood to the Hollywood model of high-concept filmmaking. While Old Nollywood was hardly opposed to or ignorant of this particular strategy (see, for instance, the low-budget music video for Nkem Owoh's "I Go Chop Your Dollar," the theme song of the equally low-budget *The Master* [Andy Amenechi, 2005]), it has clearly acquired a new, even indispensable utility for certain New Nollywood filmmakers, particularly those whose business interests span media industries. For instance, Naija Ninja Films, a New Nollywood production company founded by the popular Nigerian recording artist Lanre Fasasi (better known by his stage name Sound Sultan) and his brother, the music-video director Dare Fasasi (better known as Baba Dee), is both dependent on and generative of music-industry revenue. The company's inaugural film, Dare Fasasi's 2014 comedy *Head Gone*, not only exhibits the director's firmly established music-video aesthetic but also generated its

56 Wyatt, *High Concept*, 46.

own music-video tie-ins, including with the help of two of the film's stars, the musician 2Baba (then known as 2face Idibia) and Sound Sultan (who also produced the film). Naija Ninja Films is part of the broader Naija Ninja network of companies headed by the Fasasi brothers, which includes a record label and a public relations firm. Shot in Ibadan, *Head Gone* was made, in part, as an experiment in "synergy"—a way of modeling the interconnectedness (indeed, the inseparability) of New Nollywood, the music industry, and additional corporate interests. The film's theme song, "Head Gone (How You Dey)," featuring Karma and Blackah, gave rise to a music video (directed by Joe Chad) that recreates scenes from the film using a number of Naija Ninja's own musical artists. Impersonating the protagonists of *Head Gone*—a comedy about a group of psychiatric patients run amok—Karma and Blackah reinforce the film's "hook," which becomes even more intelligible in their hands. This is high-concept filmmaking transposed to the Nollywood context: the basic premise of *Head Gone*—that "crazy comedy" ensues when mental patients are left to their own devices—is so simple that it can be reproduced in music-video form, and by men who are not actors but singer-songwriters. This doubling effect is evident in the music video itself, which constantly shifts between clips of *Head Gone* and reenactments thereof, all set to the title song by Karma and Blackah. Fittingly, both original and copy—both Fasasi's images and their reproduction by Joe Chad—exhibit equally high production values, owing to their shared connection to the Naija Ninja brand (as well as, of course, to their shared enjoyment of significant Naija Ninja capital). Like the music video for "Believe," which was made to market *Lunch Time Heroes* as well as that film's production company, distributor, and an associated record-label-cum-public-relations-firm, the music video for "Head Gone (How You Dey)" is as invested in promoting the eponymous comedy as in further branding the diversified company that made it possible in the first place.

Formally, *Lunch Time Heroes*, in contrast to the impeccable-looking *Head Gone*, is far from perfect. The actors are occasionally out of focus, their blurred faces dramatically contrasting with the blinding sharpness of the surrounding set. Perpetually in-focus elements include the aforementioned Honeywell products, particularly the huge bags of semolina and wheat meal that stand atop the counters in the corpers' shared kitchen. Given the budget-supplementing use of Honeywell in Afolayan's *Phone Swap*, it is difficult to imagine that Seyi Babatope had nothing more than realism in mind when he chose to situate the conglomerate's products at the center of his film's many cooking scenes. In any case, Honeywell did not end up sponsoring the film, whose budget of just under \$100,000 was supplied by

Babatope's own company, PHB Films, with additional support coming from FilmOne Distribution.

In sharp contrast to Babatope's tale of humble corpors, Niyi Akinmolayan's 2015 drama *Falling* is set in and around the Nollywood industry. The film's protagonist, Muna (Adesua Etomi), is a successful Nollywood screenwriter whose husband, Imoh (Kunle Remi), is a high-powered executive responsible for managing the marketing and sales functions of a large but unnamed and unspecified firm in Lagos. *Falling* takes great pains to present him as the "perfect" man, deeply appreciative of his wife's beauty and willing to prepare a lavish breakfast as a way of thanking her for what he describes as "great sex." Early in the film, however, this "corporate power player" is nearly killed in a car wreck on his way to work—a deeply familiar Nollywood plot development that portends even thornier matters.⁵⁷ Imoh, having lapsed into a coma, ends up in the hospital, "hooked to a machine" that Muna fears is "too expensive" for her to possibly afford. "Don't worry," says one of Imoh's colleagues, visiting the grieving Muna. "It's on the company's tab." Throughout the film, Imoh's unnamed corporation miraculously "comes through," including by paying 200,000 naira a month to keep him in the "best" hospital, attached to the "best" equipment and cared for by the "best" doctors. This oft-repeated superlative apparently applies to Imoh, as well—not just as a husband but also as a boss. "He's the best GM [general manager] we've ever had," says a colleague of the man who is now in a coma, kept alive by corporate largesse. Unlike Akinmolayan's critical and box-office failure *Kajola* (2010), which painted a dystopian portrait of corporate autonomy over life and death, *Falling* earnestly suggests that major corporations are saviors, heroically stepping in with much-needed charity. Imoh's employer is also the source of a surrogate family: Muna assures the man's concerned colleagues that, though Imoh is an orphan, his work relationships have never made him feel like one.

Things take a somewhat darker turn when, after six months, the corporation suddenly stops making payments to the hospital. Confused, Muna asked why and is told that "business is bad"—that the "winds of the market" are no longer blowing in the comatose Imoh's favor, cruelly cutting him off from corporate charity. *Falling* does not linger on this development, but it strikes a sobering note all the same: the cold, hard realities of capitalism have

57 For more on the melodramatic centrality of car crashes in Nollywood cinema, see Lindsey B. Green-Simms, *Postcolonial Automobility: Car Culture in West Africa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); see also Noah Tsika, *Nollywood Stars: Media and Migration in West Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 62–67, 182, 240.

conspired to expose corporate actions as strictly self-interested—contingent on an utterly amoral market. When business was good, Imoh's employer was "able to give"—and the act of giving was, we can surmise, fundamentally an example of "corporate social responsibility," an instrument of public relations designed to enhance the corporation's "brand," burnishing it with a much-needed patina of morality. But fortunes shift, even for major corporations. "We're spending more than we are making," a corporate representative complains to Muna over the telephone.

Muna is later forced to confront what these unpredictable capitalist fluctuations mean for the Nollywood industry, and thus for her own solvency as a screenwriter. In a memorable scene, she meets with a powerful producer in the latter's office. His walls plastered with posters for actual Nollywood films (including Ikechukwu Onyeka's *Unconditional* [2014] and Desmond Elliot's *Knocking on Heaven's Door* [2014] and *Jump and Pass* [2015]), his desk decorated with an Africa Movie Academy Award and (somewhat more fancifully) two Oscars, this representative of Emem Isong's Royal Arts Academy has to explain to Muna that the "company is struggling"—that "Nollywood is not what it used to be." This seemingly throwaway reference—steeped in the clichéd language of a rote nostalgia—in fact speaks volumes about the self-imagination of New Nollywood, an industrial formation to which *Falling* surely belongs. Written and produced by Uduak Isong, who, like so many other New Nollywood players, comes from a corporate background (she previously worked in finance and in the telecommunications sector), *Falling* depicts an industry in an awkward developmental phase, poised between the isolated and "embarrassing" (yet reliably remunerative) world of Old Nollywood and the more globally intelligible, capital-intensive, high-risk realm of New Nollywood, in which debt financing replaces old patterns of payment, and in which corporate munificence is—as illustrated by Imoh's tragic situation—always contingent. The producer with whom Muna meets, with his mixture of bluster and confusion, is a telling avatar of this difficult, often contradictory transition, in which the glitz and glamor of New Nollywood serves to conceal low salaries (and even, in some cases, the complete absence of compensation), as the audiovisual deficiencies of Old Nollywood never could. The Oscars on the producer's desk may suggest a somewhat whimsical vision of a globally successful Nollywood embraced by American elites, but these markers of acclaim—fantastical though they may seem—reflect the actual, stated ambitions of so many Nollywood filmmakers, who often speak of their desire to one day make it to the Oscars. When this big-shot producer expresses reservations about her script, Muna assumes that they derive from her prominent inclusion of a

prostitute among her diverse cast of characters. A staple of Old Nollywood, the prostitute figure is perhaps too telling a reminder of times past for this forward-looking producer. Wedded to a “classy” New Nollywood aesthetic (and the recipient of two Oscars, besides), he squirms at the mere mention of the “mortifying” character. He then tries to convince Muna that he simply cannot pay her for the work that she has already completed, even though he is, by his own admission, hiring someone else—someone far more famous, but also far less qualified—to “do a rewrite.” Such are the contradictions of Nollywood capitalism as depicted in *Falling*: corporate money—what the producer possesses, albeit (he says) “not in spades”—must be used to pay not the workaday Muna, whose labors generated a complete and well-structured screenplay, but a high-profile “outsider” whose name can be deployed under the title of “scriptwriter.” Presumably, no writers’ guild can possibly protect Muna from the hostile terms and conditions set at the corporate level. Defeated, she returns to the hospital to wanly wait for her husband to wake up.

Pressured to “pull the plug”—including by her practical parents, who are separated—Muna flatly refuses, her reminiscing mind prompting a flashback to happier times: it’s Christmas, and Imoh buys his wife a new car—a Kia—and the two declare their love for one another while seated in their huge, beautifully decorated living room. (Nollywood star Ini Edo can be glimpsed in the background, acting in a film that’s playing on the couple’s flatscreen TV.) Back in the present, Muna is forced to beg her mother for money while the two are in a Shoprite, that emblem of African capitalism—the continent’s largest food retailer and, not coincidentally, an anchor tenant in the shopping malls that house Nigerian multiplexes. Her mother politely declines, citing her own penury, and Muna, who cannot afford to pay the hospital bills, begins researching home care on Wikipedia.

Muna’s fortunes begin to change when a handsome doctor named Yemi (Blossom Chukwujekwu) arrives to inquire into Imoh’s condition. Muna and Yemi strike up a friendship and are soon having lunch together at a local hotspot. Asked to elaborate on her career as a screenwriter, Muna starts listing the names of the prominent producers and directors with whom she has worked: “Niyi Akinmolayan, Lancelot [Oduwa Imasuen], Emem Isong, Uche Jombo, Desmond Elliot.” The last name impresses Yemi the most, and Muna offers to introduce him to the luminary—much to the doctor’s delight. Muna and Yemi are next seen visiting the set of Elliot’s latest film, over which Elliot (playing himself as an especially demanding director) presides, pressuring his actors to perform with more passion

than they seem capable of mustering. “It’s not their fault,” Muna suggests, stepping onto the set to offer some professional advice. “It’s the script.” Elliot agrees with his former colleague, and he asks her to do a rewrite. “You’re going to pay?” Muna asks, echoes of bitter experience in her voice. “Yes!” Elliot assures her, adding triumphantly, with well-earned pride in an ever-evolving industry, “This is Nollywood!” One of the first filmmakers to test the waters of New Nollywood, Elliot was also a major star of Old Nollywood, and his presence in *Falling* seems designed to cement his reputation as a sort of bridge between past and future—a man with high professional standards and a desire to see his industry advance both creatively and commercially.

Spaces of Inclusion

In Remi Vaughan-Richards’ thriller *The Department* (2015), the central character chides Nigerians for “thinking locally”—for “always needing to be the local boss” and for failing to forcibly insert themselves into the global economy. In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai addresses the globalized, “deterritorialized” world that more and more people (like the protagonist of *The Department*) understand themselves to inhabit.⁵⁸

Appadurai may err in appearing to oppose “tradition” to a heavily mediated modernity: at one point, he suggests that, prior to the global spread of media technologies, “social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of possible lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places.”⁵⁹ Such assertions would seem to reproduce the colonialist evacuation of meaning, possibility, and agency from African social contexts, and to defy various well-founded warnings against reifying “identity” at the expense of subjectivity. In the years since the publication of *Modernity at Large*, Africanists have endeavored to assiduously undo this opposition between tradition and modernity. The many distinctions and intersections between Old Nollywood and New Nollywood suggest a kind of microcosm of these debates, enacting, on their own scale, the reasons for avoiding binary notions of creativity and spatiality.

58 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 52–53.

59 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 53.

Africa, Achille Mbembe argues, has long been positioned as a site of identity and alterity, not of subjectivity and (global) belonging.⁶⁰ Africans themselves have contested this positioning through various means, including, Charles Piot points out, “through Pentecostal and occult imaginaries, through a sacrificial logic that enables them to jettison the past and embrace the future, through acts of mimetic engagement with that which they desire”—through, in short, the imaginative economies of Old Nollywood, with its blood rituals and success gospels. Piot’s insights suggest one way in which Old and New Nollywood are imbricated, despite their conspicuous differences. Both involve spatial as well as temporal reconstitutions, in which “the distant metropolitan or global [is] seemingly close and immanent, even at times appearing locally authored.” Piot acknowledges the ominous implications of this imaginative leap. Building on the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, he writes of the possibility that “the entire world has been subsumed by capital”—that “all outsides have vanished and the commodity form has saturated the social field.”⁶¹ Old Nollywood often attempted to engage with this eventuality, but Afolayan’s *Phone Swap* represented something of a turning point—an immersion in international capital that was at once actual and aspirational, literal and fantasmatic. Moving away from a system of petty trade and informal payments, as Afolayan has done in his partnerships with Honeywell, Air France, and other massive sponsors, has only underscored claims to global belonging evident from Nollywood’s very beginnings.

More than mere snobbery is at work here. Elitist aspiration goes only so far in explaining why New Nollywood, as a particular formation within the broader industry, tends to target the formality of corporate sponsorship, multiplex exhibition, licensing to streamers, and the international film-festival circuit at the apparent expense of more familiar West African marketplaces. More than a mere “desire for acquisition and movement”—an eagerness to approximate Hollywood glamour, as if to will it for oneself or call it into being for one’s compatriots—animates this aspect of New Nollywood.⁶² For Mo Abudu, founder of EbonyLife TV and the so-called “African Oprah,”⁶³

60 Achille Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 239–273; Achille Mbembe, “Africa in Theory: A Conversation Between Jean Comaroff and Achille Mbembe,” moderated and ed. Jesse Weaver Shipley, *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 653–678.

61 Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*, 8.

62 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 36

63 Francisca Kellett, “Mo Abudu Interview: The Oprah of Africa,” *The Times* (London), <https://www.thetimes.com/article/mo-abudu-interview-the-oprah-of-africa-to-change-the-narrative-you-have-to-own-it-groz72qkt>.

the point is less to fetishize the Global North than to contest miserabilist depictions of the Global South and counteract constructions of African women as far removed from the trappings of modernity, forever locked in a violently patriarchal past.

Abudu's efforts would seem to "appeal especially to those who are weary of the old narratives that have for too long defined Africa as victim of forces and histories beyond its control."⁶⁴ Writing of "the world of the charismatic Christian," Piot calls it "thoroughly saturated by commodity desire and the commodity form."⁶⁵ The same can certainly be said of Nollywood in general and of New Nollywood in particular, as the latter is, in many cases, able to up the ante on the industry's longstanding investment in the symbolic power of branded products, precisely by benefitting from corporate sponsorship. Produced in the standard Nollywood style, on shoestring budgets and in a matter of just a few weeks apiece, the *BlackBerry Babes* films (2011's *BlackBerry Babes* and *The Return of BlackBerry Babes*, and 2012's *BlackBerry Babes Reloaded*, all directed by Ubong Basse Nyanya) feature the eponymous smartphone as an instrument of advancement for a group of beautiful young women who understand its hypnotic power, proudly wielding it as they seduce wealthy men and generally "get ahead." But the trilogy's microbudget production in southwestern Nigeria was plainly beyond the ambit of BlackBerry Limited, despite the corporation's strategic presence in Nigeria, where it continued to outperform competitors like Apple and Android long after its obsolescence in Europe and North America. As a result of this estrangement from corporate oversight, the trilogy's inclusion of the BlackBerry brand is technically illicit—a prime example of the sort of copyright infringement that has powered parts of the Nollywood enterprise, fueling the creativity of its remix culture.

Afolayan's production of *Phone Swap* suggests certain important differences that together reflect some of the careful calibrations required by corporate stewardship. The film is certainly far less irreverent than the *BlackBerry Babes* trilogy, which takes "smartphone mania" to brilliantly satirical extremes, exhibiting a narrative looseness and thematic adventurousness that makes Afolayan's corporate-friendly romantic comedy seem tame by comparison, constrained by the representational pressures of product placement and the desire to position BlackBerry in a strictly positive light. *Phone Swap* is still inventive and enjoyable, the slick flipside of the *BlackBerry Babes* films, but gone are the trilogy's trenchant critiques

64 Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*, 56–57.

65 Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*, 75.

of addictive technologies (critiques that BlackBerry and Samsung would surely not have allowed, and that no filmmaker hoping for a corporate subvention would ever have pursued), as well as the many reverberations of postcolonial theory's emphasis on the legacies of imperialism, which here include the inability to locate alternatives to European and North American commodities. At one point in the trilogy, a character despairs of ever recovering the kinds of "authentic" Nigerian television shows that have steadily been replaced by "localized" components of the *Big Brother* franchise of reality-TV programs (all of them owned by Endemol, a media company based in The Netherlands). She is cheerfully told that she may watch *Big Brother Nigeria* on her BlackBerry phone, and that that alone should give her pleasure.

Phone Swap is not without its own satirical moments. Parts of the film suggest a sophisticated spoof of corporate culture. The male protagonist, Akin (played by Wale Ojo), is addicted to his own advancement, including at the expense of love (familial and otherwise) and friendship. Pursuing the merger of corporate departments, angling to be CEO of a vaguely sketched firm, Akin is all ambition, and almost inhuman. The globally familiar romantic-comedy framework eventually humanizes him, however, inspiring him to reconcile with his estranged mother and to recognize the value of the young woman with whom he "met cute" at Murtala Muhammed International Airport. Asked by her protective twin brothers to identify what he does for a living, Akin launches into a prolix speech, declaring himself an executive at "Mindus Congolmerate," where he specializes "specifically in the areas of product marketing and developmental services, helping to predict strategies for upcoming and future territorial trends for consumer expectations yet to be ascertained." We are back, seemingly, on the satirical terrain of the *BlackBerry Babes* trilogy, in which Tonto Dikeh's character says to a hapless suitor, "Mister, in my hand here I have the BlackBerry Javelin. I have the BlackBerry Bold 1, the BlackBerry Bold 2, and I also have the BlackBerry Curve. And if I was to get anything new for myself, obviously it would be something higher than what I have here, which is the BlackBerry Bold 3. So if you really want to talk to me, you'll get me the BlackBerry Bold 3, with a four-year internet connection. Then and only then can you actually, really talk to me." Akin's oration is similarly excessive, and indeed it receives comically puzzled glances from the twin brothers, who speak, if at all, in monosyllables. Its redundancies seem deliberate rather than products of bad writing, and they telegraph the appetite for expansion and penchant for speculation associated with finance capitalism, always fixated on "upcoming and future expectations yet to be ascertained." Yet market

success remains essential for all the film's characters, even after Akin's romantic rehabilitation. It is as if, as Piot has it, "the entire world has been subsumed by capital."⁶⁶ Even the twins, in their village outside Owerri, dream of record contracts. They aspire to be as big as P-Square, the Nigerian duo signed by Universal Music South Africa. (Asked what they do for a living, the more talkative of the two replies with a single word: "Business.") The film's female protagonist, a dressmaker and fashion designer who hopes to start her own clothing line, keeps a copy of Thomas L. Friedman's *The World Is Flat* (2005) on her work desk, next to Eric Beinhocker's *The Origin of Wealth* (2006). The frothy *Phone Swap* opens with a close-up of those two books and ends with a shot of a Land Rover.

Afolayan's distinctly corporate-friendly approach is not without its detractors within the Nollywood industry. Nor have his counterparts in the pursuit of sponsorship escaped stern criticism for the obviousness of their obeisance to brands. For every Mo Abudu committed to "glamourizing" Africa and Africans—to projecting images of wealth, education, and cosmopolitanism—there are many active and would-be producers who balk at such imperatives, raising important concerns. Often, such concerns pivot around class, ethnicity, and especially age and body type. The New Nollywood style favored by Abudu and others, and that has obvious roots in well-established Nollywood genres (particularly the campus film, with its focus on sexy university students), does not stop at capital accumulation as a marker of modern, stereotype-shattering success. It tends to prescribe youth and beauty—the latter typically codified in terms of a certain slimness of figure and relative lightness of skin, for women as well as for men.

It also offers a selective view of Nigeria's actual geographies while boldly inventing geographies of its own. Walter "Waltbanger" Taylaur's *A Sunday Affair* (2023), which he made for Abudu's EbonyLife Films, and which Netflix distributed, eliminates the Lagos mainland altogether, as though the megacity can be reduced to Victoria Island. One character does, however, take the train—an elegant modern train, the product of recent Chinese investment—all the way to Ibadan, albeit to visit a fictional state-of-the-art fertility clinic, a gleaming center of advanced science. In keeping with the EbonyLife brand, the film offers up a Lagos that is scarcely recognizable as itself—that features only the fanciest of cars, homes, art galleries, and day spas. The dialogue is full of Americanisms (along with the occasional "abeg," the obligatory "wahala"—words that, as spoken here, seem strangely out of place, as though the actors had never used them before). Produced

66 Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*, 8.

with the support of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, *A Sunday Affair* is very much an advertisement for the Lagos-Ibadan line (and, by extension, the broader, ongoing Nigeria Railway Modernization Project). Yet there are limits to the film's veneration of foreign capital, foreign speech ("Could you be more thirsty? Girl! Knock yourself out!"), and foreign style. While the Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Corporation was in fact responsible for the Lagos-Ibadan Railway, *A Sunday Affair* replaces it with a fictional Nigerian consortium headed by the title character (born Akin and played by the British actor Oris Erhuero), who, after several years in the United States, has returned to Nigeria to oversee the expansion and modernization of rail transport. The film also alludes to the presence of violent conflict in contemporary Nigeria: bandits sabotage the train tracks, causing major transportation delays. But they remain offscreen, their motivations unspecified, their actions representing a mere inconvenience that serves only to bring two characters together in typical rom-com fashion.

Just as the glossy *A Sunday Affair* cannot entirely avoid some of the realities of social conflict, the corporatization of Nollywood has not entailed the wholesale dispossession of those committed to tiny budgets, fast turnover, and a potentially off-putting parochialism. New Nollywood hasn't so much displaced Old Nollywood as given it something to supplement (and even, in some cases, stand against). Asaba films—low-budget "bush" comedies and the like, many of them shot in villages to the north and east of Nollywood's de facto capital—are still being made. Indeed, they are still very much in the numerical majority, though they may be harder to find for those without access to "traditional" African marketplaces, with their open-air vendors hawking DVDs and standard HD files on cheap flash drives. Even amid the industry's corporatization, Nollywood's status as a producer of "small media" remains secure. As theorized by Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, small media are marked by idiosyncratic borrowings that reliably address local consumers, affording them opportunities to engage with a diversity of cultural practices, away from the copyright-driven constraints and other normative frames that characterize the circulation and consumption of "big media."⁶⁷ If Old Nollywood films constitute small media, New Nollywood films suggest something much larger and, of course, less flexible, less mobile—and far more vulnerable to censorship, copyright restrictions, and corporate designs. Like the cultures out of which it emerges,

67 Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994).

New Nollywood demands a revision of standard conceptions of media history, particularly those that continue to insist that the geographies of global capitalism have not (yet) encompassed Nigeria.

Still, there are plenty of technical and stylistic echoes of Old Nollywood in even the biggest, most prestigious New Nollywood films. *The Department*, for instance, recycles establishing and transition shots in economic Old Nollywood fashion, and though it boasts top-notch cinematography (by Ayoola Ireiyomi, shooting with a high-end Red Digital Cinema Camera), the film's sound levels vary dramatically, running the gamut from the barely audible to the downright deafening. This lack of acoustic consistency—so familiar from Old Nollywood (where it was typically exacerbated by ever-depreciating VHS cassettes and other analog forms)—is regrettably common in New Nollywood, an indication of how difficult it is for filmmakers to finance their ambitious projects well into the post-production stage, even with corporate support (which, as the aptly titled *Falling* makes clear, is never a bottomless commodity, no matter how robust, inexhaustible, or philanthropic it may seem). The recording studios and other high-tech suites that increasingly dot the landscapes of Lekki and Victoria Island—and that are directly depicted in Kunle Afolayan's *A Naija Christmas*, which Netflix distributed in 2021—may be convenient, and important indicators of Nollywood's growth, but they are not foolproof (or always available). Of course, even the most expensive Hollywood films are shot with imperfect sound, their scenes marred by background noise, poor enunciation on the parts of particular actors, or problems with a microphone's pickup pattern, but they are usually fixed “in post”; performers invariably reconvene in state-of-the-art studios to rerecord their dialogue, a process known as “looping” or “automated dialogue replacement” (ADR); other errors are corrected with various sound-mixing technologies; and so on. New Nollywood filmmakers rarely encounter such luxuries, however, burdened as they are by financing problems as well as by the relative absence of adequate studio infrastructure in Nigeria. In post-production on his New Nollywood thriller *The CEO*, Kunle Afolayan had to travel all the way to Budapest, Hungary in order to record the film's original score with a full symphony orchestra in a soundproof studio. Similar efforts were made to lend Kemi Adetiba's *The Wedding Party* a professional soundtrack marked by consistent audibility. Mo Abudu's EbonyLife Films, in collaboration with a trio of executive producers from FilmOne, subsidized and oversaw post-production work at Koga Studios in Ikeja, where all dialogue was recorded under the technical supervision of Chris Jeyibo, the CEO of Koga Entertainment. (A major influence on the development of New Nollywood, Jeyibo, whose company provided

ADR and sound-mixing services for two of its own productions—Akanni's *Heroes & Zeroes* and Fayoyin's *The Visit*—was killed in a car accident on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway in October 2016.) Old and New Nollywood are not incommensurable, nor has one necessarily replaced or superseded the other (despite the impression of temporal and categorical succession fostered by the qualifiers “old” and “new”). Making sense of the geographies that they inhabit, and that they themselves help to generate, demands attention to their many nuances.

4. Twilight Forests

Cinema and Deforestation

Abstract: Through close readings of a range of films, from industrial shorts to fiction features, this chapter considers the relationship between the global timber trade and moving images in Nigeria and beyond. Timber films tend to present Africa's lush forests not only as useful sites of extraction but also as saviors of an industry that has simply run out of trees to cut in Europe and North America. Films about the depletion of the Global North are thus directly relevant to those that depict actual timber concessions in Nigeria and that attempt to radically transform the social meanings of the forests of Yorubaland.

Keywords: timber; lumber; forest management; Unilever; United Africa Company

In the 1930s, Warner Bros. produced a cycle of lumberjack dramas that, adapted from the work of conservationists, articulated an unexpected critique of corporate greed and comprehensive extraction. Such films also made clear, however, that American and European lumber companies, having exhausted their countries' own natural resources, would need to violently forge new zones of extraction on the African continent. By the middle of the twentieth century, a number of sponsored documentaries were offering glimpses of those very zones: *The Tree of Life* (1948) looked at the role of Lever Brothers in harvesting African wood; *Timber* (1955) considered the operation of the state-of-the-art PWD Sawmill in Nigeria; the aptly titled *Wealth in Wood* (Sean Graham, 1954) suggested the potential for material enrichment through lumbering; the 1957 docudrama *Fincho*, which featured Harry Belafonte as an agent of global exchange, concerned the “modernizing” and “citizen-building” role of a British lumber firm—Finch & Company—in

Nigeria¹; and Unilever's *The Twilight Forest* (Sydney Latter, 1957) celebrated the felling of Nigeria's trees as a useful, sustainable alternative to indigenous "inaction." Such films set important precedents for how lumbering would be depicted, and pursued, for decades to come.

"The Money Lust of Power"

In recounting this history, it makes sense to begin with Hollywood fiction films that offered some of the earliest cinematic depictions of the international timber trade. Such films, whether ostensibly conservationist or merely mercenary in tone, typically implied the likelihood that extractive enterprises would eventually move on to "fertile" Africa after exhausting the natural resources of Europe and North America. Set in 1902, Warner Bros.' Technicolor release *Valley of the Giants* (William Keighley, 1938) opens with a text that reads, "For half a century the lumber barons had stripped the midwest of its forests, leaving a barren desolation of stump-lands. As the supply failed they turned their eyes toward the Pacific Slopes of California where, like living cathedrals, giant redwoods stood as a heritage of beauty symbolizing in their grandeur man's hope for immortality. But man in his greed saw in these trees only a source of profit and soon the cool, green redwood forests echoed to the clamor of axe and saw. Backed by limitless power and wealth the timber barons moved in ruthlessly, crushing small landowners, destroying human happiness and natural beauty alike. It was the era of the timber steal. The oldest living things in the world were threatened with annihilation to satisfy the money lust of power—mad forest buccaneers, timber cruising pirates ..." Set in Milwaukee, a subsequent scene shows the final planning session of a lumber combine with nefarious designs on the California Redwoods. The group's leader, ambitious Howard Fallon (Charles Bickford), has friends in Sacramento and assures his partners that "state governments can be had." "The law will be on our side," he adds wryly. "You know, gentlemen, crooks like us would have a devil of a time making a living if it weren't for laws and law enforcement officials." Fallon's sights are set on 200 square miles, most of it state land. Homesteaders own a substantial acreage, and a small, independent lumber outfit owns the rest. Bill Cardigan (Wayne Morris), who heads the latter, is a proponent of modest mills and controlled cutting. Adamantly opposed to the felling

1 Noah Tsika, "Soft Power Cinema: Corporate Sponsorship, Visual Pedagogy, and the Cultural Cold War in West Africa," *The Velvet Light-Trap* 73 (Spring 2014), 51–65.

of entire forests, he runs afoul of the rapacious Fallon, who wants to cut 200,000 feet of trees a day. “The way you operate,” Cardigan explains to his rival, “these forests would be cleaned out in ten years.” “What of it?” Fallon snaps. “There are a lot of other places to move on to.”

While Fallon does not name it, the African continent is clearly one such place. Sensing the imperialist implications of Fallon’s words, which signal the possibility of global deforestation, Cardigan expresses a sincere, albeit settler-colonialist, desire to stay put. “We don’t figure to move on,” he says of his own small mill. “There will always be plenty of timber here with *reasonable* cutting and planned reforestation.” The mercenary Fallon dismisses out of hand any such concern for future generations. “Reforestation?” he cries. “What do you care what’s growing fifty years from now?” Undaunted, Cardigan continues to insist on “planning a *safe* future”; cutting redwoods, he says, can be done responsibly. Only “outsiders”—those who, like Fallon and his Milwaukee cronies, have no intention of actually residing in northern California—are willing to create “a desert of stumps and boulders and underbrush.”² Having extracted everything of value from the area, they will simply move on. Befitting its historical and industrial context, *Valley of the Giants* has a happy ending: the indefatigable Cardigan eventually succeeds in defeating Fallon; he and the homesteaders “see to it that land-grabbing

2 This rhetorical association between deforestation and desertification has persisted in cinema, as the more recent example of Susanne Bier’s *Serena* (2014) attests. Bier’s film echoes the Warner Bros. cycle in depicting the depredations of a lumber company in Depression-era North Carolina. The company’s desire to cut down all trees in the Smoky Mountains grows more urgent when the United States government announces plans to turn the area into a national park. The state’s preservationism proves even more daunting—is a more immediate threat to lumber interests—than environmental degradation. Yet it is a strictly domestic preservationism that leaves open the possibility of international plunder. Halting depletion at home, the state will simply facilitate it abroad. Shot in the Czech Republic, whose forests stand in for the Great Smoky Mountains, *Serena* was financed with support from the country’s State Cinematography Fund (under its Film Incentives Program). Forced to look beyond the forests of North Carolina, first because of its own clearcutting and finally because of state intervention, the film’s fictional lumber company turns to Brazil, where the promise of “virgin forest for hundreds of miles” motivates the protagonist, who marvels at the mahogany to be found overseas. “Raw, beautiful, completely untouched,” he says of it, adding, “You can’t find something like that in America.” Yet the film also dramatizes the fight to preserve what is left of North America’s own forests, and it focuses on the binary options of “national park or desert”—the one a product of a government that recognizes that “our smoky mountains contain the last virgin forests in the eastern United States,” the other an inevitable and permanent consequence of clearcutting. As the local sheriff, who opposes the lumber company, puts it when the company’s owner announces that timbering is good for the area’s economy, “All the profits are going north.” The line, which equally applies to the mid-twentieth-century work of timber companies in Nigeria, has a global resonance.

days in California are gone forever.” Yet the sobering recognition of Fallon’s depredations, and those of extractive capitalism more generally, lingers.

So does the suggestion that American corporations, having depleted resources at home, will simply “move on” to other parts of the world. Warner Bros.’ similarly themed *God’s Country and the Woman*, released the previous year, and also directed by William Keighley, actually depicts the African continent as an attractive option for itinerant lumber companies. George Brent plays a “foreign sales representative” in whose office hangs a large topographic map of Africa. “BRANCHES ALL OVER THE WORLD,” reads the company’s tagline, which appears on a banner that encircles a portrait of the globe, and that covers—and connects—Africa and the Americas. The message is clear: Africa, too, is timber country, and eminently attractive to American loggers.³

Warner Bros. would recycle this extraction-centered material again and again, repeatedly restaging the plundering of America’s forests and repeatedly implying the Western appetite for Africa’s own. In 1944, the studio released the short *Trial by Trigger*, a condensed version of *Valley of the Giants*. Directed by William McGann, the film opens in the form of a documentary on the history of overlogging. A voice-over narrator, whose words are illustrated by footage of men felling trees, declares, “For more than fifty years, the lumber barons of the Midwest have stripped its mighty forests, without regard for the eventual results. Like a scythe wielded in the hands of destruction, their logging crews slashed through the timber, felling great trees that could never be replaced in the lifespan of countless generations.” The emphasis here, as in the later *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, is on sustainability, the general message being that timber companies must know which trees to cut and which to leave alone—which to transform into consumer goods and which to keep in the ground. “Forest giants,” the narrator continues, “were sent crashing to the ground, felled like so much kindling, sawed into logs, and hauled through dense woodland trails to the banks of a nearby river.” The film’s image track shows the entire process as the narrator describes it, revealing the centrality of river transport as logs are tied together to form vast rafts. “From here, they were sent plunging into the water. The very water that nurtured them as saplings [now] carried them in rafts downstream to the mills. Huge saws fashioned them into

3 Gregg Mitman quotes a member of a 1926 Harvard University expedition to Liberia, which witnessed and assisted Firestone’s clear-cutting of the rainforest, as saying (approvingly), “The great forest is as bare as a good lumbering job in the US.” Gregg Mitman, *Empire of Rubber: Firestone’s Scramble for Land and Power in Liberia* (New York: The New Press, 2021), 87.

planks, and then, as though proud of the devastation they had wrought, the plunderers stenciled their marks upon them.” An insert of one such mark introduces a fake company—“FALLON LUMBER CO., BEST IN THE WORLD, ONTENGOA, MICH.”—its fictiveness permitting the film (and Warner Bros.) to avoid offending an actual timber firm in its fiery denunciation of overlogging. (Even “Ontengoa” is an invention, one that further blurs the film’s real-life referents.) The narrator proceeds to offer an impassioned critique of corporate concentration: “Backed by limitless power and wealth, they moved in, crushing small landowners and independent mill men.” Yet even monopoly has its limits. Natural resources are depletable. There are only so many trees left in the Midwest (the rapidly exhausting setting of the instructively titled lumberjack drama *Come and Get It* [Howard Hawks and William Wyler, 1936], adapted from Edna Ferber’s novel), and other spaces of extraction must therefore be identified. The narrator explains, “As the supply failed, [loggers] turned to the green slopes of the Pacific Coast”—and to giant redwood trees, which the timber companies saw not as precious wonders worth preserving but rather as ripe for the plucking.

Trial by Trigger then transitions into a dramatic reconstruction of the fight over California’s redwoods, one that retraces the narrative trajectory of *Valley of the Giants*. The film ends, like its feature-length predecessor, with the triumph of the “good” loggers who save select trees from felling, and who force the corporate giants out of “their” lands. (Just where the latter will go next is not specified, but Africa historically beckoned as a source of new frontiers for such firms, as *God’s Country and the Woman* makes all too clear.) In contrast to the character-driven dramatization, in which actors clad in period costumes reenact a Wild West scenario of the previous century, the film’s opening consists not of staged sequences but of documentary footage of contemporary provenance, showing the persistence of the very activities that the narrator condemns. (The reenactment, too, partakes of the real: as in *Valley of the Giants* and *God’s Country and the Woman*, dramatic sequences are intercut with images of actual felling, to lend substance to the reconstructions.) The retrospective narration, which describes the purportedly bygone “era of the timber steal,” is illustrated by contemporary footage—a montage of current logging practices. What the narrator denounces as an antiquated approach—that of overlogging, with its intimations of corporate concentration and rapacity—the image track exposes as an ongoing method, a timeless extractive norm.

If, as *Trial by Trigger* suggests, North America’s forests were increasingly protected by the middle of the twentieth century, the continent having been thoroughly “settled” and “developed,” Africa represented an entirely

different matter. European colonial authorities may have pursued certain conservationist measures (such as the Forest Law of 1956) in order to preserve agricultural lands and other areas believed to be in danger of despoliation at the hands of indigenous populations deemed altogether irresponsible, but their formal rule would soon end, and it had, in any case, long accommodated the efforts of private timber concerns that had no plans to abandon their concessions. During the period of decolonization, Hollywood began producing films that emphasized the commercial potential of Africa's old-growth forests. Where *God's Country and the Woman* limits Africa to a topographic map indicating the global reach of the Russett Lumber Company, these later films actually take place on the continent. In Universal's *Tanganyika* (André De Toth, 1954), the promise of logging leads American entrepreneurs to East Africa, where they find forests denser than any left standing in their native United States. "I'm in the lumber business," announces Van Heflin's protagonist upon arriving in the British Protectorate. "There's enough cedar in this country to make an army rich. My partner and I staked out our share of it. We hocked our souls on a promise we'd get our operating papers from Nairobi." As in the roughly contemporaneous *The Mark of the Hawk*, American companies require colonial goodwill in order to operate without restraint in Africa's extractive enclaves. Yet the spirit of American enterprise is such that limitless exploitation will occur whether colonial authorities sanction it or not. "The important thing is your lumber business, and to get it you'd sacrifice anybody, including children," the female protagonist tells the American timber baron, pointing to the ruthlessness and obsessive forward drive of his penetration of the African continent.

Films about the industrialized felling of Nigeria's trees, such as *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, should be understood in the context of the earlier Warner Bros. series, which sets up Africa as a new frontier for adventurous loggers, and in relation to *Tanganyika*, which explores the continent's natural resources from the historical perspective of decolonization (and neocolonialism). Films that take place on the African continent—and that, like *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, were actually shot there—must, of course, contend with the matter of racial difference, thereby departing, in certain crucial ways, from some of their Hollywood counterparts. In *Trial by Trigger*, individual American homesteaders are threatened by the timber giants who want the land on which they've settled. "Their only salvation," the narrator says, "was to unite." This is precisely what *Fincho*, like *The Mark of the Hawk*, does *not* prescribe. It suggests instead a distinctly anticommunist fear of collective action—of the capacity of the African masses to rise up and undermine extractive enterprise on the eve of decolonization. Sidney

Poitier's Obam, in *The Mark of the Hawk*, must calm and redirect his angry followers; Christianity and American capitalism have a pacifying, indeed union-busting, effect on the film's African miners. In *Fincho*, it is up to the title character, a young Nigerian man, to break up the collective that he himself, in his rage at the arrival of automation, has formed and subsequently led on a march on the British boss's compound in Owo. By contrast, *Trial by Trigger* can safely celebrate the collective actions of white settlers who fought monopoly power in the previous century, and who, as a result, "put an end to land grabbing and timber stealing in California forever" (or so the narrator claims). This, then, is what the Hollywood film is really denouncing: not logging per se but any activity that would displace white communities; not extraction but the appropriation of white-owned property. African communities represent another matter entirely, and *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* are not really interested in their rights (despite the former's pointed inclusion of a British logger's courtesy meeting with a council of elders in Owo). Instead, both films are firmly focused on celebrating corporate stewardship of Nigeria's woodland zones.

