INTERROGATING DIASPORIC IDENTITY AND MEDIA: DISTRIBUTION FLOWS,

RECEPTION PRACTICES, AND VIDEO FILM INTERPRETATIONS

OF NOLLYWOOD AUDIENCES IN NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Video Film Interpretations of Nollywood Audiences in Newark, New Jersey

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This dissertation examines how the distribution, consumption, and interpretation of "Nollywood" contribute to identity among African-Americans, Africans, and Afro-Caribbeans who live, work, or socialize in Newark, New Jersey. It also shows how the influx of movies from Nigeria and Ghana changes the media landscape of a city that has a place identity of being a "black city." As well, this research provides a glimpse into the gentrification that is occurring in Newark, where longtime residents and small businesses in downtown Newark are navigating the shifting demographics.

To frame identity, I use discourse of black identities and diasporic communicative spaces to capture the discursive practices that occur in the interactions of diasporans. Employing a multi-sited observation of shops and a street vendor, and conducting unstructured and in-depth interviews of African-American, Caribbean, and African Newark residents, I examine how participants employ movies in varied interactions with the film industry. My dissertation shows hybrid, multiple, and sutured identities emerge through the narratives of participants and observations, but participants relinquished strict allegiances to groups when gentrification or exclusion from resources threatened their livelihood.

My dissertation also reveals the following: (1) How Nollywood audiences create immaterial sites and physical locations where they engage in cultural performances to make sense of their "distinct" identities. (2) How formal circulations demonstrate trading practices transported by African and Caribbean merchants help shape commercial activities in a predominant African-American city. (3) In the non-commercial flows of Nollywood, four salient forms of circulation emerge, in which I define as *borrowing*, *swapping*, *gifting* and *online sharing*. (4) Lastly, how groups rely on private and domestic spaces to engage in interactive spectatorship where they embed themselves into the screening of films and resist bourgeoisie expectations of movie-watching conduct rooted in middle-class, dominant culture.

After an introduction, (Chapter One) looks at the development of Nollywood, (Chapter Two) establishes the field site, while the conceptual framework and research design are (Chapter Three). The remaining focus on findings with (Chapter Four) looking at distribution, (Chapter Five) examining reception sites and practices, and (Chapter Six) explores interpretation of texts, with a conclusion to end. Each chapter looks at how identity is evoked in interactions of participants.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that I come from the supernatural and am only stardust in a story that we all narrate. With that, I thank my parents Francine W. Shivers and Paul J. Shivers for introducing me to the idea that people of African descent go by many names and identities, and that we live and thrive around the world. To my husband, Duane K. Reed for supporting me from the first day we met and loves me unconditionally. To my parents-in-love, Elizabeth & Kenneth Reed, for embracing me in whole and walking with me still. To my siblings, Matito, Adaeze, Amara, Ayanna & Keita, who grew and fought with me and expand our beautiful South Central L.A. tribe. To my bestie, Selma for many nights of diasporic conversations. To the Shivers, Washington & Reed extended family and dearest friends, I am grateful for our connections. I dedicate this in whole to my grandmother, Leona Jones Washington, a quiet Louisiana woman whose life is loud and courageous — even at the tender age of 97.

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INTRODUCTION: DEPOTS & DIASPORA

The day Barack Hussein Obama was inaugurated as the first African-American president of the United States (U.S.), I watched his swearing in on a small television in the main atrium of Newark Penn Station. While waiting in the New Jersey depot, a predominantly black crowd differing in ethnic makeup quickly assembled in the central lobby to witness this event, too. In the midst of our to-and-fro's, we stopped to catch a glimpse of this historical moment. On the surface, we were just a group of black people, but the more I became encircled in the growing group that eventually packed the spacious foyer, I began to hear Caribbean accents, African languages, local American brogues, and twangs from the southern part of the U.S. As the ad hoc audience watched the events, I noticed a black taxi driver wearing a weathered African brocade shirt silently weeping to my left. Behind me, two black men talked excitedly in a language I could not understand. To my right, I overheard another black man with an African-American dialect declare to his boss that he was going to be late because he would miss the inauguration if he continued his commute to work. When he detected that I was listening to — and now looking at — him he smiled and nodded at me. I returned the gesture as a sign of agreement, that I, too, was delaying my travel to watch the inauguration.

After Obama was sworn in, everyone cheered and clapped then hugged, shook hands, or patted each other on the back — especially the black folks. At that instant, we all were in unison and acknowledged our membership in a black, African diaspora. Then in the blink of an eye, the crowd dispersed and we rushed to our different destinations by train, bus, and on foot. In this scattering, we all settled back into our coded and marked identities of blackness in America with the probability of never seeing each other again,

but with the memory of a moment of cohesion in spite of the dissimilarities in our experiences and perspectives of black identity.

This anecdote provides entry into the complicated nature of African diaspora and identity in the U.S. In this project, the term "African diaspora" describes people who identify racially as black and link all or part of their ancestry to Africa.[1] African-Americans make up a majority of the 42 million blacks living in the U.S.,[2] but there has been a growing presence of Caribbeans and Africans since the amendment of immigration laws from 1965 and on. Statistics show that blacks tend to live near each other or in the same communities more than any other racial group (Kent, 2007). Subsequently, the exchange of cultural products, cultural influences, and familial relations between African-Americans, Caribbeans, and Africans have been inevitable (Cumberpatch, 2009; Butterfield, 2004). At the same time, there exist ongoing clashes and conflicts that are often centered on identity because members of the diaspora are frequently designated as African-American or the even more nonspecific cataloguing of being just black (Tillery & Chresfield, 2012; Mwakikagile, 2007; Pierre, 2004; Waters,

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[1] Black, African diasporans, were either abducted, driven out of, or voluntarily left Africa in several mass exoduses since the early fifteenth century (Zaleza, 2005; Fabre & Benesch, 2004). The term will be defined in more depth in later chapters. I do acknowledge that the present-day African diaspora comprises of multiple racial categories and overlaps with other diasporas such as South Asian diasporas, European diasporas, East Asian, and Middle-Eastern diasporas; however, I employ the term African diaspora as it was initially applied to black people throughout the world who were also of African descent. It is also important to mention that within the migration of Africans, white South Africans were granted special permission to relocate to the U.S. during the South African Apartheid after a series of civils unrests that occurred from the 1970s to the early part of the 90s. The U.S. government provided financial and military support to South Africa for the purpose of the Apartheid regimes to stay in power and maintain a segregationist structure. One aspect of this support was to allow white South Africans to exile to the U.S. Although the special provisions were furnished to whites, very few blacks garnered such privileges. Nevertheless, a large portion of African migrants is black. According to the 2000 US Census, approximately eighty percent of foreign-born blacks are African immigrants. There are about 600,000 Africans living in the United States.

[2] This figure indicates the number of people who identified as black, either alone or in combination with one or more other races, in the 2010 Census. They made up 13.6 percent of the total U.S. population. The black population grew by 15.4 percent from 2000 to 2010 (Kent, 2007).

2001). Coupled with the sociopolitical and economic implications that come with the narrowing classification, issues around identity become more salient in a racially stratified society that favors whites (Johnson, 2008; Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005; Rothenberg, 2005; Butterfield, 2004; Hintzen & Rahier, 2003; Pierre, 2004; Waters, 2001). Added to that, each groups' specific contribution to the ever-changing American media landscape — and in whole — its narrative go largely unacknowledged — making identity even more of a contested terrain.

Stuart Hall (1996) calls black identities "points of temporary attachments" (p.19) to various discursive practices and subject positions. Hall further comments, identities are articulations of unstable junctures that are held together by circumstances. As well, he argues that identities are produced to enunciate specific strategies by particular institutions. He describes diasporic identity as fragile connections rather than comfortable unions. Building on the idea that diasporic identity construction is an unpredictable and uneasy process, diasporas operate much like the train station of my story. The site of diaspora functions as a train depot that accommodates the asynchronous arrivals and departures by which diasporans enter and leave their identities from different perspectives, multiple cultural understandings, and various histories.

Because diasporic communities construct identity at junctures that clash, contradict, and are sometimes congruous, what anchors their identity? Concentrating on the African diaspora, George Lipsitz (1994) argues that these junctures are conversations and ideas that are transmitted by cultural products of diasporans. He grounds his argument in the contemporary musical genre of hip-hop, citing the 1990s rap song and corresponding video, "Ladies First," by Newark-native and hip-hop emcee, Queen

Latifah. Lipsitz surmises that Queen Latifah demonstrated how black people in the U.S. were members of a global majority when the emcee names in her lyrics and shows pictures in her video of black women from all over the world. For Lipsitz, Queen Latifah represents post-modern cultural production that connects black people globally, and assists them in constructing diasporic identity and articulating presence in the shifts of urban landscapes since the emergence of globalization.

When Lipsitz wrote this treatise over two decades ago, he referred to African-American and Black-British artists. Although this work is still relevant, it is a precursor to the currents of people, information, and media from Africans or diasporans who have resettled within or outside of the borders of the West. In the U.S., the consequences of global media and technology allowed channels that circulate local cinema and film culture from around the world, such as Nollywood, a West African film industry — to course themselves into the American media landscape. It was in these flows of globalization that I, too, encountered Nollywood.

Nollywood first came across my media networks in 2000, when I purchased several Nigerian movies dubbed on videocassette tapes at a Nigerian general store in a black section of Los Angles called "The Jungles." At the time, I was an entertainment journalist who focused on international black artists and media and thought the purchase was a lead to a story. The movies had poor lighting and the dialogue was barely audible. I resigned myself to accepting that the purchase was a chance encounter with untrained African filmmakers' defectively made, but novel attempt to produce movies with cheap technology. That was until Nollywood re-introduced itself as I walked by dozens of African shops near my residence in Newark in 2009. The storefronts displayed vivid,

bold posters of African movies with higher quality films than my previous experience. There I began to reconsider my encounters with Nollywood as coincidental, but more so, part of the media currents of diasporans.

Thinking about how the black African diaspora produce and transmit media, circulate cultural products, create global dialogue, and use productions and dialogue as an apparatus of agency piqued my interest. In particular, I became interested as to how diasporans employed media for self-definition, the creation of diasporic communities, and the narration of individual stories outside of dominant global streams of media, culture, and economies. To understand further, the role that cultural production plays in constructing black identities in the African diaspora and in the urban terrain, this research explores how audiences of the African diaspora in Newark employ Nollywood to create discursive spaces around identity. In particular, I explore how those who identify as African-American/black American, Caribbean, and African imagine, construct, and perform identity in their participation in the distribution, reception, and interpretation of Nollywood films.

My approach to diaspora, identity, and media comes from ethnographic observations and in-depth and semi-structured interviews with Nollywood audiences and with former or current Newark citizens in a quest to understand how media contributes to the complex interactions of identity in everyday life. My focus is how participants mined cultural, political, and social material in circulating, watching, and reading Nollywood movies to make sense of the self, the identities of those in their networks and other blacks against a Newark backdrop. This research breaks ground as a media ethnography and a multi-sited account because it takes place in the U.S., where there is limited research on

Nollywood and its fan base. This study also uses all three major black groups in the U.S., as opposed to focusing on African immigrants as most ethnographies around Nollywood diaspora do. Added, very little studies focus on all three groups; thus adding to a dearth in the literature. While my research adds to a growing body of Nollywood discourse, African diaspora, and black media, it contributes to the broader dialogue of changing global media landscapes, the increased movement and resettlement of people, the shifts of national and transnational identity, and the emergence of different articulations of power through media and culture.

Research Terms

I offer definitions of several terms in this in order to discuss the nuances of their meanings throughout this study. I rely on the definitions of *race* defined by Jackson, Caldwell, & Sellers (2012) for this study. Jackson, Caldwell, & Sellers employ the definition of race proposed by Phinney and Ong (2007), Brown et al. (1999), and Sue (1999) that refers to *race* as "a sociobiological construct in which society places people in a social and value hierarchy depending on history, traditions, personal experiences, and genetic heritage based on physical characteristics" (p. 26).

The term black and the use of its meaning is a contested terrain, but is a necessary term for this project. Black is a social construction connected to the phenotypical trait of dark skin. In earlier centuries, it has been connected to mental incompetency, sexual deviance, and criminality in racist, fallacious Western science that has since been debunked (Boster, 2013; Washington, 2008); while in later twentieth and twenty-first centuries, black is connected to a struggle for power and the global unification of people who racially identify as black. In the U.S. black interchanges with African-American, but

it also means people who are racially black, but from other homelands. However, in U.S. black communities, the term is contentious because it carries a history of pathology, inferiority, and economic equality that some members refuse to be associated for various reasons (Keating, 1995; English, 2004).

Murray et al (2004) suggest *ethnicity* is a "perceived common ancestry and perceptions of a shared history, language, beliefs, norms, behaviors, and symbols of peoplehood" (p.12). In addition, *culture* is defined as a "dynamic force of symbolic meanings that shapes how people see themselves as influenced by the social environment and functional experiences" (p.12) that is connected to "providing meaning for beliefs, rituals and values, and norms that dictate how a group of people live and act."

African diaspora is a term used in this project to describe people who identify as racially black and have all or part of their ancestry directly linked to the indigenous peoples of Africa before several mass exoduses since the early fifteenth century (Zaleza, 2005; Fabre & Benesch, 2004). In this study, the term, *African diaspora* will be interchangeable with black in some instances, but I will explicate when a difference emerges that will most often point to the cultural, ethnic, and geographical disparateness occurring within the group.

There are also several terms referring to African-Americans that are interchangeable, such as *black American*; or have historical location in names used to identify people of African descent such as *Negro*, *colored*, and *black*. Most of these historical identifiers occur in the United States, but some might extend to Caribbean and African populations. As you can see, the term black can overlap, but this research will

take particular efforts to explain its usage as to when and why the appropriated meaning shifts.

For this research, *Caribbean* will be used to describe members of the West Indian population and black citizens of island-nations who belong to Latin American classifications such as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, and Haitians. Caribbean-American identifies people who have at least one parent or grandparent that migrated to the U.S. West Indian is a term that describes members of the Anglophone-Caribbean including English-speaking Panama, peoples of mainland countries Belize and Guyana, the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM) member states, but excludes Spanish speaking islands (Butterfield, 2004; Foner, 2001); however, West Indian is used when Angloglophone Caribbean participants are the area of focus at times in the study.

Finally, *Continental African* or *African* are terms describing peoples who migrated from any of the fifty-three member states in the African union. Second-and-third generation African migrants are people who have parents or grandparents that migrated from Africa, but still identify as African in the study.

Breaking Binaries

This study considers how media engagement and cultural practices distinguished black identities in order to direct focus away from the oft-used black/white, good/bad binary or trope (Yancy, 2006; Alcoff, 2003; James, 2002). Indeed, there have been attempts to shift away from a black/white paradigm, but they have resulted in the exclusion of key group members. Previous literature regarding the African diaspora privileges African-Americans (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005; Halter, 1998) and African-

American identity (Jackson, 2005; Coleman, 2002). Selected research looking at African-Americans contrasts and compares African-Americans and West Indians (Tillery & Chresfield, 2012; Butterfield, 2004; Pierre, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Waters, 2001), West Indians and Africans (Shaw-Taylor & Tuch, 2007; Rong & Brown, 2002), and even African-Americans and Africans, but there still exists a shortage of scholarship that investigates all of the major ethnic groups collectively.

Another binary this study moved beyond is the black native/black immigrant dichotomy that distinguishes one group's culture as superior, thus pointing to group members' success. As much as blacks have been homogenized, Jemima Pierre (2004) critiques an "us versus them" binary found in black immigrant discourse that draws definitive lines between native-born black culture and African or Caribbean culture, with subsequent binaries of bad black American culture/good black immigrant culture. Consequentially, the expression of cultural values and identities are in direct competition and opposition on social, political, and economic levels; however, Pierre argues that the lived realities show that both groups encounter similar issues because race is a fundamental part of U.S. infrastructure and socialization. Sherri-Ann Butterfield (2006) studied second-generation Jamaican immigrants to dispute common dichotomous assumptions in black native/ black immigrant binary by saying that the influence of culture in identity construction flows between both groups. In another light, participants in Oneka LaBennett's (2012) work on West Indian immigrant girls, used a variety of West Indian, African-American, and mainstream American media to make sense of their identities. However, these studies are the exception to voluminous literature that

homogenizes blacks or black ethnic groups, and fails to take into the account how the shifting media landscape pierces through culture as it has nation-state borders.

Lastly, I wanted to complicate the notion of the tradition/modernity binary by proffering discourse of a *traditional modernity*, the concept of weaving modern concepts into traditional systems (Renne, 1997). Jude Akudinobi (2014) says the dualistic concept of tradition/modernity is rooted in the thought that tradition is weakened by modernity, and the failure to relinquish certain traditions, in turn, slows down modernity, which has become the symbol of progress. In this binary, African tradition is constructed as polarizing against modernity. Akudinobi comments on the popular notions of this binary by using the literary and cinematic works of Africans who challenged the hegemonic ideas of modernity in post-colonial Africa. For the artists, the Eurocentric concept of modernity was just as inflexible Europeans' understanding of African culture. Philip Galinsky's (2013) study of Mangue music in Brazil echoes Akudinobi's criticism by adding that situating tradition and culture as static, results in concretizing identity that is ever-changing with new technologies. Added, Christopher Thompson and John Traphagan's (2012) study of the Japanese incorporation of traditional dress in modern fashion styles furthers the observations of Galkinsky by showing a blur between the dichotomy of old/new, industrial/agricultural, and tradition/modernity in the digital era. From a slightly different angle, Madeleine Yue Dong (2003) claims that tradition complements modernity because it is one of the nodes in the plurality of time that the city comprises. In sum, modernity does not have to dismiss tradition to exist, but blooms from tradition while keeping aspects of it that are critical to the presence of modernity.

As I will describe more in the following chapter on Nollywood's history and genres, the early movies of Nollywood bridged traditional stories and mythological heroes into updated presentations. As well, films using the genre of epic movies to address present-day issues is a common genre. Weaving tradition into modernity as "traditional modernity" is a concept Elisha Renne (1997) offers as a way to describe how African culture specifically, but indigenous cultures in general, have been doing so to stay in the competitive global market. In this study, I replace the tradition/modernity model with *traditional modernity* to explore the ways in which participants use the cultural productions from Africa to establish a media presence and visibility in global economy. For example, traditional modernity is seen in the study through the observations and descriptions of participants who purchase movies at stores that are a part of hubs of customary African shops that operate like modern-day African marketplaces in the U.S. In addition, *traditional modernity* is demonstrated visible in the innovative reception sites of participants who observe protocols of hierarchy when intergenerational groups watch the movies, and in the different ways Nollywood is watched in the in-between, liminal spaces I note as "intermezzo spaces." I conclude that in breaking from the binary model, the narratives of participants are fuller because they include multiple themes that capture the complexities in identity.

Media Representation Versus Audience Agency: Research Questions

Scholarly research provides ample amounts of inquiries into black representation in the media; however, there is a gap in the literature examining how black audiences employ media to construct and perform identity. There exists extensive literature exploring mainstream media's depiction of African-Americans (Watkins, 2005; Massood,

2003; Mean Coleman, 2002; Squires, 2002; Bogle, 2001; Gaines, 2001; Cripps, 1977). For example, Ronald Jackson (2006) looks at how African-American men construct their masculinity through the role that popular music and film play in reifying black stereotypes. Dwight Brooks and Lisa Hèbert (2006), Patricia Hill-Collins (2004), and bell hooks (1992) examine mainstream media representation of black women and their bodies, while Christine Madeleine Du Bois (2004) investigates how West Indians respond to negative Caribbean portrayals in the news. By shifting the focus of identity and media to cultural production that is created by Africans and employed by its diaspora, my research situates black audiences as active agents in how they engage in media and how the media is used.

From the early twentieth century to the 1970s, there was an accepted notion that audiences received pre-packaged messages coded into content by media producers uninterrupted and intact until Stuart Hall (1980) offered the idea that audiences read texts from multiple positions. Hall's model of encoding/decoding theorized that programmers encoded messages that their audiences then decoded differently. This important shift in audience studies gave audiences agency in their consumption activities and changed the way researchers viewed and eventually, researched reception. David Morley (1980) explored and expanded upon Hall's work by experimenting with research methods that looked at audiences as divergent, while also factoring in the environment in which the media played and the contextual variances of audience members such as race, class and gender. Morley's work moved to use ethnographic practices in studying audiences (Ang, 1996, 2006).

In this study, I employed a media ethnography through multi-sited observations of shops that sold Nollywood and interviews with Nollywood spectators. In order for me to do so, I had to acknowledge my status as an "insider" in this project. I am African American, a Newark resident, and I identify as an African diasporan; especially now since one of my siblings recently participated in a series of DNA tests mapping our ancestry that shows at least eighty percent of my lineage is from West, Southeast, Central, and Northern Africa.

I simultaneously had to acknowledge that I am an outsider because I am a migrant to Newark from Los Angeles. However, my experiences as a black woman in Newark were an antecedent to this project because my identity was frequently questions. In Newark, people thought I was Puerto Rican, Haitian, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Dominican, Ethiopian, and some-or-another-type of African, but rarely African-American. I would often ask people as to why and how they designated me outside of my African-American background. I received answers such as my clothes, the way I talked, my physical features, or my musical selections of Caribbean and African music. The responses by those who answered my inquiries, my behavior and cultural activities were peculiarities to African-Americans in Newark because I looked and acted different from them; therefore, it made me seem like something else. It was this "something elseness" that guided my questions for this project.

Olga Bailey (2014) and Myria Giorgiou (2006) point out that media informs individual and collective diasporic identity; thus identity is negotiated from many positions. Looking at distribution, reception, and interpretation of Nollywood drew narratives from participants engaging in different aspects of media employment, at

different sites and with a variety of other diasporans. In keeping with this line of thought, the above discourse evoked the central question of this project that asked, how is diasporic identity articulated differently through Nollywood? In looking at distribution, I offered the subsequent question, how are distribution networks formed and established in circulating Nollywood? Next, in examining reception, I wanted to know what aspects of reception demonstrates ethnic cohesion or disrupts ethnic linkages. Lastly, in my exploration of interpretation, I asked how do participants' readings of movies inform them in how they make sense of themselves. These questions were my attempts in providing a comprehensive story of the people who use a film industry that is largely invisible in American mainstream media, but is gaining foot in black communities.

Why Nollywood?

Intimately interwoven with American culture is Hollywood; so much so that it plays a significant role in various institutions including other media such as television, radio, printing press, and the Internet (Miller, 2007). Hollywood has also penetrated cultural industries across the globe so profoundly that Hollywood is synonymous with American identity in places outside of the U.S. (Miller, Govil, McMurria, Wang, & Maxwell, 2008). One of the unintended consequences of Hollywood is that the globe is now speaking back to it. The film industries and innovative digital film movements that are blooming all over the world indicate a piercing of the monopoly Hollywood has commanded for decades. When considering Nollywood, this research examined how a Ghanaian and Nigerian film industry that saturated African media has seeped into the American media landscape.

Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (2013) argue that Nollywood has a Pan African appeal. Moradewun Adejunmobi (2010) asserts that movies circulate through the diaspora because the themes that they carry show issues that are currently relevant to post-colonial subjects and Africa. Johnathan Haynes (2013) supposes that Nollywood functions as a transactional cultural anchor for diaspora to homeland, while Jane Bryce (2013), who studies the appeal of Nollywood through audiences in Barbados, surmises that films connect viewers to an imagined past or cultural identity. Though I agree with these suppositions, I borrow from the work of John and Jean Comaroff (2004) who proffer their concept of "Afromodernity" to describe the emergence of Nollywood. For them, Nollywood is a way that Africans and their diaspora establish "a set of dispositions and practices, of aspirations and intentions" (p. 330) with the narrative that modernity is a "world-historical production" rather than exclusive to Europe or the U.S. (p.331); thus, they see Afromodernity as a term to describe how Africans share and construct the future and history. Nollywood is a product of Afromodernity because it positions Africans in shaping global media discourses and movements, while providing an avenue for representing Africa and a worldview from African media and culture industries.

Admittedly, an established African-American cinema culture existed eighty years prior to the arrival of Nollywood the U.S. To some degree, African-American cinema is an alternative industry; however, it operates within mainstream media (Stewart, 2005). Nollywood, I argue, shows the emergence of a film culture outside of the dominant global flows that has pierced American borders. While African-American cinema pushes to create its own voice, stream of thought, and identity, its efforts have largely been acceptance by the status quo (Regester, 2005; Massood, 2003; Griffiths & Latham, 1999).

The introduction of Nollywood points to an overlooked aspect of black audiences in the U.S. There are two distinct black audiences — one that is indigenous and has participated in film culture within U.S. borders; and another set of black spectators who are foreign born and have watched movies outside and inside the borders of the U.S. It was important for this research to narrate the distinctions between these audiences by incorporating the notion that the introduction of film to black audiences and the corresponding cinema cultures and processes of their experiences occurred under extraordinarily different circumstances, in distinct ways, and at separate times.

Furthermore, using Nollywood allowed this study to explore the flows of a highly transportable media. Thussu (2007) contends that the most critical element in global flows is the ability for media to be mobile. She points out that in some areas of the world; electricity is a luxury, and Internet rare. With that being said, media must be able to travel through these realities. Ramon Laboto (2012) maps out the movements of Nollywood in terms of its connection to global shadow economies and Brian Larkin (2004) links the sustainability of the industry to a "fix-and-repair" economic and distribution infrastructure of repurposing and repairing old and dated equipment. Agreeing with these assertions, I proffer that those who participate in the industry have created a culture of transportability, accessibility, and adaptability. The culture that has emerged around Nollywood is important to its proliferation throughout subcultures and in diasporas living in minority communities that do not have to rely on the distribution flows of Hollywood in order to watch and circulate the films.

Lastly, the emergence of Nollywood is far from a niche market. As I will explore in the next chapter, the movies have been circulating in the U.S. for at least twenty years,

and is starting to gain foot on mainstream programming outlets. Already, two stations on Optimum Cable in the New York region called African Noir run Nollywood movies. This is in addition to the numerous streaming sits and streaming boxes like Roku. While thumbing through Netflix in April 2015, I began to see several Nollywood selections. Using Nollywood in this project is timely. Discourse around the industry is beginning to emerge more in U.S. academy because it is an important media telling a story about globalization that warrants deeper inquiry.

Why Newark?

As a field site, Newark provides a provocative entry point into exploring media and African diaspora identity. Newark has a place identity of being a "black city" because of the 1960s and 70s activism to enfranchise black Newarkers that was led by black arts leader and radical poet, Amiri Baraka, and composed of host of advocates and Civil Rights workers (Gibbons, 2014; Ginsberg, 2013; Tuttle, 2009). As well, Newark is predominantly black, and as mentioned earlier, Newark is comprised of a visible, diverse black ethnic demographic that has been growing since the arrival of black Caribbean immigrants in masse in the late 1980s that was followed by Africans in the early 1990s. Moreover, the city serves as an important cultural hub to blacks in New Jersey. The city and local organizations host black cultural events throughout the year that starts with Martin Luther King, Jr. celebrations in January and ends with Kwanzaa in December (Allen, 2013). In addition, Newark is one of the few major cities in the state that houses a large African-American and immigrant black business community that is intimately involved in city affairs and the local economy.

At the commencement of my research, Newark was undergoing another round of gentrification whereby franchise stores, and professional middle-class blacks and whites were displacing small minority-owned businesses and working-class and poor residents in and around the downtown area.[3] The city, under the direction of Corey Booker who has since left after winning a Congressional Senate seat in 2014, was promoted as a location in which middle-class, educated persons could move in and "diversify the city." Teachers, in particular, were recruited to teach at the charter schools that were rapidly emerging and some replacing traditional public schools. Major corporations were given tax credit incentives to stay and expand or set up business like Verizon, Panasonic, Prudential Insurance and housing developer RBH group that is building a number of housing units in downtown Newark (Jones, 2012). This process is still underway.

During the study, participants who owned small businesses, or worked at or patronized black-owned stores, vocalized their concerns around being displaced by gentrification. As the city changed, I aimed to delineate how Nollywood-based diasporan activities sheds light on how they negotiate and perform their socialization of "ethnic" roles within the shifts of their community. The terrain of Newark weaves in-and-out of the narratives of participants. My initial goals were to understand how participants dealt with gentrification while maneuvering daily. Reported were far richer stores of sustainability and obligatory alliances with various networks of black communities in the city.

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[3] There has been a series of tales of gentrification that go as far back as the beginning of Newark when Dutch settlers displaced indigenous peoples of the land. Immigrants have moved in and out of the city causing shifts in ethnic makeup, political powers, and economies. More will be explained when I establish Newark as a field site in chapter two.

Newark has a history of chronic social, political, and economic struggles (Mumford, 2007). In spite of the difficulties that long-time residents and black business owners faced, there remained a connection to Newark because it allowed them to cultivate themselves, and foster community in ways they thought other cities would not grant. Similar to the reports of Zenzele Isoke (2011) of women homemakers who worked political campaigns in Newark saw the city as "a beloved intimate space to be reclaimed, re-worked, and re-imagined as a homeplace—a symbolic space that nurtures the life-chances of young black people" (p. 117). The participants' diehard alliances to Newark buffered in some ways, the overwhelmingly negative news coverage of the city that has been ongoing since the 1967 riots (Hrach, 2011). Jeff Gruenewald, Steve Chermak and Jessenia Pizarro (2013) make this case in their analysis of the coverage of female homicide victims in Newark from 1997 to 2007 when they saw patterns of local papers, such as the *Star-Ledger*, disproportionately reporting homicides of black males when black males were the perpetrators as well as the victims of shootings.

Circulations of Illicit, Legal, and Shared Economies

Because of Newark's gross issues of poverty and unemployment that were exacerbated by state cutbacks during the current Chris Christie state administration (Giambusso, 2012), I often wondered how poor Newark residents survived. The narratives in the study show an illicit economy that is very much interwoven into the legitimate economy of the city, which is where you can locate Nollywood. Piracy is an important part of how Nollywood circulated in this study with its distribution connected to the circulation of resources, economies of the participants in the study, and in some ways, to the illicit and legal markets in Newark.

Nollywood mushroomed out of an established reproduction and distribution pirated movie system that circulated American, Latin American, Indian, and East Asian cinema and TV programming throughout Africa that I detail in the next chapter. The schema consists of pre-existing formal and informal markets repurposed as main channels of Nollywood movies when the film industry illustrated the potential of being a promising industry in Nigeria in the early 1990s. For Keyan Tomaselli (2014), pirate economies are inevitable necessities in the current global media due to disparities. In the case of Nollywood, Alessandro Jedlowski (2012) proposes that Nollywood "fluctuate[s] between regimes of legality and illegality" that are similar to the informal networks of Russian and Southern Italy, but necessary in the economies of each respective country, that if extracted, could cause infrastructural complications.[4] In Newark, the study discovered a system that circulated pirated Nollywood movies across formal and informal distribution networks, sustained shops, brokered inter-cultural and inter-ethnic relationships, and created revenue outside of the stereotypical image of the Newark underworld perpetuated by mainstream news. Moreover, the circulation showed how the visibility of movies create new media spaces that add to discursive spaces of identity.

At spaces where Nollywood appeared, dialogue between participants covered multiple issues and challenges such as immigrant status, disenfranchisement of black businesses, gender inequities, and housing concerns. Traded in non-commercial transactions, too, Nollywood were part of interactions where people swapped or presented information about jobs, community safety, or culture. The movies became a

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[4] Daniela Ivanova (2012) writes a detailed account of how organized crime during the Soviet Union was inextricably involved in forming democracy in Post-Soviet era. She argues that elites who held the power during the dissolution of the Soviet Union and subsequent transition of republics to nation-states was largely guided by mafia economy and leaders.

social and cultural currency; thus removing the capitalistic monetary value to a commodity that was part of participants finding agency in creating their own systems of trade and power structures outside of the status quo.

Lastly, participants who generated texts and information of the industry online used Nollywood to circulate Africa and participate in global discussions. Throughout the study, people's narratives mentioned the idea of using Nollywood as a natural resource that they distributed and traded in place of their inability to participate in equitable global trade and media systems. They saw movies as a natural resource because it comes from a creative process of people, thus film productions are productions from their labor that they control.

Global Media

The gap Hollywood produced subsequently forged fertile opportunities for a media that grew out of the black markets — another narrative in global media that the status quo attempts to silence. In spite of Nollywood's precarious position in legal discourse around copyright infringement, audiences that employed Nollywood did not consider buying and passing around movies as illegal, but saw their circulation and spectatorship of pirated movies as a legitimate and productive way to suture collective identity, as they articulated self in the unpredictable terrain of globalization.

The weakening of Hollywood in the global media landscape must share its space with other movies, even on U.S soil. This study illuminates how media transported and implemented in host countries is shared by African people with other blacks in ways that are at times, extremely uncomfortable. Blended families and communities made up of Africans, Caribbeans and African-Americans found Nollywood as an effective medium

to spend leisure time. Its content, in other instances, assisted in discussions regarding sensitive issues of cultural and racial identity, along with racism and powerlessness. Furthermore, the interface with movies created nodes in its channels of circulation that heightened how global productions and its spectators destabilized hegemonic notions of movies, non-Western popular culture outside, and movie watching.

Participants explained how they employed Nollywood as more than just movies that they watched, but also important texts they circulated via social networking sites. Movie clips, screen shots, music, dialogue and memes (photos or pictures with messages) extracted from movies were posted on an array of social media. Participants followed blogs focusing on Nollywood and the lives of the actors. In some cases, Nollywood became a regular part of their media diet, and at times, consumed more than Hollywood.

The economic benefits of Nollywood demonstrated a complex relationship between native and immigrant black merchants. African and African-American vendors sold movies on the street or in fledgling mom-and-pop shops in their attempts to remain open in the face gentrification that displaced small black-owned businesses. Some of the exchanges were unpleasant and some of the material merchants sold were against religious or moral beliefs, but soliciting Nollywood as a means to survive was an honorable trade. In these transactions, ideas of beauty, fair trading practices, language and cultural expectations clashed. In the daily interactions, the multifarious roles Nollywood played in the lives of participant's evoked notions of class, gender, and national identity, which connected issues of maneuvering issues of invisibility in globalization. In sum, Nollywood served as a platform to articulate visibility; especially in discussions carried out during purchases and watching movies.

Another important finding in the study is how this research revealed another lens into how the materiality of media gets repurposed. While much of U.S. media moved to digital formats, Nollywood movies on DVD thrived. Though it is transitioning to online formats such as streaming sites like Youtube, several participants told of their hobby of collecting DVDs of older movies or hard-to-find productions along with new releases. DVDs are still an important format in Nollywood circulation and consumption; thus opening up discourse into how older mediums become looped into newer distribution and consumption processes. In addition, creating catalogues by spectators opened up the space for media studies scholars and film scholars to document the changes in film industries such as aesthetics, film stock or digital formats, actors, themes, costumes, and other critical material illuminating the narratives found in the text itself.

As well, Nollywood research also uncovered the inequities in global media. Developed countries extract raw resources from underdeveloped nations for various technologies then dump dated devices into landfills in some of the same underdeveloped nation-states — all the while doing little if anything to offer assistance in developing technologies with the countries with which they trade. As a result, the already poor and vulnerable nations are left with toxic environments and a weak tech infrastructure. Ghana and Nigeria — the nation's in which Nollywood emerged — are two of the dumping sites used by Asia, U.S. and Western Europe. Nonetheless, those who developed Nollywood used cheap, dated VHS tapes to upstart its industry. Framed as an economic success story, many scholars fail to mention the severe economic and environmental consequences of technology practices of developed countries and a digital divide that if not intentionally created in the beginning is — maintained currently. I discovered that

Nollywood's emergence and sustainability is based on three green tactics — recycling, repurposing and bartering in its circulation — all green tactics that contribute to global dialogue examining e-waste resolutions, but is excluded from conversations because it indicts the inequities of global media.

Through this research, Nollywood added to providing narratives into the increased movement and resettlement of people. Because black immigrants often fall under the radar in immigrant discourse, the movies became a way to track the movement of populations. Added, it tracked what media they transported and/or consumed. This was also found to be true for black natives whose parents or even themselves were part of the mass migration of southern blacks to the northern and western parts of the U.S. There is an assumption that African-American experiences since migration ended, but participants showed that they too carry cultural, political, and identities from the South.

Nollywood audiences were used as a way to map immigrants and native blacks (who also were migrants in this study), and the physical sites that they interacted along with communicative spaces created in these interactions that provided a lens into shifts of identity. By following Nollywood, the changes occurring in participants as they spoke about their life and their dealings with movies demonstrated social, cultural, political and economic exchanges fluctuating with articulations of self. This also extended to Newark, known as a black city since the historical 1967 riots. Newark's recent flood of black immigrants changed the texture and representation of blackness in the Northeast metropolis that needs further inquiry.

Africans who sold Nollywood or screened it in their shop created diasporic communicative spaces that collapsed space and time. It evoked conversations between

clients, and brought homeland into spaces within host country creating a global consciousness within local reality. African-Americans forced to hawk Nollywood to sustain in a hostile climate for street vending in Newark, attached urban black economic crises and displacement to transnational texts like African and Caribbean immigrants. Fluid allegiances to nationality and racial identities emerged when financial instability threatened status and livelihood that adds to how global media transforms into different meanings and tools in global economies.

In general, this study offers a perspective in modernity discourse that operates from the standpoint of visibility. In order to articulate a position, one must be present. Nollywood increases the visibility and articulation of people of African descent to the point that the mass production of films and subsequent circulations generated so much content and now competes globally that the African perspective and black participation in the new media landscape must be acknowledged.

Nollywood as a Pedagogical Tool

My observations and conversations with Nollywood audience members and retailers over the course of this study revealed that Nollywood operates as a pedagogical tool. Henry Giroux (2011, 2004, 1997) maintains that films are such a "powerful teaching machine" that they become a site of cultural politics. According to Chris Lukinbeal & Stefan Zimmermann (2006), films re-present the spatial and temporal occurrence of culture and customs, while Thomas Sigler & Roberto Albandoz (2014) argue that fillms reproduce social power relations in real life. Whereas mainstream film industries such as Hollywood repeatedly "teach sets of ideas, meanings, discourse, and social configurations" that benefit dominant social order, video film industries such as

Nollywood reconfigure the lens and the social-political positioning of the spectator and subject (Ajibade, 2009).

Movies were used as supplemental and central educational tools. Films added to the stories, tradition, and language that was passed on to some participants by family members and older kinship associates in their networks. As well, the texts allowed participants to make cross-cultural comparisons. For others, Nollywood was the only media that presented African culture as diverse, nuanced, and in the everyday. In other instances, Nollywood informed participants on African religious and spiritual practices that were often seen as taboo to talk about in public, while some viewers picked up fashion cues to accentuate their style. Others saw Nollywood as an authentic cultural production that informed spectators from a position of authority unlike mainstream U.S. media. Even retailers used the angle of Nollywood being an educational media by suggesting movies they thought emphasized African tradition.

Learning about African culture while watching or circulating movies was both an individual and shared experience. At times, a person who operated as a culture broker would explain materials in movies or select movies they thought were appropriate for viewers. Culture brokers were seen as an authority, and in some cases acted as an intermediary between retailers and the people in their network whom they provided cultural knowledge or between the text itself and the person they are educating. Culture brokers emerged out of necessity, self-appointment, and from the recruitment of others. Online culture brokers shared their information about Nollywood, video clips, blog articles, memes, and pictures to their social media networks. Along with posts, they

engaged in conversations with their network that sometimes delved into identity of black people.

Conjuring Identities

Identities are layered constructions (Morley & Robins, 2002; Straubhaar, 2008). The process is a discursive practice in which identity changes and multiplies in different spaces. For this project, I thought of identities as "conjured," using the language of the occult (e.g. Vodoun, Santeria, Candomblé), as an extension of many of the early Nollywood movies, and a portion of them today that incorporate tales of mysticism. I argue that identities are raised, pulled from a dimension that is abstract and seemingly invisible to the eye, but real and substantial to the one who is conjuring it. Clifford (1998) argues that identities are conjectural. They are notions of self that are fashioned out of interactions, systems of meanings and rituals that belong to the collectivity of a group. In sum, identity articulates itself with different texts, institutions, power, and other identities (Yong Jin, 2010; Pieterse, 2003; Hall, 1996, 1990).

Hybrid identities are elements of different cultures that are formulated to construct a new self that exists in a third space, or an alternative sphere outside of the cultures it borrows from (Smith, 2008; Yong Jin, 2010). Much like the splicing of genetic modification, hybrid identities mutate to create another organism to survive in the negotiations of belonging. Far from the Darwinist claim that the cultures in use are weaker or insignificant in a new world, the current global order — and the corresponding media flow — has given rise to multiple circuits and channels spliced from various streams of media. As a result, creating a hybrid self is necessary to understanding how the self exists in this new order.

Straubhaar (2013) expands identity discourse in his argument for scholars to consider identities as cultural geographies that create new spaces corresponding to new global flows, people's interactions with power, and the shifts of power they experience. Cultural geographies are "defined from below, from the evolving identities and media choices [that are] made by audiences who consume local, national and global content daily" (p. 65). He agrees that identities can be hybrids, but the pervasive global media circuits inform identities to be layered with interactions of multiple cultures. Using both hybrid and cultural geographies as a lens to narrate how culture is read in texts, and in the self, participants in the study expand on how racialized and ethnic selves are as pliant as other social constructions that inform the self, such as ideas of class, religion, sexuality, and education.

In the narratives of the participants, there are complex positionings and repositionings around texts that demonstrate the fluidity in identity construction. Participants attached themselves to texts at moments they find pleasure in readings then detached from them when they thought that texts were disagreeable or failed to reflect their cultural mores. What people said through movies and their activities involving Nollywood movies shed light on how members of an ethnic group deal with hierarchies of power as they made sense of social positions such as class, education, gender, religion, skin color, and beauty.

Throughout the study, members showed their attempts of weaving together the fragmented aspects of the self and others. For this, I borrowed the notion of "suturing" to describe the process of stitching together an incoherence in the self and group. Johnathan M. Zeitlin (2012) argues that Jewish diasporans attempt to reconcile their cultural and

semiotic heterogeneity by suturing an imagined, homogenous homeland. Analyzing the work of poet, Marlon Morales who writes about diaspora as "sutures that will never heal," Maritza Cardenas (2013) parallels his use of suture to that of a multi-colored quilt that represents the diversity of Central American people. Similarly, participants in the study pulled and sutured identity at their uncomfortable junctures and clashes, but did so as a way to navigate through an unpredictable and sometimes hostile urban terrain, and as a way to forge communities for sustainability.

Knotty-ness

In this project, participants reported to watch movies while their hair was being braided at one of the many African-operated braiding galleries in Newark. The site of the braiding gallery displayed a complex negotiation of gender, ethnicity, beauty, and language that I termed *knotty moments* and *knotty-ness*. As time went on, I saw how knotty-ness applied to other instances that inferred complex, uncomfortable negotiations of the self against multiple factors (i.e. intra-cultural interactions, gentrification, sharing resources).

Hair salons for black women are important social sites and spaces of multiple negotiations (Jacobs-Huey, 2006). For example, the discussions of agreeing upon price and selecting a style can be tense because the way in which black women style their hair involves a personal, political, and public consequence that they must face (Brown, 2014; Tate, 2009). Stories raveled that the stylist and customer brokered deals from different positions and traded off in whose power directs the interaction. I call these occurrences knotty junctures because they take on two meanings. The first is the academic lens of knotty-ness, where sites are complex and textured interactions requiring careful

examination and unpacking. The second meaning references black women's hair itself as being "knotty" and often a spectacle, not only while negotiating in the shop and other public spaces, but also in other arenas of the external world. Knotty-ness grew as a term of uncomfortable negotiations outside of hair, but still incorporates the notion of personal appearance because the participants reported on the experiences around identities that were connected to their physical bodies.

In the knotty moments of conjuring and suturing identities, media inform African diasporans. Joseph Straubhaar (2008) argues that identities can be hybrid, multiple, or global because the current global media circuits stream content espousing different ideologies, cultures, and positions, that the identities of media consumers become layered with what he calls cultural geographies. As a result, the constructed selves of consumers point to locations throughout the world rather than localized terrain.

Considering Diaspora

In the U.S., members of the African diaspora include African-Americans, Caribbeans/ Caribbean-Americans, and continental Africans. The three main subsidiaries have settled in the U.S. under different circumstances and at different times. I must briefly provide a cursory look into each ethnic group to show how they moved from Africa to the U.S., and give a glimpse in their heterogeneous backgrounds. It is important to emphasize that there are members of these groups that belong to multiple diasporas, or for the case of this study are not included because they do not identify as black.

Diasporic memberships are not fixed to one affiliation, and often in the case of black groups, there are several memberships that even include bi-racial and multi-racial

compositions. For example, Caribbean and African nations have non-black citizens who are part of South Asian, European, and East Asian diasporas. Some participants within this study are members of two black ethnic groups, as you will read; there are informants that have an African-American or Caribbean parent and an African parent.

African-Americans

The first wave and the largest diasporic group member are African-Americans. They are descendants of Africans who were transported against their will from the early 1500s to late nineteenth century.[5] These Africans were coerced to serve as the primary source of slave labor from colonial America to almost a century after the formation of the U.S. After the dismantling of slavery in 1865, consequent to the ending of the U.S. Civil War,[6] formerly enslaved blacks gained citizenship in 1866.

Caribbeans/Caribbean-Americans

Caribbean/ Caribbean-Americans mark the second wave of African diasporans to the U.S., but were first settled in the one of the Caribbean islands before migrating. Like African Americans, they, too, were forcibly transported across the Atlantic in what is known as the Middle Passage (Gilroy, 1993). However, these Africans were brought to

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[5] The earliest records of the transport of Africans to America were from the early Spanish American trade. Restall (2000) points out that some Africans were both voluntarily and involuntarily aboard trading ships and were part of the Europe-West African slave trading relationship that had existed since the 1400s. After the Spanish trade crossed to the Americas, Portuguese trade ensued. The English trade companies formed in the late sixteenth century, and officially began transporting Africans sometime in the 1600s (Rawley & Behrendt, 2005; Restall, 2000; DuBois, 1999). It is also critical to mention research that argues for an African presence in the Americas prior to the Columbus voyage who were involved in the trade of resources such as metals, rice and corn, and also some who resettled in areas throughout the Americas (Carney, 2001; Matar, 1999; Sertima, 1976).

[6] The year 1865, marks the end of the Civil War, and not the issuance of the presidential order of the Emancipation Proclamation that was disseminated to the executive branches of the U.S. by then President Abraham Lincoln. Blacks were released from slavery as late as 1867, as signified in the Juneteenth celebration that commemorates when enslaved blacks in Texas found out about the emancipation order four years later.

work in a slave system on one of the many islands located in the Caribbean Sea. Caribbean nationals also have a history of migrating to countries under which their islands were colonized, and in some cases to Canada (Toney, 2010), making some migrants participate in multiple movements before settling in the U.S. However, Caribbean migrants disproportionately resettled in the U.S. and predominately live in Washington D.C., Miami, and the New York metropolitan area (Kent, 2007; Greico, 2010).

Most Caribbean migrants came to the U.S. after the passing of the 1965 Immigration Act that amended immigration laws, but there was a small and visible stream of Jamaican, Barbadian, and Afro-Cuban migrants around the turn of the twentieth century (Tillery & Chresfield, 2012; Kent, 2007; Daniels, 1990). Today, Caribbean-Americans and Caribbean immigrants make up the largest black immigrant population in the U.S. and the second largest wave of diasporans with a population of about 1.5 million that make up four percent of the black population. Approximately 567,000 alone live in New York.[7]

Continental Africans

Continental Africans are the last and most recent wave of the African diaspora to immigrate in large numbers. Prior to 1965, there was a trickle of select African migrants who came mainly for educational pursuits that their governments sponsored (Arthur, Takougang, Owusu, & Thomas, 2012). For example, Kwame Nkrumah,[8] the first

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

[8] Nkrumah is an important figure in discussions of the diaspora. He is a seminal figure in the Pan-African movement and is recorded to have invited African-Americans and Caribbean peoples to Ghana in "back-to-Africa" efforts after Ghana garnered independence from the British.

president of an independent Ghana studied in the 1930s at Lincoln University, a historically black college in Pennsylvania. The change in immigration policy in 1965 opened opportunities for more Africans to migrate as it revised racial and ethnic quotas and focused on attracting more immigrants who had some levels of higher education and were science professionals (Passel & Edmonston, 1994). Also, the policy reform gave "priority to family unification [and] favored the relatives of those who had recently immigrated" (Martin & Midgley, 1999, p. 17). Adding to U.S. immigration reform, African countries experienced a turbulent post-colonial era that began in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This period indicates involved numerous disruptions such as civil wars, religious conflicts and coup d'états that led to years of economic certainty. Consequently, the decades of uncertainty spurred the influx of displaced African to the U.S. who were seeking political, religious or economic asylum, especially from areas such as Ethiopia and Eritrea (Idris, 2015; Hernandez, 2012; Kent, 2007; Arthur, 2000).

Like Caribbean migrants, some Africans opt to relocate to the European nation in which their country was colonized, or some move to Canada before coming to the U.S. Also similar to the Caribbean community, African immigrants tend to live in metropolitan areas, with the largest concentration in New York. Contrasting Caribbean migrants who largely arrived as laborers, a significant portion of the first waves of African immigrants came with high levels of education, had already obtained a post-secondary education, or were seeking college degrees or post-graduate tutelage in America (Pierre, 2004). In addition, they dispersed in the U.S. more than Carribbeans that resulted in concentrations of Africans in cities throughout the country. A handful of countries largely make up the main flows of migration from a continent composed of

fifty-two nations. Nigeria, South Africa,[9] Liberia, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea dominate in streams of Africans, but Nigerian migrants garner the highest numbers, making up approximately seventeen percent of African migrants. Ethiopia follows in those numbers making up thirteen percent (Arthur, 2000).

Admittedly, these categories appear to be finite and exclude instances in which group members do not fit neatly into the aforementioned demarcations. Respectively, each group member of the diaspora carries political and economic interests, cultural capital, and historical perspectives that are as diverse from each group to the next, as it is within their own designations (Hintzen & Rahier, 2003). Yet, in the U.S., the African diaspora is generally categorized as African-American or black, as evidenced in the U.S. Census Bureau (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011; Halter, 1998; Tettey & Puplampu, 2005). The surveying agency does not recognize black ethnic groups like Hispanics or Latinos;[10] thus resulting in the "notion of a monolithic black America" (Johnson, 2008, p. 77).

Dissertation Overview

The first chapter, "Coming to America: Diaspora, Media and Nollywood," I start with a review of literature that looks at diasporic audiences then I outline the development of Nollywood to its eventual visibility in the West. The literature review first describes Nollywood by distinguishing the Nollywood model from Hollywood and Bollywood, the other top movie producing industries in the world. Next, I look at the idea

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[9] The majority of South African migrants are white.

[10] In the US Bureau, black populations are also subsumed into Hispanic and Latino populations, though these Afro-Latinos encounter similar racism as those who identify as black without Hispanic origin (Noguera, 2003).

that Nollywood is a hybrid film industry because of its multi-stranded origins that are evident in the distinctive genres. After, I examine how Nigerian filmmakers moved from subjects of the film industry of the British Empire to producers of their own filmic products. In this last section, I explore how Nollywood has been studied amongst African diasporic audiences. This chapter establishes Nollywood and sets up the conversation of its migration from Africa to the U.S.

The second chapter, "Establishing the Field Site: 'The Bricks' Newark, New Jersey," details the area in which the study takes place. First, I provide a cursory history of Newark's shift from an agrarian pre-colonial hamlet, to a city that has experienced decades of urban decline, but is now undergoing gentrification in its downtown area. I detail the racial boundaries of the city and the socio-political processes that led to the city shifting from predominantly European immigrant to a predominantly black population. Here I make the case that a visible portion of the population (Africans and Caribbean people who migrated there) have changed the social and economic texture to the city, which includes the visibility of media and culture such as Nollywood. This chapter provides underlying reasons of the economic collapse in Newark, the condition that created a pirate economy that also includes the scant availability of movie theaters for residents.

I explain the conceptual framework and research design in the third chapter, "Narrating Black Identities: Conceptual Framework and Research Design." The conceptual framework includes a discussion of how each ethnic group experiences and conceptualizes their racial identities in the U.S., and approaches diasporic communicative spaces (Hepp, 2009) to unveil identity narratives that take place around the process of

imagination, construction, and performance. Diasporic communicative spaces looks at how members of the diaspora use mediated messages to suture their identities and create connections between homeland and host country. In the research design, I explicate the procedures I followed in a multi-sited ethnography, and I close with my responsibilities as a researcher.

Chapter four, titled "African Trading Spaces, Marketplaces, Micro-Communities – Circulating in Formal and Informal Distribution Networks," begins to analyze the study's findings. I follow the formal and informal circulations of Nollywood texts to understand the distribution network in which it exists. In mapping out formal circulations, I briefly examine the pirated industry in which Nollywood is produced in Africa and its circuits across the diaspora. In Newark, I focus on the retail shops that sell the videos. At these retail outlets, merchants do more than run their business enterprises: they embed aspects of their culture into the communities where they work, live, worship, and socialize, thus creating African trading spaces in the U.S.

By mapping out the routes of Nollywood in informal circuits, I identify four categories of informal circulation identified as salient – borrowing, swapping, gifting and online sharing. *Borrowing* is a system of lending where a person allows another person to keep movies temporarily; s*wapping* is an exchange where Nollywood movies are traded between two or more people; *gifting* occurs when movies are given as a cultural present; and, *online sharing* takes place when individual users search and share sites that broadcast Nollywood or disseminate digital artifacts regarding the industry. As movies travel from one person to another, they act as central texts in passing, exchanging and performing cultural identity. Also, the routes are intertwined in the traffic of resources

sustaining and creating communities such as food, job leads, and money. At the core of its circulation is an audience and fan-base spreading Nollywood for non-commercial reasons.

In the fifth chapter, "'We Africans (or We Black), We Talk Back to the Movie:' Reception Sites and Practices of Nollywood," I propose four general locations of spectatorship: public, public-private, private and intermezzo spaces. Public spaces consist of outdoor viewings, public-private consist of business, private spaces are domestic locales, and, finally, intermezzo spaces — or in-between — are transitional spaces such as buses, taxis and trains, and arenas where private-public spectatorship is blurred. Private spaces materialize at the homes of audience members. Although private spaces make up a significant portion of spectatorship, public and transitional spaces are important sites of viewing in Newark. These locations add to the materiality of Newark contouring into a diasporic space in a post-black era of the city, and it narrates the tense undercurrents of diasporic negotiation, and the shifting geography of a city experiencing gentrification.

The sixth, and last, chapter, "Reading Africa with Love, Pleasure, and Disgust: Audience Interpretation of Nollywood Movies," focuses on audience interpretation. It examines how participants make sense of self through their textual readings of Nollywood movies. During readings, participants express pleasure and fond attachments to texts, while also feeling repulsed by some aspects of the movies. The findings in textual readings present divergent views on gender, religion, class, and culture, but in general, participants disliked movies that they felt favored a Westernized aesthetic or worldview. Gender representation was the most contested terrain. Some participants

perceived that messages in the movies promoted violence against women, while others interpreted storylines as encouraging women to persevere towards status acquisition and economic independence. Textual readings expressed that traditional practices were framed as devil worship or witchcraft, but to some participants, it showed how mysticism is part of daily life. In addition to themes of gender representation, two leitmotifs came up frequently in interviews: the representation of Africa, and how participants define their identities through textual readings.

In my conclusion, "Many Rivers to Cross & Unchartered Territories," I conclude with an overview of the project, and revisit research questions in the process. I examine several themes in the project then direct my focus to challenges in the investigation, and finally I discuss future projects.

CHAPTER ONE

COMING TO AMERICA: DIASPORA, MEDIA AND NOLLYWOOD

In 1992, an Igbo businessman named Kenneth Nnebue figured out a way to get rid of forty thousand blank VHS tapes that were imported from China.[11] He borrowed a filming concept from Ghanaian and Nigerian videographers who were taping low-tech movies with camcorders and making modest profits through their sales. Nnebue recorded his own film with actors using the local Igbo language (with English subtitles) on a handheld camera. He titled the movie, *Living in Bondage*; dubbed it on to the excess VHS tapes; packaged them in colorful slip covers; and advertised on vivid posters throughout Onitsha, a city in Eastern Nigeria that has the largest outdoor marketplace outside of Lagos. Since most Nigerians who owned televisions still possessed VCRs, the selling of VHS tapes was a marketable technological product that proved to be very lucrative. This moment is recognized as the birth of "Nollywood".[12] Not long after, Nollywood movies travelled to the United States via the suitcases of Africans (Haynes, 2000).

In the literature review that follows, I outline the development of Nollywood to its eventual visibility in the West. In the U.S., Nollywood movies are sold, circulated, watched, and now filmed. There are Nollywood conferences and awards shows from Washington D.C. to Los Angeles; however, when I mention Nollywood to non-Africans, I often get the question, "What is Nollywood?" This question in no way diminishes or

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[11] Asian countries, especially China and Japan, dump millions of old technology at inexpensive rates into Africa in order to introduce the latest technology for their countries. Kenneth Nnebue was an event promoter and sold tech products locally.

[12] Patrick Ebewo (2007) calls Nnebue's effort more of a "jump start" rather than a birth. This argument is explained later on in the chapter.

delegitimizes its presence, or its significance in my study. I argue that the question magnifies a hegemonic media structure that renders alternative or media outside of the Western paradigm invisible. Borrowing from Michel Foucault (1987), I argue that the question, "What is Nollywood" lends to the "the invisibility of the visible is invisible" (p. 24) — meaning that popular ideas and materials can be snubbed by the government in its regulation of society — which I contend extends to mainstream media.

Nollywood is present, but is irrelevant to the status quo in the U.S. Non-Western alternative media produced outside of hegemonic norms of the West are the exotic, the peripheral "other" in U.S. re-presentations. Moreover, the U.S. barely recognize foreign media from countries located outside of England, if at all. It is even more troublesome for Nollywood because it is tied to black people and Africa, which further compromises its visibility. The relationship between blacks and mainstream U.S. media carries a contentious history. Nevertheless, previous scholarship shows how African audiences employ Nollywood to articulate their experiences.

The literature review first looks at how diasporas use media. Next, I outlined Nollywood by first describing it by distinguishing the Nollywood model from Hollywood and Bollywood, the top three industries that produce the largest amount of movies in the world. Currently, Bollywood and Nollywood compete for the top two slots, but Hollywood, in terms of gross profits far outweighs the others. Next, I look at the idea that Nollywood is a hybrid film industry because of its metamorphic origins that are evident in the distinctive genres. After, I examine how Nigerians moved from subjects in the film industry of the British Empire to producers of their own filmic products. Lastly, I

explore previous research of Nollywood audiences in the African diaspora to provide a platform to build on how audiences engage in movies in Newark.

Diasporas and Media

Employing media and technology to negotiate self and group identities is becoming an important dimension in the experiences of diasporas (Watson, 2011). According to Hintzen (2007) identity construction that occurs when one is dispossessed from homeland and kinship is a subjective and difficult process. Kavita Ramdya (2010) argues that this process creates a hyperawareness of identity that can be a volatile site of discomfort. For this reason, constructing diasporic belonging is simultaneously a juncture and a shifting terrain where concepts of identity, citizenship, and socio-politics converge and collide, according to Anandam Kavoori and Christina Joseph (2011). In these renegotiations, media assists diasporans in cultivating the self, while it also serves as a mechanism to monitor your person as well as other group members (Benítez, 2012). Myria Georgiou agrees with these arguments, and adds that diasporans take on complex cultural constructions to assist in their navigation through exclusionary hegemonic structures they face in host countries.

Although diasporans share a cohesive identity, they simultaneously exist as a heterogeneous compilation (Georgiou, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004; Georgiou & Silverstone, 2006). Geiorgou asserts that media and technology from home countries become essential in sustaining communities because they thread together group members in shared identity and cultural performances in host countries, where diasporans they are physically and ideologically separated from each other. In her study of Cypriots in New York and London, Georgiou discovered that media from their diaspora was an important

daily text consumed by Cypriot migrants both directly and indirectly. Daily interactions involved immigrants using media texts in conversations because it marked actions signifying the maintenance of homeland connections. Georgiou points out that diasporans simultaneously participate in a recursive power struggle in identity construction that involves negotiating oneself in an inclusionary culture and one that is exclusionary or partially exclusionary. The different strains of performance in consuming diasporic media illustrate the heterogeneity in reception, and draw attention to the ever-changing spaces of reception practices that create a struggle between a nation-state identity and a transnational one.

Viewing diasporic media and films from the homeland evoke various sites of agency. Nandini Bhattacharya (2004) proffers that the act of reception creates liminal spaces because viewers actively think about how to adapt and navigate their new hybrid identity, while also maintaining their homeland identity. She focuses on capturing a process called "simultaneity," a term evoked by Alessandrini (2001) to detail a method of referencing multiple points of social, cultural, and political positioning while looking at films and constructing self. Bhattacharya points to gender, class, race, age, marital status, parenthood, and other dynamics playing a part in an active readership. She argues that diasporans often disrupt dominant ideologies of spectatorship spaces, when they use them to satisfy their own pleasures in viewing media.

While there is an agreement about the importance of media that represents homeland culture and social dynamics, Oneka LaBennett (2012) and Sheri-Ann Butterfield (2006) point out that immigrants often employ media outside of their diaspora, and not necessarily mainstream media in constructing identity. The two

researchers examined second-generation black West Indians in New York City, and explained that black West Indians live in communities that are represented by a number of islanders and native black populations. The interactions between the groups and the exposure to each other's media creates bidirectional influences of identity rather than one informed by dominant media and their own culture. Furthermore, Oneka LaBennett (2012) contends that the media employed outside of their diaspora might come from another paradigm, but aligns with the values of their ethnic group. On the other hand, Butterfield (2006, 2009) explicates that many members who live where there are aggregations of various ethnic representations. In black communities Butterfield studies in New York, they consume and interpret a number of diasporic media because they themselves are members of multiple diasporic groups.

Looking at diasporas and the media that they employ begins my inquiry into Nollywood. A review of diasporas and media looked at the different ways scholars consider how diasporic populations employ diaspora, host country, and homeland media. Scholars suggest that diasporans place an emphasis on media circulating in their networks and from home, as a way to create linkages and foster diasporic connections in resettled territory. The next segment examines the emergence of Nollywood, the systems of production and distribution it operates within, and how some diasporans employ it.

What is Nollywood?

Originally, the term "Nollywood" was used in a 2002 *New York Times* article to describe how an African video film industry started to gain visibility in the U.S. Coined by a reporter who noticed Manhattan-and-Bronx-based African vendors stocking their businesses with movies made in West Africa (Steinglass, 2002), the interest took the

reporter to Surulere, an unforgiving district located on the mainland of Lagos, Nigeria.[13] The reporter saw a thriving hub of filmmakers, actors, and film crews who were cranking out movies at unbelievable speeds. Also in place were effective distribution methods circulating movies independent of major Western distribution models or channels (Miller, 2012; Lobato, 2012). Astounded by the celerity and efficiency of a film industry that produced over one thousand movies with inexpensive and out-of-date video equipment (Haynes 2007, 2000), the reporter named the production system Nollywood.

For at least a decade before Nollywood was an interest story in U.S. media, it had already become an integral part of African popular culture. Commonly called Nigerian movies in Africa, the industry proliferates throughout the Sub-Sahara where movies run frequently on local television and radio stations in countries possessing transmission capabilities. As far north as Ethiopia, and as far down as South Africa, local stations and satellite channels broadcast movies regularly (Abah, 2009). So popular are the films that they include a subtitling system and a voiceover dubbing system to accommodate Francophone and Lusophone African countries (Ugockhukwu, 2013). In instances when voiceovers and subtitles are absent, crowds are illiterate, or the subtitles are not in the language of audience members, translators metaphrase storylines for audiences in real time (Pype, 2013; Bisschoff & Mendes, 2012). Since the upsurge of the video production systems from Nigeria and Ghana, other African filmmakers are creating video production systems particular to their country to represent Africa through their own visual imagery (Labouba, 2012).

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[13] Nigeria is a port city off of the Atlantic coast. It consists of five islands and a mainland.

Nollywood is not the first film industry created in Nigeria. After Nigerian independence in 1960, the government subsidized celluloid filmmaking, but the rising costs of celluloid film stock, an unprofitable film market, and the low number of trained filmmakers who could only produce few movies in the slower-paced motion picture production process, almost flat-lined local cinema (Haynes, 2011). When Nollywood began, it produced more movies in the first year than the previous filmmaking collectives did in almost three decades. Moreover, the movies were more profitable than other films produced with better quality equipment and sponsored by the Nigerian government.

Uchenna Onuzulike (2009) proffered the term "video film" to describe Nollywood because television and cinema production technologies are used to create movies. He defines video film as "any movie or motion picture produced mainly in video format while adhering to particular cinematic values and conventions." (Onuzulike, p.176). The term provides leeway for the quality and aesthetic of movies that also exist in in-between spaces of low and high technology and quality (Garritano, 2008; Haynes, 2007; Larkin, 2004).

Nollywood is a sobriquet for several Nigerian-and-Ghanaian-language[14] video film production systems.[15] Majority of the movies are filmed in Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba languages, but, in a region where there are well over two-hundred-plus languages, lesser

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[14] Some Nigerian and Ghanaian video filmmakers reject the name because it erases the heterogeneity of the production systems. For example, Akan-language movies are part of Ghallyywood (Adjei, 2014; Garritano, 2013), a Ghana production system. As well, Hausa-language movies are made in Kano, a northern Nigerian state and produce movies in *Kannywood or Kanowood*, a video film industry coined in 1999, three years before Nollywood (McCain, 2012). Hausa language movies incorporates Hausa, Arabic, and Hindi language and Islamic culture.

[15] The term "video film" is used to describe the industry because the industry uses video cameras rather than cine-cameras, although now even Hollywood productions have switched from motion pictures to digital video equipment (Green-Simms, 2012).

tribal languages are also employed such as Ekaw, Bini, Nupe, Fulfulde, Itsekiri, and Igala (Omoera, 2014; Adogame, 2008), as well as Twi, the lingua franca of the Akan people in most regions of Ghana (Müller, 2014; Edmondson, 2011; Pasley, 2011). There are also movies in English and African Pidgin English that make up about twelve percent of movie productions (McCain, 2013). Igbo and Ghanaian filmmakers — who capitalize on sub-Saharan markets and audiences in the diaspora who are not fluent in local dialects — primarily produce English-language video films.

According to Carmen McCain (2013), English-language movies over-represent Nollywood outside of Nigeria, but because of growing diasporic audiences who are not fluent in local languages, English-languages movies — as well as English, French, and Dutch subtitling — are increasing (Tsika, 2014; Ugochukwu, 2013). In spite of the varied languages and dialects used from an array of ethnic groups in the country, Osakue Omoera (2007) says movies capture many African audiences because they portray African realities that cannot be found in other films, such as complex class structures, tribal customs against modernity, post-colonial and post-Structural Adjustment Program economics.[16] Though the distinctions of the various production systems are homogenized under the moniker, Nollywood has become such a common name that it serves as an umbrella of industries even outside of the region.[17]

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[16] Mojubaolu Okome (2013) explains that the Structural Adjustment Program were neoliberal economic policy reform between developing countries and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Governments adhered to strict and unreasonable policies to pay back loans that futher put countries into debt because most, like Nigeria could not meet standards and were subsequently penalized with higher interest rates in paying back the World Bank and IMF.

[17] According to Haynes (2011, 2007) Nollywood is most noted in the West for its English speaking movies that are largely produced by Igbo and Ghanaian filmmakers; however, Nigerian films are also made in tribal languages such as Yoruba and Igbo. The Hausa people who reside in the northern part of Nigeria make movies that incorporate Hausa and Arabic language and Islamic culture. Tanzania created an industry influenced by Nollywood that is called, "Swahiliwood". South Africa is a unique region that has an Indian population that collaborates with the Bollywood industry. But there is also a movie

Nigeria receives much of the credit for the video film explosion; however, the aesthetic started in Ghana with two men, a video projectionist and his friend who was a student studying to be an auto mechanic. They came up with the idea to use handheld video cameras after local videographers who recorded baptisms, weddings and other special occasions. The friends decided to make full-length feature movies instead, so they began experimenting with home video recorders (Garritano, 2013). Local university students caught word of the technique and began filming, too. Shortly thereafter, aspiring Nigerian *videastes*, those who make movies using video/digital cameras, borrowed the concept and eventually created a video production and distribution model that made movie-making and watching an affordable art for the average poor and working-class African (Labouba, 2012).

The Nollywood Model. Technology, time, and money make up Nollywood's most signature elements that distinguish it from Hollywood and Bollywood. It is a "straight-to-video" industry that uses video and digital cameras, which are much cheaper options than the celluloid film stock that once dominated Hollywood and Bollywood motion pictures. The average time to write, script, rehearse, shoot, and edit is ten days to two weeks, and six weeks at most (Miller, 2012; Haynes, 2011; Abah, 2009). Movie scripts are fluid, and many of the actors improvise in dialogue. Rehearsals — if there are any — are easy-going, impromptu processes that are done on the set (Animasaun, 2013).

industry that is over one hundred years old that was initiated by white South Africans who are of English and Dutch descent. Today, the industry shares spaces with whites, "coloureds" (multi-racial populations), Indian descendants and the majority black populations.

Some productions allow actors to place scripts on the floor so actors can read while filming (Ebewo, 2007).

Nollywood entails elements of guerilla filmmaking. Productions are shot entirely in real locations throughout Nigeria and Ghana, and sometimes without permits. Filming crew staff are minimal and often comprise of family members, friends, or cheap day labor. During filming, retakes are rare and props simple because filmmakers must balance the short timeframes and restricting budgets for the production.

Either self-funded or sponsored by a marketer, the current average production budgets range from US $15,000 to US $100,000; but the first movie, *Living in Bondage*, was made for under ₦2000 or US $10[18] (Ajibade & Williams, 2012). Marketers fund about eighty-five percent of productions and control the production, reproduction, and distribution of Nollywood in local commerce (Haynes, 2007). Marketers are members of the merchant class who were once small-scale traders that became a petite bourgeoisie caste because they invested promoting and producing in Nollywood early on. Marketers formed member-paying associations grouped by ethnic affiliations. So important are marketers, that in order to become one, and get into the various groups representing the ethnic-based collectives, aspiring Nollywood entrepreneurs must participate in an apprenticeship for seven years (Haynes, 2007).

When compared to the production templates of Hollywood and Bollywood,[19] Nollywood has many dissimilarities with the two other industries that compete over the

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[18] The amount in U.S. currency is estimated at the time of writing research.

[19] The history of Indian cinema is comprised of multiple cinemas that have sprung up in various regions throughout the country. As Dudrah & Desai (2008) point out, before Bollywood materialized other prominent Indian cinemas existed, with several still thriving today. Cinema came to India by way of the British in the late nineteenth century, initially consisting of mostly imported films, some locally shot

top three positions in production with Nollywood. The template of intense, rapid video

production is a cost-effective strategy for the economic climate of Nigeria. Even

Hollywood and Bollywood switched to using digital video as a cheaper option. But, the

industries are drastically different at many levels that they only share similar names.

From the film stock used to the length of time it takes to complete a production, all

industries are distinct as seen in Table 1.1 where I compare the top film industries.

Table 1.1 Comparison of Top Film Industries of the World

FILM INDUSTRY	HOLLYWOOD	BOLLYWOOD	NOLLYWOOD
First full-length shoot	1910	1913	1992
Headquarters	Los Angeles	Mumbai	Lagos
Original Film Stock	Celluloid	Celluloid	VHS
Languages	English	Hindi, Hindustani, Urdu, English	Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, English
Yearly Feature Film Releases (2013)	622 (2013)	1,602 (2012)	1,844 (2013)
Average Production Time (Script to Release)	3 years	N/A	2 weeks
Average Budget	US $106 million (2007)[20]	US $1 million	US $12k – 50k
Box Office Revenue	US $10.8b (2012)	US $1.6 Billion (2012)	US $3.3 Billion (2013)
Richest Actors	Tom Cruise US $470 million	Shah Rukh Khan US $600 million	Genevieve Nnaji US $503k - $750k est.
Regulation Laws	Strict	Mediocre	Lax

shorts, theater scenes filmed to be embedded in live theater performances, and one film documenting a news story (Alessandrini, 2001). The first indigenous, full-length motion picture titled *Raja Harishchandra* was made in 1913. Though *Raja Harishchandra* debuted in Bombay, the nation's capital located in the center of the country, the first filmmaking hub emerged in southern India.

Other regions have also served as hosts to local cinemas in order to accommodate numerous ethnic groups and their respective dialects and cultures. There are a variety of film styles and film societies that have surfaced from the early 1900s to late twentieth century such as: Kolhapur in Western Maharashtra which sits on the coast of the Arabian sea; Bengal Cinema in the Bengal region of the northeast known for Parallel Cinema; Calcutta (Indian New Wave cinema) and Malayalam cinema in the south-west Malabar coastal regions; and Telugu cinema also known as *Tollywood* in the northern region near Pakistan. Even *Lollywood*, a cinema that northern India shares with Pakistan because it is based in Lahore, Pakistan, yet derives from Punjabi cinema in Calcutta. In addition, the cities of Chennai and Hyderabad currently operate powerful media centers. These are just some of the many cinemas that operate alongside or before Bollywood (Ganti, 2013; Punathambekar, 2013; Dudrah & Desai, 2008; Bhamik, 2004).

[20] Motion Picture Association of America stopped sharing information on budgets n 2007 (Cox & Proffitt, 2014).

Babson Ajibade and Ben Williams (2012) tell of a time when a Hollywood producer was invited to Nigeria to teach a film-producing workshop. The processes of the industries were so different that the instructor could not facilitate the class and ended up becoming a student who learned about the techniques of Nollywood.

When it comes to distribution, Nollywood entails a complex schema of formal and informal markets that operate within a system of shared economies. Once production ends, filmmakers sell their films to distributors who then mass produce them and wholesale to vendors at major markets throughout Nigeria and Ghana.[21] Still practiced are more rudimentary circulations with those who purchase movies in city markets then walk back to their village or town to sell them or even pass the movies around to family, friends, and neighbors. In some cases, that is in another country.[22] Smaller market vendors then produce copies and sell them to smaller marketplaces or person-to-person (Tomasselli, 2014; Miller, 2012).

At the same time, and even before movies reach the local market, major distributors in one of the marketers' associations virtually file-share videos to certain foreign buyers who mass-reproduce movies at their locations. In addition, buyers of streaming sites and satellite programs (i.e. iRoko TV, Netflix, African Noir on Optimum, African Media TV on Roku, etc.) purchase from filmmakers too and share them on their websites, but oftentimes these movies funnel into pirated market, resulting in filmmakers and actors making little to no profits. When an African consumer cannot afford movies, they rent them from local rental shops. In other instances, when buyers do not have the

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[21] The four prominent markets in Nigeria are Idumota on Lagos Island; Onitsha Market in Amenbra State; Aba market in Aba State; and Ogbete Main Market, Enugu State.

[22] Adesayna et. al. (2009) reported that teenage boys and young men purchase movies in markets and walk them to different cities, and even across the Nigerian-Ghanaian border.

technology to view them in a private space, they are watched in small video parlors and on street corners (which will be discussed further in chapter five, '*We Africans (or We Black), We Talk Back to the Movie': Reception Sites and Practices of Nollywood Audiences*).

To date, Nollywood is the first and only self-sustained, fully functional, and native-owned-and-operated operational African film industry (Labouba, 2012). There are other cinemas in Africa, but they rely on outside funding to stay afloat. For example, colonial funding supported African Francophone cinema[23] in the 1950s and is still subsidized by the French Ministry. Filmmakers primarily screen films to Western audiences, which points to one of the biggest critiques of this cinema — Africans have limited access to films — especially if they are not members of the bourgeoisie class. There is also a South African film industry; however, it is subsidized by the government and is still largely controlled by the minority white Afrikaner population that created it (Botha, 2012).[24] Unlike the older and more established film industries, Africans fund Nollywood movies for African audiences.

Along with producing hyperlocal films that are accessible to people who live on an average of one dollar a day (Lumumba-Kosongo, 2011), the video film industry

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[23] Spearheaded by Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene, Post-colonial African cinema both addressed the clashes found in cultural imperialism and post-colonial Africa, and provocatively explored cultural traditions he thought stifled African progress. The materialization of filmmakers in post-colonial Africa furnished narratives that spoke of the appearance of globalization, a new age that illuminated the hybridization occurring in the meeting of cultures; especially when colonial subjects began to migrate to their "mother country," or the nation-states of their colonial masters.

[24] There is also a South Asian diasporic film industry embedded in South African cinema that must be mentioned. The second largest group in South Africa are South Asians, a majority of them are descendants of Indians who were brought over in the nineteenth century as indentured slaves in the British Empire.

brought needed jobs to a region in economic turmoil.[25] Nollywood is part of the informal economy, but it creates between 200,000 to 300,000 jobs annually, more than Nigeria's formal sector (Lobato, 2010; Okoye, 2007). Film productions employ local actors and film crews. As well, residents and municipalities are paid for on-location filming. Moreover, the industry serves as way for civil servants — who are mandated to retire at the age of fifty — to earn money as actors in place of a nonexistent pension. The biggest local commerce in Nollywood outside of the marketers is equipment rental agencies and staffing filming crews. Many filmmakers cannot afford or carry filming gear (McCall, 2012). Equipment and ready-made film crews that include editing companies for post-production, musical scores and soundtracks have risen as businesses to accommodate the volume of rapidly produced movies (Ajibade, 2013).

Unintended Contributions. Several unintended contributions to the environment have emerged from the production and distribution practices. Electronic waste, or the practice of discarding dated technology, is an issue for industrialized countries that quickly trade in older electronics for newer ones, most often for reasons unrelated to a device's inability to work. The waste has resulted in landfills with tons of unwanted electronics that are causing serious environmental issues to the land and the people living by them. Africa has many dumping sites (Orisakwe & Frazzoli, 2010). In Nollywood, the practice of renting video equipment, recycling and repurposing technology that is discarded by East Asian, European, South Asian and North American countries, and establishing a distribution system that also incorporates a barter/trade system for poorer

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[25] John McCall (2012) points out that eighty percent of the country's GNP is in oil production, but employment is largely doled out to foreigners who are hired by oil corporations.

audiences assists in alleviating the global problem of electronic waste that comes from developing countries[26] (Shivers, 2013; Labouba, 2012). Large sectors of the Nollywood audience occupy some of the lowest economic and social strata in the world. They face major ecological issues due to non-existent environmental protections, and subsist under various forms of social and political duress. A significant portion of the population has little to any access to internet, satellite, clean water, or even reliable electricity, but their efforts to engage in modernity have benefitted the environment. In sum, their appropriation of technology and its uses magnifies the distinct media genre crafted in West Africa.

Before Nollywood, African cinema was largely unavailable to Africans. Most African cinema screened in the West were at venues hosting special events such as film or African culture festivals. When movies were screened in Africa, it was for dignitaries and other elite. Because of the underdeveloped film culture, few Africans knew how to work celluloid equipment, let alone, use it to film movies. When Nollywood emerged, Africa shifted to being the subject of Western gaze to creating a new lens of re-presentation in video and film. African movies emerged in mass during the installment of Nollywood. It ushered in a new way of seeing Africa in cinematic images and presented a system of business that has created revenue from the bottom-up.

Genres

Evidence of the hybrid nature of Nollywood is exploring its genres. Genres are repeated themes in films that categorize a certain style or aesthetic (Brown, 2013). Genre

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[26] This in no way ignores other environmental issues that are growing in urban Africa that include other toxic wastes, sewage issues, housing, agriculture, and sanitation (Hardoy, Mitlin, & Satterthwaite, 2013).

films "allows consumers to generate expectations of narratives they choose to watch, while simultaneously allowing producers to strategically fill or subvert those expectations" (p. 57). While Nollywood deals in the genre-system that is used by global commercial film industries (as shown in Figure 2), there are themes and styles that carry the distinctions found in the West African aesthetics and sociopolitical experiences embedded in the movies (Akudinobi, 2015; Haynes, 2000).

For Nollywood, genres are important in marketing movies because so many weekly movie releases compete while genres assist consumers in sorting out their selections (Haynes, 2011). Movies often take elements of several genres to create multilayered narratives that fuse African cultural elements. *Melodramas*, *Juju*, *Occult Crime*, *the Village Idiot comedies*, *Good-Time Girl*, *Hallelujah*, *Epic*, and *Hausa musicals* are popular genres that prominently display West African aesthetics against the backdrop of the struggle between modernity and tradition. There are more genres within the growing industry, but these genres encapsulate the identity of Nollywood filmmaking style.

Melodramas are they primary genre that often encompasses the subsequent genres that are discussed. Melodramas are hyper-affective films with over-dramatic dialogue, plots, and scenes. Whereas Hollywood uses million dollar special effects and high-tech equipment to draw in crowds, Nollywood filmmakers employ highly dramatic productions for blockbusters (Arthur, 2014). Zina Saro-Wiwa (2008) describes in an online essay that melodramas as extreme versions of soap operas "that should have been churned out weekly on TV, but have instead been forced out into the open market to fend for themselves." According to Haynes (2000), Nollywood melodramas borrow from

American soaps, Latin American telenovelas, and Indian films. Melodramas narrate how the victim, villain, and hero struggle between the "axis of good and evil" (Arthur, 2014) within the framework of the supernatural and religion.

Juju is a popular genre interwoven in many movies focusing on the occult. These narratives center protagonists who engage in rituals to obtain material wealth and power quickly (Garritano, 2012). Called "black magic" or juju, the characters engage in blood sacraments requiring participants to kill people or animals, or engage in bestiality or copulation with malevolent supernatural entities. Garritano (2013) argues that these movies narrate extreme attempts to acquire capital gain by people who live in poor and developing countries. Haynes (2011) contends that the movies are reinterpretations of traditional Yoruba mythologies by evangelical Christians who depicted traditional African culture and religion as "backward" and "evil". While Garritano (2006) argues the movies ultimately convey messages that reject capitalism and greed, Birgit Meyer (2010, 2004, 1999, and 1998) and Louise Müller (2014) contend that these movies reify the anti-traditional/pro-Christian dichotomy.

According to Lindsey Green-Simms (2008), mysticism operates in the daily lives of African people. It is the center of African culture that cannot be distanced from religious practices, and thus becomes central in clashes between tradition and modernity with those who practice Christianity and Islam. However, it is impossible to detach the supernatural from African culture because much of its worldview is based in the supernatural. This is evident in the oppositional struggle between traditional religion (spiritual systems) and new, Western religion that emerges often in movies. Though Nollywood films are fictional, they provide a platform for discourse of factual events

circulating locally and globally. Currently, an anti-witchcraft movement is prevalent throughout Africa, and more so with conservative Muslims and Christians. In places such as Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Tanzania, and South Africa, witch hunts have led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people, with mostly women and elders who practice indigenous traditions as targets (Onuzulike, 2013; Federici, 2010, 2004).[27] Since occult and juju are seen as inextricable in African tradition, tradition is marked as devil worship in movies using the occult narrative.

Occult Crime. Okome (2007) identifies a form of occult in urban crime movies. These movies narrate characters who are gang members simultaneously operating in crime syndicates and occult groups. Memberships of groups intertwine because they both use violence (as a blood sacrifice) as ways to satisfy requests for wealth, power, status, and revenge. Occult crime is another form of juju movies. It is a way to narrate the current issue of organizations forming out of desires to remove oneself out of poverty, but within the lens of capitalism that exploits and kills people for its goal.

The Village Idiot Comedies is a popular, yet overlooked genre by Nollywood researchers outside of Africa. Argued to be second in popularity behind melodramas (Ryan, 2013; Haynes, 2011), movies feature a protagonist or supporting actor as an agrarian villager who visits or moves to a major city and attempts to navigate their

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[27] Witchcraft is a problematic term encompassing all indigenous African religion or spiritual systems. The accusations of witchcraft are intertwined with devil worship, an allegation with a clear attachment to conservative, and arguably, fanatical Christian and Islamic practices. The Nollywood genre "Hallelujah" centers on anti-witchcraft and opposition to devil worship. Now there are accusations against children as young as newborns of being witches and in some cases end up killed by their parents. Helen Ukpabio, a Christian evangelist and Nollywood mogul of Hallelujah films (a conservative, Protestant-based movie genre), leads witch-hunts throughout Nigeria, and even in the diaspora, such as in London. She has accused children of being "servants of Satan." At the time of this research, the United Kingdom authorities are debating if she should be banned from visiting the country due to her extreme evangelist practices.

surroundings. Scenes are often improvisational and use linguistic and dialectical style of the traditional, West African oral skits and stories. The movies are designed to shock and disgust viewers, but in a way in which they can make light of the caricaturizing and stereotypical images the West's depiction of Africans (Ryan, 2013). Okome (2013) asserts that comedy allows Africans to subvert colonial imagery propagated by the British Empire in a way that undermines hegemonic constructions and allows Africans to reflect about their identities and socio-realities with comfort.

Good-Time Girls genre situates the woman protagonist as one who navigates the dangerous urban terrain as a single woman (Green-Simms, 2012b). This heteronormative theme is borrowed from contemporary African literature that constructed the feminine body, and particularly, the feminist body in the post-colonial city (Okome, 2012). The good-time girl represents the African urban woman in modernity who relinquishes morality and cultural identity for feminist liberation that is packaged as hypersexual, amoral, and driven by desires for money and material items (Lindsay, 2005; Newell, 1997). Protagonists are attractive, young women who make a series of unproductive life-choices that eventually lead them to seducing or stealing money from men. In some cases, the protagonist becomes a mistress (Garritano, 2008). Unlike prostitution, the good-time girl chooses the men she sleeps with, a strategy that liberates and confines her simultaneously. Eventually, the good-time girl sees the errors in her ways and seeks out a husband to find comfort and purpose.

In **Hallelujah** movies, the protagonist experiences a series of moral challenges that eventually lead them to accepting Christianity and ultimately spiritual salvation (Green-Simms, 2012; Ebewo, 2007). Hallelujah movies materialized as the West African

Pentecostal church's response to the "moral degeneracy" they protested to emerge in the economic, social, and political decline in society in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Okome, 2007). Ruth Marshall (2009) identifies Nigeria as "the site of the Pentecostal explosion." A Pew Research 2006 survey found that approximately three-in-ten Nigerians are Protestants, and out of that, roughly six-in-ten Protestants are either Pentecostal or charismatic;[28] consequently, providing a built-in audience for Hallelujah productions.

Subsequently, the church's popularity translated into sociopolitical importance from 1970s on. Marshall argues that faith-based practices intertwine political and secular with the sacred. Okome (2007) argues that Pentecostal doctrine took advantage of people who were suffering by showing them options of heavenly bliss rather than suffering in daily inequitable conditions. To date, Pentecostals are the foremost Christian group, sponsoring a significant portion of the religious market in Nollywood. Hallelujah movies use the genres the Juju, Crime and the City Girl as themes to proselytize Pentecostal messages.

Miracle Movies, a branch of the Hallelujah genre are instructional movies used by evangelicals to train aspiring ministers. Because Pentecostalism is so widespread, with some churches having upwards of 50,000 in their congregations, miracle movies serve as proxy instructional for pastors who cannot accommodate teaching in person. Along with movies, other evangelical merchandising sells such prayer beads, oil, holy water, crosses, amulets, and clothes said to be sacred.

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[28] Charismatic Christians is a Christian denomination that adopts many beliefs of Pentecostal Christians, but remain a part of the mainstream protestant church. There are also Charismatic Catholics in Nigeria who embrace Pentecostalism, but hold their allegiances with the Roman Catholic Church.

Epic/Sack Cloth. These moves usually are set in pre-colonial Africa and are nicknamed "sack cloth" because of the traditional costuming and reference to the past. Brown (2013) explains the promotional materials of this movie by describing the "film jackets that feature women scantily clad in cloth wrappers, their bodies adorning with *uli*[29] and beads, their hair plaited elaborately, and accompanied by bare chested young men or old men wearing beaded crowns" (p.59). This genre re-emerged in Nollywood as a direct response to occult/juju, occult crime, and hallelujah movies that have demonized traditional practices (Haynes , 2011). It is an attempt by filmmakers to portray African tradition and culture positively (Meyer, 2014). Filmmakers use Nigerian epic poetry[30] (long narrative) to retell traditional culture and heroic stories of the past through the lends of modernity (Ernest-Samuel, 2013).

Hausa Musicals are byproducts of Indian Bollywood movies that are most popular in Kano state in Northern Nigeria where Hausa people largely reside (Krings, 2008; Larkin, 2000, 1997). Hausa musicals appropriate Hindi songs into Hausa prose and compose a genre fusing the cultural elements of Hinduism with the cultural and religious components of the Hausas who are overwhelmingly Muslim (Adamu, 2010; Krings, 2005). The movies use Bollywood's formula of incorporating fashion and dance (McCain, 2009).

Indeed, there are other genres weaving through movies, but these show themes and film styles oft used in Nollywood, which has become African popular culture. Barber

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[29] Uli is a plant that grows in Nigeria. Igbo use the dye to paint elaborate designs or their body.

[30] African culture and history is an oral corpus that is passed down from one oral historian to another. Traditionally, oral historians recited the history of the state or specific families and important events in public or during significant ceremony; especially for royal gatherings or the elite. Real and mythological events make up epic poetry.

(2012) notes the constant shifts of popular culture in Africa evinces that culture is inherently hybrid. Popular art transmutes and often references each other in cultural expressions (Bisschoff & Overbergh, 2012b). For Onuzulike (2009), Nollywood is a cultural and technological hybrid splices classical themes with modern frames. On one hand, it is the "synthesis of distinct cultural identities." On the other hand, it is a fusion of distinct technologies (p. 177). Garritano (2014) supposes that it is a text of doubleness that references and performs multiple cultures and locations. In sum, it represents the clashes and reification of culture, histories, and geographies competing for dominance and co-existence simultaneously. Genres are important to this project because participants navigate them throughout their narratives — whether they are suggesting a movie or watching a film with family members, genre selection is part of their media engagement that lends insight into their identities.

Hybrid Film Industry

From the previous discussions of the Nollywood model and its genres, Nollywood is indigenous and foreign, native and immigrant, traditional and modern, colonial subject and global agent, and rural and urban. Yet and still, it is a distinct pop culture forged under unique circumstances. Nollywood is not a derivative of Hollywood, but crossbreed of the socio-cultural and economic dynamics of an Anglophone, post-colonial West Africa that borrowed from other film and television industries to articulate its identity and presence (Onuzulike, 2009; Esan, 2008; Ebewo, 2007; Haynes, 2007; Kumwenda, 2007; Haynes, 2000).

I assert Nollywood is a hybrid cultural product forged at the intersection of cultural imperialism, post-colonialism and the globalization of culture. Here I use

hybridity as proposed by Marwan Kraidy (2002): "the fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities, cross-cultural contact, which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries" (p.5). The process of hybridization forged cultural products such as Nollywood, thus becoming the material evidence of hybridity. In other words, Nollywood becomes the physical markings of hybridization and a site for the articulation of narratives of hybrid existences.

The term *hybrid* engages the formation of individual, collective and institutional identities that started to form at the onset of cultural imperialism. Modern hybridity emerged during post-colonialism, and have peaked in the era of globalization. Paul Gilroy (1993, 1987), Sherri-Ann Butterfield (2004) and Colin Baker (1999) emphasize that hybrid identities are not fixed or are single entities, but are fragmented existences that are socially constructed. Hybrid identities are fashioned at points revolving around social positions such as race, gender, religion, sexuality, class, ethnicity, immigrant or native-born status, and so forth. Since, a variety of influences make up hybridity, the location of the influences are not always clear due to the rapid changes occurring in the media landscapes.

In the process of constructing belonging, the African diaspora can be imagined — as long as they are anchored somewhere that is recognizable to those who are constructing the identities (even if it is inaccurate) — they reify the integrity and wholeness of those identities forged. However, in the African diaspora, I contend that the experiences of African peoples during slavery and colonialism disrupted and fragmented identities, which also contributes to the hybrid nature of cultural products such as Nollywood.

To discuss hybridity, I looked at how cultural imperialism, post-colonialism, and globalization are extensions of the other, and thus contribute to the hybridity of Nollywood. Schlesinger (1999) proffers a definition of cultural imperialism by Jack Lang, a former French minister, who surmises that imperialism "no longer grabs territory … but grabs the consciousness, ways of thinking; ways of being" (p.156). Tomlinson (1991) informs us that cultural imperialism is a phenomenon occurring in relationships between nation-states where one country exerts cultural hegemony over another. The application of cultural imperialism occurs when a country with military, political, and economic global dominance occupies and subordinates another country that cannot protect its sovereignty. Over time, the dominant nation-state embeds a hierarchical system favoring their systems and worldview. When military occupation becomes unfeasible, other institutions of power enforced as apparatuses of control by the colonial authority. As a result, cultural hegemony remains long after physical occupation ceases. Such is the case in the colonization of Africa.

Cultural Imperialism disabled African indigenous societies and corresponding cultural systems. Fanon (2008, 1967) theorizes that African colonial subjects were humiliated and disempowered through a series of a processes resulting in the development of an inferiority complex. He purports, a lifelong exposure of colonial subjugation, crafted feelings of inadequacy. Walter Rodney (1981) argues that colonial subjects found difficulty in constructing self-identity, due to the exploitation of their resources, land, and bodies. Growing out of discourse exploring power and the subject, Michel Foucault (1982) writes that the subject experiences three types of struggle in power relations. One with the various institutions of domination; the second, with the

forms of exploitation creating divides between the subject and other subjects; and finally, an internal struggle in which the subject wrestles against the various forms of their own subjectivities produced under hegemonic power structures.

During colonialization, imperialistic ideology clashed with native and traditional culture, thus creating new strains of subjectivities that emerged more clearly in post-colonialism. In Nigeria, the British sponsored the first film industry. The first movie screening in Africa took place in 1904 in an auditorium in Lagos. Allowed attendance were British colonial offices and local noble and upper class representations. The screening was part of a propaganda campaign throughout British colonies espousing their rule, which in turn, undermined the power and cultures of colonial subjects

Post-Colonialism examined by Fanon and Foucault, looked at the subjugation of the subject. In post-colonialism, the colonial subject seeks to rebuild cultural identity, national power, and global relevance in opposition to an invisible, yet influential, colonial power that has seeped into daily reality. Rodney points out that occupiers left occupied countries in impoverished conditions once imperialists evacuated the region. In addition, to the plunder of resources and a destroyed infrastructure, the cultural relevance and identity prior to colonialism weakened. Although, this contributed significantly to the creation of a third world category and third world conditions, Africans still persisted in redefining their nations and themselves.

Post-colonialism marks a moment when former colonial subjects push against the regimes of representation that inundated their societies. James Matory (2005) documents countries such as Nigeria disseminating their post-colonial cultures through transnational systems of communication and commercial trade with other black countries such as

Brazil, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the United States in the late 1800s and early twentieth

century. Today there are evidences of Nigerian culture in the contemporary practices of

Santeria in the Latin Caribbean, Sango worship in Trinidad, Voudun in Haiti, as well as

the Yoruba language still spoken in Brazil and employed in the hybrid religion of

Candomblé that also uses the mythological Yoruba pantheon.

Although Nigerian culture travelled, Nigerians adopted British culture while

devaluing their own. The educational system copied British rubrics of instruction.

Protestantism and Catholicism transported from England became the respectable

religions, and the British currency dictated African markets. This provokes the argument

that indeed Nigerians pushed to cultivate post-colonial identity, but the influence of its

former occupiers were still a strong part of its infrastructure. This is evident in the film

industry initially created in Nigeria that trained filmmakers in Western techniques and

distribution models (Olayiwola, 2007, 2011). Subsequently, their attempt to mimic a

European model within an African framework failed on every level. Productions were

costly, distribution was ineffectual, and reception of movies were low. Hence, Nigerians

could not replicate British and American film industries.

Globalization for Stuart Hall (1991) marks the moment when the identities of

colonial masters shifted as much as it did for colonial subjects. Colonialism left former

colonies in such distressed conditions that people began to migrate right to the doorstep,

and eventually into the homes of their colonial masters. Hall argues that the cultural

imperialist tactics generated a sense that the countries of the occupiers were better. On

one hand, the former colonial subjects sought protection and opportunity. On the other,

they wanted to live the experiences of a citizen in the nation-state they recognized as the

hub of progression, modernity, and cultural elitism. As former colonial subjects

immigrated to Europe, Hall (1991) emphasizes that they selected the metropoles of their

colonial masters so that they could access the center of power, prestige, and privilege that

they did not receive in their homelands. Consequently, the presence of immigrants and

the cultures they transported from home trickled into then created the identities of

Europe; and overall were part of the back-and-forth in the border crossings, returns home,

resettlements, and cultural production.

From Colonial Subjects to Cinematic Cultural Producers: History of Nigerian Film Making

The rise of video film production was a gradual process that started eight decades

before its materialization. The first film screening in Nigeria occurred in 1903 inside of

Glover Hall, an auditorium in Lagos. It was the first of its kind that would continue under

British colonial authority until Nigerian independence. Screenings functioned as social

events, but more so to propagate British colonial authority. Because there were very few

theaters, vans would transport movies to rural areas to show movies that were mostly

documentaries focusing on health, agriculture and other industries (Onuzulike, 2009). As

colonialism was waning in the 1950s, the British retrofitted Nigeria with a national

television system. British plans were to gradually relinquish military domination, but

retain authority by controlling natural resources, leadership, and the banking systems of

Nigeria as an invisible hand (Decker, 2005). Picked by England, Nigeria was supposed to

be *the* model country of post-colonial Africa (Matory, 2006). A television system was an

important infrastructure that allowed the British to continue their use of media to promote

a proxy British authority (Obiaya, 2012). During colonial rule, film was a popular

apparatus of propaganda by the British (Burns, 2013, 2006, 2002, 2000; Smyth, 2013),
but TV proved to be a more effective, inexpensive, and consistent medium (Larkin,
2004). As a result, Nigeria held the largest television ownership on the continent by the
end of African colonialism (Barber, 2000).

After independence, Nigeria struggled to create a film industry like their
neighbors in Francophone Africa. There were a handful of filmmakers sent to the Accra
Film Training during colonial times and several more who studied abroad, but Nigeria
found difficulties in subsidizing the industry (Onuzulike, 2009; Haynes, 1995). A series
of internal conflicts disrupted the British agenda of seamlessly transitioning into a
shadow government. The new Nigerian state started on unstable ground. Disparate ethnic
groups with different cultural, social and geo-political identities endured a forced
citizenship. Nigeria started as a country formed by former colonizers who clumped
people together without regard of the differences amongst the indigenous peoples. Battles
ensued over which ethnic groups would control various aspects of the government, the
military, the lucrative oil industry, and the country's rich agriculture. Ongoing ethnic and
religious clashes heightened disputes between major tribal groups. The Igbos, a large and
powerful ethnic group in Southeastern Nigeria, attempted to create a sovereign state
called Biafra, which in turn, led to the bloody Biafra civil wars from, 1967-1970.[31] A
dissolution of an already vulnerable infrastructure resulted. In response, England
withdrew its de facto protectorate. The naira, Nigeria's currency plummeted. As well, the
price of crude oil, palm oil, cocoa, rubber, timber and several other cash crops, lost value.

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[31] Not all Igbos advocated for Biafra, as Biafra supporters went beyond Igbo tribal group, but Igbos
dominated the campaign.

Nigeria's robust television system and the small but present filmmaking community came to a standstill. Haynes (1995) estimates about one hundred celluloid or negative stock films were produced in the 60s and 70s[32] with a handful in the 80s. Though this was impressive in comparison to most African countries, the expensive production costs with the loss of the subsidies of the Nigerian government thwarted development.[33] Local production slowed dramatically. On average, four feature-length films that were subsidized by the government were produced annually (Brown, 2013; Haynes, 2000). In addition, foreign film distribution relationships with American distributors soured (Obiaya, 2012). The modest amount of theaters in Nigeria shut down with the exception of a few in Northern Nigerian. Other businesses, especially churches that used the layout of the theater as an ideal structure to accommodate congregations, replaced theaters that closed.

The Rise of the Video Film

Although the post-colonial implosion thwarted the production of films and movies, Nigerians still purchased televisions and other viewing technologies such as VCRs in the 1980s on. The oil boom of the 40s, 50s, and 60s that was largely from the rebuilding of U.S. and Europe after World War II created a class that purchased technology and a business class that sold consumer electronics (these traders were small-scale merchants). More Nigerians were immigrating to the West for better employment and educational opportunities. The resettlements created a diaspora that remitted money

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[32] Several Nigerian movies, pre-Nollywood, were directed by African-American actor, Ossie Davis. The most notable is the 1970 film, *Kongi's Harvest*. Funded by American investors, a Nigerian produced it.

[33] By the 1970s, the military was controlled by Nigerians in the north who are believed to receive resources such as subsidies that other regions were not afforded; hence, the remaining theaters were in Jos, a city in the north and a military center.

back home. In turn, their families who remained in Africa began to procure disposable income. They also received gifts from their émigré relatives who shipped VCRs, televisions, stereo systems and other technologies of leisure or brought them back with them when they visited. Added, the growing economic relationship between China and Japan with Africa allowed Asian countries to sell outmoded technologies in Africa for low prices.

Africans entered into the globalized economy as laborers and consumers. The transnational flows of people, information, money, and culture also increased the demand for media content that connected them to the world. The problem of an absent local visual media system was substituted by the importation of Hong Kong movies, Bollywood films, Latin American telenovelas, and Hollywood movies, especially Spaghetti-junction westerns (Haynes, 2000). Since Nigeria lost its foreign distribution relationships and were forgotten by Hollywood markets in the 80s, the country quickly formed its own distribution network in the growing global piracy movie industry that began in the 80s and bubbled-over by the 90s. Illegally copying and selling bootleg movies in local markets became a regular part of the economy and the norm in Nigeria's media landscape.

Foreign cinematic images saturated Nigeria for over a decade, and shaped the movie aesthetic of locals (Ebewo, 2007; Haynes, 2007; Haynes, 2000). Karen Barber (2000) argues that the imported movies were a temporary fix for the demand for media content. Africans desired to see their own culture and daily realities in front of their screens. "Nigerians have been over-fed with these cinedrugs" critiqued Augustine-Ufua Enahora (1989, p. 102), who disagreed with the flooding of foreign cinema and the

monopoly of the few cinema halls remaining in Northern Nigeria that were run by Lebanese merchants[34]. Enahora argued that cinema is "used to heal the psychological wounds created by slavery and colonialism and to provide moral upliftment" (p. 102) but the foreign media "anaesthetize[d] the people so that they do not think of their situation" (p. 102), a predicament she described as neo-colonialism.

An absent visual media was common throughout Anglophone Africa. In Ghana, local universities offered filmmaking courses, but students could not practice their crafts. In order to make a movie, they had to travel abroad or raise capital to film locally. Both options were costly and rare. As an experiment, the students copied from local videographers who began making low-budget movies using storylines from traditional narratives and mythologies (Garritano, 2008). When Nigerians adopted the Ghanaian video film model to experiment with their own movie making, Ghana simply could not keep up with a country that has the largest population of television owners in Africa and is the largest population on the continent. Nigeria has seven times more the citizens of Ghana, but the rapid growth of video films is more than a numbers game. Nigeria's live performance culture prior to Nollywood provided a foundation for audiences to consume Nigerian storytelling.

Yoruba troupes were already videotaping their improvisational performances prior to Kenneth Nnebue, known as the "Father of Nollywood" who is later revealed to have been a producer who worked on dozens of Yoruba-language movies before his 1992 hit, *Living in Bondage* (Olayiwola, 2011; Haynes and Okome, 2007). Yoruba, an ethnic

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[34] Lebanese immigrants obtained naturalized citizenship beginning in the 1970s. Their Nigerian citizenship allowed them to trade in the nation's market that had strict policies toward foreign traders. A main industry was the importation of Indian films through legitimate and illicit markets (Enahora, 1989).

group in southwestern Nigeria, had a reputation for putting together traveling

performance theaters and videoing them before the emergence of Nollywood. The

traveling troupes journeyed throughout the country and put on stage plays ranging from

stories taken from Yoruba mythological pantheon to a satire of current issues of the state.

The performances varied from place to place and articulated the discourse of the public

sphere (Cole, 2006).[35] In order to expand their popularity, they began recording

themselves in the late 1980s. But the Yoruba traveling troupes were tapped before. In the

1970s, Nigerian celluloid filmmakers decided to switch to local languages and content

from the English-language productions because films were not stimulating profit in the

scarce media market that existed in the country (Haynes, 2000).

Directly connected to the success of Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* is his

relationships with Igbo marketers in Onitsha, who had been trading audio cassettes and

pirated foreign media prior to the movie's success. After his success, Nnebue—who is

Igbo—participated, in a tightly organized network of Igbo video-marketers that flooded

the new video film industry with a system of production and distribution that eventually

monopolized a sector of the market (Paulson, 2012; Haynes, 2011). Their network

expanded from Onitsha, the second largest marketplace in Nigeria, to Lagos, the largest

market. Still today, ethnicity is very much a part of how the video production develops

and how it is structured (Haynes, 2000). It has where that Yoruba performers first

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[35] According to Catherine Cole (2006), African artists express the daily experiences and exasperations of people in a post-colonial climate, a climate that left as many uncertainties as it does scarcities. The artists were the few people who could openly express resistance and critique government without harsh consequences, most of the time. Legendary Yoruba musician, Fela Kuti, who created Afrobeat encapsulates the "artist-as-a-messenger" of the people. A serious critic of Nigerian governance and British colonialism (Cole, 2006), Kuti's lively performances were often in his underwear, a tie, and tribal face paintings. His unwavering critiques were as bold as his performances. Kuti represents a tradition Barber (2000) says Nigerian movies are rooted in despite their appropriations of Ghana and other foreign production systems.

appeared in Nigerian movies, but because the celluloid productions were limited, Nigerian troupes are in few films prior to Nollywood.

Certainly, Nollywood is a bi-product of Nigerians repurposing technology and re-inserting African visual imagery into the global media landscape. It is also a narrative within several major shifts starting from colonial West Africa to globalization in Nigerian.

Viewing Nollywood. Taken from Foucault's exploration of how people actualized their knowledge, Foucault argues that knowledge was experienced visually and spatially (Rajchman, 1988). The spatial conditions in which viewers experienced the movies also informed them of their sociopolitical identities within globalization and as citizens. Along with an innovative distribution of Nollywood, of interest are reception sites and practices created to accommodate the absence of cinema houses. Consequentially, sites of reception drastically shifted from proper cinema houses to viewings occurring outdoors.

Audiences carved out sites that Ajibade (2007) describes "spaces of seeing" because they served as new locales where movies are watched in Africa. He identifies four categories of audiences that have emerged: 1. *private space* is relegated to homes and offices where there is a television (TV) and a videocassette recorder (VCR) or video compact disc (VCD); 2. *dedicated spaces*, are sites for the sole purpose for viewing the video film, such as video parlors, video clubs and rentals are commercial spaces in residential areas; 3. *tie-in spaces* are service businesses that use the video films as an incentive or as a source of entertainment for their clientele; 4. *found spaces* which are "free spaces in the street . . . where people chance-in on video showing" (p.8).

Onookome Okome (2007a) argues that social practices and power relations of spectatorship differ from site to site. Looking at audiences who watch movies at street vending stalls versus those who consume movies in video parlors, he says there are dramatic shifts in power and status at these viewings. According to Okome, public spaces are impromptu, volatile sites of consumption commonly found in cities and connected to the narrative of the African metropolis. He contends that these audiences chronicle the desire in Nollywood spectatorship to retell the social and cultural existence of the spectator in a format that democratizes the overall story of the experience of Nigerians in film going (Okome, 2007a; 2007b). Even more so, street audiences provide a narrative interweaving the interactions and experiences of the spectator into the screening of the movie, and subsequently, they are critical to their reading and experiencing of the film. The unstructured moments of free, open public screenings on the street lean toward indigenous, improvisational presentations by traveling Yoruba troupes that were once a popular form of entertainment in the country.[36] However, impromptu viewings contrast a more stable audience at video parlors that were "marked by a presence of space" (p.12), and executed a more constrained form of spectatorship that is valued in Nigerian and British nobility.

In video parlors, Okome parallels the gender specific social space to 1970s Nigerian cinema that largely excluded women and promoted social status. Then, the video parlors required payment and housed audience members that had higher socioeconomic ranking than the members of the street audiences. Audiences were seated,

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[36] Barber (2000) historicizes live theater and the birth of TV in Nigeria. She details how members of the ethnic group, Yoruba, would travel around the country performing plays based on traditional, oral stories from their indigenous spiritual system and cultural heritage. These residues of these plays and the mythical stories are still found in current Yoruba-speaking movies found in Nollywood.

but talked during screenings. Similar to the street audiences, the screenings transformed

the film into their social realities. The videos served as moral, cultural and political

guides that helped audience members explore society within the comfort of their social

circle. However, the seated audience contrasted public viewings because the seating

restrictions along with the movies playing highlighted a rigid class system in Nigeria

developed to be more complex when traditional, colonial, and post-colonial rankings

intertwined with British hierarchical social structures (Shivers, 2010). Whereas the public

sphere allowed democratic engagement, the private sphere reified colonial, traditional,

and gendered social statuses that created its own site of contestation.

Nollywood, the Face of a New Nigeria. Unlike the sputtering Nigerian film

industry that was subsidized by the Nigerian government, Nollywood is privately funded.

Yet and still, the government used Nollywood to market Nigeria in global markets.

During the two terms Olusegun Obasanjo served as Nigeria's president of the country

(1999-2007), he branded Nollywood for promotional purposes. Nollywood was the new

face of Nigeria to foreign investors rather than an apparatus to promote homeland identity

and diaspora-homeland connection like the Indian government did with Bollywood.[37]

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[37] According to Kaur and Sinha (2005) Bollywood is used to homogenize Indian identity by synthesizing fragments of various Indian and Western cultures. The homogenization efforts, though highly criticized for accommodating an elite lens, also borrows from the Indian diaspora. For example, Hindi and Urdu languages are mostly used because they are easier dialects to follow and cross ethnic vernaculars. However, as of late, English is being employed more often, especially for diasporic audiences not familiar with local vernaculars (Rao S. , 2010). In another instance, Bollywood films, though dominated by Hindu filmmakers, appropriate archetypes found in Muslim narratives of social gatherings. Shevtal (2012) and Chadha and Kavoori (2008) purport that the popular choreographies seen in Bollywood fuse dance styles from India, Egypt, the Caribbean, the Middle-East. Her findings showed that some Bollywood dances even incorporate hip-hop moves, an occurrence also seen in the music that sometimes embeds other Indian languages such as Tamil, Telugu and Bengali (Gopal & Moorti, 2008), all the while integrating Punjabi hip hop, the "chutney" sound from Trinidad, and Javanese music from Indonesia. The hybridity of Bollywood became ever more possible when it expanded during globalization. The period marks a moment when the borders of nation states became blurred with the transnational movements of people and the flow of technologies, and media.

Spun as a Cinderella story in official speeches and press releases in a "Nigeria Image"

campaign in 2006 (Jedlowski, 2011), Nollywood represented Nigerian ingenuity and

industriousness in post-Structural Adjustment Program era. Though Nollywood was

promoted as the story of success, Obasanjo dedicated few resources to the industry

(Obiaya, 2012).

As a private industry, Nollywood both thrives and suffers. It operates as a free

enterprise, in that it is not government controlled, but a privatized industry narrows the

ability of perspectives to be articulated. Including, the lack of government protection that

has created conditions in which entities can exploit it rather than participate in the

strengthening of an infrastructure operating in piracy industries.

Nollywood in the (Continental African) Diaspora

Paul Ugor notes (2009) a shift in pedagogy occurred when globalization and new

media technologies created new cultural spaces in Africa which are connected to the

emergence and popularity of Nollywood. Nigerian movies changed the perspective of

how Africans understand themselves in the global media landscape (Mistry & Ellapen,

2013; Omoera, 2013; Giwa-Isekeije, 2013). Babson Ajibade (2009) proffers that

Nollywood provides the opportunity for Africans to see "African faces doing African

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The transnational characteristic is critical in the diffusion of Bollywood, due to a diasporic audience who are a vital part in its spectatorship. Indian diaspora are heavily concentrated in areas such as the Caribbean, Anglophone South America, southern and Eastern Africa, the Middle East, the United Kingdom, the U.S. and Canada, offering a wide network of diasporans ranging in class and situated in distinct cultural histories (Aftab, 2002; Alessandrini, 2001). Indeed, Bollywood has an audience beyond Indians, but the Indian diaspora shares a symbiotic relationship with the circulation of Bollywood that entails staying connected with local culture, politics, news, issues and being directly linked to the economy other than through remittance. Nevertheless, Bollywood is a critical cultural product in the trade between India, the Arab world and Africa – a trading relationship that has existed for hundreds of years (Larkin, 2008), which also included a slave trade preceding European Atlantic slave trade between Europe, the Americas and Africa.

things in familiar sociocultural contexts" (p. 420). Adebogju (2011), Ugochukwu (2009), and Esan (2008) state that the movies are used to promote literacy of local tribal languages for Africans in the diaspora and even those who live in the urban areas and are not encouraged to use their native dialects. Osakue Omoera's (2014) work on Nollywood audiences makes the argument that the cultural artifacts in the film are interpreted as positive and accurate portrayals by those whose culture is represented. Omoera furthers the argument by saying that the movies are used to promote the culture in multiple spaces, at gatherings and festivals to exhibit how people who have been absent in new media are present in it, and being depicted in ways in which they approve. Nollywood as a pedagogical apparatus subverts hegemonic representations of African people and culture as it repositions African subjects in their spectatorship.

African immigrants have been transporting Nollywood to their resettled communities since the 1990s. As couriers and consumers they use Nollywood in ways that help them navigate the new terrain of their host country and the identities they brought to resettlements. Whereas Esan Oluyinka (2008) identifies Nollywood spectatorship as a form of guilty pleasure and nostalgia for African immigrants, Françoise Uguchukwu (2009) emphasizes the transnational linguistic space that audiences create when learning the languages spoken in movies. From another angle, Namvula Rennie (2009) contends that Nollywood is used as the cultural material to build the materiality of homeland community on foreign, hostile terrain. Claudia Hoffman (2013) extends Rennie's supposition by proffering that movies assist in urban immigrants creating local and transnational global landscapes interplaying between home and host coutries.

Esan Oluyinka (2008) contends that African immigrants renegotiate their social statuses and cultural performance as immigrants and Africans through Nollywood reception in London and Dublin. In his study, language and cultural products were used by immigrants to construct diaspora-homeland identities to navigate their foreign social order in which they resettled and their interactions with each other. He argues that immigrants use their culture as a moral compass, and emphasize maintaining cultural identities and ties. The movies offered viewers the opportunities to participate in consuming an African pop culture, rather than Western pop culture that they felt espoused immoral and sexualized attitudes.

Françoise Uguchukwu's (2009) study of Nollywood audiences in France brings attention to black audience members from Francophone Africa and the Caribbean that preferred Nigerian language movies dubbed with French voices as an entry in African culture. In diasporic communities, immigrants tend to communicate less-and-less in their home languages (Qin, 2006). Using African language becomes even more problematic for those who resettled when they were young or whose born in France because they lack the exposure of being immersed in an environment encouraging them to use native language. Uguchkukwu argues that the movies provide linguistic and cultural references that allow black immigrants in France to construct a Pan-ethnic African language that fuses elements of French, with Nigerian, Ghanaian, and other African languages that are represented by African immigrants in the region. The ability to create a form of communication intersects the experiences of all blacks in France who are a minority and face significant discrimination especially in the realms of housing and employment.

Namvula Rennie (2009) tracked Nollywood products sold by Nigerian merchants in Ghanzhou, China. The merchants are members of a growing Nigerian community of documented and undocumented immigrants who are navigating discriminatory and heavy surveillance practices by the Chinese government. Nollywood is an important cultural product circulated in the community because it provides an interface with homeland language and culture.

In sum, Nollywood in the diaspora blooms in multiple ways. It provides identity reinforcement, emotional support, moral frameworks, and agency to recent diasporic migrants (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Benitez, 2010; Gajjala, 2010; Esan, 2008; Adejunmobi, 2007; Sun, 2005; Appadurai, 1990). However, these studies focus on African immigrants. I looked at how black Nollywood audiences (both native and foreign-born) employ it in the U.S.

In the U.S., movies are displayed at tables and carts of Harlem, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Northeast D.C. street vendors. Movie adverts in U.S.-based African newspapers announce the latest films and encourage audiences to purchase legitimate copies from authenticated dealers.[38] They are bartered within informal trade-and-borrow networks and distributed online through Amazon, satellite, and cable television programming. Movies run in braiding salons and restaurants, and in an endless amount of private West African affairs. As of late, a monthly membership site called "iRoko TV, also known as the "Netflix of Africa" (Kermeliotis, 2012), provides thousands of movies. Several channels on the popular streaming box, Roku TV, broadcast hundreds of movies

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[38] Bootlegging is a serious issue that cripples the formal market of Nollywood, but the informal economy thrives in sales. There are ongoing attempts to direct the flow of money back to filmmakers and production companies that earn a fraction of the revenue.

while a number of Youtube users dedicate their video postings to stream full-length features. Even the production of Nollywood is becoming global. Filmmakers are making movies and hosting awards shows in Washington D.C., North Carolina, Texas, and California.[39] Even with all of this growth and diversity of access, however, there are two distinct black audiences in the U.S. — one that is native-born, African-American and has watched Hollywood all of their lives and even created their own film industry in the early twentieth century; and another set that is foreign-born and has watched Hollywood and Nollywood outside and inside the borders of the U.S. Though Nollywood has been acknowledged to have arrived in America, more inquiry into how it is used is the focus of this project.

A Convergence of Old and New Media, Tradition, and Modernity

Conventional stories of Nollywood recount an industry that sprang up within the last two decades because of old technology and African ingenuity. Consequentially, Nollywood is told in the framework of a tech utopia, the notion that a film industry is the answer to the layers of socio-economic issues in West Africa. The historical overview revealed Nollywood has a longer history than 1992, and its origins interlace traditional culture, traditional media and new media; thus making it a cultural product of traditional modernity. Nollywood is a successful invention from decades of failed attempts by filmmakers who experimented with production and distribution models with the aim of creating local media content and global visibility.

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[39] Found in online article http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/nollywood-usa-african-movie-makers-expand-filming-to-dc-area/2013/05/22/c132bae6-b107-11e2-baf7-5bc2a9dc6f44_story.html

Nollywood grew from established networks existing even before the African piracy movie industry. The marketer associations that grew out of Nollywood's boom show that Nollywood, though described as independent and self-funded, has an internal regulation system that determines the flow of movies, and if movies are made. These decisions have an ultimate impact on what audiences see in movies.

With that being said, I go back to the question that I get when I tell people, and in particular African-Americans and Caribbeans my area of study. After they ask, "What is Nollywood," I explain it to them. Their follow up response is usually, "Oh yeah, those African movies, I see them around." Nollywood is present, yet not present; it is visible, but not quite noticeable, which further piques my interest in understanding its invisibility and adjacent salience it the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

ESTABLISHING THE FIELD SITE: 'THE BRICKS' NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

Before I decided to pursue this project, I would walk through the downtown area,

discovering the nooks and crannies of the city. As a curious new Newarker adapting to

life in the northeast, I visited a number of the shops and street vendors. I thumbed

through mountains of knickknacks placed in plastic bins at one of the many dollar stores

or carts lining the streets. I looked for some type of anything to help me connect or

belong—to feel like a Newarker, or at the very least, some semblance of an insider. I was

grounded by happenstance. It occurred when I simply looked for another route to take

home.

One day while walking south on Broad Street, I passed the recently built sports

and performance arena, the Prudential Center. The back of the building faces the main

street; an intentional act to build all the openings away from the locals.[40] T*he Pru*, as

locals refer to it, is a stark reminder of the shifting landscape in the city. Instead of

traveling my usual route, I turned on a side street and passed several dollar stores and an

African textile business with an adjacent African braiding shop. Two blocks down, I

arrived at an intersection where a popular soul food restaurant sat (but has since closed in

2012) across the street from a building with several African businesses and a church on

the second floor.

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[40] Notes from Migration and City course, Fall 2009, Sherri-Ann Butterfield. This observation was
discussed by Prof. Butterfield in a class meeting looking at the urban layout of Newark and
gentrification. At the time, The Prudential center just opened. Butterfield pointed out how all the
openings to the arena were away from the Broad Street. To her, she surmised this was deliberate strategy
to keep visitors of the Prudential away from the local shops and restaurants on Broad Street.

Outside one of the storefronts, two older women seated in shabby lawn chairs and wearing tops and skirts patterned with intricate, colorful designs spoke to each other excitedly by a barbeque grill with corn still in its shucks roasting. The smell of slightly charred corn wafted in the air, and smoke slowly rose out of the pit. The women intermittently stood up to rotate the corn and fan the flames. Resting on a wheel of the grill was a sign on cardboard announcing, "Corn $1." Instantly, I was transported back to 2001 when I traveled through Nigeria, and occasionally stopped to purchase grilled corn and water in plastic bags from one of the many women vendors on the side of the road. Many of the women would have children playing in the background with some youth making loud kissing sounds to catch your attention and say through loud smacks, "Waaaatahhhh." Returning from my nostalgia, I pulled out a dollar and told the women about my trip in Nigeria. They smiled and one said, "Oh, you went to Africa. That is good, but we are not from Nigeria, we are from Liberia, West Africa." I laughed and felt at home, even within my ignorance of not distinguishing the women's nationalities. In my moment of emotion and connecting, these women were adamant about their belonging. Following that moment, I started passing this same shop on my way home.

Wandering through the local shops and local life in Newark led me to Nollywood. On one of my usual treks home from Newark Penn Station, I stopped into an African shop to peruse their items. While there, I noticed a tall rack of colorful DVD jackets. I walked by the brightly decorated items then asked the store clerk, "What type of movies are these?" He said, "Nigerian movies," as he walked toward me. I replied with astonishment, "Nigerian movies! I haven't seen these in years." He looked at me and said, "You know about Nollywood?" I responded, "Nollywood, what is that? Nigerian

Hollywood?" He nodded his head in affirmation and I laughed. "Those Nigerians are something else," I said and grunted in amazement, "umpf umpf um." He smiled and commented, "Yes they are mami."

Establishing the Field Site

As a field site, Newark provides a provocative entry point in exploring media and African diasporic identity. It offers a rich landscape for both. Newark comprises a visible, diverse black ethnic demographic and operates as social and cultural hub for local and suburban black New Jersey residents. As well, it carries a distinctive black radical political history, but it also has a longstanding relationship with local press that frames it with disparaging media representations. Nonetheless, Newark is experiencing a demographic and typographic transformation that has elements of gentrification, globalization and reverse migration affecting residents and the climate of the city. In turn, Newark, as a city, is undergoing clashes in collective identity, and individuals who reside within are redefining their chosen identities and the meaning behind them.

This investigation focuses on downtown Newark due to its centralized location for black Newarkers and those who live in border towns such as Irvington, East Orange, Orange, South Orange, Elizabeth, Roselle, Hillside, Maplewood, and Linden. Downtown Newark operates as the heart of commercial, cultural and business activity in the city, but also is a locale that serves as a social, economic and cultural hub for blacks. The corner of Broad Street and Market Street is the nucleus of commercial business in Newark. Known as the *Four Corners*, Broad and Market expands out to small businesses that are mostly minority-owned, with a significant number of its employees being black and Latino. Bargain depots, cheap furniture warehouses, mobile phone outlets, unisex salons,

inexpensive eateries, discount clothing, and shoe stores command most of the retail spaces in the downtown district. Government buildings are concentrated on several streets with high rises, both abandoned and occupied with corporate giants such as the insurer, Prudential; the telecom multinational, Verizon; the energy corporation, IDT; and residential developers offering luxury living cheaper than New York, Jersey City and Hoboken paint a modest skyline.

In front of stores on Broad and Market, and sitting just off the major veins are street vendors selling everything from hotdogs to belts, hats, gloves, purses, CDs and other small wares that are usually imitation designs they purchase from New York. Some vendors use music as a form of advertisement. One in particular hawks his own CDs of house mixes on the Four Corners, broadcasting his creations on huge speakers that create a public dance space and historical site telling of a Newark once known for its music and performance clubs. But, street vendors have been strategically displaced and harassed due to the gentrification efforts of the city to remove non-licensed sellers and "clean up" certain areas in hopes of attracting outside commercial and residential prospects.

Downtown Newark has a local economy that relies on the patronage of local residents, often oscillating between vibrant and lethargic. There are shops that emerge and disappear, but customers also frequent mainstays like Dr. Jays and V.I.M., both clothing outlets that situated in downtown for over three decades. Some businesspersons overestimate the capital realities of Newark, while others underestimate a city that has history of being gridlocked by bureaucracy, corruption and spikes of crime. Nevertheless, Newark serves as the centerpiece, and sort of a Mecca for northern black New Jersey, and

with rapidly escalating costs in Manhattan, Bronx and Brooklyn, it has become a viable relocation option for those who have been displaced.[41]

Newark is a site where black people network, bond, and tap into lively entertainment and cultural events that they cannot experience in the suburban and border towns. During the Great Migration from 1915 to 1970, African-Americans migrated to Newark in large numbers and then spread out to border and suburban towns. Even if they left Newark, like many black professionals in the 1980s and 1990s, they stayed connected to the city by way of family and friends, religious institutions, business societies, professional black organizations, or cultural and ethnic groups that headquartered in Newark. Political groups, the Black Fraternal Order of the Police, mason lodges, powerful churches, and influential and long-standing mosques are rooted in Newark.

The festivals that occur in the city illustrate African-American ties to Newark that run deeper than people, organizations and religion; it is also cultural. Newark is where black people congregate in order to party. From the annual black heritage and Kwanzaa parades to the revolutionary poetry at the Blue Door, to the annual music festivals celebrating jazz, hip-hop and New Jersey house, to the lively and tense City Council meetings that are mostly attended by local African Americans, Newark is a black city. The most popular events in the city are outdoor music festivals that take place from late spring to late summer such as the "Sounds of the City" given by New Jersey Performing Arts Center; the Lincoln Park Music Festival; and the Weequahic Park House Music

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[41] In an interview, an unemployment officer in Newark stated black New Yorkers were moving to Newark in significant numbers because of the sharp increase of New York rents. The interviewee helped local residents find jobs, and she noticed how a number of employees at the Prudential Center commuted from New York or relocated to Newark and surrounding areas for affordable housing. There indeed is a reverse migration occurring in New York and New Jersey. African-Americans, in particular are moving back down south (Pendergrass, 2013).

Festival. These events cater to black culture (both national and international) and attract predominant black crowds that travel from all parts of New Jersey, and even the larger New York metro area.

There are other events throughout the year where the black community gather to socialize. Be it the visual art scene of the weeklong city celebration local art called Open Doors, the African dance festival at Essex County College, the monthly line-dancing or 'old school' soul and R&B reviews at Symphony Hall, holiday festivities, or numerous customized birthday bashes that fill the lounges and clubs in Newark; it is known that Newark is the city for black culture and black-centered parties.

Newark as the hub of black activity extends to Caribbean and African groups as well. Black Caribbean groups started migrating en masse in the late '70s and early '80s while continental Africans began settling in the '80s and '90s. The emergence of an international black presence aligns with the Post-1965 Immigrant Act. After amending the immigration laws, the U.S. experienced a spike in the migrations of non-whites, and a surge of black Caribbean and continental African migrants to metropolitans in the east (Logan & Deane, 2003). Most of them relocated from New York to find better housing, employment and educational opportunities from the overcrowded areas of Brooklyn, Bronx and Manhattan that have concentrated Caribbean and African communities.

New York is the main entry point for black immigrants and in many instances functions as a cultural place of identity for Africans and Caribbeans. However, for those in New Jersey, Newark also provides a space where African and Caribbean peoples are actively involved in the development of the city. For example, under the Cory Booker Administration, the mayor's office installed a Newark African Commission in 2007 to

promote cultural awareness and encourage local communities to understand policies and issues affecting Africa. The Commission hosts an annual African Diaspora festival featuring an outdoor marketplace and African entertainers, both contemporary and traditional. In the summer of 2013, another African festival commenced at Lincoln Park, a recreational space used for the Lincoln Park Music Festival. As well, there is a significant Caribbean and African student population at Essex County College (ECC), the only community college in Newark, and Rutgers-Newark. Every year the city announces high school valedictorians on the local cable station – a list dominated by African and Caribbean students. At ECC, there are sports programs, such as the track program, actively recruiting African and West Indian athletes who have competed in the 2008 and 2012 Olympics.

In downtown Newark, the international black presence diversifies the commercial and residential spaces. Caribbeans and Africans own and work in a number of stores. As well, they have established cultural and ethnically specific shops such as textile storehouses, restaurants, and all-purpose superstores offering imported items and foodstuffs that you cannot obtain in franchise markets or the standard retail store. At Newark Penn Station, Haitian and African taxi drivers dominate cab services, carving out a service industry crafted in the cultural performances and diasporic networks they created.

The most prominent international black ventures are braid shops owned and operated by Caribbean, but mostly African men and women. Braiding is also an essential hairstyling art form in the African-American community, but for the most part, operates

in the informal economy.[42] Braiding shops in Newark are dominated by African women — with some Caribbean, and specifically Haitian and Jamaican braiders — and are often seen in downtown Newark. Some streets included three braiding shops or several salons offering braiding within feet of each other. Braiding, and now weaving, is a lucrative venture that attracts black and Latino clientele. And, though it attracts both genders, it is still a gender-specific, female space.

However, the inevitable coming of gentrification is visible in the newly erected Prudential Center and the emergence of boutique eateries and fashion shops such as Mercato Tomato, Pooka Pure and Simple Body Care, and Nizi Sushi situated themselves within business staples of the community like the diner on Central Avenue or Kilkinney Alehouse. Moreover, the opening of chain stores like Dinosaur BBQ, Joe's Crab Shack, Chipotle, and the announcement of a Whole Foods grocery store and a Barnes & Nobles slated to open in 2016, are indicators of big businesses catering to different demographics. Gradually replacing the food deserts notoriously proliferated throughout Newark are businesses too costly for the average Newark resident. Rents are increasing dramatically, making it difficult for working class incomes and people who have rented in Newark for decades to find housing in an area that was once desirable and partially abandoned by property owners after the 1967 riots.[43]

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[42] Braiding hair is an African tradition retained by African-Americans and for the most part was done in domestic spaces or within informal economies until the '90s when West Africans brought their braiding enterprise to the U.S. during an increase of African immigration. According to Kimberly Johnson (2011), states began to target braiding shops. In some cases, states passed laws requiring braiders to obtain cosmetology licenses to establish braiding galleries. Contentious battles occurred in states such as New York, Texas, and Illinois. Braiders claimed that they were unfairly required to obtain training and licensing for a profession that does not engage in the use of chemicals. Johnson (2011) further argues that the harsh penalties and the costs and time for a license braiders would not use made it difficult for braiding enterprises to succeed. To this day, braiding is largely done by unlicensed stylists.