If *Trial by Trigger* undermines its narrator's denunciation of overlogging—and directly contradicts the idea that such hyperactivity is safely confined to the pre-cinematic past—by offering extensive documentary footage of contemporary extractive practices, Flora Gomes, in *Tree of Blood*, scrupulously avoids showing environmental destruction. His own tale of corporate overlogging requires no visual presentation of the practice, no images of that which he denounces. Instead, Gomes merely fills the film's audio track with the sounds—stock sounds—of trees being felled, of chainsaws screaming and logs falling. We see nothing of this extensive extractive activity—not even its material consequences (such as stumps). Instead, we watch an entire community migrating across deserts in order to escape the very sights that Gomes withholds. "We left," explains one of the migrants, "so as not to have to see the deaths of our trees." Prior to the arrival of a timber company, a young man says to "his" tree, "Even outsiders admire you," which turns out to be prophetic, an ominous hint of the corporate intervention to come. For the tree specialist who soon arrives by truck, wearing a tie and wielding a knife, indeed admires the community's trees—so much so that he presumably endorses his employer's plans to promptly fell them. Those ensuing stock sounds—the machines wailing, the tree trunks crashing—suggest that large-scale extraction has in fact come to this remote corner of Guinea-Bissau, and many a character discusses the felling in anguished terms. Like the film itself, these individuals sidestep the sight of extraction, fleeing the forest at the moment that industrial

logging commences there. *Tree of Blood* ends with the migrants returning to their depleted village, and to a mural, painted by a mute who had remained behind, depicting the now-completed extractive activities that Gomes, in this film about the beauty of the natural world, refrains from enacting. In his earlier *Mortu Nega*, Gomes shows a real tree being felled; actual extraction forms a substantial portion of the profilmic event. *Tree of Blood*, by contrast, suggests an important ethical distinction, a preservationist departure from previous approaches to representing extraction. Gomes does not jettison realism but reins it in, suspending the tradition that links *Valley of the Giants* to *The Tree of Life*, *Wealth in Wood*, and even Gomes's own *Mortu Nega*. Those earlier films illustrate James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati's claims about what they call "the cinema of exploration," which "has often moved between documentary and narrative cinema." In such works as *Trial by Trigger*, *Fincho*, and *The Twilight Forest*, "the capture of nonfiction scenes"—images of actual extraction—"inspire[] the development of narrative spectacles" that further normalize the global timber trade.⁴ By the time of *Tree of Blood*, made toward the end of the twentieth century, Gomes was perhaps more "attuned to the heightened fragility of the planet and its relationship to histories of imperialism and capitalism."⁵ He acknowledges but does not in any way reproduce such histories, relying instead on echoes of extraction—"found sounds" that bear the burden of conveying what his characters simply do not wish to see. *Tree of Blood* suggests a sobering "sense of the limitations, precariousness, and exhaustion of the planet and its resources."⁶ Indeed, there were, by the time of the film's production, scarcely enough trees left for Gomes to even simulate their destruction, and the migrants' trek, conveyed through high-angle shots of cracked landscapes, indicates the inexorable expansion of the desert, the painful persistence of drought.

The colonialist perspectives that cinematically preceded *Tree of Blood*—and that Gomes critiques—are perhaps most powerfully evident in *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, which lavish visual attention on the felling of trees while claiming that the global timber trade promotes healthy woodland environments and makes for happy Africans, besides. Rather than wholly eccentric representational strategies, however, these two Nigeria-set films in fact represent a standard rhetorical approach at the contradictory heart

4 James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati, "Cinema of Exploration: An Adventurous Film Practice and Theory," in *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice*, ed. James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati (New York: Routledge, 2021), 1–19 [5].

5 Cahill and Caminati, "Cinema of Exploration," 6.

6 Cahill and Caminati, "Cinema of Exploration," 8.

of forestry's collision with private enterprise. Tim Bartley has examined the historical "coexistence of rules for responsible production and practices of rapid destruction," a paradoxical arrangement that aptly describes a range of extractive industries. The forest products industry, though ostensibly "dense with rules" intended to place rational limits on land use, is as committed to its own expansion as any other large-scale capitalist enterprise. As Bartley's research reveals, international support for sustainable forest management has not prevented illicit logging and the global trade in illegal timber. Nor are various forest-management rules necessarily fully enforced. Bartley writes that "even as these rule-making projects gained steam, deforestation rates in many parts of the world continued to increase at alarming rates. In part, this is because rules for forest management did little to reduce large-scale clearing of forests."⁷ Corporate opacity and misdirection play their own roles in this process, as does the sort of laundering of extraction seen in *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, in which the clearing of natural forests is presented as an environmentally friendly practice—a way of saving trees by felling them. In *Tree of Blood*, there is much disagreement among the villagers about how best to accomplish controlled burning—which is to say, about how to ensure the forest's long-term survival. In *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, by contrast, Africans are deemed congenitally incapable of forest management.

In such industrial films, Nigeria's virgin forests represent not an earthly paradise that demands preservation but rather an unruly jungle in need of taming and pruning. Its human inhabitants may be adept at climbing trees, but such an activity only underscores their "backwardness" in the ethnographic imagination. As Fatimah Tobing Rony observes, "Ethnographic cinema is above all a cinema of the body: the focus is on the anatomy and gestures of the indigenous person, and on the body of the land they inhabit."⁸ Yet the "fascination with native tree climbing"—the presentation of the indigenous body and the endemic tree as coterminous, as in both *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*—was also strategic, a means of aggrandizing modern industry as the mechanized antithesis of mindless "native" embodiment. As early as 1895, images of Africans climbing trees were prominent components of ethnographic exhibitions in Europe and the United States. Their names and personal histories withheld, such figures were made to fit the anthropological

7 Tim Bartley, "Global Production and the Puzzle of Rules," in *Framing the Global: Entry Points for Research*, ed. Hilary E. Kahn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 229–253 [239–240].

8 Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 111.

category of the Primitive and to illustrate their alleged evolutionary distance from modern Europeans. Félix-Louis Regnault's chronophotography paid particular attention to the "monkey-like" West African technique for climbing trees, and the ethnographic cinema that grew out of his work was equally drawn to "native" musculature and its "bestial" relationship to the natural environment.⁹ *The Twilight Forest* certainly belongs to this tradition. Though an overtly promotional work, it is also, in a way, a scientific research film, as "sober" a documentation of the climbing and cutting of trees as anything in Regnault's ethnographic oeuvre. Its uses were multiple: it was at once a form of public relations for Unilever and an internal training tool and study guide. The film is full of long takes that reveal, in real time, the painstaking methods by which African laborers manage to fell massive trees, and it repeats its predecessors' refusal to actually name such men, whose personal histories are plainly beyond the scope of the film and outside the ambit of Unilever's corporate concerns. Rony points out that the mode of "salvage ethnography," with its predilection for the figure of the "vanishing native," in fact "turned a blind eye to how [indigenous peoples] were able to resist and survive European encroachment and dispossession."¹⁰ Indeed, it was precisely the absence of cinematic images of indigenous resistance that, over three decades after the making of *The Twilight Forest*, enabled Shell's self-serving classification of peaceful Ogoni activism as terrorism and sabotage: without contradictory visual evidence—with an archive that included only films like *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*—corporations could claim that, in cracking down on environmental activists, they were simply combatting "native destructiveness." Indeed, the mythology purveyed by *The Twilight Forest* in particular—that Nigeria's indigenous populations were poor caretakers of the land—would pay dividends for Shell as it sought to recast principled resistance as mindless terrorism.¹¹

Unilever's Drain

Partly through cinema, Unilever presented itself as an agent of positive change, wholly responsible for the socioeconomic transformation of Delta State on the eve of oil's discovery there. Yet Unilever, like Finch & Company

9 Rony, *The Third Eye*, 45–73.

10 Rony, *The Third Eye*, 91.

11 Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta* (London: Verso, 2003), 72, 76.

and other timber firms, facilitated petroleum prospecting in a more direct, practical way. By clearing forests—removing virgin jungle—they offered ready-made spaces for the erection of oil derricks. This relay between separate extractive industries is at the center of the film *Oilman's Move* (Frank Nesbitt and Adolph Ozoude, 1961), a Shell-BP production shot in Nigeria, on some of the same grounds shown in the earlier *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*. Filmed from a helicopter (precursor to the high-flying drones on which New Nollywood cinematographers presently rely), deforested areas are glimpsed throughout *Oilman's Move*.¹² The documentary depicts the frequency with which petroleum prospectors must relocate—an itinerant process greatly abetted by the extractive labors of timber companies. (As Jennifer Wenzel observes of Nigeria's much-altered landscapes, "boreholes crowd out palm trees.")¹³ Simply put, Shell-BP follows roads first carved out of the jungle by Unilever, Finch & Company, and other timber firms, and it is able to erect derricks where trees have already been felled. ("Nothing is allowed to stand in Shell's way: not trees, not swamps, not beast, not man," writes the Nigerian environmentalist Nnimmo Bassey, emphasizing Shell's destruction of the mangrove forests in the coastal region of the Niger Delta. "There is not one stage of oil production that is sustainable or environmentally friendly.")¹⁴ *Oilman's Move* thus gives the lie to a central claim of *The Twilight Forest*, which insists that depleted areas will be reforested in time. Such a promise would seem implausible even in the absence of other extractive industries; in their presence, it becomes, all too obviously, impossible. S. Kolade Adeyoju, a professor and head of the Department of Forest Resources Management at the University of Ibadan, noted in the 1970s that timber companies, whatever their public rhetoric, did not actually set aside funds

12 The United States Bureau of Mines had depicted such a process—the construction of a derrick in the Mexican "jungle," a feat of engineering that required the removal of dense growth—some three decades earlier in its film *The Story of a Mexican Oil Gusher*, in which workers are seen slashing their way through a tropical forest, cutting down trees with machetes and axes. Gregory Waller lists "ca. 1922" as the film's release date, but the earliest trade-paper reference to the film that I can locate is from 1926. See Department of the Interior, "United States Geological Survey," "Make It of Zinc": *Bulletin of American Zinc Institute, Inc.* (September–October 1926): 36–39, 42 [39]. See also "Bureau's Films Tell Story of Mining," *The Educational Screen* 60–61 [60]. Gregory A. Waller, "The American Petroleum Institute: Sponsored Motion Pictures in the Service of Public Relations," in *Petrocinema: Sponsored Film and the Oil Industry*, ed. Marina Dahlquist and Patrick Vonderau (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 136–161 [140].

13 Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-Magic-Realism Revisited: Unimagining and Reimagining the Niger Delta," in *Oil Culture*, ed. Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 211–225 [218].

14 Nnimmo Bassey, "Foreword," in Okonta and Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, xi–xii [xi].

for reforestation. “Indeed,” Adeyoju wrote, “if a single word can epitomize the Nigerian forest economy, that word is DRAIN. The extraction of the best timbers and the development of a predominantly export trade of logs is a national drain that has been misrepresented as a gain to local people.”¹⁵ The aptly titled *Oilman’s Move* shows Shell-BP’s swift colonization of lands cleared by timber companies. (It also shows hydrocarbons superseding other sources of power, including those derived from logging: prior to the arrival of Shell-BP, the African Timber and Plywood Company—UAC’s firm—used wood waste as fuel in the port of Sapele.)¹⁶ Oil exploitation takes advantage of earlier extractive efforts, transforming their leavings into sites of active production.

Five years before it merged with a Dutch company to form Unilever, the British manufacturing firm Lever Brothers sponsored a film entitled *Palm Oil, Lumber, and Rubber in Southern Nigeria* (1924). Anticipating *The Twilight Forest*, the film tracks the extraction of forest wealth throughout the eponymous area. A section entitled “LUMBERING IN NIGERIA” introduces the viewer to the British concessions that lie along two rivers, the Ethiopie and the Jamieson. Both waterways are shown transporting vast rafts consisting of so many mahogany logs. Like the palm oil and rubber shown in the film’s other sections, the mahogany is ultimately bound for Port Harcourt; from there, it will reach the metropole. The film’s principal task is thus to document the interconnectedness of industries that rely equally on trees. Nigeria’s diverse woodland ecosystems yield assorted yet closely related extractive activities. *Palm Oil, Lumber, and Rubber in Southern Nigeria* offers images of those portions of Yorubaland that contribute directly to metropolitan wealth. Both *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* would return to those sites over three decades later, reiterating the earlier film’s central message while also revealing the steady expansion and increasingly technologized nature of British timber concessions.

Big Timber

International timber companies were not required for the cinematic representation of felling. Long before the production of *Fincho* and *The Twilight*

15 S. Kolade Adeyoju, *Forestry and the Nigerian Economy* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1975), 3.

16 E. S. Simpson, “Electricity Production in Nigeria,” *Economic Geography* 45, no. 3 (July 1969): 239–257 [241].

Forest, colonial documentaries were emphasizing the need for forests to be cleared—for trees to be removed in the name of “development.” The Crown Film Unit’s production *Daybreak in Udi* (Terry Bishop, 1949), for instance, describes Enugu, in an opening text, as “a distant region beyond the River Niger,” and it repeatedly shows that the area’s “modernization” depends on the razing of forests. (It even ends with residents chopping down old-growth trees to build a “modern” road.) This Oscar-winning film focuses on the construction of a maternity home in Enugu, where the British district officer (E. R. Chadwick, playing himself) asserts, “The people really want progress, but they’re not quite sure yet how to go about it ... This community development’s a new thing!” Implicit in his claim is the notion that forest management is equally unknown to the indigenous community, and that the importance of clearing woodland zones—of asserting dominion over nature—must be taught.

The Twilight Forest is an elaboration of this point. Directed by Sydney Latter from a script by Laurence Mitchell, the film was commissioned by Unilever to advertise its timber concessions in Nigeria, and to show in some detail how it managed to cut and transport millions of logs. *The Twilight Forest* was shot on location in southern Nigeria, where cinematographer Douglas Hill captured both the density of woodland and rainforest zones and the mechanized ease with which Unilever was able to penetrate them. Shipped to London, Hill’s footage was edited by Dudley Birch under the supervision of Latter and producer James Melior, who commissioned an original instrumental score from Elisabeth Lutyens and then persuaded the Sinfonia of London to perform it under the conduction of Muir Mathieson. Actor John Westbrook was hired to record Mitchell’s narration, and the finished film was promptly circulated by Unilever, both publicly and for internal staff use. Widely seen, *The Twilight Forest* was later picked up for further nontheatrical distribution by Contemporary Films, a specialty distributor based in New York City. The film had already been in circulation for nearly six years when, in December 1962, *Educational Screen* enthusiastically recommended it to subscribers for use in classrooms, churches, clubs, factories, and other nontheatrical locations, writing, “*Twilight Forest* depicts the changing technological and economic growth that has been and is taking place along the Ivory Coast and in Nigeria as a result of harvesting the timber in these areas.” “Approximately three thousand miles of tropical rain forest extend from the Ivory Coast westward through Ghana and Nigeria,” the article continued. “These forests are so thick that only an occasional sunbeam sifts down through the high branches above. For centuries past these twilight forest lands have produced giant hardwood

trees such as mahogany and walnut that have matured, died, fallen, and decayed where they lay.” The article represented a striking endorsement of Unilever’s claims, unquestioningly reproducing the company’s rhetoric as conveyed in the film itself. “The only utilization of the timber by the natives had been for dug-out canoes and in the construction of their village huts,” it went on. “In recent years, however, the United Africa Company has started forestry operations on a vast scale.”¹⁷ Formed in 1930 from the merger of Lever Brothers (of Britain) and the Dutch Margarine Union, Unilever was (as it remains) a multinational consumer-goods company, one of the world’s largest. Its subsidiary, the United Africa Company (UAC), was formed to focus specifically on West Africa.¹⁸ UAC “ensured that Unilever ... would get supplies of raw materials such as palm oil, cocoa, or groundnuts.”¹⁹ Nigeria was, at the time *The Twilight Forest* was made, a major import and export market for UAC, which began producing (or, more accurately, sponsoring) films there almost as soon as the subsidiary was established. From palm oil to petroleum, UAC films covered the full range of Nigeria’s commercially viable natural resources. Formally, such films often suggest a dialectic of production (of commodities) and destruction (of nature) that is perhaps most conspicuous—most extreme—in *The Twilight Forest*, which shows in vivid detail, and in color, the awesome impact of logging. In Nigeria, Lever Brothers made films on tin mining as early as 1924, when it commissioned Frederick Wilson to shoot footage in the Middle Belt. That same year, Wilson made the aforementioned *Palm Oil, Lumber and Rubber in Southern Nigeria*, a film that, sponsored by Lever Brothers, anticipated *The Twilight Forest* in its attention to Nigeria’s trees. The latter documentary was produced by the British company Editorial Film Productions (EFP), which had strong ties to both Unilever and the Colonial Office.²⁰ EFP was, in a way, a source of continuity between the colonial and post-independence periods, with *The Twilight Forest* representing a sort of temporal bridge, and an epochal statement of Unilever’s intention, decolonization notwithstanding, to dig in for the long haul.

17 Thomas Keith Midgley, “Film Evaluations: *Twilight Forest*,” *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide* (December 1962), 723–724 [723–724].

18 I use “Unilever” and “UAC” interchangeably throughout this chapter. My emphasis is on Unilever’s corporate parentage, but there are times when it is necessary to point to UAC’s specific operations on the ground, as in its Nigerian concessions.

19 Rudmer Canjels, *The Dynamics of Celluloid on the Road to Independence: Unilever and Shell in Nigeria* (Hilversum: Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, 2017), 13.

20 Canjels, *The Dynamics of Celluloid on the Road to Independence*, 17.

The Twilight Forest was, in fact, the second film in a Unilever series on West Africa—a collection of shorts that showed, as the company’s catalogue put it, “how the great natural resources of the tropical rain forests can now for the first time be used on an industrial scale” (words that *Educational Screen* would repeat, practically verbatim, some six years later).²¹ Other films in the series included *The Oil Rivers* (1956), about the production of palm oil in southern Nigeria, and *Traders in Leather* (1957), which bemoans the alleged “waste” of cow hides by the “natives” of Kano. *The Oil Rivers* and *Traders in Leather* were both made by the team responsible for *The Twilight Forest* (including director Sydney Latter and producer James Mellor), and all three films share the claim, articulated largely via voice-over narration, that indigenous Africans exhibit a congenital tendency to squander their own natural resources, whether by failing to utilize cow hides or by allowing trees to mature, die, fall, and further decay. If this claim was patently false, so was Unilever’s assertion—conveyed through all the Nigerian films that it sponsored—that it was practicing sustainable methods of extraction and leaving the lightest of corporate footprints on African ecological zones. The subsequent histories of those zones give the lie to Unilever’s propaganda, but so does *The Twilight Forest* itself. For like *Trial by Trigger*, which uses contemporary footage of industrial logging in a paradoxical attempt to condemn and quarantine the depredations of the overly permissive past, *The Twilight Forest* is full of images of destruction and despoliation; it shows the razing of forests (and the associated pollution of waterways) even as the voice-over narrator makes a case for sustained-yield management, selective logging, and partial replanting. Instructively, the image track, which consists entirely of footage that Hill captured throughout southern Nigeria, does not show the practices of replenishment of which the narrator speaks. Simply put, the film cannot illustrate the methods of conservation that Unilever claims to be undertaking in the region, for the simple reason that those methods were never on display for Hill’s cameras. Unilever did not actually practice what it preached.

Perhaps because of its cheerful if implausible claims to sustainability, or perhaps because of the dramatic, photogenic destruction that it indexes, *The Twilight Forest* proved the most popular of Unilever’s Nigerian films. Widely rented, it was seen by audiences all over the world. It was dubbed into German and Spanish, among other languages. In Nigeria, it was screened via mobile film units and translated by local commentators. It was also broadcast on television in Australia and throughout Europe and the Americas. A

21 Quoted in Canjels, *The Dynamics of Celluloid on the Road to Independence*, 37.



The poetics of extraction in *The Twilight Forest*.

35mm print was even stored at Buckingham Palace, a measure of the official esteem in which the Crown held Unilever, the company that, long a source of “empire timber” through the intrepid efforts of UAC, continued to “win” Nigeria even in the wake of decolonization.²² Unilever’s Nigerian films, including *The Twilight Forest*, were used to teach geography as late as 1965, and they helped promote an impression of Nigeria’s ecological zones as strictly isomorphic with extractive activities.²³

The Twilight Forest opens with the camera slowly panning from right to left across the vast expanse of a dense forest and finally settling on a group of Nigerian laborers tugging on the trunk of a freshly felled tree. “For 3,000 miles and more,” the voice-over narrator begins, “in a broad belt across the west of Africa, dwarfing the struggles of its peoples, stretches the tropical rainforest—a twilight land, where the sun penetrates only in shafts of sudden silver against the dim recesses of a world of trees.” The narrator continues, “This is a story about those trees, about pioneering, about natural resources hitherto thought inaccessible, about a great enterprise and what that enterprise means to a people fast emerging into the twentieth century of an industrial West.” Immediately following this declaration of Unilever’s modernizing power, the film furnishes credits that identify it as a documentary record of the industrial operations of UAC Timber (also

22 Canjels, *The Dynamics of Celluloid on the Road to Independence*, 42, 46.

23 Canjels, *The Dynamics of Celluloid on the Road to Independence*, 43.

known as the African Timber Company and, later, the African Timber and Plywood Company). Based in Sapele, Nigeria, the logging concession was already one of the largest plywood factories in the world when *The Twilight Forest* was made. The film conveys the extent of the company's holdings in a variety of shot types. High-angle shots in which the camera looks down at the treetops are juxtaposed with low-angle shots in which it stares up at the overgrowth. "The African rainforest—hundreds of thousands of square miles of it," the narrator explains over such shots. "Walnut and mahogany, Agba and Iroko, Sapele wood, white afara, Obeche, and a dozen more. Giant trees towering high above the surrounding bush." Nigeria's forests thus offer a wide range of commercially viable timber types. The narrator, having enumerated them, proceeds to explain that only Unilever, with its scientific experts, can properly appreciate this panoply.

Implicit in this celebration of the corporation is a complaint about indigenous ignorance—the alleged inability of Africans to take proper stock of their forest riches. This pitiable inverse of Unilever's expertise is illustrated through a shot of Sapele residents fashioning wooden canoes in what is described as an age-old method and the only significant local use of timber beyond hut construction. "For countless centuries," the narrator explains, "the African had used the trees of the forest. Here and there on the river's bank, they were his canoe, or the timbers of a village hut. The forest was his home, and he used it for his simple needs. A comb, a bowl, a hut, a canoe. Other than that, in the main, *nothing*." The narration's language betrays the sense of cultural superiority that the film encodes in its attention to Unilever's industrial efficiency. The wealth of the forest is dramatically out of proportion to the African's "simple needs." He can therefore scarcely be said to deserve it, so sporadic and limited has been his use of timber. Worse, his inattention to the forest, far from a preservationist impulse, in fact threatens to destroy it. A lack of exploitation is equated with ruination, generating a calamity that is at once economic (and thus a handy explanation of African poverty) and ecological. The narrator strikes this ominous note when he says that, under the African's stewardship, trees simply "grew and grew old, rotted, and fell. Tropical creepers covered them. The worms and the termites bored their way into them. And in the humid forest air, slowly they crumbled away, back into the soil from which they had sprung." No mention is made of the enrichment of the soil that this life cycle represents, nor, of course, of the contrasting destruction of the soil for which Unilever is clearly responsible (as in shots of large machines wreaking havoc on topsoil, chopping it up and exposing it to the harsh, drying sun by systematically eliminating the trees that previously provided protective

cover—much-needed shade). “That *was* the rainforest—primordial, ever-growing, ever-wasting,” the narrator adds over shots of rot—close-ups of exposed roots, tangled and caked with dirt and moss. The relationship between sound and image—between the narrator’s spoken words and the illustrative visuals that accompany them—suggests that indigenous populations are responsible for such destruction, yet it is more likely that these shots show the aftermath of Unilever’s own extractive practices.

There follows a long shot of a dense forest. “Oh, yes,” the narrator says, “people have often *thought* of cutting timber on a big scale, but the undertaking was too immense, the risks too great. The trees worth cutting didn’t grow conveniently in great masses like a pine forest. They grew far apart, often in inaccessible places. No one even knew if there were enough good trees to make it pay ... It was just a dream.” This is, of course, typically aggrandizing corporate speech, intended to set Unilever apart and justify its size, scope, and power. The film cuts to a close-up of a ship’s funnel, the towering, moaning smokestack announcing the arrival of Modernity. Docking in Sapele, seventy miles from the sea, this UAC ship has stopped at “the highest point upriver an oceangoing ship can reach.” Thanks to the vessel’s penetrative efforts, Sapele has become a boom town. “A few years ago,” the narrator points out, “it was a little trading post. Now it’s bursting its seams with people come to look for gold in the streets.” Logging in Nigeria thus represents a sort of gold rush—a timber-specific continuation of long-standing, and perhaps more familiar, extractive practices. Shots of Sapele’s bustling central marketplace show all manner of transactions. There are bins full of goods being hawked. Bicycles, wireless sets, and other consumer items are all for sale. “Prosperity has come to Sapele,” the narrator explains, “a prosperity never known before. For in Sapele, miles from anywhere, in the heart of the bush, had been built the United Africa Company’s two great plants—a modern plywood factory, using every latest technique the West could offer, and, at its side, one of the most up-to-date sawmills in the world.” An aerial shot of the first plant, with its tin roofs and tall smokestacks, shows its expansiveness. Seen from above, the factory covers thousands of square feet of what used to be a forest. A long shot of the second plant indicates its equivalent size. “Here was the source of the new prosperity,” says the narrator. “At last, the dark, secret rainforests were giving up their riches.” Precision sawing is then shown in close-up. Wood panels are cut from massive trunks. Conveyor belts take the freshly sawed pieces from one end of the cavernous plant to another, where they are then stacked. “Here at the mill, there was work—not for one or two but for a thousand or more,” the narrator proclaims. “And a thousand new things to learn: about



The labor of felling in *The Twilight Forest*.

insecticides that kill the voracious tropical woodworms and beetles; about tools that work by power instead of sweat; about trucks with arms in their bellies that would pick up sawn timber by the ton.” The regional reach of UAC is then emphasized as the narrator explains, “The river’s bank at Sapele was only one end of the story. In the Gold Coast, a thousand miles away from here, was an operation on the same scale—the twin half of a venture that needed millions of pounds to start and is unique in the whole history of forestry.” The regional scope of the operation is worth celebrating, the narrator implies. From Nigeria to the Gold Coast, UAC has forged important and enduring links across the British Empire.

The next sequence centers on Nigeria’s waterways as transmission belts for British-bound timber. It begins with a slow, high-angle pan of the Benin River, clogged with ships and logs, and flanked by tin-roofed plants operated by UAC. “They said you couldn’t harvest the rainforest on an industrial scale—the difficulties were too great,” the narrator says, reiterating his earlier boasts. “Now, crane-load by crane-load, the timber rattles down into the holes. Log after log. So many tons, so much a ton. The mahogany comes up out of the water, and the Sapele wood goes down into the hole. But it had needed more than a team of sweating, laboring men to get them there.” It had needed, in other words, more than the sheer physical strength—the simple, mindless “muscle power”—of Africans living “in the heart of the

bush.” “It had needed the building of a great and complex organization”—the industrial scale of Unilever, one of the world’s largest corporations. The film illustrates the point with low-angle shots of smokestacks against the sky, of industrial modernity actively transforming the sights, sounds, and smells of Nigeria. Next to the tall, skinny smokestacks, a long plank of wood—freshly sawn timber—is being hoisted onto a ship by a massive floating crane. Suspended in the air, the plank resembles another smokestack. This iconic similarity—the homology between timber and smokestack, wood and steam, two sources of power, two products of colonial invention working in tandem—seems deliberate. It invokes the extractive ecosystem over which Unilever presided and to which it contributed, and it anticipates the connection between the timber and oil industries that was just beginning to be forged when *The Twilight Forest* was made in 1957.

Despite its focus on the cerebral contributions and mechanical innovations of Unilever’s European employees, the film can scarcely be said to ignore the manual labor of Africans. The next sequence returns to the “bush” to show African men, most of them shirtless, their large muscles glistening, hacking through dense forests with machetes. “Cutting away through the bush for weeks and months and years, away from all touch with civilization,” they are the linchpins of the global timber industry, doing the difficult physical work that no white man wishes to undertake. For African laborers, agreeing to UAC’s terms “meant hacking away through thousands of miles of unknown forest, uphill and downhill, and finding out what was there. Mile after mile, a trail was forced.” UAC’s European project engineers label this process “enumeration.” They have, we are told, the technical language for—and thus a more sophisticated understanding of—what Africans accomplish through brute strength alone.

The film then cuts to an animated map showing the 3,000 miles of tropical rainforest at the highly prized center of which is the British colonial possession of Nigeria, with Sapele denoted by a large red dot, much like Samreboi, its counterpart and latitudinal equivalent in the Gold Coast. “Reports indicated areas available for operations in the Gold Coast and Nigeria,” the narrator notes. “In the most favorable of these areas, options were taken out and sample enumerations started. In a straight line across the jungle, backwards and forwards, a path was cut, and all the way, every tree above a certain minimum size was measured and recorded.” The animation traces the intricate calculations of UAC, the mathematical methods by which the company came to “tame” the “best” of its concessions. “And that was only the sample. There was another stage to come. Everywhere logging was to begin, the whole area was divided up into squares of one square

mile. Each square was then divided by walkable traces into eight sections. And that done, a team of men walked in line abreast, twenty yards apart down the length of each and every section." The animated map, with its "network of longitudinal and latitudinal grid lines," has long been a key feature of the travelogue, crucial to its promise to precisely locate spectators in geographical space.²⁴ In *The Twilight Forest*, familiar grid lines acquire a unique cartographic specificity, as West Africa becomes one large timber concession. It is an exhaustive process that takes stock of "every section of every mile of every [forest], everywhere where felling [i]s to start."

The narrator next emphasizes the selective nature of the actual felling, alleging that Unilever is only interested, ultimately, in "big enough trees of the right type." Such selectiveness is presented as a function not of market demand but rather of Unilever's conservationism, of the corporation's commitment to sustainability. According to this reputed approach, "only mature trees were to be cut." Unilever's scientists thus had to identify each "species and its exact position": "The trees were measured and numbered and put on the map. Yard by yard, the line went on, leaving behind a forest of market trees." Then, evoking the Hollywood films *Valley of the Giants* and *Trial by Trigger*, the narrator contrasts Unilever's approach to logging against that which prevailed in previous centuries, including in the United States: "In the past, in the ancient world and in the forests of America, men had descended like locusts, leaving not a tree standing. Then, where once a canopy of leaves had sheltered the ground, the rains poured onto the naked earth, flooding the rivers and leaving devastation behind. Sometimes, even the climate changed. Men felled the trees, and their children inherited a desert." This is, of course, a clear statement of British imperial chauvinism, a way of linking the United States to "the ancient world" in a sort of moral reversal of the typical hierarchy of Old World and New World. It gives voice to Unilever's rivalry with American competitors while simultaneously linking *The Twilight Forest* to Hollywood films that themselves purported to address overlogging. "But this was not to be a wholesale slaughter," the narrator proudly says of Unilever's practices in Nigeria. "Here trees were to be cut only on a hundred-year cycle, aligned for the continuous regeneration of the forest. When the axe men were gone, it would be their great-great grandsons who cut the forests next." Yet the conditional tense betrays the disingenuousness of the claims, indicating the sheer impossibility of keeping this particular, far-sighted promise, which is plainly at odds with the basic demands of capitalism—and certainly with the corporate mandates of

24 Rony, *The Third Eye*, 83.

Unilever. “The forests of the earth are man’s inheritance,” the narrator continues, now waxing poetic, “not for one generation alone but for all generations. On this basis of respect for nature, a new industry was founded. Forestry operations started on a vast scale with all the knowledge and resources of the West behind them.” There is, however, an obvious contradiction—a clear mismatch—between the phrases “respect for nature” and “on a vast scale.” The scalar imperative, in other words, is at odds with the need to “honor the earth.” The scope of operations signaled in the animated map hardly suggests restraint. Unilever has laid claim to millions of square miles of the African continent, and the idea that the corporation will preserve rather than exploit its holdings is further belied by the narrator’s reiteration of the boastful premise that European industry yields great wealth. For whence does this wealth come if not from the comprehensive excavation of lands violently seized from their original inhabitants? As the narrator puts it, “Not only to Sapele had a new prosperity come. Carried on the roar and platter of steel tracks, it reached deep into the forest, drawing in men, often from villages hundreds of miles distant.” The arrival of trucks, and of tanks to hoist and drag felled trees, transforms the landscapes of southern Nigeria, introducing exhaust fumes, dripping gasoline, tire tracks, and other sources and signs of extensive pollution. European industry reaches into the interior only to deliver raw materials to the metropole. As the narrator explains, “Three thousand miles and a year away, a craftsman would painstakingly polish the decorative grain of a table or chair, the paneling of a roof, the showcase of a show in London or Leeds. But for the African in the forest, it meant something very different.” Here, the film seems to unwittingly evoke René Vautier’s anticolonial film *Afrique 50* (1950), particularly Vautier’s observation (delivered as voice-over narration) that Black Africans in the employ of colonial companies “transport loads of cotton ... without hope of having any clothing on their backs, loads of cocoa without any hope of tasting the chocolate, loads of peanuts without the hope of keeping some of the oil or the soap, [and] loads of mahogany trees without the hope of seeing any furniture in their houses.” Vautier, in describing European colonialism as “the reign of vultures,” in fact names Unilever as by far the most profitable of the “vultures who have split Africa among themselves.” Vautier angrily identifies “millions stolen from Africa on a daily basis. In exchange, these trade missionaries introduced ‘progress’ in Africa.” Ironized by Vautier’s caustic tone, the word “progress” (or “*progrès*,” as the filmmaker puts it in French) describes, among other infrastructural affordances, a large dam—the Markala Dam on the Niger—that provides electricity to white people but is powered by cheap Black labor.

Made seven years later, *The Twilight Forest* confirms many of the arguments of the earlier film, albeit without Vautier's anticolonial (and anti-capitalist) trenchancy. It makes clear that while deforestation means tables and chairs for London and Leeds, it signifies "something very different" for Sapele. The narrator explains, "It meant that, almost overnight, the twentieth century had come into [the African's] life." Yet this statement of the modernity-conferring power of Unilever—of the corporation's capacity to bring the benighted African, locked in a "primordial" past, "up to speed"—is delivered without a hint of irony over footage of a massive bulldozer dragging felled trees through a gutted forest. The moment is almost parodic: Africa becomes coeval with Europe only upon the devastation of its lands.

The narrator's evolutionary account continues over more shots of bulldozers. "Only a brief time ago," he says, "a man had heaved and sweated and strained at a rope. Now, he was master of a machine." This particular point appears to contradict the claim that Africans are now "modern," securely inhabiting the highly technologized twentieth century. For the film has already shown how, as in *Afrique 50*, their physical labor is exploited despite advances in automation. In *The Twilight Forest*, Africans indeed "heave and sweat and strain," though a select few are allowed to operate the bulldozers. As one such gas-guzzling machine powers its way through mud and floodwaters, the image track continues to contradict the narrator's earlier claim about the uniquely ruinous consequences of America's earlier deforestation efforts. For here, too, the rains must "pour onto the naked earth, flooding the rivers and leaving devastation behind." The narrator speaks of man's mastery of machines, but the image track reveals the awesomely muddy results. In one shot, a mighty tree, so tall that its entirety cannot be contained in the static frame, falls across what remains of the land. "Through seed and sapling to maturity, so lived and died a tree, that a new seed might grow tall in its place," intones the narrator, at which point the shot fades out on the image of the felled tree. The film then fades in on the industriousness that ensues, as dozens of men begin chopping away at the fallen giant, to jaunty music. "Now, carefully sited all through the felling areas appeared the collection yards, for a tree in the forest is worth nothing," the narrator continues. "First, you have to get it out. Here at the collection yard the whole complexity of the forestry operation begins to emerge. Now, the log leaves the forest for a different world—a world of movement and organization, a world of machinery." Again contrasting the African bush, and by extension the whole of the continent, with Europe and its technological innovations and organizational acumen, the narrator suggests that Sapele, despite its belated, Unilever-granted inclusion in modernity, represents a world apart.

The narration's words call to mind Chinua Achebe's famous critique of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, that ambivalent document of high colonialism. "*Heart of Darkness*," writes Achebe, "projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality."²⁵ *The Twilight Forest*, in keeping with a longstanding cultural logic of imperialism, presents such "triumphant bestiality" in the form of nameless African laborers who, shirtless and sweating, toil in the forest, filmed as if they were so many ants (and thus evoking the Sembienian critique of the entomological dimensions of Jean Rouch's controversial cine-ethnography). To be sure, *The Twilight Forest* gestures toward the inclusion of Africa and Africans in its lofty conception of European modernity, showing Nigerians skillfully operating heavy machinery. Yet the representation of the latter only reinforces the lowly status of the men who must climb and chop the trees, and who are thus made to occupy the lowest rungs on an evolutionary ladder that, in separating Black Africans by class and skill level, resonates with the divide-and-conquer logic of indirect rule.

The film proceeds to examine the intimate connection between logging and automobility. As Walter Rodney points out, extractive industries like UAC Timber "had to improvise that kind of machinery which most effectively utilized colonial raw materials." If the demands of logging in "darkest Africa" led directly to the development of powerful bulldozers, so too did the timber industry require the innovation of nimble automobiles capable of making their way through the muck that extraction left behind. "Transport was another key problem which stimulated growth at the European end," Rodney writes.²⁶ Fittingly, then, *The Twilight Forest* lingers on the trucks and other vehicles imported to ensure the efficient navigation of Sapele's challenging terrain.²⁷ We are told that an "entire system of roads" had to be built in southern Nigeria, because "transport is the key to the whole forestry operation. There might be a hundred miles of jungle between you and the riverbank, and often the river is the only way out. So the logs, weighing maybe ten tons apiece, are hoisted onto lorries—fleets of lorries, with mechanics and repair shops and stalls and fuels and spare parts to keep them going." Once again, the relationship between logging and oil—between the

25 Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Things Fall Apart*, ed. Francis Abiola Irele (New York: Norton, 2009), 169–188 [170].

26 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018 [1972]), 209, 222.

27 "Modern industry and modern methods demand modern transport," explains the narrator of the roughly contemporaneous British documentary *Nigeria: The Making of a Nation* (1960).

timber trade and petroleum prospecting—is carefully underscored, with the narrator going so far as to suggest the wholesale remaking of Nigeria by interdependent extractive industries. “Everything you need,” he says, maintaining the second-person perspective in his ever-admiring address to the professional European viewer, “you bring in yourself, just as you build the roads yourself, and maintain them, and rebuild them when the torrential tropical rains wash them away.” The second-person address is a reminder that *The Twilight Forest* is, among other things, a particular type of industrial film, made partly for in-house use—for, that is, Unilever employees in need of more than just training. The narrator’s flattering “you” suggests that they also require reassurance and congratulations, a nod to a job well done.

The sequence devoted to automobility, to road construction and the interdependence of ostensibly separate extractive industries, ends with a long shot of a truck, loaded with four massive logs, making its way along one of the roads that cuts through the fast-disappearing forest. The image dissolves to a shot of rippling water on which two African men are reflected, both standing precariously atop logs floating in the middle of the Ethiopie. It is a poetic sight, artfully extended as the camera fluidly pans up to the men as they poke and prod the logs with long sticks. “Half a mile of forest that once would have *rotted* in the forest, now resting gently on the waters of the Ethiopie River,” the narrator captions the image. “But every log that splashes down into the water is the reward of risks accepted and difficulties overcome.” There follows a series of shots of logs being rolled off trucks and bundled on the surface of the river. This, the narrator explains, is the all-important process of timber rafting—the method used to transport collections of logs downriver. “Log by log and section by section, the timber is made up into rafts—huge rafts to be towed a hundred miles and more downriver to Sapele, down to the mills.” It is a process that also makes use of forest products other than timber: “Log by log, using the creepers of the forest it’s lashed together—twenty logs in a section. That’s maybe two hundred tons of precious hardwoods to be pulled into place.” These glimpses of rafting prefigure the imagery of Rouch’s *Moi, un noir*, in which logs from Nigeria and Ghana form rafts in the ports of Abidjan; migrant laborers from Niger are, observes one of Rouch’s subjects, “always dragging materials around on the sea,” or else “unloading sacks of coffee for shipment to France.” “It all looks so simple, so careless,” says the narrator of *The Twilight Forest*. “But beneath the quiet surface the currents are swift and treacherous, and a man who stumbled could be crushed relentlessly between tons of rolling timber. Two hundred tons to a section, five sections to a raft—a thousand



Timber rafting in *The Twilight Forest*.

tons of hardwoods on the end of a pole that used to be the center of a palm frond. A thousand tons to push and shove away from the bank and out into midstream.” The emphasis on tonnage reduces Nigeria’s forests to mere cargo. At the same time, it points to the physical vulnerability of the African laborers who tend to the trunks that dwarf them atop the unruly *Ethiope*.