[43] In 2013, a Dinosaur Barbeque opened on Market Street, just north of the Prudential Center. It was part of a renovation of downtown commercial buildings standing empty for years. On top of the restaurant are

Current-day Newark is as complicated as its history. It is a story often told in media clips around violence and crime. Resultantly, present-day Newark needs to be understood within a broader historical context.

A Tale of Urban Decline

This cursory glance of the history of Newark looks at it through a lens presented by Kevin Mumford (2007) who explored the city through the perspective of African-Americans. He moves away from describing the de-evolution of the city as the moment when large numbers of blacks migrated to the urban north, but a process in which every day black folk attempted to gradually change an urban landscape that had established systematic roadblocks before they arrived en masse to one that was more democratic with the resources left. Mumford (2007) argues that using the term "urban decline" to describe the shift in cities from flourishing to ruined is problematic because it often blames the most under-represented residents who were not involved in the long-term series of decisions resulting in the underdevelopment of the area.

Furthermore, Newark has experienced different waves of occupants who have displaced previous ones, and then left as well. This textured history also shows the various angles of inequities and a culture spanning decades before the arrival of blacks in the mass exodus from the south. Newark is one of the oldest cities in the country. Its history shows that the city may be predominantly black, but that does not translate into effective political or economic power.

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lofts going for $2,500 a month. On Halsey, renters are being displaced by investors who have purchased buildings across the street from the new wing of the Prudential Insurance headquarters. One renter explained her rent will almost double from $1,300 to $2,000 a month if she decides to renew. She and her husband own a small media company. They will be moving from a location in which they have lived for five years.

Colonial Newark. Dutch colonialists seeking to practice a more pious, Puritanical life formed Newark in 1666. They left colonial settlements in Connecticut to land south of the Passaic River. In 1667, the official name chosen became Newark[44] or *new ark*, a symbolic moniker of the biblical story of Noah who built a boat to house a pair of all of earth's creatures while God demolished the rest with unprecedented flooding. Almost immediately, the settlers of Newark carved out two intersecting roads, Market Street and Broad Street. The four corners served as cornerstone roads and the heart of the small community would stay as the city's epicenter.[45]

The first inhabitants, the Hackensacks, were native nations who initially tolerated Dutch and English settlers. Although indigenous populations attempted to coexist with immigrants through entering into trade agreements and sharing indigenous lands, native residents eventually were forced to leave. They moved into the interior of Upper Delaware Valley region when settlers violated agreements and grew violent towards native peoples. As well, indigenous populations were weakened by disease epidemics from settler populations (Kraft, 1986).[46]

After seeking total control from native populations, the location of Newark became critical in trade. For a century, Newark was a major stop on the most important networks of roads and water channels in colonial America and an important colony for the exploits of Dutch West India, followed by the British (Tuttle, 2009). Called, "The

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[44] Urquat (1913) purports New Milford or Milford was an unofficial name that settlers called the settlement because most of them came from the Dutch Colony named Milford in Connecticut. The earliest documentation of the village of 'Newark" comes from 1667.

[45] The four corners would also serve as the point in dividing the township into four wards turning the hamlet into a town in 1833 (Urquat, 1907). Today, Newark has five wards.

[46] This was a common theme for indigenous populations who were forcibly displaced throughout the U.S.

Mother of All Towns" Newark became the headquarters in establishing other townships in areas now known as Essex and Hudson counties. Newark was an agricultural settlement living off ample game, fertile fields yielding annual harvests, abundant orchards, and fish from the fresh waters of Passaic River that flowed out to the Atlantic Ocean. It had a large outdoor market that attracted people from all areas.

There were two areas of local life causing intense friction during colonial New Jersey. Religious conviction had embedded itself in every facet of life for the settlers; so much so, that it often was the root of intense civil clashes. The other issue was Colonial rule. Newark colonists frequently resisted colonial authority. Fights with the occasional riot between European royalists over the control of the New World colony grew as the territories approached the Revolutionary War. Subsequently, the opposition of colonial authority would play a part in Newark residents supporting rebels in the Revolutionary War (Urquhart, 1913).

Post-Revolutionary War. One hundred years after the arrival of the first European settlers in Newark, the quaint colony was now under British rule, but served as a resting point for Revolutionary soldiers and then for General George Washington. After the war, Newark was one of the first places to become a bedrock for manufacturing mass goods. The central location of Newark between New York and Philadelphia and the Hudson and Delaware rivers positioned the burgeoning town as a trading locale specializing in leather. Eventually, other goods were folded into manufacturing, but tanneries producing leather products such as saddles and shoes became signature goods in Newark. By 1838, the city had entered an industrial golden age with over 100 factories worked by Irish and German immigrants who were migrating to the city rapidly.

According to Tuttle (2009), Newark garnered the name "Southern workshop" because much of its business was from the South. Newark manufacturers maintained lucrative trading relationships with southern slaveholders. The southern partnerships, though very profitable, would carry political controversy and economic consequences into the Civil War (Hodges, 1999; Wright, 1989; Urquhart, 1913). By the time the Civil War started in 1861, Newark was an industrial force, but its main revenue base was from the South, causing a dramatic decrease in the economy and a rift in local and national politics. City leadership openly supported Southern causes resulting in the rest of the north admonishing the position of Newark elected officials. Nonetheless, the pro-slavery position carried by Newark leaders was a carryover from earlier attempts to expel and heavily regulate free and enslaved blacks in the city.

From the seventeenth century until the early nineteenth century, a vital part of the labor force in Northern New Jersey consisted of enslaved Africans, Native Americans, and indentured servants who were poor Irish and German immigrants, Native Americans and blacks transported from Jamaican and Barbadian plantations (Hodges, 1999; Wright, 1989). While early Dutch and English colonies enforced slavery that was drastically different from southern plantation systems and corresponding social structures, New Jersey slavery, especially in the rural agricultural areas, garnered the reputation as enacting some of the harshest laws on enslaved peoples in any slaveholding territory (Mumford, 2007). As well, free blacks enjoyed lesser freedoms and mobility than poor white servants did. Although the moral issues of slavery were points of contention in the religious communities like Newark, the need for slave labor often outweighed the moral

authority and carried into public sentiment well after the Civil War and into the industrial

boom in Newark.

In 1804, an abolition act gradually banishing slavery in New Jersey[47] led to the

passage of a law definitively ending the chattel system in 1808. However, New Jersey

was the last state in the north to eliminate it in 1866 because New Jersey public officials

were pro-slavery, plus, much of the private industries in the state serviced slaveholding

enterprises in the south. By the time slavery ended, the anti-black undertone was already

set. In the early 1800s, the small black Newark population had to report to the main

square upon the ringing of a bell. In 1817, black Newark citizens voiced opposition in

newspapers toward local white organizations that were under the leadership of then

Mayor Theodore Frelinghuysen who attempted to expel blacks in efforts to send them to

Africa, Haiti or Latin America (Mumford, 2007). In 1838, then Mayor William Halsey

headed a revival of the same organization to relocate blacks. When blacks remained,

local ordinances, restricted their movement and opportunities to achieve upward mobility

(Tuttle, 2009; Mumford, 2007; Wright, 1989). Today, on Frelinghuysen Highway, there

sits an expanse of abandoned factories and some of Newark's worst public housing. As

well, Halsey Street is a popular downtown avenue and currently one the hotbeds of

gentrification displacing local black businesses and residents.

Whereas blacks underwent generations of systematized immobility, European

immigrants experienced successful migrations. Irish, German, Jewish (German, Russian

and Polish) people immigrated to Newark first, followed by Italian, Portuguese, and

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[47] According to Wright (1989), evidence of African slave labor in New Jersey dates as early as 1623 when the Dutch started building a fort in South Jersey. In 1639 enslaved Africans were part of the town of Pavania (current-day Jersey City or somewhere nearby).

Spanish immigrants. Indeed, all European migrating groups gradually built collective wealth and power after their initial treatment as the underclass. Tuttle (2009) says that Jewish, Irish, and Italians succeeded the banking and manufacturing barons of the late 1800s who used power to garner wealth for themselves and jobs for loyal constituents. Once Jewish, Irish, and Italians won elected official seats during the manufacturing boom, they used the same model of former Newark power brokers and divvied resources to their respective ethnic groups.

Certainly, African Americans did not experience racism exclusively. All groups went through a period of discrimination. However, African-Americans faced it for the longest amount of time as it has defined much of their movement and ultimately their citizenship. By the time mass groups of black southern migrants moved to Newark which started around 1915 (Wilkerson, 2011a), the monotony of power and economic control broke down race relations leading to an imbalance in resource-distribution. Mainly occupying the low-wage, non-union service sector, blacks were not hired by manufactories (Boyd, 2014). When factory jobs opened up for blacks, Newark was undergoing deindustrialization; thus employment and especially union work was far and few between (Mumford, 2007).

Post World War II. After World War II, the city faced a housing crisis. Newark's population peaked at just over half a million residents. However, Newark was broken. Decades of mismanagement, bloated government agencies, disinvestment, city jobs with overstuffed salaries were allotted to certain people, and a host of rampant corruption activities not only forced the city to increase taxes exorbitantly, but also to attempt to recover from a twisted tradition of self-serving city leadership. The gap

between the haves and have-nots widened. In the 1950s, increases in African American

residents along with a growing Cuban and Puerto Rican community made the restrictive

housing policies for a disenfranchised and largely poor population more unbearable.

Whites were already leaving Newark for the suburbs during the white exodus out of

urban areas. Real estate loans and other incentives given to whites to leave the inner city

made suburban communities more palatable. Although whites were leaving, housing was

still inadequate. As a resolution, the city decided to erect high-rise public housing for

low-income residents on acres of land.

For over half a century, Newark's public housing stretched for blocks and were

dotted throughout the city. At first, they operated as temporary housing units to help low-

income families transition out of poverty. But the plan backfired. White flight, followed

by the exodus of a growing black professional class, drained the city of its last viable

resources. Businesses offering employment and a black middle class who could advocate

for all African Americans departed the city. Left was a majority of black and Latino poor

residents thrown into dire circumstances, which Tuttle (2009) describes as:

> Filthy, crime-ridden streets criss-crossed poverty-stricken, all-black
> neighborhoods where white business owners locked iron gates over their stores
> nightly before parting for their home in the suburbs. Children attended worn out,
> feebly-equipped schools that were de facto segregated. Merely a decade after
> welcoming their first hopeful tenants, Newark's high-rise housing projects were
> dreary and dilapidated, plagued with violence and sullied with graffiti (p.5).

The civil unrest that took place in 1967 was inevitable. Disenfranchised in every

social and political arena, a powerless black majority also endured ongoing profiling and

harassment by the predominantly white Newark Police Department. While the historic

riots highlighted black frustrations toward the minority white status quo, the unrest

established Newark as a black city. After the bloody riots left twenty-four dead and

caused $10 million in property damages, black leaders began contending for more power. Civil Rights activist Junius Washington (2013) explained that advocates for black Newark transformed confrontational politics to electoral politics. The majority black population began to build "social institutions, political organizations, visible patterns of public interaction, periodic celebrations and commemorations" (Deneer, 2010, p. 46). Though black leadership controlled resources in the city, there were very little resources left. The years of poor leadership and corruption gutted the city and stifled black leaders who soon began to do the same thing as their predecessors – dole out monies to loyal constituents. The only difference was that they passed out the scraps, thus leaving the city still consisting of low-income, poorly educated, working class.

The small pockets of middle class in Weequahic and Ivy Hill remained intact somewhat, but the rest of the city consisted of deteriorating family housing or substandard public housing known as "the projects." By the 1970s, the projects crumbled from the outside in. Compounding the social ills was the proliferation of drugs saturating the housing developments for the next three decades. Up until the 1990s, high-rise housing projects dominated the Newark skyline before most were demolished then replaced with affordable, single family townhouses throughout the city. The demolition efforts were a result of decades-long issues plaguing housing developments such as poor maintenance, overcrowding and drug activity.[48] Seen as a public housing experiment

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[48] The issues with Newark housing developments are not isolated. Many urban centers experienced similar issues, if not worse and ended up demolishing their housing projects, too, including Chicago, Baltimore and Atlanta. However, a bigger problem presented itself in all of these cities after the removing of developments – there was not enough housing to place the displaced residents. In Newark, there was a waiting list of over 11,000 families to get into government housing at the time of the decision to demolish the high-rise projects. This is addition to the people who were already living in them, but did not have a place to stay once their home was torn down.

gone wrong, many considered these developments incubators of crime (Giambusso, 2010; Mays, 2007; Levy, 1994).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Newark began to experience an influx of Haitians, Jamaicans and West Africans.[49] These groups were migrating to the United States following the 1965 Immigration Act, but most landed in New York or Southern Florida. The rapid surge of black and Latino populations in New York caused a second migration to Newark. As the city prepared to close the projects in the late 80s, new waves of migrant labor and professional classes began to add more weight to an unstable public housing and job market. With much of the projects gone, businesses around it died due to a dramatic decrease in local shoppers. For instance, the biggest stretch of projects built on High Street (renamed Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) stood on the fringes of downtown Newark. The removal of most of the buildings resulted in a dramatic decline of businesses in a downtown district that never fully recovered from the 1967 uprising.

Sections of the main veins of Newark's commercial district sat empty. The shops that remained experienced high turnover rates. Other shops sat abandoned, while others were in different states of disrepair. Some have been unoccupied since the uprising of the sixties. By the 1990s, escalated violence, gang activity, vandalism, carjackings, and drug related crime made downtown Newark both dangerous and unprofitable for businesses. Unlike most downtown sections, living in downtown Newark was an occupational and residential hazard. Nonetheless, immigrant businesses and churches filled the void.

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[49] Reports indicate West Indians and Africans are opting to move to cities outside of New York for better and more affordable housing (Bernstein, 2005). Information from participants who moved from New York to Newark said that affordable housing and better employment opportunities were the major thrusts for relocating.

Specifically, African, West Indian, and Arabic ventures sprang up alongside African-American shops and Latino shops.

Immigrant businesses established themselves in places nobody wanted to live, while catering specifically to the population of people of color. For instance, Arabs bought black owned fried chicken mom-and-pop eateries and Puerto Rican bodegas. Dominican unisex parlors, African braiding galleries and Korean-owned salons replaced African-American beauty shops. However, these businesses met the needs of immigrants and immigrant identity. First, the businesses provided jobs and income for immigrants facing grave difficulties in the job market. Secondly, they met the cultural needs of immigrant groups, affording the ability to transport culinary foods, newspapers, clothes, and other forms of media to the United States. In Newark, Jamaicans and Haitians dominate black West Indian groups, while Nigerians, Ghanaians, and Liberians make up most of the African populations. From the decline and years of civic disenfranchisement, a new black identity emerged.

An Intersection of Race & Geography: A Layout of Newark along Racial Lines

The unspoken racial lines making up Newark paint years of segregation growing out of ethnic and racial tensions heightened in issues of economic and political conflicts. Out of the 42 million blacks living in the America,[50] the Southern region of the country holds the largest amassment of black populations; however, the New York City

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[50] The number of people who identified as black, either alone or in combination with one or more other races, in the 2010 Census. They made up 13.6 percent of the total U.S. population. The black population grew by 15.4 percent from 2000 to 2010.

Metropolitan area[51] comprises the largest and most diverse concentration of diaspora members.[52] In the heavily populated region located in the northeastern section of the U.S., Newark is the second largest city in the New York City metropolitan region and is the only major city in the area with a majority black population. It is the largest city in New Jersey, and often called the sixth borough of New York because of its size and proximity to it. Newark serves as historical hub for blacks who travel throughout the NYC Metro and was a major stop for African-American migrants relocating to the northern states from the South during "The Great Migration" (Wilkerson, 2011a).

Newark is also a site that hosts a visible and viable black international population involved in all institutions. Diversity is highly visible in institutions of higher education. For example, ranked the most diverse college in the country is Rutgers' Newark campus because it educates a large number of black, South Asian and Latino students. In addition, Essex County College has a strong African and Afro-Caribbean population that make up its dominant black demographic. For thirty years, Zachary Yamba, a Ghanaian immigrant, led Essex Community College, and while there, he attracted black international students who are part of a majority black population.[53]

Though Newark is diverse, it also one of the most hyper-segregated cities in the country.[54] One can see the residential racial lines visibly carved when traveling through

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[51] The metropolitan area is defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget as the New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania.

[52] A majority of African immigrants live in the NYC metro or Washington D.C., while six of out every ten black Caribbean residents live in either the NYC metropolis or Miami (Kent, 2007).

[53] According to a 2009-2010 report on the demographics of Essex County College, by the school, it is fifty-two percent black, and seventy-nine percent of the population are students of color. Rutgers-Newark garners the title of the most diverse college campus in the country for sixteen years. Currently, twenty percent of the Rutgers-Newark student population is black.

[54] According to the 1980s census cited by Isabel Wilkerson in her book, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2011a).

the five political wards that make up the city: North, East, West, South and Central. The typography changes along with the complexions of the citizens. Latinos and Italians largely live in wards of the North and East with black people interspersed in select pockets. Dominant black populations live in the West, Central and South with Latinos interspersed between.

Drive north on Bloomfield Avenue, starting from the outliers of downtown Newark and heading towards the more affluent areas such as Glen Ridge and Montclair Township, the signage on shops are written in combinations of English, Spanish, and *Spanglish*, a hybrid dialect fusing Spanish and English vernaculars. Various flags of Latino countries fly from commercial properties, or national indicators painted onto the signs. Bakers announce sales of fresh Italian bread, cannoli, tiramisu, empanadas, flan, and trés leches desserts. The naming of schools change to Spanish surnames, and intersections honoring notable Latinos by naming them Roberto Clemente Elementary School in North Newark, and a Frederico Velez, Esq. Place on Bloomfield and Clinton Avenue map through the ward.

Walking eastward via Ferry Street, visitors will be greeted by a subdivision of Newark known as Ironbound because of its narrow streets that taper into slimmer passageways. The Ironbound is a popular section of the city separated from the other wards by the New Jersey transit line. Cross over the bridges of the trains, and step into old world Spain and Portugal fused with former colonial subjects, such as Brazilians, Cape Verdeans, Angolans, Cubans, Central Americans, and Peruvians (Buechler, 2014). Famous Spanish restaurants are located next to modern tapas eateries, Spanish grocery stores, and Brazilian steakhouses advertising "authentic" *churrascaria* BBQ. Customers

line up for the dozens of Pan-Latin coffee shops selling *café con leche* (coffee and cream) next to *suco de caju* (cashew juice), donuts, and *pão de queijo*, a cheese bread that is a popular street food in Brazil. On buildings, there are advertisements for Brazilian waxes, hookah water pipes, and *salon de belleza* (beauty salons). Out of the stores, there is an array of music representing different sounds of Latin America from salsa, bachata, Teijano, meringue and Reggaeton.

Ironbound hosts the annual "Portuguese Day Parade" that holds a special ceremony at the main church resting where Ferry forks off into the residential areas that have intimate, constricting streets like areas of Manhattan. Just across Raymond Avenue, going northeast is the recently built Red Bull soccer stadium pronouncing a grander international Latin flair. Nestled off the Passaic River in the Eastward is an enclave of Italian-American Newarkers who never left Newark, in spite of white flight in the mid-to-late-twentieth century. They coexist with residents in Ironbound. Additionally, Ironbound is promoted by the City of Newark as the international destination with highlights of its antiquated European charm with modern Latino features.[55]

On the other side of town, across the train track that divide the city, traveling south of City Hall then up to Clinton Avenue into the South Ward, there are several Protestant churches representing a multitude of denominations from African Methodist Episcopal to Ghanaian Apostolic. Between Muhammad Ali Avenue and Clinton, there sits a hotel on the corner known to longtime residents as the place where controversial African-American spiritual leader Father Divine passed out food and ministered to

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[55] It is featured as the "go to" place in Newark for tourists and for attendees of Super Bowl 2014, which was played not too far in Meadowlands, New Jersey.

Newarkers.[56] There are synagogues retrofitted to Baptist and C.O.G.I.C. (Church of God in Christ) sanctuaries, and a Roman Catholic Church south of Market Street named after a black saint with his picture painted on the exterior. Mosques attended by a black, Arab and Latino Muslim population dot the city landscape between popular Crown Chicken dives known colloquially as "chicken shacks," barbeque dives, fish fry eateries (Allen, 2012), barbershops, and hair salons advertising sew-in weaves and $25 dread retwists.[57] Dispersed in the middle of small local food restaurants are the disproportionate numbers of liquor stores and ill-stocked corner stores often identified as *bodegas*, a Spanish reference to a mini-mart.

Streets such as Martin Luther King, Jr. a staple road in most cities, intersects with Reverend William D. Watley Plaza. There is a Malcolm X Shabazz High School and public housing named the Betty Shabazz Village. In addition, there is a senior citizen facility dedicated to the first black mayor of Newark, Kenneth Gibson, and a residential building named after the highly controversial mayor of several decades, Sharpe James. Between the Central and South wards to Weequahic Park, there are enclaves of massive, well-manicured Victorian homes signaling a black middle class that often remains invisible, but houses prominent residents and notables of the city. This area, once occupied by Jewish wealth and, before then, manufacturing barons of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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[56] Father Divine was an African American spiritual leader best known for his radical teachings of which he identified as God thus the name, Father Divine. He started his church in Harlem, but his teaching spread throughout the northeast. Newark was one of the cities where he had numerous followers (Watts, 1995).

[57] Dread retwists is a process of grooming dreadlocks by twisting the base of the lock with gel, pomade, or some type of hair cream.

There are several pockets in downtown Newark reserved for whites. On the eastern side of Broad Street, several strips off the main boulevards and near Rutgers University, whites occupy corporate buildings and the few luxury high rises tucked between banks, corporate-owned structures and state buildings. Whites move about outdoors while in Newark mostly during the day, and usually concentrate around the Gateway buildings standing adjacent to Newark Penn Station, or in charter schools. After sunset, their movements are limited and rare. Usually you see white people at night to attend National Hockey League games or rock concerts at the Prudential sports and performance arena, or at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. It is most obvious when white folk are out-and-about by the overwhelming police presence. Beat cops and K-9 units circle the lobbies of Penn Station and the perimeters of Prudential Center and NJPAC. Squad cars block off streets and congest local traffic. Mounted police officers patrol the area making Newark safer for some, while crime runs rampant in other sections of the city.

Blackness in Brick City. January 18, 2014: funeral services held for legendary Newark poet, radical intellectual and African America activist, Amiri Baraka at Newark Symphony Hall brought thousands of mourners. The crowd consisted of locals, as well as national and international guests of a variety of races, ethnicities, religions, and political affiliations – convening to celebrate the life of a man who is inseparable from black power, arts, and politics in Newark. At the funeral, speakers referred to his family as the "First Family," and repeatedly connected his leadership before and after the 1967 riots to bringing blacks into power. Under Baraka and a collective of other champions, Newark serves as a template to study black political power in the urban north.

Led by Baraka, African-Americans, along with a handful of Puerto Rican nationalists captured the power of the city once heavily guarded by Italian, Irish, Spanish and Jewish authority in 1967.[58] In 1970, Newark hosted the first National Black Power Conference. The black power politics ushered in the first black mayor in the Northeastern part of the country in 1972 with the win of Kenneth Gipson who served several terms. Within a decade, blacks, Puerto Ricans and Cubans held most of the prominent positions in the city (Woodard, 1999). Newark's radical history situates the city as a black space, while the growing presence of black internationals, I argue, have evolved Newark into a diasporic space.

Black political power did not transfer into an enfranchised city. The black vanguard has had a troubled journey in creating an urban center that provided a better quality of living for its mostly black population. In fact, data shows that Newark has high levels of illiteracy, high school dropouts, non-homeownership, incarceration, and poverty (Gillespie, 2012). In 2010, it was named as one of the sixteen cities facing bankruptcy (Lubin & Goldman, 2010). In 2012, Newark still dealt with serious fiscal problems leading to the city council and Mayor Booker clashing over issues such as getting the Prudential Center to satisfy unpaid water and electric bills that have accumulated to millions of dollars, or whether or not the city should privatize sanitation and its water source (Giambusso, 2012). In 2014, at the height of a contentious mayoral race after Corey Booker left after winning a congressional Senate seat, Newark faced a deficit threatening the city's ability to hire more cops (Giambusso, 2014).

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[58] It must be mentioned that not all leaders and members of the Puerto Rican community supported the efforts of Baraka.

The newly elected mayor, Ras Baraka, son of Amiri Baraka, attempted to cut

decrease deficit by selling vacant lots and foreclosed homes owned by the city, and has

programs for city employees and teachers to purchase affordable homes; however, these

efforts barely dent the accumulation of debt in a city with longstanding issues. The black

political infrastructure is in name only in most cases, as old families who brokered the

city decades ago remain property owners or connected to decision making to the city.

Cinema Landscape of Newark

Like most cities or sections of metropolises significantly occupied by people of

color and working class or poor populations, their recreation sites, sports arenas, and

other public social spaces shut down or were left neglected, including movie theaters

(Watkins, 1998). In terms of cinema going, residents held few options: they either

attended the few remaining ragged theaters or traveled to suburbs where theaters

relocated (Scott, 2013; Smith, 2012). Spawned by an emerging home video culture and

the pirated movie industry that changed media across the globe, many chose neither, and

cultivated their own sites and reception practices. Not long after the birth of Nollywood

in 1992, the first VCD tapes made it to America, right at the height of a media crisis in

Hollywood. U.S. media monopoly faltered due to pirated music and movies circulating

heavily in cities (Sinnreich, Graham, & Trammell, 2011; Boyd, 2011; Patry, 2009). With

much of its DNA situated in the global piracy enterprises, Nollywood arrived at the

perfect moment, providing fertile soil to develop within diasporic populations.

Miriam Hansen (1994) argues that a shift in spectatorship intertwines with a shift

in the public sphere. It creates "seams and fissures" in institutions forced to create

transitional spaces replacing and challenging classical modes of consumption and sites of

exhibition. Inner city public life in Newark reintroduced outdoor vending and market culture,[59] focusing a bulk of its products on media and knockoff accessories.

Beth Buggenhagen (2012), Christopher Steiner (2002), and Paul Stoller's (2002) work on African street vendors in New York show how street merchants created a niche in unregulated economic system. In this study, they found out that counterfeited movies are a part of the wares that they peddled. Hawking pirated movies is practiced by Newark vendors, who work in a regional network of vendors traveling between New York, Connecticut and New Jersey (Gaber, 1994). Vendors supplied a population forgotten by Hollywood, and were largely left alone until recent redevelopment efforts displaced and incarcerated the outdoor marketers for licensing and piracy violations.[60] Still, the shift from theaters to alternative reception sites changed how audiences experience films and their agency in spectatorship. It also allowed other film industries to garner footing on the home terrain of a media goliath.

The time was ripe for a movie industry other than Hollywood to proliferate through pirated networks and emerge in the U.S. because it diffused media control and placed it to some degree in the hands of the people. Particularly, with populations struggling in the inner cities still desiring to be a part of modernity by an emerging home video culture and the pirated movie industry that changed media across the globe. According to Butsch (2000, 2008), an imposing cultural ideology dictates how public aggregations should behave. He situates audiences at the nerve center of long-standing

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[59] From the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, Newark had a vibrant outdoor market culture.

[60] Reports by local news cover an arrest made in Newark of two men who ran a pirated movie network. The article states that Newark is a major hub for street vendors. Article found on March 2014 at: http://patch.com/new-jersey/newarknj/two-men-arrested-on-movie-pirating-charges.

hegemonic struggles over regulation of public gatherings and citizenship in the United States.

Inner city audiences like those in Newark defined their own citizenship by employing technologies to create an unregulated media landscapes when the dominant one collapsed. The illegal became the acceptable form of viewership, fueling a critical sector in local economy, and developing another dimension of spectatorship.

In this study, I embed Newark into Nollywood as a location that diasporic audiences are remaining steadfast in the unpredictable climates in the city. Downtown Newark is an animated urban terrain filled with vibrant black people you can extract from Broad Street and Market Street then place in Abuja, Lagos, Accra, Johannesburg, Dakar or Casablanca and not know the difference. This is partly because some Newarkers recently emigrated from Africa, but mostly because residents are using a media like Nollywood to assist in navigating dire economic, public safety, and political conditions shaping the terrain of Newark, like Nigerian audiences. Johnathan Haynes (2007) embeds the city of Lagos into the identity of Nollywood, describing both as resolute entities forming coping mechanisms in some of the most apocalyptic climates.

Newark remains afloat on the backs and wills of undereducated, under-resourced and maligned predominantly black and Latino peoples. The city encapsulates how technological advances and the accessibility of cheaper consumer electronics increases in the U.S., but the infrastructures and institutions of the inner city decline along with the quality of life for its residents. Interestingly, urban audiences grew (Sieving, 2011). The growth of technology made consumer electronics cheaper, and more accessible. In turn, the apparatuses — i.e. VCRs, DVDs, computers, smart phones — provided alternative

avenues to watch movies outside of the theaters by outfitting homes initially, and then moving to mobile spaces. Although movie watching outside of the theater is not a novel idea, providing a lens into a population usually explored from a position of deviance offers a refreshing perspective of how spaces of viewing emerge under duress and paucity.

Added to the woes of Newark has been a negative depiction of the city in media since the 1967 civil unrest. Local news depicted the uprising as angry black citizens shooting at officers and causing mayhem in the city, but more investigative documentation revealed that black Newarkers endured a long-standing hostile relationship with law enforcement resulting in police brutality (Curvin, 2014). From then on, Newark was framed as a fledgling metropolis.

Inner City Views, This Ain't Living. The headquarters of the state's premier print news outlet, the *Star Ledger*, was once the Orpheum Theater, a playhouse and cinema house catering to black residents from 1925 until it was closed and then purchased by the news agency (Kukla, 2002). Newark had approximately forty-eight theaters in total from the early 1900s to early 1990s. Today, only two exist. One is a twelve-screen multiplex built by former NBA player and Newark native, Shaquille O'Neal, and the other is a two-screen adult theater catering to gay men. Out of the fifty-one theaters accounted for since the erection of the first at the turn of the twentieth century, seventeen were located in downtown Newark and seven more operated in the Central Ward.[61] Illustration 2.1 shows a theater that has been closed since the 1980s.

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[61] Downtown Newark is in the Central Ward.

Illustration 2.1 Neglected Newark Theater in Downtown District

Most theaters closed by the early '50s, and the remaining, with the exception of

one, gradually closed down after the 1967 riots. There is a correlation between the

increase of blacks and the closing of recreational sites. Up until 1949, blacks were

confined to certain areas of the city. For example, downtown Newark was a "whites

only" area. Blacks only visited downtown if they were in the service of a white employer

or entertaining at one of the many all-white nightclubs, operating similar to the Cotton

Club in Harlem that hired all-black entertainment. Kukla (2002) writes:

> Blacks in Newark had to sit in theater balconies. Restaurants and public
> accommodations also remained off limits. That was the law, a demeaning state of
> affairs perpetuated until 1949, when, at the behest of attorney and civil rights

leader Herbert Tate, Sr., Essex County legislature Grace Freeman convinces her
colleges in Trenton State House to change it (p.7).

How could a city rich in cinema house history seem to be without cinema houses to serve

present-day Newarkers while there are still active film audiences? Indeed, Newark offers

a rich landscape where the crossings of media and identity elicit uncharted intersections

that warrant further investigation. To understand this landscape, I will provide a

conceptual framework looking at how each group member navigates identity in this

climate.

In closing, Newark is an important location to narrate the emergence of

Nollywood in the U.S. By the 1990s, it bottomed out economically, politically, and

socially. The city experienced a sharp increase in African and Caribbean immigrant

populations – a number that is still growing. Their activities were augmented by an

emerging home video culture and pirated movie industry that changed media across the

globe.

Northern Hostilities

Newark's evolution disregards the common narrative of Northern territories in the

U.S. as a protectorate of African-Americans and a welcoming place for immigrants.

Interwoven in Newark's socioeconomic and political legacies are xenophobic,

discriminatory practices establishing racial and ethnic hierarchical structures that resulted

in generations of inequities.

While the newly formed United States moved towards democratic governance and

northern states worked to abolish slavery at the turn of the nineteenth century, Newark

operated under racialized and ethnic-specific feudal systems in which those in power

hoarded resources for their constituencies. Added, the city's authority, along with other

New Jersey residents, openly supported slavery because of their economic relationships with slaveholding companies in the South; hence, the passage of anti-slavery laws in New Jersey occurred sixty years after states in the north abolished slavery. When slavery ended, the initial Dutch and English manufacturing barons extracted as much of the industry and economy before they left, leaving the next group, Irish, German, Polish and Italian immigrants with a city in deficit.

As new blocs of power emerged, they maintained practices of previous power brokers — hoarding resources then doling them out to their respective ethnic networks — resulting in the change of ethnic and racial representation, while a broken, inequitable infrastructure remained. The difference between the main blocs of power is that some enjoyed more protections under white privilege and were able to accumulate more wealth than other groups. Newark experienced waves of ethnic groups coming into power such as Southern Italians, Jews, Spanish, Irish, Portuguese and African-American. The evidence of their presence remains in the city as I previously explored.

African-Americans are the most recent dominant political bloc, but this fails to translate in empowering blacks in the city. Today, Newark deals with issues of poverty, low education attainment, joblessness. Systemic disenfranchisement increased when blacks assumed power in a city that had been gutted of its resources like before. Added, African-Americans dealt with internal issues that included failed leadership. By the 1960s, blacks dominated in number, but never fully gained control of moving the city forward. Samuel Watkins (2005) describes the social, political and economic challenges that exploded in the 1990s were a failure of the Civil Rights and Black Power generations to deliver true power to subsequent generations following. In response, a bold public

African American culture of autonomy emerged in response to unpredictable economic and social changes. Previous generations engaged the status quo, asking or demanding equal rights or better treatment. Watkins identifies the new thinking as one of independence. While this was occurring, pirated movies began to circulate and disrupt media monopolies.

Not long after the birth of Nollywood in 1992, the first VCR tapes made it to America right at the height of a media crisis in Hollywood. U.S. media monopoly faltered due to pirated music and movies circulating heavily in cities (Sinnreich, Graham, & Trammell, 2011; Boyd, 2011; Patry, 2009). With much of its DNA situated in the global piracy enterprises, Nollywood arrived at the perfect moment, providing fertile soil to develop within diasporic populations.

I argue that the push of independent thought and systems is one explanation of counterfeited movies becoming a visible trade in Newark. The other aligns with Glen David Kueker and Thomas Hall's (2011) assertion that communities who have experienced collapse know how to be creative in precarious economic times. Pirated movies are unregulated by the government, thus providing agency to those who engage. In the 1990s, Newark was almost deplete of movie theaters. Using pirated films became a necessity, and operated as currency in the bold culture of independence from the status quo.

CHAPTER THREE:

NARRATING BLACK IDENTITIES: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I set up a conceptual framework and research design that guides my findings. The conceptual framework examines black identities then utilizes the concept of diasporic communicative spaces (Hepp, 2009) to unveil identity narratives that take place around the process of imagining, constructing, and performing identity. The conceptual framework looks at how members of the diaspora use mediated messages to suture their identities and create connections between homeland and host country. In the research design, I explicate the procedures I followed in a multi-sited ethnography and end with my responsibilities as a researcher. This section sets up the framework for the findings outlined in subsequent chapters.

Black Identities in the U.S.

A previous overview in the first chapter, explained how each group in this study resettled in the U.S. under historically and politically textured situations (Tettey and Puplampu, 2005; Hintzen and Rahier, 2003; Adeleke, 1998), this section focuses on how they all negotiate "Blackness" or the subjectivity of "being black" in the United States. Blackness in this study entails double-consciousness, a concept coined by W.E.B DuBois (1903), to indicate that blackness exists as the "other" in dominant American ideology, at the same time; blackness also reconciles an explicit membership in African identity. DuBois opens a discourse that approaches blackness as a hybrid state. It is the navigation

of power structures that he saw as worlds that at times collide, while in other instances

co-exist under delicate and even obscure circumstances.

A famous quotation by DuBois often cited in his treatise is: "The problem of the

twentieth century is the problem of the color line." DuBois surmised that African-

Americans had two selves warring against each other because of the racial hierarchies in

the U.S. He furthers, African-Americans experience an existential pain because they

analyze themselves and often perform through the standards of dominant culture. DuBois

describes the process as "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in

amused contempt and pity." In his writings, the soul is identity. He magnifies the

dilemma in his treatise to explore the uncomfortable and sometimes hazardous daily work

of negotiating black and American identity. Though DuBois outlines a theory proposing

that black people in the United States operate with multiple streams of consciousness, he

also links the oppression of African-Americans to Western imperialistic subjugation

experienced by people of color in the Americas, Caribbean, Africa, and Asia, and spends

a portion of his life advocating for the interests of Africa (Gomez, 2004). DuBois'

political theorizing provides a rich framework for looking at the identity of the African

Diaspora.

To scholars that study black identity in the United States, the colored lines of

belonging have confined it to just that, being black (Butterfield, 2004). Hintzen and

Raheir (2003) declare the preeminence of race attaches black people to a system of

categorization linking blackness to a set of undesirable attributes (p. 4). Blackness is even

more problematic to Taiwo (2003) because it is a fictitious category embedded within a

historical construct, and a dehumanizing process limiting the exploration and movement

in racial discourse (p. 42); so much so that race becomes a biological predictor of social practices, and is used as the rationalizations for presumptions of cognitive aptitude (Jackson, Caldwell, & Sellers, 2012).

While Hintzen and Rahier (2003) argue that race reduces "contestations over economic, cultural, and ideological formations" in the practices of blackness, Jackson, Caldwell, & Sellers (2012) and Okpewho (2001) make note of the economic, cultural and social institutions that incorporate race in its operational policies and ideology. White (2012) locates a critical moment in policity that shows how black people were regulated and blackness was codified in her exploration of the 1896 landmark judicial case Plessy v. Ferguson. The ruling passed, supporting racial segregation and making being black an inferior form of citizenship, which in turn allowed black people to be treated in discriminatory ways.

Long-standing media representations of derogatory images of black people, joined with the social-cultural political baggage it brings, make constructing and performing identity a daily, complex, and conscious process for native-born black populations, as well as for black immigrants (Hintzen and Rahier, 2003). Margaret Greaves' (2012) work on minstrel shows, examines the residual effects of minstrels — such as black face caricatures — are seen in unexpected places around the globe such as minstrel shows present-day, black-faced soccer fans in Europe or at festivals such as the "Coon Carnival" in South Africa (Pacey, 2014; Martin, 1999). Timothy Havens (2014) explores how black representation is interpreted when it travels to spectators around the world, while Jenny Sharp and Samantha Pinto (2006) look at how Caribbean people are represented in Western media.

Squires (2002) subverts DuBoisian notions of black being looked at as a position of disempowerment with an examination involving blacks who create cultural products that resist and co-exist with dominant discourse in what she calls "enclaves of black public sphere." According to Squires, being black entails efforts in exercising agency and conveying experiences from a lens that protests mainstream thought, and simultaneously shapes representation and meaning from the position of the subject in contestations occurring between public and private spheres. Taking from the arguments of Squires, the next section pulls from literature drawing attention to how Africans and Caribbeans navigate blackness and identity. Literature on African identity looks at how Africans destabilize blackness by choosing to employ Africanness as a practice of identity. In addition, black Caribbean diaspora members construct identities that pull from model-minority immigration models, as well as introducing another form of blackness deviating from mainstream notions of being black.

African Identity

"Not all Africans are black, nor do all black people consider themselves African"
(Tettey, 2001)

Starting with continental Africans, I borrow the exploration of African identity and belonging by Tettey and Puplampu (2005), who highlight the complexities of African identity in their study of African migrants. The quotation at the beginning of this section constitutes the argument that blackness and being African are not mutually exclusive because not all members of the African diaspora are racially black, but at the same time, all of those who are racially black do not necessarily carry African citizenship, nor have ever participated in the African experience. Tettey and Puplampu resound the concern of

a host of scholars who insist that African identity in the United States is complicated by the over-emphasis of race and remain inflexible in the constraints that disregard the possibilities of complex ethnic structures in black populations, and especially in African populations (Taiwo, 2003; Hintzen and Rahier, 2003; Davies & Jardin, 2003; Davies, 1999). In many ways, African migrants are confined to perceptions that Africa is one country and that the realities, racial compositions, phenotypic configurations and cultural systems of Africans are monolithic. Therefore, Tettey and Puplampu insist that African identity move away from African-American notions of blackness and consider Africanness.

Tettey and Puplampu look at four approaches that seek to unpack African identity among diasporans. The first approach looks at African identity and direct experiences in Africa. The second explores the tension of labor between continental Africans and other blacks. The third looks at hybrid African identity found in children of migrants, and lastly, they examine African identity from an essentialist perspective. Although the study of Tettey and Puplampu takes place in Canada, their exploration can be aptly applied in this research. Similar to Africans in the United States, race is salient to the African-Canadian experience (Francis, 2009). As well, hegemonic African-American identity discourse leaks into dialogue around identity in black and African populations in Canada (Tettey and Puplampu, 2005). In fact, black Canadians share historical ties with black Americans (Nelson, 2010; Winks, 1997), and in some ways, approach blackness with analogous systems. Tettey and Puplampu, disrupt black identity in North America by opting for continental African migrants to use "Africanness" instead of blackness in addressing identity construction and membership in the African diaspora.

The first approach is wrapped around a formal citizenship in Africa and a passport that indicates a belonging to an identifiable nation, direct bloodline, and group. This perspective pushes away from citizenship absent of reifying blackness because it is represented as pathological and deviant through the lens of hegemony. They argue that the first, and most critical, requirement is to either have been born there, or have recent, direct and traceable kinship. Employing the writings of Adeleke (2004, 1999, 1998b, 1998a), Tettey and Puplampu contend that black American identity is a cultural product and identity rooted in an American experience, whereas African identity is located in Africa, and thus an African cultural product. They contend that Africanness or being African can only come from one who understands the intricacies of Africa because they have experienced the complexity that occurs in performing within social structures that host a variety of identities that are linked to an array of cultural realities, languages and traditions. With that said, Tettey and Puplampu point out that Africans not only occupy an array of social statuses before they left home, but they migrate under distinctive circumstances. Upon arrival, they ascribe to different social statuses that change in a number of ways due to the access of capital and educational attainment. Once in North America, they maintain significant linkages to home and culture that also play out in their host country; however, these linkages entail social-political alliances as well as ethnic, tribal, economic and religious tensions in new territories that cannot be captured under the dynamic of blackness.

According to Tettey and Puplampu, the inflexibility of racial discourse in North America neglects to unpack the emergence of hyper-local African identities transplanted to host countries. Some examples of these practices are the chieftaincy institutions in the

Asante people of Ghana and Ivory Coast used to mobilize the fragmented diasporic

populations in Ghana (Amoako, 2006), and the ancestral hometown associations that are

seen in Nigerian immigrants that have created a structured system for remittance of funds

to their homeland (Abbott, 2006). As well, Senegalese communes in Manhattan

apartment complexes — known as vertical villages because they simulate some of the

social, cultural, and material traditions of rural villages in Senegal (N'Diaye & N'diaye

2006) — are extraordinary contrasting realities to New York City that narrate very

different stories of adaptation of African reality in the West.

The second approach when considering African identity is the political economics

that mark continental Africans differently in the labor market from other blacks. The

tension between Africans and black groups who vie for employability in a labor market

where Africans appear to be more educated and employable (Pierre, 2004). Identity

comes into play when accessing economic, political and cultural resources because access

depends on how the external world categorizes black residents (Kasintz, 2006). As also

seen in black Caribbean communities, Africans emphasize an African identity rather than

a black identity to establish a distinct belonging that is not associated to disempowering

frames mainstream discourse in the West attaches to being black (Waters, 2009). In

addition, continental African migrants must exist within what Charles Abbot (2006) calls

a "moral economy," or the expectation to provide their earnings and monies to their home

country and especially their family. A moral economy is interconnected to a familial

relationship persisting beyond communication and lineage ties, but exists with daily

identity practices determining the capabilities of a person's financial contributions.

Moreover, identity is transferred to the economic stability of the home country, due to the

remittances in Africa that are critical to the subsistence of local and state governments; resulting in the political voice and concerns of diasporic citizens.

The third approach is found in the complicated identification processes of children who have parents that are African born, but do not identify as African because they have been totally immersed in the social milieu of another country. I assert that Tettey and Puplampu focus on a hybrid identity dissimilar to DuBois. The second-generation continental African hybrid identity is a result of being geographically relocated, but not necessarily severed from culture or genetic linkages as African-Americans to Africa. Second generation African immigrants are connected by way of the parents who provide a home life that emphasizes homeland culture and a known genealogical connection that is situated within a specific location in Africa. Though the children practice behaviors that are from their host countries, the private sphere serves as referential point of their native identity (LaBennet, 2011).

The fourth and final approach explored is based in the case that there are a set of beliefs that invoke a collective memory bank consisting of shared set of common values, particularly when African identity is performed in the diaspora. Similar to the Jewish diaspora's attempts to suture a fragmented (Zeitlin, 2012), heterogeneous population, this approach by Africanist scholars is an essentialist notion that believes Africans have a clear-cut set of values across the board connecting them philosophically and spiritually. Though Africans know they are heterogeneous, making general membership claims allows them to be a part of an imagined homogenous identity clearly linking them to homeland and its people.

Caribbean Identity

Much of Caribbean identity performance overlaps with that of continental African migrants; however, the Caribbean identity process entails a fluidity of racial selves and ethnic belonging that allows both to exist in a symbiotic relationship to navigate the unavoidable racial discourse in the United States (Butterfield, 2006; Pierre, 2004; Hintzen and Rahier, 2003). Undoubtedly, black Caribbean peoples carry an identity connected to their national origins, a status giving prominence to ethnic and pan-ethnic membership; at the same time, they realize how race mitigates and undermines ethnic performances (Hintzen, 2013). Furthermore, the longer historical interaction between black Caribbean immigrants and African-Americans — in addition to Caribbean migration to the country before continental Africans — have presented issues around social and economic disenfranchisement that were considered to be pathological behaviors of African-Americans (Pierre, 2004). Yet and still, Caribbean identity performance disrupts "the meanings, representations, and practices of blackness" (Hintzen and Rahier, 2003, p.2).

It is important to locate the intersection between Caribbean and African migrants in order to understand distinctive Caribbean identity performance or construction. Scholars posit that African migrants and Caribbean migrants come to America and maintain a distinct set of cultural expressions (Pierre, 2004; Arthur, 2000; Waters, 1999). These cultures and traditions have been identified as "ethnicities" and have been described as survival tools used for the refusal of cultural assimilation and an instrument of success. Nonetheless, both groups deal with issues surrounding invisibility, along with the difficulties of forming and maintaining ethnic identity when they are defined within

racial parameters (Waters, 2009). As well, the confining parameters present implicit and explicit barriers in exploring self outside of social boundaries; and, the current social system defines and interacts with blackness from a standpoint of pathology (Taiwo, 2003). Furthermore, racial confinement disregards the cultural contributions of black immigrants and it reduces the international power struggle involving immigrants' homelands that are connected to the global power conflicts occurring against white superiority in the United States (Olaniyan, 2003). Overall, the overemphasis of race in identity subjugates human experience to a racialized one.

Also, Caribbean and African immigrants speak to their complex and multifaceted histories that are narrowed in black identity discourse in the United States. Waters (2009) details the complex identities of Caribbean residents in describing how the residents on the island-nation were forged from a range of cultural, political, economic factors including interracial and inter-ethnic intimate relationships. In the United Sates, Caribbean immigrants are immediately thrown into a space where they must reconfigure self and collective identity (p.48). Similar to African migrants, Caribbean immigrants must negotiate the identities they have transported along with their evolving perceptions of social order in a foreign landscape. To maintain a West Indian identity or at the very least, to be connected to West Indian cultures, Waters (1999, 2009) purports that networks are formed similar to that of a spider web, linking immigrants to a larger community. However, Bashi (2007) contends that these networks are not as deliberate as they are made out to be, but are communities knitted together to survive and effectively navigate through an "unequal global economy" and "a global racial hierarchy" that is comprised of complicated migration patterns and transnational systems (p. 35). Whereas

Waters points to membership affiliations such as the Brooklyn West Indian day parade to demonstrate Caribbean networks, Butterfield (2006) displays the selective networking that is practiced within West Indian groups by recounting how students at a Brooklyn high school interact with hyper-local and sometimes pan-Caribbean affiliations.

Employing and appropriating a "model minority" identity is a way Caribbean and African migrants overlap (Pierre, 2004). West Indian identity incorporates a slightly different distinction than African identity. According to Hintzen (2010) West Indian identity exoticizes its immigrant status through bacchanalian imageries, while at the same time taking up a blackness that is postured to be a cultural product of the Caribbean rather than one sculpted within the racial discourse of the United States. Whereas both groups use their immigration status and ethnic signifiers to situate themselves as templates of successful minority collectives, Hintzen (2010) contends that Caribbean immigrants produce representations that are high-spirited, hypersexual, accommodating, and ultimately non-threatening to the dominant power structure. He says that Caribbean identity is complicated because on one hand, it validates notions of inferiority, but on the other hand, it is situated as modern subjectivity through attempting model minority status.

Modern Caribbean subjectivity is linked to success that has been attained through meritocracy, while simultaneously being composed of racialized elements around blackness. Since Caribbean identity attempts to place itself outside of U.S. racial parameters, the upward mobility is seen as being drawn from a foreign background, and a transnational black subjectivity that is exempt from African-American belonging. Caribbean practices of blackness are also connected to an identity that asserts the retention of African roots more than African-Americans who are constructed as being

culturally and morally lost due to their assimilation into American cultural and social orders. But as Hintzen (2010) points out, Caribbean immigrants depend on African-American social and political power for access to social and employment opportunities, as well as protection against the very racial discrimination that they claim is circumvented as a result of an outsider ethnic consciousness.

Claims of them belonging to a "mother country" make Caribbean identity even more complex. An unmitigated African ancestry is perceived to be inferior to the roots of the former European colonial nations that are recognized as the "mother country." Though presented in inequitable terms, the multicultural background compounded by economic and social success in the global economy is essential in constructing the constraints and contradictions within a modernity discourse. White (2012) explains that modernity in the African diaspora centers achievements in the global markets along with technologically progress in contemporary industrialization (p. 1). The connection to an African origin is critical in providing distinction from a European ideology, but it also reifies their cooperation with hegemonic discourse, suggesting that Caribbean identity clashes with the dominant discourse in the areas where it rejects African-Americanness and Americanization, but sometimes operates within its systems to secure legitimacy.

In one strain of thought, the maintenance of an ethnic identity and Caribbean hyper-collectivity is cited as the essential component in experiencing economic and social upward mobility in the United States (Hintzen, 2010; Waters, 1999, 2001). Conversely, the other strain of thought surmises that an essentialist approach of Caribbean identity. This perspectives suggests that immigrants are inherently equipped with cultural signifiers that buffer them from a U.S.-based hegemonic racial

infrastructure — sets them up to participate in citizenship under subjective and subjugating terms that were not experienced by immigrants in the European immigration influx of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. The first thrust implies that by rejecting Americanization, assimilation provides a cultural identification rooted in a value and beliefs system that bolsters a reinforced, positive self-image and ethnic belonging that equips immigrants to navigate successfully the dominant institutions without being described by racial strictures binding African-Americans (Waters, 1999, 2001). Their blackness is linked to an immigrant identity that is not European, yet does not carry the stigma of Latino immigrants.

In the second strain of thought, Pierre (2004) argues that essentialist Caribbean identity reifies the racial and cultural pathologies inscribed in African-Americans, while simultaneously stereotyping black immigrants under racist representations of the foreign-born "other" that cannot achieve full citizenships because of their inability to assimilate like their white European counterparts (Butsch, 2007; Hintzen and Rahier, 1999). Hintzen (2010) and Pierre (2004) contend that Caribbean identity actively negotiates racial discourse. As opposed to previous conjectures regarding Caribbean identity being ambivalent to race, they purport that Caribbean identity in the United States was also forged through African-American and Caribbean alliances that enhanced enfranchisement for native-born and foreign blacks, as well as, contributing to successful anti-colonial struggles in the Caribbean.

Butterfield provides another angle in Caribbean identity focusing on the flow of social and cultural influences. Through her research, Butterfield (2006) argues that an exchange occurs within the co-existence of migrant communities alongside native-born

populations. The cultural swapping that takes place affects the construction and restructuring of identity on both ends. Butterfield responds to Waters' (1999, 2009) assertions that Caribbean identity is assembled by impenetrable cultural traits. Butterfield proposes in her studies with the notion of a "bidirectional" identity construction. Comparable to the dominant position that a consumer of media messages adopts in the encoding/decoding model, Butterfield notes that previous scholars assume the influences of identity are unidirectional. Though Butterfield agrees with Waters that "concepts of self" are affected by the environment of actors in communities, along with the interactions in which they engage (p. 295), Butterfield shifts through the world around immigrants in her argument entailing Caribbean and American elements and interactions that have created a confluence of cultural products flowing each way. More so, the bidirectionality of cultural production also applies to African migrants who also live and interact in these black residences.

Lastly, Butterfield (2004) furthers her argument by pinpointing how gender problematizes identity more. She noticed that black female immigrants were expected to develop a sense of independence and cultural pride that restricts their social movement more so than male immigrants. Ironically, this self-sustainability is stripped in patriarchal home environments and the pressures to surrender independence to their husbands. She notes that gender played a significant role when looking at how male respondents identified with African-American males when they had to deal with law enforcement, disrupting strict notions of traveling one path. Overall, Butterfield demonstrated how Caribbean identity is in constant flux and is informed by the media landscape as well as the social order.

Theories and concepts exploring black identities overwhelmingly agree that a fluid discourse of varying degrees and understandings of belonging are evident. DuBois' double conscious theory introduces the possibilities of an internal struggle for African-Americans with an identity attempting to fit into an American identity. His work shows more of a disjointedness than a connectivity that suggests the fragmented notions of the self by diasporans, but his work is written from a melancholy of a desire to be accepted rather than working through self.

For Tettey and Puplampu, the African diaspora is too broad; thus missing the nuanced identities of Continental Africans. However, I argue that their overemphasis of tribal or ethnic African identity fails to recognize the heterogeneity in African-Americans and Caribbeans too. Tettey and Puplampu's assertions of an authentic African membership are found in current dialogue in the African immigrant community of "Who is the real African-American?" A major thrust in arguments of Tettey and Puplampu assert that U.S.-born blacks are not African; thus, the term is more apropos to African immigrants. The heated debates over who owns the term is parallel to the many names African-Americans call themselves. The unpredictable terrain points to the mutability that African identity already experiences, and for these reasons, shows flaws in Tettey and Puplampu's argument of a finite "an authentic African" identity.

Caribbean identity may seem like a balance of African-American and Africans, but it has its own complex discourse. To be Caribbean can mean many things that fall within or become distant from African-American and African identity. While Hintzen makes strong arguments about Caribbean identity discourse that embraces hypersexual, carnivalesque identity, it is a sweeping assumption that homogenizes this group. I agree

with Jemima Pierre who says, all black Caribbean people, at some point, acknowledge that they are black and tied to other black people — even if they do not like it, it is the inevitability of living in a highly racialized climate. In closing, Sherri-Ann Butterfield's bidirectional flow carries an important implication, blacks do interact cross-culturally; hence their interactions inform personal and group identities.

Diasporic Communicative Spaces

The second and final aspect of my conceptual framework utilizes diasporic communicative spaces to unveil narratives that take place when using media to imagine, construct, and perform identity. Borrowing from Andreas Hepp (2009) and Paul White (2012), I define diasporic communicative spaces as a space "constituting an essential part of the site of [diasporic] engagement within which the message is mediated" (p.148) through translocal transmedia. The concept of the "translocal" comes out of the multiple locales in the movement of migrants between home and the place in which they resettle or temporarily situates themselves. The localities in which they travel inform their identities. Hepp defines transmedia as a "meshing of media" (p.330) with distinct structures, functions, and ways in which they are employed in personal and interpersonal communication.

Diasporic communicative spaces infer a continuous process of cultural and identity negotiations. According to Olga Guedes Bailey (2014), people have multiple positions in the everyday that constitute negotiations: i.e. language, work, travel, moving between domestic and public spaces. In her examination of diasporas using media to negotiate the daily, she contends that diasporans must live outside and inside their diasporas; thus substituting for public and private. Diasporic communicative spaces

compose a branch of communicative spaces that comes out of Jürgen Habermas' work on the public sphere.

      Spheres. Public and private spheres carry traditional intellectual assumptions of existing as binary dimensions. For Dahlgren (1995) the public sphere is a "historically conditioned social space where information, ideas and debate can circulate society and where political opinion can be formed" (p. ix). Livingstone (2005) argues the concept "implies a visible and open forum in which the population participates" (p.6). The public sphere is the external world, classically deemed masculine, Anglo, impersonal, individualized and dedicated to ideological production (Brickell, 2012; Papacharissi, 2009; Pitkin, 1981; Habermas, 1989, 1962). In contrast, the private sphere is the invisible world, feminine, intimate, family-oriented, moral-centric, non-white domain — or the space of the "other" — centering reproductive labor. Rather than co-existing, it is framed as inferior to the dominant public, confined and tucked away, autonomous and unmarred by the outside world (Rosicki, 2012; Brickell, 2012; Walsh, 2010; Klinger, 2006).

      The debate over the dichotomous relationship of public and private spheres is a long-standing discourse in literature (West, Lewis, & Currie, 2012). The public/private binary began with Jürgen Habermas, who examined how political discourse and subsequent action in Western Europe could engage with democratic representation. He described debates taking place at public venues such as offices and coffee shops, and carried out informally by members of the bourgeoisie, mainly consisting of educated male proprietors assembling to converse (Calhoun, 1992; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). Class, race and gender restrictions implied that the unqualified "others" situate themselves in the domestic and hidden private sphere. Unlike the spontaneous, exclusive

gatherings initially proposed by Habermas, Schudson (1997) argues that ideal democratic conversations are "profoundly uncomfortable" (p.299) formalized deliberations comprised of people from different worldviews, articulations and statuses. Communicators employ a problem-solving model emphasizing the importance of creating a space to listen to others' views and articulate one's own comprehensibly.

Fraser (2007) argues that the phallocentric Western European political imaginary still informs the discourse of the public sphere, and cleaves the social world into masculine/feminine, dominant/inferior, legitimate power/illegitimate power tropes (Fraser, 2013; 2007). Added, Fraser proffers contradictions found in conceptualizations of the public sphere. She points to dialogue in private spaces that center on topics debated in public, and to the platform on which public discourse occurs in the media as privately owned entities (Fraser, 1990). In another light, Weintraub (1997) argues the public and private are blurred and fluid dimensions that are multifaceted, complex layers of paired opposition relying on and driven by issues of the social world.

Current discourse on the public-private reconfigurations in the new media landscape further elucidate blurred boundaries. Hansen (1994) argues that a shift in spectatorship intertwines with a shift in the public sphere. It creates "seams and fissures" in institutions such as media that create transitional spaces replacing and challenging classical modes of consumption and sites of exhibition. According to Papacharissi (2010), technology permits geographies of new space, enabling novel conversations and "discoveries of new worlds of expression, activity and prosperity through narratives of utopian hopes and dystopia" (p.7).

Communicative Spaces. Funke, Robe and Wolfson (2012) employ the term "communicative spaces" to provide a working definition of a physical space where "different fragments of the working class" (p.20) were able to meet up and discuss everyday occurrences. In their work, Funke, Robe and Wolson focus on understanding the organization of working communities and how their members use narratives of through their shared experiences to "suture" collective identities. The notion of "suturing" implies a surgical or strategic procedure to effectively mend fractured existences that have been splintered because of an inequitable power structure that divides one from self and community. In this study, the concept will serve as a lens in unpacking how patrons who frequent local shops selling Nollywood interact in their attempts at creating a cohesive diasporic self and camaraderie. As working-class subjects are disjointed, immigrants and migrants experience fragmentation, as well. They, too, make attempts in stitching self into a comprehensive entity (Stewart, 2005).

In the process of building cohesion and dialogue, diasporic communicative spaces foster a democratic dynamic that opens discourse for diasporic identities to be both local and global, fractured and whole (Fazal & Tsagarousianou, 2002). They are spaces where diasporans produce and maintain material that demarcates their status, their belonging, and the boundaries of the space itself (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2011). However, Madianou (2005) says that these spaces are not dictated by ethnic parameters, but social parameters configuring the space to evoke transnational elements of transcending national borders. Hepp (2009) describes diasporic spaces as locating the deterritorialized junctures of diasporic communities; yet capture the materiality of hyper-local interactions that contribute to identity.

Leurs & Ponzanesi (2011, 2012) insist that participants in diasporic spaces find pleasure in being able to assert their agency. Moreover, in these spaces — if they are safe enough — participants move through their contradictions and fragmentations by providing narratives of their experiences to others. Victoria Bernal (2006) adds that diasporic communicative spaces are safe in the first place because they build upon social networks already established on the ground. The communicative spaces extend participants' membership in these networks because it allows them to express dissent or difficulties in navigating their daily experiences without the pressures of the dominant social order or even the political antagonists they might have faced in their homelands if they articulated their views.

In conclusion, communicative networks of diasporans are fluid enterprises flowing across liminalities or third spaces of not being here nor there (Appadurai 1990) and transnational spaces of being here and there. It is indeed a negotiation, but one that attempts to anchor identity in experiences that have dislocated bodies and sense of self. Engaging in diasporic communicative spaces evinces the awareness that identity is beyond "residences and legal citizenships" (Bernal, 2006), and that they are the undercurrents in mobilizing resources and power in host countries.

Research Design

This research encompasses six years of conducting a multi-sited media ethnography. Murphy & Kraidy (2003) define media ethnography as "a research process of forming communities that underscore a systematic and long-term investment in form, purpose, and practice" (p.3). Multi-sited ethnographies occur in plural locations using multidisciplinary approaches. George Marcus (1998) describes multi-sited research as

"following the thing," a practice where the researcher literally traces the movements of people, phenomenon, and cultural material (Falzon, 2005; Holmes & Marcus, 2004, 2005). As well, he argues that multi-sited ethnographies are effective methodological and conceptual methods for research projects looking at local cultures in the context of new world systems such as globalization and transnationalism. Since I was interested in studying the ways black audiences in the U.S. construct their identities, and how a transnational media influences the process, I found this method best suited to the way in which I investigate this issue.

Ethnographies are predicated upon narrating the everyday with thick descriptions of quotidian (Geertz, 1975). In the case of multi-sited ethnographies, they operate as a method to get at the subjective, intimate, and yet fertile processes of how meaning-making of the everyday, self, and media texts can circulate with the movement of the population and their daily activities (Marcus, 1995).

Research Participants. Informants were recruited through a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. I used convenience and snowball sampling to increase the chances of obtaining a sampling population that included all ethnic groups. I selected this strategic and purposeful sampling to strengthen the ability to choose "informants from segments of the social system that are meaningful" (Johnson, 1990, p. 27) to the ethnography. Convenience sampling could be difficult in a city that has a culture where people are cautious about submitting their information. On the other hand, snowball-sampling efforts did not always materialize if referrals did not respond to my outreach. Nonetheless, using both sampling strategies complement each other because they captured two different respondents, one who is sent by way of trust, and the other

who is trusting enough to allow me to interrupt their time and space and be interviewed (Burawoy, 2009).

The research participants of this study include staff of African shops and participants who agreed to at least one interview through sampling efforts. Participants had to identify racially as black, a member of the African diaspora, and be eighteen-years-old or over. Their ages ranged from nineteen to early sixties. All participants had to live, work, or socialize in Newark. Most of the participants were in their twenties and thirties, and lived in Newark as shown in Table 3.1.

After building an informal network of participants over the course of fieldwork, a "well-informed informant" emerged (Johnson, 1990; Wener & Schoepfle, 1987) by the name of Chi Chi. A young woman whose parents are from Nigeria, Chi Chi was born and reared in Newark. Scholars describe well-informed informants as "legendary figures" who are "respected" in their communities (Geertz, 2011). Well-informed informants tend to be elders or gatekeepers in the culture and a part of important decision-making in the social life. However, Chi Chi was different because she was a young woman who held a working-class job and was struggling to complete her associate's degree. She was a valuable informant because she was involved in the social and business life in Newark, and had worked primarily in downtown Newark from the age of ten-years-old until twenty-three. Additionally, Chi Chi had close friendships and associations with all three ethnic groups. Because she worked downtown for so long, she knew a lot of people, and vice-versa. As well, she had a keen historical lens of the gentrification that is taking place in Newark from the 1990s on.

Table 3.1 List of participants in the study

Name	*Ethnicity	**Age	Immigrant/Native
Aissatou	Malian	Unknown	Immigrant
Amadou	Malian	Unknown	Immigrant
Aziza	African-American	31	Native
Chi Chi	Nigerian-American	23	Native
Coco Manu	Cameroonian	43	Immigrant
Dominique	Haitian	21	Immigrant
Effie	Ghanaian-Cruzan	25	Immigrant
Hajja	Nigerian	26	Immigrant
Horus	African-American	43	Native
Jamila	African-American	37	Native
Josiah	Ghanaian	Unknown	Immigrant
Kwesi	Ghanaian	Unknown	Immigrant
Mamawa	Liberian	Unknown	Immigrant
Mimi	Tobagonian	26	Immigrant
Nadia	Ghanaian-American	35	Native
Picasso	African-American	43	Native
Raheem	African-American	Unknown	Native
Tasha	African-American	Unknown	Native
Stephanie	Igbo, Nigerian	19	Immigrant
Vivienne	Haitian	22	Immigrant
Yadira	Afro-Cuban/Latina	33	Native
Yasiin	Black	33	Native

*Self-reported ethnicity   **Age reported during first interview

Other participants were of import, too, but do not consistently emerge as a prominent informant in all three practices that I explored in this study. In each chapter, I explain who plays major and minor roles in the subjects at hand.

I must also mention that I interviewed non-Nollywood audience members to get a better understanding of the history of Newark in terms of the black experience from mid-nineteenth century to today. The oral histories were significant in narrating the shifts that some participants alluded to, but sometimes described in superficial detail. The informants were recruited from a barbershop in Newark I frequent. I visited for services or stopped by. While there, I conducted interviews with clients by first explaining my work and asking them if they could tell me their experiences living, working, and socializing in Newark. This contextualized my study and helped me, a migrant to Newark, understand changes in greater detail.

Interviews were either unstructured or semi-structured. Unstructured interviews were informal talks that were conversational or dialogical (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 223). For semi-structured interviews, I coordinated specific times to meet with my research participants. These interviews were conducted in informal and formal settings, such as cafes, restaurants, in stores, in my office, or at public events. When participants could not meet face-to-face, they were given the option of a telephone interview.

On the phone or in person, interviews were in-depth questions asking participants to describe in great detail, their practices and reception as Nollywood spectators. To direct the main participants, I employed the style of an ethnographic interview, which is a series of interviews over time that focused on how they engaged Nollywood movies and made sense of their identities.

Methods. In 2009, I began working on Nollywood as part of an interpretive methods course. From 2009 to early 2013, I carried out an extensive literature, movie, and film industry analysis. From December 2013 to January 2015, I employed a multi-sited ethnography and conducted unstructured interviews, and semi-structured open-ended interviews as my main methods. From September 2014 to January of 2015, my focus was re-interviewing participants as I began to parse out their stories.

In an effort to stimulate rich narratives from the experiences of participants, I engaged in a process of (a) literature review; (b) participant observation; (c) unstructured interviews; (d) follow up conversations; and (e) more participant observations.

Examining Literature, Movies & Industry. When I first started researching Nollywood in 2009, there were roughly about three dozen scholarly articles. In 2015, there are well over one thousand pieces of literature. This increase required me to stay abreast of Nollywood discourse because it blooms as rapidly as the corresponding industry. Taking multiple tours of the literature assisted me in explaining the complexities of Nollywood within the academy. Though the name derives from Hollywood, it is indeed a different system that operates from a varying worldview. As I was learning more about the development of the industry, I began to look for, and look at, different cultural performances and materials in my fieldwork. More importantly, I incorporated various questions with hopes to enrich the narratives of the study's participants and how they employ Nollywood in the everyday — and even in the most intimate moments that they negotiate identity.

Media ethnography has been accused of being either empirically thin or flawed due to the "underdevelopment of field experience" by the researcher (Kraidy & Murphy,

2004, p. 3). Thankfully, Kraidy & Murphy point to the institutional barriers and the resources that can stifle a full and rich ethnography, but challenge researchers to work around challenges so that scholarship can begin to examine the microsystems involved in the use of media. Living in Newark reduced travel expenses and allowed me to embed myself often in my field site. While this was a benefit, I had to learn that ethnography requires the researcher to balance their project and personal lives.

Along with reviewing Nollywood, I had to consider the distinct identities of three groups of blacks in the U.S. as well as look at their interactions with each other and media. Once I focused on the third phase of my work, re-interviewing participants, I had to go back to material that best captured the media practices that they narrated. Reviewing Nollywood discourse was a rigorous process and a significant part of my research methods. It took several years of compiling and reading literature, and comparing it to how the industry was growing in the U.S. I have attended awards and social events in the U.S. featuring Nollywood actors and regularly read popular blogs from African and diasporan writers such *Bellanaija*, *Nollywood Access*, *360nobs*, *Culture Shock Nigerians* and *Nollywood Uncut*. My literature review included ongoing conversations with researchers who are the first wave of Nollywood scholars with whom I met at a conference in 2009 at the Johannes Gutenburg University of Mainz in Germany.[62]

Participant Observation, First Phase: In the first part of participant observation, I visited each shop for about twenty minutes on the same day about every two months for

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[62] I presented preliminary findings of my work at the international symposium, "Nollywood and Beyond: Transnational Dimensions of African Video Film Industry" in 2009. The scholars there are the leading Nollywood researchers today.

one year. While there, I made it a point to speak to all of the staff, which usually meant one or two people. I purchased Nollywood during some of my visits. Other times I bought food items or nothing at all. When I visited, I made sure to greet employees and patrons. At times, I engaged in "on the hoof" (Ely, 1991, p. 57) interviews with staff or other patrons. These informal interviews went on without much planning, but assisted in my preliminary work in sampling a population. The impromptu interviews and unplanned visits assisted in me forming a sense of community.

I performed the same routine with all local shops since I am a member of the neighborhood. When I did buy movies, I asked the shopkeepers about the latest Nollywood arrivals and sought their recommendations. If a patron entered the shop during my observations, I struck up a conversation by asking them for their preference. I used this practice as an entry point to ask them questions like "Why did you pick a certain movie" and "What is it that you like about Nollywood". I attempted to push the conversations further by asking where they were from and if they liked Newark. If the respondent permitted, I asked them to elaborate on their impressions of the characters in the movies they preferred, what was their favorite genre, and if they had a favorite actor, and who were their favorite actors, if they have one.

This methodology also included my participant-observation in annual events hosted by black/African organizations or celebrating black/African culture that I have been attending since August 2009. I started with the "Sounds of the City" outdoor concerts during the summer in the courtyard of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, and have attended the African-American cultural parades, the Lincoln Park music festival in July, and the House Music festival in May, along with a host of farmer's markets.

Newark is a small city, so I tried to participate in most of the festivals and events that celebrate African-American, African, or Caribbean culture. In the beginning stages, I learned that not only do you have to show up to the sites that you are observing, but that you also take part in the nuances of everyday life (Geertz, 2001). The festivals allowed me to get a sense of black festival participants who are local, and those who come to Newark to socialize. I purposely selected summertime events in hopes of the likelihood to recruit participants who live in border towns and suburban areas, but still come to Newark to socialize. The use of Newark as a hub for social and cultural events is a noticeable trend in black-middle class communities that participate in a phenomena called "strategic assimilation" (Lacy, 2004), where they privilege black communities to socialize even though they live in predominantly white or non-black suburbs.

Unstructured Interviews. Unstructured interviews have occurred in and around shops or street vendors who sold Nollywood or other items. I engaged in conversations with shop and street vendors, as well as their patrons who spoke with me as they perused through movie selections, but most did not commit to a follow up interview. The impromptu conversations while in motion is part of the "deep, organic matter" (Nelligan & Mauro, 2008, p.11) of Newark. It is a city in constant motion during business hours, as that is when most of the downtown district is pulsating and most businesses make their money. Moreover, people were jumping onto buses or walking to trains attempting to get to their destination as soon as they can, so talking quick and straight to the point is regular in these unstructured interviews.

The impromptu conversations exploring life and belonging often occur on the sidewalks and in the working class stores of Newark. Duneier (2000) narrates how he

saw a sense of humanity, intelligence and shrewdness in sidewalk street vendors he would have not known if he were not afforded the opportunity to interview them and learn about their lives. This study was interested in capturing the humanity of the city by interviewing vendors who operated their enterprise indoors and outdoors because they are embedded in the ebb-and-flow of daily occurrences. Vendors who have storefronts pass out cards and interact with pedestrians who pass their shops, and are part of a sidewalk commercial culture. Street and sidewalk retailers see and capture much of the life that people who walk by consider the regular humdrum. Moreover, they are privy to multiple conversations and information as they attempt to engage numerous customers to purchase their wares.

Follow-up Conversations. The research focuses on participants who I could interview or speak with multiple times. The number of conversations I had with participants ranged from five to seven discussions. The initial interview was the longest, averaging two hours, with follow-ups averaging about thirty minutes.

Follow-up talks were on the phone, video conferencing, emailing, or mobile texting. Most participants preferred phone calls or texting in subsequent talks. In the study, I discovered that participants who requested to speak exclusively through texts with supplement interviews had limited data plans and could talk at length via texting. Sometimes, they texted me to add insight on a previous conversation or inform me of an activity around Nollywood or their thoughts on identity. The asynchronous conversations lasted for hours and days; becoming conversations weaving in and out of discussions of Nollywood. For example, I spoke with Chi Chi, the well-informed informant of the study, a Nigerian-American woman living in Newark, up until she went into labor. Our

conversation ended with a text she sent that continued a picture of her newborn son shortly after she delivered him.

Semi-Structured Interviews. I also incorporated semi-structured interviews. These interviews are more in-depth regarding reception practices and identity, and center a series of questions asking respondents about their modes of reception; how they identify racially and ethnically; and their rituals while watching Nollywood. I started with questions such as, "How often do you watch the movies?"; "Do you discuss movies with family members or friends?"; "Why do you watch the movies?"; "With whom do you watch them, and do you watch them with anyone else?"; "Do you talk while the movie is playing, and what do they say?" I asked these questions because in my survey phase and in earlier interviews, I heard respondents across the board admit to mimicking the accents of the actors or, in some cases, the dances, hairstyles, and clothes. Mimicking can be an indicator of identification because imitating a behavior implies that a respondent uses the text as a reference point for him/herself.

The research also entailed interaction between purchasing and talking about Nollywood. There were concerted efforts to maintain a relationship that was built on community practices. I live in downtown Newark and interacted daily with participants and the field site. It is important that I consciously maintained a critical and conscious lens as a data gatherer that kept into consideration the levels of exploitation that has occurred in Newark. However, information that I thought too sensitive or exposed the identity of the participants, I left out.

Participant Observations: Back on the Field. Margot Ely (1991) says that sometimes ethnographers "jump back in[to the field] for a specific purpose." I conducted

several more participant observations between interviews to substantiate data from informants or when they explained that a change occurred at one of my field sites. One major shift was that two of the stores I observed closed down. One shopkeeper moved to a nearby store several months later while the other marketer sold her business to someone in her network of African immigrants. Additionally, since Newark is changing rapidly, the physical layout of the streets I walked during fieldwork changed too; and thus provided an added layer to the city being the backdrop of participant's narratives.

Analysis. Interviews and field notes were not always planned. As a Newark resident, I sometimes, literally walked into a research opportunity or a discussion with an informant I would see in my comings-and-goings in the city. Interviews were audiotaped, written in long-hand form, or transcribed on my laptop as I spoke with informants. I had to accommodate the informant, and as a formal journalist, I adopted the method of seizing an opportunity to collect information because that moment will never return. As a result I have hours of transcribed interviews and fieldnotes.

To conduct a thorough analysis of the collection of field notes and transcribed interviews, data was logged in a line-numbering format. Subsequent notes written in longhand or typed in the margins of line-numbering with dates were logged when additional discoveries, a shift in direction of the study, or a phenomenon I wanted to explore in the future emerged. The method of color-coding was used to identify practices, patterns, rituals, dissimilarities, and anomalies. As I began to get deeper into analysis, the color-coding system insufficiently categorized the nuanced and multi-categorical data. As a result, I applied the system of thinking units to develop themes and sub-themes that were germane to the topic. Thinking units are "broadly framed sorting files" (Ely, 1991,

p. 143) that reorganized the loosely assembled categories I identified in my fieldnotes and at the preliminary stages of my research. Afterwards, I established concrete categories. Coded data was filed according to ethnic background and gender initially, but was resorted to accommodate other background characteristics more appropriate to the phenomena I explored (i.e. modes of reception). At other times, I rearranged files when an anomaly was located (i.e. when a participant agreed to an interview, but disliked the movies).

The coded system allowed me to reference the copious amounts of information I collected, and determine which data was critical in this study. To guide my work, I used grounded theory to build concepts and theories from data. This approach "rejects using literature to generate themes, concepts, or relationships between them," (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 240-241), rather, it builds theory from data than test preset ones (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2012, 2011).

Researcher's responsibility

This work is a collaboration between the researcher who is the author of this thesis and the participants of whom I am examining in the study (Angar, 1980, Johnson, 1990). As a researcher who lives in the field she studies, I see or speak with informants regularly. To reciprocate, I share my resources in the networks they describe in further chapters. I have written letters of recommendations, attended baby showers and graduations, weddings, and even gifted a house-warming item. Informants have become a part of the web of my social circle, too.

Some scholars forewarn of the possibilities of a researcher to fix or judge the informants (Mosse, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Ely, 1991; Clifford, 1983). However,

the narratives of informants are my narratives, too, because I am reconstructing the experiences of a population of which I am a member. Moreover, my interactions with informants and listening to their stories pushed me to be diligent and conscientious of writing narratives that many in academia overlook or fetishize (Abu-Lughod, 1991). In this process, I have transformed. I understand Patrick Murphy's (1990) initial resistance in being vulnerable by including the monographs of the ethnographer into ethnographies. The self-reflexive process I experienced in exploring identity, as I did my own, evoked visceral emotions. I conceptualized about fragmented people, which included me, but it became an actual thing when I experienced it in numerous conversations and on the field. In a conversation with African diaspora scholar, Kim Butler, she said, "Diaspora is painful." Indeed it is.

CHAPTER 4:

AFRICAN TRADING SPACES, MARKETPLACES, MICRO-COMMUNITIES – NOLLYWOOD CIRCULATION IN FORMAL DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS

Understanding the distribution system of Nollywood is critical to the examination of the flow of a transnational movie industry that has global power, but still circulates under the radar of Hollywood (Miller, 2012). This chapter localizes Nollywood, looking at how it circulates in an urban setting. The channels of distribution lend insight into a diasporic audience that plays an important — but understudied — role in its dissemination. This section looks at the circulations of Nollywood in two ways: what I call formal and informal distributions. I define formal circulations as the distribution of movies for commercial purposes, and use Henry Jenkins' (2010) definition of informal circulations as noncommercial movie distribution. For formal circulations, I map out how Nollywood travels from Nigeria to the U.S., where I focus on the locality of distribution in Newark, NJ, a predominantly black city. In informal circulations, I locate the movies in the various channels of audiences.

Nollywood flows through a number of distributors, shopkeepers and vendors who make up the formal component of a complex distribution system (Jedlowski, 2012; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Lobato, 2010). Equally important are its informal circulations passing through multi-stranded kinship and familial networks. In some instances, informal channels perform as the essential arteries in the routes of Nollywood rather than formal circuits. This is especially true for diasporic audiences who must rely on and create transnational distribution systems for an industry disconnected from dominant global media currents (Adejunmobi, 2014; Tomaselli, 2014).

Much of the work involving Nollywood focuses on Nigerian audiences with some attention to spectators in Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa (Ugochukwu, 2013; Miller, 2012). There is some work pointing to diasporic audiences in the U.S. and the UK, but the extant research centers on either the Nigerian diaspora or African immigrants (Adejunmobi, 2011; Shivers, 2010; Esan, 2009). This study expands who we think are conventional consumers in the diaspora by including Caribbean migrants and African-Americans. In the U.S., black residents across all ethnic categories do not exist in a vacuum. They are more likely to live in communities that represent their racial classification than any other racial group (Kent, 2010; Wilkerson, 2011a). The close proximity of these black communities, as is the case in the predominantly black city of Newark, obliges interaction and exchanges in the flow of Nollywood.

The flow of this chapter provides a cursory look into Nollywood distribution in Africa, as it has already been in explored in chapter one, "Coming to America: Diaspora, Media and Nollywood." Next, formal distribution examines the decline of African-American street vendors and the subsequent rise of African merchants. Then I move onto examine interactions at three Africans shops by centering shopkeeper, Amadou, his employee Chi Chi, storeowner Kwesi, and Mamawa. By examining shopkeepers, I look at how they transport African trading practices to Newark's commercial districts, and ultimately bring their cultural practices and products.

Following, I map out the intricate interactions of informal circulations by exploring these themes: borrowing, swapping, gifting, and online sharing. Each category shows the complex cultural performances and meanings behind activities. For borrowing,

I examine Yadira and her mother who borrow movies from African women living a Newark housing development they once lived. In the instance of swapping, I examine the practices of Mimi, who swaps with a network of West Indian family members and peers. Also, I look at Jamila who swaps with the wife and daughter from her husband's previous marriage. Moving to gifting, I employ the experiences of Nadia, who is presented movies by her uncle. Finally, to analyze online sharing I use the narratives into the virtual activities of Aziza and Stephanie.

Film Distribution to Process

Before Nollywood makes it to Newark, it travels through several channels. To understand the film distribution process, a diagram tracks Nollywood flows through formal and informal economic and social structures that start in Nigeria and end in Newark. I selected the distribution process in Nigeria because it is the most documented. Indeed, a distribution system is alive and well in Ghana, but because Nigeria is the documented headquarters of Nollywood, my focus remains in that region (Adeosokun, 2014; Tomaselli, 2014, Adejunmobi, 2014; Lobato, 2012, 2010, 2007; McCall 2012; Esan, 2008; Haynes, 2007, 2000; Larkin, 2004).

As shown in illustration 4.1, once film production is completed, marketers mass-produced copies. They sectioned off copies in bulk amounts then wholesaled them to distributors established at the major markets in Nigeria. Once wholesale buyers procured their bulk orders, they in turn, reproduced the film then sold them in smaller bulks to smaller vendors, or sold them at video stalls they owned in the major markets. If marketers had connections to an international distributor (which is often the case), they file-shared or shipped movies before or shortly after movies made it to local markets.

Today, the larger international distributors were in other countries in the Sub-Sahara (South Africa), the UK, and the U.S. Movies made it to U.S. distributors via the internet or through a number of formal and informal sources, including mail delivery, boat shipments of other African goods, or in the suitcases of one of the thousands of people traveling to-and-from Africa.

In the New York metropolitan area, which consists of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey — small shops, basement spaces of mixed-used buildings, and modest warehouses in the boroughs of New York City (mainly Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn) housed wholesale distributors. U.S-based wholesale distributors reproduced copies in order to sell movies in bulk to local store merchants, street vendors, and ship DVDs throughout the U.S. Additionally, wholesale distributors retailed movies to consumers who frequented their shops. Africa merchants who sold in that region that were a part of this study, reported to ship movies to the Caribbean. However, the wholesale distribution centers in New York did not monopolize the distribution of video films. Much of the circulation occurred at smaller levels. After the business owners of smaller shops procured copies from the distribution centers, they sold them individually to the communities they served. Some vendors reported shipping movies abroad to countries that demanded Nollywood video films[63] while they maintained clients in Newark.

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[63] Interviews with African street vendors in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas and in San Jan, Puerto Rico alerted me of a Caribbean distribution system established by Africans who sell goods they purchase in New York. From my observations, these goods resemble items sold by African vendors in New York consisting of sunglasses, t-shirts, scarves, dresses, hats, and bootleg purses. Only Africans sold Nollywood films. The Africans that were most abundant as vendors were Senegalese and Nigerian. The Senegalese vendor in San Juan said that Africans moved to the islands and South America to escape the saturated street vending market in New York. In addition, he commented on the welcomed warmer weather and cleaner atmosphere. A Newark shopkeeper from the Ivory Coast indicated that he profits considerably in the U.S., reporting that he ships thousands to St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Jamaica and Guyana after making copies from the supplies they bought from a New York distribution center.

Illustration 4.1 Formal and Informal Circulation of Nollywood
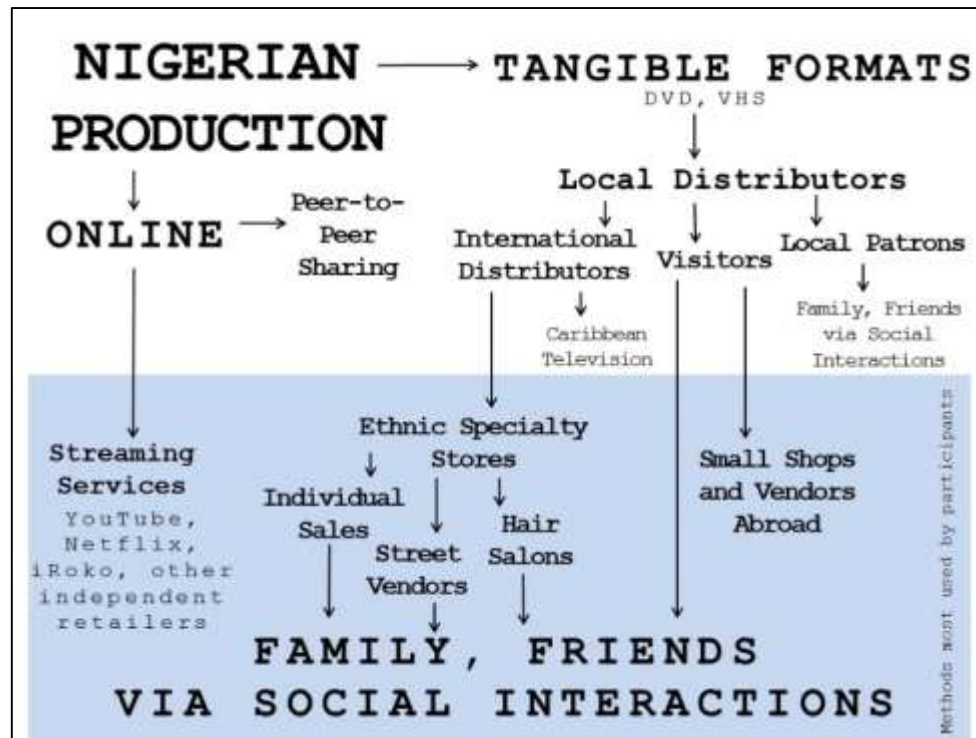
Respondents in this study bought Nollywood from a range of retail locations including ethnic bric-a-brac stores specializing in the importation of African and Caribbean goods, braiding shops, music and video stores, flea market vendors, and even restaurants. Swapping and borrowing between members of kinship networks played an important part of the process. A portion of the DVDs that left Africa, usually do so in the suitcases of travelers (Haynes, 2000). After they arrived in the U.S., they go to family members and friends who passed them throughout their channels. Lastly, the distribution process constituted individuals who accessed the movies own their own. This usually occurs through online usage. Whether using Youtube, Netflix, or iRoko TV (an online Nollywood subscription known as African Netflix), or watching clips from Facebook

posts then participating in comments, the individual engaged in a part of the distribution without having to tap into interpersonal face-to-face networks.

The distribution system mapped out in Newark narrates a formal circulation encompassing enclaves of African merchants transporting African trading spaces to the shops in which Nollywood is part of the merchandise they sold. As retailers negotiated the livelihood of their ventures, they also interacted with the predominantly African-American residents of the city and the visible Caribbean populace who resettled in Newark. Though African shops are specific in ethnic and regional identity, they depended on the patronage of African-American and Caribbean consumers. As Nollywood traveled through the formal entities of a video and music shop, multi-purpose shops, a braiding gallery and street vendors, it took on multiple meanings as it moved through various hands. In addition, Nollywood audiences employed it in different ways to navigate identity and belonging.

The informal circulations traced in this study showed non-traditional distribution practices and coinciding passageways that have emerged outside of Hollywood's dominant infrastructure. Once consumers purchased Nollywood DVDs, they cycled through numerous hands, flowing through heterogeneous strains consisting of established routes and unpredictable circuits surfacing spontaneously. When movies made it to Newark, they have come into the city from as far as Los Angeles, London, and the northern Nigerian town of Kano, and delivered as far south as Trinidad & Tobago. Some participants circulated and searched for movies online. They shared files, links to streaming sites, and even digital artifacts such as memes, articles, blogs, and videos or clips within their virtual networks. As movies spread in multiple and intricate circuits,

both online and offline, its movement through diasporic channels magnified its reach. The diagram provides a cursory understanding of the flows of Nollywood, while this chapter paints a more detailed story of its circulation on the ground, and the complex ways the distribution process is connected to identity. In what follows, we will see that distribution is based on articulating identity and building relationships beyond ethnic markers.

Piracy

In order to understand the distribution systems I am exploring, it is important to examine how piracy largely contributes to Nollywood's circulation. I have talked about the illegal copying of disks in Nigeria in an earlier chapter. The practice of reproducing movies without the consent of filmmakers continue in formal and informal circulations of this study. I focus on local shops to explore above ground distribution in the formal sector because Nollywood is a commercial product sold at stores, though unregulated. However, a customer can simply walk into a store and purchase a movie without having to engage in any clandestine practices such as going to the back of the store, to pick out a movie from a secret stash. Unlicensed reproductions display prominently in shops. To me, this as an extension of an unregulated system throughout Africa, that is problematic in controlling the markets, but has been lucrative in circulating movies. Moreover, I identify solicitation of movies in shops as above ground because it displays the ethnic networks in movies sold on the surface. Though Nollywood is a part of a shadow economy, some practices interweave into legitimate trading spaces.

Adrian Johns (2010) defines piracy industries as doppelgänger structures operating parallel to legitimized business systems. They emulate business models

regulated by state and international powers. Although they are alternate economies,

piracy conglomerates function as complex multinationals to regionalized, highly

organized cartels that fuel the legitimate and illegitimate structures (Jedlowski, 2012).

Media scholars agree that piracy is an old practice and concept, but the

information age shifts the sites of contestation (Ajibade and Williams, 2012; Larkin,

2008, 2004, 2000, 1997; Haynes, 2000). Argues Keith Hart (2010), the production of

culture, via "entertainment, media, and the provisions of information services" (p. 99) is

the fastest, and largest growing sector of trade across the globe. The transportability,

rapidity, and inexpensive methods of media reproduction along with cheap, portable

technologies have disrupted the monopoly and stronghold of the West's and Asian

economy (Hart, 2007; Thussu, 2007).[64]

In the case of Nollywood, Alessandro Jedlowski (2012) proposes that Nollywood

economies "fluctuate between regimes of legality and illegality" that are similar to the

informal networks of Russian and Southern Italy, but necessary in the economy of the

country that if extracted, could cause infrastructural issues.[65] Paul Colson's (2012) study

of Nollywood's informal status proposed two relevant claims — an illicit economy is not

a lawless sphere; and critics of illicit economies, such as Nollywood, cannot examine the

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[64] Johns (2010) builds on the notion of subverting hegemonic economic structures by pointing out that corporations accuse off-the-grid-networks for illegally selling or sharing information, while they have been pilfering intellectual property and organic matter before piracy was an issue for them. Patents on seeds, plants, sea life organisms, animal DNA, and the genetic codes of humans have been taken without consent and copyrighted by corporations that have been documented in using them to manipulate human, plant, and animal life.

[65] Daniela Ivanova (2012) writes a detailed account of how organized crime during the Soviet Union was inextricably involved in forming democracy in Post-Soviet era. She argues that elites who held the power during the dissolution of the Soviet union and subsequent transition of republics to nation-states was largely guided by mafia economy and leaders.

industry without first critiquing the nation-state and global climate it emerged (Jones, Crook, & Hall, 2012).

Keyan Tomaselli (2014) and Brian Larkin (2004) move farther away from questions of piracy illegalities to focus on the structures in which pirate economies exists. Tomaselli situates piracy in the persistent inequality apparent in the Global South. For him, pirate economies are inevitable necessities in the current global media due to disparities. Larkin (2004) locates piracy in a "fix-and-repair" African modernity that requires experts who fix broken and second-hand technology that is often sent to Africa. "Fix-and-repair" is an economic and distribution infrastructure established from pirating American, Indian and Chinese films in the 1980s on (Haynes, 2000). Ingrained in Nigerian economic survival is the sense of salvaging and re-fixing, that it led way to a culture that appreciated the reproduction of Hollywood, Bollywood, Latin telenovelas, and Chinese films, even if the copies produced grainier products (McCall, 2004).

Roman Lobata (2008) contends that piracy is mislabeled as a rupture in capitalism. He argues that the competitor must survive in a cannibalistic economy that, in fact, epitomizes free enterprise. At the same time, pirated movie industry complicates Eurocentric, nation-state models of property and legality over culture because those who circulate movies in informal markets see their practices as violating neither ethics nor legalities, but is a necessity in the current global streams.

Hart (2007) disagrees by pointing to a shift from central bureaucracy managing material capital in Africa to unregulated systems of economy as "the rise of the market" (p.97). He furthers, this new form of market is identified as "informal" because it exists and thrives as a non-capitalistic market outside of quasi-neo colonial surveillance systems

of African administrations. For him, Africa's economic issues were not due to unemployment like that of the Great Depression in the U.S. People held employment, but workers are paid abysmally low wages in a private sector that is fueled by low-middle class and petite bourgeois classes who determine wages that are also predicated on the social class systems carried over from traditional classifications and colonial times. The government and the small corporate sector (of mostly foreign companies) offer few jobs (Hart, 2007; Haynes, 2007).

In spite of the economic success of the video boom in Nigeria, media piracy has become synonymous with the total degradation of the protection of property rights (Larkin 2004, p. 290). Quite often, Nollywood is labeled as an informal industry because of its link to media piracy. Informal is a problematic term describing Nollywood (Jedlowski, 2012). Although it is unregulated, it is far from unstructured (ibid). The mechanism in place to produce Nollywood (as I described in chapter two) may seem disorganized, but they exist and flow into a highly systematized distribution system. This is the case in Newark. African merchants followed then expanded circuits of trade that were established by African-Americans in a similar fashion Nollywood emerged through networks and ethnic trading systems already in place.

Formal Circulations

Decline of the African-American Street Vendor. Downtown Newark is a small section of the city, but carries a bulk of commercial businesses, including street vending. Though street vending is present in Newark, it is scantily modest in comparison to New

York. Newark street vendors are rapidly being displaced due to gentrifying efforts.[66] I connect the rise of African merchants to the gradual decline of African-American street vendors. Part of the decline of African-American vendors is the systematic displacement by city policy and the rise of African-American male incarceration spurred by the increase of the drug trade. Until the 1990s, black-owned businesses were largely owned by African-Americans. It has since diversified with Caribbean and African businesspersons. While the shift boosted black immigrant businesses, the trend shows a decrease in African-American ownership.

African street vendors first established themselves amongst African-American street vendors in the late 1980s.[67] Street vending used to be the normal way of shopping during the city's industrial ae in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Vending decreased dramatically when factories left the city, but re-emerged in the 1970s. Street vendors sold books, magazines, used goods, clothes, shoes, and accessories (e.g. scarves, sunglasses, hats and purses) (Duneier 1996). According to Chi Chi who used to vend in the 90s with her mother and Yassin a third-generation Newarker who still shops at vendor carts, the city's downtown street vending was vivacious, lucrative industry. Both talked about the New Jersey house music that played all day and into the late evening as people walked the major thoroughfares to the smaller boulevards. Street vendors sold their wares into the late nights on weekends, unharmed and unworried about robberies or crime because they were a collective that protected each other.

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[66] One of the reasons that street vendors are being removed is because local law enforcement links their presence to drug peddling and other petty crimes on the main thoroughfares of the city.

[67] In Newark, street vendors were predominantly African-Americans from the 1970s to the early-to-mid 2000s.

In the 1990s, bootleg copies of first-run Hollywood movies proliferated the black market. When Africans began to migrate into Newark from New York, they joined the vending culture that already existed and when hawking the pirated movies. African merchants sold the same goods as African-Americans along with imported African goods and textiles, and accessories. Added, they were highly organized collectives that networked around ethnic, religious, and nation-state identities (Abduallah, 2009; Babou, 2008, 2002; Stoller, 2002). Newark has a prominent Black Muslim community, which made it easier for West African Muslims to establish themselves because they networked with other Muslims at the mosques.

Moreover, African merchants brought over highly systematized import/export trading practices from Africa. Included, Africans had been trading with Asia before they immigrated to the U.S. and used their linkages to bolster their commerce in their host country. Their trading tradition included the burgeoning pirated movie industry that was being fueled by their commerce in the U.S. I argue that this ties to the emergence of Nollywood in Africa because vendors were traveling back-and-forth from the U.S. to Africa and were establishing trading relationships with African émigrés who were pirating. Purchases in the diaspora bolstered African economies, which ties to its flourish.

Indeed African merchants were extremely organized when they entered the informal economies in the U.S.; however, they chose to situate themselves in African-American communities. As a result, there are African micro-communities in black cities or areas of the city that have high concentrations of black people, for example, Little Africa (Harlem); Le Petit Senegal (Harlem); Little Ethiopia (Washington D.C.) and Little Nigeria (Houston). Moving to concentrated black populations was a lucrative decision for

business. According to Yasiin, African merchants "followed the money trail" in Newark.

Chi Chi said that she sold pirated American movies as well, and worked with African-

American vendors because most of her customers were African American or Caribbean,

which substantiates the claim that a distribution model was already in place in Newark

prior to the emergence of Nollywood. The established street vending and pirated movie

industry controlled by African-Americans has largely died in Newark. Yasiin provided an

introduction into what happened.

> Newark in the 90s is like the same today but it was much more vibrant. More [outdoor] vendors. More music playing and way more bodies. These streets were packed. Vendors all up and down Broad [Street] and Market [Street] and up and down the side streets. It was poppin'. Then they tore down the housing projects. And all that shit [that was] going up there came downtown you know. You didn't go to Broad [Street] and Market [Street] to buy drugs, you went to the hood, up in the projects like on High Street. But tearing down the projects forced the closure of businesses by the projects eating off the business from the people who lived there. The dealers and hustlers moved down hill and started dealing in the areas where the people shopped. The city then put the smack down on vendors with this licensing shit, and cut off their bread. What happened then? They started hustling and selling drugs at the spots they used to vend. Then these hard drug laws got implemented and these dudes were getting twenty, twenty-five [years] for slanging rocks. Today, they're just getting out and they are even shook at what Newark is. For real, it is a skeleton of what it was.

Yasiin pointed to a triangulation of three phenomena that caused street vending to

decline: the displacement of Newark residents from public housing, the enforcement of

licensing for vendors, and the passage of harsher drug laws that made it easier to give

longer sentences to those who were convicted. Michelle Alexander (2012) has an

exhaustive argument on how the drug laws that were passed in the 1980s and 1990s have

obliterated African-American male populations because so many men are incarcerated or

are in the penal system. Newark's recent history is drenched in these statistics. Drug

crimes and the organization of gangs (Bloods and Crips gangs brought from Los

Angeles) around drug territories is still an issue in the city, albeit not nearly as problematic as in the 80s and 90s, during the rise of crack cocaine. But the residuals of the social, economic, and cultural effects still resonate.

The unfortunate set of circumstances for the African-American vending community proved to be an opportunity for African merchants who used old trading routes and practices to establish themselves. According to Chi Chi, the first African merchants, like her mother and her mother's friend Amadou (who is discussed in the next section), moved from street vending to set-up brick-and-mortar stores. Their initial vending merchandise were pirated movies and clothing accessories like African-American vendors. As African-American vending declined, African merchants used street vending to grow their enterprises and expand in a U.S.-based network.

Street Vendors. While brick and mortar shops operated as the main veins in the formal distribution of Nollywood movies in Newark, street vendors also participated in its retail. Horus, an African-American street vendor began selling Nollywood DVDs due to the growing demand of customers who preferred copies of Nigerian movies rather than pirated copies of silver screen and b-list movies generated by Hollywood filmmakers. According to Horus, selling Nollywood became a way to survive off a waning business targeted by local law enforcement.

Horus had a vending cart on a major boulevard in downtown Newark for several years. Although he sold hats, purses, belts, gloves, sunglasses, music CDs, and DVDs. His main source of revenue was pirated movies. According to the Newark-native, most vendors in the area sold the same clothing accessories stocked in his cart. They purchased them in what he calls the "bootleg section" of Manhattan. Horus described the "bootleg

section" as an enclave of Chinese, Arab, and African wholesalers who supplied small businesses and street vendors with counterfeit items. Because most items resembled each other from cart-to-cart, Horus explained how a street vendor had to offer products that others did not have. Though Horus cited this strategy as innovative, he said that pirated movies are a more cost-effective venture. He explained that the wholesale prices were cheaper and more affordable, making reselling them the most profitable strategy for a street vendor like him who lives a modest life.

Horus started getting requests about what he called "African movies" in 2011 or 2012. At first, Horus did not know what an "African movie" was and what they looked like or where to get them, so he never pursued stocking his cart. However, a series of events in 2012 made him reconsider. After Corey Booker campaigned and won as Newark's mayor in 2008, a crackdown on street vendors ensued. At first, the number of licenses for street vendors reduced. Then unlicensed vendors who continued to peddle their wares were fined. Next, law enforcement began raiding the warehouses where unlicensed vendors and those selling counterfeit products stored their products. Horus lost his cart in one of the raids, but got it back after paying a hefty fine. Gradually, Newark Police Department enacted a system of seizing items, then arresting street vendors. In 2012, Horus was sentenced to twenty-one months after his arrest for selling pirated Hollywood movies.

After eighteen months of incarceration, Horus was released without a source of income or a home because he lost both when he was arrested. No longer possessing a vendor cart, or being able to garner a vending license and the money to re-start his business, he began to do what a number of displaced street venders like him did – became

a mobile street vendor. Horus moved around Newark, sometimes setting up his wares on a bench. Mostly, he went door-to-door to small businesses with a suitcase selling DVDs. He targeted hair salons and barbershops. That is where I met with Horus again,[68] at a barbershop. A photo of a mobile vendor walking the street with his wares in his bag is in illustration 4.2.

Horus told me that he expanded his route from primarily selling at barbershops to African braiding salons. The workers at the braiding galleries overwhelmingly asked for African movies. Finally, he decided to investigate and invest in African movies. The first thing he did was watch several. "You know what. Them movies are good," Horus said emphatically. "They're better than a lot of the stuff I sell. I been telling my folk about them." The "folk" that Horus referred to is his family, friends and customers who have never seen Nollywood. Most of these people are African-American. Horus says an encounter at a braiding gallery solidified his reason to switch to selling Nollywood movies: "I went to one African [braiding gallery] shop and the women told me, 'If you sell African movies we will buy them from you and refer you to other shops.' I was like, wow," Horus said dragging out his last word. "I think black people need to watch these anyway."

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[68] I first encountered Horus at a local arts event in 2010. When I bumped into him in 2013, he told me his story.

Illustration 4.2 Mobile Street Vendor

The experiences Horus detailed are a transition from a pirated movie industry of

American films to Nollywood. It is similar to Nollywood launching from the established

pirated industry in Africa. I argue that there are linkages between Newark's bootlegging

and those in Africa. They mirror each other because they started almost simultaneously.

Most importantly, Horus' account provides a narrative of the displacement of street vendors as gentrification ensues in Newark.

Rise of the African Merchant. Up until the late 1990s, African merchants were usually male street vendors or traveling merchants. With the increase of a black international presence in the last three decades, more women and children came to the U.S. in the 80s and 90s, thus expanding the participation of African migrants in business and bringing African trading customs to the U.S. (Hintzen, 2010). Agabjoh-Laoye (2006), N'daiye and N'daiye (2006) and Stoller (2002, 1996) explain that traditional trading in Africa is a gendered territory. Women commandeer local marketplaces, while long distance trading operates through men. According to Agabjoh-Laoye (2006), the traditional merchant spaces in African marketplaces modernized in the U.S., while Stoller (2002) makes note of how the customary gender roles found in traditional African marketplaces and long distance trading blurred once Africans resettled in the West.

In the U.S., both men and women participate in local and distance trading. They travel back-and-forth to Africa selling an array of imported goods in their diasporic locations. In contrast to gendered territories seen in African markets, men are the most prominent figures who work local stores and street vending.[69] In businesses catering mostly to women (such as clothes and braiding galleries), if a man owns it, he co-manages with a woman who oversees the daily operations. The woman is likely his

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[69] African men dominating local markets is a result of two major factors. One, African men still disproportionately immigrate, as with many other migratory groups; two, merchants must factor in safety issues in cities like Newark that surge in crimes that affect businesses such as theft, robberies and shootings in business districts; especially on the heaviest foot traffic in the city, Broad Street and Market Street, which sits as the heart of downtown Newark.

spouse, another female family member or a trusted associate of the kinship network in

which he belongs manage daily operations (Babou, 2008).

The following field notes are of my encounter with Amadou, the owner of small

shop in Newark. This provides an entryway into exploring how African and Caribbean

shops selling Nollywood are important in understanding the distribution from a

hyperlocal lens:

>On a late fall morning I walk into a shop owned by Amadou, an immigrant from the Ivory Coast, a francophone country located in West Africa. Amadou owns a narrow 400-foot retail space in downtown Newark dedicated to selling African and Caribbean media. His store offers music, music videos and movies from Francophone and Anglophone West Africa, and dancehall club events that are video-recorded in Jamaica. Nollywood makes up half of his collection.
>
>Amadou stocks his shelves with DVDs that have colorfully designed jackets. The pictures on them are headshots or full body photos of people dressed in a range of urban, Western clothes and traditional West African fashions. On covers displaying actors dressed in urban gear, the titles are bold print announcing headings such as, *Return of the Blackberry Babes 2*, *Runaway Lover*, *Beautiful Enemy*, *Eyes of the Gods*, *Finding Mercy*, and *Broken*. On the jackets where people are dressed in traditional clothing, the titles are in English and Nigerian languages such as Igbo and Yoruba, naming movies like, *Onochie*, *Royal Entanglement*, and *King's Heart*. Interspersed between these movies are DVD jackets with titles I cannot decipher as they are not in Yoruba, English or Igbo. Other titles announce movies offering series like *Terrible Mother Part 1, 2, 3, 4*. In a small section of the collection, I notice headings that include words such as, *dancehall* or *bashment*, indicating a Caribbean selection specific to Jamaica.
>
>I look at the movies contemplating on what I want when Amadou interrupts my thought when he says, "I'll give you [a] good deal, five movies for $20 only."
>
>I thank him and tell him I will take all five. He collects the money and handed me the bags of movies. "Here take one more for free," he said and motioned for me to choose from the hundreds of movies of the wall. I smiled, "Thank you brother."

Much of the formal circulation of movies took place in shops like Amadou's. His video

and film store is one of several dozen African and Caribbean small businesses selling

Nollywood movies or screening them throughout the day in their establishments as a

source of entertainment. A picture of an African shop in illustration 4.3 shows how Nollywood movies are marketed.

At these retail outlets, merchants did more than run their business enterprises. They also embedded aspects of their culture into the communities they work, live, worship, and socialize. They are part of a micro-community of mom-and-pop black immigrant shops in Newark whose owners transport their business models, trading practices, and even the materiality of an African *marketplace* to the U.S. Equally important, within the commercial hubs consumers exchanged information not related to Nollywood while they purchased the West African movies. The information passed assisted participants in negotiating daily life. Creating diasporic communicative spaces, in the following sections, I will explore how Amadou, Chi Chi, Kwesi and Mamawa, all shopkeepers, used their African trading practices to sell Nollywood. Next, I look at Horus, an African-American street vendor who peddled movies in downtown Newark. These examinations show the different techniques and perspectives of vendors, who are an important thread in distribution networks.

The African Marketplace in Newark. Interspersed in Newark's downtown commercial district are African and Caribbean shopkeepers and street vendors who sell and screen Nollywood. Their presence illustrates the emergence of traditional and contemporary African trading spaces in urban metropolises of the "West" (Agbajoh-Laoye, 2006). These African trading spaces materialized as clusters of brick-and-mortar shops or street vending bazaars retailing common goods and imported merchandise native or popular to the local African and Caribbean populations frequenting the shops. Within this assortment of shops, you will find Nollywood either for sale or movies

screened continuously in a fashion similar to American retailers who broadcast Hollywood movies, cable television, or play the radio as a multi-media marketing strategy for consumers who are shopping in real time. Ajibade (2007) calls these *tie-in spaces*, businesses that run movies during operating hours. Whether vendors solicit or broadcast Nollywood, the movies constitute an important part of the makeup of this commercial hub.

African *marketplaces* are locations officially designated for the purchase of goods and services, and are sites where consumers, merchants, and local artists engage in multiple interactions and identity performances (Saul, 2006). In Africa, the marketplace is usually an outdoor shopping center situated along a major route and is often centrally located in a village, town or accessible section of a city (Antonel & Chowdhury, 2014). The physical layout includes chains of stalls, booths and carts where vendors sell the necessities of daily life, hawking everything from produce to petroleum. Some vendors offer tailoring, shoemaking, woodcarving, and braiding services.

Other selected marketers, depending on the location, provide mechanical or technological services such as fixing cars or providing internet and cell phone accessibility at makeshift cyber cafés (Burrell, 2012). Marketplaces differ in size as they do in the products and services offered and the mapping of vendors. From neatly formed rows and circular plots to vendor parcels ordered as seemingly disordered zig-zags, the markets are designed in particular orders based on a number of factors such as gender, age, and class of traders, and the type of product offered (Wooten, 2003).

Illustration 4.3 Door and Signage of a Vendor Selling Nollywood in Newark

A version of the African marketplace emerged in Newark. Instead of rows of kiosks or tents, African and Caribbean merchants set up clusters of stores like in illustration 4.4. Rarely did an African or Caribbean merchant establish a business in an area where they are the only representation of their ethnic, regional, and country of origin. According to Scott and Getahun (2013), the clusters of shops serve as a nerve center for micro-communities formed by migrants. Micro-communities are organically formed sub-districts built around the identity and needs of migrants. The communities mobilize and

enfranchise African immigrants and provide a geographical space so that the group can maintain coherence and expand. Gradually, these communities become viable locations for future immigrants who usually find out about ethnic enclaves in transnational networks.

Illustration 4.4 Cluster of African Shops Simulating African Marketplaces

In Newark, shopkeepers aligned with fellow migrants from their country or ethnic affiliation, and hired people from the same network or not far from it. Storeowners tended to occupy a space as a co-op rather than a single store or sole proprietor. Many of the shops were easily identifiable. They often had an African flag representing their country, while other signage indicated an affiliation with Africa by either having an image of the continent as a silhouette or on the awning.[70] In some cases, the name of the store was an African first name or the word "Africa" used before the service such as "Bintou's fabulous braiding" or "African market" as shown in illustration 4.5.

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[70] Even though several adjacent stores located on the same street offer similar services, the material signs of the stores connect retailers to specific identities or African locations that inform consumers who seek out merchants from their country, region or ethnic affiliation.

The complex congeries of retail spaces offered a range of products and services featuring specific African affilitations. The trading practices and the strategic layout of the shops constituted a sub-business district serving as a hub for social, cultural, and political exchange. In some cases, marking a shop as a religious site appears in the commercial spaces. On his street alone, Amadou, was part of four African-Muslim-owned stores occupying the storefront of a mixed-use building comprised of commercial spaces at the bottom and apartments on the above floors.

Illustration 4.5 Signage on Shop Marketing African Affiliation and Movies

Some of the customers frequenting the cluster of shops on Amadou's block, in addition to the retailers, openly practiced Islamic traditions with Amadou. Several

women employees wore clothes covering their body and hair, such as *hijabs* and *al-amiras*. Intermittently, a handful of shopkeepers knelt on small rugs in the corner of their shop to perform the five-times-a-day prayer called *salat*. Some Fridays after community prayer services called *juma* at one of the several mosques within the downtown corridor, or when the sun goes down to break their daylong fasts during Ramadan, a small group of African men gathered in front of Amadou's storefront. On the days they convened, the men stood in loosely formed circles outside the shop while women with different colored head wraps of African prints and one-colored material sat in the back seat of cars parked along the street next to the shop. They waited for the gathering in front of Amadou's shop to dissipate. Once it was finished, the men drove away in the cars filled with waiting women.

West African Muslim street vendors and small shop traders are a visible contingency of black commercial spaces in the New York City metropolis, including Newark. N'daiye and N'daiye's (2006) work on West African Muslims shows how they simulate homeland village communal life in their residences and places of business. Included in everyday trade is an incorporation of their religious activities, such as praying together and celebrating Islamic holidays (Abdullah, 2009; Babou, 2002). Within the commercial and social spaces, West African Muslims also attempt to incorporate the gender roles of their home country (Babou, 2008). Salzbrunn (2004) argues that in American public spaces, West African Muslims demonstrate their political and religious identities when they gather, with prayer being an important activity (Stoller, 2005).

Amadou's shop is a *dedicated space,* as proffered by Ajibade (2007), as it is a site specifically earmarked for screening Nollywood. Taking the place of a conventional

movie theater, the designs of the spaces were solely for viewing Nollywood. It is also a

tie-in space (Ajibade, 2007) because Amadou screened movies throughout the day and

sold movies as they play. This space flowed between functioning as a site of reception

and one of distribution.

Ajibade (2007) argues that the designs of the dedicated spaces are interpretations

of a Western cinema house. Dissimilar to the design of a dedicated space built for

imitating Western cinema, Amadou screened movies on a centrally located TV in well-lit

rooms where audiences interacted while movies ran. Brian Larkin (2004) writes that in

Nigeria, televisions are often shared luxuries that sit in the living rooms of a house or in

the middle of squares for shared viewing for people to watch. Amadou's selection of

centralizing the television thus aligns with African practices.

Amadou's purpose for creating an African video and music store was to open a

business marketing African media, a resource rarely readily available in the U.S. He

attempted to move away from emulating the West by embedding West African reception

sites. He purchaseed his movies from a warehouse in the Bronx with Malian and

Senegalese traders who obtained movies through file sharing and purchasing them from

other local movie traders. Though Amadou used a pan-ethnic model to sell his wares, he

cycled his money through his own network.

While in Amadou's store, either Nollywood (a digital film industry) or a West

African francophone band played on the old television set that sat at the center of his

space – lending to the simultaneous convergence of old and new media and the merging

of diasporic ethnic identities. Watching television is a shared experience. James Burns

(2002) points out that film watching in Africa has traditionally taken the form of outdoor

community events. While running in Amadou's space, Nollywood movies operated as a text situating customers and shopkeepers within the context of an African marketplace. A frequent setting in Nollywood movies is a marketplace or a business in the city. The marketplace setting that often appears in the movies began to blend into the backdrop of the real time marketplace displaying the film, while also highlighting the very space of exhibition. Nollywood movies running continuously substitute the real time performers at the African marketplace, while the kinship members who gathered outside the store take on the role of cultural performers, too. The actors on the television set replaced live performers in the African promenades, while the customers engaged as African marketplace attendees.

Translation: Get that Money. Another critical dynamic found in the formal circulations of Nollywood is verbal engagement. During these purchases, customers and retailers exchanged news, personal experiences and information about resources outside of Nollywood. Interpersonal communication was essential in soliciting the movies due to the fundamental practice of bartering and negotiating prices in an African trading space (Morange, 2015; Bredeloup, 2012). Emerging out of these interactions are junctures where actors in these spaces and in these instances, navigated multiple identities that blurred finite diasporic belonging as they maneuvered through inter-and-intra diasporic ethnic social interaction.

In some instances, language can be the element that binds or distances customers. For most African immigrants, English is a second or third language. Even if their English is proficient, they must deal with the difficulty of speaking with an accent unfamiliar to native speakers in their host country. Crawford and Avula (2014) say that children whose

parents are foreign born often have the responsibility to serve as culture brokers and translators. Lopez, Dent, Ecosto & Prado-Steiman (2011) argue that this task often burdens children who have to operate as translators for their parents in business transactions; yet and still, it is important for the survival of the family. This also shifts the parent-child dynamics (Chun, Lipsitz, & Shin, 2013). Amadou picked up English when he migrated twenty years ago to the U.S., but once he hired Chi Chi to work for him at the media center, he relied on her to do much of the talking for his English-speaking customers.

Hired by Amadou, Chi Chi's parents emigrated from Nigeria before she was born in Long Island, New York.[71] Chi Chi calls Amadou "Uncle," a term denoting his status as being older, a fellow Muslim, and a respected community member. Both families supported each other in business affairs, and engaged in social functions such as African parties and *Eid* celebrations, the festivities to commemorate the end of Ramadan. Educated in Newark public schools, and then becoming an on-again-off-again student at a local community college, Chi Chi explained that African children educated in America often spoke on behalf of their parents, even in business settings. Translating or speaking on behalf of Amadou was an extension of the communication responsibilities she did for her parents, as they expected her to see Amadou as a father figure while under his employ.

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[71] When she was a baby, her family relocated to Newark upon the recommendation of a family friend who said that her father could better sustain his household driving cabs. Chi Chi recalls that her parents had decided to move upon the insistence of her mother who was almost kidnapped by a white man who offered her a ride while she was eight months pregnant. Her mother, new to the country was used to catching rides in Nigeria. She was shocked when the driver pulled out a gun and threatened to kill her if she attempted to escape. Luckily, she jumped out and fled. Immediately thereafter, she demanded that their family relocate or she would move back to Nigeria. When Chi Chi's father discovered viable employment in Newark, he also learned of a growing African community there. Once they relocated, as practicing Muslims, the family soon met Amadou and befriended him.

Working for Amadou, Chi Chi described herself as the spokesperson of the shop. She cleaned the shop, opened it in the morning, ordered, and oversaw inventory (especially Nollywood DVDs) and stocked shelves, but her most important role was to sell Nollywood. Chi Chi sold Nollywood movies and served as the expert reviewer. When customers entered the shop, she greeted them and directed those interested in the movies to engage in conversations where they explicated their interests in the type of movies they were looking for. If they did not know what type of movie they wanted, Chi Chi provided detailed plots and descriptions of genres and actors to give them an understanding of their selections. Also, she asked about their own general life interests to gauge what movies might be appealing. Chi Chi said:

> In African stores, we service our customers, so when someone walks in, we walk up to them and greet them. You don't go into no African store and we just sit there and watch you walk around. Nooooo, we ask how can we help you. You talk to them and see what they want so you can help them.

The description of providing patrons with customized, intimate service differed dramatically from a typical shopping experience. If anything, black customers experienced racial profiling in retail outlets, even in the predominantly black city of Newark. Chi Chi explained that her customer service efforts were due to the media center "being an African store" and "this is what Africans do for their people." She pointed out that the customer service practice is also "doing what Africans got to do to get that money." Chi Chi emphasized the terms "being African," or existing in an African space, suggesting there is an expected cultural performance that she must carry out to maintain the integrity of Africanness of the shop for customers in general, but for Africans specifically, and even non-Africans who visited the shop in search of an African atmosphere. Chi Chi's description of promoting Africanness contrasted viewing spaces in

Africa that aim to create the polar opposite — a Westernized cinema experience for Nollywood spectators.

Chi Chi's response lends to Tettey and Puplampu's (2005) discourse of African identity politics points to one of the ways in which Africans make sense of their identity in the diaspora. The appropriation of essentialist ideas to behaviors such as Chi Chi reduced the heterogeneity of Africans; however, in some instances, homogenizing identity provides agency in negotiating the everyday. Nollywood becomes the object used in materialization of Africanness; consequently, it serves as a symbol of identity and a commodity of identity.

Simultaneously, Chi Chi stressed the goal to "get that money," as an ideology that she connects to being African. "Getting money" is an act Stoller (2002) addresses in his book, exploring New York African merchants selling wares that go against their religious or cultural beliefs as a way immigrants rationalize the moral and religious entanglements of trade in the age of globalization. In Chi Chi's case, she was proud to make a living selling Nollywood movies. Though she laughingly acknowledged that the movies were pirated, she pointed out that the movies were purchased in a distribution network of buyers and sellers who run a legitimate business that was not "controlled by the man," nor were they "selling drugs or doing other funny business like other Nigerians do." She too embraced the stereotype of the crooked Nigerian. Her argument is reminiscent of a statement by legal scholar Regina Austin (1994) who opens up an essay about street vendors with the words:

> I, like many blacks, believe that an oppressed people should not be too law abiding, especially where economics is concerned. The economic system that has exploited us is not likely to be effectively exploited by us if we pay too much attention to the law.

Selling Nollywood in an African space is Chi Chi's and Amadou's act of resistance, a

push against difficulties they experienced in the labor market in the U.S. in securing

employment and income when they are stigmatized because of their racial and immigrant

identities (Abott, 2009).

As well, the store functioned as a space where Chi Chi began to make sense of the

different cultural dynamics between Africans, West Indians, and African-Americans:

> I enjoyed customer service the most when I worked at Uncle Amadou. I got to
> talk to [black] Americans, Africans and West Indians. Most of the people who
> bought Nollywood were women. Nollywood can be so melodramatic and
> emotional. [Black] Americans would tell me how they got hooked on the movies
> was by watching them in African braiding shops. Africans would just sit and
> debate with me or another African in the store about who was better at
> filmmaking, Ghana or Nigeria. SMH, Nigeria of course duhhh LOL.

In her story, Chi Chi gendered consumers by connecting its popularity and affectivity to

women. As well, she situated it in the form of addiction, connecting it to pop culture

discourse of heavy consumption and linking people's consumption of it to their personal

stakes in the texts. As well, she talked about the communicative spaces created when

audiences argued about texts, and their preference.

Chi Chi has little if any experience living in Nigeria. She admitted to visiting

Nigeria once as a child, but has a vague recollection of it. Nollywood operated as a

cultural blueprint for her. She used it to make sense of her African self, but also to

reconcile an African immigrant identity geographically disconnected from home. Daniel

Dayan (1998) writes on how media serves as a mechanism for diasporic communities to

construct cohesive identities from their fragile positions of being disconnected from their

homeland. In host countries, Benedict Anderson (2006) contends that media becomes the

cultural material rooting diasporans who create imagined communities. At the same time,

Nollywood brought a sense of belonging and kinship to a diasporic population Chi Chi worked to understand and in whom she looks for junctures and similarities.

Suggesting Movies. Picking out movies was a normal practice in shops selling Nollywood films. It is a sign of expertise, but it also suggested courtesy. Entering into the conversation is a storeowner named Kwesi and a shopkeeper named Mamawa. Kwesi, an immigrant from Ghana, ran a multi-purpose shop selling imported foodstuffs, phone cards, mobile phone accessories, and Nollywood. Mamawa, a Liberian immigrant, oversaw an import store for her son, suggested Nollywood movies she liked to watch.

By establishing a rapport with Kwesi using identity politics, I became a part of his community of shoppers that were mostly people from Ghana, Togo, and the Caribbean. The first time I visited, he asked me if I was African. In the exchange, I described myself as black American, but still African. To explain further, I quoted a 1960s African-American leader who argues that black people in the U.S. should still consider themselves Africans. "Malcolm X says that if a cat has her kittens in an oven that don't make them biscuits," I told Kwesi who responded with a laugh. He thought I was Ethiopian and said that my forehead was similar to a group in the Upper Volta Region of Ghana.

During my visits, Kwesi seized every opportunity to educate me about Newark, African culture and dialogue, the state of black people around the world and U.S. politics, especially President Barack Obama. The movies he suggested I buy emphasized traditional culture and are set in Africa's. According to him, the contemporary-themed Nollywood films are "rubbish," and I needed to get "real culture," by viewing tradition-themed movies. In this instance, Nollywood was used a pedagogical tool for immigrants

who deal with acculturation. His selections for me were for my cultural health rather than what he thought my cultural background demanded. When Kwesi referred to Nollywood as a way to augment my cultural knowledge, the movies were nutritional supplements or medicine for my perceived cultural deficiencies. Here, using Nollywood as a pedagogical tool foreshadows my discussion of this matter at length in the following chapters looking at reception and interpretation of movies.

Kwesi illustrated a trading practice in which he decides on selections based on what he assumes is "culturally good" for their clients. On the other hand, the interaction between the researcher and a Liberian store manager named Mamawa elicited a different shopping experience. Mamawa recommended movies according to her preference of Nollywood stars. Mamawa was quiet the first time I visited her store. After she discovered I knew Nollywood, she began to talk to me about her favorite movies, including actors and songs. Often she would get excited when she discussed plots and Nollywood women actors she admired.

There were two she particularly liked, Ini Odo and Omotala Jalade Ekeinde. She said she liked them because they were excellent in their craft and their English was good. When I asked what she meant by them being "good," she explained that you "could understand them" and they were "believable" in their roles. Mamawa provided suggestions from what is enjoyable to her, and who communicated the most efficiently. "Oh, that Ini Odo is good-good," Mamawa said between hums of affirmation and expressions of delight. "She act [*sic*] better than anyone. I can watch her all day. Anything she got, I will watch." By linking language proficiency to the credibility and caliber of the acting, Mamawa's emphasis on English language movies highlighted how

language is a central theme in the immigrant experience, and important to Nollywood's diasporic audiences. Language determines how well one can navigate in a host country, and in the case of Mamawa, how audiences consume and understand texts.

Like Chi Chi, Mamawa is an avid spectator of Nollywood. She knew the body of work of actors and their personal lives. She would comment on who was married, who got divorced and who was doing "bad-bad". When she doubled a word, usually good or bad, she solely referred to the circumstances of Nollywood women celebrities. A "bad-bad" actor was a performer caught in a personal scandal like an extramarital affair or a child out of wedlock. A "good-good" actor meant someone successful in her craft who was also morally upright to Mamawa. Celebrity for Mamawa directly connects to the off-screen lives of actors and determines if their body of work will be support. The shopkeeper showed how personal news of actors largely plays into the star system.

Mamawa's selling practices pointed to a highly developed star system in Nollywood. Jonathan Haynes (2007) says that the star system is an important strategy used by filmmakers and film solicitors for illiterate viewers, or those who cannot read the language on video covers. By superimposing the faces of actors on DVD jackets reconciles those who are illiterate or cannot understand the language. It also helps filmmakers understand who to cast in their movies due to the popularity of actors. The more popular the actor results in the higher potential for better profits (Garritano, 2014; Esan, 2008).[72] Furthermore, the star system promotes movies in an industry that has to compete with dozens of video films released weekly. Mamawa's emphasis of the star

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[72] Saul and Austen (2010) point out that in movies selections correspond with the favorite or popular directors.

system connected to Amadou's tactic of offering movies that tied to African-American celebrities of American pop culture. For example, he often urged me to purchase films that starred Nadia Buria an actress known as the "Nollywood Beyoncé" because she starred in movies using the name of the popular African-American singer.

Nollywood shifted between three roles; it is a product, a pedagogy and a practice. As a cultural product, it is both merchandise and artifact. On a superficial level, movies were a thing that is bought, traded and sold. Just underneath that layer, Nollywood was a popular culture aesthetic expanding and changing, while traveling between diasporan members. As a product, it offered an alternative film industry with a distribution system controlled by people of African descent with networks and channels catering to the needs and flow of the local. It was also is employed as a critical element in "being African" as shopkeepers broadcast Nollywood to display a contemporary African media situating Africans in modernity, but disseminating cultural ideology and practices in the text. As a pedagogy, shopkeepers solicited Nollywood to customers as a text to learn African culture. Marketed as an apparatus to become or be African, the films served as texts to inform consumers of African issues.

The act of buying Nollywood made it a practice. In the distribution system, to purchase the movie at an African shop is the participation in a movie industry, but also an imported cultural practice. Purchasing Nollywood at a shop incorporates participants in transnational circuits that challenge Western economic monopolies and establish presence and agency in global media.

Local and Global Flows: Identity and Cultural Products

Marketplaces and street vending locales are vital in the flow of Nollywood. The commercial enclaves serve as a hub where stores display ethnic belonging and offer spaces for compatriots and members of the diaspora to shop and engage in discourse. Much like the setting of a traditional African marketplace, the hubs are meeting grounds for citizens. Along with Nollywood, the marketplace was carried with African merchants. The Nigerian film industry plays a critical role in the materiality of stores soliciting and screening the movies. It is the central media sold by marketers, and it is often the main media simulcast in the shops to augment efforts in creating an African trading space.

Jade Miller (2012) asserts that the marketers and corporate distributors of Nollywood largely control the distribution process and types of movies circulated in the diaspora. I argue that the distribution process is multi-channel market that is based on market demands and accessibility. It is an industry defined and controlled by distributor and audience. Since Nollywood is a cottage industry, the distributor in some cases is also the audience, and vice-versa, thus blurring who has control (Ugor, 2007).

The street vending narrates a story of the predatory nature of capitalism in vulnerable areas on one hand, and on the other hand, how it opens up the market, but with a caveat — in order to sustain in a highly competitive and inequitable trading system, commerce is traded within illicit economies. Horus' experiences show how he used an African cultural product to make money because he has more protections selling an unregulated Nollywood movie than an unlicensed Hollywood; therein lies the precarious financial and legal positions of street vendors.

Though it is a transported African cultural practice, I argue that the location of these trading spaces within black communities such as Newark situates these locales as diasporic spaces where African, Caribbean, and African-Americans participate and fuel social and economic ecosystems. Indeed these shops carry explicit markers identifying a connection to specific nations or regions. However, the compatriots of the storeowners make up a portion of the consumers who shop within these enclaves of ethnic markets.

Informal Circulations

Circulating cultural products become more significant for diasporans who are forming landscapes (ethnoscape, technoscape, financscape, mediascapes and ideoscape) signifying their identities (Appadurai, 1990). Within the routes of Nollywood's informal circulations, diasporans tap into circuits created by those moving back-and-forth between home and host country. Although the movements generate unpredictable routes, they serve in bridging migrant communities and neighborhoods often scattered during the process of relocation (Van Dijk, 2002). The person who transports Nollywood operates as a courier and a culture broker in the transactions by functioning first as a consumer/collector then as an expert/distributor. Diasporans who wait for movies rely on importers to supply movies, so that it contributes to satisfying leisure and cultural needs.

At the core of its circulation is an audience and fan-base spreading Nollywood for non-commercial reasons. By mapping out the routes of Nollywood in informal circuits, I identify four categories of informal circulation identified as salient – borrowing, swapping, gifting, and online sharing. *Borrowing* is a system of lending where a person is given movies to keep temporarily by someone they know. *Swapping* is an exchange where Nollywood movies are traded between two or more people. Next, *gifting* occurs

when movies are offered as a cultural present. Lastly, *online sharing* takes place when individual users search and share sites that broadcast Nollywood or disseminate digital artifacts of the industry. As movies travel from one person to another, they act as central texts in passing, exchanging and performing cultural identity. The routes are intertwined in the traffic of resources such as food, job leads, and information and welfare services that sustain and create community.