A particular division of labor is at work here, even among the Africans. The lengthy *Ethiope* sequence shows a lone watchman taking up residence on a sort of floating dock. “There,” the narrator explains, “beneath his roof of bamboo thatch, he’ll live until the raft arrives. It’s not exactly living in the lap of luxury, but somehow, watchmen always seem to manage.” At first, the watchman’s stillness suggests a dramatic contrast to the hyperactivity of the sweating men who must roll, bundle, and steer the massive logs all while trying to avoid injury and death. But the watchman, too, has tasks to complete. A close-up shows him boiling yams, feeding the fire beneath the iron pot with scraps of wood. “It used to take a month or more for the raft to drift on the current down to Sapele,” the narrator says over these shots of food preparation. “Now, with diesel tugs, it takes less than a week.” With these words, the film returns to the theme of extractive interdependence: motorized vessels require fuel; diesel powers the tugboats the way scrap wood feeds the watchman’s fire. Even as the film insists that Unilever has “brought Nigerians up to speed”—yoked them to modernity and prosperity—it cannot help showing the evolutionary differences that persist, the developmental lag that continues to obtain along the *Ethiope*, where a lowly

African watchman burns scraps while waiting for a state-of-the-art vessel powered by hydrocarbons.

That Africans and Europeans are anything but coeval is underscored when the narrator mentions the latter's knowledge of the broader, indeed global, economic contexts in which UAC Timber operates. Implying temporal-developmental difference while invoking spatial separation, the narrator notes, "Four thousand miles away in London, *other* men are studying the pulse of world markets, calculating prices and freight charges ... while yet the timber is hardly wet with the water of the Ethiopie." These "other men" are the unseen masters of "money matters," their mathematical prowess the intellectual, and thus unrepresentable, obverse of the Africans' brute strength. The latter is eminently photogenic: while the narrator speaks of the sublimity of European financial expertise—of a mastery so profound that it cannot possibly be depicted—the image track continues to show Nigerians toiling along the rafts, their nearly naked bodies vulnerable to the elements. Finally, the diesel-powered tugboat arrives to pull the raft "steadily on, down between the green riverbanks, down to the mill." "Millions of feet of hardwood," the narrator continues. "But it's more than just timber floating down to Sapele. It's a visible sign of the true interdependence of Africa and the West: reward for the West, without whose knowledge and resources those logs would have rotted back into the ground; reward for the African, for it means wealth for the tribe on whose land it stood." The African is not credited with any expertise of his own, or even with physical strength; the phrase "without whose" does not apply to him. The European's capacity to begin thinking about global markets well in advance of the timber's arrival at Sapele—the metropole's sheer anticipatory acumen—is all-important here, and it pulls the African into its orbit. Wood, which once was waste, is now wealth. European intelligence has conferred productive capacity on Africans, granting them purpose and prosperity. "Yesterday," the narrator intones, "it was a risk no one would take. Today, it's a great industry providing revenue for tribe and government, and employment for thousands." He closes by addressing Unilever employees, each one an engine of modernity: "You built roads where there were no roads, trained men straight from their villages in a hundred new skills, brought machines where machines had never been. You came into the forest, and where you came you created wealth where before it had wasted back into the earth."

It is tempting to wonder whether the film's Nigerian translators, accompanying the mobile cinema units that took *The Twilight Forest* into virtually every corner of the country, ever gave this second-person commentary an ironic spin. Did "you" turn into "they" to signal the film's

original intention of addressing, and of aggrandizing, European experts? Did Nigerian spectators balk at the suggestion that they themselves were mere recipients of foreign expertise on their own familiar grounds? Some must have recognized, and reacted to, the risibility of the idea that they were wasters and spoilers of natural environments. Out of “dense bush” has been made a “modern land,” *The Twilight Forest* maintains. That such transformation entails environmental degradation is clear from a particularly startling juxtaposition of sound and image: the phrases “reward for the African” and “wealth for the tribe” are spoken over shots of a naked child wandering across barren sands. This scene of underdevelopment—the despoliation of once-fertile lands from which natural wealth has been so violently extracted—plays out against the literal, visible backdrop of a tugboat pulling those two-hundred-ton rafts downriver. Then comes the narrator’s triumphant final pronouncement: “Today, from that twilight forest, timber for the world is on its way out.” Shot entirely on location in southern Nigeria, *The Twilight Forest*, like many a film about Africa’s production of raw materials, does not picture the riches that its narrator promises. It does not because it cannot—they do not exist except in the metropole, where Nigerian wood is fashioned into fancy commodities for European consumption. Location shooting, in this instance, excludes visions of consumerist abundance.

The Politics of Rot

Far from a strictly informational alternative to Hollywood fantasy, *The Twilight Forest* merely recapitulates the colonial logic conveyed in so many fiction films. Directed by John Ford from a story by Rudyard Kipling, Fox’s *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), for instance, articulates aspects of this logic in its depiction of America’s educative encounter with the British Raj. The film opens with Shirley Temple’s protagonist riding a train en route to a colonial outpost on the Indian subcontinent. She and her mother are desperately fleeing penury and the associated depredations of the Depression in their native United States. The mother’s father-in-law, it turns out, is a colonel in the British Army. In one of the film’s first lines of dialogue, Temple wonders why, if her grandfather is English, he doesn’t live in England. Her mother responds with bracing simplicity: “Because Queen Victoria transferred him here,” she says, thus setting the specific historical scene, with its imperial underpinnings. Later, Temple’s grandfather explains of the British, “It’s our job to keep the big [Indian mountain] pass open, so that trade can

flow through it, and bring peace and prosperity to *everybody*.” Yet this navigable route is kept open at the expense of continuous armed conflict with Islamic forces in the northwest. That the latter claim trading rights of their own is ignored or dismissed by the colonial interlopers. “England wants to be friends with all her people,” the colonel declares at one point, and the ingenuous Temple, at only eight years old, believes him. Still, she wonders why England is at war with the empire’s own colonial subjects. Her grandfather complains, by way of an explanation, that Muslims don’t trade but rather plunder. “For thousands of years,” he blurts, “they’ve lived by plundering. They don’t seem to realize that they’d live much better if they planted crops and traded and became civilized.” Here, then, is the very argument expressed in *The Twilight Forest*, which dutifully applies it to Nigeria and the timber trade: the civilizing mission of British colonialism, and of the American-style capitalism that will soon replace it (and supplement the embedded European endeavors that Unilever’s efforts themselves epitomize), is predicated on the introduction of crops conducive to global trade.

Made in the waning days of British colonial rule in Nigeria, and partly for Western audiences reputedly in need of praise for their persistent efforts at re-colonization, *The Twilight Forest* merely alludes to the sun finally setting on the empire. By contrast, *Wee Willie Winkie* imagines the handover of managerial expertise from British soldiers (acting at the Crown’s behest) to American civilians (including little Shirley Temple, a prepubescent girl who represents the chipper, informal future of white rule). Colonial (and neocolonial) subjects must be forced—at gunpoint, if necessary—to plant, cultivate, and trade; anything else is mere “plundering.” Temple tries valiantly to convey as much to the Muslim freedom fighters and their chief, who capture her toward the end of the film. She carefully repeats her grandfather’s words, rehearsing his crude imperial logic: “The Queen wants to protect all her people and make them happy and rich!” The assembled freedom fighters roar with laughter. Agitated, Temple insists, “It’s true! All of it!” Again, her captors laugh. Still, this being a Hollywood fantasy, Temple is able to broker a rapprochement. The film ends with the triumph of “trade,” the reciprocal essence of which is so simple that even a child can effectively convey it.

The Twilight Forest will invert this intergenerational trajectory, purportedly conveying trade’s importance to children—infantilized Nigerians who must learn to replace sustainability (“plunder,” “waste”) with “development” (accession to Western extractive practices and trade controls). James E. Genova has written of the notion, so central to the “civilizing mission,” that

“Africans’ modernity was rooted in the fundamentally agricultural/peasant nature of their cultures.”²⁸ *The Twilight Forest* offers a curious twist on this dialectic of tradition and modernity: it depicts Africans as agents of climate change, yet their agency in this respect is a measure not of their modernity but of their “backwardness.” It is precisely by “doing nothing”—by letting forests grow according to nature’s own inscrutable designs—that they wreak environmental havoc. Africans, in other words, threaten planetary health through inaction—an inversion, perhaps, of today’s prevailing logic, wherein climate change, to the extent that it is recognized at all, is attributed to those who *act*—who intervene, disturb, and despoil. According to *The Twilight Forest*, nature, if left to its own devices, will simply destroy itself. It must be “tamed,” its trees felled and transported, including at the cost of the fertile topsoil. Genova stresses the colonialist idea that “the incorporation of aspects of [European] civilization ... would enable Africa to meaningfully contribute to the further enhancement of the human condition.”²⁹ Like colonial troops drafted into world wars, Africans are co-opted to the human struggle against nature.

If *The Twilight Forest* associates Africa with nature, it also defines this association in terms not of harmony and fertility but of discordance and rot. The problem lies in *how* Africans inhabit the land, and it is up to Unilever to oversee their rehabilitation. Their trees must be taken away from them, lest they decay; their lands must be depleted, lest they contribute to planetary deterioration. *The Twilight Forest* offers a quintessential example of what Genova describes as the basic project of colonial and colonial-approved films, which tend to posit intimate yet pitiable and remediable connections between Africans and the natural world: “Once those associations had been fixed, the European element was introduced, usually around some specific project or to locate a dilemma in need of resolution. The objectives or problems were cast across a wide spectrum encompassing conservation (of wildlife and land), facilitation of Western education, improvements in health, infrastructure development, political maturation, etc. The resolution to any situation centered on the coming together of Africans and Europeans in a manner whereby the outsider accepted the humanity of the indigenous people as well as the legitimacy of their culture, and the African embraced modernity as defined by the European. The narrative usually concluded with a harmonious movement into the future where only benefits awaited

28 James E. Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 60.

29 Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa*, 62.

both Europeans and Africans.³⁰ *The Twilight Forest* offers a particularly striking illustration of these tendencies, though it can scarcely be said to actively “humanize” indigenous populations or to legitimate their cultural practices. Genova quotes a Swiss firm’s 1957 application to the French colonial government as declaring that the “Europeans who live in Africa have a mission to accomplish and a program to complete. The conditions of life among the primitives subsisting in the interior of the territory justifies completely and morally this mission.”³¹ *The Twilight Forest* takes to ethical and climatological extremes such complaints about indigenous populations merely “subsisting in the interior,” ascribing to their lifestyle everything from Biblical conceptions of sloth to more modern complaints about land mismanagement. The film also attempts to lend weight to the idea, expressed in that same 1957 application, that Europeans have “made more useful the treasures held in the [African] forests or buried in the [African] desert.” Some foreign firms (including Hollywood companies with such works as MGM’s *Trader Horn* [W. S. Van Dyke, 1931] and RKO’s *Below the Sahara* [Armand Denis, 1953]) may have celebrated “the ageless life of eternal nature,” but Unilever favored a far darker portrait of nature left to rot, a victim of African inattention.

Indigenous forms of forest knowledge have long been misread—often willfully—by corporate interests committed to naturalizing their own systems of extraction and enrichment.³² When, in *The Twilight Forest*, Unilever complains that Africans have not “developed” their forests, the firm offers a deeply familiar imperialist self-justification, one that dates back at least to the doctrine of *terra nullius* (“empty land” or “no-man’s-land”) used to justify the Spanish colonial seizure of already-occupied territories in the New World.³³ Such misrepresentations have been difficult to dislodge, but progress is being made. The Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin, for instance, is now widely recognized for “putting the well-being of the [tribal] forest and [its] people ahead of profits and doing the exact opposite of commercial foresters” by felling trees that are sick and dying and harvesting only those

30 Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa*, 64.

31 Quoted in Genova, *Cinema and Development in West Africa*, 64.

32 James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savanna Mosaic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

33 T. Frederick Davis, “Ponce de Leon’s Second Voyage and Attempt to Colonize Florida,” *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (July 1935), 51–66 [55]; Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13; Pekka Hämäläinen, *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2022), 37.

that have fallen naturally.³⁴ Such centuries-old indigenous sustainability practices permit high-quality trees to grow and reproduce.³⁵ As a result, tribal forests tend to be highly rated for their biodiversity and resistance to climate change—hard-won victories for communities repeatedly subjected to modernization pressures. When the Menominee’s reservation was established in the middle of the nineteenth century, the United States government, anticipating some of the land-management methods of British colonialism in Nigeria, exhorted the tribe to clear the area’s trees for farming. But the Menominee people successfully resisted—and continue to resist—federal and market demands, favoring hand felling over modern logging methods. In the absence of such indigenous success stories (which must, of course, be constantly and carefully guarded), the forestry business is often solely responsible for woodland regeneration. As *The Twilight Forest* inadvertently indicates, the industry’s techniques of reforestation, if implemented at all, leave much to be desired and even prove counterproductive, as is the case with the post-clearcutting planting of a monoculture of combustible trees—a homogeneous patch of commercial, nonnative forest prone to wildfires and generally detrimental to biodiversity.³⁶

Given such negative consequences, it is striking to encounter the enthusiasm with which the American trade press once embraced Unilever’s rhetoric. One publication wrote that *The Twilight Forest* “emphasizes how [Unilever provides] the Ivory Coast-Nigeria area with education, experience, new skills, tools, machinery, trucks, ships, and roads. The undertaking means money for these African tribes and governments and needed lumber for the world.” The appraisal continued, “*Twilight Forest* is a wide-audience film and can be utilized by elementary through adult groups. It can be effectively correlated with study units in the areas of forestry lumbering, conservation, African area studies, economics, and world geography.” The film’s educational value was, for this particular reviewer, inextricable from its poetics. “The dynamic editing of the initial sequences seems to transport the viewer

34 Cara Buckley, “The Giving Forest,” *New York Times*, April 22, 2023, A1.

35 Gregg Mitman has documented Firestone’s felling of Liberian forests that were once home to the Kwa-speaking Bassa people. Prior to Firestone’s arrival, theirs was “a landscape managed to sustain a diversity of life” through selective chopping and burning. “Oil palm and cotton trees were left standing, a reflection of the integral part they played in the lives of some of Liberia’s indigenous peoples.” Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 84.

36 Claire Cameron, “We Thought We Were Saving the Planet, but We Were Planting a Time Bomb,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2023, SR5; Catrin Einhorn, “How Much Can Trees Fight Climate Change? Massively, but Not Alone, Study Finds,” *The New York Times*, November 13, 2023, A9.

to Africa,” marking *The Twilight Forest* as a kind of travelogue, a “virtual voyage” up the Ethiopie. It is no mere process film: “Dress, color, and rhythmic chanting blend together to set an effective tone ... The synchronized sound is outstanding, especially in the scenes showing the cutting down of the enormous mahogany. The blows of the multiple axemen and the quavering and falling of the old tree are very impressive.”³⁷ Lost in this appreciation of the film’s formal qualities is any sense of whether its arguments—especially regarding Unilever’s commitment to conservation—bear scrutiny. It would be up to the growing environmental movement to contest the claims of *The Twilight Forest* and other industrial films, and to draw global attention to the deleterious consequences of large-scale extractive practices.³⁸

Environmentalist Interventions

The speciousness of Unilever’s self-defense is demonstrated in the film work of the American environmentalist Harvey Richards, particularly *The Stump Makers* (1963) and *Timber Tigers* (1971), two short documentaries that, while centered on the West Coast of the United States, offer systematic critiques of the global timber trade. Formally, both films are nearly identical to *The Twilight Forest*, consisting as they do of documentary footage of logging operations supplemented by detailed voice-over narration. Ideologically, however, the two films depart dramatically from Unilever’s work, making clear the high ecological costs of extraction. *The Stump Makers* is particularly instructive in suggesting that, because “the last of America’s green forests are about gone,” the country’s timber companies (and the many markets, both foreign and domestic, that rely on them) will have to turn to the African continent to satisfy their insatiable needs. “The last of the nation’s commercially important old-growth saw logs fall before an army of modern machines,” the voice-over narrator (Richards himself) says as the image track shows what he describes (thus mirroring both the documentary prologue of *Trial by Trigger* and the entirety of *The Twilight Forest*). “What was once an apparently limitless expanse of virgin timberland will soon come to an end.” While “wood has built our nation,” its extraction has left behind little of value, and “we live in a land of shrinking open space.” Directly contradicting

37 Midgley, “Film Evaluations,” 724.

38 Gregg Mitman has written of Firestone’s corporate perspective that “the clear-cutting of Liberia’s rainforest represented not ecological violence, but the foundations of modern industrial development.” Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 87.

the ultimately triumphal historical claims of *Valley of the Giants* and *Trial by Trigger*, the narrator of *The Stump Makers* asserts that conservationists “fought a *losing* battle with the early timber barons” whose ruthlessness set the tone for the global timber trade. “‘Cut and get out’ has always been the cry of the industry,” motivating its constant movement from one space of extraction to another (as along the coast of West Africa in *The Twilight Forest*). Destructive logging leaves behind barren, “cut-over and burned-over lands.” Denuded of large old-growth trees, such lands are newly vulnerable to the elements. Careless logging practices damage important watersheds. Even before it is exposed to the drying effects of unaccustomed sunlight, the topsoil is harmed beyond repair by the massive machines that *The Twilight Forest* celebrates as diesel-fueled engines of modernity. “The chaos that is left behind” in extraction’s wake—the havoc that accompanies depletion—includes wildfires caused by the unwonted dryness and fed by the logging residue left to decompose on deforested land. For, contrary to the claims of *The Twilight Forest*, it is the global timber industry, not “lazy” indigenous populations, that leaves wood to rot, and that generates all manner of unused materials, besides.

The Stump Makers provides numerous glimpses of such profligacy, and of surface soils destroyed by machines. The companies responsible for such ruination claim, as Unilever does throughout *The Twilight Forest*, that they are practicing sustained-yield management, assiduously pursuing selective logging and partial replanting. Yet the narrator of *The Stump Makers* suggests that such phrases represent nothing more than “highly publicized window dressing”—so much hot air. In reality, massive logging operations, which gobble up unregulated private lands and increasingly penetrate public ones, not only “disfigure the face of the earth” but also fail to “return the land to even a semblance of its original beauty.” Whatever it professes, the global timber industry “does not plant enough seedlings to provide the slightest hope for the perpetual forests which play such an important part in their propaganda.” “Sustainability” and “conservation” are “little more than slogans.” Both concepts are plainly at odds with the “insatiable demand of the lumber industry,” but that industry is increasingly adept at public relations, as the widely distributed, immensely popular, and often poetic *Twilight Forest* attests.³⁹ While advertising itself as environmentally friendly,

39 The global timber trade, as it presents itself in *The Twilight Forest*, shares a certain style of propaganda with other extractive industries. In their account of oil capitalism in Nigeria, Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas note of Shell that it “employs a sophisticated array of damage-control experts, scenario planners, lobbyists, and spin doctors to present the image of a caring, thoughtful,

“an uncontrolled, predatory lumber industry” in fact quickens the pace of deforestation around the world, creating “barren and desert land,” including on the African continent. Dominated by a few large companies—including the Unilever whose size and planetary scope is celebrated in *The Twilight Forest*—the lumber industry has perfected public-relations techniques that “have deluded most of the people into believing there is no need for adequate legislation to conserve and restore our vanishing heritage.” And while it may bring prosperity to a particular area (like Sapele) where sawmills and distribution facilities are set up, such prosperity is partial and temporary. It lasts only as long as the mills remain active. The peripatetic character of the timber trade, a product of the capitalist drive to penetrate additional territories—to make fresh conquests, to break new ground—is also guaranteed, and compounded, by the depletion of the forests near which the mills are set up. Abandoning the areas that they have wrung dry, the timber companies effectively create ghost towns.

Made eight years later and based on Richards’ two-year survey of forest areas and their depletion by timber giants employing increasingly large machines, *Timber Tigers* begins by acknowledging the relation between genocide and extraction. Over an animated map of North America, the narrator (Dudley Knight this time) notes, “When the white man came to this continent, he found vast, magnificent stands of virgin timber.” He then “killed or evicted Indians from lands where they had lived in harmony with woods and wildlife for thousands of years.” This representative settler also, eventually, introduced “mechanical monsters” that facilitated the razing of

and socially responsible company to the outside world. Long before the issue of the environment became a topic of national discourse in Europe and the United States, and multinational oil firms were forced to adopt the veneer of environmentally friendly companies, Shell had elevated the concept of selling itself to the powerful conservationist lobby into an art form, devoting a considerable chunk of its budget to this effort over the years.” In the next chapter, I consider some of the cinematic expressions of this particular effort on the part of Shell and other oil majors. Here, however, I want merely to stress how Okonta and Douglas, in their critical examination of Shell, shed light on some of the key, self-exculpating features of Unilever’s *The Twilight Forest*, a prescient expression of “corporate social responsibility” designed to deflect attention away from the actual depredations of industrial logging. Because, as Okonta and Douglas concede, it is “not always easy to penetrate the elaborate ‘environmentally friendly’ façade erected by [such corporations’] green lobbyists and spin doctors [and documentary films] to the ogre that is polluting and despoiling the world’s fragile ecosystems,” Harvey Richards’ impassioned work—his decades-spanning cinematic activism—remains invaluable for its assistance in this regard. Indeed, it powerfully anticipates the scathing documentaries on resource extraction that director Glen Ellis and Catma Films made for British television in the 1990s, including *Heat of the Moment* (1992), *Hell in the Pacific* (1993), *The Drilling Fields* (1994), and *Delta Force* (1995). Okonta and Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 44, 63.

forests. The effects of such depletion are felt, the film insists, as far away as the African continent. North American forests may shrink, “but the demand for wood products expands.” *Timber Tigers* is able to show, from the vantage of the early 1970s, that the sunny predictions of *The Twilight Forest* have not come to pass. Yet the film hardly requires the historical perspective of its own moment of production. As the narrator observes, “From the beginning, the guideline of the lumber interests has been: ‘Let the ecological and social chips fall where they may.’ In their drive for quick profits, they gobbled up forests with reckless disregard for the consequences. The consequences have been an ecological disaster in the three primary elements of man’s natural environment: air, land, water.” The film furnishes visual evidence of floods, soil erosion, and other calamities that prefigure the paradox of the climate crisis as experienced in the twenty-first century. As the narrator puts it, ventriloquizing the lumber companies, “After us, the deluge *and* the desert!” Extreme forms of wetness and dryness coexist thanks to the destructive practices of the global timber industry. The extractive interdependence to which *The Twilight Forest* alludes, as in its references to oil-powered machines, only exacerbates the problem: petrocapi-talism encourages the production of “ever more enormous” devices—“metal claws and power saws”—to “devour” the natural environment. The BP film *Skyhook* (James Hill, 1958), shot in Papua New Guinea, focuses on such technological expansion, including the use of a special helicopter—the powerful rotorcraft of the title, what ENI’s later documentary *The People of Petroleum* (Gilbert Bovay, 1965) will refer to, poetically, as “the yellow dragonfly of the oilmen”—to bring equipment and supplies to a manmade clearing in the Papuan jungle. It also resembles *The Twilight Forest* in a montage sequence of Papuan workers chopping down massive trees, but it rather gruesomely exceeds its predecessor in showing the logs falling on helpless animals, part of the broader process of displacement and habitat destruction that climaxes in the use of a massive bulldozer to, as the voice-over narrator puts it, “push[] and tear[] at tree stumps and boulders.” *Timber Tigers* duplicates such imagery and even echoes such utterances, thus demonstrating the self-damning character of earlier industrial films and associated forms of boosterism. As Richards reveals, the largest corporations and their subsidiaries, having “logged out” various regions of North America and left behind “economically distressed areas and ghost towns,” simply “move on to ever new fields of exploitation” (which is precisely what *Skyhook* celebrates in its triumphal account of oil companies penetrating ever more “inaccessible sites on the map, with strange names”—areas located in “isolated corners [of] the remote places of our world”). They also, conveniently, “own timber lands, mills, and

distribution facilities in Europe, Africa, and South America. Can they be stopped? The historic record seems to say they can't—not while private profit can run like a bulldozer over the public interest." *Timber Tigers* ends on this sobering note, undermining the determined optimism of such films as *Valley of the Giants* and *Trial by Trigger*, and rendering patently absurd the conservationist premise of *The Twilight Forest*.

The nocturnal metaphors that power Unilever's film seem especially ominous in retrospect. Given the subsequent pace of deforestation, terms like "twilight land," which the narrator uses to characterize southern Nigeria, seem less fanciful than perhaps intended—less like poetic references to the density of the rainforest, of a closed-canopy arrangement that permits no sun to touch the floor below, than simple descriptions of the final years of such density, the autumn of environmental health. Produced in the same year and in nearby regions of Yorubaland, *Fincho*, to which I turn in the next section, shares with *The Twilight Forest* several significant representational techniques, though it was made in the service of a separate concession and in a docudramatic style by a man who would come to regret its role in the climate crisis. Both films emphasize the introduction of heavy machinery and the rise of technologized processes of extraction in ways that anticipate the 1960 documentary *Nigeria: The Making of a Nation*. Sponsored by the UK government's Central Office of Information, the latter celebrates the transfer of industrial innovations from Britain to newly independent Nigeria, where modern automated cotton gins, coupled with higher-quality crops generated through extensive scientific research, yield mountains of highly exportable fiber. New technologies, the film makes clear, are rendering Nigeria's natural resources more "acceptable in world markets." The idea is illustrated in a sequence that reveals how, in the words of the film's voice-over narrator, "a well-known United Kingdom firm set up a large mill, and Nigerians soon learned to handle the new and intricate machinery." Though it shares the ultimately celebratory thrust of both *The Twilight Forest* and *Nigeria: The Making of a Nation*, *Fincho* is unique in its dramatization of the relationship between automation and job loss. Threatened with redundancy as a direct result of the transplantation of heavy machinery from metropole to colony, the young men of Yorubaland form a powerful political collective that threatens the stability of white-owned enterprise. Much like the exactly contemporaneous *The Mark of the Hawk*, *Fincho* depicts the disruptive potential of trade unionism but eventually redirects that potential toward "cooperation" with neocolonial forces. The project of taming labor—of disciplining the African masses—smoothly pivots from the coal mines of Enugu to the vanishing forests of Owo.

Accommodating Mistah Finch

In 1955, an itinerant filmmaker named Sam Zebba, having shot footage in the Amazon rainforest, turned his attentions to the timber of Nigeria. Born in Latvia but raised from the age of nine in Mandatory Palestine, Zebba had relatives involved in the international timber trade. Those relatives, Boris and Rena Behrman, were Latvian immigrants to Britain, where their firm Finch & Company was headquartered. Begun in Latvia, the Behrmans' timber business acquired a Nigerian concession by the early 1950s, at which point they began recording 8mm color footage of "[g]iant trees ... being felled in the jungle, and hundreds of bare-handed African workers ... pulling the heavy trunks through the mud."⁴⁰ An experienced maker of short films (including of the Amazon jungle), Zebba aspired to move into the production of features, and he sensed that Nigeria might provide just such an opportunity. In 1955, he flew to Lagos, equipped with a 16mm Arriflex camera, portable sound-recording equipment, "and a reasonable amount of Kodachrome color film."⁴¹ He then made his way through Ibadan and Benin City before ending up in Owo, where Finch & Company had a major concession. "Although I examined everything I saw as a potential focal point for the film's story," Zebba later claimed, "I soon realized that neither the harsh colonial exploitation of the natives, nor the social hierarchy of traditional African rulers, would be my anchor. It was the tree-felling enterprise itself, and the impact this had on those caught in its advance."⁴² That the enterprise was run by his relatives surely factored into this decision. The Behrmans granted Zebba unprecedented access to their Nigerian operations, allowing him not only to film the felling of trees and the transportation of timber through the country's rough roads and down its tranquil waterways, but also to dramatize—and fictionalize—the expatriates' own lives. European employers of Owo's indigenes, the Behrmans oversaw an extractive enterprise that was fast altering Nigeria's natural landscapes, depleting its forests, establishing roads for the transportation of timber, and installing all manner of equipment at the foot of the Yoruba Hills.

Fincho views its corporate sponsor as an agent of social change in Nigeria, one whose paternal hand—sometimes soft, sometimes stern—fashions cosmopolitan subjects out of the alleged torpor of indigenous tradition.⁴³

40 Sam Zebba, *Aspects of My Life: Selected Images* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2013), 102–103.

41 Zebba, *Aspects of My Life*, 103.

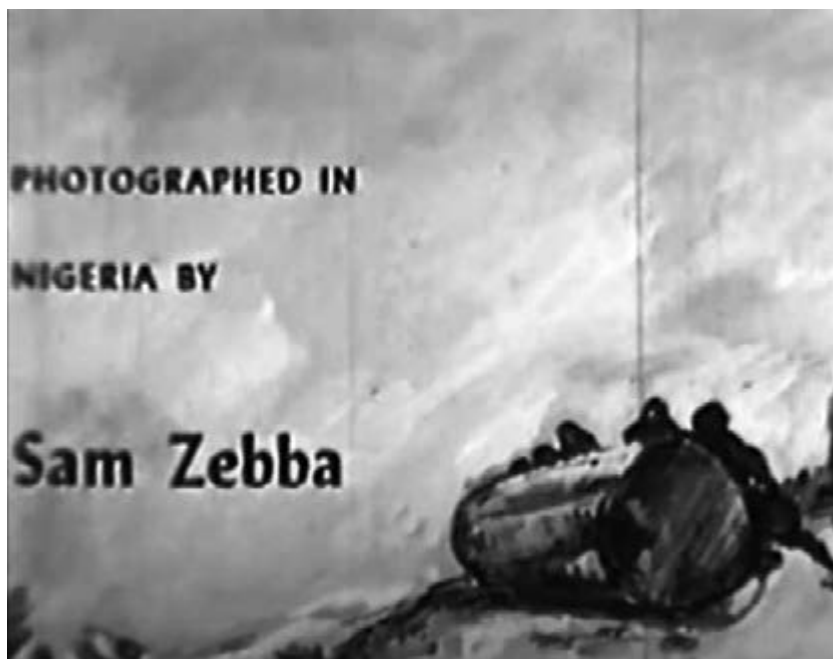
42 Zebba, *Aspects of My Life*, 104.

43 For more on this process, see Tsika, "Soft Power Cinema."



Fincho.

Fincho thus echoes *The Twilight Forest* in calling for the modernization of the African interior, an active process viewed, in both films, as a principled rejoinder to “traditional” inactivity. The harvesting of timber is emblematic of modernity in more ways than one. An increasingly mechanized operation reliant on powerful machines of extraction and transportation, it is also a transformative approach to the natural world and, as such, previously unknown to indigenous populations, whose “natural” preference for “letting well enough alone” is the curious cultural obstacle that Finch & Company, like Unilever, must overcome. *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* might be seen as cinematic expressions of the missionary zeal that characterized extractive capitalism’s midcentury incursions into the African interior—invasions that, in neocolonial fashion, proceeded with persuasive tools other than canon and constitution. Shown internally to European employees of both corporations, the films were intended primarily to promote a kind of workplace pride—a triumphal appreciation of what industry could achieve in cultural, political, economic, and environmental terms. Exhibited to African audiences, however, the films were meant to change minds. Where *Fincho* departs from the exactly contemporaneous *Twilight Forest* is in its elaborate dramatization of cultural transformation. In contrast to Unilever’s largely sober, observational documentary, *Fincho* is a work



Zebba's credit.

of docufiction that emotionalizes the arrival of modern logging methods in remote Owo.

The film opens with a special introduction from the American superstar Harry Belafonte. Shot in southern California after Zebba had returned to his post as an instructor at UCLA (whose facilities he requisitioned for the completion of *Fincho*), the prologue suggests an extension of Belafonte's role in Fox's 1957 *Island in the Sun*, which he had just completed for producer Darryl F. Zanuck and director Robert Rossen. In the Fox film, Belafonte's Caribbean trade unionist promotes an interracial program of economic modernization. In *Fincho*, Belafonte, playing himself but reciting a script penned by Zebba, offers similar claims about the transracial, transcontinental significance of logging, an extractive process that capitalism has perfected, and that promises to bring African timber to every corner of the globe. The scene unfolds in the spartan confines of a windowless room. On the wall behind Belafonte hang an African tribal mask as well as a felt outline of the African continent. Belafonte sits on a draped stool, stares into the camera, and delivers an instructional lecture on the global relevance of *Fincho*. Explaining what makes the film unique, Belafonte points out, "It was not filmed with professional actors or studio technicians but rather by the simple folk of a small Nigerian village." Turning to the (rough) outline



Harry Belafonte contemplates the African continent.

of the African continent—the rather pitiful scrap of fabric pinned to the wall behind him—he adds, “So small is that village, and so insignificant its name, I doubt if you could find it on your map. Nevertheless, it is there.” The issue of framing—of spatialization—is thus raised at the outset. In promising that Owo is “there” despite its absence from the typical world map, Belafonte positions the film as an attempt to correct the myopia of standard cartographies by including the Nigerian village in the globalizing calculations of extractive capitalism. “As you will see,” he continues, “life in an African village is very much different from our own—so different, as a matter of fact, that some of us might even say, ‘Well, what have the problems of an African village got to do with us?’ Well, it has a great deal to do with us.” Cartographic inclusion is, then, insufficient on its own. It must be supplemented with assertions of Nigeria’s relevance to the rest of the world—to “us” (in the Global North, the generalized site from which Belafonte is understood to be speaking). *Fincho* depicts, Belafonte adds, “a problem which in one way or another exists everywhere.” Not only is Owo deserving of a place on the world map—a cartographic marker of its existence. It also stands in synecdochal relation to the globe.

Fincho’s production began with a more modest geographic proposition—namely, that an entire film crew could easily reach inland Owo

via coastal Lagos. It was while tracing this particular path to the interior that the film's producers first encountered Patrick Akponu, a charismatic young conductor on the Lagos-Owo bus line. The handsome, energetic Akponu appeared to embody the complex combination of regionalism and cosmopolitanism that the filmmakers planned to depict in *Fincho*. Ferrying passengers from port to forest, he was an attractive avatar of social and spatial mobility, efficiently connecting the excitement of Lagos to the relative tranquility of Owo. There were, however, limits to Akponu's capacity to project Nigeria's modernity, at least in the anxious view of foreign filmmakers unaccustomed to certain Nigerian accents and, in any case, unable to record sound on location in the forests of Yorubaland. Planning to dub all the dialogue anyway, they cast Akponu more for his look—more for his visible physicality, his handsomeness and musculature—than for his voice. Akponu's title character, named not only after Finch & Company but also after the firm's white timber extractor, Mr. Finch (identified in the credits by the Nigerian Pidgin designation "Mistah Finch" and played by the British CEO of Finch & Company's Nigerian concession, Gordon Parry-Holroyd), would be voiced by Zebba, who provided a sort of all-purpose "African" accent that English-speaking audiences could easily understand.⁴⁴

The film is primarily about the expansion of Finch & Company, and it focuses on the disruptive introduction of elaborate timber-extraction equipment. Therein lies the drama, for no sooner are local laborers (headed by Akponu's *Fincho*) convinced of the benefits of formal employment than they are forced out through automation. Rendered redundant despite their accession to the corporation and its conception of wage labor, they grow bitter. *Fincho*, then, is a docudrama, at once a sober account of the business of felling, an advertisement for a particular extractive enterprise, and a morality play about the need, amid rapid modernization, to balance automation and job creation.

The film opens with a sequence that evokes Vautier's *Afrique 50*. Zebba's camera pans over dense forests, eventually finding children at play in a river that fulfills many of their basic needs. As *Fincho*'s voice-over narration explains, "My village may be small, and far away, but my people ... found in it all that a man could want in life." The past tense hints at loss or transformation, complicating the camera's view of outdoor recreation. As in Vautier's film, nature's affordances are soon revealed to be limited, inadequate. Children may exult in them, eagerly splashing around in the

44 Zebba, *Aspects of My Life*, 107.



Patrick Akponu in *Fincho*.

Niger (in *Afrique 50*) and the Owo (in *Fincho*), but that is perhaps because they are not yet aware of what their provincial lives are missing. While *Afrique 50* centers on colonial expropriation and other forms of imperial violence that effectively deprive indigenes, *Fincho*, as an industrial film, takes a different tack, asserting the need for rural Nigerians to “become modern”—to embrace the latest technologies and actively participate in the “taming” of nature. “Things did not change much in our village,” laments *Fincho* on the soundtrack. He quotes what he claims is a local proverb but is really Zebba’s own invention: “The ways of our people are as old as the earth itself.” Presenting rural Nigerians as homologous with the natural world that they unquestioningly inhabit, *Fincho* introduces its central claim: that resource extraction requires social change. The alteration of the natural world (here, the depletion of Yorubaland’s dense forests) will precipitate, and increasingly depend on, a dramatic alteration of Yoruba life. Earlier encounters with the wider world were not nearly as transformative, *Fincho* wryly recalls. European missionaries, for instance, merely added Christianity to an already eclectic polytheistic mix, and none of those men remained in the area for very long, anyway. By contrast, new technologies of extraction



Fincho surveys Owo.

stand to exert permanent effects on the physical and social landscapes of Yorubaland. Nigerian life—not least of all for the young, aspirational Fincho—will never be the same.

Early on, Fincho and his girlfriend are seen swimming in a river. Frolicking and then lying wet on the riverbank, they proceed to discuss her dowry and how he might pay it. Fincho proposes going to work for the European-owned timber company, a new employer in Owo. “White men—all they want is ivory, gold, the riches of the earth, even slaves,” the girlfriend sneers. “That was a long time ago,” Fincho insists, to which his girlfriend replies, “The white man has not changed.” Fincho’s protests continue in voice-over: “Our village had neither gold nor ivory nor riches of the earth. All we had was jungle—thick, dark, treacherous jungle, useless to any man, black or white.” This is the dismissive language of *The Twilight Forest*, transferred from that film’s English-accented narrator—the BBC-style voice of Unilever—to the Nigerian Fincho. Where the one commentator, with his Received Pronunciation, uses third-person pronouns to highlight the “backwardness” of indigenous populations and bemoan their neglect of the natural world, the other, with his “African” accent, identifies with those who wrongly believe

their own lands to be empty, devoid of commercial value. He implicates himself—via Zebba’s ventriloquism—in their ignorance.

If Owo’s forests seem “useless,” then, it is only to Fincho and his fellow Africans, unaware as they are of the woodland wealth that surrounds them; it is they who are responsible for its status as *terra nullius*. Fincho is here recalling such ignorance, reflecting on it in voice-over while the image track shows him fishing with his sister. In the next scene, the white man—Mr. Finch himself, the protagonist’s namesake and the head of the timber concession—arrives by car. He has come, he says, “from downriver,” and he is ready to meet with the local chief. Seated before the latter, he announces, “My name is Finch. I work for a timber company. I’m a man who knows the forest very well. Around your village, there are many good trees worth much money, but they are doing no good to anyone just standing there. Now, my company would fell these trees and sell them and make money. If you give us permission to fell, we will pay your village royalty rates customary in other villages down the river.” An elders’ council convenes to discuss the proposal. A hearty debate ensues. Some of the elders believe that logging will simply destroy their land, immediately and irrevocably. Others counter that forest clearance is necessary to create more farmland. Present for the debate, Mr. Finch promises in Pidgin, “As we fell ‘em, so we go pay you.” The chief decides that the proposal—rent for trees—is agreeable. Papers are promptly drawn up for him to sign.

There remains, however, the matter of labor to discuss. As Mr. Finch puts it, “we need men to help us do this work.” The elders angrily refuse, saying that the village’s men cannot be spared; they are needed for other tasks, with deeper roots in the area. (The scene recalls the moment in *Palaver* in which the British Mark meets with a traditional ruler to request additional labor for the tin mines on the Jos Plateau.) The brave young Fincho, a budding individualist, is the first to break with convention and go to work for the timber company; in the process, he inspires other young men to do the same. As he explains in voice-over, some traditions must be allowed to die, while others offer useable insight into the timber industry that has come to transform Yorubaland. For one of the village’s traditions “taught us not to weep for our dead, but to celebrate their departure,” as Fincho explains over shots of an elaborate burial ceremony. It follows that there is no need to weep over felled trees, no need to grieve the loss of forests. Extraction is thus “indigenized” in *Fincho*, rendered isomorphic with “native” logic.

Before becoming a true “timber man” and acquiring the nickname that links him to the concession, Fincho joins his friends to climb trees during the coconut harvest. The images of their activities—of the grace and speed



Growing pains: Fincho contemplates automation.

with which they reach the dangling coconuts—evoke the visual rhetoric of ethnographic cinema. They are meant to further illustrate the idea that the indigenous population has historically related to their trees only in an extremely limited, indeed “primitive,” way. As in *The Twilight Forest*, it is up to the Europeans to teach the natives about their own lands. “In fact,” Fincho’s voice-over notes, “it was Mistah Finch who told us how many square miles of forest our village had, and that was something neither the schoolmaster nor even the chief had known before.” The image track shows Mr. Finch introducing costly instruments that he uses to carefully measure the terrain. It is Mr. Finch, the white man in his well-pressed modern attire, who hacks his way into the wilderness, clearing brush and other impediments with a massive machete. “Mistah Finch did not hesitate to enter parts of the bush we had never touched before,” marvels his namesake on the soundtrack. “Deeper and deeper we cut our way into the jungle ... In the end, every tree was measured and marked for felling.” This is precisely the sort of clear-cutting comprehensiveness that *The Twilight Forest* communicates through animated maps. *Fincho*, in giving voice to an imagined Nigerian man, expresses its sense of Western cultural superiority in the invented,

ventriloquized form of African self-critique: “In Africa we have a proverb: never do today what you can do tomorrow. I do not think that Mistah familiar with this saying!” The British Mr. Finch embodies the speed of capitalist enterprise, the impatience and general restlessness of the neocolonial project. Admiring him, the young, impressionable Fincho starts to wear fine Western clothes and soon becomes the envy of the entire village.

Fincho combines documentary and fiction in ways traceable to the much earlier *Palaver*, with its melodramatic framework and glimpses of real tin fields. Sequences showing actual work—the laborious chopping and felling of giant trees—closely resemble their equivalents in *The Twilight Forest* (which, unlike *Fincho*, contains no dramatizations). A montage of trees falling, and of more and more Nigerians joining the work of deforestation, strikes a particularly ominous note, however. Afterward, Fincho reflects over a close-up of his forlorn face: “Yes, together we destroyed our forest, and together we surrendered our freedom.” Yet industrial modernity—the sublimity of large and intricate machines—is sufficiently distracting: great ships, equipped with towering cranes, eventually come to collect the logs. “The ship was very big,” Fincho recalls, still excited by its size. “Our timber was actually lifted out of the water and carried through the air to its proper place aboard. It must have taken hundreds of men to pull the timber up so quickly. Of course, I myself did not go aboard, and so I was unable to discover the truth.” It turns out that automation was responsible for such efficiency. Its perfection brings job loss to Owo—to men who have only recently become acquainted with wage labor. Mr. Finch promptly fires many (though not his namesake), explaining in Pidgin, “Big machine don come. One machine it go do hundred men work.” In the next scene, Fincho watches as trees are bulldozed, the big machine, operated by a single man, doing the work of twenty or more. Enraged (though he himself remains employed, a measure of Mr. Finch’s paternal affection for him), he gathers a group of angry young men. Wielding sticks, the men march on Finch’s compound, where the European is living well with his wife and children. “I have no work for you now!” Mr. Finch shouts at the assembled masses, forgoing Pidgin for this curt and very British dismissal. An irate Fincho threatens destruction of the machines that have replaced the workers. Hearing this, the European launches into a defense of automation: “The machine is here to help man, not to destroy his labor. We want the machines to do the work, yes. But we need men to keep the machines running—men with brains, not sticks. Drivers, mechanics, operators. I will teach you how to use these machines so they will work for *you*. And you will earn more money.” Fincho initially resists the offer. But, as he recalls in voice-over, “the sound of engines refused to



Gordon Parry-Holyrod's Mr. Finch explains automation.

stop." Their sheer constancy is sufficient to change minds—to guarantee submission. Once activated, the hum of industry cannot easily be turned off.

Shots of Mr. Finch sitting atop a fast-moving Caterpillar indicate the ease with which the white man controls his great machines. "The schoolmaster was right: the outside world *was* coming closer to us every day," continues Fincho's narration. "Our village would never be the same. *Africa* would never be the same." Here, the film invokes the values of an emergent Yoruba modernity in which mechanization is embraced rather than shunned. Fincho must be reminded that the Yoruba have never feared the incorporation of new tools, have never resisted "development." The white man's Caterpillar, however fearsome it may seem, is just another instrument. Fincho's own maturation requires him to relinquish his narrow fixation on manual labor and learn how to "master the new machines," using his brains and not just his brawn. But the entire community must accept the need to cut down trees on an industrial scale. Soon, a local sawmill is set up. Partly owned by the community, it provides jobs to hundreds of men who happily acquire the necessary technical skills. *Fincho* ends, like *The Twilight Forest*, with an emphasis on the outward movement of goods—on the flow of logs from

Owo to the coast, and from the ports of Nigeria to Western Europe and the United States. Finch & Company, the title character points out, “bought most of our timber.” Owo’s trees have become London’s floors.

Timber Can’t Wait

If Flora Gomes opens *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* (1991) with the image of a timber truck taking Africa’s freshly felled trees through the city and toward the sea (and international shipping lanes), his *Tree of Blood* is an impassioned answer to *The Twilight Forest* and the corporately convenient Euro-American notion that Africans are inattentive stewards of their woodlands. Manthia Diawara notes that the film, done “in the style of an African folk take, is set in the forest village of Amanha Lundju, a place where the birth of children is celebrated by the planting of a tree. The trees are considered spiritual twins. But for every tree planted the rapacious state destroys many more for firewood and lumber.”⁴⁵ As in *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, which has a disillusioned former revolutionary saying in the cold, programmed voice of the newly corporatized that “timber can’t wait” because “timber means money, and money’s the weapon now,” *Tree of Blood* sets extraction in the context of neocolonial collaboration between Africa and the West. As in his previous films, Gomes does not shy away from the implications of the postcolony’s complicity with foreign capital (and thus with the mechanisms of its own, continued domination). As he told an interviewer, “Given the absence of any [non-extractive] industry or technology, natural resources are an essential source of riches in Guinea-Bissau. [But] the relationship between Man and Nature goes beyond simple economic considerations.” *Tree of Blood* is thus, in Gomes’s own words, “a parable about the need for a balanced evolution in the relationship between man and earth, about the construction of a future based in the deep roots of a culture that still has a lot to contribute to a more humane world.”⁴⁶ Fittingly, forest protection is the crux of the matter for Gomes.

The forest’s meanings are multiple, its relationship to cinematic modernity difficult to pin down. Paul Richards has cited cinema’s role in fostering a kind of forest consciousness among far-flung populations. In his study

45 Manthia Diawara, *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 281.

46 Quoted in Diawara, *African Film*, 281.

of the Sierra Leone Civil War, Richards draws attention to the forested districts of the country's eastern and southern provinces, where marginalized insurgents developed advanced forms of bushcraft inspired, in part, by the Hollywood film *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982).⁴⁷ Shot on location in the Fraser Valley, a thickly forested region in northwestern Washington State, *First Blood* features a protagonist—Sylvester Stallone's Rambo, a disgruntled veteran of the war in Vietnam—whose social exclusion leads him to hide out in the woods, equipped with all manner of carefully honed combat skills. Richards describes the popularity of *First Blood* among young Sierra Leoneans who, occupying their own country's forested diamond districts, repeatedly watched the film in generator-powered video parlors. The woodland warfare in which Rambo excels proved eminently recognizable to the Sierra Leonean insurgents who effectively replicated it. Yet the Pacific Northwest and Sierra Leone are linked by more than just dense forests, as Richards points out. Both are marked, albeit to differing degrees and with discrepant effects, by a receding state that has relinquished its responsibility for the provision of social services. As in Gomes's *Mortu Nega* (1988), the dense forest is at once a convenient hiding place and a target of extractive capital. Insurgents (whether the American Rambo or the members of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front) are ejected only for extraction to recommence. Deforestation and other modes of depletion mean not only enrichment for multinationals and their state partners but also the elimination of the possibility of bushcraft-as-resistance. It hardly matters if the latter is an unintended outcome. Extraction simply and inevitably compounds dislocation.

Nollywood, for its part, has frequently depicted Nigeria's forests as sources of horror, building on a particular Nigerian literary tradition (traceable to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, with its woodland zones of prohibition) as well as on Igbo mythology. In her work on Nollywood's "moral geographies," the art historian Nomusa Makhubu has called attention to this cultural equation between forests and "evil," which, in her reading, only underscores the industry's "dissociation from the local."⁴⁸ The dense forests of film and literature do not actually exist in contemporary Nigeria, and not simply

47 Paul Richards, "Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone," in *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, Second Edition, ed. Roy Richard Grinker, Stephen C. Lubkemann, and Christopher B. Steiner (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010), 543–554.

48 Nomusa Makhubu, "Charting Moral Geographies: Nollywood and the Concept of the Nation," in *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation: Nollywood and National Narration*, ed. James Tar Tsaaior and Françoise Ugochukwu (Abuja: Adonis & Abbey, 2017), 241–256 [244, 253].

because of the supernatural creatures said to dwell in them. Deforestation has rendered these spaces doubly fanciful while serving to connect Nigeria (albeit negatively from an environmental perspective) to other parts of the world where tree cover has similarly been lost. Yet even as location shooting outside urban centers showcases some of the natural splendor that remains despite the best efforts of the global timber industry, melodramatic narratives draw on familiar associations between thick forests and frightening spirits. Evil woodland areas abound in Nollywood, with numerous film titles telegraphing their horrors: *The Forest of the Dark Secret* (Franklin Chinedum Nwoko, 2018), shot outside Asaba, in the wilds of Delta State; *Surviving the Evil Forest of Abunde Yul Edochie* (Ugezu J. Ugezu, 2013), shot in the woods of Nkanu West, in Enugu State; *My First Excursion to the Evil Forest* (Ilochi Olisaemeka aka Mr. Man Alone, 2017), shot in the hills of Enugwu Ukwu; and so on. In all such films, the forests of Igboland are spaces of sacrifice, dumping grounds “alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness” (as Achebe puts it in *Things Fall Apart*).⁴⁹ They are, in many instances, places where, according to custom, newborn twins are left to die. (This murderous superstition is resisted in Odion P. Agboh’s *Twins of the Rainforest* [1998] as well as in the more recent *The Twins-Killing Forests* [Matthew Uzukwu, 2021], a historical epic about the Scottish missionary Mary Slessor and her work among the Efik.) Even Tecu Benson’s *The Senator* (2003), a trenchant depiction of Nigerian politics, features an evil forest in the family history of a central character, who learns, much to his dismay, that vengeful creditors once exiled his grandfather to the wicked woodland zone as punishment for his inability to pay his debts. There, the pathetic debtor was simply swallowed up. (Decades later, his descendants fight over access to the forest.) Though it draws on Igbo mythology, Ilochi Olisaemeka’s *My First Excursion to the Evil Forest* also depicts the revivification of alluvial mining as a kind of zombie activity driven by slave labor. Shot in and around the open pits and sandy streams of hilly Enugwu Ukwu, the film forges a powerful link between the “bad bush”—the evil forest of Igbo lore—and modern extractive industry.

In Yoruba tradition, forests are also the domains of kings and other powerful community leaders, a reality reflected in any number of films from southwestern Nigeria. (Yoruba literature does, however, feature its own share of spectral woodlands, starting with D. O. Fagunwa’s *Forest of a Thousand Demons*, which Wole Soyinka translated into English in the late 1960s, three decades after the book’s initial publication.) In Tunde Kelani’s Yoruba-language *The Land is the Lord’s* (1993), two men conspire to sell a

49 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009 [1958]), 86.

portion of ancestral land to a petrol company that has plans to construct a filling station. Speaking through a worldly intermediary, the gods assert their ownership of the land. A venal chief dismisses them as “nothing but fiction. *We* are the gods ... The spot is perfect for a filling station. Any god that trespasses will choke on the fumes.” What the blasphemous chief does not mention is that if deities can succumb to gasoline exposure, then mere mortals—those living and working around the filling station—surely will, as well. Still, in an echo of *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, the local king has absorbed the oil company’s claims about the need to clear the forest, to make commercial use of “neglected” lands and transform *terra nullius* into a space of capital. “The forest,” the king reasons after digging has commenced, “was just lying there, unproductive.” With *The Land is the Lord’s*, Kelani had wanted to “focus on environmental conservation,” as the director later recalled to Jonathan Haynes. His film is both a reprise, via pernicious figures like the chief and the king, and a repudiation of *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*; it both communicates and condemns—indeed punishes, in show-stopping Nollywood fashion—their shared extractive logic. “Our remaining forests and rivers were protected by taboos,” Kelani told Haynes, “and in an era of cultural vacuum, they seem to be disappearing and giving way to housing estates and filling stations, the rivers polluted and dying everywhere.”⁵⁰ In *The Land is the Lord’s*, the spiritual realm, accessed through the Ifa divination system, is a source of insight into the depredations of unchecked commercial enterprise. It also supplements the negative environmental impacts of extraction (which here include deforestation and air pollution) with elaborate punishments of its own. In more secular Nigerian films, such calamities are not unfamiliar. Arie and Chuko Esiri’s *Eyimofe* indirectly acknowledges deforestation when the title character, having lost his sister and two nephews to carbon monoxide poisoning (they “choke on the fumes” produced by a bad back-up generator), visits a morgue and learns of the prohibitively high cost of wooden caskets. Nigerian ebony, which has all but run out, is twice as expensive as Nigerian mahogany—an asymmetry with deep roots in the country’s economic life.

Human activities have long shaped West Africa’s ecological zones. The Ashanti Empire was, according to the ecological historian James L. A. Webb, “committed to a truly massive clearance of rainforest.”⁵¹ Using slave labor

50 Jonathan Haynes, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 119.

51 James L. A. Webb, Jr., “Ecology and Culture in West Africa,” in *Themes in West Africa’s History*, ed. Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 33–51 [44].

to effect a significant ecological transformation, the empire replaced and precluded the hunting and gathering that had previously characterized human life in the territories under its control. Even pre-colonial forms of export agriculture, involving commodities from cotton to peanuts to cocoa, wreaked ecological havoc, routinely degrading soils and generally depleting lands in savannah, rainforest, and woodland zones.⁵² Ignoring or discrediting such historical realities, in keeping with the broader denial of the agency of colonized populations (subjects declared helpless can hardly be said to have actively converted entire biomes), *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* re-inscribe subaltern powerlessness. Contrary to the claims of both films, however, it was not “native inaction” that led to the degradation of West Africa’s lands but rather the opposite (which is certainly not to say that no African communities ever pursued conservation). In an attempt to succinctly explain the histories of ecological transformation into which modern industrial practices were actively intervening, the makers of *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* simply fell back on familiar notions of primitivism, of indigenous indolence and passivity, of *terra nullius* and the need for “development.” Their approach was, of course, part and parcel of imperial logic. As Webb notes, colonialists habitually identified a “lack of initiative” among the autochthonous populations they encountered, whose “primitive ecological practices” they either dismissed or failed to recognize. “[P]resuming that they had ecological knowledge superior to that of West Africans with centuries of accumulated experience,” Europeans in commercial and colonial service “prescribed an intensification” of extractive activities, “to be led either by market forces or by coercion.”⁵³ Ignoring or disdaining local wisdom was a way of aggrandizing, and of normalizing, the latest industrial methods of forest clearance. Rather than implying that indigenous Africans had no effect on the lands they inhabited (as in contemporary modes of liberal condescension that romanticize “native” populations as congenitally “green”), *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* argue that such individuals had the *wrong* effect.⁵⁴ Both films posit, in other words, a longstanding autochthonous tendency to ruin rainforest and woodland zones through negligence and apathy.

While it certainly shared a general colonial attitude of moral and intellectual superiority, the argument advanced in both *Fincho* and *The*

52 Webb, “Ecology and Culture in West Africa,” 46.

53 Webb, “Ecology and Culture in West Africa,” 47.

54 For more on the fantasy of “green” Africa and its relationship to the imperial imaginary, see Guillaume Blanc, *The Invention of Green Colonialism*, translated by Helen Morrison (Medford, MA: Polity, 2022). See also Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

Twilight Forest deviated from colonial administrative logic in revealing ways. Specifically, it ignored colonial objections to human land-use practices deemed ecologically deleterious and thus hindrances to colonial agricultural ambitions. “The forest wealth of Nigeria has been very little exploited,” lamented the British Foreign Office in 1920. “The only export of any importance is mahogany.” The report continued, “The export of ebony is now negligible, though large quantities are still available. The supply has, however, been largely exhausted in the drainage areas of the Old Calabar and Cross Rivers, from which the bulk of the South Nigerian ebony used to be obtained.” The Foreign Office noted, “Wholesale destruction of forests in order to clear the ground for agriculture has been the constant practice of the natives.”⁵⁵ What such reports invariably failed to mention were the colonial policies, including the use of forced labor and the banning of hunting, that ensured that Africans would have to grow their own food in order to survive.⁵⁶ Increasingly concerned with the problem of forest loss, the colonial state proposed forms of forest governance that clashed with local traditions (and desperate survival methods) as well as with European corporate ambitions. Colonial authorities called for “forestry legislation, designed to prevent the destruction of forests and to facilitate the creation of reserves.”⁵⁷ While *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* both place the blame for depletion and despoliation squarely on indigenous populations, they refrain from identifying African practices of forest clearance, and they only show “native communities” constructing the occasional dugout canoe and fashioning non-timber forest products like twine and thatch. Again, the “traditional” problem that the two films identify is not an improper or otherwise counterproductive practice of rainforest and woodland clearance but, instead, the complete absence of felling.

To sell the idea that Nigerian biomes were in need of industrial logging, the makers of *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, operating with private sponsorship and under corporate oversight in the late colonial period, were obliged to falsely suggest that Nigerians themselves had simply steered clear of their own trees for too long, allowing the wood to rot. Thus while their position was clearly continuous with the general colonial “belief that West Africans were responsible for environmental degradation,” it added novel dimensions and a fresh vocabulary to the question of how best to “manage” Africa’s natural

55 British Foreign Office, *Nigeria: Issue 94 of Handbooks Prepared Under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920), 54.

56 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 176, 197, 199.

57 British Foreign Office, *Nigeria*, 25.

resources.⁵⁸ It also, in a crucial sense, flew in the face of colonial goals that centered on the restoration of despoiled lands and the welfare of agricultural communities, even as it sought to echo the colonial state's commitment to sustainable forest management.⁵⁹ While such ostensible conservationism reflected the colonial state's fear of the social and political instability that environmental degradation could engender, it also conflicted with the ambitions of mining companies dedicated to continuous extraction.⁶⁰ The relentless expansion of tin mining in the early twentieth century meant considerable tree loss in the already sparsely forested Jos Plateau region. Looking back on this period of extractive capitalism, one tin miner recalled in 1961 that "the only trees left standing on the Plateau were those which refused to burn."⁶¹ (In 1976, Robert Bates offered a similar observation about Zambia, saying, "Where but a little over fifty years ago forests once stood, there now stand copper mines.")⁶² What *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* do not mention is the fact that by the 1940s the colonial state had set up forest reserves in direct response to the obvious depredations of private companies, which threatened agricultural interests, social equilibrium, and even the legitimacy of colonial rule itself.⁶³

As the administrative authority of the colonial state receded in the 1950s, however, colonial ecological beliefs began to be replaced—or more openly contested—by the corporatist rhetoric of films like *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, which envisioned, and advanced, a distinctly neocolonial future for Nigeria. In this unfettered era to come, companies like Unilever and Finch & Company would need to pay no more than mere lip service to the importance of sustainability. Africanist scholarship has emphasized how Euro-American technocrats in charge of resource extraction generally "had to break from their colonial predecessors and become more enlightened,

58 Webb, "Ecology and Culture in West Africa," 48.

59 For a cinematic elaboration of these goals, see *Towards Wholeness* (Peter Bucknall, 1952), a feature-length docudrama that addresses land conservation in colonial Nigeria (but was produced by the Church Missionary Overseas Film Unit, which gives conservation a distinctly Christian spin).

60 Gavin Bridge and Tomas Fredriksen, "Order out of Chaos: Resources, Hazards, and the Production of a Tin-Mining Economy in Northern Nigeria in the Early Twentieth Century," *Environment and History* 18, no. 3 (August 2012), 367–394 [391]. See also Blanc, *The Invention of Green Colonialism*.

61 A. H. Kirk-Greene, "Kitty Cooke Looks Back: A Personal Mining Memoir," *Nigerian Field* 36 (1961); quoted in Bridge and Fredriksen, "Order out of Chaos," 389.

62 Quoted in James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2.

63 Bridge and Fredriksen, "Order out of Chaos," 391–392.

rational, and technologically sophisticated.” In the process, such neocolonialists “rather euphemistically referred to [local populations] as ‘less developed,’ suggesting that, following a script of modernization, Africans could be transformed through their interaction with technology.”⁶⁴ *Fincho*, in particular, traces what Webb, writing about the late colonial management of the Niger River’s floodplains, identifies as a post-1945 “shift[] from the control of labor to more overtly technological solutions.” Yet the film, in its staging of Mr. Finch’s deferential meeting with a local chief and the subsequent convening of the elders’ council, also represents an elaborate denial of the fact that neocolonial technocrats (as Webb tells it) “worked ‘from the top down’ and did not attempt to elicit responses, reactions, and suggestions from the villagers who would be most directly affected by [their] interference.”⁶⁵ Actual Nigerians are voiceless in both *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*—perhaps most insidiously so in the former, which skillfully ventriloquizes them (a fact that is not necessarily available to those lacking knowledge of the film’s production; indeed, the “naïve” viewer might think that he is hearing Fincho’s voice, or at least Patrick Akponu’s, and not that of director Sam Zebba impersonating a Nigerian). Both films, and their technocratic underpinnings, also mark the transition from colonialism’s civilizing discourses to the paradigms of development, modernization, and self-determination that increasingly characterized the post-1945 period. In *Fincho*, the strategic inclusion of the elders’ council indicates an ideological commitment to such paradigms, rather than simply a means of denying or deflecting attention from the corporate takeover of African lands. By implying that the forest concessions of Finch & Company are not unilateral acquisitions, the film expresses its developmental credentials. At the same time, it complicates them—undermines its ostensible commitment to democratic values—through the presentation of the Nigerian Fincho as an exceptional figure vested with the potential to achieve full inclusion in the modern technological world. This proto-neoliberal ethic—this sense of Fincho as having to choose between sloth and self-advancement—lends the film a distinctly American quality clearly attributable to writer-director

64 Stephan F. Miescher, Peter J. Bloom, and Takyiwaa Manuh, “Introduction,” in *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa*, ed. Peter J. Bloom, Stephan F. Miescher, and Takyiwaa Manuh (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1–16

[9]. See also *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

65 Webb, “Ecology and Culture in West Africa,” 48.

Sam Zebba, who professed a keen appreciation for the United States, his adopted home. *Fincho* thus belongs to and expresses “a moment of historical transformation that dislodged colonial mercantile interests in favor of US capital accumulation.”⁶⁶ Like Lloyd Young’s production of *The Mark of the Hawk*, which situates this transformation amid the collieries of Enugu, *Fincho* presents the forests of Yorubaland as spaces of privatized globalization where perpetual consumption is not only possible but also preferable both to colonial restraint and indigenous inaction.

In his autobiography, Zebba, looking back on his work in Nigeria, expresses considerable ambivalence. For all the pride he takes in *Fincho* (his first and only feature film), he is not blind to the social and environmental destruction that it indexes: “Writing this account more than fifty years after the event, I would be hard put to defend [*Fincho*’s] point of view vehemently today. Deplorably, the price of deforestation, and the resulting ills to society and to the planet, has proven to be much higher than at first conceived, yet sadly the process goes on as before”⁶⁷ *Fincho* would be Zebba’s calling card. It got him hired as second-unit director on Warner Bros.’ lavish intercontinental production of Fred Zinnemann’s *The Nun’s Story* (1959), much of which was filmed on location in Central Africa during the first three months of 1958.⁶⁸ Working under the esteemed Zinnemann (reportedly an admirer of *Fincho*), Zebba shot extensive footage of the Congo River (which, in *The Nun’s Story*, transports the titular sister to and from a mission hospital located “deep in the bush”). Included in the finished film, such footage, showing the river as glimpsed from above via helicopter, suggests an extension of *Fincho*’s visual attention to Nigeria’s vital waterways. In his autobiography, Zebba writes of the Niger and the Congo, the two great African rivers along which he worked, indicating that he filmed them in a manner meant to highlight their similarities in terms both of limnology and political economy.⁶⁹ Viewed together, *Fincho* and *The Nun’s Story* suggest important geographical equivalences between separate European colonies, the one

66 Miescher, Bloom, and Manuh, “Introduction,” 4.

67 Zebba, *Aspects of My Life*, 102. See also Zebba’s article “Casting and Directing in Primitive Societies,” which was published shortly after the shooting of *Fincho* in 1956. Sam Zebba, “Casting and Directing in Primitive Societies,” *The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1956): 154–66.

68 For a comprehensive account of the making of *The Nun’s Story*, see Daniel Steinhart, “Postwar Hollywood, 1945–1967: Foreign Location Shooting,” in *Hollywood on Location: An Industry History*, ed. Joshua Gleich and Lawrence Webb (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 101–123 [112–119].

69 Zebba, *Aspects of My Life*, 123–125.

British, the other Belgian. But the two films also imply more elemental connections that exceed historically specific forms of governance. Indeed, the Niger's resemblance to the Congo, as captured by the peripatetic Zebba, anticipates Kenneth Gyang's comparative approach to the Calabar and the Drammen in the New Nollywood film *The Lost Café* (2017). The relational perspective that Zebba advanced in the 1950s does not belong exclusively to the imperial imagination, nor is it a unique property of corporate industrial film. It flourishes in alternative contexts marked by specifically postcolonial sensibilities in which globally shared issues find compelling expression.

5. Bad Fuel

Oil Consciousness from Hollywood to Nollywood

Abstract: This chapter explores affinities between cinema and oil. The former's representation of the latter has played an important role in shaping both oil consciousness and oil economies the world over. By the time the commercial exploitation of oil commenced in Oloibiri in January 1956, Western cinema had established a familiar set of strategies for addressing oil citizens, modeling collaborations between multinational oil corporations and state power, and presenting some of the possibilities of postcolonial oil governance. Petrocapitalism makes certain forms of cultural production possible while militating against others. But Nollywood has responded to such histories from distinctly Nigerian perspectives, contesting familiar claims about the country's petroleum riches. This chapter includes close analyses of some of the industry's many depictions of the politics of oil.

Keywords: Niger Delta; petroleum; Shell; Chevron; fossil fuels; environmentalism

Born in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, director Jeta Amata long wanted to make a film about petroculturalism and its complex effects on his country. The initial result of his efforts, 2011's *Black Gold*, so dissatisfied the obsessive Amata that, following the film's splashy premiere, he reshot much of it, while retaining its cross-cultural core, its frequent shifts between Los Angeles and Warri—between Southern California and South-South Nigeria. Released in 2012, *Black November*—the product of Amata's costly revisions—features, like its predecessor, a “mixed” cast of Nollywood and Hollywood actors (with Mickey Rourke, Kim Basinger, and Anne Heche replacing Eric Roberts, Tom Sizemore, Billy Zane, and Michael Madsen). The petrocultures that Amata depicts are truly global, but they are far from uniform. In *Black November*, Americans can ignore the smoothly

operating oil infrastructures that surround them—that quietly carry the refined products that power their homes and fuel their cars. Oil derricks are artfully camouflaged throughout Southern California, where oil spills are seemingly unthinkable some forty years after the Santa Barbara disaster of 1969. In Warri, however, Nigerians are hyperconscious of the oil pipelines that are always bursting, flooding the wetlands with poisonous crude. At one point in *Black November*, Amata dramatizes an experience that Niger Deltans know only too well, lending it a tragic dimension also taken from reality and based on an incident memorialized by the poet Ogaga Ifowodo. A village's residents are told that a nearby pipeline has ruptured once again. It is as if the announcement triggers muscle memory among the many villagers who hear it: they grab buckets and within seconds are out collecting the spurting oil, determined not so much to stanch its flow as to exploit the sudden availability of a practical resource that is typically out of their reach. When the authorities arrive and order them to stop, one woman protests that it is better to pirate fuel for cooking than to allow the wetlands to be contaminated. The leaks are rarely fixed in a timely fashion, so why not spare the rivers and streams through collective theft? The authorities are unmoved. One policeman has the bad sense to light a cigarette, and the entire area goes up in flames—an explosive illustration of the compound problem of oil pollution, which affects air as well as water and earth. In the background, gas flaring goes on as before, a constant source of contamination. Offering a vivid illustration of Ifowodo's poem "Jese," about a 1998 pipeline explosion that killed over a thousand people, Amata uses the considerable resources of New Nollywood—a big budget, state-of-the-art digital cameras and effects—to bring to the screen a signal disaster in Nigeria's history.¹

Back in Los Angeles, heavily armed Nigerian militants take hostages at a well-trafficked underpass—a symbolic location for their staging of an oil protest. Their goal is both specific and general. They want to free Ebiere (Mbong Amata), a young woman scheduled to be hanged in Warri for the crime of peacefully resisting petrocapitalism. (Ebiere's actions, and the trumped-up charges that lead to her imprisonment and death sentence, strongly link her to Ken Saro-Wiwa, the writer and activist executed along with eight others by Nigeria's military government in November 1995—the "black November" of Amata's title.)² But the militants also want to draw global attention to the ongoing pollution of the Niger Delta region, and they

1 Ogaga Ifowodo, "Jese," in *The Oil Lamp* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 7.

2 Roy Doron and Toyin Falola, *Ken Saro-Wiwa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016).

have captured an American reporter (played by Basinger) through whose professional equipment they plan to broadcast their impassioned critiques of petroculturalism.

Amata's ecoterrorists seek to reposition the experience of pipeline explosions, recentring the violence of extraction on downtown Los Angeles, and so, with its location shooting, does *Black November* itself. Amata brings orange fireballs to Hollywood's own streets, staging the chaos of liquid fuel with some of Hollywood's own stars. By piping the fiery problem of petroculturalism from Warri to Los Angeles, Amata powerfully counters the American tendency to "offshore" it to places like Nigeria. An action film, *Black November* accelerates "oil's slow violence"³ at one of the major sites of its strategic mystification, a place where derricks are camouflaged to support "modern" designs and to meet metronormative expectations. If Amata's Nigerian characters contest the international unevenness of petromodern gains, he himself, as a filmmaker, rejects the formal unevenness so frequently mapped onto it. Which is to say that *Black November*, a Nollywood production, looks like a Michael Bay film. Moving back and forth between Nigeria and the United States, it explodes the binary of visibility and invisibility, slowness and acceleration, latency and conspicuousness, that so often governs the global distribution of petromodernity. "One out of every five Americans uses Nigerian oil," one of the militants (played by Wyclef Jean) tells the television reporter's global audience, while another, adopting a more accusatory tone and pointing to the inadequacy of oil infrastructure in Nigeria, screams, "We export crude oil to you people only to import refined oil!" This is a familiar complaint of the Global South—for the producers of raw materials, for whom such substances must be fashioned into consumable commodities by the technologically advanced Global North. ("Bad fuel," unrefined and bought on the black market, plays a pivotal, indeed fatal, role in Arie and Chuko Esiri's 2020 film *Eyimofe*: acquired in a desperate attempt to generate electrical power, it courses through a faulty generator and kills a woman and her two children.) In *Black November*, the militant's claims are, of course, conspicuously missing from the process films that celebrate the extraction of Nigeria's natural resources, and that also—conveniently, strategically—omit the fact that Africans must, if they can, buy back refined versions of their own riches. In Amata's melodrama, the target of the complaint is the fictional (and bluntly named) Western

3 Graeme Macdonald, "Containing Oil: The Pipeline in Petroculture," in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, ed. by Imre Szeman, Sheena Wilson, and Adam Carlson (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 36–77 [64].

Oil, which has been extracting Nigeria's petroleum for decades. (If Ebieri is the film's stand-in for Ken Saro-Wiwa, Western Oil is its substitute for Shell, the Anglo-Dutch multinational most responsible for the devastation of the Niger Delta region.) On his way to the airport, with plans to take a private jet to Nigeria, one Western executive (played by Rourke) is caught in the ambush. Flashbacks show him responding to Ebieri's agitations from his well-appointed office in Los Angeles. At one point, he explains that he was actually born in Nigeria, to an American father who ran a tin mine in Kaduna. With this revelation, *Black November* links oil prospecting to other forms of extractive industry in Nigeria, suggesting a complex history of interconnections and dependencies, one wholly in keeping with the country's actual experiences.

Amata's film is also about the entwinement of Nigeria and the United States. It stresses the latter's reliance on Nigerian crude (and alludes to its erstwhile reliance on Nigerian tin) while also indicating some of the cultural affinities between the two countries, despite obvious economic and biopolitical differences. (Amata's sobering opening text reads, "NIGERIA. World's 5th largest producer of oil. Continuous oil spills make it the most environmentally devastated land in the world. Average life expectancy: 47.") If *Black November* is about international interdependence, it also, with its diverse cast and far-flung shooting locations, embodies it. Amata's reflections on petroculturalism resonate with Stephanie LeMenager's argument that "oil itself is a medium that fundamentally supports all media forms."⁴ For jet fuel powers the Western executive's many trips between Nigeria and the United States, so too did it power Amata's. The film itself simply wouldn't exist without the petromodernity that is its subject. The extravagance of its intercontinental production is in a long, heavily capitalized, carbon-intensive cinematic tradition.

This chapter explores such complex affinities between cinema and oil. The former's representation of the latter has played an important role in shaping both oil consciousness and oil economies all around the world. Hollywood, for its part, had a robust tradition of depicting oil production—and, of course, of aggressively exporting such depictions—long before Nigeria became a leading petrostate. By the time the commercial exploitation of oil commenced in Oloibiri in January 1956, American cinema had established a familiar set of strategies for addressing oil citizens, modeling collaborations between multinational oil corporations and state power, and presenting

4 Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

some of the possibilities for postcolonial oil governance. Hollywood's own oil consciousness is thus a matter as much of screen representations as of political-economic practices. Nollywood, too, has been implicated in such petroculturalism. Particular cultural practices are traceable to Nigeria's oil wealth, as Karin Barber, Andrew Apter, and Omolade Adunbi have shown.⁵ Simply put, petroculturalism makes certain forms of cultural production possible while militating against others.

What Michael Watts calls Nigeria's "oil complex" is a function of discursive as much as material conditions.⁶ It is inextricably linked not merely to Nigeria's oil deposits but also to the media that attempt to make practical, intellectual, and emotional sense of them. Nigeria's cinematic fortunes have long been inseparable from those of its oil economy. If a boom in the latter sector enables a renaissance of sorts in the former (as when, flush with oil money, Nigeria's federal government lavished funds on the production and marketing of the epic film *Shehu Umar* [Adamu Halilu, 1976], shot on expensive 35mm stock), then so too does a bust spell mutual disaster. Witness, for instance, the causal relationship between the precipitous drop in oil revenues in the 1980s and the cancellation of those Hollywood contracts that, with their provisioning of films, projection equipment, and even air-conditioning services, had made Nigeria's hardtop cinemas viable in the first place.⁷ Indeed, the loss of spaces of film exhibition—the closing and repurposing of movie theaters across Nigeria—cannot be fully understood outside of the volatile framework of petroculturalism.⁸ Chief Eddie Ugbomah's aptly titled *Oil Doom* (1981) addresses not only the economic fallout from dropping oil prices but also the negative social, political, cultural, and ecological consequences even of oil-fueled boom times. Ugbomah's film was made in the middle of a three-year decline in Nigerian oil exports—a period of considerable shock for the country's economy. With its fatalistic title, it points to the ultimate powerlessness of those in the grip of oil. Following Ugbomah's lead (but earning only the chief's scorn), numerous

5 Karin Barber, "Popular Reactions to the Petro-Naira," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 20, no. 3 (September 1982): 431–450; Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Omolade Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015).

6 Michael Watts, "Antinomies of Community: Some Thoughts on Geography, Resources and Empire," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29, no. 2 (June 2004): 195–216. See also Michael Watts, "Righteous Oil? Human Rights, the Oil Complex and Corporate Social Responsibility," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 30 (2005): 373–407.

7 Noah Tsika, *Cinematic Independence: Constructing the Big Screen in Nigeria* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

8 "Nigeria-US Trade Declines," *Newswatch* 1, no. 18 (June 3, 1985), 33.

Nollywood films dramatize the petrocultures that Nigerians know all too well, often extending them into the industry's own outré representational territory.⁹ Yet such films should also be understood in relation not merely to their celluloid predecessors, such as Ugbomah's *Oil Doom*, but also to the Hollywood dramas and Shell documentaries that for decades lent Nigerians a sense of what oil wealth might mean.

Western Oil

Since as early as the 1930s, American films—especially Westerns—have been screened nontheatrically as part of the welfare programs of various Africa-based extractive operations. Hollywood has therefore played a more pronounced role in the sphere of extraction—in resource-driven geopolitics—than is typically admitted. Indeed, the itineraries of oil, silver, tin, copper, coltan, lithium, and other resources central to screen media—their geographic movements from Africa to the wider world and back again, including in the form of cinema and associated media—should inform any investigation of Hollywood's Nigerian entanglements. Along with mining firms, rubber companies made extensive use of film to attract, instruct, and entertain employees on the African continent, and they established important precedents on which oil prospectors would build in the 1950s.¹⁰ By the 1930s, American rubber interests in Liberia (a de facto US protectorate) were crucial to the circulation of Hollywood films in “Anglophone” West African markets, including Ghana and Nigeria. “There are no [Liberian] laws giving other countries preference over American films,” reported an American trade paper in 1938, “nor are there any quota or contingent laws in effect or contemplated. Further, there is no legislation which might reduce or prevent American distribution of motion pictures.” No censorship was discovered. No films—American or otherwise—were known to have ever been rejected by the authorities, including the barons of extraction who understood cinema to be an indispensable social lubricant and important labor tool.¹¹

9 For more on Ugbomah's antipathy toward Nollywood, see Onookome Okome, “Nollywood and Its Critics,” in *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, ed. Mahir Şaul and Ralph A. Austen (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 26–40 [33].

10 Gregg Mitman, *Empire of Rubber: Firestone's Scramble for Land and Power in Liberia* (New York: The New Press, 2021), 128, 181, 202.

11 “Liberia,” *The 1938 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures* (1938), 1237–1238.

British films represented Hollywood's most significant competition in Liberia. In the late 1930s, American films made up roughly half of all films screened there, while the other half consisted of British productions. Extractive interdependence came into play even here: Firestone's rubber plantations created significant demand for both entertainment and instruction, including in the form of industrial films about tin mining and oil prospecting.¹² Such films not only complicate the idea that cinema's cultivation of "petro-literacy" is a paradoxical process that depends upon, and reproduces, oil's invisibility, sustaining its latency in consumer goods (plastics, cars) and in the global circulation of objects and people.¹³ They also give the lie to the familiar ecocritical complaint about petroleum's conspicuous cultural absence, an objection that dates at least to Amitav Ghosh's 1992 article "Petrofiction" and that enjoyed a renewed prominence with the publication of Peter Hitchcock's 2010 essay "Oil in an American Imaginary," in which Hitchcock, echoing Ghosh, wonders why culture continuously "misses" (or deliberately avoids) the manifold importance of oil despite the substance's sheer ubiquity.¹⁴ But industrial films—those objects and emblems of institutional functionality—are also cultural forms, experienced as popular attractions by consumers primed to directly encounter representations of oil. Onookome Okome, Brian Larkin, and other Africanists have emphasized the widespread social acceptance of a mobile pedagogic cinema enjoyed as entertainment by large and often voluntary audiences across twentieth-century Africa.¹⁵ In addressing such audiences, films about petroleum not only documented prospecting and extraction. They also modeled everyday oil uses (and oil objects, including plastics) for communities largely unconcerned with the kinds of distinctions between pedagogy and entertainment, documentary and fiction, and state

12 Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 181–183, 200–202.

13 Michael Malouf, "Behind the Closet Door: Pixar and Petro-Literacy," in *Petrocultures*, 138–161.

14 Amitav Ghosh, "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel," *The New Republic* (March 2, 1992): 29–34; Peter Hitchcock, "Oil in an American Imaginary," *New Formations* 69 (Summer 2010): 81–97.

15 Onookome Okome, "The Context of Film Production in Nigeria: The Colonial Heritage," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 24, no. 2–3 (Fall 1996): 42–62; Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Aaron Windel, "Mass Education, Cooperation, and the 'African Mind,'" in *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa*, ed. Peter J. Bloom, Stephan F. Miescher, and Takiyiwaa Manuh (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 89–111. Tom Rice, in *Films for the Colonies*, documents the British Empire's recognition (and celebration) of the extreme popularity of its overtly instructional mobile cinema units. Tom Rice, *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

forms and Hollywood fantasies that the discipline of film studies would so dogmatically impose, with early theoretical interventions premised on the imagined irrelevance of overtly instructional fare in the face of a hegemonic escapism.¹⁶

Colonial and linguistic affinities notwithstanding, Hollywood was not about to let British films—entertaining or otherwise—dominate the Liberian market. Thanks in large part to Firestone’s entrenchment, the industry understood Liberia to be an American outpost, a sort of frontier town that, as such, mirrored the “wild” yet enterprising settings of American Westerns (while also anticipating Michael Watts’ description of the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico as twinned “oil frontiers”).¹⁷ “American films are very well received, in fact there is a decided preference for them,” read one US report, pointing to the “keen interest for movies” in interwar Liberia, where the BER Motion Picture Company “from time to time secured old films from America and exhibited them in Monrovia.” At the time, Liberia lacked conventional movie theaters. No commercial screening venues were wired for sound, making reissued silent films, including Westerns, the only viable options for the paying public. For most of these ticketed showings, a dance hall known as the Pavillion, in Monrovia, was utilized.¹⁸ Reportedly, the “shows were well attended and even though the pictures were silent fourth-rate ones, cut, and of rare old vintage, they were met with great enthusiasm and applause.” At the time, American rubber interests in Liberia maintained two 35mm sound projectors for their private use. To compete with them—to draw out the leading Firestone employees and others accustomed to “quality” films—the Liberian Entertainments Company was formed in 1938. It immediately won the right to distribute films (both documentary shorts and fiction features) to Ghana and Nigeria, and it had designs on Sierra Leone, as well.¹⁹ Throughout West Africa, it would supplement the initiatives of Firestone and other extractive interests that

16 It is not my intention to suggest that instructional films about oil were necessarily more popular than other films about extraction. As I point out in the previous chapter, *The Twilight Forest*, Unilever’s film about the timber industry, was remarkably popular in Nigeria. Screened via mobile film units throughout the country, translated into a range of indigenous languages by local commentators, it was a major attraction despite (or because of) its institutional provenance and instructional character.