Spreadable Media

When talking about informal circulations of Nollywood, the study uses distinctions between distribution and circulation as defined by Henry Jenkins (2010) in his concept of *spreadable media*. Whereas top-down distribution overwhelmingly exists in mainstream broadcasting, circulation is a bottom-up organic spread of media encompassing "a hybrid system where content spreads because of a series of information transactions between noncommercial participants." Jenkins posits that the changing media landscape undermines total corporate control of media distribution. Informal circulations have become a critical site in Nollywood distribution in that it captures how audiences manipulate the flow of media as they disrupt mainstream channels.

The survivability of media depends upon grassroots circulation amongst audiences (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013). Latonero and Sinnreich (2013) assert that the new media landscape, especially digital culture, is largely decentralized and gives way to a blur between traditional and contemporary consumption. Moreover, a mash-up culture where collaborations, remixes, and appropriating of media technologies and media content have become a significant part of media engagement (Wang, 2014; Campbell, 2013). Fans and audiences are active agents who engage in disseminating media as much

as they read, redefine and re-present it. Furthermore, informal circulation, media content expands in reach because of involuntary consumers. For instance, Myria Georgiou (2006) says that even when people who are not interested in consuming media, but nearby when media plays also are folded into the experience; consequentially extending its reach. As content travels across media platforms and devices, it moves through unpredictable routes carved out by dispersed networks that encounter unique interactions.

In the current digital era, audiences actively engage in a "participatory culture" where they shape media flows by deploying customized audience practices to the media content they desire to spread. Aligned with corporate or commercial media distribution,[73] audiences have a personal stake in its diffusion. They attach social currency and other personal investments to the spread of media, such as the ability to shape media flows, to frame content within their circles, and to contribute to the broader dialogue and narrative. Jenkins, Ford & Green (2013) posit that informal circuits allow consumers to manipulate and embed themselves in how media texts are constructed (i.e. dubbing with subtitles, adding commentary or transforming scenes into memes), consequently creating complex tributaries.

Mapping the Informal

In the section on borrowing, I examine the stories of Yadira, a young Latina who is also African-American. She narrated her and her mother's engagement in a borrowing system established by women in a government-housing complex in Newark. In my discussion on swapping, I look at how Mimi, a Toboganian immigrant who exchanged

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[73] Jenkins uses the term "stickiness" to describe a practice in commercial, top-down distribution. It is a marketing term used to package information in a way to attract audiences for profit making.

movies with her friends, and Jamila, an African-American woman married to a Liberian, swapped with her stepdaughter and the former wife of her husband. Nadia, a Ghanaian-American, constructed her African identity with the movies she is gifted by her uncle. Aziza, an African-American professional and Stephanie, a recent Nigerian émigré, shared digital artifacts to their peers and networks via social networking sites.

Borrowing Nollywood

Person-to-person lending of Nollywood movies was an essential practice in connecting Nollywood audiences and building community within native and migrant blacks in Newark. One of the circuits in Nollywood's distribution was a borrowing system where audience members borrowed movies from other audience members. In borrowing, a request for a movie takes place because the borrower does not have access to movies or the borrower's selections prevented them from swapping their collections with another person. Borrowing practices allowed audiences to carve out economic, cultural and social paths outside of controlling, dominant lending and media structures such as libraries and movies rentals that entailed a level of surveillance. It sutured gaps in the flow of resources between black residents who divided themselves through ethnic alliances.

Borrowing is a familiar concept in African, Caribbean and African-American communities that engages stakeholders in brokering relationships on various levels (Ignatow, Poulin, Hunter, & Comeau, 2013; Verrest, 2013). Local cooperatives such as money lending collectives, seed exchanges at community gardens — a community-based practice of loaning tools or equipment to mend or carry out daily tasks — and extending food or culinary styles are part of systems of borrowing. Traditionally, it is a ritual

connecting and sustaining the community. More recently, borrowing has become essential to economic survival and sustainability for all groups. In some instances, the networks created by systems of borrowing become the grassroots associations that advocate for local protections of the community against corporate and government entities disenfranchising the poor, women, and communities of color (Hossein, 2013). In others, these networks centralize political campaigning.

Just as much as borrowing has sustained communities, it operates as a contentious site. African and Caribbean countries are in economic quagmires due to structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s and the more recent micro-credit loans. Both of these programs have been criticized as having created difficult to impossible conditions of repayment that put further economic stress on countries or business owners (Omorodion, 2007). In addition, African-Americans have a history of being denied business, personal and housing loans. And, when they acquire a loan, the terms come with high interest rates from predatory lenders (Lim, Broussard, Dinecola, Gregory, & Weber, 2014; Blanchard, Zhao, & Yinger, 2008; Cavalluzzo & Wolken, 2005). In spite of the limitations enacted by the establishment, the system of borrowing that surfaces in Nollywood distribution is a response to failed borrowing relationships within systems of power and a sign of potential sustainability and brokering.

Yadira: Cross-Cultural Borrowing. The story of Yadira, a twenty-something African American and Afro-Cuban woman illustrates the nuances of borrowing in informal circulation. She spoke of racially and ethnically diverse families forging cohesive communities actively engaging in one of the few remaining high-rise

government housing developments in Newark.[74] Participants loaned cultural products and

services. In turn, these communities created safe havens in one of the most notorious

places to live in the city.

> When I was 15-years-old, I lived in one of the last [Newark] high-rise projects. Everybody around us was from different countries, especially on the floor we lived on. There were two buildings that made up these projects. One building had a lot of black Americans and the other building had a lot of people from all over. I don't know how it got like that. We used to live in one building with the black Americans and then we went to the other building. We just happened to get on a floor where no one was from America. We lived on one of the two floors that were like all African, Haitian and Caribbean and there was only one black [American] person.
>
> It was like our own community. Our own village you know. We borrowed things, shared food. I babysat some times. I even got a job at a dollar store working for this African man. My mom put in a good word for me because he happened to be the husband of one of our African neighbors and he knows my mom. I remember the first day I went to the dollar store to speak to him about the job. He asked me if I was black American. I told him no, even though I am half African-American. He said "Good, those people are thieves and lazy." I was like whatever. I didn't last long there [She laughs].
>
> But in those projects the people on those two floors looked out for each other, in spite of the shit you'd see. You'd step over blood cause somebody got shot the night before, and shit like that would happen, but when we got up to our little spot, we were good. We looked out for each other for real.
>
> My mom had a Nigerian friend downstairs. Her daughter used to do my hair. And then she would do my mom's hair. One day my mom went and got her hair done at their house, and she had the African movies there one day. The Nigerian lady had a lot of movies like fifty of them. She gave my mom some movies and told her, "Take these ones over here and whenever you finish them, bring them back and come get some more."

The incident between Yadira's mother and her neighbor developed into a relationship in

which African women in their housing complex provided her mother Nollywood movies

from their collection. Yadira's mother, to date, has never purchased a movie because she

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[74] Up until the 1990s, high-rise housing projects dominated the Newark skyline before they were demolished and replaced with affordable, single family town homes throughout the city. The demolition efforts were a result of decades-long issues plaguing housing developments, such as poor maintenance, overcrowding and drug activity. Seen as a public housing experiment gone wrong, many considered these developments incubators of crime (Giambusso, 2010; Mays, 2007; Levy, 1994).

has a network of friends who purchase so many that she relies on their selections to remain an active audience member. Borrowers depend on the movie libraries of others; thus, another person dictates their preference of movies; however, they borrow from people in which they value their expertise or taste in movies. The loaners are culture brokers in this case. In no way does this diminish the role of the borrower because the loaners suggest movies based on the knowledge that they have of the borrowers, which in turn, points to the importance of a relationships existing before borrowing takes place.

In Yadira's case, borrowing Nollywood was one of the items flowing between residents in a series of daily commodities and services. The community welcomed Yadira and her mother into an African-Caribbean enclave in a Newark housing project also served as the same social unit introducing them to Nigerian movies. The African women in the complex made a conscious decision to share Nollywood and embedded it as a text in which they communicated daily life and navigated the immigrant experience. The experiences of Yadira provide an entryway into exploring the informal distribution networks of Nollywood films that materialize as translocal practices.

Yadira told of African and Caribbean people sharing economies, foods, fashion and other resources, including the formation of intimate relationships and marriages. Borrowing systems replaced their inability to garner economic support, political representation and visibility in the rapidly changing communities of Newark affected by gradual gentrification and the decline of social programs assisting in their survival as migrants. Yadira would often go with her mother to the apartment of her Nigerian friend to return and borrow more Nollywood movies. Visits lasted for an hour or two, with the two women going to another section of the apartment to talk, while Yadira struck up

conversations with the daughter who frequently braided her hair. Prepared food and produce were exchanged between women, along with news and especially events centering on the changes in Newark, and government housing specifically.[75] The meetings would keep women residents informed of possible safety issues, actions to take against slumlord property managers, and the coordination of baby-sitting times, shopping trips and Nollywood watch parties.

When the mother and daughter visited their neighbors, the domestic space transformed into both a site for the dissemination of information and a film library.[76] The Nigerian host provided hand selected movies, giving reasons why they should watch them. Here, the consumer/collector asserted her perspective into filmic texts and frames it so that other audiences will consume it with strands of her articulation and more importantly, her presence; thus establishing her own visibility.

More interesting were the intellectual spaces emerging out of these conversations. In the domestic spheres, the dialogue of black women immigrants resembled women who made sense of their identities in black Francophone Parisian salons of the early 1900s. According to Sharpley-Whiting (2002), African and Caribbean immigrants formed intellectual circles at the Parisian home of Jane and Suzanne Nardal, sisters from the island of Martinique. Using popular black literature and news from the New Negro Movement to the Harlem Renaissance, the discussions usually focused on issues of

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[75] There is a shortage in government housing going on for several decades, along with complaints of poor property management and segregation.

[76] Kuhu Tanvir writes about the shift of film libraries from public collections to networks of private, pirated cinema archives. These private collections connect spectators in ways that pubic collections limit exchanges such as that as the women Yadira speaks of who might not go to the library, or have the time to learn the library system. Another limitation with public film collection are the limited and dated supply of movies.

belonging and the immigrants' daily negotiations of citizenship, in particular, Frenchness, Latinness and Africanness.[77]

Unlike the intellectual public sphere leading up to the French Revolution, black immigrants in France used the domestic space and hyper-local cultural products of African-Americans that were traveling transnational black routes to develop a worldview around identity; eventually leading to the Negritude Movement. Today, in the projects of Newark, Yadira spoke of how her mother and the immigrant women of the community would gather at the homes of each other to discuss various topics that would often revolve around Africanness, womanhood, immigration, diasporic belonging, and the vulnerabilities and strengths these social statuses entailed. Employed as a text to navigate discussions that were sensitive, controversial and rarely visible in the public space, Nollywood became critical in framing perspective and forging relationships.

According to Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013), the spreadability of media content involves fans using media as a way to garner currency in social interactions. In the circle of women to which Yadira and her mother were members, Nollywood is used as a reference point in understanding traditional West African spiritual systems shunned as witchcraft and devil worship in Christian and Muslim communities, but were similar to the Santeria Yadira grew up practicing with her Afro-Cuban mother. This is a common theme across the various Nollywood genres: esoteric African practices, folk rituals, and sacred systems that existed before and operated outside of Western practices of

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[77] Sharpley-Whiting (2002) argues that these conversations were the foundation of the Negritude movement, an intellectual and cultural campaign to articulate Africanness in African and Caribbean nations colonized by the French.

Christianity and Islam. They all find expression in Nollywood films: romance, comedy, hallelujah, gangster, or village movies.

According to Yadira, the African contingent of the housing development took a strong liking to her mother. Yadira said, "We have good relationships with Africans. They were mostly Nigerian, Liberian and Ghanaian. They think that Cuban culture is good, especially with the Santeria and Yoruba [religion we practice], that's African." To Yadira, practicing Santeria directly connected them to Africa and opened up doors into an African network that included jobs and the acceptance of Yadira as a prospective girlfriend to one of their sons, if she so chose. These connections; however, were facilitated through the borrowing system of movies that were established. The dialogue amongst Yadira and her mother's cohort created diasporic communicative spaces where references to African spirituality and Cuban and African homelands centered them speaking of "here and there" to navigate their immigrant experiences.

Though Yadira's family openly practices Santeria, it is taboo for both African and Caribbean women to discuss their knowledge and practices in front of their children. "When they'd think I'd be listening, they start whispering. That's when I knew they were talking about the spiritual stuff and they didn't want me to hear. But I see all that type of stuff in the movies. I practice magic in my own life," informed Yadira. She reported eavesdropping on conversations between the Nigerian woman and her African friends visiting in the house. They explained to her mother the different movies and meanings (in particular the traditional and spiritual practices), all the while making suggestions on ones from which they thought her mother would most benefit. Some of the content they discussed involved rituals meant to protect and procure an intimate relationship, money

attraction ceremonies, and ways to incorporate daily protections. Yadira explained that Africans were comfortable discussing detailed rituals usually kept between them, but due to their Cuban links, they were considered the most African in the Caribbean. Here, Nollywood shifted between a guilty pleasure and a pedagogical tool, as it created pleasure when women consumed movies featuring themes of mysticism and traditional ritual.

In contrast, the celebration of African identity in Cuban culture was a painful site for her Cubanness. Yadira and her mother are brown in complexion, similar to that of legendary salsa singer Celia Cruz. When I met Yadira, I assumed she was African-American or if not from the U.S. I thought that she at least she identified as racially black. Yadira engages in a more complex belonging. In Cuban culture, Africa as a cultural practice is highly regarded, but Cubans shun the racial identity connected to Africa. In other words, blackness in general, regardless of their phenotypical hue, is considered ugly and inferior: "Although my father is a black American, my mother prefers that I call myself a Latina because she is Cuban." When the researcher asked Yadira if she could be Cuban, Latina and black, she responded, "I am not *black black*. I am dark-*complected*," using the adjectival variation of the word "complexion" to signify she may have the same hue as people who identify as racially black, but her Latina heritage differentiates her racial identity.

In communities of color, the term used by scholars to identify prejudiced based on the gradation of skin tone is *colorism* (Hunter, 2013; Faught & Hunter, 2012). In Latino residential areas in Newark, Yadira reported that she and her mother experienced colorism. She reported that lighter and fairer Latinos frequently treated her and her

mother with disrespect, in particular Cubans and Puerto Ricans who Yadira said, "claim that they are white, but often have that black ass, big hip *abuela* (grandmother) at home cooking arroz con pollo." Here, she pointed to the denial of an African ancestry by most Cubans and Puerto Ricans, whether recent or several generations back. This rejection of ancestral ties to Africa directly affects Yadira and her mother.

Yadira recalled the stories of her mother who told of systemic exclusion and harassment by fair-skinned Newark-based Cubans. Her immigration experience has been largely marred by the difficulties she faced by Cubans who left her out of Latin immigrant networks. Her mother had to create her own network with black West Indians and Africans, a community in which she still resides. It is in the community of acceptance and survival that Nollywood became a media through which to articulate the human experience of the two Latina women. Nollywood's references to Santeria connected Yadira and her mother to Africa via the modernized medium of film. In the borrowing system and through her consumption of Nollywood, the Afro-Cuban mother-and-daughter explored their blackness in a comfortable, safe space. However, their examination occurred outside of American blackness because movies focused on culture rather than race.

Ariel Dulitzky's (2005) work on race and racial discrimination in Latin America argues that racist attitudes and practices of Latin Americans travel with them to the U.S. The problem with its invisibility in race dialogue in their resettled communities is that dominant discourse in their home country denies the practices of institutionalized racism. Throughout Latin America, Afro-Latinos face systemic inequities such as little job security, low political representation, and poor education and high dropout rates. Anani

Dzidzienyo's (2005) work on Afro-Brazilians surmises that Brazilians, just like the rest of Latin America, positively value the physical appearance of "whiteness and near whiteness" (p. 137) that has resulted in the social, political, and economic disenfranchisement of blacks. In Peru, Suzanne Oboler (2005) says race is more ambiguous because people's race is designated as a class status rather than a racial classification due to the country's history of whitening the population. This also goes with racial discourse in Mexico, where the work of Bobby Vaughn (2006, 2005) shows that Afro-Mexicans have been invisible because their racial classification is subsumed under indigeneity. Yadira's accounts of white and fair-skinned Cuban compatriots rejecting her mother illustrates the precarious relationships Afro-Latinos experience within their own group once they immigrate to the U.S. By borrowing, Nollywood, Yardira and her mother validate the importance of their culture via their claims to *morena* culture.

Even though Yadira and her mother moved from the housing development, her mother either visits their former home or invites friends over. Usually, her mother goes and sees her Nigerian friend for more movies and any updates on the small hamlet in which they once lived. Yadira admitted that she was happy to move out of "the projects," but the community harnessed there has never occurred in their new neighborhood.

Nollywood mediated interactions and deepened communication, community and identity. Nollywood served as a critical conduit in forging sustainable relationships in a volatile economic and housing climate for those who receive government assistance, and in negotiating immigrant life through gendered lenses. The group was an

intergenerational, cross-cultural group who used their gender identities to navigate their experiences because there were similarities that anchor their conversations.

Swapping

The second salient type of informal circulation, *swapping* Nollywood, is a distribution method where two or more parties trade movies. In this practice, swapping movies are the currency used to broker relationships. *Swapping* practices center on an appraisal process that articulates not only the value of the commodities, but also the social status of participants. Guiding interactions are exchanges based on the personal value of movies, knowledge of media content, and the importance and nature of relationships between the people involved. In other words, the more you know about the movies you are trading, and the Nollywood industry as a whole (i.e. actors, trends in the industry or the latest and popular releases), the more you garner social and cultural capital within and outside of Nollywood audiences. Each participant who swaps also attaches an immaterial value to movies in exchanges. This story revolves around Mimi, Effie and Jamila who recall their swapping practices as avenues to acquire resources, nostalgic moments, camaraderie, and broker stronger relationships.

Swapping movies entails collaborations between people who leverage their knowledge of products during interaction (Ito, et al., 2015). Within the process of swapping, participants share their narratives to create linkages between each other and articulate their identity. Swapping is a cultural performance as much as it is a media practice. For media to spread, there is a process of appraising or curating media when archiving and exchanging it. Determining the value of the cultural product encompasses several major players: the expert appraiser, the owner of the object, the collector, and the

admirer or spectator. The expert provides a neutral assessment of the object(s). The

owner argues its worth within a narrative explicating its meaning and value in a personal

history. All the while, the collector provides a final arbitration, rationalizing their

evaluation with the information presented and personal knowledge of the object(s).

Added to the performers are admirers or spectators who witness these negotiations, as

well as the actual space (physical or virtual) where negotiations take place.[78] Together,

these dimensions give insights into how performers carry out their roles and positions, the

personal investments of traders and their relationships toward each other.

The study of s*wapping* Nollywood found participants recounting the use of

storytelling as a central component in expressing the importance of the movies traded and

the rationale used in offering the movies. Similar to *borrowing*, *swapping* was just one of

several cultural products or information traded within multiple strands of kinship and

familial networks. However, Nollywood is one of the few media artifacts traded. The

process often takes on multiple meanings in negotiating the immaterial value of movies,

thus becoming a fluid currency in social interaction.

Mimi: Swapping Nostalgia. For some immigrant audiences, *swapping* arouses

nostalgic recollections of a life they left behind. This sub-practice maps out how

exchanges of movies invoke audience members' home memories. In circulation, the

nostalgia of connecting with homeland fuels diasporic distribution because it is a flow of

"cultural phenomenon" where culture crosscuts global circuits that evoke tangible and

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[78] Jenkins, Ford and Green (20103) proffer that this gaze is performed with pleasure as they form their own opinions regarding the value of the object(s) and think about personal items that might have similar importance and, in turn, may harvest for the proprietors some social or cultural significance.

imaginary connections (Smets, Vandevelde, Meers, Winkel, & Bauwel, 2013, pp. 259-61).

Mimi has been swapping Nollywood since she lived in Tobago. When she was a teenager in the early 2000s, her aunt brought home a series of Nollywood movies named after the popular African-American singer Beyoncé. Recorded in the same fashion as bootleggers who film movies in theaters with cameras, these were pirated copies made from recordings of movies screening on a computer monitor. She recalled the poor quality of the movie by detailing the inconsistent audio volume and visual scratchy presentation. Nevertheless, she immediately "got hooked" and wanted to watch more. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, Nollywood was difficult to access. As a result, swapping with friends and family became a viable avenue for her to access more titles.

Mimi openly admitted to engaging in piracy in Tobago, but I use Lobato's (2008) argument to assert her practices as neither ethical nor legal violations. Rather, swapping pirated movies is a contextualization of the economic disparities in globalization that restrict the distribution of knowledge to developing economies (p.15). Mimi illustrated how piracy is a means to access information around a dominant distribution system's regulation in the flow of cultural products. Through her circulation, Mimi inserted her narrative, intellectual and cultural capital as well as her localized distribution methods into the global flows of Nollywood, and overall digital ecology.

According to Mimi, Nollywood movies are a novelty in Trinidad, thus as costly as, or more expensive than, Hollywood films. Mimi procured most of her movies from her mother who migrated to New York when Mimi was a toddler. When her mother visited Tobago, Mimi's grandparents, aunts and uncles — who reared her in her mother's

absence — prepared elaborate homecomings. These efforts demonstrated a recent phenomenon among transnational Caribbean families engaging in the ritual of family reunions to solidify kin-based networks and re-constitute lineage (Sutton, 2004). Part of the reunion involved the distribution of gifts. Mimi's mother brought dozens of movies at a time.[79] The movies became a text linking Mimi to her mother, an African culture she learned via movies and a growing black population welcoming an African media.

The memory of receiving movies from a mother who lives abroad is evoked when Mimi swapped in the U.S. The transnational mother-child relationship Mimi experienced points to the tension in the imbalances of global economies, and, in another light, shows how migrant mothers reshape parental practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). Mimi said that Toboganian culture is family-oriented. Mothers are hands-on and fiercely protective of their children's well-being, as well as highly invested in their education and learning their culture. Because of her mother's absence, motherhood, and in turn childhood was defined through material objects and gaps of face-to-face interaction.

Presents such as movies were used to substitute the loss of time that are attached to certain cultural values. According to Mimi, her mother, who is a nanny for a wealthy white family in Manhattan, inundated her daughter with presents, money, clothes, and movies to compensate for her absence and caring for another child. Money and clothes were primarily for school and came with an expectation that Mimi performed well. Nollywood movies provided leisure and entertainment to an industry absent of the Western values of Hollywood of which her mother disapproved, but provided an outside

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[79] Mimi's mother exhibits gifting here rather than swapping, but I left this in Mimi's narrative so as not to fragment her description of how she built her collection of movies. [also good to point out here how the same person can be involved in multiple informal modes of circulation, as recipient and agent]

cultural lens that Bollywood, an industry very prevalent in Trinidad & Tobago, did not offer.[80]

When Mimi immigrated to the U.S. at sixteen, her stepfather, Picasso, subsidized her collecting hobby by helping her pay for Nollywood movies. Through the help of Picasso, Mimi built a library of several hundred movies. Mimi has family members who visit her parents' home. Today, she swaps with family members moving between Tobago, Toronto, England, and the New York metropolitan area. However, Mimi emphasized that she is very protective of her extensive collection. She swapped select movies for other Nollywood video films she has not seen, often keeping her favorites in her collection. Her choice movies feature actors that she likes. Some movies were invaluable because they have deeper meaning to Mimi; thus, she kept those she connects with the most as cherished items.

Additionally, Mimi swapped with a group of West Indian peers she befriended when she migrated to the U.S. in 2008. She explained that she is the only one in her cohort who immigrated as a teenager and watches Nollywood the most. Everyone else was either born in the U.S. or moved when they were young and to her are more "Americanized." She said she recruited friends to watch Nollywood, and introduced them to swapping practices she learned in Tobago. She proudly explained that she still has the best selection, and is reluctant to trade movies because she felt her friends did not value

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[80] Trinidad and Tobago were part of a British colonial campaign propagating authority through cultural imperialism in British cinema. From the turn of the twentieth century to World War II, England flooded its colonies with cinema in order to shape the social, cultural and political climate of territories they knew they would inevitably lose. In the 1920s, distributors began importing Hindi-language cinema to Trinidad & Tobago to accommodate the large South Asian diaspora who immigrated as laborers of the British empire from 1845 – 1917 (Burns, 2013).

them as much as she does. However, swapping movies is part of their relationship. To swap movies evoked a nostalgia of when she exchanged movies at home.

Swapping fosters Mimi's ideas around community and sustainability. She felt "Americans waste a lot of stuff" and do not appreciate the ease with which they can acquire technology and other products that are expensive or difficult to locate in Trinidad and Tobago. In her home country, swapping fostered social and economic connectedness, an ideology she sees as empowering. It bolstered her immigrant and Caribbean identity against an American hegemonic economy. Now as a Tobagonian immigrant with cultural values outside of American norms, Mimi explained that she knows the value of frugality unlike her "Americanized" West Indian peers. As Mimi readjusted to American life, she dealt with multiple identities and a form of double-consciousness, as a battle to live in two different worlds, and at the same time, reconcile with self when one has more influence than the other (Labennett, 2013). Her circulation practices reaffirmed her ties to Trinidad and Tobago, but also distances her from other West Indian youth she feelt have abandoned appropriate Caribbean culture and performance.

Jamila: Culture Swapping. Jamila, a thirty-something African-American, stay-at-home mom started culture swapping with her Liberian in-laws. Part of the exchanges included swapping Nollywood. At first, Jamila engaged in a borrowing system, but now she swaps. Wedded for seven years to a West African immigrant who was previously married to a woman from his country, her husband brought a teenaged daughter to their marriage. Jamila also brought a child to the union — an African-American son. Later, they had son and a daughter. At the time of the study, Jamila swapped with the ex-wife of her husband and her stepdaughter who is now a college student.

Since most of her husband's family is still in Liberia, Jamila had limited engagement with his familial ties; however, she relied on the relationship she has built with her stepdaughter and the child's mother. Her swapping has explicit intentions: she engaged in it to form a bond with the two women, and understand her husband's heritage. Jamila explained that it was important to absorb African culture, and more important from the perspective of a woman and girl so that she could comprehend the gender roles and dynamics of a blended African-American and African family.

Mixed marriages, even if ethnically mixed, include embracing culture and learning to work through fundamentally different social and kinship organizations (Williams-Forson, 2010). The complexity between African-American and African marriages is examined in the work of Williams-Forson (2010) and Durodoye & Coker (2008) who point to the strains in relationships around navigating cultural differences that are best resolved in developing strategies that incorporate variances of each family dynamic. For Jamila, regularly s*wapping* Nollywood contributed to strengthening the relationship with the extended family of her husband because it obliged both parties to frequently interact, dialogue and develop sensitivities when dealing with culture clashes.

Jamila said she became a fan of Nollywood around 2005. At first, she exchanged movies to understand African culture, but eventually became a fan, so much so that she attended an African concert in 2010 in Newark just to see the host, Van Vycker, a popular Nollywood actor from Ghana. It was after Jamila began making concerted efforts to learn African culture via Nollywood that she garnered respect and trust from her stepdaughter and husband's ex-wife (who reached out to her to help her rear her teenager on dating and going to college in the U.S.).

Jamila's stepdaughter experienced difficulties leveraging her African identity with her immigrant status and her identity as a teenager. As a result, Jamila began sharing tips with the mother and supported the daughter in understanding the nuances of dating culture, especially around the language and behaviors of courtship of urban African-Americans. Jamila referenced Nollywood storylines around relationships to assist her stepdaughter in reading the behavior of courtiers and selecting suitable young men to date. In swapping, she would suggest movies for her stepdaughter to watch so they could discuss sensitive issues she thought were easier to talk about if they watched similar themes.

Towards the end of this study, Jamila's son with her husband unexpectedly passed, and her stepdaughter, with whom she formed a strong bond, assisted in burying her brother and caring for Jamila when she needed the help. Jamila said it was the relationship she formed by swapping with her daughter, which forged stronger linkages.

Through the flow of Nollywood, Jamila engaged in swapping of information entailing identities around African and African-American womanhood. It also brokered her relationship with extended family members playing a critical role in sustaining her marriage, understanding her husband and creating rituals incorporating African-American culture and Liberian cultures.

Swapping Nollywood evinces an intricate flow of resources, ideologies and culture. The text operates as a tangible product, connecting people and immaterial meanings conjoining community and relationships in sharing and cultural economies. An important function in exchanges is the act of *culture brokering*. People who occupy the roles of brokers must navigate the layered social statuses and identities of participants. As

well, culture brokers must weigh in their own social position in deciding the types of movies to trade, or if they would trade at all. In addition, both parties consider the investment of the practice with each other, as the exchange obliges them to interact within the social and cultural boundaries that are established. While Mimi reported to factor in how the other party values movies, Jamila thought about appropriate material to swap with her stepdaughter. Following this line of thought, there is an understanding in swapping that the exchanges may not equitable because participants place different values on the products they are exchanging; however, the act of swapping informs relationships beyond exchanges and often cultivates affiliations.

Gifting

Gifting Nollywood is an interpersonal practice in which movies are given from one person to another, with the anticipation that the recipient uses the films as a way to deepen their cultural knowledge. In turn, the information contributes to future donor-recipient interactions and other interfaces within their respective communities where media content assists in identity construction and performance. The reasoning behind obtaining cultural understanding varies between those who are gifting and to whom they are handing the movies. Whereas African respondents report gifting as a way to acculturate family members and generations in their kinship networks who are reared in the diaspora, African-Americans passed movies to family and friends in efforts to expose them to African media, and explore Africa from an African pedagogical perspective.

This section examines the story of how Nadia, a first-generation Ghanaian-American, is gifted movies from family members upon their return from Africa. This case of gifting shows the varied meaning in gifting that points to identity and distribution.

Gifting is attached with the meaning that presenting cultural materials would result in the recipient consuming products and become more knowledgeable of African culture; hence movies function as a pedagogical tool and cultural currency that arrives at points to enrich recipients.

Gift-giving. Gifting or gift-giving is an archaic and common tradition found in many cultures. The custom is a symbolic ritual of exchange to acknowledge the role each participant plays in the action of reciprocity (Antón, Camarero, & Gil, 2014). Scholarship examines gifting as a social process that uses material items to communicate and consolidate relationships (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012; Giesler, 2006). Now literature explores how gifting flows from interpersonal to communal, offline to online, and is steered by motives outside of market and moral economies such as value systems based on culture, globalization and remittances (Singh, Cabraal, & Robertson, 2012, 2010; Rucker, Freitas & Kangas, 1996; Appadurai, 1990).

With the recent accessibility of electronic and digital technology, the social meanings of gifting disrupt traditional understandings and practices and take on more intricacy (Lotanero & Sinnreich, 2014; Smith & Golightly, 2014). In a diaspora, gifting includes such things as sending remittances, or providing dowries for marriage from an overseas groom to his bride (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012; Buggenhagen, 2004). This is why Visconti et al (2014) argue that researchers need to look at the gifting of "ethnic products and ethnic people through a lens adequately addressing the social and conceptual sophistication" illustrated in their interactions. Gifting Nollywood in this study looks at the process as part of a distribution system linked to encouraging

diasporans to participate in flows created by kinship networks, on one hand, and to act within the cultural behaviors and worldview considered appropriate, on the other.

Nadia: Gifting Africa. Material objects traveling through circuits are used to articulate a source of belonging and operate as a tangible cultural product symbolizing authenticity (Shennar, 2013; Hannam and Offeh, 2012; Brubaker, 2005; Sun, 2005). Moving cultural goods from Africa to the United States across the Atlantic Ocean materialized long before the participation of recent African immigrants; however, they contribute significantly to the practice of transporting items from homeland to host country. Paul Gilroy (1995) attempts to unpack the recent networks forming the passages across the Atlantic in describing them as routes that disembowel the meanings and appropriation of cultural products transported in the shipping process. To him, they are neither African, African-American nor Afro-Caribbean, but mutate into transatlantic, black cultural production and expressions of identities that are formed in an attempt to articulate self and belonging within modernity.

Contra to Gilroy's assertion, Nadia narrated that the movies and the ritual of waiting for them explicitly convey an Africanness and her participation in an African economy. Gilroy (1995) argues in his writings of the black Atlantic, that identity is situational and geographical. As a person moves, the politics and reasons behind their cultural performances shift to the conditions of the situation and the location in which the identity is carried out—thus arguing for a fluid identity. In contrast, a thirty-four year old daughter of Ghanaian immigrants, Nadia "became African" by participating in two practices: exchanging African culture through family members and friends within extended kinship networks, and watching the movies her uncle supplied upon his return

from Africa. This form of gifting I call "gifting Africa" because it is a cultural production

moving through routes to augment African identity to create a cultural economy outside

of the hegemonic strictures of dominant culture. The movies embody Africa, and are

given with the idea that the couriers are bringing Africa to spectators to secure and

solidify African identity and behavior; hence the term "gifting Africa" and an account

given by Nadia:

> I started watching Nollywood in the 90s. My uncle would bring the video
> cassettes from Africa when he visited. After that, he brought DVDs. Eventually,
> they were being sold over here and he did not bring them as much. It got to the
> point that he didn't bring anymore because they became so accessible in the
> States. Now I usually look at them online. It's a lot easier now to get the movies,
> but I still remember when I was a girl, and me, my mother and my other sister
> would be waiting on my uncle to bring those tapes. I feel like, in my in my own
> way, I am supporting my people. You know, something African.

Africans circulating the movies is in itself an African practice from the perspective of the

participant. By spreading the movies, it continues the physical flow of a cultural product,

as much as it streams ideas and meanings of Africanness. To Nadia, her participation

deepened her connection, and reconciles the personal clashes of obtaining Africanness in

America. Since she resides in a host country, circulating African movies boosts the global

presence of African cultural currency and market economy from her perspective.

Equally important, the movies provided Nadia the opportunity to experience the

evolution of Nollywood alongside Africans. She emphasized her lengthy spectatorship as

a way to authenticate identity and a genuineness in her in circulation practices. By

recalling the shift from VHS tapes to DVDs, then online, Nadia established herself as a

long-time spectator, and one who is knowledgeable of the shifts occurring in the industry,

even though she lives outside of Ghana.[81] Nadia identified as being both African and black American. In her stories, she described how those who have lived in Africa their whole lives consider African children born in the diaspora or those who have lived outside of Africa for a while only partially African. Questions around her African citizenship amplified her participation the spreading of Nollywood because it was one way she practiced her Africanness.

Furthermore, the movies served as a source of African entertainment absent in American media, as well as an integral part of pictorializing daily life in Africa. Nadia was *gifted* Nollywood as a way to supplement the social and cultural interactions she lacked growing up in the U.S. Immigrant family members explained to her that "being African," or Africanness, is a concept learned through a set of protocols and etiquette experienced and repeated in daily interactions fully achieved by growing up in Africa. According to Tettey and Puplampu (2005), black American identity is a cultural product and identity rooted in an American experience, whereas African identity is located in Africa, and thus an African cultural product. They contend Africanness or being African can only come from one who understands the intricacies of Africa because they have experienced the complexity that occurs in performing within social structures that host a variety of identities that are linked to an array of cultural realities, languages and traditions.

Although reared speaking *Twi* (a Ghanaian language), eating *jollof rice* and *kenkey* (Ghanaian food), and exchanging *high life* (contemporary Ghanaian music) within a network revolving around Christian church services that "had lots of Africans," Nadia

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[81] Nollywood is comprised of Ghanaian and several Nigerian production companies. The term serves as a generic name for several specific industries.

learned Africanness through interactions occurring at specific times and in the domestic

spaces or specific private gatherings of an insular community. Reared in a predominantly

white and Latino neighborhood in Los Angeles, it was difficult for Nadia to consistently

"be African" in California. "In L.A. black men don't date black women, especially

women like me and especially in 'The Valley,'"[82] said Nadia. "For one, I'm dark-skinned

and I'm African with natural hair. Even African men don't date me," she explained.

Nadia faced dilemmas of black citizenship at times. Her blackness seemed

magnified when her African identity surfaced. Because of her direct African ties, being

(black) American was problematic, too. Both required her to inhibit both identities

simultaneously, while apologizing for the other's contradictions when it violated the

belonging of the other.

Nadia's uncle who transported movies from Africa to the U.S. served a cultural

ambassador in which she placed value in his selections and his knowledge of the

industry. In this instance, her uncle was a culture broker bridging authentic African

identity and diasporan identity. Moreover, the uncle who *gifted* movies to Nadia

ultimately contributed to the sustainability of the industry. He played an integral part in

distinguishing the needs of his diasporan network on one end of his route. On the other

end, he engaged in commercial activity with African marketers. Her uncle occupies local

and global positions in a system that Adejunmobi (2007) describes as "parallel markets"

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[82] An urbanized suburb located in the southwest section of Los Angeles County, mostly consisting of neighborhoods making up the San Fernando Valley, a territory bounded by mountains. This area was known as the "citrus belt" and used to be mostly comprised of citrus farms, but was gradually uprooted in the 1920s at the start of creating a Greater or suburban Los Angeles. The area sharply changed during the white flight of Los Angeles from the 1950s to the 1970s, a time that the city experience the 1965 Watts riots and the labor strikes of agriculturalists in the city, but especially in San Fernando Valley (Garcia, 2001). Today, the area contains neighborhoods such as North Hollywood or NOHO, a popular arts district, Sherman Oaks, the porn capital of the nation and other cities housing production studios such as Glendale, Burbank and Studio City.

which are transnational economies that intersect with Nigerian financial systems and the

global commerce of diasporans that operate outside of the economy of their host country.

Rather than identifying them as pirate economies, Adejunmobi calls them minor

transnational interactions where the regional distribution of movies depend on the

international circulations, as much as the global circuits depend on the regional

distribution. The symbiotic relationship connects to a diasporan identity Nadia defined.

Her Africanness was contingent upon her position in the flow of African media, and in

particular, Nollywood.

Online Sharing

Circulating Nollywood formatted to DVDs and VCDs is rapidly shifting to online

streaming in the diaspora. This leads to the final informal circulation practice, *online

sharing*, or virtual circulations of Nollywood content. This section narrates how

respondents exchange movies and Nollywood products online through a multi-stranded

system of sharing products and discourse. Spreading Nollywood content within this

practice is manifold, but consists of several dominant online activities: recommending

sites, music and images (streaming sites, blogs, memes, and Facebook pages);

roaming/searching; following blogs, hashtags, and the social media activities of

Nollywood industry workers (actors, directors and bloggers); and dialoguing/commenting

(blogs, Youtube Channels or social media post with Nollywood content). While these

activities certainly circulate Nollywood, I argue that these complex virtual circuits go

beyond this one industry. They involve file-sharing and peer-to-peer networks where

participants share content and help build community representing Africa in modernity.

The popular practice of file sharing, a procedure which is estimated to account for about sixty percent of internet use (Liebowitz, 2006; Peitz & Waelbroeck, 2006) involves individuals anonymously and asynchronously copying digitized products, such as music, film, television shows, books, video games, and computer software programs. Though not the same as interpersonal trading, this practice includes an element of interactivity, as those who share files in turn download files shared by others. Peer-to-peer (P2P) is a more specific platform (and certainly one of the more popular distribution systems of file sharing), allowing peers to share their resources within their networks. Additionally, P2P file sharing is a common platform used to share large media files such as movies and music (Kjøsen, 2014; Sinnreich, 2013; Trammell, 2013). Admittedly, file sharing encompasses a host of legal questions, battles and injunctions around copyright infringement and protections against intellectual property. However, user-generated content within distribution systems operating outside of market economies disrupt blanketed charges toward practices considered illicit because they are traded in non-commercial-driven capacities with the purpose of diffusing media content they are invested in generating, rather than profiting from sharing (Crisp, 2014; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

There are intersecting social dimensions within the communities of users who distribute and transfer unauthorized copyrighted files (Caraway, 2013). For years, there are two main thoughts in file sharing: the dominant perspective frames it as digital piracy and illegality, while the other describes the practice as consumers who are engaging in media content on their own terms (Karaganis, 2011). There is another frame of thought that distances file sharing in peer-to-peer networks from criminality. Users assert that the

dominant media systems do not operate to serve the best interests of the artists with the media generated. Rather it protects the monopoly of hegemonic media systems (David, 2010). Caraway (2013) argues that scholarship neglects to unpack the motivations of user-generated media content within a lens that considers class and access. Citing instances when users employ file sharing because the media content is of low quality, unavailable to local markets, or too expensive as a formal copy; thus his challenge blurs the question of ethics. Regardless of mainstream thought around sharing, it is overwhelmingly becoming a socially acceptable act.

In the case of Nollywood, diasporans are likely to use the Internet as a main conduit in informal circuits. In the previous section on gifting, Nadia offered a simple answer to online usage; the accessibility is easier in attempting to utilize an industry operating with older technologies in another continent. Added to Nadia's claims is the availability of broadband. Although there is a digital divide in poor, working-class and communities of color in the U.S., there exists a vaster ability to access the internet in the U.S. than Africa and the Caribbean (Shivers, 2013). Thus, diasporans are able to access Nollywood quicker, cheaper and easier online than through the traditional forms of distribution.

Although online streaming provides diasporans access, it is problematic for an already vulnerable Nigerian film industry. Popular streaming sites like iRoko TV run movies to subscribers for a monthly fee, but reportedly underpay production studios leasing their films to the company for three years (Haynes, 2014). These sites provide access to Africans and those living outside saturated areas of the media, but the monthly fee is still considerably high for the average African; therefore, its dependency relies on

elite and international viewership or the emergence of P2P platforms sharing free movies, thus further undercutting profits to Nollywood production companies and actors.

Two participants who practice online sharing offer drastically different ways they share online, but both circulate movies through kinship and peer networks, and virtual communities. Aziza is a thirty-something African-American woman who is part of several online and offline collectives that shared Nollywood. Stephanie, an eighteen-year-old recent immigrant exchanged links to free online streaming sites with friends still living in Nigeria. While Aziza used Nollywood to promote a broader agenda of disseminating African media and culture, Stephanie focused on procuring information on sites she can watch to abate feelings of separation and loneliness, and stay abreast of Nigerian pop culture.

Aziza: Trending Africa. Aziza works in social media marketing and is online most of the time. Her job requires active online engagement, but throughout her workday, she interacted with friends and family on personal accounts she set up on various social media platforms. One day she recalled receiving a Facebook message of a Youtube link to a skit remaking the popular African-American urban comedy classic, "Friday." The actors were Africans living in the U.K. A fan of the original film, Aziza began to engage in the commentary of the trailer in the Youtube comments sections. She, like others in the forum, encouraged the creators to produce a full-length version. That day, Aziza asked a Ghanaian coworker if she had seen the trailer. Her colleague had not, but explained that the skit was probably a Nollywood production.[83] Aziza was unfamiliar with Nollywood

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[83] The trailer is not a Nollywood short, but borrows from the industry's oft-used strategy of re-appropriating black American popular culture. Aziza's mistake of connecting the skit to Nollywood occurred several times in the interview where she connected Ethiopian movies to Nollywood. To her, it fit

until her coworker described the film industry and it immediately captured her interests. Since then, Aziza frequently shares and receives Nollywood links ranging from clips, full movies, skits, memes and blog posts.

Before Nollywood, Aziza explained that she frequently watched Bollywood and independent black films on Youtube. Though she was not familiar with Nollywood, she felt that her interest in film industries outside of Hollywood made it easier for her to become a spectator. She explained her online network of black people who were black indie film enthusiasts and *Afrofuturists*. Afrofuturism is a recent paradigm that offers an African-centered lens into the current digital world (Yaszek, 2006). Afrofuturism reconfigures old theories like Pan-Africanism and traditional African spiritual systems such as Orisa worship and Voodoo as aesthetics represented in the virtual world (Hobson, 2014; Nuruddin, 2011). This, in turn, is seen as the future of black ideology and unification.

Much of Afrofuturism is explored in creative works such as literature, visual and performing arts. In these Afrofuturist circles, Aziza reported how Nollywood is considered a template to spread black culture on a global scale outside of dominating production systems. She explained:

> My African-American friends are fascinated by how popular Nollywood is and how independent it is from Hollywood. My African friends are fascinated by the cultural dominance of African-American films and are trying to [understand the formula] for African industries.

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under a generic category of African films. This problematizes the distinctions of African movies and the various industries producing them; making Aziza's actions similar to how U.S.-dominant social order homogenizes black people. There are several underlying reasons for this. One, Aziza an African-American who operates within a Pan-African paradigm and an African-American worldview that collapses identity in many ways to promote the overarching theme of solidarity.

After Aziza began watching Nollywood, she realized that there was a Nigerian woman from whom she bought vintage purses at a flea market who also sold Nollywood movies: "They were in front of my face the whole time." She admitted to being slightly uneasy about disregarding Nollywood because she said as a black American, she "should know how it feels to be invisible in the media." This directly connected her reasons to disseminate information about Nollywood rather than simply sharing links to streaming sites or full movies. Significant amounts of people in her social media networks are not familiar with Nollywood and the emerging African artists and arts. She spread Nollywood to raise awareness and to get more people to view other industries outside of Hollywood as both a political and cultural campaign. With the posts, she sometimes incorporated African languages she sees in movies or Nollywood clips, especially ones with Yoruba terms referring to gods. One of her expressions is, "What the Fela, Shango,"[84] to express excitement and her approval of something that is so good that it is inexplicable. These references were her way of distributing African culture by way of Nollywood.

Although Aziza is part of a collective of a college-educated blacks living mostly in the Northeast who explore black aesthetics outside of mainstream culture such as music, art and movies, she preferred to share and discuss Nollywood with "regular folk who are spectators" absent of "high-brow critics." To her, a common spectator gave answers that were authentic and offer insight without any pressures to be politically correct. This afforded her an eye into the real world of African movies.

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[84] A term of excitement that uses Fela Kuti, the most prolific and controversial Nigerian musician who created Afro-beat, and Şango, a deity in the traditional Yoruba Pantheon.

Aziza informally distributed Nollywood products by posting links to clips, news articles, vines and memes on her Facebook and Instagram profiles, and sometimes onto social media pages of people in her online network. She, too, operated as a cultural broker by exposing and providing cultural material. To her the dialogue in which she engaged gets "ratchet," which is typically associated as a derogatory word for transgressive behavior in black women. For Aziza, however, "Ratchet is not a derogatory term or thought pattern. To me it is resistance in defining our existence and everyday reality without the white gaze." Theri Pickens (2014) agrees with Aziza's suppositions and points to a trend of middle-class and educated black women who purposely act "ratchet" to circumvent the pressures of black female respectability that often limit the expression and articulation of femininity and blackness.

One popular clip Aziza recalled sharing was of an African man dancing during a Christian church service. In the scene, he was making an offering in a basket in the front of the church while dancing to lively gospel music. He seemed to be so affected; he jumped up and down, and moved his body profusely while shaking his hips. Suddenly, he fell back onto the ground and flipped over. For weeks, discussions around this clip debated whether the church was African, African-American or Caribbean. The larger dialogue explored how black people worshiped within religions and spiritual systems. This clip became so popular that Aziza even saw African-American comedian Kevin Hart post it in his Youtube account in a segment jokingly exploring the funniest Youtube videos. Later she discovered through her sister that, that clip was from a Nollywood film.

Rather than accepting popular representations, Aziza spoke of articulating presence and reconfiguring notions of culture and respectability. It is a recognition that

dominant media currents exclude African media content and the voices of black people. This is not new, but a resurgence of black creativity and black audiences operating outside and within hegemonic structures.[85] Similar to the innovative and informal or alternative circuits of African-American cinema, also known as black films or black Hollywood, the "chitlin' circuit"[86] contains channels where movies are passed through a number of networks to bolster other audience members and maintain the viability of movies without the support of mainstream media.

Paula J. Massood (2010, 2005) historicizes how black actors and black production companies had to work and distribute their material both inside and outside of Hollywood. Outside of Hollywood, a map marking the places where they could perform was given the term "chitlin" after the black American cuisine, chitterlings, because those foods were served in these clubs or the areas where actors traveled. The black press augmented the circuits with regular coverage of black entertainers to create an alternate film and entertainment industry. The channels and practices of disseminating Nollywood

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[85] Film was introduced to the United States in New York City, but for almost a century, the systematic exclusion of blacks from making movies existed in Hollywood (Massood, 2003). African-Americans engaged in film production about twenty years after their white counterparts. Much of it occurred outside of the dominant Hollywood film industry until the last two decades of the twentieth century. In the 1910s and 1920s, most black filmmakers were either self-taught, or transported what they learned as extras and staff on major studio filmmaking to their own ventures (Bowser, Gaines, & Musser, 2001; Leab, 1975; Cram and Bowser, 1994). Until the mid-twentieth century, blacks were trained outside of film academies in the United States, or went to Europe for film education. In the 70s and 80s, African-American directors emerged as a result of the popularity of Blaxploitation; however, much of those movies were directed and filmed by whites. A small cadre of black filmmakers became visible in the 80s through the UCLA film school, and by the mid-to-late 80s until today, African-American filmmakers increased significantly with the current numbers at its highest.

[86] A colloquial term to describe the routes created by African American entertainers who travelled to different black towns and communities to perform when they could not in mainstream, white establishments that systematically blocked their participation. "Chitlin'" is a shortened term for the African-American culinary dish, chitterlings, which are pig intestines. This dish created by enslaved blacks who received the unwanted parts of animals from slave plantation owners such as the guts, tongue and hooves of animals.

films, music, and other art by blacks still exist in the cultural memories of black people as they are expressed via Aziza operating a citizen journalist.

Stephanie: Streaming and Searching for Home. Stephanie knew about online streaming of Nollywood before she accessed it. When she moved to the U.S. from Nigeria, she almost immediately began sharing and collecting the links of streaming sites. A full-time first-year college student having a difficult time adjusting to American culture, and missing her city in Igbo State, she reported to look for Nollywood-related websites in most of her spare time. Sharing Nollywood served as a space of familiarity and comfort. She is a member of a network of friends she knew in Nigeria and their extended Nigerian network. Stephanie said that maintaining connections with her peers back home helped her deal with a loneliness she developed because of the shock she experienced in a social order that clashed with the culture of her upbringing.

In Nigeria, Stephanie did not watch Nollywood often. When she did, she viewed it on DVDs and VCDs. To her it was boring and too dramatic. Contrastingly, once she immigrated to Newark, Nollywood became a valuable resource. In Newark, Stephanie felt out-of-place. The customs, interactions and cultures were hard to understand: "Here there is so much disrespect. Younger people do not greet older people on the street. When I say 'Good Morning Auntie' to this woman or that lady, they do not respond. Un, uhn. This is crazy."

To quell her unease, she began to look for sites on the internet in the computer lab of the Newark-based community college she attends. The restrictions on streaming and the slow connection made it difficult to watch. She said she begged her uncle, whom she

stays with, to get internet access his home. Reluctantly, he did when she convinced him that she needed it for school.

Once internet was set up at her home, she began to contact her friends through email and Facebook and Nigerian forums, asking them for links to Nollywood movies. Indeed, they responded, but due to their limited online access, their communication was intermittent, resulting in Stephanie continuing to search on her own:

> I stay up late looking for Igbo movies. I miss the culture, the music, there isn't anything like Nigerian movies. You know, I took them for granted when I was there. Now I ask my friends. Please send me *Naija* movies, good movies. I don't watch American movies, oh no. I watch Nollywood all day if can. It reminds me of home.

Combing the internet, she found blogs, trending memes, Nollywood music and video clippings, along with streaming sites. She learned to rip the songs from the movies and play them on her computer. Stephanie shared them with her friends who had not heard of many of the links or sites because they were mainly for Nigerians living abroad. Stephanie's attempts to maintain homeland connections as her friends in Nigeria dealt with issues of access and connectivity, while she experienced culture shock, her spatial separation heightened with her inability to maintain consistent communication; and in turn, amplified her thoughts of homeland. According to Oluyinka Esan (2009), Nollywood satisfies or brings about nostalgia of living in Africa for immigrants. For audiences, the movies "reconstitute[s] time and space," by situating the consumer into familiar territory. Stephanie, who admitted to dealing with the depression of being separated, experienced what Esan (2009) describes as moments of pleasure because the spectator rejects dominant culture by consuming African media. While Esan focuses on spectating (to be discussed in chapter five), I apply his analysis to circulating Nollywood.

Since Stephanie disproved of the Newark culture she experienced, she found pleasure and productivity in spreading a media with which she was both familiar and through which she gains grounding. More importantly, sharing transpired with established friends.

After long intervals on the computer, her uncle discovered that a lot of her activity involved streaming or searching for movies. Surprisingly, she said that he approved of the activity. He told her that he would rather see her at home watching Nigerian movies than socializing with people who are "no good," like black Americans. In his work on African immigrants employing Nollywood, Esan (2009) notes they use the films to adopt or negotiate behaviors and attitudes deemed culturally appropriate. Women and girls who opt to stay home at night and watch Nollywood rather than attend a social club were socially acceptable within the boundaries of Nigerian femininity. More importantly, these coded behavior models occurred in domestic spaces, and in turn, engender Nollywood and restrict its movement amongst some women. Though Stephanie said she disliked engaging in Nollywood in the confines of her uncle's home, it is the best alternative until she found friends and learned more about Newark.

Come Full Circle: An Overview of Formal and Informal Distribution

Most of this chapter explored the physical travels of movies for several reasons. At the time of this study, DVDs were still prevalent in informal circulation. At the end of the study, participants who were usually younger reported an increase in online usage. Though the rapidly evolving world of online activity needs much exploration, there are critical issues posing a challenge to exploring this area in-depth in this study. Only a small segment of streaming sites had English-language collections, thus limiting the users of this study who are Anglophones or cannot fluently speak traditional languages of the

country (Orimaye, Alhashmi, & Eugene, 2012). In addition, there is more terrain to uncover in offline interactions throughout a diverse diaspora such in the U.S., and so this researcher attempted to capture some of the nuances in face-to-face, interpersonal experiences. However, offline activity links to digital practices: whether talking on the phone, texting, tweeting or posting about movies, circulation somehow travels between both worlds — the digital and the non-virtual reality.

In Newark, spreading movies solidified partnerships of those in the vulnerable social positions dealing with issues such as resettlement, employment, wealth inequity, gentrification, housing and media misrepresentation. The participants attempted to comprehend shifts in their everyday realities by creating communicative spaces where they could explore layered meanings of self and community. Nollywood trafficked through commercial and non-commercial routes evoking interactions involving cultural performances and negotiations. In commercial circuits, movies were used to help sustain business owners and vendors who were peripheral in mainstream economy. In informal circulations, Nollywood circulated as a cultural and social currency to assist participants in suturing resources and identities. Certainly, capital is critical, as it dictates the production of movies and, ultimately, the buoyancy of lives and groups, but becomes peripheral when narrating the personal investment of audiences who used it to broker relationships and as a media that helped create African and diasporic spaces.

When African merchants joined the vending culture that already existed in Newark, they transported their import/export practices that demonstrated a highly organized system of trade and networks that were divvied by ethnic and regional affiliations. They became a part of a community of African-American vendors who sold

pirated American movies, but while the presence of African-American street vendors declined in the 1990s on, African merchants increased. Today, African-merchants are a vital part of a micro-community of mom-and-pop black immigrant shops. Within some of their establishments, Nollywood sold along with other imported African and Caribbean products and foods.

At these retail outlets, merchants embedded aspects of their culture that one participant described as "being African," or existing in an African space, suggesting there is an expected cultural performance to maintain the integrity of African identity. Shopkeepers hired people within their networks and set up businesses as co-ops operating adjacent to other African shops. Further establishing an African marketplace, shop signage such as African flags representing respective countries, images of Africa or using the word "Africa" within the name of the store. Fashioning the materiality of the shops to promote and sell ethnic goods boosted the expansion of African spaces that patrons entered and departed. Much like the train station I described in chapter one, they engaged in African discourse in these spaces. Emerging out of these interactions are junctures where actors in these spaces and in these instances, navigated multiple identities that blurred finite diasporic belonging as they maneuvered through inter-and-intra diasporic ethnic social interaction.

Interactions in the shops included purchases as well as exchanges in news, personal experiences and information about resources outside of Nollywood. Interpersonal communication is essential in soliciting the movies due to the fundamental practice of bartering and negotiating prices in a traditional African trading space. For some African immigrants, English is a second or third language, or spoken in an accent

different from American accents that made it difficult to communicate with Anglophone customers. Chi Chi, a second-generation Nigerian often spoke for her employer, Amadou whose first language was Wolof. In this instance, Chi Chi operated as a translator and culture broker who communicated the goals of "being African" in the store, and in turn, provided information of the transaction to Amadou.

Selling Nollywood for retailers meant that their distribution was part of an unregulated industry. During my visits, Kwesi, a Ghanaian shopkeeper, suggested movies that he thought were "good culture" and seized every opportunity to educate me about African culture and dialogue about the state of black people around the world, U.S. politics, especially President Barack Obama, and Newark. These conversations overlaid my purchases of Nollywood, but established Kwesi as an authority on African culture, and thus implying that his suggestions nourished my cultural self. In a different approach, Mamawa sold movies emphasizing the star system in Nollywood that started in Africa. She choose to keep me updated on the personal lives and latest work of Nollywood stars to augment the movies she suggested. While Kwesi approached our interactions with a paternalistic sentiment, Mamawa chose to offer selections based on actors' work. Both operated as cultural brokers bridging Nollywood to clients.

The movies provided shopkeepers an avenue to create community and generate income on their own terms; even if movies conflicted with religious or moral beliefs as expressed by Amadou, the owner of the video and music store selling movies and music from West Africa and the Caribbean. Using Keith Hart's (2007) supposition that the African market called "informal" through a Westernized lens because it operates within a

non-capitalistic system aligns with merchants in the study. Although the Nollywood industry operates within a structure that is unregulated, it is indeed organized.

In the case of Horus, a displaced stationary street vendor who now walks through Newark selling movies, his operations are compromised by local pressures to deter pirated movies. He started selling Nollywood out of necessity, and too, enjoyed being able to hawk pirated African movies rather than face the risk of arrest like he did before selling bootleg Hollywood films. There is a sense of ownership of the streets that Horus evoked because he knew the terrain well, but troubled because local officials threatened his ability to peddle in public spaces with the gradual removal of street vendors — efforts which he points to as a sign of gentrification.

While African immigrant retailers transported African culture, children of African-born parents like Chi Chi, used African markets to embed themselves in a cultural space not afforded to them because they grew up in the U.S. and rarely visited the homeland. Daniel Dayan (1998) writes on how media serves as a mechanism for diasporic communities to construct cohesive identities from their fragile positions of being disconnected from their homeland. The African shop became a blueprint for African commercial life that Chi Chi enjoyed. She used the materiality and the interactions within the shop to make sense and suture her African self, and reconcile an African immigrant identity geographically disconnected from home. The physical space of the shop blurred in functions as a tie-in and dedicated space for Nollywood, as it also functioned as a site where customers and passersby cultivated diasporic communicative spaces to dialogue within the framework of referencing the homeland in a host country or being in the "here and there."

In informal circulation, as the stories of audience members unfolded, a common theme threaded their circulation practices. The currency of presence and visibility outweighed economic profit. In globalization, the ability to be visible became critical in global economies. More importantly, the ability to have power in defining the flow of personal resources was paramount. The movies are one of many resources diasporans distributed in an ecosystem where sharing resources is an inevitable function of exchanging realities; and not necessarily consciously or in harmony, but in ways to sustain collectivity and bolster individuality.

Person-to-person lending of Nollywood movies was an essential practice in connecting Nollywood audiences and building community within native and migrant blacks in Newark. In the case of Yadira and her mother who borrowed Nollywood from African women, the interaction provided an entry for them to be a part of an enclave of black immigrant women who exchanged resources, child-care, food, job leads, and other information to make up for the lack of resources in dominant society. The intra-ethnic alliance also sutured a black woman immigrant identity where they carved out intellectual spaces in conversations they took part in while discussing Nollywood movies. In another light, Nollywood was used as a reference point in understanding West African traditions and an important media that often connected Yadira and her mother to dialogue about culture and blackness — which was difficult to do with Latinos who excluded them because of their dark skin linking them to the racial category of black in the U.S.

Swapping, another form of informal circulation was slightly different from borrowing. Whereas in borrowing, the direction of the flow of movies occurs in one direction, in swapping, audiences traded movies — making the practice a bidirectional

activity of culture and personal values exchanging too. Swapping was a negotiation engaging the value of a cultural product from the giver to the receiver. The value expressed by each also indicated the relationships between the parties. Mimi swapped with other West Indian teen immigrants to evoke memories of Tobago. Her nostalgic moments elicited memories of family life; her mother's visits back to Tobago who brought movies to her from the U.S., and the swapping Mimi participated in Tobago where material items passed through many hands, as opposed to the American culture she thought was wasteful. Most importantly, swapping in the U.S. supported her efforts in maintaining a Tobagonian identity.

On the other hand, Jamila who is married to a Liberian, swapped movies with her stepdaughter and the previous wife of her husband as a way to exchange culture within the blended family she made with her spouse. Swapping brokered relationships between two cultures where they roles of women and girls are performed different. Jamila used it to gain entry into the culture of her husband's family. In turn, that opened communication between her and her stepdaughter, who Jamila helped navigate adolescence as a black immigrant.

Next, gifting Nollywood was a practice where the presenter is a culture broker. Movies were cultural productions moving through routes to augment African identity to create a cultural economy outside of the hegemonic strictures of dominant culture for diasporans. The movies embodied Africa, and were given with the idea that the couriers transported Africa to spectators to secure and solidify African identity and behavior; hence the term "gifting Africa." By spreading the movies, it continued the physical flow of a cultural product, as much as it streams ideas and meaning of Africanness. To Nadia,

a second-generation African immigrant who was gifted movies by her uncle said the movies assisted in her learning Ghanaian identity, as opposed to a generic African identity because in interactions with Africans, it was important to demonstrate specific ethnic belonging to explicate authenticity.

A diehard Nollywood audience member, Nadia expressed that her participation as a Nollywood fan deepened her connection, and reconciled the personal clashes of being reared in the U.S. Her African-born parents and family members constantly reminded her that she lacked the cultural competence they acquired growing up in Africa. Consuming the movies gifted to her by her uncle satisfied her family's efforts to enrich Nadia, as well as her efforts to be an African. Furthermore, the movies that she received as gifts from her uncle while growing up in Los Angeles also marked her participation in the industry since the 1990s. She voiced pleasure when explaining that she viewed movies on the different formats they were mass produced and broadcasted — from videocassettes to satellite and then online. To her, this created a stronger bond to a popular African cultural product and ultimately African culture. Now Nadia uses her knowledge of Nollywood to inform non-African blacks in her network, acting like a culture broker herself.

Online sharing of links and dialoging on social media networks about Nollywood, places the industry and Africa into conversations of modernity. Aziza learned about Nollywood via a social media post of a person in her network, and in turn, posted Nollywood clips and other items related to the movies, onto her social media platforms. This was her way to promote movies in several of her circles of people who did not know about Nollywood.

Her online activity also provided her entry into conversations that placed Africa and its diaspora in discourse around modernity that she calls, Afrofuturism. Circulating movies virtually heightened her emphasis of African culture through a digital lens, which aligns with Camoroff and Camoroff's (2004) exploration of Afromodernity, or situating Africa in the future. Aziza spoke of articulating presence and reconfiguring notions of culture and respectability via the internet was important for people of African descent to continue transnational dialogues and embed their conversations in global power.

Online sharing for Stephanie, a recent émigré of Nigeria, allowed her to maintain relations back home to deal with the loneliness and uncomfortabilities of her new immigrant life. Nollywood satisfied or brought about the nostalgia of living in Nigeria for Stephanie because movies "reconstitute[s] time and space," (Esan 2008) by situating the consumer into familiar territory; thus Nollywood became a text articulating her identity and her despair.

Although online sharing helped Stephanie maintain Nigerian ties through by communicating via email and social media about the latest news or Nollywood movies with her friends back home, the lack of access to the internet in Nigeria often disrupted her communication. The interruption and gaps of time between conversations with friends evoked a stronger nostalgia, and increased her participation in watching movies.

With both Aziza and Stephanie, their dialogue created a virtual Africa, a landless concept that exists in the imagination. For Aziza, an imagined geography is what she had been doing all of her life — imagining Africa without going there. In her online interactions with other diasporans who have visited or lived there, her imagining of home is authenticated in a collective image that is drawn. For Stephanie, the imagined Africa is

connected to a geographic understanding, but Africa to her is regionalized to Nigeria, thus home is specific, and imagined as comfort, and a place where she can be authentic, as opposed to her difficult negotiations in immigrant life. Subsequently, virtualizing Africa places it and the bodies linked to it, into a digital modernity.

In closing, Nollywood shifts between three roles; it is a product, a pedagogy and a practice. Bought, traded and sold as cultural products, movies are solicited as pedagogical tools of culture and as an apparatus to become or be African. As it flows within networks and channels catering to the needs of audiences, the meanings shift as diasporans make sense of self while handling the texts through their interactions with other diasporans.

In closing, Nollywood is a template of global diffusion and dialogue, incorporating multiple aspects of distribution. It survives in places like Newark beyond the presence of black people because it circulates as a necessity, a product that generates revenue, and cultural production placing African people in the present. The narratives of participants explicitly and implicitly talk about hierarchies of power and the circulation of movies that serve as a natural/cultural resource traveling through channels.