17 Michael Watts, “Oil Frontiers: The Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico,” in *Oil Culture*, ed. Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 189–210.

18 Gregg Mitman has documented the later use of the Firestone Overseas Club, located on the company’s 80,000-acre plantation, for film screenings. Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 181–183.

19 “Liberia,” *The 1938 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures* (1938), 1237–1238.

used cinema to both educate and entertain their employees.²⁰ Industrial films, such as Firestone's own *Medicine in the Tropics* (1948, remade in 1957), *Liberia—Africa's Only Republic* (1949), *Pacemakers and Champions* (1955), *A Changing Liberia* (1956), and *African Rhythms* (1957), circulated throughout the subregion, forging links between geographic locations and extractive industries. The lessons that Firestone had learned in Liberia, including about tropical diseases and the management of local populations, could be—and were—applied to Shell's operations in Nigeria.²¹

Like Firestone in Monrovia, Shell and other oil interests maintained their own film libraries. Important clearinghouses, these local film libraries were central to the strategic planning of oil companies. Via such film exchanges, which they owned and controlled, the oil majors could disseminate carefully selected motion pictures intended to cultivate appreciation for resource extraction. Some of these films were donated by Hollywood studios or had simply fallen into the public domain; others were rented (including from the Liberian Entertainments Company and other regional outfits) on a temporary basis and at carefully negotiated prices; and still others were produced "in-house" by the oil majors themselves, including in partnership with dedicated film companies. All of them were deployed as part of the oil majors' efforts to normalize their presence in Nigeria, as film-friendly Firestone had surely normalized its own presence in Liberia. Since the early 1960s, the Shell-BP Film Library, with branches in Lagos and Port Harcourt, has provided oil-themed films to Nigerian audiences.²² (Shell-BP's administrative center was located in Port Harcourt, where one of its refineries was producing over one million tons of oil annually by the early 1960s.)²³ Overtly instructional shorts, such as *Birth of an Oil Field* (Duke Goldstone, 1949), produced by George Pal in collaboration with Shell, and the Ethyl Corporation's *Oil for Everybody* (1947), served as clear examples of institutional propaganda and commercial advertising. Other works of nonfiction, such as Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948), sponsored by Standard Oil, and Shell's own *Shellarama*, shot

20 Nathan D. Golden, *Review of Foreign Film Markets During 1937* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Commerce, 1938), 186.

21 Throughout this chapter, I use "Shell" as shorthand for the Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd.

22 "Nigeria," *The 1963 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures* (1963), 662–63; Tsika, *Cinematic Independence*, 37–38.

23 "Nigeria: Marketing Prize of Africa," *Printers' Ink*, January 13, 1961, 53, Record Group 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Rockefeller Brothers Fund (hereafter RBF), Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York. For more on Shell-BP's administrative center in Port Harcourt, see James Bamberg, *British Petroleum and Global Oil, 1950–1975: The Challenge of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 73.

on location in the Niger Delta in the mid-1960s, occupied a more ambiguous middle ground, offering a less direct, more poetic form of promotion. Fictional Westerns, from Warner Bros.' *Flowing Gold* (Alfred E. Green, 1940) to the independent production *Tulsa* (Stuart Heisler, 1949), could, with their star-studded casts and conspicuous commitment to "entertainment value," conceivably distract from specifically institutional objectives, though these films, too, typically included documentary-style prologues and other elements that signaled certain pedagogic goals in keeping with those of the oil companies, much as Universal's *Pittsburgh* (Lewis Seiler, 1942), starring John Wayne, had managed to include extensive "scientific" instruction on how to understand coal and its uses.²⁴

Scholars have increasingly explored cinema's relationship to petroleum. Celluloid is itself a petroleum by-product, as Marina Dahlquist and Patrick Vonderau note. Their pathbreaking account of "the historical relation between cinema and petroculture" shows how moving images participated in the establishment of certain energy regimes in the twentieth century.²⁵ Dahlquist and Vonderau propose "petroleum extraction as a new analytical lens" through which to revisit the pedagogic and institutional utility of a range of films.²⁶ Their interventions, and those of the contributors to their edited collection *Petrocinema: Sponsored Film and the Oil Industry*, raise important questions about the roles that moving images have played in the formation of petrostates. Brian R. Jacobson has made similar claims about "corporate films that recounted oil's world-making ambitions and sought to invest audiences with oil-centric worldviews." Building on the insights of Matthew T. Huber, Stephanie LeMenager, and others who have written on the cultures of oil, Jacobson argues that film "did more than just reveal [a] new world" of petromodernity but also "helped create it."²⁷ "Working in

24 *Pittsburgh's* cast of characters includes a scientist (played by Frank Craven) who periodically explains coal's properties, enumerates coal's derivatives, and charts coal's futures, including via didactic voice-over narration. Neither fully absorbed into the film's melodrama nor a strictly segregated instructional element, the scientist is the characterological conduit of a kind of coal documentary that plays out within the star-studded fiction. Writing about an earlier period in film history, Jennifer Lynn Peterson dubs this style "instructive entertainment." Jennifer Lynn Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 2.

25 Marina Dahlquist and Patrick Vonderau, "Introduction," in *Petrocinema: Sponsored Film and the Oil Industry*, ed. Marina Dahlquist and Patrick Vonderau (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 1–11 [2].

26 Dahlquist and Vonderau, "Introduction," 5.

27 Matthew T. Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); LeMenager, *Living Oil*. See also *Oil Culture*, ed. Ross Barrett and Daniel

an energetic feedback loop, film and oil, the last century's most powerful media, co-constituted the world we have today," he writes.²⁸ Examining some of the "new oil worlds" of the twentieth century—the concession and drilling sites, superhighways, and undersea zones of exploration—Jacobson convincingly implicates cinema in their creation and perpetuation. He identifies a particular petro-logic whereby "film became more than just an add-on to the corporate project; it became part and parcel of oil's world-defining work."²⁹ "Oil," he argues, "powered both cinema and its own search; cinema powered the idea, shared with the oil industry, that the world was there to be captured and remade in its image."³⁰ Mona Damluji's work focuses on the relationship between moving images and oil prospecting in the Middle East, while James Ferguson has proposed "seeing like an oil company" in "neoliberal Africa."³¹ Rudmer Canjels, for his part, zeroes in on Shell to offer important perspectives on how film production and oil prospecting operated in tandem in late colonial and post-independence Nigeria.³² Shell's cinematic efforts, like those of Unilever with *The Twilight Forest*, were widely distributed and immensely popular. Seen by Nigerian as well as international audiences, they were indispensable in shaping the company's public image and ensuring its ongoing operations in the Niger Delta, whose mangroves, swamps, and tropical forests it had long since penetrated. Canjels provides a history of Shell's Nigerian film unit, which the company established in Lagos in 1959, and which would survive for the

Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, ed. Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017); *Cold Water Oil: Offshore Petroleum Cultures*, ed. Fiona Polack and Danine Farquharson (London: Routledge, 2021); Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*.

28 Brian R. Jacobson, "Prospecting: Cinema and the Exploration of Extraction," in *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice*, ed. James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati (New York: Routledge, 2021), 280–294 [281].

29 Jacobson, "Prospecting," 284, 292. See also Rachel Webb Jekanowski, "Dispatches from Two Cold Water Oil Cultures: Norway and Newfoundland and Labrador," in *Cold Water Oil*.

30 Jacobson, "Prospecting," 285. See also Brenda Longfellow, "Extreme Oil and the Perils of Cinematic Practice," in *Petrocultures*, 27–35.

31 Mona Damluji, "The Image World of Middle Eastern Oil," in *Subterranean Estates: Life Worlds of Oil and Gas*, ed. Hannah Appel, Arthur Mason and Michael Watts (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 147–164; Mona Damluji, "The Oil City in Focus: The Cinematic Spaces of Abadan in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's Persian Story," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 75–88; James Ferguson, "Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005): 377–382.

32 Rudmer Canjels, "Creating Partners in Progress: Shell Communicating Oil during Nigeria's Independence," in *Petrocinema*, 208–224.

next four years. This was, Canjels makes clear, a self-contained unit that shot extensive footage on location in Nigeria. (Postproduction, including the recording of voice-over commentaries, generally took place in London.) Yet Shell's cinematic efforts long outlasted this particular unit. By 1965, Shell was collaborating with the Cinerama Corporation to produce, in Cinerama, the industrial film *Shellarama* (Richard Cawston, 1965), a visually stunning account of how Nigerian oil is located, pumped, processed into gasoline and high-quality diesel, and used to power the automobiles of the world. The spectacular *Shellarama*, which was seen by tens of millions of people by the end of 1965, and which enjoyed a substantial nontheatrical afterlife via reduction prints, lent a distinctly Hollywoodian flair to the exploitation of Nigeria's hydrocarbon riches.³³

If the country's petroleum frontier seemed familiar to global audiences, it was partly because Shell had deliberately drawn on the representational repertoire of Hollywood studios, with their longstanding attention to petroculturalism. As with their depictions of the timber trade, the major studios had established particular norms—a certain narrative grammar—for oil drilling. Not even Shell could fully escape the shadow of Hollywood films about the extraction of petroleum, and, indeed, for all its specifically Griersonian artistic and pedagogic ambitions, it did not seem to want to. Anticipating Shell's film work, Warner Bros.' *Flowing Gold* (Alfred E. Green, 1940) opens with a rolling text that reads, "OIL! Black, liquid gold flowing from the earth ...! OIL! Stored by Nature a million years ago—bringing to man a new civilization! OIL! Black gold, locked deep in the earth, has challenged man's imagination. Man took up the challenge and sank steel shafts to tap the reservoirs of this strange power ...*flowing gold*." The film explores the colonizing drive of America's oil drillers, who, having exhausted their country's own reserves, must turn to outlets overseas. (This obvious repetition of the central thrust of Warner Bros.' timber films is its own expression of extractive interdependence: the studio's self-plagiarizing efficiency is inextricable from the actual operations of globalizing industries that in fact mimicked one another as their economies overlapped.)³⁴ After

33 "SHELLARAMA," *Monthly Film Bulletin* (London), January 1, 1965, 141. For more on the film, see Tsika, *Cinematic Independence*.

34 The career of the prominent Nigerian businessman Chief Francis Edo-Osagie offers an illustration of this specific resource connection—that between timber and petroleum—as it developed between the 1940s and the 1960s. A key player in the timber business in the emergent oil areas of Igboland, Edo-Osagie became a member of the board of directors of the Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria while continuing to export wood. After consulting with British timber brokers in Abonnama, Ahoada, Owerri, and Port Harcourt, Edo-Osagie would

striking oil in the south-central United States, the film's protagonists (played by John Garfield and Frances Farmer) immediately make plans to prospect for oil in Venezuela. They hope to "tie up with some big oil outfit" there. They understand that "Venezuela is a long way off" but that it holds the promise of a new petroleum frontier. (By 1952, Shell was making films in Venezuela, where it set up a special unit that prefigured its Nigerian one.)³⁵ If *Flowing Gold* looks southward, the Warner Bros. drama *Northern Pursuit* (Raoul Walsh, 1943) follows an opposite longitudinal trajectory, opening with a documentary-style, cartographic account of Canada's founding—a montage of maps and other images designed to conceal the genocidal foundations of settler colonialism. "In the year 1497," says the stentorian voice-over narrator, "John Cabot reached the shores of Canada. John Cabot was an Englishman. In the year 1534, Jacques Cartier reaches the same shores. Jacques Cartier was a Frenchman. Since that time, many men, of many nations, have come to these shores. They all found the same thing—a vast country, a beautiful country, a rich country. But what was more important, they found a way of life in which these people could live side by side as free men." Shots of various extractive practices—coal mining, mineral processing, oil drilling—accompany this description of inter-European harmony, lavishing visual attention on all-white enterprises that implicitly displace indigenous populations. In the star-driven dramatic narrative that follows, invading Nazis replace settler colonialists as threatening forces; indigenous populations are depicted as disposable to the former (one Nazi officer casually kills a pair of "Indians" generous enough to guide him through the frozen wilderness) but not to the latter (an "Indian" woman marries a man of Scottish extraction). *Northern Pursuit* dramatizes the need to protect Canada's petroleum reserves against acquisitive Nazis. In the process, it extends its studio's interest in the global dimensions of petroculturalism.

If *Northern Pursuit* largely erases the indigenous occupants of Canada's oil-rich lands, the Walter Wanger production *Tulsa*, released six years later, anticipates *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* in representing "natives" as pitifully

help extend the market for Nigerian mahogany beyond the UK into other parts of Europe as well as the United States. (He was also instrumental in securing indigenous control of the export of Abura's logs.) He built up a transportation company, complete with a fleet of large trucks, and served as Vice President of the Nigerian Timber Association while simultaneously advising Shell-BP. See Henry Kanu Offonry, *Investment in Goodwill: The Story of a Nigerian Philanthropist* (Owerri: New Africa Publishing Company, 1987), 20–21; and Tom Forrest, *The Advance of African Capital: The Growth of Nigerian Private Enterprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 76–78.

35 Canjels, "Creating Partners in Progress," 209.

ignorant of the natural resources around which they live. It opens with a voice-over narrator (Chill Wills) justifying genocide and forced displacement because “the Osages, the Creeks, the Choctaws, the Seminoles, the Chickasaws, even some Pawnees” were allegedly unaware of their land’s mineral riches. “All the time the oil was underneath the ground. Well, it had to come out, and refineries had to be built to process it and make it what it is today—the lifeblood of *our* civilization.” The inevitability of extraction is central to *Tulsa*, a Western that, in its wide international distribution, sought to acquaint diverse audiences with a racialized hierarchy of petro-knowledges ranging from the scientific expertise of Euro-Americans to the complete ignorance of indigenous populations sitting complacently atop vast, untapped mineral wealth. “Oil is like a wart in the middle of your back,” observes a petroleum booster in RKO’s *Laugh and Get Rich* (Gregory La Cava, 1931), adding, “You can’t always put your finger on it.” *Tulsa* suggests that the challenging task of resource identification belongs to the brave white expert who infiltrates and transforms previously unexploited frontiers, from the American Far West to Africa south of the Sahara.

Scholars of African cinema have long stressed the formative impact of the Hollywood Western. “The popularity of Westerns,” writes Odile Goerg, “may seem surprising given that the cowboy/Indian divide metaphorically mirrored the dominant/dominated paradigm clearly found in the colonial context.”³⁶ Yet Hollywood Westerns, perhaps because of the aggressiveness with which they were exported (or “dumped”), represented perhaps the most watched and most imitated of all film genres in colonial West Africa. As Didier Gondola’s research makes clear, they were at least as influential in Kinshasa, where “the heat of the tropics” could seem an environmental reflection—a sweaty extension—of the cinematic Far West, and where young men could consciously fashion themselves after the “toughest” screen cowboys, staking their claims to a masculinity denied them by the Belgian colonial project.³⁷ Echoing Gondola’s account of these Congolese “Bills,” Goerg says of the Nigerien migrants in Rouch’s *Moi, un noir* that “their environment was above all marked by Westerns: including posters on walls, clothing styles, and catchphrases. These references circulated smoothly between different cultural environments.” Goerg reports that Westerns, “which were already popular in the interwar years, found an extremely

36 Odile Goerg, *Tropical Dream Palaces: Cinema in Colonial West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 135.

37 Ch. Didier Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence, and Masculinity in Kinshasa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 201.

enthusiastic audience in the new postwar cinemas, particularly among adolescents." "Indeed, Westerns remain present in everyone's memories," Goerg adds, referring to her African interview subjects, who readily "cite the names of actors such as John Wayne and Gary Cooper and the titles of films [and film serials] such as *The Lone Ranger* (1938), watched many times in the 1950s." Goerg argues that it "would take the politicization of the 1950s to challenge this identification" with the Western's "brave cowboys," but it is perhaps equally true that the Western continued, even in the more radical climate of decolonization, to offer paradigms for understanding everything from nationalism to petrocapiatism.

Westerns may well have been "popular for their simple narratives and clear-cut moral messages," but it is important to acknowledge that such stories often pivoted around the very resources, including petroleum and gold, that were partly defining postcolonial nation-states. Indeed, as Goerg notes, Westerns' "narration left space for personal and culturally localized interpretations ... Their eventful adventure narratives, easily identifiable heroes, and draconian systems of justice echoed the narrative codes of local oral tales. This favored the identification process and facilitated the appropriation of specific elements into daily, local existence thousands of kilometers away from the places represented on the screen." As a result, a "real culture of the Western emerged, with a corpus of references shared by an entire generation."³⁸ In a 1950 report to the British Kinematography Society, Norman F. Spurr, a filmmaker who worked in colonial government in Nigeria (and later as an audiovisual specialist for UNESCO), noted the "almost universal appeal of Chaplins and Westerns"—an essential intelligibility that extended even to "illiterate peasants" in East and West Africa.³⁹ Spurr did not, however, specify what was so comprehensible about the Western (or, for that matter, about Charlie Chaplin films), though his report provided a tacit explanation in a section on the screening of instructional and promotional shorts for Nigerian audiences. "Is it possible to use films made for other audiences in other countries?" Spurr wondered of cinema exhibition in Nigeria, concluding, "It would seem to depend entirely upon what they are about. If the subject matter is within the experience of the audience and the film is simple and direct, the answer seems to be 'yes.'" Spurr went on to cite "African locomotive drivers" and other users of "coal-burning engines" as likely to benefit from films about

38 Goerg, *Tropical Dream Palaces*, 134–135.

39 Norman F. Spurr, "Films for Africans—1910 or 1950?," *British Kinematography* 16, no. 6 (June 1950): 185–188 [185].

fossil fuels. “In Nigeria,” he reported, “we tried out films on the internal combustion engine with staff employed by the motor section of the Public Works Department.”⁴⁰ Shell, too, apparently got into the act, producing and distributing documentaries that focused on aviation. (In Nigeria, the company’s fuel powered the fleets of both West African Airways, which operated from 1946 to 1958, and the British Overseas Airways Corporation.) Spurr’s report indicates that Shell was producing documentaries for Nigerian audiences years before the company established its film unit in Lagos, just as its Nigerian service stations (and its fueling of planes at Nigerian airports) long preceded the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in Oloibiri.⁴¹ By the 1940s, Texaco and Mobil also had service stations operating throughout Nigeria.⁴² The oil majors were the country’s gasoline retailers decades before they started removing its crude, their service stations dotting landscapes both rural and urban well in advance of the drilling of development wells and the laying of pipelines. Nigerians had time to get acquainted with petroleum. Cinematic representations joined service stations, signage, and even market literature to suggest the wonders (and dangers) of petro-modernity for audiences not yet aware of their country’s vast reserves of crude.

The sheer popularity of Westerns was at least partly attributable to the Film Export Code to which Hollywood agreed at the end of 1942, and which deemed the genre acceptable for its capacity to promote law and order. (By contrast, films that dared to address racial and labor conflicts, such as Warner Bros.’ *Black Fury* [Michael Curtiz, 1935], which concerns striking coal miners in Western Pennsylvania, were met with export bans.)⁴³ African cowboy films, starting with Moustapha Alassane’s *Le Retour d’un aventurier* (1966), in which a Nigerien man—a “been-to” or “repat,” in the parlance of neighboring Nigeria—returns to his homeland equipped with the style and

40 Spurr, “Films for Africans,” 188.

41 “Petrol and Oil Dumps Will Be Arranged,” *The West African Review: 1934 Christmas Souvenir of Nigerian Affairs* (December 1934), 79.

42 In 1959, *Variety* reported that Vi Phillips, a former officer of the Ziegfeld Club (a Broadway charitable organization), was in Nigeria on a two-year stint doing public relations for Mobil, which was by then well-entrenched in the country. “Jungle Ziegfeld,” *Variety* 214, no. 5 (April 1, 1959): 1.

43 Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, translated by Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 238; Charles Ambler, “Cowboy Modern: African Audiences, Hollywood Films, and Visions of the West,” in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, ed. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, and Robert C. Allen (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 348–363.

sensibility of a Hollywood (or Spaghetti Western) cowboy, both confirmed and complicated this collective repertoire. Yet shared experiences of resource extraction—and of battles over resource control—were perhaps just as significant as the “universal” appeal of cowboy heroes and rural adventures. Gondola suggests that in colonial and postcolonial Congo, “the sense of belonging cowboy movies provided”—the impression they fostered of a certain similitude between Africa and the United States—hinged at least partly on their depiction of the economic effects of natural resources, with Westerns routinely calling attention to gold rushes, silver mines, and the boom-and-bust cycles of extraction that African states know only too well.⁴⁴ The centrality of extraction to the Hollywood Western is also indicated by the “Copperbelt cowboys” of Rhodesia—teenagers who, in naming themselves, underscored a specific mineral connection, shared across cultures and historical contexts. Copper mines figure prominently in such notable Hollywood Westerns as *Broken Lance* (Edward Dmytryk, 1954) and *Cave of Outlaws* (William Castle, 1951), standing in for the gold rushes and oil discoveries of other works in the genre. (The liberal *Broken Lance*, like the earlier Gene Autry film *Back in the Saddle* [Lew Landers, 1941], has the distinction of showing extraction’s negative effects on the natural environment, as a major copper mine starts to pollute a vital waterway with its toxic tailings, even killing forty head of cattle; the copper frontier encroaches on the older cattle frontier in an epic clash of extractive regimens.)⁴⁵ In so many Westerns, as in postcolonial Africa, boomtowns are built up and just as quickly abandoned. Propping up entire economies, extraction can also create ghost towns. Spent wells and barren mines—“drained to the penny,” to quote a character in the John Wayne Western *Haunted Gold* (Mack V. Wright, 1932)—serve as sobering reminders of the exhaustibility of metal, mineral, and hydrocarbon resources.

Viewing the Western as a significant source of the narrative grammar of extraction—particularly oil extraction—offers insights into the film work not only of Shell and other companies but also of the Nollywood industry. In an essay on Mambety’s *Hyènes*, Dayna Oscherwitz describes the Western genre, with its Indian-fighting “pioneers” and other white settlers, as exhibiting distinctly colonial properties. “The narrative of Western civilization overrunning indigenous civilizations is certainly common to both westerns and the colonial cinema, as are a number of other elements,” Oscherwitz

44 Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys*, 87.

45 In Republic’s *Back in the Saddle*, Autry’s singing cowboy finds out that a copper mine is polluting a stream and killing cattle.

writes, drawing on the idea that both filmic categories “legitimize[] Western civilization’s eradication of other civilizations.” Yet if, as Oscherwitz has it, the Hollywood Western seeks to communicate “American technical superiority and cultural superiority,” it is worth pointing out that such lofty categories often (as in *Tulsa*) include the science and customs of resource extraction. If “the worldview that undergirds the western” is “one in which ‘civilization’ (as represented by white American civilization) legitimately expands the territory under its control, exporting its values, its way of life, and its technologies to other regions,” then the genre must be seen as bearing, in certain crucial respects, a strong resemblance to industrial films that show the exportation of sophisticated strategies of oil prospecting and drilling, and the seemingly inexorable penetration of foreign lands by individual oil companies.⁴⁶

Dominating African movie screens for much of the twentieth century, the Western arguably played an important part in the generation of oil consciousness. It often staged battles over oil—over the substance’s meanings and uses, as well as over emergent oil economies. Such debates, so germane to late colonial and post-independence Nigeria, repeatedly played out on the generic terrain of the Western. As Brian Larkin has written, “newly urbanized peoples, forging identities for themselves, found powerful resources in the flows of foreign media that were part of the broader cinematic ecology of urban life” in postcolonial Africa.⁴⁷ Yet what happens when we start to understand such resources in a more literal sense, as natural materials in addition to affective affordances? Simply put, when Nigerians watched Hollywood Westerns, they often found oil in them—fanciful as well as docudramatic depictions of a substance with which they were becoming acquainted as workers, consumers, and possible beneficiaries of an emergent petrostate.

Made just one year after oil was finally discovered in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta, the Allied Artists production *The Oklahoman* (Francis D. Lyon, 1957) reflects Hollywood’s mounting interest in offering salable critiques of racism and exploitation. If the film’s moral claims seem antithetical to the premises and objectives of colonial governance in Nigeria, it likely wasn’t banned there. (Goerg notes that colonial authorities, though

46 Dayna Oscherwitz, “Of Cowboys and Elephants: Africa, Globalization and the Nouveau Western in Djibril Diop Mambety’s *Hyenas*,” *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 223–238 [226–227].

47 Brian Larkin, “The Grounds of Circulation: Rethinking African Film and Media,” *Politique africaine* 153, no. 1 (January 2019): 105–126 [123].

deeply concerned with the ramifications of screen representations, rarely rejected Westerns.)⁴⁸ *The Oklahoman* is a quintessential example of post-1945 Hollywood liberalism. It concerns an indigenous family—a hardworking “Indian” farmer and his many children—living in Oklahoma Territory in the 1870s. Given the opportunity to leave their reservation, the family relocates to a large plot of land and starts homesteading. One day, the eldest son starts complaining of stomach pains. He is taken to the local doctor (played by Joel McCrea), who determines that the boy has consumed “mud and water” from what the father ominously refers to as a “very bad black swamp.” The father, whose name is Charlie, has, he explains, repeatedly tried to drain the swamp, but “it keeps filling up by itself,” gushing a mysterious, foul-smelling black substance. Ever the conscientious homesteader, Charlie promptly fenced it in, but a stray cow from a nearby ranch managed to break the fence and enter the swamp. In helping dislodge the bulky animal, Charlie’s son fell in the water, swallowing a couple of mouthfuls in the process. “It tasted awful,” the boy testifies to the doctor, who begins to suspect that the swamp in fact contains more than just “mud and water.”

So, however, does the most powerful cattle rancher in the territory, a clearly coded villain who instructs his brother and associate to secretly collect samples of the swamp water, to be taken to a trusted chemist in Oklahoma City. The white rancher is “ninety percent sure,” by sight alone, that the swamp contains highly valuable petroleum. But he wants it tested nevertheless—wants, that is, modern scientific confirmation of the legitimacy of his hunch. Chemistry can ratify his gut feeling. No less instinctive than the “Indians,” the rancher is distinguished by his faith in institutions. This is precisely the mode of differentiation that marks *The Twilight Forest* and other colonial and neocolonial paeans to the extraction of African natural resources: indigenous populations, because ignorant of science, cannot be trusted to cultivate the riches of their own lands, which they will gladly allow to lie fallow. Euro-Americans, by contrast, will use every tool at their disposal—math and science first and foremost—to “tame” and exploit nature. As *The Twilight Forest* also insists, they have facts and figures at their fingertips, and they readily sketch graphs and charts. “We’re going into the oil business,” the rancher informs his brother in *The Oklahoman*, lending a predictive panache—a speculative flair—to his practiced economic rhetoric. “It can become the greatest industry in the whole country. Why, it makes cattle raising look like thirty cents.” He continues (again echoing the language of *The Twilight*

48 Goerg, *Tropical Dream Palaces*, 148.

Forest, whose narrator explains the conjectural foundation of modern economies, their basis in advanced theory and research), “I’ve been looking into this pretty thoroughly in the past few months. The market for that stuff is growing every day.” “Who buys it?” the brother asks. “We all do,” the rancher answers. “Fuel oil, naphtha, paraffin, kerosene. Where do you think all those things come from? Crude oil brings from five to twenty dollars a barrel, and a couple of hundred thousand barrels from a good well is nothin’!” Calculation and enumeration, along with the promise of a kind of economic sublime (since the tabulation of large figures, for all its mathematical precision, also generates a sense of unfathomable riches), subtend the excitement. “It’s big—the biggest thing either of us will have anything to do with in our lives,” the cattle rancher assures his brother. “We’re gonna change the whole face of the Oklahoma Territory!” The words are at once figurative and literal: extraction, as much as it promises to alter social life, also entails topographic change—considerable material upheaval.

The ambitious cattle rancher—described as the “biggest” in the state—is out for new terrain to conquer, a novel economy, a fresh method of extraction. He is a brute and a bully—the terror of the Territory—and the film’s most obvious villain. Yet the hero—McCrea’s doctor—shares his basic extractive logic. Where the rancher wants to acquire Charlie’s land and the oil under it, the doctor wants *Charlie*, the land’s rightful owner, to be in charge of the extraction. At no point in the film does a white character, villainous or heroic, suggest that the fossil fuels should be left in the ground. It is taken for granted that the indigenous population, once made aware of the presence and value of petroleum, will want to drill it.

This representational approach was not entirely fantastical, however—not entirely the product of wishful thinking or liberal presumption. Perhaps because of the persuasive power of screen representations like *The Oklahoman* itself, Niger Delta communities actually did welcome drilling in the 1950s, at least at first. Omolade Adunbi’s ethnographic research reveals one community’s “elation on hearing that a geophysical survey indicated oil deposits in the area. The chiefs, children, and women danced around the town, celebrating the discovery,” which “reinforced the promise of their ancestors that their land and life would blossom in wealth.”⁴⁹ Indigenous cooperation with Shell was premised on shared discourses of material prosperity. In *The Oklahoman*, such discourses must be cultivated; the promise of opulence must be introduced. The doctor needs to convince

49 Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*, 40.

Charlie that his swamp, which looks to the indigenous homesteader like a “bad” morass to be avoided at all costs, and carefully fenced in, is, in fact, “probably full of petroleum—crude oil.” “If it is,” the doctor adds, “you’ll be a rich man, Charlie.” The evil rancher wants the oil all for himself, possibly for export to the highest bidder. (He has already caused a stir by disrupting local patterns of cattle trading.) But with Charlie nominally in control of the petroleum reserves, there can be “enough oil for everyone,” as the doctor so cheerfully puts it. (The white physician seems to presuppose that the “native” Charlie will spread his wealth within the territory—will give freely of his hydrocarbon riches.) Where *The Oklahoman* exceeds the historical precedent of the Niger Delta, however, is in its depiction of indigenous populations as wholly accepting of white domination. “We are defeated in honorable battle,” Charlie says, his use of the present tense to describe a past event not simply a stereotyped means of communicating his indigeneity (it represents a form of “broken” English, as “exotic” as his accent) but also a means of signaling an ongoing conflict in which indigenous populations repeatedly lose. (Perhaps, then, *The Oklahoman*, with its compliant “natives,” is not at all antithetical to the logic of colonial governance.) Charlie the representative “Indian” accepts his subordination to the United States and to capital. “You can’t trust ‘em—any of ‘em,” one white settler warns of the area’s indigenous inhabitants. Such suspicions are said to justify white “management” of the latter’s natural resources. McCrea’s doctor, like Shell, is in charge of drawing them out.

It was a German company, Nigerian Bitumen, that commenced oil exploration in Nigeria in 1908, six years before the amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates. Two world wars stalled the progress of various prospectors, though not before Frederick Lugard introduced the Colonial Mineral Ordinance, the first oil-related legislation in the newly amalgamated state, which codified Britain’s monopoly on oil prospecting there. Formed in 1936, Shell D’Arcy Exploration Parties, a joint venture between Royal Dutch/Shell and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (renamed British Petroleum in 1954), accelerated things a decade later. (When a new Colonial Mineral Ordinance was introduced in 1937, it gave Shell D’Arcy exclusive exploration and prospecting rights in Nigeria.)⁵⁰ In January 1956, oil was discovered in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta region. By that time, Shell had developed the technology necessary to prevent water seeping into the oil fields and obstructing operations—something that its German predecessor

50 Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta* (London: Verso, 2003), 23.

had lacked back in 1908, when a massive oil spill in the Lekki Lagoon halted its work.⁵¹ ExxonMobil, an American multinational corporation and a direct descendant of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil, began accessing Nigerian oil fields in the 1960s. (It would soon become the second largest oil company operating in Nigeria.) Shell's pursuit of Nigeria's oil accelerated and intensified after the 1956 Suez crisis, when Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, temporarily preventing British passage (and thus Shell's transport of oil) and generally exposing Britain's weakening hold on the Middle East. In 1956, Shell established its operational headquarters in Port Harcourt, and it began exporting crude oil in 1958.⁵²

Shell's nineteen-minute film *Nigeria on Stream* (1956) depicts the early exploration of Oloibiri, Afam, and other locations in the Niger Delta region. Four years later, the company released *The Search for Oil in Nigeria* (Frank Nesbitt, 1961), which, with a running time of thirty minutes, more extensively documents the elaborate process of oil prospecting, including the work of a seismic exploration party. Such films, Rudmer Canjels makes clear, were intended to advance Shell's "image as a benefactor that brought vital economic assets to the country and had a wealth of experience, which, according to the company, were both needed by Nigeria."⁵³ Canjels quotes British filmmaker Douglas Gordon, who headed Shell's film unit in Nigeria, as writing, "The successful 'projection' of this image may well prove an essential factor in the Company's unhampered prosecution of its business." Shell's films, Gordon continued, were meant "to win general approval" of petroculturalism, which placed them alongside all sorts of works, from star-studded Hollywood dramas like *Flowing Gold* and *The Oklahoman* to industrial shorts like the American Petroleum Institute's *Barrel Number One* (Hollingsworth Morse, 1955), even as they signaled the specificity of Shell's corporate contributions.⁵⁴

The Search for Oil in Nigeria opens with the arrival by riverboat of a British expedition party. In retracing the paths previously followed by other extractive industries, the film mimics the imagery of *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, with their emphasis on the transportive power of Nigeria's intricate waterways. Like those earlier films, *The Search for Oil in Nigeria* lavishes attention on parties of surveyors committed to the exploration of

51 Phia Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria, c. 1903–58," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 2 (2009): 249–274 [253–254].

52 Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *The Politics of the Global Oil Industry: An Introduction* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2005), 199–201.

53 Canjels, "Creating Partners in Progress," 211.

54 Quoted in Canjels, "Creating Partners in Progress," 211.

every inch of their respective concessions. Made the same year, *Oilman's Move* (Frank Nesbitt and Adolph Ozoude, 1961) shows the careful relocation of an elaborate drilling platform from one part of the Niger Delta to another. Representing the sheer geographic expansiveness of that oil-rich region, the film also illustrates the responsiveness of Shell to changing environmental, social, and political conditions. Emphasizing the company's adaptability in postcolonial Nigeria, the aptly titled *Oilman's Move* also addresses Shell's specific "Africanization" policy, whereby more and more Nigerians were employed in the oil sector, including in senior positions. As a condition of the company's retention of prospecting licenses, Shell was required to train Nigerians to fill all manner of positions, a process explored in greater detail in *Nigeria's Oilmen* (Frank Nesbitt and Adolph Ozoude, 1962), in which new Nigerian hires undergo extensive instruction at a Dutch-run, Shell-affiliated trade school in Port Harcourt. Co-directed (like the earlier *Oilman's Move*) by a Nigerian, Adolph Ozoude, the film features a voice-over commentary by actor-producer Yemi Lijadu of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. A prolific multimedia talent, Lijadu was also Wole Soyinka's cousin. Shortly before narrating *Nigeria's Oilmen* for Shell, he produced his own adaptation of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for Nigerian radio.⁵⁵ Soyinka, for his part, narrated *The Search for Oil in Nigeria*, lending the film an "authentic" African voice—a set of recognizably Nigerian cadences that, as such, improved on the ersatz African accent that Sam Zebba had fashioned for the *Fincho* soundtrack. Yet Zebba's film clearly anticipated *Oilman's Move* in its strategic use of Harry Belafonte. For the latter film would similarly draw on the global popularity of calypso, employing the voice of Samuel Akpabot, who at one point describes, through song, the difficulties that Shell faces as its trucks navigate flooded roads. *Oilman's Move* also features the voices of narrator Adamu Mohammed and highlife musicians Ambrose Campbell and Fitzroy Coleman; viewed alongside the similarly themed BP film *Skyhook* (James Hill, 1958), which opens with a shot—and with the sounds—of a Papuan playing guitar, it suggests the currency of "Black" music as a kind of cultural lubricant in the film work of the major oil companies. As Canjels notes, Shell routinely used local voice-over and musical talent to "communicat[e] for viewers that they were seeing an authentic portrayal of Nigerians working in the oil industry." The films' specifically Nigerian soundscapes also perhaps "lessened [their] colonial feel," further promoting an impression of petromodernity as a truly

55 Terri Ochiagha, *A Short History of Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018), 91.



A Shell truck refuels a four-engine airplane at the Ijeka Airport, October 8, 1950. Photograph by Edward Harland Duckworth. Courtesy of Northwestern University Libraries.

postcolonial phenomenon.⁵⁶ Such films were shown throughout Nigeria via Shell's "cinerovers," which, like other (auto)mobile cinema units, were doubly dependent on petrol, consisting as they did of both vans (or trucks) and diesel-powered generators. In carrying Shell films to various regions, cinerovers offered further demonstrations of the movies' messages about the importance of oil. Fast-moving and gas-guzzling, the vehicles embodied the very representations that they were designed to circulate.

As their obvious resemblance to *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* attests, Shell's Nigerian films were not produced in a vacuum. They built not only on recent industrial precedents—on, specifically, the Nigerian operations of Unilever and other extractive enterprises—but also on decades of cinematic explorations of oil capitalism. Indeed, several earlier films offer insights into Nigeria's relationship to petromodernity. The Vitaphone short *Romance of Louisiana* (Crane Wilbur, 1937), for instance, dramatizes the political quest for ever more "outlets for American exports," as one character puts it. But it also implies the dependence of the United States on the natural resources of foreign lands, even as it expresses a sort of New Deal enthusiasm for the seemingly limitless supply of American oil. Such confidence would, of course,

56 Canjels, "Creating Partners in Progress," 217.

not last long. The Second World War and associated upheavals would make clear the need for overseas (and offshore) petroleum sources. Distributed by Universal, the Walter Wanger Western *Canyon Passage* (Jacques Tourneur, 1946) reflects this shrewder dispensation. Perhaps fittingly, the film features a representative of the aging British Empire—a wizened migrant to the United States—who takes it upon himself to warn an American associate about the dangers of overconfidence. Ominously invoking “the trouble that always comes,” the expatriate businessman asks, “Why do you suppose I came here, 6,000 miles from Liverpool?” His relocation was precipitated, he suggests, by the need to find fresh spaces of exploitation, the old ones having been exhausted. “All Americans think the tide flows forever for them,” he observes. “But gold veins run out.” New frontiers must be found. “In this interdependent world, there is no region in which the United States can renounce its moral and ideological interest,” announced the Office of War Information in 1945, underscoring the global search not only for export markets but also for metal, mineral, and hydrocarbon assets.⁵⁷ The “penetration of West Africa by international mining-refining concerns proceeded at a more rapid pace after 1945,” notes J. Forbes Munro.⁵⁸ The American-owned Liberia Mining Company, for instance, was established in Monrovia in 1951, its purpose to extract iron ore from the Bomi Hills, where the Gola people had long utilized high-grade deposits that the United States, led by federal geologists, openly coveted.⁵⁹ British interests, struggling to retain control of Africa’s natural resources, did not look upon such developments with equanimity. “If America is allowed to invest too much capital, the mineral wealth of Africa will become American before it is dug from the soil,” warned a 1949 broadcast of the BBC’s *General Overseas Programme*.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the sort of inter-imperial cooperation that MGM’s 1956 film *The Power and the Prize* depicts was not just a Hollywood fantasy. It would inform even Shell’s early film work in Nigeria, which should be understood in this post-1945 context of increasing convergence between American and Western European interests. With *Shellarama*, Shell and the Cinerama Corporation—co-producers in this particular venture, which thus represented a fusion of Anglo-Dutch and American commercial and ideological

57 Quoted in Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2018), 515.

58 J. Forbes Munro, *Africa and the International Economy, 1800–1960* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1976), 194.

59 Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 231.