CHAPTER FIVE

"WE AFRICANS (OR WE BLACK), WE TALK BACK TO THE MOVIE":

RECEPTION SITES AND PRACTICES OF NOLLYWOOD

Newark is a theater-desert when it comes to providing an adequate number of facilities for watching movies. Presently, there are two active theaters: a one-screen adult movie house running gay porn and a twelve-screen venue showing top Hollywood releases.[87] Recently replacing a smaller Cineplex, the twelve-screen multiplex is a state-of-the-art building featuring high quality digital technology. Described as the "best place to watch a movie in New Jersey,"[88] it is the only place for most Newark residents to do so. With the exception of the annual Black Film Festival held at the Newark Museum, mainstream exhibition spaces that screen films from Africa are nonexistent in Newark.

The present reality of limited movie theaters is drastically different from a city documented to have had almost fifty cinema houses in total from early 1900s to early 1990s (Read, 2013). However, the decline of movie theaters did not result in the deterioration of exhibition spaces or audiences. In fact, movie watching and sites of spectatorship have *increased*— though they have dramatically altered. In this chapter, I look at sites of reception and the reception practices of Nollywood audiences in order to add to the discourse first offered by Onookome Okome (2007) and Babson Ajibade (2007)[89] on how audiences create non-traditional modes and sites of reception in a city

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[87] Both theaters are located in the Central ward; one of the five wards in the city.

[88] Found in article, "Newark debuts all-digital CityPlex 12," 26 September 2012. Internet: http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content_display/esearch/e3ifc3c621728aec983e88d2a90add9e47c. Pulled December 27, 2014.

[89] Please reference my exploration of Okome (2007) and Ajibade's (2007) work on consumption spaces and "sights of seeing in chapter two, a section exploring the development of Nollywood and Nollywood audiences.

almost emptied of theaters. In these new sites, Okome and Ajibade begin discussion how they constructed identities through their interactions with the movies and each other.

After an extensive mapping of Nollywood reception sites, this chapter proposes four general locations of spectatorship: public, public-private, private, and intermezzo spaces. *Public spaces* in this study are outdoor venues or spaces that screen movies and consist of outdoor viewings at vendor carts. *Private-public spaces* are at a storefront business, a braiding gallery, and restaurant. *Private spaces* materialize at the homes of audience members. Finally, i*ntermezzo* — or in-between spaces are transitional spaces such as buses, taxis and trains, and arenas where private-public spectatorship is blurred. Although private spaces make up a significant portion of spectatorship, public, private-public and intermezzo spaces are important sites of viewing in Newark. These locations add to the materiality of Newark to the contouring of Newark into a diasporic space in a post-black era of the city, and they narrate the tense undercurrents of diasporic negotiation and the shifting geography of a gentrifying city.

This chapter pulls from interviews and field notes to provide a multi-layered, nuanced narrative of spectatorship. The main actor interwoven in public and private spaces is Chi Chi, a working-class, second-generation Nigerian-American who is familiar with the merchant community in downtown Newark, and African business owners specifically. She worked in Newark in several capacities. She assisted her mother, who first owned a vending cart in the 1990s, then opened a braiding gallery in the early 2000s. Afterwards, she sold Nollywood at a media center owned by a Malian immigrant who is also a family friend. Chi Chi frequented many stores in this area as a friend and customer, and she is a fervent spectator at home and in family settings. Her narration appeared in

many spaces of exhibition, allowing the researcher to frame the themes emerging out of the responses of other participants who are just as critical in providing insight to alternative viewing spaces and spectatorial practices.

For this portion of the study, I focus on the following central questions to the participants: Where do you watch Nollywood? With whom do you watch? On what devices? What do you watch? And, what do you do when you watch it? These questions are important because they address two critical discourse of film spectatorship — the materiality of the screening site and audience performance. The shift in movie watching from theaters to domestic spaces, and other non-traditional sites contributes to how audiences perform during spectatorship. Richard Butsch (2000, 2007) surmises that audience performances are shaped by what authorities think audiences are, and what the audience members themselves think about their audience identities. To bolster the process of forming an identity around audience, the site of where reception occurs fosters these feelings too — consequently, the responses of participants illuminate the negotiation of hegemonic expectations of movie watching behaviors and how the backdrop of reception sites contribute to these negotiations.

Mapping the Spaces

Public spaces are explored through the experiences of Horus, who has movies on consignment at the vending cart of a street marketer who can still sell his wares on the main boulevards of downtown Newark. Horus provided insight into the establishment of viewing in public spaces because he walked from business to business, selling movies to staff and customers. His most ardent clients were those at braiding salons who screen movies continuously throughout their long days of operations.

In the public-privates spaces, Nollywood operates as a backdrop in businesses. Here I look at a video and music store owned by Amadou who employed Chi Chi; an African restaurant catering to African patrons; and a braiding shop with an African staff who styles African American and Caribbean women. At these stores, I use Babson Ajibade's (2007) *tie-in spaces* to locate how movies are employed with layered meanings. Tie-in spaces are places of business that screen movie during store operations. It is used as a strategy to induce clients and offer entertainment while shopkeepers provide services.

Private spaces move through a number of locales in the domestic sphere that take on multiple meanings. However, much of the interactions are grounded in a *pedagogical* use of the movies (which we saw also in the previous chapter focusing on formal and informal circulations). In the private space, I begin with Effie and Chi Chi's family gatherings that are both formal and informal meetings. Then I explore parent-child spectatorship in the experiences Nadia retells when she watches movies with her mother and sisters. Next, I look at how Vivienne engages in mother-daughter binge-watching of Nollywood. I move to the moments when Mouminata negotiates spectatorship with her parents and siblings, and then examine how couple Raheem and Tasha watch movies in the intimate spaces of their bedroom. Finally, I explore how movies are watched amongst peers, one group that is in college and another that is comprised of stay-at-home immigrant women. I conclude with a look into intermezzo spaces, those that involve people moving about as they view movies. Here I narrate the stories of Josiah, Nadia again, and Aziza, all who watch movies on mobile devices.

Public Spaces

Nollywood spectatorship adds to the transitory ambience of Newark and the flow of outdoor performances and bodies traveling to-and-fro. In a city known for its movie piracy culture, where street vendors openly hawk movies and blast illicitly copied house music CDs on street corners, the public spectatorship of movies connected itself to the landscapes of Newark. The research interrogated the experiences of a street vendor named Horus who was both stationary and mobile, depending on the day.

Outdoor screenings were indeed a public, open space. Unlike a drive-in theatre, public spaces are outdoor, open screenings tare free to the public. Onookome Okome (2007) expands Habermas' public spheres[90] by describing street viewings of Nollywood movies in Nigeria as democratic spaces, but volatile terrain. Okome argues that spectatorship involves the articulation of multiple voices and performances negotiating texts and audience members.

During stationary vending narrated by Horus in this study, the movies played for customers at his stall, consequently opening a democratic space where viewers discussed movies with other vendors and pedestrians. During mobile vending, brief screenings of movies played at shops, which constructed a hybrid space of transition, and a "passing

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[90] Public and private spheres carry traditional intellectual assumptions of existing as binary dimensions. For Dahlgren (1995) the public sphere is a "historically conditioned social space where information, ideas and debate can circulate in society and where political opinion can be formed" (p. ix). Livingstone (2005) argues the concept "implies a visible and open forum in which the population participates" (p.6). The public sphere is the external world, classically deemed masculine, Anglo, impersonal, individualized and dedicated to ideological production (Brickell, 2012; Papacharissi, 2009; Pitkin, 1981; Habermas, 1989, 1962). In contrast, the private sphere is the invisible world, feminine, intimate, family-oriented, moral-centric, non-white (or the space of the "others) domain centering reproductive labor. Rather than co-existing, it is framed as inferior to the dominant public, confined and tucked away, autonomous and unmarred by the outside world (Rosicki, 2012; Brickell, 2012; Walsh, 2010; Klinger, 2006).

through" spectatorship premised on business transactions. These viewings merged leisure and capital through viewings and consequential negotiations for cultural products.

Static and Mobile Vending. Horus, an African-American street vendor, began to sell Nollywood DVDs due to the growing demand of customers who preferred copies of Nigerian movies rather than pirated copies of silver screen and Hollywood B-list movies. He began selling Nollywood videofilms after his incarceration for selling counterfeited Hollywood movies. Horus lost the ability to sell at a stationary cart and began hawking movies by traveling from shop to shop around Newark. He focused on salons and barbershops for his mobile business, and discovered the popularity of Nollywood at braiding galleries. The staff and some customers at the braiding salons agreed to be regular customers if he had a selection of African movies; resulting in him investing in researching then purchasing copies in bulk.

In the middle of the study, Horus told me that he partnered with one of the few stationary vendors who was still able to sell videos and music in the downtown area. Rather than market Hollywood and Top 40 artists, the vendor specialized in African-American independent movies, educational documentaries, lectures of different scholars (and conspiracy theorists), and New Jersey house music from the 70s, 80s and 90s. Horus began to supply the vendor with African, Haitian, and Jamaican movies because the marketer wanted to tap into the African and West Indian population in Newark. At the vending cart, Horus said movies played to show to potential customers the quality of the DVD and film production. If customers were unfamiliar with the movies, they screened to give potential customers a glimpse.

At the outdoor screenings, movies are not played in their entirety, but just enough to satisfy the customer. Sometimes movies run for a couple of minutes, and sometimes they run for an hour. It depends on the customers. Usually, movies ran longer when Horus is discussing them with the stationary vendor, or with customers who stop by because they know the movies or the vendor. The vendor, who was also a man, talked with Horus and the customers about the plotline of the story, but conversations veered off and they began to talk about black people in general, and Newark specifically. "These movies are deep. I've been hustling Hollywood stuff for years, but it bugs me to see movies with African people. Acting, directing, scriptwriting, dancing, crying, all that," laughingly said Horus who commented further:

> For real, when I play these movies, me and *old head*[91] chop it up about how black people here need to get onto to this and be independent. We so caught up with trying to get approval from something that ain't ours no way. That's why we losing this city right now.

According to Onookome Okome (2007), street locals are impromptu sites of consumption. He contends that audiences fold the daily realities of their lives into the narrative as movies screen from the carts of various street vendors. Their narratives are part of ad hoc conversations occurring during screening. As a result, another narrative emerges that retells the social and cultural existence of the spectator in a format that democratizes the overall story of their experience by intertwining the chain of events in the film with their lives (Okome, 2007a; 2007b). Street audiences employ the open discourse that occurs in the public sphere to bolster critiques of the movies along with

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[91] "Old head" is an African-American colloquial term popular in the Northeast that signifies an elder. It is a term of endearment that men usually say to older men to show some type of deference. The old head can be someone who imparts wisdom to younger men, or a man who was successful or well-known in the neighborhood (or streets) and fell upon hard times and is struggling as an older man. To say "old head" recognizes that his successes are acknowledged.

their opinions of current affairs. Horus and the vendor he collaborated with engaged in

critical readings of the Newark Administration and the changing political and cultural

landscape that is forcing them out of outdoor marketing. He brought up that during the

warmer months, several farmers' markets opened around the city, but vendors such as

him and his colleague were banned from selling there. Screening movies at vending sites

in an area that is systematically removing outdoor vendors for piracy was a sign of

rejecting the policy to ban bootlegging and it is one of survival. It tells an interesting

story of how African-Americans are using African media to sustain in an unstable

economy.

Most of Horus' sales came from his door-to-door peddling at small businesses. He

stashed his DVDs in a rolling suitcase along with a binder of all of his selections. The

binder contained the samples he used to show clients the movies. He has two or three

copies of each movie packaged in his bag. At braiding shops he said, "the women run the

show." Braiders or to shop owners thumbed through his selections in his binder. When

they were interested in a movie, they either bought it or put it in their DVD player to

view the quality. Horus described the staff at braiding salons to be far more

knowledgeable about the movies than him: "They know the real names of the actors. If

the movie is part of a series of this or that. If this actress got married. If this person went

to jail [in real life]. It's like a whole other world of African Hollywood." The interactions

at the braiding shops allowed Horus to learn more about the film industry in its entirety

and about aspects of African culture. He said they explained the different languages, the

various ethnic groups in the movies, and the politics of the countries they represent and

their relationships with African immigrants from other nations.

From his interactions, Horus began to foster stronger communal ties with shopkeepers, something that he had never done before. Now he stops by the shops to "catch up" with staff even when his movie supplies are low. He said that keeping in touch with shop staff assisted him in maintaining his rapport with shop owners and staff, but he also was intrigued in learning more about African culture and people: "Man these people have a whole system that runs outside of America. Down to the movies. I respect that." Horus engaged in two types of reception that bring very different experiences. In the outdoor spaces, he engaged in conversations of the familiar with another African-American vendor. Their talks in the public sphere center on the affairs of the state within the communication systems of African-American culture. However, when he traded at braiding shops that are African-owned, his audiencing is from the purview of a student who learned through the perspective of an African immigrant.

Public-Private Spaces

In examining public-private spaces, this research unpacks interfaces in the various spatial conditions of the business to understand how modes of reception and reception practices inform identity construction, imagination, and performance. Public-private spaces were commercial locales that screened movies during their business operations. To study brick-and-mortar businesses, I focused on three locations: a video and music store, a restaurant, and a braiding shop. However, there are other businesses I discovered that sell Nollywood such as bodegas, African social clubs, corner stores selling cigarettes and lottery tickets, and the general African or Caribbean depot selling imported items and various bric-a-brac. I even learnt of a laundromat offering movies. I focused on these spaces because these are the businesses mentioned by participants.

At businesses, the TV and DVD/VCR were centrally located within the store, continuously playing movies during clients' visits and in between. This was an inducement executing multiple purposes (Mistry & Ellapen, 2013; Ugochukwu, 2011; Haynes, 2007; Okome, 2007). It drew customers and entertained them, as well as accommodated the amusement of workers. This research adds a third body of people spending time at the shop — non-buying shoppers who were friends and family that frequented to socialize. They too engaged with movies, hence creating more layers in a diasporic communicative space. According to Babson Ajibade (2007), places of business operate as both commercial and social spaces; thus layering consumption that moved between a space of service, a space of community building, and a space of viewing.

Video and Music Store: The Dedicated Space. Chi Chi, a former employee at an African video and music store, watched films partly because it was her job, but also because it fed her obsession with movies without having to pay for them. To stay abreast of movie content and the film industry in general, she reviewed movies at the media shop. Most of the time, movies played without customers present, serving as a source of entertainment to shop workers and visiting friends and family of Chi Chi and her employer, Amadou.

Most passersby were men who met with Amadou. They paid limited attention to movies, but occasionally chimed in during certain plots. Male spectatorship in Chi Chi's periphery appeared to be involuntary, a consequence of being nearby. Esan (2008) talks about the public display of ambivalence toward films from male viewers. The men at Amadour's shop interacted with Nollywood from a cursory position, usually during casual proximity to a screening. Their performance of masculinity through distancing

themselves from the film screening illustrated their negotiation of public articulations of black masculinity measured through a hegemonic lens (Gray, 1995).

Described Chi Chi: "they'd come to the shop, sit for hours and drink tea with their legs crossed" while the movies played. She also reported seeing this at the distribution outlets in New York she visited with Amadou to purchase movies in bulk. Superficially, their public performance seemed to pass the time away, but work done by Ousmane Kane (2011), Eric Ross (2011), Zain Abdullah (2010), and N'Diaye & Giorgiou N'Diaye (2006) on African immigrants who practice Islam in the U.S. shows that their leisure interaction was embedded in black, Muslim, West African masculinities. At the shop, men recreated and performed African-centered, Muslim village life and public male interactions transported from their homeland. Zain (2010) proposes these public displays are intentional markings to distinguish them from African-Americans racially, and even from those blacks who live under the tenets of Islam, but are not African.

When women stopped by, Chi Chi spoke more with them. This was an opportunity to step away from the male-centric space. Amadou's wife, Aissatou, was the other woman who regularly came by. She is a stay-at-home mother with two children. Even though Chi Chi translated for Amadou, he occasionally participated in English-only conversations more than his wife did, which has resulted in limited opportunities for Aissatou to converse in the language of their host country. Through their engagements at the shop, Chi Chi and Aissatou formed a friendship involving exchanges to develop their communicative skills.

Immigrant women who resettle with male family members tend to take on domestic roles, while men integrate themselves in the commercial work force (Rinnawi,

2010). Because women are at home, they have fewer opportunities to communicate. Often they struggle with language barriers, and at times, decide to communicate in their homeland languages rather than that of the host country as an act of resistance. In some cases, using their homeland languages is a sign of resisting assimilation, especially from some with little public participation and involvement in formal economy (Collier, 2006). Already, immigrants face difficulties in securing employment or sustainable incomes. Black women immigrants in the U.S. find it harder to secure economic avenues due to their race, class and gender. (Nawyn & Gjokaj, 2014; Takougang, 2014; Arthur, 2009; Corra & Kimuna, 2009). Chi Chi and Aissatou's conversations at Amadou's video and music center were opportunities for both to articulate self in public, male-dominated immigrant spaces.

While Chi Chi used Aissatou's visits to assist in developing Aisatou's English-speaking skills, Chi Chi learned African Francophone culture and formed deeper bonds with Aissatou. Movie texts provide a platform for women to talk. Aissatou attempts to express herself and grow her English vocabulary with phrases and sentences she learned watching Nollywood and by talking with Chi Chi. François Ugochukwu (2011) surmises that movies reify Nigerian identity in the diaspora by acting as a pedagogical tool that audiences can use to incorporate language and cultural practices in their interactions with each other; however, Aissatou proved Oluyinka Esan's (2008) suppositions—her reception practices show an African film industry evoking *pan-ethnic dialogue and identity*.

The pair's back-and-forth, watching movies and then commenting on them, was an act of "productive work," a performance Esan (2008) designates as activity African

women display when they are meting out cultural performances appropriate in public spaces. In his ethnographic work of Nollywood audiences in London, Esan records Francophone African women immigrants using Nollywood movies to learn English in order to garner better jobs and negotiate daily interactions. Aissatou's use of Nollywood to interact with women to enhance her English-speaking skills illustrated her efforts to change the shop into an inter-cultural and inter-linguistic pedagogical space that widened her network and redefined her gender roles in a host country.

Restaurant: Eating Africa. Restaurants screen African movies for customers to view on wall-mounted flat screen televisions, or centrally-located older televisions. It is a common staple in African restaurants, mediating layers of consumption across owners and workers from Franco-, Luso-or-Anglophone African nations. The African restaurant serves as a social and cultural nerve center and a site to build community and identity. While meals are served and eaten in real time, screening movies allowed customers to consume the modern world through an African perspective.

National cuisines are central cultural products in imaging and construction identity. In turn, food and the ritual of consuming it are critical in cultural performance (Cusack, 2000). Both signify connection, social binding, and feelings of inclusion (Latshaw, 2009; Marte, 2007). Diasporic communities use food as a cultural product in assisting in resettlement (Botticello, 2013). Nollywood screenings in African restaurants thus superimposed two salient and meaningful cultural consumption practices: eating food to nourish the physical self and the cultural self; and engaging taking in films to enrich and feed cultural performance and authenticity.

Local restaurants serve daily functions in communities. Restaurant service, and in particular African restaurants, have been one of the industries African immigrants have consolidated as a working-class labor base (Ness, 2012). It is a sector they enter using cultural knowledge to gain position in a competitive and discriminatory labor market. As well, the restaurant is a meeting place for socialization and the construction of identity in a host country where tradition, gender roles, and social structures are disrupted.

Traditionally, cooking is a task for African women and girls, but in host countries, men also provide culinary services at African restaurants. According to Agabjoh-Laoye (2006), the traditional spaces in Africa modernized in the U.S. Stoller (2002) notes how the customary gender roles switched. In Africa, men are long-distance merchants, while women are local marketers selling goods and services that fuel the daily flow of life. In the diaspora, men are prominent figures in local stores and even cook as an enterprise.[92] This blurring of traditional gender roles is counterbalanced by the screening of Nollywood movies that project African filmmakers' portrayals of gender; thus enhancing the cultural performance, or at the very least, engagement in an aspect of African culture.

Eating rituals in African culture are also interactive. In Africa, food preparation and eating are at times used to teach and tell stories, but are disrupted during resettlement (Williams-Forson, 2013). Diasporans, therefore, create hybrid or new formalities (Botticello, 2013). In this case, spectatorship in restaurants substitutes for storytelling and cultural transmission during meals. Texts serve as direct and indirect media in

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[92] African men dominating local markets has two major factors. One, African men still disproportionately immigrate as with many other migratory groups; and merchants must factor in safety issues in cities like Newark that surge in crime that affects businesses such as theft, robberies, and shootings in business districts; especially on the heaviest foot traffic in the city, Broad Street and Market Street which sits as the heart of downtown Newark.

disseminating culture, but modes of movie consumption depend on with whom you share a meal. People discuss the films while they are eating and have conversations as they are playing.

Chi Chi frequented African restaurants with her husband. Although many businesses outside of African shops screen movies, for those who play Nollywood movies, it carried an African context. Since she was already proficient in her native Nigerian cuisine, she preferred Francophone African national cuisines when she dines out, usually at Senegalese or Guinean restaurants. There, she saw families, other couples, and peer groups eating while movies are playing. Most movies were Nollywood, but the cinemas of Senegal, Mali, and Guinea also played if customers are from those regions. Customers conversed between each other, and if they knew the restaurateurs, as is often the case, they spoke with them too. As movies ran, different discussions, various subject matters, and dishes fold into layered consumptions. The conversation in the restaurant intertwined with the dialogue in the movie created a meta-textual performance that brought African culture of storytelling and transmitting ideas about Africa into discourse.

For African migrants, eating is one of the few communal rituals they experience with family or other Africans. Talking while eating and spectating intensify feelings of community and culture. Televisions hanging on the wall or mounted on a shelf in a corner where it is high and visible, simulated African life for all in the restaurant.

For Aziza, an African-American who frequented local African eateries, the movies were artistic African canvases coming to life. She was a cultural voyeur, gazing at African cultural production similar to a Mike Featherstone's (1998) description of the city flânuer who moves through urban areas to explore the social spaces and takes in the

textual make up of spaces and the textures of the spaces themselves. In this case, the media and culinary landscape she participated in was also a site for her to consume cultural material and performances.

This suturing of communities and identities to navigate daily life is similar to the studies by Wolfson, Robe & Funke (2012) of working-class people in a Northeast U.S. city sharing stories to make sense of daily life. The storytelling became a part of the practice of nourishing the self and body in the ritual of eating. The diasporic communicative space was the restaurant. The movies were texts that add to the conversations of restaurant customers and staff who used food to evoke home and cultural memories. Therefore, food and home intersected in a hybridized ritual fusing traditional storytelling, national cuisines, diaspora, and media that made it a space within traditional modernity. Exchanging stories over food, I argue, strengthens African identity and blackness.

The Braiding Shop: Coiffed-Roads of Gender, Hair and Blackness

One of the few spaces African, African-American and Caribbean women interact in propinquity is the braiding gallery (Abdullah, 2009; Babou, 2008; Collier, 2006). While the galleries are public spaces, they help create both public and private identities. Moreover, hair braiding is a process that can be quite lengthy, depending on the intricacy of the style. Screening movies on a television is a common strategy used to entertain salon customers and stylists who sit for hours engaging in the ritual.[93] As movies run

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[93] Movies are reported to be screened at tailor shops as well. These shops usually have male tailors or a co-ed staff. I thought this is important to mention; however, I focus on the gendered-feminine space because braiding galleries are far more common than tailoring shops, and there are more chances for inter-ethnic interactions here. For this research, I focus on these experiences to unpack the heterogeneity I argue exists between groups of the study.

continuously during hair styling, they become the backdrop of the ebb-and-flow of daily business where clients and stylists negotiated concepts of beauty, communication issues, cultural performances, cultural competency, styling choices and amounts paid for services.

In the U.S, hair salons are viable, common commercial spaces in black communities (Perry & Waters, 2012; Harvey, 2005). Salons are lucrative because they are one of the few remaining enterprises with a built in client base that recycle black dollars. There is a tradition of black women providing beauty services to black women. For Instance, African-American entrepreneur, Madame C.J. Walker's enterprise of beauty products and salons were so profitable that she became the first self-made woman millionaire in the twentieth century (Dossett, 2009; Lowry, 2011; Due, 2000). Walker created a template for black beauty salons still copied. When braiding shops opened during the explosion of the African cultural pride movements of the 1960s and '70s, these specialty salons folded into the already-lucrative black beauty industry. African women immigrants who resettled after the 1965 immigration reforms brought braiding systems from their homelands; consequently, entering the market as either employees of African-American-owned shops or new businesses owners themselves (Abdullah, 2009).

In Newark, African immigrants own and operate majority of braiding galleries. However, their clientele is primarily African-American and Caribbean. Braiding staff are from Anglo-and-Francophone West Africa, but braiders from Senegal, Ivory Coast and Guinea dominate galleries (Babou, 2008). Because of the proliferation of braiding shops in black commercial districts, I argue that they are public spaces engaging a preponderance of public spectatorship.

On a superficial level, the predominance of Nollywood screenings at braiding shops gendered spectatorship overwhelmingly to women and girls. However, a closer analysis revealed black women and girls are significant disseminators of media and cultural knowledge to households. They maintain families and hold employment disproportionately more than black men (Kenney, 2013). It is their consumption of global media that eventually seeps into their daily negotiation and understanding of media, which their households will eventually absorb. For example, both Tasha, an African-American introduced to Nollywood by a co-worker and Chi Chi, a Nigerian who sold Nollywood at one point, made more money than their husbands did. With their income, they also purchased most of the leisure products for the house. While Tasha bought movies from an African store, Chi Chi received movies from her former employer, Amadou, who owns the video and music store.

Hairstyling is more than coiffured curls and cash flow. Black beauty shops are critical sites of social, cultural and political engagement (Gill, 2010). Beauticians played an essential role in disseminating information and mobilizing black women during the Civil Rights Movement (Gill, 2010). In black communities, hair is very much a part of identity. Styling and social status trace back to traditional African societies. Styling was so inextricably connected to identity that slave-traders, who realized the importance of hair to status, would shear Africans shortly after capture to sever any connection to homeland (Patton, 2006). Although the intricacies of social status were lost to slaves, braiding is one of the few recognizable customs retained by black women in the U.S. and is a style still contested in mainstream assertions of beauty ideals.

Historically and currently, braiding is a symbol rejecting a dominant culture's white ideals of beauty (Ayana & Tharps, 2014; Patton, 2006). Representations of black women in popular culture either undermine their presence or present them in disempowering depictions, often portraying them as hypersexual, exotic, aggressive, or unattractive (Collins, 2004, 1999; Jewell, 1993). Braiding galleries represent a significant space promoting the aesthetics of black women, of natural hair,[94] and especially of Africa. Screening Nollywood was part of resisting white beauty norms. To stylists and clients normally bombarded by the dominant culture's media establishment, the steady flow of movies featuring black women wearing fashions and hairstyles — whether they were African or from Western culture — was an interruption of depictions of white women as models of beauty.

Nollywood served as a visual way for clients to gaze at updated hair and fashion and gather ideas or understand traditional and contemporary African styles. In turn, stylists used movies as references to explain styles and cultures to customers; thus creating a site of diasporic communication. Gazing at movies in this context allowed women spectators to subvert the white beauty gaze by using texts for aesthetic pleasures (Radway, 1991; Ang, 1985; Stacey, 1987) directly connected to identity construction, in which African/black ideals of beauty serve as the templates of deciding hairstyles set for public presentation, and even private, intimate interactions.[95] Tasha, an African-

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[94] Natural hair is contested in black women's hair discourse. Stylists often use synthetic hair as hair extensions. Additionally, braided hair does not mean the hair is natural. The definition of natural hair I use is hair texture left in its natural state; the absence of chemicals or heat in changing texture.

[95] There is also a history of white women desiring black women's bodies and appropriating hair styles and reconfiguring themselves; hence Bo Derek wearing and "popularizing" cornrows in the 1979 film, 10; and Kim Kardashian's reconstruction of body parts to be curvaceous in ways similar to the stereotypical assumptions of black women.

American woman who watched movies during her visits to an African braiding gallery,

described the shop she frequents:

> The windows [of braiding shops] usually have posters of women wearing all different types of braid styles. The posters are typical signs telling you that it is a shop, cuz some shops don't have names or are upstairs and you can't see them from the first floor. When you see those posters or one of those sidewalk signs, you know a braider is somewhere around. Senegalese twists, cornrows, box braids, Ghana braids, fishtails and other [hair] styles be on the posters.

The materiality of the shop represents a black woman-centric mediascape. Shown

in illustration 5.1, pictures of women styled in different ways sat on a billboard outside of

the shop.

Illustration 5.1 African Braid Shop

Photos and movies added to the creation of a social world conceptually located in African ethnic identity that produces and circulates the notion of Africanness (Appadurai, 1995). At the same time, Africanness is a commodity. Along with hairstyling services, braiding galleries sold of an array of fashion and hair products such as African textiles, clothes, synthetic hair, costume jewelry, scarves, hats, sandals, slippers and other bric-a-brac. These items are pivotal in constructing gendered spaces centered on popular African fashion and the grooming needs and desires of black women. Movie exhibitions added to this milieu with continuous scenes depicting women wearing items similar to articles displayed in the shop including hairstyles. While some movies may have contemporary themes and scenery, others had traditional settings, displaying customary style and dress. Movie scenes displayed African women reified the materiality of a shop promoting African womanhood and aesthetics.

> ***Knotty Moments.*** Braiding salons are not always comfortable (Abdullah, 2009). The negotiations of agreeing upon price and selecting a style can be tense. During styling, dialogue is part of customary practice; however, language barriers can sometimes cause difficulties in communication (Collier, 2006; Jacobs-Huey, 2006). I called these occurrences knotty junctures because they take on two meanings. The first is the academic lens of knotty-ness, where sites are complex and textured interactions requiring careful examination and unpacking. The second meaning references black women's hair itself as being "knotty" and often a spectacle, not only while negotiating in the shop and other public spaces, but also in other arenas of the external world.

> Musician Bob Marley used the term "knotty" in reggae song "Natty Dread." *Natty* describes the Rastafarian customary dreadlocks and is the Jamaican patois term for

knotty, but it also can mean natural. I reference Marley's song because braiding shops promote natural hairstyling. Furthermore, his lyrics explored wearing an African hairstyle in a Eurocentric space. Dreadlocks were spectacles in the sphere of British respectability; they rejected combing's hegemonic aesthetics, identity, and cultural performance, instead epitomizing organic blackness. Marley encouraged people who wore their hair in dreadlocks to create public moments of resistance towards dominant structure. Simultaneously, the moment, as Marley sings, "satisfy my soul" implying a freeing of the internal, the self.

Representing and evoking knotty-ness also is displayed at barbershops, where men also express resistance and natural selves. In terms of women — whose bodies are on display in gendered ways and under circumstances that point to intersectional moments where their multiple status become fangled identity representations — the knotty moments occur as women attempt to satisfy aesthetic and cultural desires.

The language barrier at Africans shops can be problematic for stylists and clients, especially when either is a non-Anglophone immigrant. Tasha told of moments when she could not understand Nollywood movie action or dialogues. Sometimes she asked stylists for a translation, but stylists could not always explain movie content or adequately translate dialogue because of language barriers. Tasha explained that stylists talked amongst themselves in another language or a patois of English she could not understand. They also talked on the phone while braiding clients' hair. Moreover, it was also uncomfortable for the stylist who was also negotiating communication and power: clients hold phone conversations or talk with each other, excluding the foreign-born stylists.

Though Nollywood played in the background, all occupiers of the shop engaged with select persons, while tuning out the rest.

Other tensions arose. Staff most often determined what movies played, causing further tensions and highlighting layers of power dynamics. Not everyone liked watching Nollywood. Tasha reported that some clients opted for music, games or streamed videos on their smartphones, while others chose to read books or magazines. In one instance, a fellow client remarked when a stylist turned up the volume on a Nollywood movie, "Here we go with this shit." This client put on her headphones and began a loud phone conversation to block out the movie's audio.

Unlike clients who readily demonstrated their distaste for African movies, Tasha hesitated in making a request to watch something else. She expressed her lack of authority in changing the movies. Media selections at African shops, in her experience, came from the shop employees. Even though she may not agree with the selections, her goal was to obtain an attractive hairstyle. With that in mind, Tasha had a mantra: "Never piss off the person in your head," meaning to avoid upsetting the stylist because the stylists' could perform poorly if they are not happy with the media they are consuming, or a fussy client.

In contrast to *tie-in spaces*, a concept presented by Babson Ajibade (2007), he suggests that showing movies at business such as hair parlors entices customers,[96] braiding salons illustrate that spectatorship does not always cater to customers. Whereas Tasha saw the client as having limited decision-making power, Chi Chi, whose mother owned a braiding gallery, said customers have the ultimate power because they are the

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[96] Ajibade (2007) talks about different types of businesses that screen Nollywood to customers.

ones who pay for services. Said Chi Chi, "People have walked out of my mother's shop without paying because they didn't like the style or service, but they had no intentions of paying in the first place." Chi Chi explained that clients who refused to pay were African and specifically Nigerian:

> When Nigerians come to the shop, my mom never says where she is from because they'll gyp her out of money. Flat out won't pay if they knew she was Nigerian. Some of them at least. But to make sure it doesn't happen, she don't say nothing about being Nigerian. Nigerians who refuse to pay are more likely to dupe other Nigerians or '*FOBS*'."

> *FOBS* is a colloquial term meaning "Fresh off the boat," describing recent

immigrants who are not accustomed to the social order and legalities in their host country. Depicted as naïve, easily duped or manipulated and eager to stay out of trouble, recent immigrants avoid any situation that may lead to deportation, according to the Chi Chi. She explicated, "[Nigerians who do not pay] think they can get away with it" because FOBS and Africans generally avoid law enforcement, and in her opinion, Nigerians are worse to each other because of tribal and regional differences they transported with them. Her remarks highlighted how clients targeted the vulnerability of immigration to overpower client-stylist relationships.

According to Chi Chi, Nigerian clients were the most demanding and difficult, even when screening movies. "Because it's Nigerian [movies] they think they know it," said Chi Chi. "If they don't like the movie [selection], they'll tell you to change it." African customers are the liveliest when in engaging in texts, described Chi Chi: "We go back and forth with [commenting on] the movie. Africans be loud, but Nigerians be turn't up. They are so animated yo, but that's what makes doing their hair worth it."

While movies played, they talked throughout and often grunted, sucked their teeth, or made occasional guttural sounds at certain times. Movies became territory in this instance. Nigerian spectators seized control of the experience and appropriated it as their media to control. Françoise Ugochukwu (2011) proffers Nollywood as a salient cultural product for diasporic Nigerians; it is like an umbilical cord linking them to ancestral lands. Spectatorship transcended watching, but turned into a consumption similar to nurturing—so much so that viewing was a protective and sacred moment.

Because the braiding shop is a stratified space, clashes occurred, supporting Oneka LaBennet's (2011) supposition that identity negotiation is an unpredictable process where participants perform multiple identities depending on whom they were with and the statuses they can assume. Movie exhibitions and the physical layouts of shops in the study articulated layers of cultural identity, heightening performances of womanhood and individuality. Furthermore, spectators experienced uncomfortable moments in which they worked through communication issues, cultural differences, styling choices, and negotiations of money, further highlighting layers of power and intra-gender relations that black women negotiated. In sum, the braiding shop is an intersection of gender, aesthetics (specifically hair), and blackness.

Screening Out of Necessity. Displacement, economic uncertainty, and gentrification repeatedly materialized in interviews of businesses owners and workers at shops, uncovering frustrations for minority-owned businesses attempting to survive in a gentrifying downtown area. On a practical level, screening films was part of a business decision to save money. Business owners screened Nollywood out of economic necessity and not necessarily for the customers. All African shops in the study operated without

cable or internet. Chi Chi explained that African storeowners saw it as a waste of money because it took away depleted revenue. Nevertheless, even if they wanted digital programming or internet, it would be too costly to install because the buildings in which they operated were so old and neglected that they never wired them for such amenities. Screening movies on dated televisions is a common, but affordable practice; especially in a city where small businesses struggled to remain open. During the years of the study, half of the stores in the research closed or changed ownership. Around them, high-rises stand as evidence of the new directions. Nonetheless, these businesses and vending locales narrated a dynamic tension between customers and shop staff often articulating or seeking belonging, power, or a combination of the two. Actors presented layers of self-filtered through fluid identities constantly shifting to accommodate people and situations.

Private Sphere

Two responses on reception practices were most often reported in interviews: movies are often viewed at home, and often with family or close members from their kinship network. The private sphere of a diaspora is an important site because it invokes a sense of intimacy and belonging (Klinger, 2006). It is a space where individual identities are cultivated, and collective identities are constructed. However, it is not an absolute sanctuary from the outer world. It is a space where one sees how connected they are to publics. Notwithstanding classical understandings of the home as a fixed, bounded and gendered space, it undergoes reshaping in the everyday experiences of its occupants and their cultures, both material and immaterial, in which occupants engage in the outer worlds (Blunt & Varley, 2004).

Using movies as a pedagogical tool reemerged throughout the reception practices of audiences. Paolo Freire argues that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention" (p.164) that is developed through a system of inquiry and interaction between student and teacher. He further claims that pedagogies resist hegemonic regimes of knowing when those who are learning are as empowered and humanized as those who are teaching. But, learning and teaching go beyond classrooms (Luke, 1996). It is a discursive process that transforms the consciousness of those building knowledge (Cooks, 2001).

In media, there is a pedagogical relationship between spectators/consumers and media. Films are salient pedagogical apparatuses that produce "images, ideas and ideologies that shape both individual and national identities" influencing the social practices of spectators in their everyday lives (Giroux, 2011). Zahn (2011) argues that films construct new meanings within representations that incorporate filmic material such as lights, dialogue and bodies (Zahn, 2011). Added, Courtney & Gravelle (2013) argue that national identity gets compromised with pedagogies transmitted and promoted by global media.

Henry Giroux (2011, 2004, and 1997) maintains that films are such a "powerful teaching machine" that they become a site of cultural politics. Whereas mainstream film industries such as Hollywood repeatedly teaches "sets of ideas, meanings, discourse, and social configurations" that benefit dominant social order, video film industries such as Nollywood can reconfigure the lens and the social-political positioning of the spectator and subject (Ajibade, 2009).

The emerging film production of black filmmakers across the globe has given way to a call for a "sustainable pedagogy" in film industries that recognizes the nuanced aesthetic and ideologies of popular black culture around the world that sustains media industries, even in dominant media (Smith-Shomade, Gates, & Perry, 2014). Nigerian movies changed the perspective of how Africans see themselves in the global media landscape (Mistry & Ellapen, 2013; Omoera, 2013; Giwa-Isekeije, 2013; Ugor, 2009) because it provides the opportunity for Africans to see "African faces doing African things in familiar sociocultural contexts" (Ajibade, 2009, p. 420). Films are interpreted as positive portrayals because it demonstrated cultural representations absent in Western media. Osakue Omoera (2014) furthers the argument by saying that the movies are used to promote the culture in multiple spaces. In sum, Nollywood as a pedagogical apparatus subverts hegemonic representations of African people and culture as it repositions African subjects in their spectatorship.

Family Gatherings: The Collective Gaze. Participants placed emphasis on watching as a collective. There was a preference to view movies with at least one other person, but participants enjoyed it most when they watched in a group. Okome (2009) sees group spectatorship as a form of collective gaze, describing reception as an interactive spectatorship involving viewers engaging with the text as well as each other. He argues that private spaces allow spectators the ability to watch without the expectations of public viewings. During these moments of group watching in the study, the collective gaze became an interactive cultural performance evoking the status of spectators and their relationships with each other. Some participants explained their deference toward certain individuals during screenings, while others used collective

spectatorship as an opportunity to explore uncomfortable moments in working through cultural performances and identities.

When first and second-generation African and Caribbean immigrants of the study watched movies with family members, they cited two main groups in which they participate: one that is intergenerational, and the other of their peers. During intergenerational viewings, it was important to maintain respect and etiquette when older family members were present, so movie selections weighted to family-friendly productions.[97] Typical family viewings occurred with members of the family living in a residence, but immigrant households frequently disrupted the traditional American nuclear family unit. Most migrant families consisted of extended family or kinship associations. Some shared households while others visited for prolonged periods.

According to Vilna Bashni (2007), immigrant networks are social webs consisting of both close and extended family members who attach to various collectives of people with established economic and social stability in host spaces. Effie, a second-generation immigrant with Ghanaian and Crucian parentage, grew up in a household where her parents hosted close and extended family, friends of the family and even their family and friends. She described how her parents hosted members out of obligation in assisting in the survival of compatriots in their transnational network.

Customarily, when kin visited, the host home became a meeting ground for local family and friends who stop over frequently. People dropped in unannounced or called ahead of time. Sometimes, the host home held gatherings. Effie recalled helping her

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[97] Participants insist there are more appropriate movie options within Nollywood, in contrast to Hollywood.

mother to prepare meals and room for visiting African and West Indian relatives, and the crowds that gathered to meet them. During gatherings, some visitors watched movies in the family room. At other times, Effie's family screened movies to offer a form of leisure entertainment in the common area:

> After dinner or church, we usually watch them. When we are together, my dad likes us to watch village movies. You know, movies with women in traditional dress acting like how it was back in the day. Usually my little brother would sit on my Dad's lap and the rest of us would sit on the couch by him. He would explain African customs when we didn't understand. We would ask him all type of questions and sometimes my little brother or I would laugh at some scene. My father would scold us and say, "This is your culture. African culture. It is not funny."

Movie watching was a frequent leisure activity. Spectators interacted and talked throughout movies, often adding another layer to narrations. In some instances, participants recounted viewing moments within an intergenerational collective, when the elder viewers narrated and explained potentially unfamiliar cultural aspects to younger or diaspora-reared viewers. Older members began to provide memories of growing up in Africa, and made comparisons between there and here. At some point, they emphasized their children's privilege to be in the U.S.; at other times, they nostalgically lamented the cultural knowledge and community they left behind. This usually surfaced from tension between diasporic children and an immigrant elder.

Effie's experience showed the tension between modernity and heritage, immigrant and native, host country and homeland. TV was a conduit of culture, but at the same time, it signified modernity re-presenting culture, which resulted in different readings. Tense moments emerged when children laughed at cultural performances that their father wanted them to incorporate into their lives. The disruptions were awkward junctures in learning about African identity for Effie and her siblings. Nevertheless, the presence of

her father mediated how and what is consumed. Asserting his knowledge and experiences

growing up in Africa, along with his patriarchal authority, was his attempt to make the

idea of cultural consumption and the actual reception practice more palatable.

Though Effie's household teemed with life when someone visited from Africa,

she said there were stretches of time when her parents and extended family members

were so involved in their own daily lives that they were unable to socialize. The lives of

immigrants can be fractured (Wolfson, Funke, Robe, 2013); therefore, gatherings are

important social functions. Watching movies amplified feelings of home. During

gatherings, performances reified identities in some ways, but blurred belonging in other

instances.

Special Gatherings. There were special days when viewing attracted more

spectators and take on another life amongst African audiences. Formal gatherings such as

birthday parties, marriage celebrations, births, funerals, holidays, and religious

observances also embedded cultural rituals into the events, unlike informal meetings in

the previous section. In some instances, the screenings were central, but at other times,

they were part of the background. Chi Chi, a member of a large Nigerian family and

substantial network of extended family and friends, explained seating arrangements

during movie screenings. During special gatherings, the elderly had preferential seating,

while youths sat on the floor. Very small children may sit on others' laps. Elders who had

deteriorated sight and hearing sat closest to the TV, but in general, the oldest members of

the gathering occupied the highest statuses. Chi Chi relays the following incident:

> You're expected to greet aunties and uncles and respect what they say. We call
> older men and women in our family auntie and uncle even if they are not our
> blood. When we come together, that is how we do it. We don't greet older people
> by their first name. What? Are you crazy? You'd get slapped. Even me. One time

> I disagreed with my auntie and she told everybody I disrespected her. Just because I disagreed.

The living room or family room remained the social hub of the family and a space where the presence of technology meditates communication (Evelien, Courtois, & Paulussen, 2012). Although new media technology has diversified consumption, the shared experience of watching TV is still an important part of social life in the domestic space (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, & Fraser, 2012; Spigel, 2013; Klinger, 2006). All the interviewees demonstrated that during collective spectatorship, viewing rituals usually took place in communal quarters, such as the living room or family room,[98] where the largest—or sometimes, sole—television was located. As movies played, the living room served as both a classroom and home theater. It was a site of social status performance and analysis, of nostalgia and identity discourse, education and intergenerational transmission and a centralized location for shared media use.

Screenings during gatherings are animated. The space turned into home cinema without regards to traditional American bourgeois notions of viewing in cinema.[99] The crowd was lively, talking to each other and commenting on the screen's play of events. Spectatorship shifted from *the* focused activity to an interactive action within a flow of activities. Chi Chi said younger members of the audience often texted on mobile phones or held side conversations, but were mindful never to disrupt the primary dialogue of

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[98] Other communal spaces reported were kitchens, playrooms and bedrooms. The kitchen is where women prepared meals and watched movies if a television was available. Playrooms are similar to living rooms and family rooms, but are in a part of the house that his less formal. Some gatherings had Nollywood playing in different rooms throughout the house so that participants of the events would engage in movies as they pass through bedrooms that displayed movies.

[99] Although even in bourgeois homes, spectatorship can become lively, Janna Jones (2011) talks about her experiences during movie night in a middle-class household. She says that spectators watched in silence and still generated senses of comfort and satisfaction because they experienced the television program or film together.

older members. They created multiple forms of spectatorship as they viewed screens of their phone and the television similar to the in-between spaces I discuss in the next segment on intermezzo spaces. Dancing and singing occurred. Most times, older audience members initiated activity and encouraged others to join. Partygoers embedded themselves in the screening of the movie when they danced and sang along. And, on the other hand, they blurred the lines between the text and real time, creating a lived experience with a recorded body of work that turns into lived aesthetic, embedded in the socialization process.

Special gatherings emphasized expectations of etiquette and protocol more than family gatherings, though the cinema spaces in both instances were fluid, and often shifted in meaning and function. Identity constructions situated themselves in host and home country at gatherings, as audience members negotiated social status and place. Older members led as culturally competent spectators and experienced nostalgic moments they express via storytelling, singing and dancing. Younger audiences went between being here and there, between host country and memories they heard from homeland. They left conversations and held other discourses to articulate their in-between-ness and negotiation of second-generation status and limited cultural knowledge. Younger members often obliged, but reserved much of their interactivity for dancing, singing or reciting dialogue for peer viewership. There it took on other meanings, explored in a later section on peer spectatorship.

Parent-Child Spectatorship. Parent-child viewing is another type of reception appearing in participant reports. Spectators regarded these viewings as special moments because it allowed them to use movie watching as an opportunity to form emotional

bonds. Spigel (2013) contends that TV changed the dynamics of communication in the family and revolutionized family leisure time. Family leisure moved from outdoor recreation to indoor activities in superimposing hierarchies of gender and generation (Spigel, 2013). As well, watching became an intimate, feminized and passive participation. Contrastingly, parent-child spectatorship allows for active audiences to engage in a number of activities.

Watching Nollywood is an important ritual for Nadia and her sisters during their holiday trips to their parents' Los Angeles home. The act of watching elicited nostalgia, rather than the movies themselves. "We cuddle up in blankets and watch movies all day and all night. It reminds me of back in the day," recalled Nadia. Nadia spoke of bonding with her mother and sisters as women, an experience different from when she was a girl and young adult. Home became a layered concept for audiences. While her mother reminisced of Africa and home culture, both parent and children longed for the home created in Los Angeles, which evoked memories extending the nostalgia of homeland, but also new understandings of Africa in a domestic space created within a diasporic space.

In contrast to Victorian notions of lethargy or passive consumption, Nadia and the women in her family acted with the movies: "Honey, when we get together, all you hear is yelling and smacking. We are Africans. We talk back [to the movie]. Sometimes I sing and play back scenes when I like the song or a scene that's so good. That's how you watch African movies." When Nadia described her viewing experiences during the holiday visits, the researcher commented that she sucked her teeth while reminiscing. Shocked, Nadia laughed and responded, "Oh I am acting just like my mother and aunties.

You should hear them. They do this every other word. And loud, honey." The researcher caught a glimpse of how Nadia code switched her cultural performances. Retelling her story, she shifted her language and consciousness to that of the home space of her mother. She removed notions of proper American behaviors to occupy her Africanness in full. Her memories of home became so fond, Nadia traveled back home in real time, invoked her identity through language, memory, and via bodily gestures such as sucking her teeth.

Binging With Mom. Binge watching, or binging, is a form of spectatorship, of watching media content continuously for extended periods. Binging is a reception practice identified as viewership outside of scheduled TV airings or on streaming sites such as Netflix where subscribers can watch full seasons of TV shows. I argue that binging is not a new phenomenon, but is instead re-emerging. In nineteenth-century Nickelodeons, films ran for a penny and adolescents often watched films repeatedly throughout the day. Indeed, binging discourse assumes that large consumptions of media occurs in one sitting and in individual settings, but some sectors of Nollywood audiences binged together and intermittently throughout the period of a visit between a child and parent.

Binging is a regular form of spectatorship in parent-child and individual viewing. Binging occurred when viewers reserved time to spend together, usually during mother-daughter viewings. Vivienne, a Haitian immigrant, often binged with her mother when she visited from college. Yadira, a twenty-something Newark resident of Cuban and African-American parentage, binged with her Afro-Cuban mother when she stopped by her home. Hajja, a Nigerian immigrant, binged when she visited her mother and sisters

still living at her parent's home. Watching with a maternal figure connects to traditional understandings of TV watching in the home (Jago, et al., 2012), but active participation deviated from classical assumptions of passivity.

Binging has been correlated to addictive behaviors, overeating and social disconnectedness (Matrix, 2014; Sussman & Moran, 2013; Boulos, Vikre, Oppenheimer, Chang, & Kanarek, 2012). The reception practice is associated with the continuous viewing of television episodes; this study appropriates binging with movie marathons where friends, intimate couples, and roommates would do it, along with solo viewers. Contrastingly, Nollywood audiences who binged saw their activities as spending productive time with each other. Respondents agreed that movies are entertainment, but they learned from them and used them to talk about real-world issues with parents and children. Parent-child binging cultivated an ever-changing relationship in a social order influence by media. To participants, binging *was* family time, and quality time because families were together and consuming a media that espouses identity.

Culture-Brokering. Watching African media as a family was important to parents because it allowed members to enjoy an African aesthetic together. In some cases, audience members occupied multiple roles during spectatorship. Mouminatou, a second-generation Guinea-American, watched films with her family. Her father, who is fluent in English, Malinke, French and several other languages — acted as an interpreter, culture broker, and mediator during screenings. The family split their spectatorship between Nollywood and French-language West African and Moroccan films. Communicating in English was difficult for Mouminatou's mother, but Mouminatou and her siblings who were born in the U.S. are not fluent in neither Malinke — their parrents'

language — nor French — the national (colonial) language of her parents' home country. When they watched Guinea films, her father explained dialogue and elements to children; when they watched Nollywood, he extended the same assistance to his wife, though he was less adept at explaining the cultural elements because he was from Guinea.

Mouminatou explained that they have a larger collection of Nollywood than Guinea films. Though Mouminatou felt obligated to learn more of her culture, she preferred Nollywood productions because she could understand them better, and the story lines were more interesting to her. However, her mother held authority over the only TV in the home. If the parents chose, the children must watch with them even when they were not interested. This also sometimes included their father, whom Mouminatou said expressed ambivalence about watching Nigerian movies. Nevertheless, he spectates to accommodate his wife.

The data also included couples who watched movies in the domestic sphere. The bedroom was where some of the most intimate and private activities take place. Tasha and Raheem, an African-American couple, watched movies in their bedroom. They preferred the bedroom because it was a space for them to relax and enjoy movies in an intimate and comfortable setting. Their bedroom provided an area of ultimate seclusion, or *cocooned* them, as they confined themselves while they watched movies. During bedroom viewing, they often paused or played back scenes when they could not understand what actors were saying or when the context of the conversation was culturally foreign. These moments were awkward. When they wanted, Tasha and Raheem conducted Internet searches, but did not always make this effort, in order to avoid disrupting their leisure space. When they could not understand, they often laughed as

they attempted to imitate accents and lines. Sometimes they would extend their imitation of accents beyond spectatorship "for fun" and "act like [they] are African," by imitating noise expressions such as grunts or teeth-sucking they heard during the movie. Through humor, the couple lightened the situation to mitigate their discomfiture in negotiating diasporic membership.

Peer Viewing: Ethnicity, Race, Gender. All African women respondents reported parental pressure to marry within their tribe-specific ethnicities and to maintain a proper reputation. If they could not marry endogamously, then they were expected to seek a man from their home country, or at least from other African regions. Religious criteria were less important. Some respondents said their parents strictly expected religious homogamy, but focused on a potential husband's ethnicity and nationality. For these respondents, watching Nollywood transfers marriage-affirming cultural ideologies. Women were expected to stay home, even for leisure activities. While home, it was preferred that they watched Nollywood instead of Hollywood because it was an "extension of [domestic] work or 'productive' activity" designated for "respectable" women (Esan, 2008). These coded behaviors models occurring in domestic spaces feminized private viewings, but also showed how women are restricted in their culture, more than men (Butterfield, 2006; Espiritu, 2003).

Charity, a college student whose parents are Igbos from southeastern Nigeria, watched Nollywood melodramas featuring contemporary Nigerian music (e.g. hip-hop and R&B) in her dormitory with two to three Nigerian female students she met on campus. She preferred to watch them with other Nigerians because she could comfortably mimic the behaviors, language, and noise expressions of actors she says reminded her of

Nigerian parents. Making fun of the cultural performances of older Nigerians suggested she was disrespecting Nigerian identity in general, but she explained that watching and performing in her own private space allowed her to explore uncomfortable negotiations without the scrutiny of older relatives.

While Charity and her cohort simulated Nigerian characters using humor, they related common life experiences. The women discussed growing up with Nigerian parents, going to Nigerian churches and visiting homeland as "Americans." Movies operated as reference points in identity construction and performance, and mediated second-generation immigrant experiences. "Don't get me wrong. I love the fact that I'm from Naija, but sometimes Nigerians can be too much," admitted Charity. She expressed how she felt overwhelmed when her social interactions with them became implicit competitions to display the strongest Nigerian identity. This was also the case at her parents' home, when she was expected to behave as a proper Igbo woman.

When she is not in school, Charity watched many of her movies with family and select friends at her parents' home. There she watched Christian-themed productions drastically different from her movie nights in her dorm. The movies her family viewed had "church songs and bible quotes," while the movies in her dorm featured "young, beautiful *Naijas* (colloquial term for Nigerians) in the club and doing things that young people do." Nonetheless, her parents were concerned with whom she associated through her spectatorship. They preferred her to socialize more with Igbos of her age group, so that she can solidify tribal relationships. She reported that her parents allowed other African and Caribbean peers to visit, but no African-Americans received invitations to

join her watch parties. "My family tell[s] me not to associate with Johnsons. They tell me to watch out because they are 'no-good,'" said Charity.

When she said "no-good," she indicated quotation marks with her fingers. The researcher asked her why she referred to African-Americans as "Johnsons" and "no-good," and whether "Johnsons" had a similar meaning to *akata*[100] — a Yoruba term loosely translated as wild animal or savage, and the Nigerian analogue to *nigger* (Mwakikagile, 2009). Her hand covered her mouth agape, and she shook her head in affirmation. Charity expressed shock that I know the word *akata*, and reported that older people say it often, but younger Nigerians refrained because they understand African-Americans better — this was due to the increased interaction outside their nationality. Charity further explained that the first term, "Johnsons," while not inherently an epithet, is appropriated as an unfavorable generic derogatory name that many Nigerians call African-Americans. By taking a common surname of African-Americans and connecting it to unfavorable qualities such as criminality, bad influence, and laziness, results in a form of stereotyping suggesting African-Americans are intrinsically "no-good."

African-Americans were not the only people excluded from Charity's movie screenings. Some African peers were also unwelcomed. Not invited to viewing parties were those who were unemployed or in low-status employment, not enrolled in college, formerly incarcerated, or have exhibited other public behavior that embarrasses their parents. Often, these peers were disappointments to the Nigerian community. In some

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[100] Akata or Akuta is a Yoruba term describing Igbo people who were enslaved in large numbers during the black Atlantic Slave trade. According to Al-Sulaimani & Grier (2009), a significant amount of people from the Ekpri Akata, an Igbo society, were sold into the slave trade (for instance, approximately 240,000 Igbo were brought to Cuba). The term Akata became analogous with slaves, and now, African-Americans.

cases, the family ostracized them. Charity's parents felt that the presence of such peers could lead her astray. Moreover, her family felt the pressure to maintain their respectability in the Igbo and larger Nigerian communities. Extending an invitation to a failure—by Nigerian immigrant standards—threatened their status, and ultimately risked Charity's social capital in future courtships.

Unlike in dominant American culture, where marriage is a decision involving the couple, in Igbo culture, marriage is a process involving entire families, not individuals. Charity described her parents as strict Catholics with Igbo expectations for her to remain a virgin until she is married because they insisted that she maintained her reputation to demonstrate that she is suitable to marry an ideal Igbo man. That entailed that she surrounded herself with appropriate company. Her watch parties were her primary form of socialization at home. The only males who attended were family members. Her brothers, on the other hand, had more freedom to socialize outside of the home, go on dates, or have sex. While movie nights at her dorm provided her the freedom to explore Nigerian identity with humor that might offend cultural norms of her ethnic grouping, viewings at her home allowed her parents to surveil her social gatherings and ensure she was operating within religious and cultural expectations.

Peer Viewing: Vertical Villages. According to N'Diaye and N'Diaye (2006), *vertical villages* are multistory buildings in the predominantly African-American neighborhoods of Harlem and the Bronx, reconfigured to mimic the functions of rural Senegalese villages by immigrants adapting to urban life. They explain, "Like a village in Senegal, they provide communication networks, information, easy social and economic reciprocity, health care, and contexts for cultural performances" (p. 104). Each room and

each story in the buildings serve different facets of life. N'Diaye and N'Diaye (2006) list the different functions of the building: prayer rooms, laundry facilities, communal eating designations, and areas to sell food and Senegalese-specific items. The concept of vertical villages captures the construction of community through shared space, resources, religion, and leisure time.

Yadira, an Afro-Cuban/African-American retailer who lived in one of Newark's housing development's with her mother, participated in a collective of immigrant women who rotated hosting venues for watching parties Their spectatorship ritualized the ethnic coding and behaviors of different groups:

> Man, my mom is really into those things, but she never watches Nollywood alone. When I lived in the projects with her, I would watch them with her all the time. Sometimes my mom would have ladies from the building watching them with her too, but they were always like African, Haitian, Jamaican, Dominican. They'd be loud too.

Guests brought food and drinks from their national cuisines to supplement appetizers provided by the host. Chips and other American snacks were a favorite with women. Yadira's mother also purchased bottles of wine and non-alcoholic beverages. Sharing food during spectatorship opened up another diasporic communicative space where people exchanged identities through their palates. The digestive consumption of cultural culinary styles is similar to interactions at African restaurants. The text served as a medium in exchanging conversation around identity while eating national cuisines. However, in this instance, women explored diasporic identities rather than their Africanness.

Yadira's mother held viewing parties when her daughter was at school. Yadira reported frequently coming home to see her mother and a group of African and West Indian women talking around the television.

> I walk in and the television is loud, or they'd be in the middle of a conversation, loud, talking about the movie that had just gone off. These women be all into it, making sounds when something happens. Yelling at the TV or each other and take what they saw in a movie and use it to discuss their own lives.

Yadira reported that the dramatic or scandalous behavior that she saw in Nollywood movies would evoke emotions and start discussions about the plot. The women speculated on the Nollywood relationships, wardrobes, and storylines in the next installments of the series. Additionally, they spoke about real life issues that related to plots in the movies. Some women cried while speaking about their difficulties, using this space as an opportunity to talk about issues they feel non-immigrant women do not confront. These immigrant stay-at-home wives and mothers were invisible; their domestic obligations often restricted their public movements, thus omitting their voices and experiences from public discourse. Watching parties allowed them to escape the duty and boundedness of the home so that they could socialize with peers. It was their "girl's night out," a time where they could openly laugh, dance, talk, and transgress gender and cultural expectations of their ethnic groups to engage in guilty pleasures of gossip, using profanity, drinking alcohol, and speaking about sex or other issues that may be taboo in other social arenas, including home.[101]

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[101] Radway (1991) privileges the female audience in her seminal ethnographic work by looking at the practices of women romance novel readers in a Midwestern suburb. Through in-depth, open interviews that occur within a domestic setting, she complicates traditional paradigmatic angles of feminism that dispute the domestic space as being a site of female agency in order to privilege participants to respond within an environment in which they consume literature.

The ritual of watching occurred on various levels. The intimacy of viewing Nollywood intertwined with their surveillance and subsequent reports of the goings-on of their community. The women, who attended and hosted watch parties of their own, also supervised Yadira and her brother in the building. They reported to her mother when they saw Yadira or her brother in trouble or acting out of line. The village extended to public spaces, too. For instance, Yadira is expected to acknowledge women in the housing development when she chances upon meeting them outside of the complex.

Many of the women Yadira's mother socialized with were either part-time workers or stay-at-home mothers and wives. Yadira's brother has special needs that required her mother to work limited hours. Most households in the two floors were multi-generational and gathered income from different members. When she was a college student, Yadira worked as many hours as she could to help her mother, even giving a portion of her financial aid check every semester to make ends meet. As a recent graduate working two minimum wage jobs and now living in her own Newark apartment at the time of the study, she struggled to assist her mother, but Yadira said Latina culture expects daughters to help their parents, and especially their mothers. Generating income can be difficult for immigrants, especially if women face issues such as language, skills, education and single parent status. Yadira said the dilemma frustrated her mother who she described as a "proud Latina." Often, her mother shared some of her experiences with the friends she hosted at the Nollywood viewing parties because they understood and knew her daily struggles first-hand.

Intermezzo: Mobile Devices in Public-Private Spaces

The popularization of Nollywood throughout Africa springs from the creative ways audiences construct spaces of exhibition (Ajibade, 2007). The transportability of media helps sustain Nollywood outside of Africa. Technological advances increasingly expand access to film, resulting in major shifts in sites of spectatorship and reception rituals (Thussu, 2007). Field observations and participant reports informed of reception occurring with mobile devices. This consumption was an emerging form of reception practice reported minimally in this study, but deserved interrogation for what I argue is the next phase in the expansion of Nollywood. This is especially true in the diaspora and in Africa when data for mobile devices become affordable for the average audience member.

While most of the research on streaming videos focuses on cell phones (Goggin, 2012; Hjorth, Burgess, & Richardson, 2012), there is growing research examining other portable consumer electronics and their usage in public spaces and places (Berry & Hamilton, 2010; Ito, Okabe, & Anderson, 2009; Cesar, Knoche, & Bulterman, 2010). Focusing on three types of spectators with several distinct devices, I looked at how mobile devices "provide a personalized media environment that is attached to the person and not the physical place" in public, private spaces and transitional spaces (Ito, Okabe, & Anderson, 2009, pp. 75-76). Sometimes the spaces overlapped, blurring the worlds of social interaction. Other times, they distinctly carved out performance. Viewers watched movies on mobile devices as they traveled in taxicabs, buses, cars, and trains. In this section, a taxi driver employed a small DVD player, a lawyer uses her mobile phone, and a working student views movies on her laptop.

Mobile Cinema. There are many occupational hazards in the transportation industry. One is fatigue from working long hours that can shift between mentally-taxing, fast-paced bursts, and monotonous periods of waiting for fares or inching through traffic. Communication technologies have become important tools assisting taxi drivers in accumulating spatio-temporal knowledge to navigate large-scale, elaborate road schemas, weather, traffic, and other factors contributing to the time-sensitive nature of their business (Waters & Winter, 2015). Cabbies already engage with electronic devices such as cell phones, payment meters, GPS navigation, and dispatch communication systems. The anecdote of a chance meeting between me and an African taxi driver viewing Nollywood in his car while he transported me epitomized the creative ways spectatorship is employed by a working-class laborer.

Josiah, a quadragenarian from Ghana, demonstrated how he cleverly turned his cab into a mobile cinema. In order for him to profit from driving, he worked extended shifts, therefore leaving little to any time to devote to leisure activities, and so, he preferred to spectate during moments he appropriated as leisure:

> After awaiting a taxi to pick me up at Newark Liberty International Airport, I enter a white cab and give my address to the taxi driver. He grunts and nods his head while talking on his Bluetooth and pressing the cab's meter to start charging me for the four-mile ride to my home. As I look at the meter, I notice the driver has mounted a small DVD player onto his dashboard. He flips up the screen of the DVD player and turns it on, while moving through bumper-to-bumper traffic exiting the airport. A movie appears on the screen and begins to play in what seems to be the middle of a scene. The volume is so loud that I can hear it clearly in the back seat. I peer closer to the screen and watch the plot unfold. It is a Nollywood film.
> I ask the taxi driver if it is a Nollywood movie. He turns around in surprise and asks me, "You know about Nigerian movies?" I answer affirmatively. We both laugh. He asks me if I am African. I told him that I am from Los Angeles. He inquires further. "Where are your parents from?" I smile and respond, "Louisiana and Mississippi." He keeps focus on the traffic and follows up with a question. "Are you Jamaican?" I reply, "No I am African-American." He is now looking at

> me through the rearview mirror and a thick, plastic shield, separating driver from passenger that has long lost its transparency and says, "Black American? You know about these movies?" I tell him, "Yes, I do. I watch them."
>
> I quickly ask, "Where are you from?" He responds, "I am from Ghana, West Africa. I watch these movies while I wait for business. Sometimes I wait one hour to pick up one customer. It passes the time away." I nod my head and tell him that he is a "hard-working brother." He smiles and shifts his focus back on the road and turns up the volume on the DVD. We watch together and begin talking more.

Josiah's mobile consumption is individualized and shared. Though he played movies for his amusement, by using his taxi as a reception space he embedded customers and anyone else who glanced at the movies, transforming private viewing into a shared media experience. His use of the DVD player to play African movies was his decision to display identity through technology. Establishing his cab as a regular site for spectatorship was *footprinting*, a practice in which mobile device users form relationships with commercial sites as desirable locations to consume media (Ito, Okabe, & Anderson, 2009). In the process of maintaining his spectatorship, the driver left traces of his media participation at distinct locations, thus territorializing his consumption ritual.

Josiah rarely screened movies while transporting people from the airport, he claimed. To the researcher, this seemed like a code for "non-black" people, which he laughingly confirmed. I followed with a question, asking if he played it because I, as a phenotypical black person, entered into the cab. Josiah admitted he thought I was from Jamaica or Trinidad and therefore I would not mind. If he had known I was African-American, he told me, he would have been reluctant because "Black Americans don't like [Nollywood] movies". When I asked him if he thought this was a prejudice against displays of African culture, Josiah agreed: "Black Americans, they see Africa, sometimes they say things that are not good about Africa. I am proud to be African." Josiah

commented on historical and cultural tensions between African-Americans and Africans existing for decades.[102]

The alliances Josiah experienced between African and Caribbean cabbies afforded a safe space for him to more comfortably display cultural materials in public. In the work of Oneka LaBennett (2013) on black and Latino immigrants who use media to construct and perform identity, she argues that participants decide on how, when, and where they express various aspects of self. Initially, they determine the identity of the person they interact with, and then perform their versions of self to them. Josiah selected his media by first determining if the rider in his cab could maintain a safe space for him to perform an identity to which he attaches distinct and obvious cultural performances.

Josiah disclosed that many black Newark taxi drivers watched African movies in their cabs during downtimes, or watch as they sit outside their vehicles while they rest or await a fare. The traditional taxicab industry in Newark is divided racially and ethnically — black and Latino drivers. Black Newark cabbies monopolized cab services at Newark Penn Station and queue for fares around the clock. Watching movies at the station, Josiah said, was one way black drivers passed their time. Josiah's story differed radically from many of the reports of African male participants who reported themselves as involuntary spectators.

In conclusion, taxi driving is a continuous public performance where transporters engage in constant open and transparent activities. Josiah's disclosure suggested that men

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[102] Strained relationships between African-Americans and Africans and Caribbean peoples include cultural differences, perspectives of racial relationships in the United States, education of social/cultural/political histories, and forming relationships under hegemonic social structures. These are some of the issues scholars note as part of long-standing tensions between the groups (Thornton, Taylor, & Chatters, 2013; Tillery & Chresfield, 2012; Pierre, 2009; Pierre, 2004).

more openly expressed their spectatorship in gendered and ethnic-specific spaces. Their disclosures revealed that their constructions of identity and belonging informed their performances (i.e. their decisions about when/how to screen these films).

Cocooning While Commuting. Nadia, a second-generation immigrant, lives in Newark, but commutes to Manhattan where she works as counsel for an insurance company. Her 90-minute commute includes a bus ride into New York City and two subway trains. She used her commute to "catch up" on African news and watch movies. Every day, Nadia tuned out busy morning traffic and other commuters by putting on her earphones connected to her cell as she walked to the bus stop. She either began playing a movie already queued on her phone or surfed various streaming sites such as Youtube or iRoko TV. Sometimes, the movies are uninteresting, but sometimes she found a feature-length video that she watched all the way.

By insulating herself through the use of her mobile phone by "sheltering [the] self from engagement with the physical location and [the] co-presence" of others (Ito, Okabe, & Anderson, 2009, p. 74), Nadia created a *cocoon* (Kobayashi & Boase, 2014). The media cocoon she constructed through her cell phone privatized the public and urban spaces she passed through (Campbell & Park, 2008; Crawford, 2008), by blocking out her passage through territories and interactions Nadia perceived to be meaningless.

Nadia said she used her commute for most of her spectatorship nowadays because she worked long hours. By the time she arrived at her home after work, it was late or she was too exhausted to do anything but shower, eat, and sleep. Movies were her way to "punch out and relax" before and after her job. Whereas her spectatorship allowed her to escape from immediate situations (Wilken, 2012), she focused on Nollywood to connect

to an African media that linked her to identity; thus bringing a diasporic media space into the urban space (Aoki, Szymanski, & Woodruff, 2009). The juncture of digital technology and transitory space highlighted her negotiation and understanding of "here and there" (Frith, 2012), because she used homeland cultural materials to transition from her home to an engagement in the labor system that limited her leisure time, like the taxi driver Josiah.

Cocoons and Campsites in Domestic Spaces. Up until now, I examined the use of mobile devices to view movies in public spaces. Now, I shift to the private, domestic space to narrate how household members employ mobile technologies to negotiate overarching domestic relationships through sharing them. Aziza watched movies on her laptop (using a free Wi-Fi network near her home) for several conveniences. She can watch anywhere and at any time within her house. She located streaming sites broadcasting free movies, a plus for a graduate student of limited means. Additionally, Aziza selected movies based on her preference alone, without having to accommodate that of other household members.

Private spectatorship presented ideas of agency with media. Aziza's mobile device gave her various options on when, where, and how to spectate (Lotz, 2014). Online reception practices magnified feelings of autonomy, and it amplified individualized usages (Klinger, 2006). While watching Nollywood on her device provided control, it also made her spectatorship invisible. She said she watched movies on her laptop as a compromise with her partner who "abhors the shit" out of them. Ironically, her favorite place in the house was the living room where there is a television. Although the living room is the traditional site for TV viewing, she and her partner

preferred to watch television together in their bedroom. She chose her laptop to view

Nollywood for its maneuverability, intimacy and size. The flat screen in her living room

was too big for her ad hoc viewing sessions. With her laptop, she could turn movies on

and off any time, adjust the volume and more easily move around the house. The living

room became her *campsite* (Ito, Okabe, & Anderson, 2009), a place where she chose to

establish spectatorship using her mobile device to mark a comforting and personalized

territory in a house she shared.

Since Aziza removed herself from communal watching spaces, she sectioned off

spectatorship, but connected to a virtual community of spectators where different levels

of engagement such as fatigue, interest, and leisure occurred. For example, she could be

on her computer, though not really concentrating on movies. The viewing became

ambient entertainment while she engaged in other media activities such as social media

interactions. However, if there was a movie she was enjoying, she turned her attention to

the film while still involving herself in other online activities, but they supplemented her

watching experience. If she had difficulty understanding the movie or was interested in

other information such as actors, the production company, an outfit, or a hairstyle she

saw, she searched for information on the internet.

Additionally, Aziza posted real-time updates of her perspective of movies; users

in her network then discussed her posts and engaged in conversations. This resulted in

bringing her voice to public debates and therefore blurred the lines of private-public

spaces. This passage between public and private countered the dominant perception that

individualized watching disconnects viewers from each other. The intermezzo also

represented the liminality of identity, in-between of being here and there, even the notion

of traveling while consuming products to construct an identity that will be employed at the person's destination (as in the case of virtual usage).

Spectatorship in intermezzo spaces highlighted how viewers surveillanced the representation of black bodies within the safe spaces they construct. Sarah Fila Bakadadio (2015) argues that this practice illuminates afro-modernity performances in which black people use their agency to present visual representations of their corporeal selves and ideological selves. For black spectators, both foreign and native born, they participate in how these bodies travel digital spaces then implemented in real spaces in the diaspora to create diasporic sites.

From Street Corner Screenings to Taxi Cab Spectators: An Overview of Reception

Reception practices and sites by participants showed diversified activities and spaces. Reports by spectators said that they negotiated reception with other viewers, the environment in which they watched movies, the technology in use (including those unrelated to the viewing, such as cell phones, computers or traditional domestic technologies of kitchen equipment) and themselves as well.

During public viewings, street vendors narrated a public culture in Newark of power and culture brokering. Public viewings on the street corner were impromptu, democratic spaces and sites of unpredictability and tension. As downtown Newark transformed, the vendors faced permanent displacement if they sold pirated copies of Hollywood movies, so they relied on alternative industries such as Nollywood. Their screenings showed potential clients the quality of the movie or a glimpse of what the movie looked like; especially for people who had never seen African films. The gatherings were ad hoc because anybody walking by could join in on the conversations,

making the space liberating, but also creating the potential of being targeted by law enforcement who have been profiling street vendors. Profiling was a sign of gentrification to Horus who navigated hostile city ordinances that have displaced him and forced him to partner with a stationed vendor to sell his wares.

To solicit movies, both vendors held conversations with clients and passersby about black life, which included identity. Similar to Habermas' public sphere where intellectuals met up to talk about the state, Horus and his vending colleague were street professors who engaged the public in local and national politics. Included in discourse were issues around the condition of black people in Newark, the U.S. and in Africa. Nollywood were one of the texts that informed some of the conversations, which included dialogue about how Africans operated outside of dominant economic systems. However, discussions included their opinions of ethnic relations within black communities, which critiques were caustic at times.

In private-public spaces of businesses that were analyzed, Nollywood served as the backdrop to shop interactions. In the video and music center of West African shopkeeper Amadou, men in his network who stopped by to visit showed ambivalence towards movies and acted as if the movies were an unobtrusive and unimportant accompaniment in their visit. Their actions displayed intentional behaviors to distinguish their cultural performances of masculinities. During my observations at Amadou's shop, scenes of the marketplace appeared in movies being screened often played off the real time marketplace occurring in the shop creating a multi-textual context. Women also were present at Amadou's store—Chi Chi, the store's employee and Amadou's wife, Aissatou bartered their knowledge of culture and language via Nollywood texts. The

pair's back-and-forth, watching movies and then commenting on them, was an act of productive work that Esan (2008) designates as appropriate cultural performances of African women in a rigid set of gendered expectations formulated by African immigrant communities. Gender became salient in this instance of the shop. While men acted as if Nollywood was useless, women actively and openly employed movies to improve themselves.

In ethnic restaurants, spectatorship at restaurants substituted for storytelling and cultural transmission during meals. Food and the ritual of consumption demonstrated cultural performances that signified social binding and feelings of inclusion. The synergy of ethnic food, cultural memory, diaspora, and the display of digital media, placed the traditional into modernity. Nollywood screenings in African restaurants thus superimposed how customers simultaneously nourished the physical self while satisfying their cultural selves.

Braiding salons demonstrated how women negotiated their power and perceptions of other women's power in the shop through nuanced interaction — hence the term I offered in these complex interactions as *knotty moments*. African owned braiding shops screened movies on a television as a common strategy to entertain salon customers and stylists who sit for hours engaged in the ritual. As movies ran continuously during hair styling, they became the backdrop of the ebb-and-flow of daily business. The films offered visual images of black women wearing braiding styles that customers in the shop picked for their hair fashioning. As well, shops offered supportive spaces to black women who chose to wear their hair in braids or styles that have been controversial over the years; therefore, the braiding salon encouraged them to openly reject dominant culture

that has scrutinized black aesthetic. To complicate the space, beauty was a commodity. Along with hairstyling, fashion accessories were sold. These items assisted in providing a space that catered to the grooming needs and desires of black women, but at a cost.

Tension also emerged at braiding salons when movies ran. Staff and owners often selected what was played on televisions, which was reported to always be Nollywood by participants. However, clients differed in movie preference or the selection by staff, but because the structure of the shop gave the power to staff and owners to select movies, clients felt disempowered. On the other hand, clients remained because their hair styling was most important. At the same time, stylists and owners had to maneuver through issues. For example, Chi Chi mentioned language barriers between clients and stylists that caused uncomfortable moments, or in some cases, when clients refused to pay. Here, intercultural alliances broke down when Chi Chi spoke of Nigerian clients who she said had not paid in the past when they discovered that her mother, a Nigerian, owned the shop. The precariousness of braiding salons linked to all shops in the study, that overall, faced daily uncertainties as they worked to stay open—which uncovered shopkeepers screening Nollywood to avoid the costs of installing then subscribing to cable television, or their inability to do so because property owners failed to update the buildings with wiring for such amenities like cable and the Internet.

Overwhelmingly, Nollywood spectatorship occurred in the private sphere. Very often, viewing occurred in collectives linked through familial or kinship ties. Among extended kinship ties, viewers' negotiated status from gender, age, and those who were born in the diaspora versus immigrant. Special gatherings amongst Africans such as religious or cultural celebrations of extended family and friends emphasized more rigid

expectations of etiquette and protocol than informal family assemblies; though in all viewing spaces, identities and the spaces themselves, shifted in meaning and function.

Spectators across groups interacted and talked throughout movies, often adding another layer to narrations. At the moment of reception, spectators demonstrated certain actions they linked to distinct racial and ethnic, identities. Audiences engaged in animated activities such as talking with other viewers, dancing to movie soundtracks, mimicking scenes, executing audible expressions such as grunts or lip smacking, and commenting aloud during broadcasts. A common activity is "talking back," wherein viewers conversed with the text as if actors or the movie plot can hear their advice. In the study, participants claimed that "talking back" was an activity exclusive to their cultural performance; however, all ethnic groups interacted with texts by talking back or performing as movies played.

In some instances, African participants recounted viewing moments within an intergenerational collective, when the elder viewers narrated and explained culture that they thought others might not know. During this time, older members began to provide memories of growing up in Africa, and make comparisons between "here and there," a diasporic communicative space. Identity constructions made by African spectators situated themselves in host and home country at gatherings, as audience members negotiated social status and place. Younger audiences went between being here and there, between host country and memories they heard from homeland. At some points in the viewings, it was reported that they left conversations to hold dialogue on mobile devices such as cell phones that made their media interaction layered.

Parent-child viewing is another type of reception appearing in participant reports of all groups. Spectators regarded these viewings as special moments because it allowed them to use movie watching as an opportunity to form emotional bonds. Nollywood audiences who binge-watched said that they spent productive time with family members when they did so. In some cases, audience members occupied multiple roles during spectatorship where members operated as culture brokers and translators.

When it came to couples who watched privately, they meted out moments when they had trouble understanding texts with humor. When cohorts watched, the interactions are less socially stratified. Younger African viewers often imitated their parents or older members at moments during the film, while older groups carried out conversations and activities they deemed appropriate among peers. In peer viewings, adults who were children of African immigrants, used humor to imitate their parents as a way to express the ruptures of belonging between outside structures and the cultural expectations of their families. In peer networks of black women immigrants who formed watch clubs, they shared their experiences while commenting on movies to create safe spaces when they explored identity and challenges of living in a host country.

Intermezzo spaces or transitional spaces explored the transportability of Nollywood. Josiah, an African taxi driver gave another narrative of African male viewers in his story of watching Nollywood as he transported customers on a DVD player that he mounted onto his dashboard. In this case, his mobile consumption is individualized and shared. I identified him using his cab as a regular site for spectatorship as *footprinting*, a practice in which mobile device users formed relationships with commercial sites as desirable locations to consume media (Ito, Okabe, & Anderson, 2009). Additionally,

Josiah said that he was an active viewer along with a cadre of African and Haitian drivers who provided transportation in Newark and surrounding cities, and watched Nollywood as they waited for customers. Other than Picasso, an African-American man who talked about his Nollywood activities, men of the study said they rarely watched movies or involuntarily participated in consumption when movies were playing in proximity to them. Josaih's narrative disrupts the public masculinities seen in Amadou's store, and suggests that African males are more animated in all-male reception sites.

Cocooning was another term I employed to examine how Nadia insulated herself through the use of her mobile phone when she travelled to work by bus and train. The media cocoon allowed her to privatize her public spectatorship by blocking out others and geographies during her passage. On the other hand, Aziza used her mobile device in the stationary space of her home. While she watched Nollywood, Aziza participated in other online activities such as posting her comments of movies she watched during real time or search for information about something that she saw in the movies she could not understand.

In closing, during reception, there were moments of connectedness and solidarity with the people that were engaged in the viewing, and the group in which they identified, but viewing easily prompted the painful process of identity construction, and highlighted racial and ethnic group differences, causing moments of friction and discomfort. While some behaviors were regulated to some degree, other displays of culture and identity were openly explored rather than judged. Although there were moments of humor and tension at sites of reception, participants explained that these were safe spaces involving discussions and actual performances reifying and challenging cultural norms negotiated

in the outside world and within ethnic groupings. In whole, practices showed Nollywood audiences, just like black populations, often clash and disagree.

For at least five decades Newark's identity as a black city remained undisputed. Black in this instance is a localized, native black identity rooted in African-American discourse. However, the increase of black immigrants into the city, and their visibility in the commercial, social and private spaces, I argue, shifts Newark from a black city to a black diasporic metropolis. The public to private viewing sites in this study nods to the idea that the interactions occurring in these physical locales and the locations themselves create nodes of diaspora that disrupt a notion of a hyper-local black identity. The negotiation of the "here and there" and creating a space acknowledging local and transported culture along with the trading and borrowing of culture and cultural products augments the sharing of spaces, information, and identities that are fluid understandings of blackness that travel across national lines.

CHAPTER SIX

READING AFRICA WITH LOVE, PLEASURE, AND DISGUST: AUDIENCE

INTERPRETATION OF NOLLYWOOD MOVIES

This chapter intimately examines how participants made sense of self through their textual readings of Nollywood movies. Nollywood audiences, and those who self-identified as ardent fans, interpreted some texts as positive and others as negative. During readings, participants expressed pleasure and fond attachments for the films, while also feeling repulsed by some aspects of the movies. The polysemic nature of audience readings inspired the title of this chapter and links to the fluid and active imagining and constructing of diasporic identity that I observed in this study.

Before David Morley's 1979-80 landmark study on audiences, much of the audience research models operated from assumptions that media had a direct and inescapable power in influencing audience perception and behavior (Morley, 2006, 1992; 1980; Bratich, 2005; Kellner, 2002). Previously accepted notions proposed that audiences passively received uninterrupted pre-packaged messages that were coded into media content by media producers. Stuart Hall's (1972) breakthrough essay on encoding/decoding is a germinal writing introducing audiences as spectators that read media content from a dominant, negotiated, and oppositional positions. Morley's work (1980) exploring British audiences of the television news magazine, "Nationwide," marked an epistemological and methodological shift in the way audiences experience media. Indeed, the methodological consensus currently states that audiences actively read media texts (Murphy & Kraidy, 2003; Gray, 1987), but of equal importance is that audiences read texts from multifarious positions and produce an array of meanings

(Butsch, 2008, 2007; Bratich, 2005; Murphy & Kraidy, 2003; Alasuuttari, 1999; Gray, 1987; Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). Morley's work challenges scholars to experiment with research methods that look at audiences as divergent, while factoring in contextual variances such as gender, race, and class.

Feminist scholars argue that film reception fosters male power and privilege through its use of repetitive erotic, coded messages (Ogunfolabi, 2013; Manlove, 2007; Thaggert, 1998; Mulvey, 1975). Laura Mulvey (1975) describes male spectatorship as a fetishistic scopophilia activated by watching female disempowerment on screen (Manlove, 2007). Mulvey contends that even spatial conditions of theaters, such as techniques in lighting, encourage spectators to construct fantasies of dominance. Whereas studies on the male gaze explores spectatorship and interpretation, Radway (1991), Stacey (1987), and Ang (1985) argue that the concept of the "female voyeur" nuances textural readings from a number of social performances and social positions.

Though general reception studies that are approached from a feminist perspective make paradigmatic shifts in the field (Mao, 2009; Leyda, 2002; Thaggert, 1998; Reid, 1991; Diawara, 1988; Allen, 1990), others look at black spectatorship. Diawara (1988) adds that both black men and women fall under the probe of a dominant lens that supports the textual readings of white males while simultaneously dictating and undermining black males. According to Leyda (2002), Hollywood provides "race-specific" pleasure to both male and female audiences by repeatedly presenting black characters in disempowering and undesirable frames. Thaggert (1998) points to black female spectators being neither white nor male; hence excluding them from discourse around the gaze. hooks (2003) and Kelly (1998) concur, arguing that black female

spectatorship should be explored from the standpoint of an oppositional gaze that rejects the depiction of a subpar woman of color next to presentations of white Victorian ladyhood. Kaplan (1997) proposes that the "Other" also has a gaze, and that it disrupts the notion of power in subjects who employ a hegemonic perspective. Most importantly, race and ethnicity scholars working on reception explore spectatorship through *collective* audiences, as opposed to individual viewership.

In the U.S., film reception plays a critical role in constructing, imagining, and performing racial, ethnic, and diasporic identity (Naficy, 2001, 1999). Immigrants use textual interpretations to reinforce cultural values and traditions from their homelands, thus resisting assimilation (Thissen, 2012, 1999; Rinnawwi, 2010). According to Giorgio Bertillini (2012, 2004, 1999), when resettled populations engage in cinema from their homeland, the text and the reception practice foster and strengthen national identity and ideologies against the distinctions disseminated in mainstream media. Immigrants can garner a sense of nationhood from readings because the act of viewing and the interpretations that were produced meant participation in authentic cultural activities in the diaspora (Bertellini, 1999). For African-Americans who participated in "The Great Migration," groups who were forced to resettle and lived in a media climate that supported racist, tyrannical laws against their enfranchisement, interpreting movies served as a vehicle to socialize and orient themselves in American culture (Griffith & Latham, 1999).

Scholars have found Nollywood[103] audiences of the diaspora use movies to construct cultural capital and perform traditional identities (Bryce, 2013; Hoffmann,

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[103] I use research of diasporic audiences who watch Bollywood to provide a richer understanding of how diasporans use homeland media to construct identity. Specifically, I examine ethnographies conducted by

2013; Esan, 2008; Uwah, 2008). In some instances, it is used to construct a transnational identity (Bryce, 2013) or a traditional identity (Uwah, 2008). At other moments, the movies narrate the immigrant experience in host countries (Hoffman, 2013). Nollywood is used as an apparatus to learn language and link their identity to homeland belonging (Ugochukwu, 2011). Online reception, such as that on YouTube, negotiates authentic usage of language and understanding of codes spoken in films (Orimaye, Alhashmi, & Eugene, 2012; Miller, 2012). This type of reception supplements the imagination and narratives of both immigrants and generations born in the host country, by providing visual understandings of homeland and cultural daily life to supplement home memories of parents and grandparents who immigrated.

Some academic literature presents Nollywood as a cure-all for diasporans (Tsika, 2015; Abah, 2011, 2010). Esan (2008) describes Nollywood as though it is a guilty pleasure stashed away from other black populations co-existing with Africans. However, in this study, participants read Nollywood from various angles, and some disliked various aspects of the movies. To explore how Nollywood audiences read the text with love and

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Bhattacharya (2004), Ramdya (2010), Kavoori & Joseph (2011) and Shankur (2004). These works explore how Indians in the diaspora use Bollywood to construct cultural capital, perform translocal identities, mediate the meanings of Indianness, and navigate the different levels and layers social status. Lastly, this section will draw upon similarities and differences between Bollywood and Nollywood to usher in a conceptual framework further guiding this research. According to Kaur & Sinha (2005) Bollywood is used to homogenize Indian identity by synthesizing fragments of various Indian and Western cultures. Bhattacharya (2004) discovered how a Bollywood audience re-purposes a domestic space into providing comfort and seclusion. The term, *basement cinenphilia*, came out of respondents in her study using basements to watch Bollywood alone or with older children in their household. Kavita Ramdya (2010) examines the cultural and social dynamics within Indian communities that have developed distinct concepts and practices for several generations, around dating and marriage in a host country. The ethnographies by Kavoori & Joseph (2011) and Shalini Shankar (2008) explore third-and-fourth generation Indian immigrants who use the Bollywood filmic style of song and dance, and *filmis*, film scores circulated in pop music, provide visual, musical content and choreography as a resource for identity construction and performance.

disgust, the work of Jacqueline Bobo (1993) and Catherine Squires (2011) will be employed in this study. Although these theorists look at African-American audiences in the U.S., their work is applicable in this study for several reasons. This research includes African-Americans as part of the diaspora, and since they are the larger group, much research has been done about them. As well, black audiences navigated an outsider status similar to black immigrants, and at times, all groups shared the same issues of exclusion in media.

Bobo and Squires examine how black audiences actively engage in texts they may simultaneously disagree with and find some value in viewing. Bobo (1993) argues that black audiences are indeed heterogeneous and engage in discourse around meaning making from cultural readers' perspective. In her ethnographic study of black women's reception of *The Color Purple*, she discovered that discontent with portions of the movie was overridden when viewers related to the emotional content of the film and identified with the characters. According to Bobo, female audience members use their cultural knowledge and "empathetic readings" (1993, p. 272) to "read through" texts that are not visually or politically apparent, but are culturally and emotionally salient.

Catherine Squires (2002) proffers media consumption does not necessarily mean the enjoyment of the text, stating that some audiences, such as black or minority audiences "have not enjoyed the same access to public spaces, media resources or other tools to participate in discourse" (p.449). When the opportunity emerges, even if the media content informing discourse is disliked, it provides a space to dialogue about citizenship and identity (Squires, 2000). Although she is referring to mainstream media, this notion can be applied to the textual interpretations of audiences in Nollywood.

The participants I selected were those who were willing to talk about textual readings and identity at least two times after the initial interview. Three members of each ethnic group (for a total of nine participants) are represented in this chapter with only one male. Admittedly, the readings of participants intersect with gender frequently, but their comments and thoughts on identity highlight the complexity of black women (diasporic) audiences, an understudied population.

Chapter Flow

This chapter explores the interpretations of audiences by looking at themes frequently mentioned by participants. The first theme, the representation of Africa, examines how participants reflected on how the continent, the people, and the terrain were depicted in Nollywood. Participants commented on the real life issues that they saw in movies; how they made cross-cultural comparisons; and their reflections on stolen experiences as a diasporan. The next prominent theme, gender representation, examined how participants interpreted fashion, hairstyles, skin color, intimate relationships, and power. Afterward, participants made sense of how the theme of contemporary and traditional religion brought pleasure or discomfort or both. The last section studies how participants used their interpretation to make sense of self. In their narratives, the following are discussed: hybridity, pressure to marry within ethnic-specific groups, pan-ethnic identity, and black American identity. The close of this chapter goes over the density of this work to highlight salient moments in the narrative.

I selected data from participants who could speak with me in follow up interviews because their interpretations of texts and identity were layered. Subsequent talks allowed me to look at fieldnotes from previous conversations then construct more questions when

participants' explanations needed further exploration. The questions to participants were designed to get them to think about how their identities corresponded or clashed with textual readings. For example, to explore how movies have an effect on their lives, I asked how they could relate to some of the situations that they see in Nollywood, and how they applied what they saw or heard in movies to their own lives. To see how they read cultural practices and messages in movies that might be different to them, I asked participants, "How do you try to understand things in the movies that are unfamiliar to your culture?" Furthermore, to get them to talk about their notions of other black identities questions were posed, such as "When you watch the movies, do you think about who you are?" and "When you watch the movies, do you think about other black people?" The interviews were structured as open-ended questions in a series of one-on-one conversations. They sometimes turned into back-and-forth dialogue that veered from reading Nollywood and went into the nuances of their lives.

Representations of Africa

"Every regime of representation is a regime of power …" – Stuart Hall

According to Stuart Hall (1996), presenting cultures through cinema is a form of subjecting viewers to a knowledge of self that "cripples and deforms" (p. 213) them in the process of constructing their cultural identities. Yong Jin (2010) adds to Hall's analysis by proffering that representation is a process of reconstructing self with images and concepts that misshape or re-innovate. This is certainly the case in the hegemonic portrayals of Africa from the colonial era onwards. Popular cinema repeatedly presents Africa as "the dark continent" in order to reinforce racist Western notions of an

underdeveloped continent absent of culture and its place in history (Olorunsiwa, 2014; Dovey, 2009; Reynolds, 2005; Murphy, 2000).

This message and the prevailing white characters depicted as heroes, controllers of nations, and gods that must overpower the indigenous populations portray the African population as primitive and animal-like (Metzler, 2012). In the eyes of Western media today, Tarzan is still required to tame the savages (Earnhart, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2012). White characters come in the form of peacekeepers, paternalistic philanthropists, and military humanitarians (Dawson, 2011; Vambe, 2014).

The act of reading Nollywood movies allowed African audiences to watch cultural products from their homeland. Participants who identified as African see Nollywood as an authentic medium in contrast to American mainstream media. "I see an African in a [Hollywood] movie, I get ready to cringe because I know it's some stupid mess," expresses Chi Chi, a woman whose parents are Nigerian born. "I see my people when I watch Nollywood."

The representation of Africa was of particular importance for participants. African-Americans and Caribbean participants had never visited Africa and relied on the media images to make sense of the Africa they were shown in mainstream media. For African participants, they all have traveled there, but go infrequently. However, their understanding of Africa more aligned with how it was represented in Nollywood movies rather than U.S. media. Participants overwhelmingly expressed that Nollywood was one of the few media they watched that featured real locations in Africa. Although they consumed Hollywood movies that film in Africa or feature African characters, these

movies disproportionately starred white actors or storylines were based on a white experience (Artt, 2012).

In Hollywood films, Africa is a jungle, village, or slum (Müller, 2014; Paleker, 2011), and African characters are sorcerers, disfigured or physically abnormal, rogue militiamen, despots, or helpless souls in need of a white savior (Higgins, 2012; Mafe, 2011; Evans & Glenn, 2010; Earnhart, 2007; Bogle, 1994; Bowser, 1994). In casts that are predominantly African-American, African characters are crooks, service workers, or sidekicks who were the brunt of culturally debasing jokes (Sewell, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Adebajo, 2004; Olaniyan, 1996). Other times, Africa and its citizens were romanticized or portrayed as primitive. If participants exclusively depended on Hollywood to provide them with images of Africa, the resultant personification would be of the mystic savage.

"There are two movies I remember offhand growing up that had Africans; *Coming to America* and *Shaka Zulu*,"[104] says Picasso, an African-American information technology professional. The generally limited presentation of Africans and black people made Nollywood an attractive media for Picasso, in that he feels Nollywood does a better job of portraying black people in less problematic roles.

According to Picasso, it took American media, be it cinema or television, a lot longer to show that a black person could be smart, of have the riches that white people have.

> They always have us playing maids, singing or dancing or something like that. But over there in Nollywood, they have us as prime ministers, or holding high ranking offices, or having control of lands, you know political positions.

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[104] *Coming to America* is a comedy starring African-American comedian/actor, Eddie Murphy, playing an African prince who travels to the United States in search of a wife. *Shaka Zulu* is a South African epic movie based on the life of the 18th century Zulu king who defeated the British, but was eventually killed.

Hollywood is just starting to get around to doing that and they have been around for a long time. Nollywood just came out.

For Picasso, viewing blacks in actual roles, and particularly seeing male characters in positions of power, were pleasurable moments in the texts. This offered a refreshing reprieve from the daily American news reporting of black people, especially men, committing crimes. For him, media coverage surrounding the killings of young African-American males by white men or law enforcement increased feelings of stress and powerlessness.[105] Moreover, Picasso valued Nollywood for featuring all-black or mostly-black casts. He also found satisfaction in how characters' socioeconomic statuses varied from poor and working-class to wealthy. He also mentioned enjoying the ability to select from different genres. His favorite movies are comedies, action, and melodramas. To him, each genre showed multi-dimensional characters that Hollywood often neglected to include in its depictions of black people:

> Blacks in Hollywood [play starring roles] when they are in a comedy. In the West. Black people are always the one you laugh at. We can't be seen as serious people and deep thinking people. We're not even sex symbols. Maybe one or two of us, but you don't see them in dramas, horror movies, suspense or even a lot of action movies. If it's a black person in the movie, nine times out of ten, they are a comedian or the jokester.

In Hollywood, African-American characters over-represent deviant portrayals, while under-representing positive images (Gray, 2005). Likewise, limited and disparaging representations of Africa were problems for African audiences. Nadia, who has African parentage, agreed that Nollywood movies are a needed change from the overbearing, negative images of black people she saw on U.S. television and in Hollywood films. For

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[105] Picasso was referring to the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 by a gated-community security officer in Florida; the shooting death of Mike Brown in 2014 by a Ferguson, Missouri police officer; and the 2014 death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY due to a chokehold inflicted by a police officer.

Mimi, who recently emigrated from Trinidad & Tobago,[106] Nollywood was neither good nor bad, "It just shows what happens in that specific country." Aziza, who said the movies "have a lot of black people [in them] so you see ratchet ones, good ones, hood ones," had a similar reading. "It is something where black people are living every day. Nothing special. Nobody breaking any records, just living," she adds.

Mimi and Aziza note the significance of the quotidian in the movies because they often see Hollywood movies depicting black people at extreme moments or in exceptional situations. "You're either super funny or superfast. Or you're surviving slavery, or getting shot out. That's not my everyday life. I'm human," insists Aziza. In American media, blacks are fetishized with superhuman abilities to over-perform or underperform (Lendrum, 2005; Barlowe, 2003). Another popular depiction is as endurers of insurmountable social challenges of racism or slavery (Dubler, 2014). Nollywood movies that are situated in the everyday humanize black characters, thus situating African-ness and blackness in the ordinary flows of life.

Real Issues, Unrealistic Genres. In another light, Hajja maintained that movies deal with real issues in Nigeria. She drew parallels between women depicted in movies and what is happening in Nigeria. "Women have less decision-making power. They stay primarily in the marketplace where most work, or they stay at home. They're not educated and they're not supposed to be educated because they're not supposed to be heard." Hajja applauded how some movies touched upon prevalent problems in Nigeria

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[106] Trinidad & Tobago are one island, but it is commonly known to outsiders as Trinidad. Even though there is a cultural primacy to designate the islands as Trinidad on the outside, there is a difference between islands to residents. In her home country, Mimi is a Tobagonian, which is drastically different from the more urban, more populated, and faster-paced Trinidad.

that are rarely shown outside of Africa, especially when stories show how issues transpire

from the perspective of Africans. Though she was glad that movies brought the daily

lives of African people to the screen, she also experienced levels of discomfort. Hajja

relayed the following:

> You will see arranged marriages, and the light-skin phenomenon and the preoccupation with status amongst certain people. I think with Nollywood movies you're always exposed to some issue of class because Nigerians are into class. That's how society operates over there. Rich or poor. Chief or servant. Big man, little man. Class is a big thing. So I think those elements still rings true to me.

Specific issues around women's rights, colorism,[107] and class are told from a local

perspective. To her, these provided viewers a lens into an authentic Nigeria. For example,

in 2002, a young woman named Amina Lawal, a Muslim in Northern Nigeria was

sentenced to death for committing adultery. Ayesha Imam (2005) argues that Western

media condemned Islamic law without considering the nuanced ethnic and cultural issues

involved in how laws are interpreted in Nigeria's policy.

Mimi's mentioning of the ability of movies to provide a local perspective was

analogous to Hajja's:

> It's good to know that there's movies out there that show local culture. I don't want to use international. When I say local I mean African. Black people from the land of our ancestors have movies out there that are attracting people. They are sending messages all over the world. There are white people out there that love watching African movies. So it's like I feel good to know that our brother and sisters are acting and sending a message.

However, Hajja said movie content misrepresents African societies, and sends out

erroneous messages.

> Sometimes I just laugh at the movies. It's the bad acting more than anything. And the plot lines. They seem to be very huge and unrealistic. Well to

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[107] Margaret Hunter (2013) defines colorism as a social process that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark-skinned people of color in areas such as income, education, criminal justice, sentencing, housing and the marriage market.

me it's unrealistic. But of course, in the countries where it's happening, it's real to them. But I don't know, not always. The twists and turns can be so over the top and unrealistic that it makes the plot lines such a joke.

Whether movies were read as unrealistic or authentic, the movies provided a lens into African life from a perspective rarely seen in dominant American cinema. Mimi linked movies to assisting black viewers in making ancestral connections, thus strengthening her own ties to an African identity. However, the unrealism that Hajja read in movies at times, undermined its authenticity in telling accurate stories. When they did this, Hajja distanced her Nigerian identity from it.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons. While Hajja shared how she negotiated her positive readings of movies with her unfavorable impressions, Caribbean immigrants explained that movies assisted them in making comparisons to Caribbean and African life. All Caribbean participants expressed seeing parallels between the cultures. When they sought out similarities, it helped them draw linkages to their African identity.

Vivienne and Dominique, both Haitian immigrants, drew comparisons between Haitian culture and African culture, but they explained a contradiction in understanding the similarities and differences. The women reported that they were reared with family members who emphasized a rich culture due to the ability of Haitians to maintain African culture. Haitian culture is noted for strong African retentions in music, language, and religion throughout the Caribbean (Apter, 2004; White, 2011; Dulitzky, 2005), but Haitians are reviled for strong cultural retention in the Caribbean, particularly in Latin American countries in which they are members (Duany, 2006). In the U.S., Haitians are further stigmatized with media images of HIV/AIDS, immigration risks, and long-standing stereotypes that media in slaveholding states cast upon Haiti from the 18th

century Haitian Revolution to dissuade other enslaved blacks from uprising (Dayan, 2004).

Because of their standing in the Caribbean and Latin America, and of the Western media pillorying Haiti, Vivienne and Dominique were taught to leverage their perceptions of enriched cultural capital against the stigmas. However, these women never formally learned the specific parallels between African and Haitian cultures from family members, or at either Haitian or American schools. Their parents frowned upon the idea of taking classes about Africa because they thought it was a waste of time and money; they were going to school to pursue medical and law degrees. Consequently, movies became the women's self-appointed pedagogical tool.

Vivienne and Dominique said that they found the most similarities between Haitian and African cultures through movies set in villages. Vivienne, who left Haiti as a toddler, preferred movies depicting traditional Nigerian or Ghanaian societies, whereas Dominique, who favored movies in the city, emigrated from Haiti in middle school. For Vivienne, village movies were a reminder of growing up in the northern Haitian countryside. While there, she lived with her grandmother, aunts, uncles, and several cousins and siblings. The extended family setting and rustic living in Haiti were memories she held and revisited while watching Nollywood. Dominique, on the other hand, grew up in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. She disliked trips in her youth to rural parts because she saw herself as an urbanite rather than a farmer. Her vivid memories of the city were the marketplaces; in particular, the industriousness of Haitian market women, which she related to scenes of the marketplaces in Nollywood. Both

women drew connections to aspects of Nollywood that reminded them of home and heightened their feelings of an unbroken cultural link to Africa.

Mimi, a Tobagonian, said she often uses Nollywood to compare the lives of African women with Caribbean women. To her, watching Nollywood movies was "fascinating because the culture is so rich and the language is beautiful." She fell in "love [with] the African accents" and expressed admiration when she saw women wearing flip-flops in movies. "In Tobago we call them slippers or leather ding ding." Mimi explained that flip-flops are popular in Trinidad & Tobago, and even more common in Tobago, the island of the two-island nation that is more agricultural and rural. When she sees flip-flops in movies, she reads it as actors being "true to themselves" and their culture.

Mimi explained that in her country, girls and women imitate American culture so much that they wear Ugg Boots in the humid tropical climate. By embracing and celebrating language and connecting common footwear in Trinidad with that in Africa, Mimi acknowledges her membership in diasporic culture from the standpoint of a black immigrant connecting to her African roots as she negotiated the influences of American culture in her home country. This moment signified her thinking of Tobago as her home, and not Africa while still acknowledging that she too is a distant relative.

Sherri-Ann Butterfield (2006), Yen Le Espiritu (2003) and Mary C. Waters (2002) argue that immigrant girls are expected to block the influences of American morality and sexuality in order to maintain the standards of homeland cultures. In order to do so, they must locate media from which they can extract characters and content to construct diasporic identities (LaBennett, 2013). Kamille Gentles-Peart (2013) contends that ethnic media are instrumental for spaces for immigrant discourse; especially in the

areas of gender and race. Mimi reads the characters' identity to make sense of a self-situated in gender and class identity. She used moments in the movies to work through the imagination of a cultural and socially constructed body that grounded her to an identity outside of America.

Furthermore, Mimi's reading is similar to a study done by Jane Bryce (2013) who interviewed Nollywood audiences in Barbados, an island just north of Trinidad & Tobago. The African languages, accents, and culture appealed to West Indian audiences. Women in Bryce's study read movies or scenes depicting women from rural areas more favorably than those depicting women from the city. According to Bryce, the rural/urban or good-culture/bad-culture dichotomy represents longstanding class issues in the West Indies. "If you dress like that in the islands they think you [*sic*] rich," said Mimi. In movies, Mimi's readings suggested that people in the cities represented urbanism, which is another way of interpreting that they embraced Western modernity, while subsequently relinquishing their tradition.

Stolen/Lost Experiences. All African-American participants read Nollywood to supplement their identity, specifically from the position that the movies represented culture and identity that was stolen. Tasha, a native Newark resident said, "Black [American] people are lost. We don't know where we come from. The movies show me who I would have been if my ancestors didn't come here." She attributed much of the ignorance that African-Americans demonstrated toward Africans to an American media system that portrays black people and Africans in disparaging ways—so much so that African-Americans are discouraged to know more about Africa. For example, the positive representation of Tarzan against the negative portrayal of Africa/Africans in

Western media discussed previously (Vambe, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Metzler, 2012; Dawson, 2011; Earnhart, 2007) also resulted in multiple readings from black people. Using a simplified version of Hall's encoding/decoding, viewers strongly commented on images of Africa/Africans, while others accepted the images. In some cases, African-American viewers simply do not care.

Watching movies brought an internal discourse and reflection of identity and belonging for Aziza as well. When she read movies and witnessed cultural practices, she thought about the meanings of Africa she encountered in the larger society, the ones her parents told her about and those she forms. These meanings originated from the following three angles that often contrasted: 1. Africa as uncultured; 2. romanticizing African culture, histories, and its current status; 3. Africa as a site where she attempts to articulate her belonging.

Aziza said she grew up seeing Africa portrayed on television as "a place you never want to go" because it was primitive and dirty, with an abundance of flies and starving people. Her parents, who promoted African culture, romanticized it as a beautiful place where "[black people] were kings and queens who ruled the world], and possessed "superior cultures that created civilization." When Aziza moved to the East Coast from the South, she encountered a variety of African people who voiced their disdain for African-Americans because Africans thought African-Americans did not possess culture. She often clashed with Africans and black West Indians who made assumptions of cultureless African-Americans. These experiences changed her ideas of Africa and black people.

When Aziza began watching Nollywood, the movies provided her a space to think through the *knotty* moments around the concept of Africa. Knotty-ness was introduced in the previous chapter to explain how black people in the U.S. negotiate themselves in complex interactions with people, media, and public expectations of respectability. Knotty moments were instances participants negotiated multiple positions within a space that carried opposing notions. Aziza said she often thought about who she would have been if not for slavery. She said she did not yearn to be African, but due to circumstances she feels a life-long melancholy regarding the fact that she only knows Africa from media images and the imagination of her parents. Picasso, too, shares how he often contemplates who he would have been if not for slavery. Furthermore, Aziza and Picasso think about how other black audiences (who are not in their ethnic grouping) view them, and how they define what it means to be African.

Represent, Represent

As opposed to U.S. mainstream media, Nollywood movies, whether bringing pleasure or disappointment, consistently offered representations of Africa. Participants overwhelmingly explained how these movies showed the nuances of African geographies, languages, and people occupying varying positions of power. The representations prompted participants to think about ways of connecting with their images of Africa. However, to some, Africa is misrepresented because of the preponderance of religious and gendered messages in texts.

Africa became many things when read in movies. What was consistent across participants was their shared sense of being able to negotiate with more representations of Africa in Nollywood than in Hollywood or any other Western media. For many, Africa

was placed in the present tense. All African-American and Caribbean participants reported to have never visited any African country, so for them, being able to interpret multiple presentations of people, terrain, and settings was refreshing. However, for those whose ancestors were forcibly resettled in America and the Caribbean as a result of slavery, the process triggered feelings of lost connections. African participants agreed that Nollywood offered a range of African representations and illustrated Nigerian issues from the perspective of Nigerians, but some felt that depictions stereotyped important parts of African life.

Gender Representations

Gender analysis is a frequent topic of discourse amongst Nollywood scholars (Gaudio, 2014; Adewoye, Odesanya, Abubakar, & Jimo, 2014; Offiaeli, 2013; Ugor, 2013; Bryce, 2012; Okome, 2012; Ukata, 2010). Rafiel Gaudio (2014) analyzes how movies feminize homosexuality and promote the anti-gay sentiment in Nigeria, while Adewoye, Odesanya, Abubakar, & Jimo (2014), argue that gendered "homo-erotica" themes increase with the rise of the anti-gay climate. Rita Offiaeli (2013) examines how Igbo movies serve as scripts that regulate gender roles and mediate economic and social issues in Nigeria. Paul Ugor (2013) and Onookome Okome (2012) examine how movies around the growing sex trafficking trade in post-colonial Africa is indicative of the youth culture that has emerged in Nigeria where young adults and adolescents involve themselves in dangerous culture economies to obtain the wealth that they see in mainstream media. Jane Bryce (2013) argues that women in Barbados identify with female characters who assert their power through sexuality; whereas Agatha Ukata

(2010) contends that movies in general, misrepresent the real world lives of women in Nigeria.

Participants in the study often spoke of ways in which movie represented women. While male participants read female characters as displaying favorable portrayals, women participants voiced contrasting views with men and with each other. On one hand, they enjoyed how women represented independence, upward mobility and traditional beauty. On the other, they criticized images they saw as disempowering and misogynistic. Three themes emerged from interviews: women and beauty, women and relationships, and women and religion. At times, themes intersect[108] and inform others, resulting in multiple identities. The intersectionality magnifies how participants must maneuvered through various social positions informing the process of reading the self while interpreting texts.

Women and Beauty. Fashion, hair and skin were common focal points in readings of female characters amongst women participants. Participants preferred characters who wore African clothes and traditional hairstyles or contemporary styles featuring natural hair. To some degree, several participants incorporated the fashion and hairstyles they saw in movies with *panache* corresponded with their ideas of multiple citizenships. Some participants disapproved of characters who appeared to have lightened their skin while others voiced empathy for the beauty practice.

Fashion. Women participants picked up fashion cues from Nollywood female characters who wore traditional and modern African clothes, and most emulated various

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[108] Intersectionality arguments contend that identities are multidimensional and shaped by the ways one aspect of identity informs the other (Sanders & Banjo, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991).

aspects of these styles. They reported to fuse their current fashion sense with characters

of the styles they admired. Garritano (2014), Krings and Okome (2013), Pype (2013), and

Bryce (2013) argue that audiences' identification with fashion trends informs their public

identity. Aziza found inspiration in contemporary fashions worn by female characters.

She described them as African fabrics that were tailored with various European designs

such as peplum shirts and skirts, one-arm asymmetrical mermaid dresses and French cut

jackets. Hajja liked to buy blouses and dresses similar to those she saw in the movies or

get them custom-made, but wore them differently by having one side falling off of her

shoulder like how she saw Senegalese women wear their clothes. In the same way, Nadia

integrated African fashion in her daily attire from the latest trends she saw in movies.

Hajja and Nadia said the movies were merely a supplement to what they already were

doing, but one of the highlights of Nollywood is fashion:

> Many people think Africans are stuck in tradition[al African clothes], but Ghana has a booming fashion industry with high profile designers. Beyoncé and Solange Knowles wear African designers. One thing the women over here look forward to is checking out the designs and styles. When casts wear beautiful clothes that means the movie has a better budget and the ladies have better wigs. [laugh] Seriously, though. Nigerian clothes and designs are fierce and bold. Ghana and Nigeria designs are very popular in Africa and in the States and the U.K.

Nadia's comments indicated the important relationship between local fashion and film

industries, and its subsequent effect on the visual aesthetics practiced in the diaspora.

Wearing clothes representing homeland fashions were significant practices for African

diasporans because they reinforced and re-established connections between homeland

and host country (Fumanti, 2013). I argue that mixing and matching fashions is an

articulation of dual citizenships and multiple identities. Styling intersects with notions of

citizenship, diaspora and modernity. Wearing clothes is the statement of "being here and there." It embraces the bricolage of identity nuanced through layers of clothing.

Leora Farber's (2010) work on hybridity points to South African fashion as a site that explicitly displays hybrid identity because designer and youth who create their own trends, appropriate fashion from local and global traditional and contemporary styles. She argues that fashion is an extension of a socio-cultural articulation of the globalized world. In another study, Victoria Rovine (2014) proffers that African fashion splices from an international network of material culture and aesthetic. Hybrid identities are fashioned at points revolving around social positions such as race, gender, religion, sexuality, class, ethnicity, immigrant or native-born status, and so forth. Much like the mixing and matching with the participants in this study, fashion is connected to a deeper sense of belonging that travels across the world, but is threaded to specific identities.

Hair. Hairstyling is a critical non-verbal cue marking beauty, status and power amongst black women (Thompson, 2009; Babou, 2008; Walker, 2007; Patton, 2006). All women except Chi Chi, the only interviewee who veils because she is Muslim, repeated that hairstyles made an impression on how they read movies. Aziza and Yadira interpreted women who wore wigs in movies with village settings an oxymoron. To them, the village represented tradition, but the wigs worn by female characters were attempts to be modern through hegemonic standards. Yadira commented, "I know wigs are [found] in the pyramids with mummies [that are thousands of years old]. If you're going to wear one, wear a braided wig. Not a plastic one that looks like you got the hair from a Barbie Doll. Plus, those wigs kill hairlines."

Yadira's critique is rooted in discourse of black hair products. Korean and Chinese companies hold a monopoly on black haircare products and accessories including wigs, weaves and synthetic hair (Shin, 2014). Yadira disagreed most with actresses who wore poor quality wigs to achieve an African-American look. Although Yadira wore her natural hair, sometimes she, too, dons wigs and weaves. She explained that wearing wigs and weaves displays her African-American culture and the natural hair movement in the United States that has emerged in the last several years. This movement encourages women to resist using chemicals and irons to style their hair. In this movement, black women receive tips on how to manage their unprocessed coifs. Wearing wigs, weaves and hair extensions is a way to protect their hair from overexposure to harsh winters or the drying conditions of the summer. Yadira claimed she was not attempting to copy white beauty or anything else; she is "being who she is." Up until this point, Yadira steadfastly maintained her Latina identity, but used her African American-ness to work through these clashes in identity.

Aziza and Yadira criticized weave-or-wig-wearing female characters. They felt this was an unsuccessful attempt by filmmakers to Westernize characters. Aziza called the wigs "busted" and described the styling as "bird's nests on top of their heads". She could not understand why characters wore old, ill-fitting wigs rather than their hair in braids or a traditional Nigerian hairstyle. To her, wigs and weaves were vestiges of cultural imperialism communicating that African and natural hair is inferior. Speaking from a different perspective, Yadira perceived the costuming of wigs and weaves as an effort to emulate African-Americans. She cited a specific film series she saw several years back featuring characters with the names of African-American and West Indian pop

stars such as Beyoncé and Rhianna in *The President's Daughter, The Return of Beyoncé,*

and *Beyoncé and Rihanna*:

> I really don't like the "Beyoncé and Rihanna thing," cause I feel like they're trying to be something they're not. They're mimicking something they're not, especially in beauty. Like with skin bleach and stuff like that. Like the main girls have a lot of foundation and blond weaves. It's just a lot.

In contrast, Nadia understood hairstyling preferences in some of the movies as a way to

present Africans in modernity. It is a nod to African-American culture and a statement of

presence.

> Africans love Beyoncé, and we still haven't seen her with her real hair while she's performing. The everyday African can't buy a four hundred dollar weave and a [Nollywood] film wouldn't budget four hundred [dollars] for a wig. That's like three days of the budget.

To Nadia, contemporary hairstyles such as wigs and weaves dispel stereotypes about

African people being primitive or stuck in the past. However, she agreed that white ideals

of beauty and the proliferation of African-American media influence the aesthetic choices

of films.

The women participants' readings of hair connected to their experiences in real

life. They, too, faced the pressures of determining the value of black aesthetics against

white idealized beauty and body images (Patton, 2006), but they read these aesthetics

differently when interpreting movie texts.

White Face. Although there were different readings of hair, women participants

who noted the bleached skin of some of the actresses disagreed with the practice and read

it as a negative image in movies. There are two types of fair skin in this case. One skin

tone is a naturally lighter shade of brown, and the other has been cosmetically lightened.

Much of the comments on fair skin pertained to actresses whose skin appeared to be

cosmetically bleached. However, Yadira observed that the lighter skinned actors (both

male and female) in general, played roles that were polarizing. They were either the most

desired or the most reviled. However, the theme of fair skin moved the discussion away

from reading female characters to the skin bleaching phenomenon of black people in

general.

Chi Chi — whose parents are Nigerian immigrants — admitted to knowing

women who bleached their skin. To her, this practice represented "'white man's' magic"

(her phrase), because it fooled black people to think their skin was ugly and white skin

was beautiful. *White man's magic*, describes the phenomenon in which black people

believe European or Anglo explanations than their own racial or cultural justifications:[109]

> When Africans get [American and Bollywood] movies, they see white and
> lighter-skinned people in the best roles, marrying the best looking people and
> having the best jobs. Africans say they love their culture, but they bleach their
> skin so that they are seen as pretty and beautiful. Men do it too, but it is more
> prevalent in women. In America, light skin is the right skin. That's why Halle
> Berry are [sic] part of the pretty black people crew. But Lupita [Nyong'o] was
> like the dark chocolate poster bunny of the month. She was pretty for a minute.
> Mostly to white people and they had to tell us that, that chocolate girl is pretty
> over there. But when [mainstream media] finished with her. Whoosh. She's gone.
> And we didn't care cause we still stuck on light skin. I love my people, but this
> disturbs me, you know. Black women must have white faces to be pretty.

During the interview, Chi Chi, who was pregnant at the time of interview,

disclosed that she found out that her Nigerian in-laws preferred lighter skin when the

color of her child was discussed: "They tell me. 'We want the child to be nice and brown

like you.' My husband is dark, dark, dark and I think it's beautiful, but that's that 'white

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[109] This is reminiscent of the Clark & Clark (1947) social experiment in which they asked black children
whether they preferred to play with a black doll or a white doll. Overwhelmingly, the children preferred
white dolls, suggesting that the preponderance of white supremacy affected the perceptions of even
school children going to segregated schools. The findings became a critical part of the case to end
segregation in the South in the 1954 Brown vs Board of Education decision.

man's magic' working. It's their juju that they call science." Added, Chi Chi pointed to actors who lightened their skin to acquire acting gigs. Black male actors bleach their skin to get romantic leads that she calls "lover boy" roles. As well, she said that Nigerians call women who are bleached in movies "high mileage women" because they are often represented as demanding and difficult to deal with.

The use of skin lightening is widespread in Sub-Sahara Africa (Glenn, 2008).[110] Chi Chi explained that skin lightening is a phenomenon in Africa because of the perceptions that lighter skin makes one look more attractive and procures better social and economic capital (Blay, 2011; Kpanake et al., 2009). In Nigeria, reports say that seventy-seven percent of women traders use a cosmetic to lighten their skin (Adebajo, 2001). Even amongst African adolescents and men skin lightening is prevalent (Ogunbiyi, Omigbodun, & Owoaje, 2009). Unfortunately, many of the lightening creams and soaps that are sold in Africa contain chemicals that cause a myriad of health problems (Dlova, 2014; Olumide et al., 2008; Del Giudice & Yves, 2002). Nigeria and other countries banned the importation of skin lighteners with dangerous ingredients (Glenn, 2008). But, because lighter skin is deeply connected to status, lightening creams — though harmful — are in demand, and thus highly circulated in illicit markets (Hunter, 2011; Glenn, 2008).

All the women who commented on lighter skin tones of actresses also revealed to know at least two family members or friends who bleached. Stories revealed close relatives and friends who used harmful creams to the point that their complexions turned

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[110] I must mention that skin bleaching is an issue in many non-white countries and populations. It is prevalent throughout South Asia, Latin America, Korea, Japan, Southern China, the Caribbean and amongst African-Americans; hence Michael Jackson.

ashen. The participants reported to see scarring, blotches, and dark patches on skin that was so extensive and damaging that the women they knew who suffered from these side effects always wore thick maquillage in public.

Aziza spoke about her shock to see a family of Igbo daughters who were former schoolmates whose complexions went from dark brown to "looking like *Walking Dead* zombies," while Yadira spoke of Latinas who used soaps and creams to be *blanquita*, a slang word for white woman. Hajja and Nadia cited family and friends who used imported lighteners. But, when it came to reading actresses with lightened skin, Nadia had a slightly different interpretation. She surmised that the bleached actresses lightened their skin before their acting careers. To her, bleaching is a reflection of the lightening craze throughout Africa, and its corresponding color hierarchy. It is a practice that she said comes from the influence of European beauty standards, but also African-American videos and movies circulating in Africa that disproportionately feature lighter women: "Ghanaians watch American hip-hop and R&B videos and all that stuff. There is African hip-hop and R&B here too and it borrows a lot of black Americans. Blacks here are hard pressed with the light skin thing too. That's what black people find beautiful," expressed Nadia.

Chi Chi had a different understand of bleached skin in Nollywood. She said that actors did in fact bleach their skin to get hired in movies because lighter skin leads were very popular, and considered more attractive.

Women who brought up skin lightening voiced their opposition from different positions, but all agreed that the practice was a manifestation of black people's negotiation with their own perceptions of beauty ideals. Chi Chi used the term "white

face" to describe the way she thinks black people internalized beauty myths of fair skin as superior. "White face" borrows from the racist imagery of black face in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American popular culture. Black face was a form of entertainment ridiculing African-American culture and caricaturizing the physical features of black people. Scholars thus note the reverse, that white face is a performance of internalized oppression by people of African descent (Blay, 2011; Hunter, 2011; Lindsey, 2011; Charles, 2009).

Women and Intimate Relationships. Women participants repeatedly mentioned that female characters who made out well in the movies behaved within the guidelines of patriarchy. They were domestic, preferred to be in a heterosexual relationship, and declared the personal importance of motherhood. Their power was articulated through a masculinist lens. Participants with these views also opined that movies objectified women, and those depicted as hypersexual or lesbian were immoral and inherently corrupt. Female characters interacted with each other in competition, usually over male companionship. While some participants read female characters' actions in intimate relationships as empowering, others found them disturbing. In this section I will be looking at the how the fairy-tale of Cinderella and women's power is represented in depictions of women in relationships.

The Cinderella Effect. Two participants expressed feelings of inspiration when they saw female characters overcame obstacles. Mimi, an immigrant from Trinidad & Tobago said she related to female characters who overcame financial obstacles, while Yadira expressed admiration for those who defeated social hierarchies. However, both women commented on female protagonists who became well-off by winning the

companionship of an affluent man over a competitor who seemed to be better suited.

Mimi followed the career of Ghanaian actress, Jackie Appiah, because she likeed her

choices in the roles she plays:

> I admire Jackie Appiah. She looks like an independent person and the way she carries herself is so strong and graceful. She acts in different movies and she has different roles, but she plays a lot of strong characters. There was a movie where she was poor and through hard work, she brought herself up to middle-class. People treated her bad, but she overcame everything.

In her statement, Mimi drew parallels between Appiah's characters who gained upward

mobility and the challenges she dealt with as an immigrant:

> I grew up with my grandparents. I didn't grow up with my mom. I didn't know my mom for 12 years, so when I came to the country in 2001 and see [*sic*] her for the first time, I think about "Hey, I can't get this connection with this person I haven't known in 12 years." Now that I have my mom, it's so new. So, when I see Jackie in movies where she had no one. She was on the bottom of everything. And she has to take care of herself and her niece. I tell myself that I can do that too. You strive for more than just to be *[sic]* regular. You just want to be somebody.

Mimi idealized female characters who became financially secure in spite of initial lower-

class status. She connected her immigrant status to that of characters' class struggles, and

linked her feelings of loneliness to that of the characters without family or friends for

support. Moreover, Mimi read Jackie as a hero because she is flawed, but still perseveres.

For Mimi, the representation of women who overcome class struggle and abandonment is

a significant narrative in immigrant experiences of West Indian women.

In Trinidad and Tobago, black women are more likely to experience single

motherhood, spousal abuse, and low-wage employment with little protection (Sukhu,

2013; Hadeed & Lee, 2010). Mimi said her mother brought her to the U.S. to surmount

limited economic and educational options, but navigating the social and school landscape

is difficult. Although she surmises that the movies do not provide solutions on escaping

issues of survival, the relatability to these characters is a "[confirmation] that [she] can achieve success" in America.

Yadira's father is African-American, but she grew up solely with the culture and identity of her Afro-Cuban, immigrant mother. Yadira connected with female characters who were the "ugly duckling" and were invisible and seen as worthless, but ended up "getting the man."

> I would identify with the main protagonist, with women who was a [*sic*] servant girl or an underdog and everybody's doubting her and doesn't think she'll get the guy. You know, the girl who grows up poor and considered to be a nobody, but there is something special about her. When she gets the opportunity, her quality of life can get better and she gets the man in the end. That's the character I root for because I can identify with that.

Growing up on government assistance, without her father, Yadira experienced both the economic challenges her mother faced as a black immigrant, and the social exclusion she and her mother endured because they are *morenas*, dark-skinned women. Yadira brought up the challenges she often faced in Latino communities due to her complexion. She recalled times she heard comments from other Latinas such as "You're pretty for a dark *complected* person," or— when she spoke Spanish — the surprise that is expressed by other Hispanophones when a "black person knows" what they are saying. So scarred by her experiences, Yadira cried as she recounted hurtful events in her life to me. She said she only revealed her Latina identity in public when she was with her mother, or when Spanish speakers talked about her and she disrupted the conversation:

> I've been at Santeria ceremonies, like some *bembé*[111] and they just be talking about me saying shit like "Why is this *negra* here?" When I start talking, they are shocked and say that they thought I was black. I'm like, yeah whatever motherfuckers. You know black people are everywhere.

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[111] Bembé is a ceremony in Santeria religion.

Yadira explained that Latinos suppress their racial identities in the presence of non-Latinos. She said they attempt to hide the racism that is prevalent in Latin America, though they transport racist ideas and practices to the U.S.:

> Cubans are the most nationalistic, but white Cubans are *uppity*.[112] Black Cubans like my mother live in the *campos*, the countryside, and [are] probably poor. If you are a white Cuban, you have resources and connections. You can be white and not even tell anybody you're Hispanic. If you are brown, you can't hide who you are.

"Cinderella movies" is the term Yadira used to define movies that end with the "underdog" female protagonists winning the companionship of men who are handsome and rich. She described these movies as "fantastical features" that rarely materialize in the real world, but the storylines gave her hope to meet someone who disregarded her working class background. "I work hard. My mother works hard. She, me, we deserve to be swept off of our feet and taken care of," stated Yadira.

Mimi and Yadira's readings of female protagonists assisted them in their negotiations as "the other." Oneka LaBennett (2013) argues black immigrants experience great difficulties in amending intersecting gender, racial, class and ethnic identities in a host country where they are the minority in all four categories. Mimi and Yadira used images of black women they deem respectable, independent, and resilient to articulate feminine power and deal with feelings of loneliness and exclusion.

That positive reading of Nollywood notwithstanding, Mimi acknowledges that in movies, women's wealth and their fates come from men. "Honestly, I personally would not want to be in a country where women are being mistreated. Cause it looks like men

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[112] Uppity is a colloquial term indicating a member of the bourgeois class. This term can also mean a person who may or may not be part of an elite class, but adopts a bourgeoisie ideology.

has *[sic]* more power in that country," said Mimi. Louise Müller (2014) says, men dictate the women's wealth and social status in Nollywood storylines. When women attempt to acquire financial means outside of a husband or through the approval of a man, it is through nefarious means such as prostitution (known as "good-time women") or witchcraft (Ogunfolabi, 2013; Bryce, 2012; Gaudio, 2007).

Power. Jane Bryce (2012) argues that powerful women in Nollywood films are depicted as dangerous. Female characters who assume dominant roles disrupt male-dominant frames in Nigerian society; resulting in neutralizing strong female characters of their power in film (Adewoye et. al 2014; Offiaeli, 2013; Ugor, 2013). Participant, Aziza thinks that women in general are portrayed negatively, and finds many of the movie themes misogynistic, while Hajja, an immigrant from northern Nigeria, says the films accurately show the inner workings of Nigerian patriarchy. "Women are expected to fall in line behind men in Nigeria," she explains. "Women are portrayed as submissive. Characters do not have whole identities." Aziza, a prominent critic of the mistreatment of women in Nollywood, points out that women are punished for various moral and religious violations with curses of "barrenness" or thrown out of the home. In general, children are the cornerstone of wealth and status for women in African culture; hence, infertility denotes a woman as useless, and removing her out of her domestic space signifies she is both physically and socially dead.

African participants use their real life models to counteract disempowering representations they read in films. Chi Chi says the treatment of women is "old school thinking" of Nigerians, and does not reflect the social order today. She does acknowledge that women have fewer liberties and opportunities for upwards mobility than men, but

she insists that Nigerian women are strong and create ways to maneuver. To her, the

movies are entertaining, but the portrayals of Nigerian women are incorrect and from a

traditional, male perspective:

> My mother could not go to school and did not know how to read until she got married at fourteen-years-old. While she worked at home, she learned to read. When she immigrated to this country, she was the one who "held the family down". She hustled up the money so we could eat. She sent money back home to her kids [that U.S. immigration] wouldn't allow to come with my parents when they left [Nigeria]. She is the backbone and the entrepreneur. Not my father. He's like whatever. But my mom, I live for her. I want to be her. Not like these crazy chicks in these movies. My mom's real.