60 Quoted in W. Alphaeus Hunton, *Decision in Africa: Sources of Current Conflict* (New York: International Publishers, 1960 [1957]), 85.

objectives—extended to Nigeria the very strategy that Standard Oil (Exxon's ancestor) had applied to the US Gulf Coast through its sponsorship of Robert Flaherty's film *Louisiana Story* (1948).⁶¹ Designed to naturalize the broadly destructive advent of oil drilling in a previously "untapped" region, the celebrated *Louisiana Story* offers one illustration of how cinema fortified and expanded the power that Standard Oil had managed to retain despite repeated legal assaults. For all its widescreen splendor, *Shellarama* suggests simply a shorter version of *Louisiana Story*, a Technicolor summary set and shot in Nigeria. This similitude is achieved through a series of seemingly effortless transpositions that speak to the temporal and geographic stability of extractive capitalism: Louisiana becomes Nigeria (and vice versa); the officials and crew of the Humble Derrick No. 1, on Petit Anse Bayou, become the officials and crew of Shell (and the Cinerama Corporation) in the Niger Delta; and Flaherty's sharp-eyed Cajun boy, impossibly eager to assist the company men in the violent transformation of his homeland, becomes the equally compliant Nigerians who, in Shell's globalized imaginary, willingly participate in the destruction of the Niger Delta. Yet if the waterborne Cajun boy gains a petrol-powered motorboat in *Louisiana Story*, his more cosmopolitan Nigerian counterparts, in *Shellarama*, acquire fancy cars and thrilling motorbikes that they then take to their modern jobs.

Throughout the 1960s, Shell continued to use cinema to help sell itself as a wholly constructive corporate citizen of Nigeria, even as frequent devastating oil spills threatened its public image and aroused all manner of local protests. Shell remained outwardly complacent in the face of such environmental damage and social unrest. David Fleming, the general manager of Shell-BP, publicly thanked Niger Delta residents and their political leaders for having "shown a considerable amount of co-operation with the Company." Much as the making of *The Mark of the Hawk* had inspired some Nigerian activists to denounce Enugu's complicity with Hollywood capital, however, Shell-BP's infiltration of the Eastern Region occasioned pushback from union leaders who, as the *West African Pilot* put it, "objected to the attempt being made by the Company to exclude certain categories of workers from Union-Company negotiations." A. U. D. Mbah, president of the Shell-BP Workers' Union, "maintained that any interference with freedom of association and unionism would amount to a flagrant breach of international convention." Yet he would go on to reassure Shell-BP and other foreign companies in a public address, proudly declaring, "We have no Fidel Castro here and I hope [Shell-BP]

61 For more on the historical connections between the Niger Delta and the US Gulf Coast, see Watts, "Oil Frontiers."

will continue to be reasonable with the country.”⁶² Mbah had seemingly internalized the idea of Shell as a job creator and overall booster, his words of reassurance carefully echoing the rhetoric of so many of the company’s own films. Such language would prove remarkably durable. As late as 1997, John Jennings, then chairman of Shell, was able to say, “We try, within the context and framework of acceptable terms and conditions, to be a good citizen [in Nigeria]. In a situation like Nigeria, the local communities rely on the oil companies to help replace and provide some of the infrastructural support that the government doesn’t provide. We have long accepted that responsibility and last year we spent US\$36 million doing just that.”⁶³ As William Reno has observed of Shell and its fellow petrogiants, “The problem for these oil companies is that Nigeria’s government is not an effective protector of property or manager of the country’s domestic politics.”⁶⁴ It was a problem that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) was beginning to recognize by the early 1980s, when a significant fall in oil production, prices, and revenues, coupled with the sheer corruption and rank incompetence of Shehu Shagari’s Second Republic, led the federal government to scramble for income, including by seizing what the MPAA later estimated at \$25 million in box-office profits meant for its member studios back in Hollywood. But if Hollywood fled, Shell and other oil companies remained firmly in place. Hollywood would, of course, eventually return—some might say with a vengeance. But the petrogiants never left.

Hollywood Westerns remained a staple of screen entertainment in Nigeria. The International Film Distributing Company (IFDC), an American firm, began selling such Westerns to Nigerian television as early as 1960, and they are still in heavy circulation on terrestrial and satellite channels. Aided by the US State Department’s International Motion Pictures Division, which was responsible for advising commercial organizations that conducted business abroad, the IFDC ensured the continued reception of the Western’s typical messages about extraction and settlement.⁶⁵ This does not mean, of course, that such messages were necessarily endorsed or otherwise accepted by Nigerian audiences. Stephanie Newell’s research

62 “Shell-BP Company on Nation & Investment: Commends East Gov’t for its Co-operation,” *West African Pilot*, Monday, November 14, 1960, RG 5, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, RBF.

63 John Jennings interviewed by Nevine Mabro, “Interview: John Jennings, Dangerous Liaisons,” *Index on Censorship* 26, no. 4, (July/August 1997), 50–55 [54].

64 William Reno, “The Privatization of Africa’s International Relations,” in *Africa in World Politics: Reforming Political Order*, ed. by Donald Rothchild and J. Harbeson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 190–212 [189–199].

65 “Hollywood Roundup,” *Weekly Television Digest* 16, no. 45 (November 7, 1960), 13.

has shown how Nigerians ridiculed, redefined, and generally resisted the styles and premises of the various colonial health-education films screened for them, thereby demonstrating the limitations of top-down audiovisual instruction.⁶⁶ Ikechukwu Obiaya has revealed that Nigerians took offense even at the celebrated, Oscar-winning Crown Film Unit production *Daybreak in Udi* (1949), which they found “simplistic and patronizing” in its attempts to teach “community development.”⁶⁷ There is little reason to believe that other kinds of films, whether Western spectacles or Shell documentaries, were necessarily more effective in promulgating their ideas. But many of them did try to cultivate oil consciousness, including among communities whose members had their own notions about the hydrocarbon resources beneath their feet—about where such resources came from and what they meant both economically and spiritually. Omolade Adunbi’s ethnographic perspective sheds light on a particular “myth of origin” in which crude oil is understood as the transmogrified remains of enslaved persons who died during the Middle Passage, only to be unceremoniously dumped overboard into the deep waters of the vast Atlantic. Though ostensibly “unscientific,” this myth is, of course, rooted in historical reality, and it is not entirely incompatible with the “legitimate” definition of fossil fuels as consisting of decomposing organic matter. Yet the centrality of Black bodies to this oil-specific origin story motivates the ownership claims of various Niger Delta communities, whose members tend to view local petroleum reserves as deriving directly from their ancestors. Viewed from this regional vantage, which is at odds with the logic of the rentier state, the wealth represented by fossil fuels is a kind of patrimony—a specifically African inheritance claimable only by Niger Delta residents whose ancestors were lost to the slave trade. As Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas note, “Shell is only the latest in the long list of robber barons that have plundered their land, beginning with the slave trade in the sixteenth century. This inhuman trade sucked the people of the Niger Delta into the orbit of international finance capital and, indeed, laid the basis for the exploitation of their resources by outsiders.” Michael Watts has echoed these remarks, writing, “The petroleum frontier followed the slave and palm-oil frontiers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.”⁶⁸ Local, slavery-centered forms of knowledge are thus

66 Stephanie Newell, *Histories of Dirt: Media and Urban Life in Colonial and Postcolonial Lagos* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 58–78.

67 Ikechukwu Obiaya, “A Break with the Past: The Nigerian Video-Film Industry in the Context of Colonial Filmmaking,” *Film History* 23, no. 2 (2011): 129–146 [137].

68 Okonta and Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 2; Watts, “Oil Frontiers,” 198.

in tension with the very scientism that Shell's films (like Unilever's before them, and like *The Oklahoman* with its references to advanced laboratory testing and mathematical economics) embodied and promoted. However insistently they claimed to be introducing petromodernity through short documentaries and star-studded features, major corporations did not have a monopoly on oil consciousness. Their efforts often competed with knowledge claims that derived from non-filmic, non-corporate sources, such as the oral tradition and even incipient forms of Afrofuturism. If, as Adunbi reminds us, "science does not function in a vacuum," then neither were oil films, which aspired to the scientific, received in a vacuum.⁶⁹

There remains the question of whether African audiences, in embracing certain imported cultural forms, have historically responded, at least in part, to the sheer familiarity of representations of resource extraction, regardless of the specific national and industrial sources of such representations. In his study of the reception in Nigeria of the first few seasons of the American television series *Dallas* (1978–1991), Joseph Amali Shekwo, a student of mass communication based in Abuja, suggested that Nigerian audiences were able to actively transform the "foreign" text via interpretive habits that allowed them to effectively "Nigerianize" it.⁷⁰ Yet *Dallas*, in depicting an oil empire that links Texas to Southeast Asia and beyond, traveled especially well in the 1970s and after not simply because of the practices of "dumping" that Hollywood companies had long since perfected in consultation and collaboration with the US Departments of State and Commerce. Exported to spaces of extraction outside the United States, *Dallas* surely elicited jolts of recognition from audiences already subjected to the global oil industry. As a cultural effect of oil capitalism, it did not require radical recontextualization. Shekwo's 1984 analysis, like Ien Ang's influential study of the program's global appeal (published two years earlier), offered a useful reminder of the heterogeneity of reception strategies.⁷¹ But—and again like Ang's—it arguably underestimated what was so widely comprehensible about the

69 Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*, 239.

70 Joseph Amali Shekwo, *Understanding Gbagyi Folktales: Premises for Targeting Salient Electronic Mass Media Programs*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1984; Ien Ang, *Watching "Dallas": Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985 [1982]).

71 See also Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of "Dallas"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Like Ang and Shekwo, Liebes and Katz are not really concerned with the meaning-making potential of extractive industry or with oil's relationship to media texts, though at one point they quote a member of a Russian discussion group as saying that "oil is the main theme" of the series, "the main problem in the program" (75).

program. Focusing on Dutch responses, Ang, who did not consider the African continent, effectively ignored the materiality of extraction. “The oil industry,” she asserted at the beginning of her study, “does not have everywhere the charged mythical significance that it has in American cultural history.”⁷² This may be true, yet it does not account for the fact that the oil industry, whatever its relationship to myth, operates just about everywhere, laying some of the discursive groundwork for *Dallas* in locations seemingly far removed from the centers of American power.⁷³ As a result, the program likely requires relatively little translation, at least where extraction and its discontents are concerned. Communities subjected to constant gas flaring and frequent oil spills probably do not need to be told that J. R. Ewing represents the dastardly lengths to which an oil magnate will go to derive riches from the earth. They are already steeped in the evidence of such avarice, already suffering the consequences of such spoilage. Certain idiomatic expressions may be incomprehensible, but the extractive essence of the show surely is not.

An emphasis on culturally variant modes of reception may, in other words, understate the global familiarity of oil capitalism. The academic fetishization of difference—the centrality of cultural distance to the anthropological imagination—often precludes acknowledging the global standardization of extraction, the worldwide spread of prospecting, drilling, and associated chicanery. As Ledum Mitee, an Ogoni activist and one of Ken Saro-Wiwa’s surviving associates, put it around the turn of the twenty-first century, “When I travel outside Nigeria people often ask me how far away Ogoni is. I tell them it is as far as the nearest Shell service station.”⁷⁴ If *Dallas* is enjoyed everywhere—from the Gulf of Mexico to the Niger Delta, two extractive zones that Michael Watts, for one, has linked as sites of dispossession and despoilation—it is not necessarily because audiences are working hard to “reposition” the program according to emphatically local epistemes.⁷⁵ *Dallas*, indeed, fits neatly into markets long since tapped by the oil majors. The show’s depiction of extraction is widely fathomable, and particularly so in Nigeria, where the depredations of Shell have long stood in mimetic relation to J. R.’s fictional exploits. That the Middle Belt viewers with whom Shekwo

72 Ang, *Watching “Dallas,”* 4.

73 For a detailed account of oil’s status as a “mythic commodity” in Nigeria, see Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*.

74 Quoted in Ferdinand Daminabo and Owajionyi Frank, “The Curse of Oil: The Unspoken Ecological and Environmental Devastation in the Niger Delta Region of Southern Nigeria,” *Journal of Sciences and Multidisciplinary Research* 7, no. 1 (2015): 44–51 [46].

75 Watts, “Oil Frontiers.”

communicated likened the character to a trickster figure from Gbagyi mythology—that they tended to frame *Dallas* in “traditional” terms—does not mean that other, more “modern” readings were not also available to them.⁷⁶ The folktale offered just one local analogue; industrial extraction undoubtedly provided another. The point is that no one in Nigeria needs to willfully “misread” or “reinterpret” the oil-soaked *Dallas* in order to “relate” to it; Nigerians are already living its melodrama, from the power corridors of Abuja to the polluted fields of Asaba. Nigeria even has its own J. R. Ewings—its ogas, its “big men” who benefit from oil wealth while so many others suffer. Thanks to the very petro-modernity that forms its subject, *Dallas*, in Nigeria, is anything but exotic.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Hollywood Westerns were perhaps equally intelligible to Nigerians for whom the boom-bust cycles of extraction were facts of life, whether in the cassiterite-rich Jos Plateau area or the coal hills of Enugu.⁷⁷ When Eric Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Export Association of America, visited Nigeria in the summer of 1960, he observed (and was told) that the only US films shown on the country’s commercial screens were Westerns.⁷⁸ As he later put it in the pages of *Variety*, “Our Westerns are decidedly popular, old or new ... In Nigeria, a cabinet minister told me ... that the only United States films he and his family have seen are Westerns, and that his four-year-old son, a fan of Westerns, usually greets him with ‘Daddy, stick ‘em up.’ He felt that

76 In the much-anthologized opening to his book *Hollywood Planet*, Scott Robert Olson cites Shekwo’s account of this “local” reading of J. R. but does not mention that Shekwo was, at the time of his reception study, also working on a multivolume history of African folktales and myths, which might explain his perhaps disproportionate emphasis on the trickster interpretation (to say nothing of his possible influence on his respondents, who may well have perceived him as expecting “traditional” critiques). Olson does concede, however, that while “at least part of the explanation for the success of any text resides in the culture consuming it, another and perhaps more significant part resides in the text itself. This is particularly true given that certain texts are successful in so many different cultures; if the reason for the popularity of a text is found only in the culture, then why do so many cultures share such an interest in particular texts? Although ‘Dallas’ was successful in Nigeria because of specific cultural attributes of [Nigerians], perhaps even more of its success is due to the structure, images, and ideology of the text.” Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999), 2, 9, 18. See also Joseph Amali Shekwo, *Gbagyi Folktales and Myths, Volume 1* (Abuja: Garkida Press, 1984).

77 For a reading of *Dallas* as a Western, see Horace Newcomb, *Television: The Critical View*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 167–174. Newcomb does not, however, address the visual and narrative grammar of oil prospecting and production.

78 “Johnston Finds Opportunities in Nigeria for Theatres and Films,” *Motion Picture Daily*, September 9, 1960, 1, 3 [3].

this might possibly be too much of a good thing.”⁷⁹ Johnston himself was agnostic on the subject of genre, recommending only the construction of more and better theaters and a smoother, more efficient means of distributing the kinds of films that Nigerians seemed to like best. Despite the genre fatigue reportedly experienced by the cabinet minister, Westerns would only multiply in Nigeria along with the country’s media platforms. Set in fictional Mineral City, *The Roy Rogers Show* (1951–1957), many of whose one hundred episodes were essentially adaptations of the star’s earlier Western films, was licensed to Nigerian television in 1960, months before the country became a formally independent federation.⁸⁰ Republic’s *Apache Rose* (William Witney, 1947), one of those earlier Westerns (reworked as the 1954 episode “The Lady Killer”), concerns the discovery of oil and the violent pursuit of mineral rights. *Apache Rose* was plausibly distributed to Nigeria long after its initial theatrical run in the United States (it may well have been among the “old” B Westerns that Johnston encountered during his 1960 trip), and “The Lady Killer” was in all likelihood seen by Nigerian television audiences just a few years after Shell-BP became the sole concessionaire of the Niger Delta’s oil fields, which were coming on stream as *The Roy Rogers Show* was entering the country’s airwaves. Courtesy of Roy Rogers Syndication (with crucial assists from program sponsor Nestle, which would work to transform southwestern Nigeria into an important soybean-producing region, and the National Broadcasting Company [NBC], on which the show was originally broadcast, and which burst into the Nigerian market with the telling declaration “Television is a natural resource”), *The Roy Rogers Show* was contracted to a Nigeria that was being pulled into the kind of petromodernity that the program, with its contemporary Western setting (“Mineral City”), directly depicted.⁸¹

79 Eric Johnston, “Africa in Not-So-Slow Motion,” *Variety* 221, no. 6 (January 4, 1961): 17.

80 “He Just Keeps Ridin’ Along on TV,” *Broadcasting* (July 18, 1960), 78–79 [78].

81 “He Just Keeps Ridin’ Along on TV,” 78; “NBC International to Establish a Federal TV Service in Nigeria,” 1. Nestle’s need for raw materials, especially soybeans, led to its collaboration with the University of Agriculture Abeokuta (UNAAB) in 1999. Between 1990 and 1996, Nestle Nigeria had cultivated research-and-development partnerships centered on soybean breeding. Recognizing UNAAB’s “knowledge advantage,” Nestle began wooing the university in pursuit of its proprietary information, eventually becoming “the only major external donor and industrial partner with UNAAB.” Today, Nestle Nigeria employs approximately 2,000 people, working with UNAAB as well as the Ibadan-based branch of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture to obtain improved yields of high-quality, “Nestle-ready” soybeans. UNAAB helped Nestle to move beyond Northern Nigeria, previously the corporation’s only source of soybeans in the country (owing to the long-held assumption that the crop would be too difficult to grow in the rainy southwest—an assumption that UNAAB’s pioneering research managed to undo).

With local productions not yet plentiful enough to fill programming schedules, the Hollywood Western was crucial to the emergence of the television medium in Nigeria, and it invariably carried salient lessons about the politics of resource extraction. Months before Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) started broadcasting in October 1959 (thereby becoming the first television station in Africa south of the Sahara), it purchased a telefilm package that included *Hopalong Cassidy* (1949–1952), another episodic series adapted from a robust corpus of feature films.⁸² “Black Waters,” an episode from the show’s final season, concerns the attempt to locate crude oil deposits on Comanche land. An official from the Bureau of Indian Affairs calls on Cassidy, with his deep historical knowledge and extensive interpersonal skills, to help persuade a Comanche chief to reveal the exact location of the crude. The gentle Cassidy is quick to acknowledge indigenous expertise, noting, “There’s a lot of evidence in the museums that proves that the Comanches knew of the existence of oil long before the white man came west.” “The land of the black waters that burn” (as the Comanches are said to call the oil-rich territory) is about to be opened to homesteading, after which the “discovery” of crude deposits will not benefit the tribe (as royalties will go solely to the homesteaders—the new, private owners of the soil). The federal agent, determined to secure a much-needed windfall for the Comanche, tells Cassidy, “I have the promise of the government that the Indians will get twenty-five percent of all the oil taken from their ground.” Cassidy is not confident that the tribe can be compelled to participate in oil exploration, even at a profit. He explains that Comanche knowledge of crude has always been coextensive with a decided fear of the substance, in which horses and warriors would occasionally get stuck. “The chief has always been pretty set in his ideas,” Cassidy adds, warning the federal agent of the stubbornness of custom. Part of the ideological project of “Black Waters,” with its “sympathetic” attention to Comanche rights and livelihoods, is to underscore the importance of instilling petromodern values in

Southwestern Nigeria became a testing ground for new techniques (in this case, the engineering of improved seeds and grains and a new method for promoting soybean growth) that have led to considerable corporate enrichment for Nestle, whose attention to Nigeria can be traced back at least to the international syndication of *The Roy Rogers Show*. Calestous Juma, *The New Harvest: Agricultural Innovation in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55–56.

82 “Flock of Mex, Nigerian Sales For Freemantle,” *Variety* 215, no. 11 (August 12, 1959): 52; “New York Roundup,” *Television Digest* 15, no. 33 (August 17, 1959): 14. For more on the transmedia status and transnational reach of *Hopalong Cassidy*, see Michael Kackman, “Nothing On But Hoppy Badges: *Hopalong Cassidy*, William Boyd Enterprises, and Emergent Media Globalization,” *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 76–101.

communities ignorant not of the existence but of the merits of crude. In the episode, indigenous populations must be taught to desire and not to fear hydrocarbon resources, to see petroleum seeps not as so many patches of viscous quicksand but as sure sources of wealth, speed, and prestige. “You know my feeling toward the Indian,” the federal agent reminds Cassidy, “you know I’ve always tried to help them.” But “helping” here means convincing the Comanche to embrace a fossil fuel economy.

Eventually, “the natives” come to regard oil as something other than a dangerous nuisance. They learn that it is a major commodity, one that belongs, in a real sense, to the tribespeople beneath whose feet it is found, and who will be paid substantial rents for its extraction. If “Black Waters” was televised in Nigeria, as it almost certainly was, then it would have resonated with audiences aware of how oil exploration and production had so recently been pursued in the country, where geophysical surveys preceded meetings between Shell-BP and various chiefs. Welcoming the company to the Niger Delta in 1954, local elders were later called upon to consult their oracle and to perform animal sacrifices to ensure the flow of oil.⁸³ Omolade Adunbi has described the durable currency of this culturally specific origin story, which has repeatedly served to remind Nigerians of their authorship of oil exploitation—of the central role that they played in prospecting and production. Simply put, Niger Deltans were indispensable to the business of extraction, much as the Comanche Nation is in “Black Waters.” In the episode, the only threats to Comanche rights are two shady would-be homesteaders—an “evil woman with the tongue of a snake” (as the chief describes her) and her mendacious male associate—who act out an elaborate fantasy of white liberalism, providing services to children on the reservation and generally appearing to promote Comanche culture, the better to conceal their nefarious designs on the tribe’s oil deposits. The two eventually involve the corrupt local sheriff and a few other white men in their scheme, but the state—represented by the earnest Bureau of Indian Affairs agent as well as by the honorable Hopalong Cassidy—remains an ethical and trustworthy participant, a worthy collaborator even in the eyes of the initially skeptical Comanche. “My people are never in a hurry when there’s something important to be considered,” says the chief’s son, who nevertheless acknowledges Hopalong Cassidy’s pronounced powers of persuasion, saying of the fair-minded cowboy, “I think he could convince my father that black is white.” Which is, in a sense, Cassidy’s actual task: he must teach the chief to see crude as virtuous and clean rather than

83 Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*, 40.

dangerous and dirty. He informs the venerable elder that oil drilling “may bring great prosperity to all your people in the years to come,” his use of the conditional tense a subtle sign not simply of the volatility of extractive economies but also of the difficulty of guaranteeing an equitable sharing of resource revenues over the long term. Still, the episode ends with the villains vanquished and the federal government reaffirming its commitment to the Comanche. Oil engineers turn in their geophysical survey, company drillers set to work, and “soon [the] tribe will prosper as never before” (as Cassidy, jettisoning the conditional tense, promises the chief by way of a farewell). When *Hopalong Cassidy* was sold to WNTV in 1959—the year of the passage of Nigeria’s Petroleum Profits Tax Act, which was based on the principle that those residing on drilled lands deserved recompense in the form of rents and taxes—such assurances were still, perhaps, plausible in Niger Delta communities. With its depiction of oil as a tribal property, “Black Waters” appeared to substantiate the guarantees that Niger Deltans received in the wake of the Oloibiri discovery, echoing and even universalizing the idea that resource rents would, barring some snake-tongued conspiracy, redound to the benefit of all ethnic groups.

As a commercial, sponsor-supported medium answerable to advertisers, television was a key participant in the cultures of oil capitalism in Nigeria. When television was introduced in the Western Region, it was in a strategically significant commercial and administrative center where advertisers (both foreign and domestic) could expect to reach “desirable” consumers.⁸⁴ As Oluyinka Esan notes, the medium’s commercial mandate was foundational in Nigeria, even as WNTV inherited traces of the public-service spirit of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The station’s parent company was initially in partnership with Overseas Rediffusion, a British commercial firm that sold programming and advertising time for WNTV.⁸⁵ But the Nigerian station was also conditioned by the aims of McCann-Erickson, an American advertising agency that worked with Nestle and other brands interested in purchasing ad time on Nigerian television.⁸⁶ McCann-Erickson also designed promotional campaigns for the Cinerama Corporation, the American producer of *Shellarama*, which was shot on location in the Niger Delta in 1965.⁸⁷ While Nigeria’s advertising sector dates

84 Oluyinka Esan, *Nigerian Television: Fifty Years of Television in Africa* (Princeton, NJ: AMV Publishing, 2009), 36.

85 Esan, *Nigerian Television*, 45–46.

86 “He Just Keeps Ridin’ Along on TV,” 78.

87 Tsika, *Cinematic Independence*, 35.

at least to 1928 (via the West African Publicity Company, which handled accounts for the United Africa Company and Lever Brothers), it grew rapidly after the formation in 1959 of the Yaba-based Nigerian Advertising Service.⁸⁸ In postcolonial Nigeria, advertising agencies, both local and international, operated at the intersection of cinema, television, and oil, at once creating and confirming a cultural conjuncture that would become hyper-familiar in Nigeria, and not simply to the minority who owned TV sets, for radios, magazines, newspapers, posters, and billboards all carried signs and symbols of the oil industry.⁸⁹ If heavily syndicated, sponsor-interrupted television series like *Hopalong Cassidy* and *The Roy Rogers Show* have reliably recycled cinematic accounts of oil capitalism, Shell itself has also helped to keep old Hollywood alive by distributing subsequent-run prints out of its film libraries in Lagos and Port Harcourt, which have operated steadily since the early 1960s. Telefilm programming thus joined older forms of nontheatrical distribution to repeatedly expose Nigerians to messages of petromodernity, a multimedia reception that cut across class lines, as the largely cosmopolitan audiences for *The Roy Rogers Show* and *Hopalong Cassidy*—in a country where only an elite urban minority owned television sets—joined the poorer classes consuming even older Hollywood hand-me-downs (particularly B Westerns) as well as industrial documentaries circulated via the mobile film units that not only survived but thrived after independence, carrying messages of extraction and consumption to all corners of the postcolonial state.⁹⁰ Fittingly, the coming oil boom would greatly increase private owner-

88 Esan, *Nigerian Television*, 46; Tsika, *Cinematic Independence*, 28–30.

89 Warner Bros.' *The Footloose Heiress* (William Clemens, 1937) depicts just such a nexus. Its characters include a middle-aged advertising executive whose biggest account is the Century Oil Company. The film opens with the company requesting a radio program on petroleum. The middle-aged executive is out of ideas, but a younger adman suggests personifying carbon—transforming the chemical element into a live-action and/or cartoon character. The older man initially imagines a series of sketches set in a garage, but the upstart, who comes from a prominent Boston family familiar with “the ad game,” has a better idea: “If your client wants to dramatize carbon, then *dramatize* it,” he urges, suggesting “a series of sketches showing people driving—people who have to get somewhere: honeymooners, a guy hurrying to get a job, [a] fireman, and so forth.” The idea, as described, anticipates the montage of drivers (including Nigerians going to work) in *Shellarama*. Century Oil immediately orders 13 episodes of the proposed program, which promises to blur the line between advertising and entertainment.

90 In her history of Nigerian television, Oluyinka Esan notes that while the medium “was an expensive venture both for the broadcaster and the audiences,” and “most likely to attract the more affluent sections of society” (those who could afford individual sets), it is useful to remember that there may always have been “a measure of communal reception even within the domestic sphere”—that even the most affluent of urban homes may well have accommodated a diversity of television viewers, owing to an ethic of asset sharing and “neighborliness” retained from a

ship of television sets and other media technologies in Nigeria, expanding access to the kinds of extractive norms rehearsed in “The Lady Killer” and “Black Waters,” which envision no limits to material production. Yet much like the short-lived oil boom itself, such programs may have encouraged false expectations of sustainable growth and lasting prosperity. When the boom went bust, however, Nigerian filmmakers were on hand to dramatize the fallout. Their work offers an important corrective to the cheerful claims of *Hopalong Cassidy* and other Hollywood artifacts.

Where the federal government is firmly committed to “fair” compensation for the Comanche in “Black Waters,” the centralized disbursement of oil revenues would have dire consequences for ethnic minorities in Nigeria. At the same time that *Hopalong Cassidy* was cultivating sympathy for the Comanche and promoting the idea of tribal participation in oil profits, Nigeria’s fragile federal structure, with its combustible ethnic politics, was emerging.⁹¹ “Black Waters” does not really question the methods of revenue allocation or the exact percentages involved (why, for instance, is the Comanche Nation to receive just a quarter of oil profits and no more?). Yet the episode, with its emphasis on federal disbursements by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, also models fiscal dependence on a central government—a calm, “rational” deferral to federal authority and, specifically, federal control over oil rents and revenues. Such modeling should not be underestimated, as Andrew Apter argues in his account of how Nigeria’s petromodernity, in which the federal government technically owns the oil in the ground, “took shape through specific technologies of cultural production.”⁹² The ritual exchange of sovereignty is a key, indeed generic, dimension of “Black Waters,” which anticipates, and perhaps influenced, later representations of the arrival of extractive industry in Nigeria. From *Fincho* to the Rogers Ofime production *Oloibiri* (Curtis Graham, 2016), such representations would signal the centrality of ceremonial transfer to the emergence of political

“rural mindset.” The television set as “modern artifact” was thus inserted into traditional living arrangements that survived the experience of urbanization and “mediatization.” Esan, *Nigerian Television*, 37, 40. The promise of reaching elite Lagosian audiences (and affluent expatriates) certainly motivated the (American) National Broadcasting Corporation to partner with WNTV and, later, the Nigerian Television Service (NTS). So, too, did it inspire independent syndicators, individual brands, and advertising agencies to take Nigerian television—especially in Lagos and Ibadan—seriously. But Esan offers an important reminder that the likelihood of communal viewing—what had made mobile cinema units so attractive first to the colonial state and then to private concerns and postcolonial governments—stimulated the development of television broadcasting by Nigerian politicians eager to cultivate an expansive polity.

91 Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 264–270.

92 Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 23.

economies of timber, tin, and petroleum, offering a collective historiography of indigenous assent that has also helped clarify, if not construct, a popular sense of local and national betrayal by extractive capitalists whose early promises of shared wealth have not materialized for most Nigerians. “Black Waters” ends with Cassidy reassuring the chief that prosperity will soon come to pass for the Comanche. Afterwards, however, the happy cowboy simply rides off, into another territory and another episode (like the itinerant petrocaptalists of *Oilman’s Move* and *Skyhook*), unable, like the series that tracks him, to test his pledge to the tribe—to show the social, environmental, and economic consequences of oil drilling.

That is the task of *Oloibiri* and other films shot on the toxic grounds of the Delta, where cameras inevitably capture abundant evidence of oil pollution. Those actually living in the Delta’s oilfields would be systematically disempowered—abandoned and neglected—thus compelling the creation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and other grassroots activist organizations invested in renegotiating, and even upending, the terms of Nigeria’s petromodernity. Yet most Nigerians (among whom were viewers of imported programs like *The Roy Rogers Show* and *Hopalong Cassidy*) did not necessarily care about the plight of the ethnic minorities appealing for oil revenues and reparations as early as the 1960s. “Black Waters” and other media texts may well have confirmed, however indirectly, the popular perception of the isolated Ogoni as “scarcely human” and “cut off from the modern world”—and thus as undeserving of the substantial shares of oil revenues that the noble Comanche manage to obtain on *Hopalong Cassidy*.⁹³ (Apter goes so far as to say that “the Ogoni were universally despised” during the period of Shell’s initial ascent in the Delta.)⁹⁴ Whatever their relationship to actual industrial practices, and whatever their effect on interethnic politics, spectacles of extraction permeated media- and mineral-rich Nigeria even before the oil boom and the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), which the country hosted in 1977, and which signaled and celebrated the postcolonial triumph of petroleum.⁹⁵ As Apter suggests, “visions of excess and access were available to all” as petromodernity intensified in the wake of independence.⁹⁶ The representational value of extraction—even for audiences not yet aware that there was high-quality crude to be drilled in

93 Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 259.

94 Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 263.

95 Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 50.

96 Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 51.

the Niger Delta—should not be underestimated. Whether watching a Shell documentary or an episode of *Hopalong Cassidy*, Nigerian audiences were apprised of the importance of petroleum economies, just as they had earlier been taught, through mobile film units, specific styles of consumption and habits of hygiene (whether they chose to adopt them or not). Even carless Nigerians could see the value of oil at local cinemas and service stations, while the automotive elite received flattering confirmations of their modernity, and implicit celebrations of their cosmopolitanism, on their private television screens.

Resource extraction—and especially oil recovery, which requires a considerable degree of industrial standardization and is far less susceptible to the sort of “artisanal” uptake evident in, say, tin mining—is an understudied source of what Scott Robert Olson calls “transparency,” or “the capability of certain texts to seem familiar regardless of their origin, to seem a part of one’s own culture, even though they have been crafted elsewhere.”⁹⁷ But while Olson sees US multiculturalism as the major fount of such transparency, I tend to observe the relative homogeneity of extraction, which, while not necessarily the same everywhere, exhibits certain industrial, technological, and even social and cultural stabilities as it traverses national borders. Simply put, the retrieval process is itself a source of consistency. This is not to suggest that fictional (or, for that matter, documentary) representations of extraction are entirely “faithful” reflections of the actual business of coal mining or oil drilling. It is instead to argue that there is a certain cultural logic at work in such representations, an elaboration of idioms of extraction that can be mapped onto a material commensurability—a “law of equivalences,” in Baudrillard’s sense—deriving from oil as commodity form (and, indeed, from the coalpit as workplace, as Carolyn Brown’s comparative account of the Udi escarpment and the South Wales Valleys makes abundantly clear). This common measure of mineral and hydrocarbon wealth, despite salient differences (Nigeria’s sweet crude versus the thicker, heavier varieties that require the thermal stimulation of reservoirs, or private as opposed to national ownership of oil fields), may help explain the popularity, or at least the intelligibility, not merely of *Dallas* but also of all manner of Hollywood Westerns in Nigeria. When, in 2018, Disney’s *Black Panther* was marketed especially aggressively in the country, it was partly on the assumption that Nigerians would “see themselves” in its Black cast, and that the film would serve as a profitable agent and expression of Pan-Africanism; the US Consulate in Lagos even hosted a private screening in honor of Black

97 Olson, *Hollywood Planet*, 18.

History Month.⁹⁸ But *Black Panther* is also, as Cajetan Iheka has pointed out, a film about extraction, in which “vibranium” functions as a fantastical metaphor for the actual African minerals and hydrocarbons that power the world. Its violent plot “resonates because the extraction of resources such as oil and uranium ... has engendered similar social conflict and ecological degradation from the Niger Delta in Nigeria to Arlit in Niger.” Simply put, *Black Panther* “reverberates with current problems on the continent”; its “futuristic Wakanda resembles Africa now.”⁹⁹ Exported to Nigeria, works as otherwise dissimilar as “Black Waters” and *Black Panther* illustrate the convergence of local and international experiences of oil capitalism.

Lucky Man O!

Nigeria's postcolonial status as an oil-rich rentier state did not go unnoticed by the makers of narrative fiction films. Distributed by Warner Bros., Lindsay Anderson's *O Lucky Man!* (1973) registers the country's apparent upward trajectory as it follows the adventures of a coffee salesman, Malcolm McDowell's Mick Travis, whose career is inextricably linked to African agricultural and economic developments. In one of the film's first scenes, Mick is touring the Imperial Coffee plant in England. Newly hired by the (fictional) company, he meets a cheerful young woman (played by Christine Noonan) on the factory floor. Watching her pack coffee on a bustling assembly line, he asks, “Do you realize this Nigerian coffee is being packed straight back to Nigeria?” The worker flashes a knowing smile and says, “Frightening, isn't it?” What she means, perhaps, is that Nigeria's newfound capacity to import commodities manufactured from its own raw materials—to consume the fruits of its own lands—can only startle an imperial center long accustomed to a unidirectional system of extraction, to treating itself as terminus. Frightening, too, might be Nigeria's newfound oil wealth, and the sheer bargaining power of a petro-state allied with OPEC during what the West experienced as a prolonged energy crisis.¹⁰⁰ The plant worker's playful smile suggests, of course, that she is far from flustered by this reversal of fortunes; perhaps she is even delighted by the idea.

98 Katherine Suwa, Chibuike Ohieri, Sagir Ahmed, and Olaoluwa Aworinde, “Black History Month,” *Crossroads* 24, no. 2 (May/June 2018): 4.

99 Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 2.

100 Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 21.

Yet the reversal is not comprehensive. Certain longstanding conditions remain firmly in place. Take, for instance, the fact of British manufacturing itself (and of the aptly named Imperial Coffee). In *O Lucky Man!*, Nigeria's coffee cherries must be shipped to a plant in the metropole, where their seeds—raw coffee beans—are extracted, processed, and packaged. Depicting Nigeria's ongoing dependence on foreign plants for the processing of its own raw materials, *O Lucky Man!* also alludes to the country's oil wealth, which indeed made possible a boom in imported products (though Nigerians have never been known for their love of coffee). It is perhaps not incidental that the film's director, Lindsay Anderson, was one of the architects of the Free Cinema movement in Britain. As a documentary filmmaker, Anderson had pursued freedom from, among other endowments of the Griersonian tradition, the idea of colonial dependence so succinctly expressed in, for instance, the Crown Film Unit's *Spotlight on the Colonies* (Diana Pine, 1950), whose voice-over narrator notes that "if the colonies are to send us the food and raw materials we're short of, we must send them the tools to do the job"—instruments of extraction and exportation.¹⁰¹ With its loose structure, varied aesthetic techniques, and general irreverence, *O Lucky Man!* suggests freedom, specifically, from the conceit that Nigeria's crops cannot be consumed by Nigerians (even if they must be processed abroad). If the film is accurate in its allusions to Nigeria's general lack of manufacturing capacity, it does not shy away from the equally pertinent reality of the country's rising, oil-fueled fortunes. A generous reading of the plant worker might point to the frightening, saddening fact of the underdevelopment of the Nigerian postcolony, whose natural resources are exported through multinational corporations that then refine them (literally in the case of crude oil) and sell them back at rates determined by the global market. Perhaps it is equally frightening that Imperial Coffee's British plant employs thousands (like the chipper assembly-line worker herself) to process what cannot be made in Nigeria, even during an oil boom.

O Lucky Man! further dramatizes underdevelopment in a later sequence featuring Ralph Richardson's Sir James Burgess, a British industrialist who owns half the world's copper mines. "In Bolivia, he drove half a million peasants off their land," explains his daughter (played by Helen Mirren). "They starved to death." Histories of extraction, then, are equally histories of dispossession, displacement, and mass death, a point that the film reinforces when Burgess takes a meeting with Dr. Muna, the despotic ruler of Zingara,

101 For more on *Spotlight on the Colonies*, see Rice, *Films for the Colonies*, 6, 179.

a fictional African postcolony.¹⁰² Proposing “an association with our country that will be as profitable to you as to ourselves,” the dictator screens a short promotional film on Zingara—precisely the sort of film that Shell and other oil companies had long produced for viewers in and beyond Nigeria. A white businessman, part of Dr. Muna’s entourage, provides live narration. As the film-within-the-film offers images of sandy beaches and luxury hotels, the narrator notes that “holidaymakers from the industrial centers in Europe and the Americas” are quite “at home” in Zingara. Targeting such tourists requires a massive program of new construction, as well as the importation of British technologies and expertise. The promotional short thus shows European companies installing themselves in Zingara, overseeing the transformation of the natural environment, and employing indigenous workers to perform the hard labor of “industrial transformation.” While the white expatriates enjoy “surroundings of luxury and sophistication” (not to mention “picturesque entertainment ... provided by Zingara natives performing their age-old rituals” on demand), the indigenous laborers reside in “ultramodern workers’ camps” located on the outskirts of town, conveniently out of view of the vacationing elite. Zingara’s chief function, then, is to “satisfy European demands,” from the economic to the visual. “Experienced European engineers are supervising the native labor force,” the narrator says of footage that, rather than faked by the makers of *O Lucky Man!*, appears to be of actual extractive operations on the African continent. By incorporating such glimpses of extraction, the film—cultivating what Jaimie Baron calls “the archive effect”—communicates the stakes, the real-world underpinnings, of its own form of political cabaret.¹⁰³ Africa is not merely referenced through dialogue; it is also visible—“as itself”—via the interpolated footage.

The film’s satirical elements are also grounded in familiar economic policies—reliable engines of expansion for foreign capital and of underdevelopment for African economies. Addressing Zingara’s specific “plans

102 Dr. Muna is played by British actor Arthur Lowe, who appears in blackface (and who would go on to win a BAFTA for his performance). While the use of blackface in *O Lucky Man!* has been widely denounced, it is possible to interpret it as a crude commentary on Dr. Muna’s complicity with white capital. Like other members of the film’s cast, Lowe plays multiple roles in *O Lucky Man!*, and Anderson, who professed “no respect or affection” for blackface, perhaps intended to suggest that Lowe’s white characters (an executive at Imperial Coffee, a corrupt hotelier) “exist inside” Dr. Muna, whose “coconut problem” (to quote Nollywood’s *Osuofia in London*) is plainly that of possession by white power brokers seeking to exploit Zingara. Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise: The Collected Writings*, ed. Paul Ryan (London: Plexus, 2004), 489.

103 Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

for industry," Dr. Muna declares, "Our free-export zone will offer generous advantages to all concerns financed by foreign capital." When Sir James raises the question of repatriation of profits, the dictator introduces Zingara's Indian-born labor secretary, who rises to her feet to assure Sir James that "labor conditions in Zingara offer excellent opportunities for the foreign investor ... Strikes and slowdowns are a thing unknown ... Special attention is paid to cleanliness." Production levels are perpetually high because labor unrest is effectively suppressed; racially segregated living quarters materialize and sustain white supremacy; and foreign capital is protected at the expense of local investment—which is precisely why Sir James, who is looking to expand his already-considerable access to "extractive enclaves," is "considering Zingara" in the first place. Foreign technicians, the labor secretary adds, are not only welcome in Zingara but also "exempted from all personal income tax." "Life for our foreign visitors," she continues, reiterating points made in the promotional film, "will be fully commensurate with the standards of living and convenience enjoyed by their colleagues in America or the European Common Market." Dr. Muna sums up the "sell": Zingara "presents a unique opportunity for secure investment and a high rate of return." Sir James has one final concern: "What guarantees can you provide for the safeguarding of investment? I refer, of course, to the threat of insurrection." Dr. Muna does not deny that Zingara is home to "a small element" that is "attempting to cause unrest," but he assures Sir James that the problem is "firmly in hand." (The dictator sounds, of course, not unlike the Shell officials and military rulers who, by the time *O Lucky Man!* was made, had long developed ways of minimizing—and suppressing—sources of resistance originating in the Niger Delta.) It turns out that Dr. Muna has secured the services of a Colonel Steiger (Wallas Eaton), a European mercenary "whose achievements in Nigeria must be well known to you." When the colonel himself materializes to sell his strategy for crushing dissent in Zingara, he screens a film that outlines a planned counteroffensive against the 2,000 rebels operating in the country's northern territories. The colonel's film shows a map of Zingara, which, in its outline, roughly resembles Nigeria (though Zingara appears to be an island, with several smaller islands surrounding it); "Kidasha" suggests Kaduna, while "Port Zingara" evokes Port Harcourt and other Delta cities in which Shell operated at the time. The colonel, sounding not unlike an oil prospector or timber baron, complains that "the terrain is unfavorable—jungle and swamp favor the native." But, like a Shell or a Unilever, the massive military machine is prepared to overcome such obstacles through superior technology as much as through sheer force of imperial will.

The satirical *O Lucky Man!* was not uncontroversial upon its release in 1973. A British expatriate in Zambia wrote to Anderson that the film exhibited a “misunderstanding of the specific circumstances of post-liberation African states”—to which Anderson replied that the “intentional jumble of characteristics given to the fictitious state of Zingara were [sic] designed to make the audience see the sequence in ... general terms,” rather than as a portrait of a particular postcolony.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Anderson’s Zingara suggests elements of Nigeria, and even of former British possessions in the Caribbean. Such compositing tendencies have persisted in cinematic representations of African extraction. Indeed, the British-American coproduction *The Dogs of War* (John Irvin, 1980), adapted from the 1974 Frederick Forsyth novel of the same name, suggests a continuation of *O Lucky Man!* in its depiction of an African postcolony whose natural resources magnetize major corporations. The fictional postcolony in question—Zangaro—even echoes Anderson’s Zingara. Early on, the ominously named Manson Industries dispatches a mysterious emissary named Endean, an Englishman (played by Hugh Millais, perhaps best known as the formidable bounty hunter in the employ of a powerful mining company in Robert Altman’s 1971 film *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*), to secure the services of mercenary Jamie Shannon (Christopher Walken). “The corporate interests I represent,” explains Endean, “contemplate investing several *hundred* million dollars in the development of, uh, certain resources in Zangaro, West Africa.” The emissary’s euphemism (“uh, certain resources”) conceals the comprehensive scope of the corporation’s appetites. Ostensibly interested in platinum, Manson Industries is in fact attempting to obtain the exclusive mineral and mining rights for “*all* Zangaro,” as Endean later reveals.

A former British colony, Zangaro is currently ruled by a brutal military dictator, General Kimba. As a British journalist wryly notes, Kimba has long “ranted about neocolonialism” as a way of deflecting attention from his own despotism, his own desire to “stay within his borders and slaughter his [people].” He even imprisons his chief rival, Dr. Okoye (played by South African playwright and actor Winston Ntshona), a physician who fought heroically for Zangaro’s independence but who proposed “maintaining links with the mother country.” (Kimba won election precisely by opposing this gesture of reconciliation.) Registering his recalcitrance, Manson Industries wants to hire a well-trained, well-equipped mercenary team to “take out” the dictator; the corporation will then install a handpicked puppet ruler.

104 Quoted in John Izod, Karl Magee, Kathryn Hannan, and Isabelle Gourdin-Sanguard, *Lindsay Anderson: Cinema Authorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 159.

After Shannon, a venal, even bloodthirsty soldier of fortune who yet retains the capacity to be appalled by the depredations of neocolonial extraction, learns of the depth of Manson's commitment to "winning" Zangaro, he asks Endean, "What'd you find there—oil? Diamonds?" What Shannon does not know is that Manson's interests transcend such particulars; the corporation's desires are more expansive than he can possibly imagine. "I don't believe he can even spell 'platinum,'" Endean quips to one of his corporate contacts, late in the film. "He's no idea what's at stake." To Shannon, Endean attempts to convey the simple fact that competition for resources is only intensifying: "The world's running short of commodities. One day, we'll go to war over rice."

The generalized, composited Africanity at the center of both *O Lucky Man!* and *The Dogs of War* also entails transposable natural resources—the malleability of the rentier state. At the same time, the two films evoke what David Harvey has called "empty cosmopolitanism"—that is, cosmopolitanism as an "empty ideal ... bereft of geographical specificity."¹⁰⁵ If, however, multinational corporations care little about Nigerian culture, they care a great deal about the Nigerian state and its capacity to accommodate their needs. There can be no doubt that, as the United States Trade Representative has long maintained, the Shagari government broke contractual agreements with MPAA member companies, refusing to compensate them with promised percentages of box-office earnings. This contract violation could be attributed, at least in part, to lingering resentment of the MPAA's repeated refusal to permit deferment of payments in the wake of the naira's precipitous post-oil-boom devaluation—a seemingly obvious sign of the association's eagerness to pathologize and penalize Nigeria around the time of the oil shock, especially considering that deferred payments had long been accepted (however reluctantly) amid foreign-exchange difficulties in other national markets.¹⁰⁶ The MPAA's citation of Nigerian "corruption" and "bad governance" as the reasons for its withdrawal from the country seems even less ingenuous (albeit predictably in line with World Bank rhetoric) when juxtaposed with the agency's profitable maintenance of relationships with any number of "corrupt" states where the rule of law was, throughout the 1980s, weak or nonexistent. As James Ferguson has made

105 David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012 [2001]), 210, 211.

106 United States Trade Representative, *1996 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1996), 261. For more on the MPEA's history of accepting deferment of payments, see The Motion Picture Export Association, "Trade Restrictions on US Motion Pictures," *The Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, 1960, 780.

abundantly clear, “good governance” is hardly a precondition for foreign investment, regardless of the reformist discourses of the World Bank and the IMF. In fact, “violent and ‘corrupt’ states, even those with active civil wars, have often attracted very significant inflows.”¹⁰⁷ Nigeria’s volatile oil sector suggests a striking contrast to the Shagari-era film sector in its capacity to magnetize multinational firms despite the preponderance of sabotage and theft. Oil capitalism in Nigeria, inextricable from violent conflict and generalized “corruption” in the Niger Delta, is thus rendered exceptional by the continued presence of foreign companies, which remain entrenched even amid ongoing losses of production and profits.¹⁰⁸

If, in its precise operations, the oil sector obviously and considerably differs from commercial media and other profitmaking ventures, it exhibits a certain internal coherence, a stability across geographic locations. Indeed, other parts of the Global South shed light on Nigeria’s economic and environmental predicaments, generating films that suggest a common experience of oil capitalism. But they may also indicate what is uniquely tragic about the situation in Nigeria. Ebrahim Golestan’s documentary *A Fire* (1961), for instance, examines the destructive consequences of corporate efforts to drill an oil well near Ahvaz, in Iran, in 1958, two years after the discovery of commercial quantities of the fossil fuel in Oloibiri. Over shots of the eponymous inferno, which evokes the fictional (yet realistically staged) catastrophes of *The Wages of Fear* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1953) and its American remakes (1958’s *Violent Road*, directed by Howard W. Koch, and 1977’s *Sorcerer*, directed by William Friedkin), Golestan’s voice-over narration notes how oil infrastructure becomes part of the landscape, naturalized even in its scorching breakdown. Yet there are limits to such absorption. The harvest time eventually arrives, and the local farmers, their scythe-bearing hands shown in expressive close-up, must gather wheat as the fire rages, and breathe the explosive air, rendered multiply deadly by the release of poisonous gas. Golestan claims that the area’s sheep grew accustomed to the catastrophe—to the great “jet of gas from the bed of the earth.” Hoping to put out the fire, the oil workers—Americans prominent among them—first turn to water from the Karun River. Laying a pipe between reservoir and oil well, they demonstrate that one scarce resource must be harnessed to handle the ruinous consequences of another’s extraction. Offering an important contrast to the nitroglycerine that is so dramatically central

107 James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 196.

108 Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 202–203.

to *The Wages of Fear* and its fictional counterparts (including the exactly contemporaneous Hollywood film *Blowing Wild* [Hugo Fregonese, 1953]), Golestan's *A Fire* initially emphasizes water for its reparative potential, though it eventually shows the workers' recourse to dynamite. Close-ups of explosives being packed into protective boxes precede long shots in which the combustible freight is carefully transported to the site of the fire. After seventy days, the inferno is finally extinguished.

The Iranian emergency—temporary by definition and requiring the intervention of famed American oil firefighter Myron Kinley—is the norm in the Niger Delta, a seemingly permanent condition, as Amata's *Black November* and other films so powerfully illustrate. (*Oloibiri* even directly references Iran's contrasting yet eerily resonant oil histories.) Golestan's poetic invocations of the naturalization of catastrophe acquire the force of the literal in Nigeria, where the constancy of gas flaring is a daily reality, and where no heroic figure—no Myron Kinley—will swoop in to help put out the flames. Yet *A Fire* is hardly a triumphalist film. (Nor is it a clearly branded product, an unambiguous tool of institutional advertising: the oil company's logos are never glimpsed in the film, which shows only the Caterpillar tractors brought in to shovel up the debris—the mangled steel and charred valve parts—in the inferno's aftermath.) Golestan's mordancy is evident throughout—even at the very end, in a closing title that reads, "The fire was put out and the well was shut ... and the efforts continued to drill another well, but that is another story." Even in English translation, the language here strongly suggests the possibility of catastrophic recurrence, of an endless cycle of exploration, extraction, and destruction. In the sequence that immediately precedes this end title, Golestan's voice-over employs speculation and conditionality to complicate the seemingly decisive extinguishing of the fire: the words "What if a new spark ...?" are repeated portentously. What if a fire starts anew? What if catastrophe recurs while the carcass of the old valve is removed and new parts are installed? Such questions, Golestan suggests, may well be moot. For *A Fire* vividly reveals that extraction is destruction, poisonous gas and explosive air among the inevitable consequences of oil drilling.

Flames of (S)hell

Released in 2016, the New Nollywood film *Oloibiri* opens with a title card identifying the eponymous community as the site of the 1956 discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region. The words "BASED ON TRUE EVENTS" are then

superimposed over shots of lush vegetation, the digitally enhanced, almost fluorescent green of the grass and palm leaves suggesting a nostalgic vision of a more verdant past—an impression confirmed by a sudden flash-forward to 2015, with its more muted colors and general atmosphere of pollution and decay. Gas flaring sullies the air while oil spills stain the waterways. The fictional LESH, a multinational oil company that stands in for Shell, has been wreaking environmental havoc for decades. “LESH thinks that peasants relish some oil in their water,” observes Timipre (Olu Jacobs), an elderly resident of Otuagbagi, a community in Ogbia, Bayelsa State. A former activist who regrets not having done more to resist the incursions of multinational oil companies, Timipre has been reduced, in old age, to feebly warning children not to drink contaminated water.

Timipre was present for the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956. A flashback shows his younger self seated among friends for a presentation by a European businessman who cheerfully announces a “development initiative” involving petroleum extraction. While Timipre’s associates express excitement over the new venture, the well-informed young Nigerian strikes a note of caution. “You signed the Anglo-Persian Oil Alliance,” he reminds the outsider, “till the Iranians wanted more control over their oil wealth, which was so much to your dislike.” In response, the European businessman claims that his company has “the blessings of everybody here,” as well as an elder-approved remit to “empower this community.” (In Amata’s *Black November*, a Western Oil executive similarly says of unruly Warri residents, “We can handle them through the elders.”) He continues, “We are offering all sorts of development objectives. We are building roads, we are improving the schools. We are even employing your youth.” The scene recalls the meeting of the village elders in *Fincho*, a gathering at which the British timber executive, having outlined the case for extraction, receives official permission to proceed; it also evokes “Black Waters” in its depiction of the ceremonial palavers that, in fact, served to confirm British authority and permit resource extraction.¹⁰⁹ (*Fincho*, too, gestures toward indigenous resistance: the local chief is initially skeptical of the British proposal; other elders cite the possibility of environmental catastrophe, and everyone agrees that the village’s young men should not work for the timber company but should instead focus on farming. The community comes around in the end, of course; as in *Oloibiri*, the European

109 For another, equally strategic depiction of the corporate pursuit of local authorization, see the Nigerian Tobacco Company’s film *The Chiefs of the Eastern Region at Enugu* (1959). Founded in 1951, the Nigerian Tobacco Company was jointly owned by the Nigerian government and the multinational company British American Tobacco.

is simply too persuasive, and so are the awe-inspiring tools of his highly technologized trade.) “Don’t create unnecessary issues,” a friend warns Timipre amid the excitement of 1956. “Men and women are employed. Oloibiri is the new Lagos!” Meant to celebrate Oloibiri’s modernization—a process that promises to place the previously overlooked community on a socioeconomic par with the port city—the friend’s comment also carries darker meanings, as Timipre himself recognizes. For to “become Lagos”—to abandon tradition and enter the age of extraction—is also to be transformed into a sacrifice zone, a place of depletion and environmental emergency. “Can’t you see that these people are raping us?” Timipre cries. “Our waters now float with small rings of oil! Our air smells toxic! Can’t you people *see*?” His impassioned outburst receives a blunt response: “We do not want to see through your eyes.” Blindness, then, is a willed condition, a simple choice. There are those who, like Timipre, marshal the evidence of their senses, and those who flatly refuse to perceive the sins of extraction.

In the heavily polluted present, in which those sins are impossible to ignore, Timipre reflects on his failures as an activist. “I told our people that we should seek greater involvement in how our oil wealth would be used,” he recalls forlornly, noting that he was never able to offer more than mere talk. Another flashback reveals that he sought religious counsel, repairing to the outpost of a European missionary. “It would be wise,” the cleric tells Timipre’s younger self in the flashback, “if you people got involved in what is being done with Oloibiri’s oil.” The foreigner’s words are ambiguous (“getting involved” might well mean protesting extraction), but his exasperated tone suggests that he is simply serving the interests of the oil company and seeking to compel his indigenous parishioners to embrace modernity. “Getting involved” would then entail signing up for wage labor (as in *Fincho*), aligning the local community with the extractive cause through salaried work. Still clutching his rosary beads, Timipre is left feeling that no one—least of all a European missionary, that classic handmaiden of imperialism—will join him in opposing the intrusive oil company. Defeated, he flees to London, preferring to escape the scene of destruction and live out much of his adulthood in the very place to which Oloibiri’s brutally extracted riches are repeatedly taken—an ignominious decision that he later regrets.

Cutting back and forth between the Niger Delta (the site of extraction) and Houston (the headquarters of a multinational oil company), *Oloibiri* conveys a sense of global interconnectedness familiar from *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005), *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), and other contemporary network narratives. At a swank Houston function, Robert Powell (William

R. Moses), the chairman of Foreshaw Explorations, announces a new plan to extract oil from the Niger Delta: "As per our promise, we have secured oil mining leases in Nigeria's Niger Delta. We have established 12 oil wells in Otuagbagi." In a rather crude illustration of the Marxian conception of the comprador class, the film shows Foreshaw Explorations employing a venal Nigerian director of operations—a fat-cat general manager who physically resembles Sani Abacha, and who, like that notorious dictator, surrounds himself with prostitutes and cares only about amassing personal wealth. Through him, Foreshaw Explorations obtains a 30-year lease in Otuagbagi, where it plans to produce 8,100 barrels of crude oil a day, with a projected profit of over \$300 million annually.

Meanwhile, Timipre is under the care of a psychiatrist, equally troubled by his past failures, the present condition of Otuagbagi's natural environment, and the emergence of militant organizations, including one that, under the leadership of the ruthless Gunpowder (Richard Mofe-Damijo), intends to drive all oil companies out of Nigeria, starting with the well-entrenched LESH. (A trained geologist, Gunpowder once worked for LESH, and it was this experience—his behind-the-scenes exposure to corporate malfeasance—that radicalized him.) Intergenerational conflict colors Timipre's heated encounters with Gunpowder, who is at least twenty years his junior and does not think that extraction can be halted through peaceful means—through mere protest. "I am the creation of your lousy generation," Gunpowder taunts the aged Timipre. "Such a timid bunch, cheering while your land was being pillaged and sapped dry!" Though Timipre was decidedly not among the celebrants of 1956, he accepts Gunpowder's condemnation. He disagrees only with the younger man's embrace of violence.

Powell, the Houston-based Foreshaw CEO, begins receiving anonymous documents apprising him of some of the adverse health effects of exposure to petroleum hydrocarbons. He decides to travel to Nigeria in a tentative, exploratory attempt to ensure that his company will operate more "humanely" there. Shortly after arriving in Port Harcourt, however, he is ambushed by Gunpowder and several other well-armed militants. Powell manages to escape, eventually ending up at Timipre's doorstep. The latter, at first, is scarcely sympathetic to the terrorized CEO. Though he disapproves of Gunpowder's bloody methods, he also believes that Powell, experiencing mortal fear for the very first time, is simply getting what he deserves. "His greed brought him grief!" Timipre brusquely explains to his grandson, who soon convinces the bitter old man to assist the endangered foreigner. Even as he leads him out of Gunpowder's immediate path, however, Timipre cannot

help but denounce the CEO and all that he represents. “Bugger off!” he snaps at one point, as the two are navigating the soggy terrain of Otuagbagi. “You siphon oil and send it to your country to build a better future. Oh, yes! While our own life is messed up.” In response, Powell protests, “I didn’t come here to steal from you! I came here so that my company can learn how to treat your community with respect.” Ultimately, the Holy Bible, with its directive to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” convinces Timipre to relent in the face of extractive capital. Not only does the Nigerian come to accept the American CEO as his neighbor (a process of accommodation that requires him to ratify Foreshaw’s thirty-year lease). He also joins forces with the CEO in an effort to make possible that signal oxymoron of corporate social responsibility and cause-related marketing: “environmentally friendly extraction.” In familiar Nollywood fashion, Christianity solves some rather thorny problems, reconciling past and present, tradition and modernity. The Bible blunts Timipre’s activist impulses and leads him to formally welcome Foreshaw Explorations to Otuagbagi.

Oloibiri belongs to a long tradition of clash-of-culture narratives that pivot around petroleum extraction. It recalls, in particular, Bill Forsyth’s 1983 film *Local Hero*, which similarly features a Houston oil executive who travels to another country in order to secure mineral rights. In Forsyth’s film, the executive, Mac, who specializes in mergers and acquisitions for Houston-based Knox Oil, is dispatched to Scotland shortly after brokering a major deal in Mexico. Yet Africa remains very much on his mind as he prepares to leave for Aberdeen. “Look after Africa for me while I’m gone,” he instructs an associate, who responds by asking, “All of Africa?” “No,” Mac clarifies, “just the west-coast deals” (which presumably encompass the all-important Niger Delta region). As in *Oloibiri*, Houston, however important, is just one node in an extractive network that stretches across the globe, and that simply cannot function without the African continent. The Scotland of *Local Hero* is, one Knox executive insists, “not a Third World situation,” in sharp contrast to Mexico or Nigeria; it is that rare space of exploitation in which American oilmen can feel “at home.” Yet much as Otuagbagi transforms Powell, the Scottish coast inspires Mac, giving the formerly incurious executive a new appreciation of both physical geography (including the seashells scattered across the area where Knox intends to establish a refinery) and human geography (for the village that stands atop considerable hydrocarbon resources is peopled by all manner of lovable eccentrics). Mac’s newfound ecogism does not prevent him from following through on his obligations to Knox; petroleum extraction remains a priority. “It’s the *only* business,” Mac declares of oil drilling, adding rhetorically, “Could

you imagine a world without oil?" He and a colleague—a representative of Knox's Scottish subsidiary—proceed to detail petroleum's centrality to modern life; they agree that its supremacy is unshakeable, even as they walk along—and marvel at—a pristine beach. Here, as in *Oloibiri*, continued extraction is presented—implausibly—as compatible with conservation.

Produced with the support of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, *Oloibiri*, like *Local Hero* before it, cannot imagine a postextractive, decarbonized future.¹¹⁰ The film ends with computer-generated newspaper headlines announcing the historic collaboration of Powell and Timipre. ("Elder and CEO Decide That Working Together Is Better Now," reads one.) Images of rapprochement accompany the headlines: Timipre and the CEO are shown shaking hands at various public events. A production of Rogers Ofime's Winnipeg-based Theatron Media, *Oloibiri* suggests the inoculation theory: it supplies a dose of environmentalist criticism, and alludes to the historical depredations of Shell, while bearing the imprimaturs (and potentially advancing the interests) of no fewer than three Nigerian oil companies, one of which, Capital Oil & Gas, is a product of the deregulation of the downstream oil-and-gas sector under Obasanjo. (*Oloibiri* thus recalls the 1974 film *Gold*, which critiques a single—fictional—mining firm but ends with a tribute to South Africa's General Mining & Finance Corporation, the Buffelsfontein Gold Mine, and the West Rand Consolidated Gold Mine.) The film's production was thus made possible by something that the narrative ultimately celebrates: the licensing of private refineries that promise to "do better" (than Shell) and "respect" Nigerian citizens. That such citizens may not be able to afford the oil extracted from under their feet is of no concern to *Oloibiri*, though even *Local Hero* manages to address the all-too-familiar asymmetries of life in a globalized resource state. ("They see the world," Scottish lobstermen say of the crustaceans that they harvest—creatures that "catch a plane every night," to be transported to markets far away; the lobstermen themselves cannot afford them, nor can any of their neighbors—the crustaceans are simply too expensive to be consumed locally.) In *Oloibiri*, Timipre's activism is focused squarely on Bayelsa State, and his efforts to "clean up" his natal home might well create or exacerbate other sacrifice zones, both in and beyond Nigeria. The film features a theme song whose lyrics obsessively repeat the name of the eponymous community. Playing

110 The film's other sponsors included the Federal Capital Territory Administration, Oranto Petroleum, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON), Capital Oil & Gas, Diamond Bank PLC, Project ACT Nollywood, and Zerock Construction Nigeria.

over the closing credits, the song cements the impression that reparations for Bayelsa, offered amid the continuance of petro-extraction, can only mean pollution for other parts of the Niger Delta region. Decontaminating Oloibiri—Timipre's sole goal—will be carried out under the auspices of Foreshaw Explorations and as a condition of the corporation's thirty-year oil-mining lease. "The poison is not only in our rivers," warns Gunpowder's mother. Nor, indeed, is environmental destruction attributable only to Shell. But such thorny realities are ultimately subsumed under a wan celebration of the "humane" and mutually enriching bond between Foreshaw/Powell and Nigeria/Timipre.

However much the film maligns it (via LESH, its fictional surrogate), Shell is not monosemic; it can still serve as a powerful symbol, and as an active agent, of Nigeria's worldliness. In the fall of 2016—in Nigeria's independence month, no less—*Oloibiri* had its lavish international premiere at the prestigious Shell Hall in the Onikan district of Lagos Island. The film has thus been enmeshed in an elaborate process of greenwashing that is not new in Nigeria—that is practically as old as Shell itself. In Ikenna Emma Aniekwé's *The Liquid Black Gold* (2009), another Nollywood film that cannot imagine an alternative to fossil fuels, Sam Dede's protagonist explains to his wife that "our real enemies are the government; our perceived are the oil companies." The latter, however, have long sought to alter this perception, including by implausibly shifting the blame for environmental destruction onto a state apparatus that Nigerians are already accustomed to complaining about. "What have we done to the oil companies to deserve this kind of suffering?" cry the young Delta residents in Aniekwé's film, which responds by shifting attention toward corrupt governance, as though Shell and the state were not partners in crime. Ugezu J. Ugezu's *King of Crude* (2011) and *Crude War* (2011) similarly focus on failures of political leadership, while Moses Inwang's *Militants* (2007) prefigures *Oloibiri* in its depiction of foreign oil executives victimized by insurgents in the Delta.¹¹¹ (*The Liquid Black Gold* also features a "white" character—the well-connected Mr. Phillips, played by light-skinned Nigerian actor Cecil Harry, at the time a specialist in expatriate roles—who survives a kidnapping only to broker a rapprochement between warring factions.) None of this is to suggest that Nollywood is naïve about petrocapi-talism, or remotely unaware of the state function of Shell and other oil majors. If grumbling about the government is very much a Nigerian national pastime (convincingly reflected in the aforementioned

111 For more on this cycle of films, see Añuli Agina, "The Niger Delta in Nigerian Video Films," *Critical African Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 2013): 79–91.

films), objecting to oil extraction is not. Questioning who profits from petroleum riches, how, and with what political effects is, simply put, a far more marketable approach for Nollywood's commercial filmmakers than asserting that the country's fossil-fuel reserves should be kept in the ground. Nollywood has not yet echoed the Nigerian environmentalist Nnimmo Bassey, who argues, "The simple answer to our climate crisis, one begging to be accepted, is that we must simply leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole and the tar sands in the land."¹¹² Instead, Nollywood, to the degree that it acknowledges petroculturalism, simply and strategically extends to familiar melodramatic territory the basic premises of decades of industrial films: oil is life; extraction is imperative; petromodernity is permanent.

An early scene in *Local Hero* suggests the public-relations function of films like the docudramatic *Oloibiri* and Shell's own *Oilman's Move*. A group of Knox executives gather in a Houston conference room for a preview screening of the latest paean to petroleum extraction—an industrial film produced by Knox's in-house outfit. This film-within-a-film features an authoritative voice-over narrator who intones over footage of gas flaring, "Nature guards her treasures jealously. Just a decade ago, these fields were beyond our reach—we didn't have the technology. Today, a Knox engineer will tell you that he might need a little time, but he'll get the oil. He knows that a little time is all that we have left." With that last line—delivered over aerial shots of lengthy pipelines—*Local Hero* betrays an awareness of the strategic importance of environmental pessimism to an extractive enterprise largely responsible for pollution and climate change. Rather than denying finitude, Knox embraces it, burnishing its reputation in the process. If Knox can be trusted to locate nature's treasures, it is because the corporation is keenly aware of temporal limits. If it deserves public support, it is because of its honesty and "integrity." Willing to acknowledge self-extinction, Knox will not whitewash. It will only, perhaps, greenwash.

The Knox film glimpsed at the start of *Local Hero* resembles nothing so much as Shell's Nigerian productions—docudramatic shorts that tended to telegraph the oil major's doggedness in the face of natural obstacles. But its voice-over narration also anticipates the accelerated rate of discovery of Africa's natural resources in the twenty-first century, a time (so far, at least) of repetition for industrial extraction, and thus of perpetuation for petroculturalism. Nollywood films like *Black November* and *Oloibiri* reflect some of Nigeria's specific experiences of petromodernity. Like Jeta Amata,

112 Nnimmo Bassey, *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2012), 117.

Richard Mofe-Damijo, who plays Gunpowder in *Oloibiri*, hails from the Niger Delta region and even served as Delta State's Commissioner for Culture and Tourism. Mofe-Damijo lends the film his own powerful, site-specific associations, supplementing its reliance on location shooting in Bayelsa State. At the same time, however, *Oloibiri*, like *Black November* before it, links Nigeria to the overseas markets for its oil, cross-cutting between the Niger Delta and a megacity in the United States. Where *Black November* is partly set in Los Angeles, *Oloibiri* uses oil-rich Houston for the city's celebrated status as "the Energy Capital of the World," and it shows how this popular construction is subtended by the exploitation (and despoliation) of southern Nigeria.

In the 2017 Nollywood film *The Lost Café*, Kenneth Gyang forges important connections between Nigeria and another site of oil and gas extraction—another "nation constituted by fossil fuels": Norway, whose oil and gas output was steadily increasing when Gyang shot there.¹¹³ The director's poetic efforts to bridge Nigeria and Norway build on a long tradition of comparative analysis that, in covering vast geographical distances, has also indicated the global entwinement of various natural resources. Extractive interdependence is, for instance, markedly evident in the film work of the United States Bureau of Mines, a division of the Department of the Interior that was established in 1910 and that began producing motion pictures in 1916.¹¹⁴ By 1929, it had amassed what was possibly the world's largest collection of industrial films. Financed by the private organizations that participated in their production, the bureau's movies were distributed free of charge (minus shipping costs) to schools, churches, factories, vocational training centers, scientific societies, business and civic organizations, and the armed forces. Major works included the one-reel *Getting the Most Out of Coal* (1920); the three-reel¹¹⁵ *Story of Oil* (1920), produced for Standard Oil; the four-reel *The Story of Natural Gas* (1922), made in cooperation with the Natural Gas Association of America; the seven-reel *The World Struggle for Oil* (1924) and the eight-reel *The Story of Petroleum* (1928), both sponsored by Sinclair Oil; the five-reel *The Story of Iron* (1928), financed by three of the largest companies in the sector (Pickands Mather, Bethlehem Steel,

113 Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective, *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism* (London: Verso, 2021), 123.

114 Arthur Edwin Krows, "Motion Pictures—Not for Theaters," *The Educational Screen* 21, no. 1 (January 1942): 14–17, 21 [15].

115 A nine-reel version of *Story of Oil* was shown in 1920 at an event celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Standard Oil Company. "Standard Oil, 50 Years Old, Tells Its Deeds and Aims," *Petroleum* 8, no. 4 (February 1920): 33.

and Youngstown Sheet & Tube); and the four-reel *Refining the Crude* (1929), funded by the Gulf Refining Company. Over eight million Americans were said to have seen these and other films made under the aegis of the Bureau of Mines in 1946 and 1947 alone.¹¹⁶ The bureau continued to produce films for the next several decades, revisiting key themes and venturing into new sites and styles of extraction.¹¹⁷ (The Bureau of Mines was dissolved in 1996.) “Particularly well publicized and circulated,” notes Gregory A. Waller, “were [Bureau of Mines] films that tracked the [oil] industry beyond the United States, reflecting the increasing competition during the 1920s for ‘foreign’ oil resources.”¹¹⁸ Inevitably, the bureau’s stated goal of “visualizing the mineral and allied industries” brought it to the African continent, which, anticipating films from Fred Zinnemann’s *The Nun’s Story* to Gyang’s *The Lost Café*, it proceeded to position in comparative relation to Europe.¹¹⁹ Completed in 1925, the three-part, nine-reel *Through Oil Lands of Europe and Africa* (later updated and reissued as *Trip Through the Oil Lands of Europe and Africa*) was commissioned by the Pan-American Petroleum and Transport Company. Owing to its moment of production some three decades before oil was discovered in commercial quantities in Oloibiri, *Through Oil Lands of Europe and Africa* sidesteps Nigeria in its wide-ranging journey. Yet in depicting the production and refining of oil in Egypt as well as the transportation of the substance through the Suez Canal, the film suggests an important precedent for the visual and conceptual strategies of Shell, Sam Zebba, Zinnemann, and Gyang.¹²⁰ For here, in a form combining the contemplative poetics of the travelogue and the straightforward instruction of the sponsored film, is an obsessively comparative account of African and European geographies, one that lingers—like Shell’s *The Search for Oil in Nigeria*, Zebba’s *Fincho*, Zinnemann’s *The Nun’s Story*, and Gyang’s *The Lost Café*—on the waterways that efficiently convey natural resources.¹²¹

116 Samuel Weiss, “Special Purpose Films in 1947,” *The 1948 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures* (1948): 725–730 [729].

117 In 1964, it made *Washington and Its Natural Resources* in cooperation with Richfield Oil; in 1972, it produced *Emergency Investigation of Coal Waste Embankments*.

118 Gregory A. Waller, “The American Petroleum Institute: Sponsored Motion Pictures in the Service of Public Relations,” in *Petrocinema*, 136–161 [140].

119 “Complete Film on Oil,” *The Film Daily* 64, no. 58 (December 9, 1933): 14.

120 It also anticipates Bernardo Bertolucci’s *La via del petrolio* (1967), with its poetic shots of an oil tanker sailing through the Suez Canal. For more on the film, which Bertolucci made for ENI, the Italian state-owned oil and gas company, see Georgiana Banita, “From Isfahan to Ingolstadt: Bertolucci’s *La via del petrolio* and the Global Culture of Neorealism,” in *Oil Culture*, 145–168.

121 For detailed descriptions of the film’s three parts, see *Descriptive List of Motion Picture Films of the U.S. Bureau of Mines* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1929), 9–10.

By 1965, including Nigeria in the global story of oil was essential, as *The People of Petroleum*, which Swiss filmmaker Gilbert Bovay made for ENI, the Italian state-owned oil and gas company, powerfully indicates. Linking Nigeria not merely to Italy but also to Iran, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, *The People of Petroleum* offers a panoramic portrait of oil capitalism's connective potential. The film's Nigerian section, shot on location in the Niger Delta, evokes the exactly contemporaneous *Shellarama*, particularly in shots of riverboats penetrating the region's dense freshwater swamp forests and carrying both Nigerian navigators and European technicians. But where *Shellarama* forgoes voice-over narration, preferring a strictly visual account of the Delta's worldliness, *The People of Petroleum* offers a pontifical Italian-language commentary on Nigeria, at one point deploring the country as "a corner of the earth hostile to human beings"—a "kingdom of humidity, of insects, of malaria, of lianas," where one "sweats while standing still."¹²² By linking lianas—the Delta's long-stemmed woody vines—to mosquitos and malaria, the film implicitly justifies their eradication, presenting them as dangerous impediments to industrial progress. Removed to make way for oil technicians more accustomed to air-conditioned offices, the lianas represent a surmountable obstacle, but they also serve as reminders of the picturesque specificity of the extraction zone in which they thrive. Nigeria, the narrator suggests, is at once "the country of the Niger River" and "the Africa of illustrated postcards," a particular space of exploitation that is also representative of Black Africa (for "everything here resembles the most conventional idea of the Black continent"). Sketched in Milan and refined in Lagos, topographic maps are finally put to the test in the Delta's swamps.

A key sequence shows Nigerian workers hacking away at the wilderness, their machetes clearing a path for private industry in what is merely a prelude to more destruction, finally glimpsed in a reprise of the imagery of Unilever's *The Twilight Forest* and other timber films. On the soundtrack, drumbeats suggest not simply a traditional, "tribal" musicality but also the obsessive forward thrust of men and machines. "You pass through the branches," intones the narrator, his voice blending with the music, "and you can hear the sharp blows of the large knives. After many days, a gap strewn with dry branches will be opened." The drumbeats fade and a new, "modern" sound can be heard—the hum of high industry—as "the noise of the first machines resonates in the forest." The latter include the same massive bulldozers and other technologies of clear-cutting seen in *The Twilight Forest*. At one point, the narrator of *The People of Petroleum* attempts to justify such wanton

122 All translations are my own.

devastation (of a forest “robbed of its silence” and stripped of so many of its trees) by asserting, “It is necessary to know what the earth hides in its depths.” In any case, he adds, this is “the heart of tropical and unhealthy Africa, where it is not easy to live.” Thus “powerful bulldozers have been transported” to the area, whose “forest resists but will give in to the assault of the tracked vehicles” that thoroughly transform the landscape, bringing illumination “where barely a bit of light once filtered in,” and roads where once there were none. The narrator’s pithy summation—“The forest has surrendered”—would be a fitting title for Unilever’s film, as for *Fincho*.

The People of Petroleum is particularly attuned to the connective power and general cultural and national significance of the Niger. As the narrator puts it at one point, “Nigeria was conditioned geographically and historically in the great river, and it sees here its ancestral aspect transforming.” Yet such violent change at the hands of extractive industry (“Everything here was done by the oil men”) is not to be lamented. For all that it is losing, Nigeria is gaining something, too: “In Nigeria, 300 languages and dialects are spoken. Today, a new one has been added—that of the men in helmets who have come from far away.” While Bovay’s work for ENI generally aggrandizes the company as a beneficent global citizen—most conspicuously in his 1968 film *Africa: The Birth of a Continent*, which posits a causal connection between oil capitalism and political independence—*The People of Petroleum* also reveals some of the environmental linkages that preceded ENI’s penetration of foreign territories. But the film’s production preceded the late twentieth-century revaluation of watersheds, in which the word “wetland” would come to carry an ethical and aesthetic currency emphatically opposed to the negative connotations of “swamp” (a “dirty” term that *The People of Petroleum* plainly prefers in its alarmist account of the unhealthful aspects of “la palude,” or “il pantano”). At no point can it conceive of the mangrove forest as anything other than “bad” terrain to be cleared by and for the oil industry, so that Nigeria may better resemble “clean” Europe. The film, like *Trip Through the Oil Lands of Europe and Africa* before it, shows the truly “transnational scope of oil culture” as it follows naturally occurring connective paths and forges more than a few of its own.¹²³

Crosscutting between aerial images of the Calabar and the Drammen, Gyang’s *The Lost Café* offers a subtler view of such global interconnectedness. Even on the seemingly homogenizing terrain of petrocapi-talism, however, Nigeria and Norway are not transposable. In the former, oil was discovered in commercial quantities in 1956; in the latter, in 1969. Yet both have fed the

123 Banita, “From Isfahan to Ingolstadt,” 148.

idea that oil and gas production is economically, culturally, and temporally transformative, reliably carrying poor and “backward” communities (Oloibiri in Nigeria, Stavanger in Norway) into moneyed modernity. The prosperity gospel preached by the films of Shell, Exxon, Unilever, and Hollywood dies hard.

Conclusion

Environments of Interaction

Abstract: This book has used the concept of Nollywood geographies to explore key aspects of Nigeria’s relationship not only to its own natural resources but also to the world beyond its national borders. If colonial empire formed some of these contexts of interaction, then so, in an even more elemental sense, did natural environments. Today, Africa’s economic dependence on natural resources is only increasing, a function not simply of deindustrialization and the shrinking of the continent’s manufacturing sector but also of the uncanny capacity of extractive industries to uncover new mineral and oil reserves—to identify fresh mining and hydrocarbon assets and, in so doing, strengthen longstanding impressions of Africa as an egregiously underexploited land of plenty.

Keywords: wetlands; offshore drilling; Disney; ecohorror; rewilding; ecosystem restoration

“Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.” – Edward Said¹

In the Warner Bros. crime melodrama *Heat Lightning* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1934), set at a remote filling station in the Southwestern United States on a day when the temperature exceeds 110 degrees, a character marvels at the innocence of a recently screened film in which the African climate, with its sweltering seasons, is described as utterly unique. “People in town are still laughing at an African movie they showed the other night,” he notes. “The

¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 7.

man on the screen says, ‘Here in Africa, folks, it’s 112 in the shade—believe it or not!’ Well, it was 125 right there in the theater!” What the character calls an “African movie” is likely meant to be an American movie about Africa. (Judging from the presence and quoted commentary of the “man on the screen,” it is probably intended, more specifically, as a travelogue or other documentary.) Whatever its genre and provenance, this didactic film-within-a-film, with its absurd suggestion that Africa’s extreme heat is all but inconceivable to those outside the continent, exhibits an ignorance of global climatic continuities that makes even its provincial American viewers roar with derisive laughter.

In the American desert setting of *Heat Lightning*, references to the Sahara abound. They are among the rhetorical strategies by which the local population confidently places their region, however remote, in a global frame. Fittingly, given the windswept gas station around which the action takes place, the locals’ sense of themselves as global citizens—and of the social, economic, and environmental parallels between the Southwestern United States and North Africa—is bolstered by oil prospecting, a frequent topic of conversation. Extraction cements the worldliness of a setting already connected to other parts of the globe by its extreme temperatures.

The characters in *Heat Lightning* seem to anticipate, in their own, colloquial ways, Edward Said’s famous remarks about geography as subject to multiple forms of mediation, from the phenomenal and commonsensical (as in the reminder that the American Southwest features terrain, and reaches temperatures, that would be familiar to many Africans, just as it shares globally intelligible habits of resource extraction) to the downright erroneous (as in the exoticizing, essentializing claim that Africa is physically and thus socially divergent and disconnected—an assertion that threatens to contribute to racial or at least continental polarization but that the characters in *Heat Lightning* see for the laughable tripe that it is). Geography is distinctly vulnerable to (mis)representation. Marshalling the power of analogy, *Heat Lightning* reveals the value, and perhaps the limits, of the kind of comparative approach encapsulated in Michael Watts’ use of the term “oil frontiers” to describe both the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico.²

Cinema has long documented the human modification of Lagos wetlands as well as the steady transformation of the Louisiana coast. Some decidedly ambitious films even crosscut between African and Euro-American

2 Michael Watts, “Oil Frontiers: The Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico,” in *Oil Culture*, ed. Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 189–210.

landscapes, as though the watercourses of the former run eventually into those of the latter, and vice versa, offering visions of reciprocal relations that typically draw attention to resource extraction. Such works—from Cinerama's *Seven Wonders of the World* to Nollywood's *Gone*—contest geographic dichotomies, rejecting binary naivete in their accounts of global resemblances and interrelations. The occasional film also counters the environmentalist claims of contemporaneous works, exposing the emptiness of colonial and neocolonial promises. *Broken Lance* and other Westerns depict the toxic pollution that *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest* attempt to conceal through images of timber rafts gliding “cleanly” and “naturally” downriver, the neatly bundled products of extractive enterprise.

Working from the assumption that Africa could be made to resemble Europe, colonial films repeatedly depicted the perceived need to transform Nigeria's natural environments. The Colonial Film Unit's *Towards True Democracy* (1951), for instance, outlines the conversion of Lagos from an allegedly useless “malarial swamp” to a modern, productive city, while the Nigerian Film Unit's *Apapa Development* (Lionel Snazelle, 1953) celebrates land conversion and deforestation as if such processes were not only good but also irreversible. Directed by King Vidor, the roughly contemporaneous Hollywood melodrama *Ruby Gentry* (1952) gives the lie to such assumptions, offering a compelling counternarrative of environmental “progress.” When, at the climax of Vidor's film, a saltwater swamp returns to overtake the land “reclaimed” from it by an ambitious entrepreneur (in precisely those large-scale industrial processes mapped out in both *Towards True Democracy* and *Apapa Development*), it is through the human intervention of a scorned, spiteful woman who orders field workers to “turn off the pumps.” Farmlands become marshlands once again—an apocalyptic reversion that *Ruby Gentry*, through its erotic melodrama, presents as a force of (female) nature. A manmade agricultural wonder—hundreds of acres of industrial production, the pride of the North Carolina coast—is spoiled by a woman-made deluge. In *Ruby Gentry*, the alignment of woman and nature suggests an awesome power before which even heroic Charlton Heston is helpless. Confronting the sudden ruination of his fields, Heston's futurist can only ask for a cigarette before meekly fleeing the scene of his humiliation. He has no recourse. Nature wins.

This rather odd film underscores the continual effort required to maintain reclaimed land, to defend it against threatening natural forces—a technologized constancy signaled both visually, in shots of always-churning machines, and aurally, in the ambient sounds of the ceaselessly functioning pumps that keep the new farmlands free of “destructive” saltwater. Only

the vengeful title character, working in concert with the natural world, can stop this mechanically beating heart with an order that she twice repeats: “Turn off the pumps.” Reclamation is hard, but it is also easy—which is to say that opposing nature is arduous and ultimately futile, while working *with* it, as Ruby does, is instantly, overwhelmingly effective. Halted by a Herculean effort, the almighty ocean comes crashing back, as it did in Lagos in April 1984, when Bar Beach, having already undergone substantial erosion, flooded in a flash, ruining facilities belonging to the Nigerian Television Authority and other media producers, and prompting Nigerian journalist Basil Okafor to observe the environmental (if not political and infrastructural) parallels between his country and the United States. “In the United States, *much of which is weather-hazard area like the Lagos Bar Beach*, weather forecasts are taken most seriously and residents are usually warned of catastrophes well on hand, through the mass media,” Okafor remarked on the pages of the *Lagos Sunday Times*, singling out Miami as an important point of comparison.³ In the case of Lagos, a major organ of the mass media was itself submerged—quite literally—in the kind of catastrophe that has since become recurrent in and around Bar Beach, with business and social activities suspended for several days in 1996, and again in 2001 and 2002.

Seawater has little regard for human endeavor, whether Charlton Heston’s fictional farming empire on the former marshlands of *Ruby Gentry* or the NTA’s actual editing suites on the dredged sands of the Nigerian coast. Vidor’s Hollywood melodrama, released between *Towards True Democracy* and *Apapa Development*, sounds a dire warning that the colonial films, with their modernist faith in the human capacity to contain nature, do not acknowledge. For what the colonial state decried as malarial swamps were really, of course, rich wetlands, ecologically significant in themselves, their delicate balance of forces threatened by the turn “towards true democracy,” with its developmentalist attachment to the doctrine of *terra nullius*—to the idea that forests existed to be felled and marshes to be filled. Modernized and urbanized, Nigeria saw man and markets battling flora and fauna, and its specific environmental and economic conditions generated motion pictures that powerfully attested to global(izing) dynamics. The daunting aspects of geographic dispersal have long been managed through formal intimacies and industrial partnerships. *Apapa Development* and *Towards True Democracy* resemble *Ruby Gentry* in fundamental ways, and not simply because of the

3 Basil Okafor, “Measures Said Needed to Prevent Flooding at Bar Beach,” *Sunday Times* (Lagos), May 25, 1984, 1, 13 [13], emphasis added.

shared coastal affordances of Nigeria and North Carolina (or the Central Coast locations—San Luis Obispo, Morro Bay, and Pismo Beach—that convincingly play it for Vidor's cameras). The sanitarian thrust of the colonial documentaries mirrors the capitalist force of the Hollywood film. Antimalarial action maps easily onto entrepreneurial endeavor.

The American and Nigerian landscapes—the former shot by cinematographer Russell Harlan, a veteran of dozens of westerns dating back to some of the first Hopalong Cassidy movies, the latter recorded under the auspices of the Colonial Film Unit and its national successor—have much else in common. The natural disaster depicted in *Ruby Gentry* is latent in *Apapa Development*, which shows the efforts of massive dredgers—including some of the world's largest, shipped to Nigeria via cargo steamers—to “reclaim swampy land.” The visual motif of sand mixed with water—in jars, spoil mounds, and excavator buckets—suggests not simply a natural heterogeneity but also a material hierarchy, one in which water will always win out over granular materials that settle at its depths. The environmental imagery of *Apapa Development* is thus in active tension with the film's high-modernist claim to represent the permanent conversion of marshlands via state-of-the-art technologies and toward nationalist ends. Even ENI's later *The People of Petroleum* (Gilbert Bovay, 1965), for all its insistence on the power of modern machinery to “conquer” the Niger Delta's mangroves (“The forest has surrendered”), acknowledges nature's recalcitrance in the narrator's comments about the necessary seasonality of industrial labor. “We must hurry,” he notes over shots of bulldozers clearing away portions of the swamplands, “because the tropical climate allows us to work only in the dry season; the heavy rains will block men and vehicles.” Moments later, speaking over an aerial shot of a drilling site—from, that is, the lofty vantage of an oil company's high-flying, landscape-surveying helicopter—the narrator is back to insisting that “nature can be tamed and subject to receiving a long convoy of men and vehicles,” a seemingly endless line of industrial activity. But his preceding allusion to the rainy season suggests that there are limitations to such confidence—natural constraints on commercial ambition. As Okafor observed in 1984, catastrophic flooding is “not a total accident but an expected occurrence,” whether in Nigeria or North Carolina, Ghana or Florida.⁴ Nature can always “bite back,” as it does even in the form of the falling tree that severs the right arm of Henry Fonda's independent Oregon logger in Paul Newman's *Sometimes a Great Notion*

4 Okafor, “Measures Said Needed to Prevent Flooding at Bar Beach,” 1.

(1971), or the massive log that rolls onto the character's son (played by Richard Jaeckel) in the same film, pinning him down so that he drowns in a relentlessly rising tide. Location shooting in the timber fields of the Pacific Northwest lends Newman's film some memorable images of actual felling operations along with near-constant reminders of nature's resistant power. But more standard corporate practices are not necessarily shielded from environmental defiance. Even control over major studio space is imperfect, a fact famously dramatized by Nathanael West in *The Day of the Locust* (1939) when a Hollywood set—an elaborate recreation of an early nineteenth-century European battlefield, complete with grassy hill—collapses, injuring various extras and bringing production to a grinding halt. Hollywood fantasy is no match for physics. Nor is Nollywood ambition immune to environmental disaster, as the recurrent flooding of Bar Beach makes clear.

Ruby Gentry shows the extreme beauty of “first nature” in the marsh's triumphant return to its proper location. Just as the film is sensitive to the many qualities of the titular “swamp girl”—a little-appreciated rural “creature” shunned by elite society—it acknowledges that wetlands carry powers and meanings that exceed and ultimately defy the ways they are used and abused. Rejected by the very capitalist who toils to transform the marsh into a source of wealth—as if it were not sufficiently “productive” in its original, “empty” state—Ruby, as played by Jennifer Jones, is the swamp personified, her vengeful agency akin to the wetlands' own. Sump pumps, the extractive instruments of human endeavor, can always be switched off (and what happens, anyway, when there is no petrol left to power them?). Vidor's strange, crazy movie about class and climate, eros and ecology—as delightfully outlandish as any Old Nollywood classic, with Ruby kin to the riverine, serpentine Nneka, an American Mami Wata—offers its own, sobering lessons for Lagos, and for the rest of the world, as well. Ruby's almost mythic story concludes with her becoming as one with the water, a wizened sea captain at home behind a ship's wheel, forever sailing out to sea. Having harnessed the awesome power of the ocean, she finds herself—like the residents of Makoko—living a maritime existence apart from others, but perhaps predictive of their eventual trajectories. Those living onshore look down on the seagoing Ruby, as denizens of Lekki might look down on Makoko's poor, without apparent awareness of the permeability of the line that separates them. Ruby becomes aquatic only after surrendering her desire for romantic love and class advancement, reminding us that, whatever our wishes—and whatever new technologies promise to solve

our earthly problems—we can only capitulate to the waves. The water is coming. The water is here.

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This book has used the concept of Nollywood geographies to explore key aspects of Nigeria's relationship not only to its own natural resources but also to the world beyond its national borders. If colonial empire formed some of these contexts of interaction, then so, in an even more elemental sense, did natural environments. Today, Africa's economic dependence on natural resources is only increasing, a function not simply of deindustrialization and the shrinking of the continent's manufacturing sector but also of the uncanny capacity of extractive industries to uncover new mineral and oil reserves—to identify fresh mining and hydrocarbon assets and, in so doing, strengthen longstanding impressions of Africa as an egregiously underexploited land of plenty. Recent mineral, oil, and gas discoveries have transformed Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda into resource-dependent economies, reinscribing these and other African countries within the rhetorical frameworks advanced in such films as *The Twilight Forest* and *Nigeria on Stream*, in which the African continent becomes an indispensable provider of resources depleted or protected in Europe and North America.⁵ When Texan wells run dry, additional drilling commences in the Niger Delta. The Gulf of Guinea becomes more intimately linked to the US Gulf Coast through common strategies of deepwater drilling.⁶ Trees safeguarded in the Pacific Northwest are felled in Yorubaland. Coal is phased out in Ontario only to be mined again in Enugu. And so on.

Cinema continues to participate in this process, with individual films building on much-earlier precedents even as they purport to offer radical alternatives. In a trenchant analysis of Disney's much-praised *Black Panther*, Cajetan Iheka carefully demonstrates how that blockbuster film reiterates

5 John Page, "Rediscovering Structural Change: Manufacturing, Natural Resources, and Industrialization," in *The Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economics, Volume II: Policies and Practices*, ed. Célestin Monga and Justin Yifu Lin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 257–271.

6 As Ken Silverstein has noted, Louisiana's coastal wetlands are disappearing at rates that are among the fastest in the world, partly because the oil industry's canals and pipelines "eliminated the natural wetlands barrier, and sucking oil and gas out of the marshes caused the land to literally cave in and disappear." Silverstein continues, "In addition to corruption, Louisiana has come to share other characteristics with classic Third World petrostates, including glaring social inequalities and little spending on social programs." Ken Silverstein, *The Secret World of Oil* (London: Verso, 2015).

extractive logics, including those that imply, however implausibly, the sheer limitlessness of Africa's natural resources. Like Unilever, Shell, and other massive companies, Disney "must repress the stark realities of finitude and ignore the environmental cost" of extraction, Iheka argues, adding that *Black Panther's* "futuristic vision relies on the illusion of infinite resources and reinstates the [African] continent as a site of conflict fueled by resource control."⁷ As the ecological historian James L. A. Webb suggests, the twenty-first century has seen an uncanny recurrence of colonial ecological beliefs, including the sort of denigration and dismissal of indigenous environmental knowledge evident in *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*. Western conservationists, echoing the concerns of colonial authorities, have sought to draw worldwide attention to what they see as African communities' poor stewardship of their own lands. Perpetuating "the belief that forest peoples [are] ecologically destructive," NGOs—whether nominally opposed to or in the service of extraction—only enable the kinds of greenwashing techniques at the center of *The Twilight Forest*, in which Nigeria's woodland zones can be saved exclusively through industrial logging.⁸ In its depiction of Nigerian men as adept climbers and choppers of even the tallest, sturdiest of trees, the film affirms the longstanding anthropological assertion of African hardiness and agility—of the "savage's" brute strength—at the same time that it attempts to defuse the threat of competition from "native" populations. For the African's facility is strictly physical: he cannot comprehend, much less master and execute, the complex manufacturing and exportation schemes that are the exclusive preserve of European experts—white men of math and science. If films like *Black Panther* powerfully contest such racism, they only reinforce the idea of Africa as one giant zone of extraction. And if corporations, from Unilever to Disney, care about the social identities of those doing the digging, the planet surely does not.

It is by now platitudinous to say that climate change is a geographically uneven phenomenon that disproportionately affects the Global South, whose inhabitants bear no responsibility for the environmental catastrophes closing in on them. Tiago de Luca has offered an important critique of this liberal cliché, writing that "to simply reject planetary ontologies and epistemologies is ... not the solution." Trumpeting one's awareness of asymmetries is easy; devising "collective solutions on the global scale" is

7 Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 2.

8 James L. A. Webb, Jr., "Ecology and Culture in West Africa," in *Themes in West Africa's History*, ed. Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 33–51 [49].

hard. Indeed, performing concern for the “real” victims of climate change is not only patronizing; it also serves a displacing or preemptive function, “as if we could afford to not think about the planet as a whole because some places are the first to bear the brunt of environmental disasters.”⁹ Such temporal discrepancies may well be a think of the past, anyway. As I write this, smoke from Canadian wildfires is choking “privileged” New York City, making it difficult to see and to breathe; “elite” Manhattan resembles Mars (or the Australian bush), for days on end. Those who can escape to second homes upstate, or in Vermont, are arriving to find those homes flooded, the streets surrounding them completely impassable. If proximity to the ocean is an increasingly risky proposition, distance from the coast offers no guarantee of protection.

Pressure to open new lands to extraction—and to re-mine already plundered areas like Enugu and the Jos Plateau—increases by the day. But even the latest oil and mineral finds are finite. Lands are limited, but human populations only grow—in some cases dramatically, as in Nigeria, one of the world’s most populous countries, projected to become second only to India by the end of this century (if humanity makes it that far). Deforestation, a process of depletion first celebrated in such industrial films as *Fincho* and *The Twilight Forest*, continues apace almost seventy years later, and with increasingly dire consequences, including greenhouse gas emissions. China’s current, pronounced presence in Africa similarly duplicates and intensifies earlier experiences, such as the construction (begun in 1967 and completed in 1976) of the TAZARA Railway to link Zambia’s Copperbelt with coastal Tanzania. Born of the Bandung Conference of 1955, and therefore intended as an expression of solidarity with the Third World Project—with nonalignment, anti-imperialism, and resistance to apartheid—the project would only bolster extractive capitalism, proving its essential ideological compatibility with colonialism and neocolonialism. When, in 1997, a Chevron executive proudly declared, “There isn’t a rock we haven’t drilled through,” he was testifying to the thoroughness of the company’s excavation of Nigeria.¹⁰ But he was also implying the planetary scope of such tireless operations. Chevron’s penetrative efforts were aided by—and, in their own turn, facilitated—those of other industries committed to prospecting and exploration.

9 Tiago de Luca, *Planetary Cinema: Film, Media, and the Earth* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 41–42.

10 Quoted in Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: FSG, 1999), 177.

African histories provide especially vivid illustrations of such extractive interdependence. Machines powered by Enugu's coal were also lubricated by the Niger Delta's palm oil, delivered for export to various coastal outlets. Shell's *The Search for Oil in Nigeria* assiduously retraced some of the geographical paths of Unilever's *The Twilight Forest*, showing the imbrication of logging and drilling. Tin from Jos made it to Lagos and points beyond because of hydrocarbons extracted from Ngwo, as even the silent film *Palaver* shows. Motion pictures made after 1956 illuminate a sort of resource relay wherein the baton is passed from Enugu's "soft," sub-bituminous coal to the Niger Delta's "sweet and light," low-sulfur crude, and from Warri, one of two onshore hubs of the oil industry in Nigeria (Port Harcourt being the other), to various offshore locations. This process of material, industrial, and geographical transfer keeps extractive economies alive and dynamic, with Nigeria and other African countries providing life support for global mining companies, much as they did for VCDs (introduced in 1993 but almost instantly obsolescent in most markets beyond Nollywood's) and Blackberry (the smartphone brand that Apple and Android effectively vanquished in the Global North but that was kept afloat for a time by Nigerian consumers, with their pronounced and Nollywood-influenced affection for BBM). Nollywood extended VCD just as the Gulf of Guinea draws out the search for oil and gas. Media and mineral frontiers are repeatedly reopened in Nigeria, prolonged and perpetuated even as they come to seem superannuated elsewhere. Recovered forms and residual practices define the country's extractive landscapes. No wonder Kunle Afolayan's *Ìjògbòn*, shot in close proximity to the open-pit mines of Oyo State, is so attentive to the persistence of surface and underground excavation.

If even films critical of petrocapi-talism, such as Jeta Amata's *Black November* and Curtis Graham's *Oloibiri*, cannot imagine a postextractive future, then neither, it would seem, can the Niger Delta communities at the center of Omolade Adunbi's groundbreaking ethnography. The members of such communities, Adunbi argues, "perceive the state as an intruder that has come to take away what they consider an ancestral heritage" and "symbol of [their] impending wealth."¹¹ Rather than wanting the oil to remain in the ground, they long simply to assert full control over its extraction. Stuart Hall's concept of "legitimate materialism" could convincingly encompass prospecting and exploration, and Nollywood films in fact routinely assert the right of

11 Omolade Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 236.

humble Deltans to derive hydrocarbons from the earth.¹² (Afolayan's *Ìjògbòn* is perhaps more ambiguous in its documentary-style depiction of the illegal mining that occurs at the edges of its fictional narrative; drawing inspiration from the cautionary dimensions of Yoruba mythology, the director offers a sobering account of the so-called "resource curse" while simultaneously capturing—and not necessarily knocking—the hustle of actual "artisanal" miners.) Among some populations in the Global South, Maristella Svampa observes, "critical discourse or radical opposition is considered in terms of antimodernity, negating progress, 'infantile ecologism,' or even 'colonial environmentalism' promoted by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or foreign agents."¹³ Indeed, the conservation efforts of colonial authorities, whatever their motivations, and however paradoxically, allowed such privately financed films as *Fincho*, *The Twilight Forest*, and *The Mark of the Hawk* to celebrate extraction as the profit-generating essence of African independence, and thus to anticipate ENI's 1968 documentary *Africa: The Birth of a Continent*, with its self-serving and almost comically implausible equation between oil capitalism and national sovereignty. The freedom to fell trees was likened to liberation from colonial rule. Full ownership of coal reserves was presented as the crux of political autonomy.

Such "legitimate materialism" has reappeared in more recent efforts to align Nigeria with BRICS countries endeavoring to supplant the United States on the terrain of resource extraction.¹⁴ In August 2004, the Nigerian federal government terminated its contract with Solgas Energy, an American company that it swiftly replaced with an Indian competitor. (Solgas went on to charge the federal government with breach of contract.) Around the same time, BFI Group, a privately owned Swiss organization, was edged out

12 Stuart Hall, "A Sense of Classlessness," *Universities and Left Review*, no. 5 (Autumn 1958): 26–32.

13 Maristella Svampa, "Commodities Consensus: Neoextractivism and Enclosure of the Commons in Latin America," translated by Liz Mason-Deese, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (January 2015): 65–82 [67].

14 As Sharad Chari explains of one such country, "India has actively sought investment in the African continent for energy security, as a market for goods and services, and for access to strategic minerals and natural resources." Chari cites the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation of India Ltd. (ONGC), "an Indian parastatal that has played an increasingly important role in accessing African oil." ONGC has negotiated an oil-for-infrastructure deal in Nigeria, where, in "strong competition with Chinese counterparts," India "has sought to represent itself as an 'old friend.'" Sharad Chari, "African Extraction, Indian Ocean Critique," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (January 2015), 83–100 [94]. See also Emmanuel Akyeampong and Liang Xu, "The Three Phases/Faces of China in Independent Africa: Re-conceptualizing China-Africa Engagement," in *The Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economics, Volume II: Policies and Practices*, 762–779.

of the Aluminum Smelter Company of Nigeria. In 2005, China offered \$200 million in exchange for a partnership in Nigeria's telecommunications sector and 30,000 barrels of crude per day—a classic oil-for-infrastructure deal. The following year, the China National Offshore Oil Company purchased a \$2.3 billion stake in a Nigerian oil and gas field. Amid China's mounting claims on Nigeria's natural resources, American oil giants have dug in their heels, even as Shell has taken steps to sell its "traditional" Nigerian oil and gas operations (while, of course, remaining a major force in the offshore sector, pursuing hugely lucrative deepwater drilling in the Gulf of Guinea). ChevronTexaco, the new company formed by the merger of Chevron and Texaco in 2001, began building a floating oil platform off the coast of Nigeria in 2005.¹⁵ (ChevronTexaco is also active in Angola, where it operates numerous oilfields.)¹⁶ Brenda Chalfin's research on the Gulf of Guinea offers a clear demonstration of how, since at least the 1960s, "Africa has come to function as a strategic oil reserve for the rest of the world." The West African littoral, Chalfin suggests, has been drawn into "the wider oil-extractive complex" in ways that offshore drilling has only intensified.¹⁷

Mimicking Makoko, the oil majors' own floating cities will only ensure the need for more such unplanned, improvised spaces in which populations displaced by climate change might conceivably reside. George Jedrzej Frynas and Manuel Paulo have written of "a new scramble for African oil," while Sharad Chari has focused on "contemporary incursions of Chinese and Indian capital in Africa," where "'extraction' forces an abrogation of broader social transformation."¹⁸ Building on James Ferguson's insights in *Global Shadows*, Chari views "enclaves of resource extraction as sites of global power and capital," using oil-rich Nigeria as one of her key examples. As Chari notes, "the politics of oil reverberates across multiple domains," and one of my goals in this book has been to contribute to scholarship that insists on cinema's inclusion among those spheres.¹⁹ Indeed, cinema has

15 Heinrich Bergstresser, *A Decade of Nigeria: Politics, Economy, and Society, 2004–2016* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 22–64.

16 Thomas Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

17 Brenda Chalfin, "Governing Offshore Oil: Mapping Maritime Political Space in Ghana and the Western Gulf of Guinea," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (January 2015), 101–118 [102, 105].

18 George Jedrzej Frynas and Manuel Paulo, "A New Scramble for African Oil?," *African Affairs* 106, no. 423 (2007): 229–251; Chari, "African Extraction, Indian Ocean Critique," 83. See also Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011); Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

19 Chari, "African Extraction, Indian Ocean Critique," 85.

sounded warnings about offshore drilling at least since the 1965 release of the aptly titled *Coast of Skeletons*, a European-South African coproduction that also connects Texas and Nigeria as significant sources of oil and gas. The global oil industry may be unevenly visible as it traverses Warri (where its destructiveness can hardly be denied) and Los Angeles (where its derricks are effectively camouflaged), or Port Harcourt and Houston. But cinema, whether in the form of an Old Hollywood melodrama or a New Nollywood action thriller, can counteract such discriminative tendencies, at least at a basic representational level, exposing material continuities and forging affective connections.

It is a commonplace of environmental criticism to hold out hope, to propose that we can learn to suspend and overcome extraction simply by studying its cultural impact. I wish I could share such optimism. “Perhaps it’s worth saying it’s OK not to be hopeful,” suggests the marine biologist Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, who admits that she is not by nature an optimist, and that her exposure to the data, as a scientist, only underscores her sense of the inevitability of climate collapse.²⁰ Like Johnson, I am generally suspicious of scholarly clichés, including the seemingly obligatory claim that by analyzing climate change we may gain the tools necessary to “correct” it—that we can usher in a better future by cataloguing the perilous present. I don’t want to end this book with a rote nod to the possible. Childless by choice, cautious by temperament, torn between a desire to tell stories and a guilty awareness of the high environmental costs of print books (to say nothing of the moving-image media I regularly consume and about which I obsessively write), I wonder if it isn’t too much to say that my scholarship is more a contributor to problems than part of their potential solution, likelier to exacerbate than ameliorate a range of miserable conditions (including my own depression and anxiety). But perhaps Connor Ryan is right to highlight a productive, sustaining ambivalence as one of the many lessons that Lagos holds, not only for its own inhabitants but for the rest of the world, as well.²¹ Nigeria’s megacity may seem “interesting, anomalous, different and esoteric” (to quote Ananya Roy’s account of those urban theories that, originating in the Global North, see only alterity in the Global South), but its specific responses to climate change, recorded by Nollywood’s indefatigable filmmakers, will almost certainly have practical salience for other places, including

20 Quoted in David Marchese, “This Scientist Has an Antidote to Our Climate Delusions,” *New York Times*, Sunday, May 19, 2024, MM11.

21 Connor Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils: Nollywood and Nigerian City Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023).

high-toned Manhattan.²² James Tar Tsaaioir has suggested that Nollywood, which “has increasingly transgressed national territorial boundaries in its migratory rhythms,” is an important participant in the processes by which “a planetary consciousness in a multicultural world order is being negotiated and renegotiated.” Simply put, “Nollywood is unbound.”²³ By its very limitlessness, it carries the potential to reflect, as well as to shape, all manner of geographical negotiations.

With its low-lying coastal areas, Nigeria cannot help but call to mind the Hollywood film *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, 1995), in which sea-level rise yields creative solutions that are now being attempted by the Lagos State Government, among other entities.²⁴ (Numerous observers have remarked that Eko Atlantic, Nigeria’s artificial peninsula, seems to belong to Hollywood’s futuristic imagination.) The atolls that represent *Waterworld*’s postapocalyptic norms of habitation are not exactly unknown in Nigeria, where floating slums are at once inventively responsive and exceedingly vulnerable to climate change. Makoko, the subject of so many breathless cable-news exposés, may shock and titillate the West with its resemblance to dystopian science fiction, but it is more than just an “informal” or “unauthorized” fact of the Nigerian present; it is also a possible future for conventionally housed CNN viewers residing in flood zones.²⁵ An example of what Jai Sen

22 Ananya Roy, “The Twenty-First-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory,” *Regional Studies* 43, no. 6 (2009): 819–30 [820].

23 James Tar Tsaaioir, “Introduction: Filmic Texts and Their Social/Cultural Contexts—Nollywood as Site for Transnational Narrativization,” in *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation: Nollywood and National Narration*, ed. James Tar Tsaaioir and Françoise Ugochukwu (Abuja: Adonis & Abbey, 2017), 17–46 [24–25].

24 Director Kevin Reynolds made *Waterworld* as the immediate follow-up to his 1994 film *Rapa-Nui*, which dramatizes the historical fact of deforestation on what is now known as Easter Island. *Rapa-Nui* considers some of the social and ecological consequences of forest loss, while *Waterworld* features abundant references to petroculturalism, as well as a climactic shot in which the rusted oil tanker that has served as a base for petroleum-hoarding pirates is revealed to be the Exxon Valdez. That *Waterworld*, with its oil-soaked recognition of climate collapse and human ingenuity, is in certain senses “Nigerian” is a premise briefly explored in Helon Habila’s 2010 novel *Oil on Water*, in which the protagonist, a Nigerian journalist investigating his country’s oil economy, recalls the experience of watching the Reynolds film on television—a somber experience that reminds him that there is “something sad about a people who were born and lived and died on water,” whatever adaptations they were able to make to their changing environment. Helon Habila, *Oil on Water* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 96.

25 And a past, present, and certain future experience for those living in the subsidence zones of the US Gulf Coast, as Stephanie LeMenager makes clear in comparing those zones to coastal Nigeria, as part of her argument for “the inclusion of US southerners within the South as a *global* region.” Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 108.

calls an “unintended city,” Makoko is aberrant only to the extent that the world’s coastlines can be preserved.²⁶ It may not be anyone’s plan, but it may well become everyone’s reality.

Shot from above in Bolanle Austen-Peters’ Nollywood film *Collision Course*, Makoko and other “floating communities” offer abundant evidence of Nigerian resilience. Such corroborative images evoke Ryan’s reminder that “although it remains an outlier in most developmentalist measures of urban normativity, Lagos is nonetheless a city that works. It has become a place where many things are possible and where Nigeria’s tremendous capacity for creativity, ingenuity, and cultural accommodation is on full display.”²⁷ Ryan convincingly argues that the “open endurance” of Lagos “brings into focus dimensions of life that are increasingly common to cities around the world, especially given the intensification of the effects of globalization and neoliberal capitalism.”²⁸ It is a place of “resilience and persistence” where “experiments in flexibility, provisionality, and contingency” abound.²⁹

One way of illustrating such hustle is to consider Nigeria’s status as a subsequent market—a place where material practices and cultural forms can (and frequently do) come back from the dead. From coal mining to BlackBerry Messenger, well-worn genres, technologies, and even entire industries—extractive and otherwise—are routinely revived in Nigeria, a reality allegorized in Afolayan’s *Mokalik*, which features the story of a fancy automobile, both manufactured and driven to death overseas, that is eventually brought to Nigeria to be “salvaged”—restored to operable life by a Lagos mechanic whose near-magical labors allow it to run well on Nigerian roads (with, in all likelihood, fuel extracted from the country’s reservoirs, sent abroad for refining, and reimported from the Netherlands). The story, devised by seasoned screenwriter Tunde Babalola, underscores a stubborn fact of international commerce: when something stops working or is otherwise exhausted in Western Europe and the United States, it is invariably redirected toward resource-rich, population-dense, and perpetually “promising” Nigeria, a place known for its sheer resuscitative flair.

Such consumer-centered salvage operations, whether desperate and intentional or casual and accidental, could be read as tropes of oil frontiers and other spaces of extraction that, as Michael Watts observes, are “dynamic and

26 Jai P. Sen, “The Unintended City,” *Seminar* 200 (April 1976): 33–40.

27 Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils*, 5.

28 Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils*, 11.

29 Ryan, *Lagos Never Spoils*, 6, 8. See also Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 347–372.

unstable, ... discovered and rediscovered—opened and reopened—rather than simply open, closed, and depleted.” If, in fact, “the oil frontier appears as a permanent prospect,” then so does Nigeria itself. Frontiers in general, Watts suggests, “are regularly reanimated,” their constituent forms zombified out of sheer habit.³⁰ Replaced (or “remediated”) by DVDs only a few years after their global introduction, VCDs found an important outlet in Nigeria, where Nollywood extended their shelf life beyond all normative expectations (and much to the delight of foreign manufacturers). As its appropriation of this Asian invention attests, Nollywood absorbs influences from all over the world. Yet the industry is still firmly situated in Nigeria, tethered to the country where its stories gain greatest purchase. The contrasting tenuousness of Hollywood’s relationship to place—the projective or metonymic nature of the industry’s nickname—is vividly illustrated by MGM’s decision, in the late 1940s, to add the words “Made in Hollywood, USA” to the closing credits of films bearing its corporate logo.³¹ The move was made in spite of the fact that the studio’s production facilities were located not in Hollywood proper but several miles away in Culver City, and it was made at a time when MGM, like other major companies, was authorizing “runaway” productions in parts of the world—including Africa—where tax credits and other incentives helped ease the financial burdens of filmmaking amid seismic industrial change.³² For US studios stationed in Nigeria in the 1960s, the distance between Lagos and Los Angeles, though far greater than that between Hollywood and Culver City, was nevertheless similarly subsumed under the name “Hollywood,” a designation that, in its amorphousness, continues to deflect attention from the extractions, imperialisms, and interconnections carried out under its banner and promoted as “harmless entertainment.”³³ (Even one of the industry’s own products, *Heat Lightning*, acknowledges the potentially harmful aspects of an exoticizing “African” film that, in addressing American audiences, intends to flatter their sense of difference and confirm their feelings of superiority, despite or perhaps because of global similarities as perceptible as the sweat on one’s forehead.) It is in forceful response to this imperialist history—to a territorializing logic of nomenclature that defines all geographies as belonging to globe-spanning

30 Watts, “Oil Frontiers,” 193, 195.

31 Leo Braudy, *The Hollywood Sign* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 127.

32 Daniel Steinhart, *Runaway Hollywood: Internationalizing Postwar Production and Location Shooting* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

33 Noah Tsika, *Cinematic Independence: Constructing the Big Screen in Nigeria* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

Hollywood—that the Nigerian filmmaker Walter “Waltbanger” Taylaur proudly appends the phrase “Made in Nollywood” to the end credits of his films, whether they were shot in Lekki or Ibadan, or with Nigerian or Chinese capital.

Set in the mining town of Lago, before the Teapot Dome scandal (in which Secretary of the Interior Albert Bacon Fall leased government-owned lands to private oil companies), Clint Eastwood’s *High Plains Drifter* (1973), for all its apocalyptic overtones, suggests a moral distinction between the US government, which owns (and apparently plans to preserve) the land from which gold is being commercially extracted, and the corrupt private company seeking to sustain such activity at all costs. In African cinema, by contrast, the state is rarely, if ever, shown to be opposed to or otherwise outside of the business of extraction. It is, rather, the latter’s lubricant, an agent of environmental change and the recipient of lucrative rents as well as bribes and other kickbacks. For every *Black November* that appears to soft-pedal the state’s complicity in the depredations of petrocapi-talism, there is a *Crude War* that limits critique to questions of local governance, and that omits entirely the basic fact of resource depletion. Yet evidence of such depletion is not hard to find, even in sanitized or otherwise deflective representations. Paying attention to the precise location work of second units, for instance, yields insights into how films have pictured extractive resource zones for over a century. As with other subjects examined in this book, the second unit—a separate, smaller crew dispatched by large productions to record additional footage, often of exteriors—unites Hollywood and Nollywood (and more than a few of the industries in between). After directing *Palaver* in the tin fields of Nigeria’s Middle Belt, Geoffrey Barkas completed second-unit photography on *Rhodes of Africa* and *King Solomon’s Mines*, capturing invaluable footage of some of the copper, coal, diamond, and gold mines of southern Africa. After directing *Fincho* in the forests of Yorubaland, Sam Zebba filmed the Congo River for Fred Zinnemann. Tope Oshin, too, employed a second unit for *Up North*, which returns to the Middle Belt settings of Barkas’s *Palaver*.³⁴

A close examination of second units stands to enrich film scholarship by widening its scope beyond narrow auteurist paradigms and uncovering otherwise inaccessible connections. The Niger and the Congo do not simply share basic aquatic characteristics; they were also shot by the same man—Sam Zebba—around the same time, and for purposes whose similarities (and

34 Oshin’s second unit consisted of director Editi Effiòng, cinematographer Pindem Lot, drone operator Tolu Shosimi, and five others.

differences) come into view only in the light of second-unit labor. Even the best, most comprehensive accounts of the making of *The Nun's Story* fail to mention Zebba, while Barkas's work goes unacknowledged in the abundant scholarship on *King Solomon's Mines*. Critical writing on New Nollywood, with its burgeoning crews and increasing dependence on drone operators, must avoid reproducing such blind spots.

This is not merely a matter of aesthetics and authorship. It also involves crucial intersections between cinema production and longer-standing forms of extractive capitalism. For if Zebba's travels through Nigeria were facilitated by Finch & Company, his work along the Congo River was made possible by the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, the powerful Belgian mining firm that had long exploited the region's natural (and human) resources.³⁵ Thanks in part to Zebba's efforts, *The Nun's Story* boasts footage not simply of the Congo River but also of the fishing communities of Wagenya and the leprosarium at Yalisombo.³⁶ The latter's actual patients appear in the film, as Owo's own timber workers, enlisted as extras, had earlier appeared in

35 Belgium's Ministry of Colonial Affairs was a crucial intermediary, and Daniel Steinhart reports that Warner Bros. "also took advantage of its connections at the State Department to obtain help from the US ambassador in Brussels and the consul general in the capital of Léopoldville to gain local cooperation in the colony." Daniel Steinhart, "Postwar Hollywood, 1945–1967: Foreign Location Shooting," in *Hollywood on Location: An Industry History*, ed. Joshua Gleich and Lawrence Webb (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 101–123 [114]. Universal's *Congo Crossing* (Joseph Pevney, 1956), set in West Africa but shot in the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden, alludes to the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga in its lurid account of mineral extraction; the plot concerns efforts to ascertain West Africa's precise distance from the Congo River, but the film's Southern California shooting location is no help in this regard. For more on the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018 [1972]), 181; Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 157, 224; and Iva Peša, "Copper Communities on the Central African Copperbelt, 1950–2000," in *Born with a Copper Spoon: A Global History of Copper, 1830–1980*, ed. Robrecht Declercq, Duncan Money, and Hans Otto Frøland (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2022), 162–182.

36 Made under the auspices of King Leopold III of Belgium, produced by the Belgian International Scientific Foundation, and distributed internationally by 20th Century-Fox, the documentary *Masters of the Congo Jungle* (Heinz Sielmann and Henry Brandt, 1959), exactly contemporaneous with *The Nun's Story*, served as an advertisement for CinemaScope and DeLuxe Color. ("Here," wrote one critic, "is an instance where the wide screen enhances the subject matter being presented.") Narrated by Orson Welles and William Warfield, *Masters of the Congo Jungle* was an "attempt to preserve on film, in [a] rapidly changing age, the mores, customs and struggles of a people that have existed for centuries." The documentary's title is meant to refer to "the natives" whose daily lives it records—they have "mastered" the "jungle laws." However, given the capital-intensive colonial as well as neocolonial structures by which the film was made, the title more aptly refers to Leopold's rule, with its strategic amenability to an American corporation like Fox, which, in this instance, used proprietary technology in order to help "sell"

Zebba's *Fincho*. For its part, *The Mark of the Hawk*, in using Enugu's collieries as shooting locations, acquires an occasional documentary quality akin to that of an industrial film on coal mining, while also echoing the coal-centered didacticism of such Hollywood melodramas as *Pittsburgh* and *Bad for Each Other*. When Kenneth Gyang, in *The Lost Café*, chooses to cut back and forth between the Niger and the Drammen, he offers more than just a callback to *The Nun's Story* and other films that placed Europe and Africa in a relational frame. He also provides powerful visual evidence of shared histories of resource extraction, using the latest drone technology to reveal the past, present, and probable future coursings of oil capitalism from high above. Nollywood geographies include such absolute spaces of production (of energy and cinema), even as they exceed the historical circumstances that made, say, Enugu's coal so valuable, and employment in its collieries so viable for Nigerians. They demand that we look anew at—and consider the manifold connections among—areas of extraction that continue to shape our warming world.

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African Media in an Age of Extraction takes a fresh, site-specific look at the relationship between moving images and the mining of natural resources, arguing that where we “place” Nollywood and other industries has important practical and conceptual consequences. Such locations are not just spatial metaphors but also tangible geographies with material connections to extractive economies. Sites of film production are often spaces of oil prospecting, timber harvesting, and mineral extraction—natural environments continuously transformed by capital. *African Media in an Age of Extraction* links such absolute spaces—reclaimed lands, razed forests, petroleum zones, abandoned coal mines collecting moss, vast tin fields inspiring illegal dredging by populations locked out of the licit economy—to the abstract and lived dimensions of film villages, shooting locations, and exhibition centers. The geographies of African media industries are not fixed locations cleanly separated from surrounding areas or from the wider world (including Hollywood), nor are they fully detachable from the mineral and hydrocarbon resources that also define them. Considering multiple scales—the local, the national, the regional, the continental, the planetary—this book takes stock of the physical terrain and extractive objects that Nollywood shares with other industries and that structure screen media more broadly. Topographies, political economies, national identities, and natural resources are entwined in ways that cinema makes intelligible and that carry the potential to transform the way we see the medium itself.

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