Hajja's story of her mother bares similarities to Chi Chi's. Hajja's mother was prohibited

from attending school. When her mother immigrated to the U.S., she earned a G.E.D.

then went on to receive both undergraduate and graduate degrees. She operates her own

business and provides for her family while Hajja's father travels most of the time for

business. Although Hajja approves of movies presenting real issues in Nigeria, she says

they never feature the fortitude and strength of Nigerian women who fuel the country and

the diaspora. In Chi Chi and Hajja's narratives of their mothers, the women here,

including Yadira and Mimi, children of Caribbean mothers, appear to link their

experiences and stories to that of their mothers, and thus their identity.

Contrasting the divergent readings of female characters made by women

participants, Picasso was the only participant who provided a reading on women that was

wholly positive: "The women in the movies are strong and have an influence on

everything, even on who their children marry." When questioned about how many female

characters that he saw in positions of power, Picasso paused and responded: "Shoot, I've

seen judges, lawyers, bankers. But now that you asked me, men do play the lead and are

mostly the presidents of a company, or the authority figure." Picasso maintains that

women are depicted as more respectable in Nollywood than in Hollywood films. He cited female characters who wed after finishing their education and starting their careers as a counter-image to the U.S. media. For him, it is uplifting to see families together — as opposed to images of single mothers — because these characters provide ideal models for his daughters.

Furthermore, Picasso uses women's representations as a way to compare African women in society with his Tobagonian wife. He sees similarities between the cultures, and in some ways, the movies help him understand the West Indian family and societal structures that were foreign to him, for example: child-rearing, marrying into an extended family system, and immigrants assisting each other and their families back home through borrowing collectives and banking systems outside of mainstream economy. The cultural parallels he makes between movies and his ethnically blended family assist in mitigating uncomfortable moments when he is navigating his wife's culture.

Women and Religion. Mentioned frequently by women participants was the mistreatment of women within the religious doctrines of Christianity and Islam. Participants overwhelmingly understood women to be depicted negatively in general, but perceived female characters who practiced "voodoo," "magic," "fetishism", or "juju" as being especially punished unfairly and capriciously. While one participant chose not watch movies with strong religious themes, others looked at films to compare how religion is practiced in Africa. Non-African participants were more vocal in their disapproval of how women were treated in movies espousing religious ideology, while African participants came to different conclusions.

Monotheism in Africa. Reared in the Catholic Church by parents from the Deep South, Aziza said her upbringing tolerated aspects of African spirituality as a part of black culture. Aziza reads traditional spirituality as an authentic African culture; however, she says that it is often depicted negatively in movies, especially ones she identifies to promote Christian themes.[113] To Aziza, Islam and Christianity are oppressive religions because of their control of women through extraordinarily harsh and biased measures. When she saw how women were treated in movies because they practiced animism, she said movies painted women practitioners as "employees in the devil's workshop":

> It seemed like women were blamed for everything. They're the witches, the adulterers, the reasons why men sinned or the village went crazy. In one movie, a woman was accused of witchcraft. The townspeople confronted her and her stomach exploded and out came a goat. I was like, "Okay, what the hell is that?" I grew up hearing stories about ghosts and juju. I was told that some was good, some was bad, but nobody was getting stoned. Now if I'm looking at a movie with fanatical Africans I usually stop it and look for something else.

No longer following the Catholic faith, Aziza reads characters who are fervently religious in movies as brainwashed by a version of "white baby Jesus" Christianity because indigenous religion is presented as being inherently evil, while Western religion is embraced as pure. Aziza specified that Nigerian Christianity and Islam were extreme forms of worship. She compared Nigerian Christians to Ethiopian Christians and Jews, who she thought followed religious doctrines in ways that were more humane. Nonetheless, Aziza still watched movies and admitted later in the interview that sometimes, she did watch Christian movies in its entirety when they carried a plot line she found interesting or not as violent toward women.

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[113] Aziza says she never saw a movie promoting Islam or portraying Muslims.

Aziza was not alone in her assessment, though she voiced the strongest

opposition. Even Hajja, a devout Muslim, saw animistic portrayals as problematic. She

thought depictions of tradition strongly affected the perception of Africans to outside

audiences, and that they misrepresented traditional spiritual systems through the female

characters:

> There are certain ways that they portray voodoo that I think trivializes it and
> makes it seem like a joke or unrealistic, when it is very real. Voodoo is like the
> quick fix to the problem [in movies]. You just see the Western influence. I don't
> know if I want to call it just the Western influence, but you do see medical
> doctors and [Christian] preachers in some cases disavowing it totally. Voodoo is
> portrayed as something that is so accessible, that everyone can sort of just get it.
> Like you can just turn the corner and get it like bodegas out here. They trivialize
> the priestess or a person that says they're skilled in the practice.

On the last census records, the vast majority of Nigerians reported to be Christian

or Muslim with a small percentage reporting to practice traditional spiritual systems

(Pereira & Ibrahim, 2010). While Catholicism is established in parts of Nigeria,

especially amongst Igbos (Uchem, 2015), Pentecostalism is the fastest growing Christian

denomination in Nigeria (Anderson, 2013; Adeboye, 2012). For Muslim populations,

Sufism is the predominant Islamic tradition in Nigeria — as in all of Africa — but a

growing fundamentalist movement has emerged within the last decade and is growing

more prominent with the intensification of political efforts of the radical militant group,

Boko Haram (Thomson, 2012).

Religion is a volatile, contested terrain that has resulted in deadly civilian

conflicts between Muslims and Christians that precedes the formation of Nigeria as a

nation state (Akwara & Ojomah, 2013). However, Pereria & Ibrahim (2010) contend that

the two groups locate common ground when they create policy to regulate women's

bodies and lives. Their religious messages are expanded because Nollywood is largely

funded by Christian and Muslim networks that sponsor filmmakers who in return embed religious messages espousing gender hierarchies and the suppression of women's rights (Müller, 2014; Akinola, 2013). Participants picked up messages in their readings when they discussed the ways female characters were punished with a traditional Christian and Islamic practice of shaming, stoning and humiliating women in public.

Everyday Magic

Traditional spiritual systems are perceived as having both positive and negative sides. For instance, Yadira and her mother watched Nollywood to understand the daily implementation of what Yadira calls "everyday magic." She said women in the film marked the doors of their homes with writing, or put herbs and powders on their floor for protection. The practice of the occult was one of the main reasons Yadira and her mother watched the movies. They looked for moments when characters performed rituals indicating the practice of the occult or mysticism:

> One of my majors was anthro[pology] and we talk about the importance of the "everyday" in class. Everyday magic is just daily things you do to get through. Just greeting each other in a certain way to ask for protection is the everyday. Not like hocus pocus, Voodun or Santeria. It's like everyday to them, but to us, we be like it's different. We don't do that in America. Or at least not on camera.

For the Afro-Latinas, the practices of everyday magic demystified traditional African spirituality. Santeria, Yadira claims, is secretive and excludes women in certain ceremonies and from leadership roles such as high priests. To her, in Nollywood, the women show agency in their daily spiritual needs; whereas in Santeria, practitioners rely heavily on priests who dictate much of the religion and are predominantly men.

Chi Chi is a Muslim who follows the basic tenets of Islam, but her family consists of Christians, Muslims, and those initiated into traditional spiritual systems. Her parents

are from a small state that is centrally located in Nigeria. The residents of the town practice multiple religions. Chi Chi was in favor of conservative portrayals of religion in movies because it is an accurate portrayal. It showed how Africans worship differently than the homogenized portrayals shown in Western media. "African Muslims are not Arabs. Islam is my religion. I have my own culture. I am Egala. I wear African prints. I speak my language. I don't give up my African culture for Arab culture to be Muslim."

Stereotypical imaging of Muslim Middle-easterners has been a consistent activity that is practiced in Western media and literature for centuries (Kumar, 2012). As well, Western media's narrow representations of Muslims ignore the millions of Islamic practitioners in Sub-Sahara Africa. Nigeria has the second largest Muslim population, but has been featured in prominent news coverage of Boko Haram in early 2015. According to Deepa Kumar (2010), Western media frames Muslims into five key categories: 1. Islam is a monolithic religion; 2. Islam is a uniquely sexist religion; 3. the "Muslim mind" is incapable of rationality and science; 4. Islam is inherently violent; 5. the West spreads democracy, while Islam spawns terrorism (p. 257). Chi Chi's reading of her identity disrupted the hegemonic constructions of Arab identity and ideology in Islam and the clashes between African culture and Islamic practices (Diouf, 2003; Sharkey, 2008; McIntosh, 2004).

Seeing Culture, Making Self

The final section of this chapter examined how respondents' readings of movies informed their interpretations of their own identities and of other black people. A significant part of textual readings were respondents who reported that they had to *see or read* culture through themselves in order to access it or mark it in movies. Seeing/reading

in this instance is more than a visual experience. Respondents identified culture through auditory sensation with music in movies. Their palates came alive when they connected foods and drinks in films to the culinary traditions of their own. They spoke of feeling nostalgia, empowerment, and frustration while interpreting the culture in texts that made them reflect on their own identities.

As it turns out, all participants were part of resettled groups, whether immigrants or domestic migrants. Some were U.S. transplants; others were children of those who left other homelands. Even for African-Americans, at least one parent migrated in "The Great Migration," marking black Southerners' resettlement from the agrarian southern states to Northern, Mid-Western and Western regions of the country. This mass exodus shifted the social order and identity of the U.S., along with the people involved, including their descendants. On some level, every participant — whether carrying an immigrant story or a migrant narrative — talked about his or her fragmented and sutured identities. This dialogue of becoming became even more nuanced as they attempted to explain who they were, while also explaining themselves in the texts they interpreted.

Hybridity. Respondents who were immigrants or whose parents are foreign-born said these movies elicited thoughts about their identity drawing from multiple cultures and geographies. They did not point out aspects of their identities to describe the fragmentation. Rather, it was instances in their experiences, which highlighted the fragmented nature of their identities. These moments occurred when their identities did not garner full citizenship, something they negotiated in reading movies too. These notions of self were hybrid constructions that articulated them being "here and there," a diasporic belonging of local and global.

I described at length in the introduction, chapter one, and chapter two, discussion of scholarly discourses on immigrant, transcultural media and global flows, that hybrid identities are of critical importance. Hybridity emerged when African participants expressed variances on the believability of movies; however, the consensus was that movies were built around African culture and life – both historical and modern. Nadia said she concentrated on language. Language read as a passport into African social and communicative circles in Newark and in her network. When she interacted with Africans, the language used determined the level of one's cultural citizenships. It also signified how Americanized you are. Those who were not proficient in a local language or an African-English patois are the most Americanized, and thus positioned at the periphery of some interactions. Whereas those who knew the language and the latest colloquial words or phrases used in Africa, occupied the highest form of citizenship.

Nadia assumed her identity through language, focusing on the layered meanings she found in movies. A basic tenet of Nollywood is the verboseness of the scripts. African culture is an oral culture, and is reflected in Nollywood's extensive length in scripts and the improvisation of actors who extend the dialogue (Merolla, 2014; Tomaselli, 2014; Tsaaior, 2013; Murphy, 2012; Adejunmobi, 2008). Locating herself in interpreting the meanings of language assisted Nadia in the process of her assumed hybrid identity.

Nadia said she frequently promoted Nollywood and supported it by watching it as much as she can, but she struggles with identity, specifically how her American citizenship squares with her African heritage. She emphatically stated, "I'm not fully African, but I'm not fully American. When I am in Africa, I am 'the American.' When I

am in America, I am 'the African.'" She expressed a sense of incompletion, of not producing the requirements of full citizenship of either. While she preferred to be recognized as African, she felt like she lacked the cultural and local knowledge and the familiarity of Ghana.

Mimi, Hajja and Yadira also mentioned notions of hybridity. These women are immigrants or children of foreign-born parents. They pull from certain things from their home cultures and other bits from American values. Nollywood became a tool in selecting what aspects of culture performance and knowledge made sense in their suturing. Nollywood operated as the thread in fusing identities that were split between two or more homelands.

Relationships. Hajja used her readings of texts focusing on arranged marriages with the pressure she was under to get married and launch a profitable career. Although most movies were unrealistic to her, she said the "underlying messages in the treatment of women are real and disturbing." Hajja identifies is a feminist and a community advocate in Newark, but notes that her parents' expectations of her are based in traditional Nigerian understandings of the woman's place in courtship and in the workforce. Though reared to be obedient to male authority, become a doctor or lawyer, and accept the practice of arranged marriages, Hajja said she is very independent, but is undecided with her career, and dated around rather than get "hooked up by people who don't know what she likes." Though she considered herself as attractive and a "good woman", she admitted to difficulties in finding a suitable partner:

> I have met Nigerian men who agree that the way people date back home is so antiquated, but they are pressed too to abide to certain rules. If we are dating, our parents are very much into our lives and want to control our every move. So they say, "Hey, I can date or marry an American or West Indian woman and not have

> to deal with this." I want to be with an African man, a Nigerian man and a Muslim, but these things make it harder.

Hajja faces a dilemma all black women in the study admitted to experiencing or having had experienced. They are expected to relinquish parts of their identity and power in order to marry within the ideal cultural constructs of their culture. When she watched Nollywood, her disdain of the pressure to perform within African gendered constructs that conflicted with her feminist ideology heightened. At these moments where she saw women characters participating in gendered oppression, she expressed moments of displeasure with the movies.

Pan Ethnic Identity. African respondents ascribed to various meanings of movies, even in making sense of identities that were foreign to them. Growing up in a Hausa household that relocated to the U.S. when she was a toddler, Hajja used movies to familiarize herself with other Nigerian ethnic groups. She learned about other Nigerian cultures, like Igbo and Yoruba, to enrich her knowledge of them, which in turn, informed her interactions with them in the U.S. In the diaspora, Nigerian immigrants regularly establish distinct ethnic and hometown associations (Abbott, 2006; Haugen, 2012); however, large communities like those in the U.K. and U.S. are experiencing pan-ethnic dialogue and cross-cultural identity through ideologies and identities espoused in movies (Ugochukwu, 2011). Equally important, the movies allow immigrants to draw parallels reinforcing national identity rather than ethnic belonging. Hajja additionally used movies to acquire cultural knowledge to explain to non-Africans the differences between ethnic groups:

> With Caribbean people they pick up a lot on the accents and mannerisms with Nigerian people. But it's interesting to me how they point out how [they think] we're supposed to act or looked [sic] based on the movies. I have a friend from

Jamaica and she'll comment to me and say, "You're not a real Nigerian." The movies she watched [a] Nigerian woman would beat someone who tried to take some. So her perception is based on the movies and her interactions are extracted from what she saw.

When interacting with blacks who were not from Africa, some assumed Nigeria was one culture and one language that Hajja said that they called "Nigerian." This assumption falls into the homogenization that Africans encounter in the U.S., but Hajja said she did not mind explaining the differences because she went through American public education that rarely taught about Africa. She said that she saw it as a teaching moment on several levels. On one level, the representations of Africa in movies reinforced her Hausa identity by presenting cultures and language of other groups. As well, it showed the heterogeneity of African peoples, and their media consumption. Another layer indicated that movies buffered and mediated her perceived homogenous identity in dominant culture.

What the Hell is a 'Black American'? One of the main reasons Picasso watched movies was to understand how a cohesive black culture operates. He said African-Americans had no culture because it was just fragments of what African slaves remember in Africa and what European enslavers forced them to take on:

> You got black people who speak French in Louisiana. What, you have a certain type of talk up here. Where my father's from in Texas, they speak with an accent. Of course you have some soul food like gumbo or greens, but that's it. That's not culture. What I see in those movies and when I'm with my wife's family is culture. There's a way people speak to each other and treat each other. There are protocols and certain ways to dress. I see people getting married and having to do certain things. They have language. They have a way they worship. African-Americans don't have that so to speak.

I asked Picasso how he described his identity and he said, "I am Scottish Irish, Native American and African." When I ask him how he makes sense of his identity

without a culture, he said that his culture is "American culture, it is a mixture of a lot of things." This is the same reason why understanding the cultural elements in Nollywood is critical to him because it rooted him to a culture he never learned: "I let my daughter know African-Americans lost their culture for a lot of reasons, but we are strong people. I show her Nollywood movies and tell her, 'Hey this is where I came from.'"

Picasso used films to educate his daughter while he educated himself, but for Aziza, African-American culture is a full-bodied worldview and practice. She said she never heard of not having culture until she migrated to the northeast from attending school in Alabama:

> I remember I befriended this Jamaican girl because I lived in Jamaica for my [graduate] research and I love it there. Well, we're chopping it up and talking about Jamaica and I make some reference of how picking fruit from one of the trees reminded me of picking fruit from my grandmother's house. I began to say something about the south and she said something like "Black Americans don't have culture. You'll get real culture in Jamaica." I must've turned three shades of black on her ass. I had never heard of that. Then I asked myself, "What the hell is a Black American" because I never called myself that. I'm just black or African-American, even African, but Black American? That put such a sour taste in my mouth. But I've learned that, that's how I have to distinguish myself up here. I am "Black American" to my African and Caribbean friends, but to my family, I'm Aziza, the skinny little black kid from the hood.

Aziza prioritized the wide variety of elements that make up culture. It reconciled her disdain for the way women were treated in the movies and she said the "hours of bad acting and melodramatic scripts" she tolerated in the movies. Culture is the reason she watched Nollywood. She looked for cultural practices analogous to her Southern identity and says she enjoys analyzing other black people and how they lived: "Black people are so intriguing to me. I see things in the movies and I swear I have just seen my uncle or my godmother. They act the same. The same expressions. But then I see another movie that is so different and I learn from it." Aziza used the movies as cultural material to

speak to Africans she knows or those with whom she strikes up conversations in public spaces:

> I be on the bus and I see a bus driver and I say [to myself]: This guy looks like he's Nigerian. I will ask him and they'll look surprised or smile and tell me if I'm right. But I think they're surprised I talk to them because people don't say hi up here. But, I'm usually right half of the time, but it opens the door to communication. As much as I can roll my eyes at Africans, I find out that the regular African guy or woman driving a bus or taxi, selling clothes, braiding hair, or just hustling up some money selling oils and DVDs to support their family is cool peeps.

Aziza subtlety brought up class in using movies to create spaces of identity discourse in her interactions with African immigrants. She identified with working-class Africans because it is in those exchanges where she found the ordinariness she sought in understanding the culture that she read in movies. Aziza satisfied her "guilty pleasures" by enjoying movies "where they ball out and bling" to show that Africa is not a poor continent. But she connected most to movies that showcased villages and tradition. To her, those movies explicitly illustrated Nigerian culture because it reminded her of her grandmother's neighborhood — which closely resembled a small hamlet — where she picks fruit without impunity. Movies about villages ferried her to a place of calm and simplicity, something she said evoked nostalgia and feelings of familiarity that she liked to bring up in her conversations with African immigrants.

Aziza said she identified as African, though she knows there are multiracial elements in her lineage. She chooses to embrace her African identity, but one that is global and not ethnically specific. Moreover, she emphasized:

> Just because I say I am African does not mean I am not black. My ancestors were in slavery. I know I have a couple of African tribes in me. I may not be Yoruba or Zulu. I am just another type of black on a very long bloodline that was disrupted . . . not uninterrupted.

Aziza resettled herself and identity in Africa by making a distinction between black and African. In fact, she cited black as an ethnic category of Africa analogous to older nations. The term "disrupted not uninterrupted" she used reconciled her feelings of losing parts of her identity, while attempting to create new ones in the fissures of relocation occurring in generations before and recent migrations within the U.S.

Picasso and Aziza offer polarizing understandings of their black identities. For Picasso, reading culture brings him completion. For Aziza, reading culture evokes solace. Whereas Picasso described himself as multi-racial, he sees African-Americans as culture-less. Contrastingly, Aziza identifies as black, though she is multi-racial and sees much of her African-American culture in Nollywood.

It must be mentioned that Picasso was reared in New Jersey, while Aziza migrated there from the South. Isabel Wilkerson (2010) argues that black southerners are like immigrants who left their home countries for America and fought to maintain homeland culture; especially with ensuing generations. Picasso is a second-generation migrant and says he knows little of his father's life and the culture of black Texans. However, Aziza is firm in knowing her Louisiana roots. She replaces Africa with the South as her home country, but says Africa is the site of her bloodline or "the Motherland".

The Disgust in Readings

In my fieldwork I was denied over a dozen times by African Newark residents who declined to participate because they did not watch Nollywood; though some were willing to provide their reasons for this topic. The anomaly of the total disgust emerged during the phase of the research of recruiting participants. Myria Georgiou's (2006)

research intimates a form of involuntary spectatorship of people who consume diasporic texts because they are within proximity of it viewing. These respondents said that if they were in the same room when Nollywood was playing, they left because they adamantly refused to consume movies. One respondent, a Nigerian man in his early thirties said he "despises" Nollywood because it promoted a fake Africa and further divided African-Americans, Africans and Caribbean people. However, his mother and sister were avid spectators, but he defined their viewing as being "brainwashed by bullshit" because it created class and cultural divisions within Africans, and spread to other black people who lived in the diaspora.

Another woman who just graduated from college said she used to watch movies, but distanced herself when she felt that the industry began to emulate Hollywood themes. Elements of Nollywood that caused her departure from movies were the highly sexualized scenes, profanity, and use of hip-hop, gangster images, and the popularity of fair-skinned actors. Another African man whom I interviewed extensively, disliked the movies, but watched them with a group of Cameroonian friends during social gatherings to appeal to others in the party. He thought the movies are overdramatic, and lacked versatility because they were often about love and relationships. He preferred movies about espionage and government corruption, but said that Nollywood could never film such a movie in Africa because the filmmaker would get killed for such a controversial film. This disgust opened up a direction for further exploration, because it might indicate that diasporic audiences abandoned their media because they thought the media has abandoned them.

Hybrid and Sutured Subjects

The focus of this chapter was to examine how participants interpreted Nollywood films, and how those interpretations further informed how they made sense of their diasporic identity. Throughout their interpretations, participants used films to talk about African, Caribbean, and African-American culture and the depictions of black people in movies. I found that participants focused their interpretations on several versions of the following leitmotifs: representation of Africa, gender representations, portrayals of beauty, religious practices, cultural performances, and discourses of power. When reading their own identities, participants often talked about how their complex backgrounds created multiple identities or pan-ethnic identities. Interpretations of themselves coincided with the different angles from which they read the films. The more they talked about the movies in relation to their identities, the more they attempted to suture a comprehensive belonging, Nollywood was used to anchor these feelings, but at times, the movies provided points of discomfort.

All participants enjoyed the range they saw in the representations of Africa and African people. Diversified images of African geography, characters, and genres provided them with a collection of references that they regularly experienced in Nollywood, as opposed to Western media. Consistent across participants narratives were their shared sense of being able to negotiate with more representations of Africa in Nollywood than in Hollywood or any other Western media. Participants spoke of how the variety of African terrains, different types of residences, and the sight of Africans wearing traditional clothes in expensive cars gave them more varied images of life in Africa.

All African-American and Caribbean participants reported to have never visited any African country, so for them, being able to interpret multiple presentations of African people, terrain, and settings was refreshing. For African-American and Caribbean participants, movies were a reprieve from the Western images of African jungles, shantytowns, malnourished children, and war-torn territories. For many, Africa was placed in the present through its images, but it also maintained and presented African culture in frames of the past, and how African culture carried this past into the present.

Picasso, an African-American, found pleasure seeing black men in powerful positions, as opposed to the daily disempowering images of blacks that he saw in American news and Hollywood. While watching movies, Picasso negotiated his minority status in the U.S. and current controversial cases in 2013, 2014, and 2015 of black men and teen deaths at the hands of law enforcement. To him, seeing black men as judges, CEOs, and police officers presented black men with dignity.

Similarly, Aziza, an African-American, and Mimi, a West Indian, found agreeable the presentation of Africans and black people in the frames of ordinariness or normal life because it humanized blacks in frames that Western media failed to do. Aziza and Mimi critiqued how Western media depicted black lives and people within extreme conditions such as crises, superhuman abilities, or animalistic.

African participants Nadia and Chi Chi said movies offered a visual sanctuary from American media because Hollywood depicted African people negatively. It was especially difficult for them growing up as African, and interacting with non-African blacks who referenced these movies in their perceptions of Nadia and Chi Chi. To them,

Nollywood films offered better accurately portrayed images and stories of Africa, its people, and culture.

While African participants agreed that Nollywood offered a range of African representations and illustrated Nigerian issues from the perspective of Nigerians, some felt that depictions stereotyped important parts of African life. Hajja, a Nigerian immigrant was most outspoken on how some representations of women's issues and traditional African religion disturbed her because they were unrealistic. To her, Nigerian patriarchy and traditional attitudes of filmmakers undermined women's movements and progress in Nigeria. She also felt that movies trivialized African religious tradition, which to her, resulted in non-African blacks taking on narrow perspectives based on biased, negative portrayals in movies.

Hajja's readings opened a discussion of participants' interpretations of gender representation, impressions of religious practices, and the portrayals of beauty as the most contested terrain. Some participants perceived the movies to present disempowering images of women and promoted violence against women; while others interpreted storylines as encouraging women to persevere towards status acquisition, independence, moral aptitude, cultural observance, and strength. For Aziza, women were to blame for much of the social or moral upheavals in movies. To her, this suggested a conservative Christian theme that pointed to women's inherent evil or flaws connecting them to the biblical story of the character Eve who fell from grace for acquiescing the temptations of the devil. Aziza disliked the harsh criticisms of women; how they met violent deaths or engaged in bizarre sexual practices more often than male characters. Mimi, Nadia and Chi Chi acknowledged that movies showed harsh treatments of women in some

instances; however, they connected mistreatments to conservative religious and cultural value in Africa that were problematic, but presented authentic perspectives.

Participants also interpreted female characters in films positively. Yadira and Mimi enjoyed success stories of female protagonists who were initially poor or considered unattractive. To them, these stories narrated women's strength, determination, and emergence above challenges. Yadira, the daughter of an Afro-Cuban immigrant found that the messages of success and marriage of an unlikely character provided relief and inspiration from her and her mother's experiences as black Latinas excluded by fairer-skinned Latino community members. On the other hand, Mimi used the star system to identify Jackie Appiah, a Ghanaian actor, as an artist who performed in a number of films illustrating women's independence and personal strength. Stressing positive qualities in black women's characters from outside the U.S. helped women navigate how their gender identity intersected with class and immigrant identities. Both Yadira and Mimi reported feelings of alienation and moments where they struggled to reconcile their homeland culture with that of American culture, and used Nollywood to anchor their identity of blackness and womanhood.

Another contested theme was beauty. Women participants diverged in readings of hair, skin color, and fashion cues. One of the most salient readings surfaced when they spoke of the representations of fair-skinned women and the controversial cosmetic procedure of skin bleaching. Readings of disfavor emerged in response to characters' hairstyles, too, and in particular, when they saw women wearing weaves and wigs. Hairstyling was a critical non-verbal cue marking beauty, status, and power amongst black women. Aziza and Yadira explained that the actors with fair skin color and those

who wore their hair or wigs in straightened styles indicated that filmmakers emulated white or European ideals of beauty. They disliked these particular images and linked them to a larger discourse of cultural imperialistic issues in black communities globally that see their culture and people as aesthetically inferior.

Chi Chi disliked how male actors bleached their skin to garner leads in romance movies, and fairer female characters were caricatured as difficult, high-maintenance, yet entitled and privileged women. For Chi Chi, these representations divided black people and further fed into longstanding issues of black people's preference for fairer skin. Though Nadia agreed that skin color was an issue throughout Africa, she disrupted Aziza and Yadira's readings by suggesting that Nollywood filmmakers were often copying African-American media they received via Africa's pirated movie industry, which circulates movies and television programming from the West. Overall, discourse of beauty showed how important aesthetic linked to identity for women.

Some participants referenced fashion to express their multiple identities. Fashion was a vehicle to explore and present homeland and host culture in public and private life. Hajja, Aziza and Nadia incorporated some of the fashion they saw in movies into their own styles, often fusing with American and European styles. Looking to films for hairstyles was explored in earlier chapters and also lends to this conversation. Women participants emphasized traditional fashions and hairstyles that explicitly stated their African or diasporic identities; by using various cultural fashion cues demonstrated in movies, they borrowed pieces of cultures to assemble a cohesive identity, sutured them together to create hybrid and multiple identities that they thought represented them best.

Movies with highly religious themes marked a site of contestation in readings. Added, textual readings by several women participants expressed a belief that traditional practices were framed as devil worship or witchcraft, whereas others thought that the presentation of mysticism in everyday life de-mystified traditional religious practices in Africa. Mentioned earlier, Hajja interpreted the representations of traditional movies as negative. Aziza disapproved of the demonic associations to mysticism, and the overrepresentation of women as malefactors in movies – and the violent fates they met. In contrast, Yadira said that she saw movies as showing magic as an accessible, everyday practice that she found pleasurable and disrupted how Santeria in Cuban culture secreted-away African traditions and required initiation into exclusive secret orders to access it – and disrupted the exclusivity, secrecy, and sexism of how Santeria of Cuban culture hid away African traditions?. For Aziza and Hajja, representations of traditional and contemporary religions undermined African tradition and encouraged violence against women, while promoting fanatical and misogynistic translations of African-practiced Christianity and Islam. On the other hand, Yadira used the representations to inform her of religious and cultural practices that men cartelized in her practices of Santeria.

In an examination of the use of movies to read their own identities, participants gathered their identities from different cultures and attempted to mend the different dimensions of themselves together as they explained their interpretations of movies. Nadia's discussion of African culture and her negotiation of it in her own life showed how children of African immigrants maneuvered through multiple identities located in different places. This notion is similar to Jeff Straubhaar's (2013) argument that people's identities have globalized cultural due to the rapid dissemination of media.

Others used Nollywood to make cross-cultural comparisons between their home cultures and the material that they identified in the movies as culture, such as song, clothes, language, and traditional religious practices. Caribbean immigrants explain that movies assist them in making comparisons to Caribbean and African life. All Caribbean participants expressed seeing parallels between the cultures. When they sought out similarities, it helped them draw linkages to their African identity. Vivienne and Dominique, both Haitian immigrants, drew comparisons between Haitian culture and African culture. Mimi compared the lives of African women with Caribbean women. Nollywood celebrated African culture and embraced tradition – something that brought pleasure because she felt that West Indians distanced themselves from the culture of the homeland so as to embrace Western lifestyles and values. To her, films satisfied culture in spite of what she saw as the trappings of modernity.

Nollywood texts operated as a leveraging apparatus participants used in times of insecurity – and in moments of empowerment, the movies bolstered their black identities. Aziza reconciled her thoughts of African-American displacement by insisting that she is still a member of Africa's narrative, and her ancestors have created another version of Africa within African-American culture. To her, African-American culture is a combination of strands of culture retained and adapted. The films helped her fill in gaps to make sense of herself in some areas, but more so, informed her understanding of the Africans she befriended and encountered at her job and school. However, Picasso pointed to fragmented pieces of African culture that Aziza used for his argument that black Americans are cultureless because they are incomplete. This became the reason he

enjoyed Nollywood: because it presented a comprehensive culture, he had not afforded

himself as a black American

Different readings demonstrated that themes and meanings made from movies

were fluid – showing interpretations from positions of both love and disgust.

Nonetheless, films modernized the presentation of Africa, showing traditions in the past,

and in current frames. It also presented people and daily life in modern frames.

Interpretations showed how members wove understandings of culture and tradition into

identity discourse of modernity. Participants provided profound narratives of how they

attempted to suture hybrid and multiple identities by mending fragments of self to create

a position within a collective. I use a stanza in Jamaica Kincaid's prose poem — which

describes her own understanding of black identity — so as to point to the core of the

extremes in which African diasporans living in white-majority host countries have to

negotiate between the constraints of a hyper-collective identity and an hyper-individual

one (Wright, 2003). Kincaid's description of identity that comes from "many tiered

spaces" acknowledges that blackness "provides a deeply complex version of selfhood and

identity formation" (Edwards, 2007) in a milieu that often swallows or disrupts notions of

blackness.

I used the term "suture" throughout this chapter to suggest a surgical or strategic

procedure to mend splintered identities because of inequitable power structures and

dislocations (Funke, Robe & Wolfson, 2012). Suturing is subjective and intentional; thus

I place suturing into the domestic practice of sewing clothes. In these conversations,

Africa is home, and movies are apparatuses in mending identities tied to home culture

while negotiating other identities to which they have ascribed. Using the idea of identities

as a quilt, people's identities are piecemeal fabrics, and their textual readings serve as needle and thread that works toward stitching notions of self that turn out to be much like quilts of the African-American tradition, a cover made of many cloths. The results are disjointed, unpredictable patterns, but to the quilt makers – the diasporans — it is a comprehensive work of art.

CONCLUSION

MANY RIVERS TO CROSS & UNCHARTERED TERRITORIES

At the outset, I argued for research, and in particular, media studies that provided an in-depth consideration of the heterogeneity of black populations in the U.S. This project revealed that heterogeneity is more than a state of difference; it is a constant negotiation and articulation of disparateness that at times is disavowed for necessary sutures for survival. There are sweet spots and safe zones in diaspora, in which I described in this work as junctures at which pendulums swing in tandem, but they are the rarest moments of all; yet and still, collectivity in diasporas is expressed at critical moments in order to recalibrate power and presence.

Throughout the study, I attempted to identify data that answered questions guiding this research: How is diasporic identity articulated differently through Nollywood? How are distribution networks formed and established in circulating Nollywood? What aspects of reception demonstrates ethnic cohesion or disrupts ethnic linkages? And, how do participants' readings of movies inform them in how they make sense of themselves? This chapter elaborates on these questions by reviewing the study and discussing the narratives that emerged. Next, I explore the challenges of my project, and, finally, I talk about how I plan to expand this research in future projects.

Nollywood

The project began with an overview of how Nollywood materialized in West Africa then surfaced in the African diaspora. In the decades prior, a number of Nigerian filmmakers unsuccessfully attempted to create a local film industry using Western filming methods and celluloid film stock that proved too costly in a country dealing with

deep infrastructure and economic issues. In the 1980s, aspiring Ghanaian videastes began to tinker with the idea of recording full-length movies on hand-held cameras. Their idea spread to people in neighboring Nigeria who began to experiment with production and distribution models too.

At the time Nigerians and Ghanaians began to try out alternative filmmaking technologies, globalization widened the gaps in wealth and quality of living between industrialized and developing nations. People began to relocate for better opportunities. Along with people moving — media and communication technologies became more accessible in developing countries. In Africa, television, radios, cars, and computers were often second-or-third hand items that were constantly being fixed and repaired (Larkin, 2004), but often shared by communities — especially televisions that sat in central locations of town squares, family compounds, marketplaces, and businesses for communal watching.

Within the flow of second-hand technologies were the circulation of pirated movies and television programs from the United States, China, India, and Latin America. It supplied Ghana and Nigeria with media content that those countries lacked. Ghanaian and Nigerian moviemakers used local mythologies and extracted material from the foreign media they viewed to create modern African narratives. After years of creating movies using modest equipment, local movie producer and tech businessman, Kenneth Nnebue, created a marketing system that aligned with the release of a movie he filmed, which points to the emergence of Nollywood.

Nollywood production and distribution systems showed a schema in which filmmakers rapidly produced movies using an intense, high-paced formula that could

supply dozens of movies weekly to local audiences who consumed videofilms with equal fervor. Although, the film industry is unregulated by governments, Nollywood functions within a well-organized system of marketers who control local production, reproduction, and distribution of movies. Marketers organized in ethnic-specific associations, and used their affiliations to divvy up managing the distribution of movies at major open-air markets that were located in a number of cities and towns. However, marketers lost control once movies left local markets and were distributed throughout Sub-Sahara Africa then circulated to Africans living abroad. Outside of local Nigerian and Ghanaian markets, different retailers, consumers, and fans regulated its flow through formal and informal circulations.

Shaped by a number of stakeholders and cultural influences, Nollywood carries a hybrid blueprint. Taking bits of the best parts, repurposing technologies, and "fixing and repairing" passed down, or discounted second-hand items, has progressed African media and entertainment. Nollywood offers a model of Afromodernity and traditional modernity. The template shows how African people stand in the present and create pathways for the future by using and retooling their worldviews and culture. Although there are evident negotiations, between Western influences and tradition, Africans refused to relinquish their culture because ethnic markings are signposting in how they move through the world.

I looked at Africans who traveled with their culture by examining previous work exploring how others employ Nollywood outside of Africa. The literature focused on African immigrants, and in some research, other black non-Africans were included, but were peripheral participants. In several studies conducted, diasporans used movies to

supplement their media consumption, as way to stay abreast of local fashion and music trends, and as an apparatus to teach local language and culture to children born in the diaspora. The dearth in literature exploring how black non-Africans use Nollywood, especially since mentioned research indicated that blacks (whether foreign or native born) tended to live near each other, necessitated this study even more.

Newark

Following my exploration of Nollywood, I set up the site of my research. My exploration traveled through different wards showing various ethnic and racial groups that make up the city. Although it has a majority black population, Newark has a visible Latino community, and in some pockets, like Ironbound, a Spanish and Lusophone-immigrant community thrives. As I established the field site, I attempted capture the vivid energy and people who I experienced while walking through the city's major commercial districts.

The vibrancy of Newark cannot escape ongoing gentrification, a shift that is displacing residents and small businesses in the downtown area. Redevelopment efforts ushered in developers, corporations, and chain stores; as well, middle-class whites, and professionals of color began to migrate to Newark. As people like myself made their way to the city, it caused friction between recent settlers and long-time residents and businesses. Commercial and residential rents increased in a city with housing crisis since mid-twentieth century. Locals and migrants competed for jobs and defining the use and interactions in public spaces.

The current tension in Newark is a new version of an old story. I examined early Newark up to the historic 1967 riots, with the urban decline that followed. With these

narratives of Newark, a trend of discrimination emerged. Those who held power and wealth kept it to enfranchise their ethnic groups. Newark's politics, economics, and social order operated within ethnic white power structures (i.e. Irish, Jewish, Italian, and Spanish) for centuries; and provided a cultural, political, and economic base that established these groups throughout the state, as they eventually left Newark. Although most whites left, a considerable amount maintained property ownership and some occupy important positions in the city.

After the 1967 riots, blacks came into power as the majority group, and eventually represented most of the local elected offices, but the city already bottomed out in every industry that carried the local economy. More problematic, industries that left with white flight were not replaced. Because blacks were ushered into power with legacies of low wealth in a society privileging and supporting the enfranchisement of whites. Black leder offered little economic opportunity to constituents and failed to create industry in the city. In fact, factory buildings still sit empty. Coupled with a series of failed and corrupt leadership, the little resources left were pilfered by a few black gatekeepers who in turn, had to answer to silent white landowners who own much of the commercial real estate in Newark. From the 1970s on, the city went into further decline and peaked in the 1990s as a hostile and fledgling city.

One response was the rise of sub-cultures such as the circulation of pirated movies to supplement the movie theaters and other recreational activities that shut down when Newark declined. Bootleg movies became a point of the local economy. Pirated movies were a visible part of the media flows of Newark. It was sold at many of the numerous carts owned and operated by African American men. Vending carts lined

major and ancillary streets in downtown Newark; but a series of crackdowns by law enforcement that arrested vendors who sold counterfeited movies and music decreased vendors' presence.

While Newark was adjusting to a new, inequitable economy and a dwindling city, and the less but still rigid immigration laws in the U.S. opened to resettling non-Europeans such as Africans and Caribbeans. African-American communities diversified with the arrival of immigrant blacks. African-American street vending culture experienced the entry of African merchants who brought their trading practices that included merchant networks. African street vendors became fillers for the decrease of African-American merchants. Within the items traded were Nigerian and Ghanaian.

At first, Africans who knew the movies bought them, but because of the cross-cultural interactions and shared economies as seen in the African markets I described in the study, Caribbeans and African-Americans began to purchase movies and other items at these shops as well. Including the inevitable friendships and intimate relationships increased. Now in Newark, you have a growing black immigrant population in a city of majority African-Americans, who integrated themselves into the economies of the city and embedded their media products and practices.

Multiple negotiations were percolating with the growing, heterogeneous population. Added to the shifting Newark demographic is the way that blacks negotiated being black. From a DuBosian perspective, identity is a two-ness, a negotiation of an American membership on one hand, and an African membership on the other. For Africans and Caribbeans, being black meant maneuvering between and around a classification that reduced their textured, cultural, historical and political histories to race.

More problematic, black immigrants are largely invisible in immigrant discourse, thus further diminishing their experiences.

To narrate black ethnic groups, whom I identify as members of the African diaspora, and the burgeoning film industry. I chose to use the ethnographic approach of George Marcus of mapping out a phenomenon, by following the material items that are connected to it; therefore, I charted the movies as it traveled through different hands, homes, and virtual circuits. The multi-sited ethnography and a series of interviews with participants that I conducted revealed how engaging in movies elicited rhizomatic performances and constructions of identity.

African Shops. Nollywood's foothold forged a noticeable presence in the media landscape in Newark. African merchants and Caribbean traders retooled the trading practices they transported to accommodate the urban geography of Newark. Movies became such a profitable industry in Newark that (non-Nigerian and non-Ghanaian) African and Caribbean traders attached additional media industries to their inventory derived from other black diasporic populations, including their own country, as seen in Amadou's shop. Nollywood became a bridge to diasporic media that contributed to reconstructing the black media spaces of Newark into a textured media landscape.

The commercial spaces conducted business and served as social sites to members of the shopkeeper's network. Abdul Maliq Simone (2004, 2001) talks about the network of African migrants throughout the world that create micro-communities to restore emotional, financial, and cultural ties. Newark shops were sites where customers, friends of the staff, or passersby stopped to socialize. The usage of shops by storekeepers merged commercial, social, and religious life, which in turn created complex communicative

spaces. The stores were also places that participants learned how to navigate immigrant life, as when Chi Chi helped Aissatou with her English, or how Amadou's shop served as a place for West African Muslims to congregate after religious events and talk about the everyday.

Because of the symbiotic relationships between African-Americans and Caribbean people, the shops depended on patronage outside of their networks of Africans. The diasporic engagements were moments where African trading practices were used to barter cultural goods and extend the commerce/social blur of African spaces to other black clients. This is especially true at braiding shops where the staff is African, and the clients are largely African-American and Caribbean. Interactions at braiding galleries are contextualized in ethnicity, language, class status, and perceptions of idealized beauty.

The wearing of natural hair rather than processed styles is part of a global natural hair movement involving millions of black women who have returned to natural styles. Often online, women post pictures of their hair that was styled from a braiding salon, or they imitate the styles that come out these salons and post them on various social media platforms. The shops become part of a global network of black women aesthetic. Furthermore, braiding salons offered Nollywood the best opportunity for exposure because clients would sit for hours at a time to be styled while movies played. Movies showed hairstyles of which women used to fashion their own hair, along with the actual fashions in the movies to create personal dress that fused their different tastes and reflected a hybrid identity. In these spaces, Nollywood served as ambient entertainment or a text in which language, and negotiations of power and beauty appeared.

The shops themselves were diasporic hubs, or headquarters like the train station in the beginning of this dissertation — where people arrived and departed from a black identity. In this case, people negotiated with the dominant African identity embedded in spaces by shop owners. That meant that even Africans negotiated with other Africans, as Chi Chi intimated, she is an Anglophone Nigerian while her boss was a Francophone Malian. Their ethnic identities and cultural practices were considerably different as reported by Chi Chi in her love of the food styles of French-speaking African countries that use sauces and different spices different than her national dishes.

Unfortunately, by the end of the study, the visibility of movies in mom-and-pop shops decreased, partly because the clusters of stores owned by black immigrants reduced along with African-American stores. Shops closed, downsized, or changed ownership. Gentrification in downtown Newark is resulting in whole blocks being torn down and massive buildings gutted. Less than a year later, the framework of mixed-use structures appear. The erection of franchise businesses and corporate-owned housing disenfranchises the average Newark resident who will have difficulty in acquiring new housing or replacing their shops. However, property owners' neglect of their buildings, both commercial and residential, created difficult conditions to live or operate a business with basic updated amenities such as proper electricity, cable wiring, and plumbing.

The economic benefits of Nollywood demonstrated a complex relationship between native and immigrant black merchants. African and African-American vendors sold movies on the street or in fledgling mom-and-pop shops in their attempts to remain open in the face gentrification that displaced small black-owned businesses. Some of the exchanges were unpleasant and some of the material merchants sold were against

religious or moral beliefs, but soliciting Nollywood as a means to survive was an honorable trade. In these transactions, ideas of beauty, fair trading practices, language and cultural expectations clashed. In the daily interactions, the multifarious roles Nollywood played in the lives of participant's evoked notions of class, gender, and national identity, which connected issues of maneuvering issues of invisibility. Nollywood served as a platform to articulate visibility; especially in discussions carried out during purchases and watching movies.

Online Streaming. Nollywood is also disappearing from the vitrines of shop owners because viewers are increasingly using streaming websites. The prominent displays of posters and shelves of DVDs that were signature visuals in African and some Caribbean shops at the beginning paled in comparison to the state of Nollywood at the closing of the fieldwork and in the final participant reports. The last time I visited Kwesi, a Ghanaian shopkeeper, he said that his movies were old and he would not be stocking new features because movies were now unprofitable. With audiences preferring more-and-more to watch movies online, the shops decreased their inventory. Some participants expressed that they could access more titles on streaming sites than at shops that carried anywhere from dozens to several hundred movies. On websites, there are thousands. As well, participants used streaming sites because it diversified where and how they watched movies. Evident in the intermezzo spaces of audience members who watched during travel or on mobile devices in liminal spaces.

Participants who shifted to internet streaming admitted to several difficulties that disrupted their viewing experiences. Subtitles were cut off at the bottom or the format in which it was filmed, could not adjust to a high definition screen; thus obstructing a full-

screen view. Often sites had advertisements that awkwardly appeared in the middle of scenes. Some of the advertisements were five minutes long. What made these ads more problematic is that they are embedded into the movie by the content provided, which prevents viewers to skip ads, which is an option on sites like Youtube. One of the most frustrating experiences in online viewing was the absence of the availability of a full series. Nollywood movies usually had multiple movies, but online streaming often had the first part or in some cases, only one movie in a series. The absence of a full series abruptly cuts viewers' ability to follow the whole plot, making their viewings, and subsequent readings of the movies fragmented.

Nadia voiced her frustration with streaming, but still preferred to stream over DVDs because of its transportability of online movies. She said that her mother still chose DVDs because it was a way for her to swap with family members and friends travelling back-and-forth from Africa. Trading, swapping, and gifting have become a part of the African immigrant experience that used movies as cultural and social currency that her mother enjoys. When Nadia recently visited Los Angeles, she taught her mother how stream online. They tried both mediums, but selected DVDs to binge because they were able to see the whole series of a movie.

Plus the materiality of the DVDs served as a physical connection to Africa. The story of Nollywood shows a resurgence of DVD usage in the U.S. transported from Africa. The industry repurposed a dated technology to circulate their media; thus turning the DVD industry to depend on Nollywood rather than the other way around. In additional, the three-dimensional aspect of DVDs demonstrated how touching movies is part of constructing diasporic identity as the DVD itself became a material representation.

Though streaming is popular in the U.S. that is still a luxury of the West because of the digital divide and internet access. If it were not for the free internet Nadia used in her apartment building, the WIFI Aziza poached from an unsecured private network near her house, or the school's internet library that Stephanie used, much of these women's movie watching would be curtailed.

Though accessing movies online is increasingly popular, there are diehard collectors like Mimi, a Toboganian who continues to build her library collection. She was one of most ardent fans in the study. Her movies were attached to her identity as an immigrant because she transported her Nollywood spectatorship to the U.S. when she migrated. The movies reminded her of home because it was there she started watching and swapping movies with relatives. Additionally, Mimi followed the industry rather than just watched movies. She actively monitored actors she liked by following the personal lives of actors, their social media activities, and watching Nollywood events online. Mimi used old and new media to engage in Nollywood. Preferring to watch movies on TV, she supplements her fandom with online participation in a host of Nollywood-centric blogs, websites, and social media.

Another important finding in the study is how this research revealed another lens into how the materiality of media gets repurposed. While much of U.S. media moved to digital formats, Nollywood movies on DVD thrived. Though it is transitioning to online formats such as streaming sites like Youtube, several participants told of their hobby of collecting DVDs of older movies or hard-to-find productions along with new releases. DVDs are still an important format in Nollywood circulation and consumption; thus opening up discourse into how older mediums become looped into newer distribution and

consumption processes. In addition, creating catalogues by spectators opened up the space for media studies scholars and film scholars to document the changes in film industries such as aesthetics, film stock or digital formats, actors, themes, costumes, and other critical material illuminating the narratives found in the text itself.

Informal Circulations. Informal circulations of movies uncovered salient practices of audiences that were important in circulating movies and brokering relationships. *Borrowing* and *swapping* entailed the passage of movies within a system where inter-ethnic communities exchanged other resources such as food, child care, money, job leads, and information on safety concerns. The circulations deepened relationships because it embedded trust to return items, and it also disclosed each other's leisure activities, and thoughts on other aspects of life because of their movie preference. Media was an integral part of sharing identity, as seen in the informal circulation I named *gifting*, a practice where one person gives movies as a present. The gift-giver was someone who had a close relationship with the recipient and attached expectations to the movies they presented. The movies were given to encourage the recipient to learn about African culture through the movies, thus supplementing their understanding. However, there is an implication that one is not culturally competent in showing African identity, making this circulation sometimes problematic for recipients who dealt with the idea that someone they respect, sees their cultural knowledge as inferior.

The last informal circulation, *online sharing* involved the participation of pre-existing offline relationships and ones formed online. It is online that communities shift and memberships are fluid, but sharing through social media posts and other online activity exposed the media to people in larger numbers than the previous ones that were

hand-to-hand. Sharing clippings, films, memes, and other Nollywood material served as the cultural currency in brokering relationships in place of the face-to-face, people valued the posts of others to create a virtual collective. Participants explained how they employed Nollywood as more than just movies that they watched, but also watched and circulated Nollywood content via social networking sites. In some cases, Nollywood became a regular part of their media diet, and in other instances, it was consumed more than Hollywood.

Intermezzo Spaces. Josiah and Nadia who travelled as they were watching movies engaged in sites that I define as *intermezzo spaces* because the virtual, offline and imagined worlds collapsed during reception. The notion of traveling superimposed the idea of getting to an identity. Josiah watching movies on a DVD player mounted onto his dashboard drew his customers into a reception space he created. He, in ways, operated as a culture broker while running movies as he transported people during this time, the person being transported and his own travels were collapsed into multiple identities and negotiations. On the other hand, Nadia negotiated space and time by cocooning from other commuters to watch movies, she too transported herself while traveling, as a way to escape. Her offline world became ambient noise as she moved through different terrains from home to work, she also began to transform from her home identity to her work-self. In another light, Aziza, who stayed home, navigated her intermezzo space different. Her home space was supplemented with the virtual space when she watched movies on her laptop. Camping and cocooning herself, Aziza created a world within her world – negotiating online and offline self simultaneously.

Private Sphere. The dramatic shift of the commercial landscape of downtown Newark intensifies how Nollywood is distributed and watched in domestic spaces. The domestic space evoked the process of simultaneity where many levels of identity were constructed, negotiated, and performed in all groups. In the private reception sites and practices, I identified a person who acted as a *culture broker*, one who used their knowledge, age, or both to interpret movies and assess the knowledge and actions of those around them. The culture broker often served as a teacher who informed the immediate interactions and imaginations of home culture and identity. Nollywood became a pedagogical tool that spectators referenced. When a culture broker was absent, the text itself became the instructor.

When Nadia, Chi Chi and Effie, who are children of foreign-born parents, watched movies with family members, the older persons would explain the cultural elements in the movie. In the case of African-Americans, Aziza, and the couple Raheem and Tasha, the meanings and dialogue in the movies were unclear sometimes. This left them to construct their own interpretations based on their own knowledge and cultural background, and, in some instances, on what they learned from internet searches. Haitian immigrants Vivienne and Dominque made cross-cultural comparisons between Haitian culture and African culture to see how much of their tradition retained African roots. The ways in which audiences engaged often referenced the identities they brought to spectatorship. In turn, these identities were negotiated during reception along with how they spectated.

Other identity markers emerged that were salient during reception. Gender, class and age determined with whom some people watched, or how they interacted. Women

peer groups who formed watching parties used the movies to make sense of their lives and temporarily escape their responsibilities as mothers, immigrants or wives. Some used the sites from where they watched as locales to discuss taboo subjects in their culture and engage in intellectual discourse in their negotiations with being the "other". Being a spectator afforded the membership into circles such as Yadira and her mother, who were embraced by African and West Indian women in a housing development because it was discovered that they were ardent watchers of Nollywood. The collective they formed operated much like a safe hamlet or village in which they cycled movies, discourse, and information that assisted them in sustaining their families and personal well-being.

In another instance, Charity, a Nigerian college student, represented the shift when viewing at her mother's house versus in her dorm where she had more privacy to explore movies with her college friends in a way she knew her mother would disapprove. Performing various versions of self with different company showed that Charity actively engaged to stay in character, or maintain the integrity of the identity she performed.

Street Vendor in the Public Space. The street vendor adds to the materiality of Newark. Horus represented nodes of political discourse and autonomy in the public culture of the city. He kept the currents of dialogue by engaging customers and passersby with conversations about Newark, black people, politics, and life in general. He exposed customers to the movies when they were unfamiliar with Nollywood, thus changing his role from a peddler to a culture broker. Also, he operated as a record keeper who chronicled Newark's history via conversations. Because he vended both stationary and mobile, he observed and interacted with people throughout the day. To be able to make a living through his personal enterprise was a point of pride for Horus. Though he was

previously incarcerated, selling Nollywood was empowering to him rather than a risk because he felt that law enforcement could not antagonize him with U.S. piracy regulations because he hawked a foreign film industry that had little regulation.

For him, the movies represented his spirit of independence and autonomy — that were connected to underlying feelings of masculinity because with vending he made decisions about his livelihood without the insertion or permission of outsiders. He often praised the movies featuring all black casts and operating outside of American economy. During his interactions with African women at the braiding salons that he solicited movies, Horus felt to have gained insight into an African worldview and business practices. Nollywood served as a source of income, a text to teach others as a culture broker, and an apparatus of resistance.

Identity. Making sense of the self through readings of text demonstrated a highly individualized identity construction. To assert an African or black identity was an unstable process for all participants. Members of Caribbean cohort were adamant about articulating a Caribbean identity more than an African one. They agreed that their heritage was strongly rooted in African ancestry, but based on what they saw in movies, they were far from African, and indeed Caribbean. African-Americans were split in how they identified. Some expressed an African identity while others identified as African-American. Picasso, an African-American identified as American because he thought native-born blacks were without culture, and were rather patchworks of other cultures with which they have interacted since slavery. Yadira embraced her African heritage and rejected a black identity, even while considering herself Latina overall. African participants all agreed they were African, but some considered themselves hybrid since

they could not relate to movies because they lived in the U.S. all or most of their lives. The movies indeed represented their culture, and where their ancestors originated, but those who identified as hybrid such as Nadia, said that they were as much American as they were African.

A pan-African and pan-black identity expressed by Raheem and Chi Chi is the notion of a universal identity derived from experience, political positioning, and cultural expression. Raheem employed a Pan-African identity from a socio-political lens. His position stated that African peoples at home and in the diaspora are connected through a series of social and political struggles. To him, even though diasporas have distinguishing characters, the similarities outweigh the differences. Chi Chi moved away from those assumptions of Pan-Africanism to a cultural-political lens. She preferred a pan-black identity because the term Africa and the current understanding of Africans are a cultural and political construction formed outside of the people Africa represents. Blackness to her is more appropriate because it grounds racial discursive constructs as the most important. She maintained that ethnic identities are important in blackness because it recognizes the diversity; thus, I used the term pan-blackness to describe the variegated dimensions of black identities she acknowledged.

Challenges and Unchartered Terrain

A challenge in the project that is often echoed in media ethnography is the limited time and resources to capture and write about the nuanced field site and participants I met while in situ (Silverman, 2006; Murphy & Kraidy, 2004). I focused on Nollywood audiences in Newark, but had to dedicate an amount of time to understanding Newark,

with its urban flows, patterns, and rapid changes occurring during my research within the

context of the employment of Nollywood. Though this is fascinating, it made the research

difficult in exploring audiences because my research began to look for the history of

black audiences in Newark rather than Nollywood audiences. Indeed, much of my work

looked at Nollywood audiences in the field. However, I often drifted back to retrieve

information or interview people who did not watch Nollywood, but had a longer history

in the city that could identify certain shifts and explain the climate of the city at major

moments (i.e. Newark riots, post-riots/black power movement, white flight, black

professional class flight, bootlegging pre-Nollywood).

I unintentionally sampled a group that disproportionately were women. I had no

representation of Caribbean men and a low representation of men in general. The

inability to access men changed the texture of my research as I prepared to look at gender

from different angles. Since I sampled many women who were customers at one of the

many braiding shops throughout Newark, I knew I had to involve the braiding salons.

However, I never gained access. Staff and owners were suspicious of my intent. Chi Chi

explained that most braiding salons had undocumented and unlicensed workers. In 2009

and 2010, a series of stories covering West African women who held captive and forced

to work at salons in-and-around Newark came out in local papers.[114] My privileged lens

forgot about these incidents, as well as considering the possibility of undocumented black

immigrants. Immigration discourse in the U.S. focuses on Latino immigrants, resulting in

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[114] This report covers a trial of a Nigerian couple who were tried for human trafficking of twenty West African women. They were forced to braid at salons in Newark and East Orange and lived under strict surveillance. Story found on 24 March 2015 at the following: http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2009/08/east_orange_man_admits_human_t.html

marginalizing black immigrant experiences and stories that make their invisibility more vulnerable in deportations than others do because their stories and issues fall under the radar (Benoît, 2013).

I must mention two moments I purposely tabled for future research, but were interesting spaces to explore. Vivienne and Dominque, Haitian women in the study talked about how Haitian stores sell Nollywood alongside Haitian cinema. I aim to explore how non-African shops selling items specific to their ethnic identity use Nollywood.

Another moment that sparked my interest was the ways in which participants shared their online activities when using Nollywood. Participants told of different circulation patterns emerging in their informal distributions. To me, these are the embryonic stages of an open-source, African media community and a creative commons distributing African-centered pop culture, cultural knowledge, aesthetics, and media. The unconventional distribution system of Nollywood to flood markets with as many movies in short amounts of times has saturated local markets, while a portion make it to the diaspora. The exploration of Nollywood showed that filmmakers continue to create even though they know that their movies will be pirated because being visible, and present becomes important social and media currency in this media age.

An African creative commons or an open source library function as a location in modernity to exchange and experience African media and aesthetic within the terms of the diaspora it reflects. One of the consistent issues of media and race/ethnicity is representation. Criticisms on how Africa is represented by dominant media are ample because it is often portrayed as archaic, primitive, static, and underdeveloped. In sum, it

lacks the capacity to enter into modernity. Sarah Fila-Bakabadio (2015) argues that we look at the presentation of black bodies by black people is their attempts to "represent blackness in their own terms". She further argues that these presentations comment on, resist and challenge dominant paradigms. Within the modernity discourse, aesthetic is used to argue the presence of an articulated black voice and body that is transnational. The layers expressed in the study unveil specific informal practices of circulation with a purpose to spread a media that re-presents African bodies through an open source that floods the media world with imaginaries formulated by African peoples.

Open source is the idea of having a platform that provides free media for online users to remix, mash-up, and hack texts. Because of the copious amount of movies that are generated, a lot of material cannot be seen because of the lack of a space to exhibit them. In order to circulate movies, and the cultural productions connected to Nollywood such as Nollywood comic books, movie soundtracks, music inspired by the industry, and entertainment and trade magazines, audiences must be able to insert their own narratives into them. It is already occurring with memes and remixed videos circulating. As well, the hybrid, DIY origins of Nollywood along with its signature aesthetic of making meta-cultural references in movies, suggests that filmmakers have been hacking since the beginning. The open source will be a way for audiences to interact and play with material, as well as intellectually engage. This fuses the Afrofuturistic movement that remixes African traditions into futuristic narratives, with Afromodernity and practices of traditional modern.

Lastly, there is the issue of doing justice to a wealth of information within a short term versus long-term project. There was so much that the participants shared that I

simply could not put everything in this thesis. Indeed their voices will be in work to come. Many participants said that they were never asked questions about who they were or what they liked, and what they watched or listened to. Their answers and their lives were so fascinating and intricate that it would be an injustice to try to squeeze the robustness of their stories within these lines. What was chosen was a decision weighing heavy on me, but I do acknowledge the power I have in writing these representations. Moreover, I fully recognize there are many things missed in this project, but this is the beginning of a genre in audience research.

Final Words

As I write the conclusions to this years-long research, I am looking at a Nollywood movie streaming on Netflix. For the past two weeks, Nollywood movies pop up in my Netflix selections, especially after I was one of the many who streamed the movie, "Half of a Yellow Sun," a film about the Biafra war in Nigeria that began to stream in March 2015. I found out that it was playing through a Facebook post from an African-American woman who I did not know. She stated in her post that this was her fir time she watched any film from Nigeria. This instance shows how media travels through a number of matrices.

Employing media, especially in the media saturated terrains we live, the interactions with other people, whether intentionally or not expose each other to our media tastes. Nollywood is steadfastly moving out of the shadows of being a peripheral, niche industry — intertwining between fan bases, alternative markets, and dominant

industry, it has walked past the front door of dominant media and is preparing its seat at a global table.

In closing, I started from scratch with little information on how I would go about this media ethnography. I look forward to seeing how this work grows and how I develop my insight in representing a diaspora of which I am a member.

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APPENDIX A: SITUATING THE RESEARCHER

I employ the African diaspora as a subject because I am a member, shifting in the ebb-and-flow of the sometimes incongruous and contested classification.[115] More specifically, I classify myself as an African-American and have experiences that are entrenched in the social, political and cultural realities of having longstanding roots in the U.S. It is important to provide this positionality in my research, as I acknowledge that I am a member of the native-black population that is also the largest black ethnic group. As an African-American, I can trace a portion of my family lineage in the United States as far back as the early 1800s. However, this study considers the migratory patterns of African-Americans and situates the researcher as an intra-national migrant who has experienced similar occurrences as those immigrating to the U.S.

In Newark, the site of my research, I am an insider, living in the predominately African-American Central ward, and just on the edges of the downtown area. But simultaneously, I am an outsider. Like a native Newarker, I too have experienced residing in an urban center that is identified as the inner city. Similar to Newarkers growing up in the 70s, 80s and 90s, I lived in a section of Los Angeles that has been grossly, and disproportionately affected by deindustrialization, heightened drug policies of the 80s and 90s, surging unemployment, segregated housing and other forms of disenfranchisement that have been concentrated in black urban communities (Vargas, 2006; Alonso A. A.,

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[115] There is an ongoing discourse around who "belongs" or should be considered members of the African diaspora. The initial tenets of African diaspora was from a Pan-Africanist perspective that advocated for a worldwide unification in which all peoples of African descent recognized each other as part of a global collective. It has splintered into polarized schools of thought that vary from a Pan-African perspective to a selected membership that should only include Africans who have recently migrated from Africa and still have recognizable ties (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005).

2004). I am familiar with analogous themes weaving some pointed experiences of black urban America, but there are major distinctions as a migrant Angeleno that position me as an outsider while a resident of Newark.

I am from Los Angeles with strong roots in what is called the "Deep South." My mother is from Louisiana, my father from Mississippi. We all have university experience—my mother has a master's degree in French, while my father did attend college, he was expelled in his senior year for his involvement in political protests. Also, we are considered to be members of the black middle class, even though I grew up in the inner city[116]. In comparison to the average African-American Newark inhabitant, most are descendants of Southern migrants who travelled to the Eastern seaboard of the county.

In terms of economic status, according to the U.S. Census Bureau only twelve percent of its residents who are over the age of twenty-five have a bachelor's degree and are working-class citizens. Plus fifty percent of the Newark residents live at twice the federal poverty level (Legal Services of New Jersey, 2012). This situates me as having a polarized identity, because I am considered "country"[117] from an upbringing heavily

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[116] I have specified "black" middle class to signify a difference between black middle class and white middle class. Pattillo-McCoy (2000) and Feagin & Sikes (1995) point out that black middle class and white middle class live in separate and unequal realities where most black middle class would qualify as lower middle class; and often face racial discrimination in attempts to move up in social status. However, African-Americans who have better educational, employment and housing opportunities than most blacks in the United States who represent disproportionate high numbers of disenfranchised populations define the black middle class.

[117] A term used in African-American urban culture to describe southern migrants and their culture as backward and unequal it signifies a person who is not urbanized or modern and in some ways, ignorant and uneducated.

laden with Louisiana and Mississippi cultural identity and "bougie,"[118] meaning that I am more of an elite class due to my education and global travelling.

In addition, it must be mentioned that Newark is considerably smaller in size when compared to Los Angeles, and has drastically different racial and ethnic dynamics. In Los Angeles, African-Americans only comprise 9.3 percent of the population with Latinos and whites making up roughly 77 percent combined, and Asians are 11.3 percent of the demographic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Los Angeles is a young U.S. city that carries a strong Mexican presence with influences of East Asia, white Anglo and black southern. Contrasting, Newark is 52.4 percent black, 33.8 percent Latino or Hispanic, 11.6 percent white and 1.6 percent Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Newark is an old city in U.S. history and has served as a transitional site for millions of migrants from Europe, blacks from the southern part of United States, Puerto Rico, Cuba and other places overseas. It also has a visible Caribbean, African, South American, South East Asian and Middle Eastern demographic introducing another range of ethnic nuances.

I do acknowledge my insider-outsider status, as it is critical in the reflexive nature of this investigation. Nonetheless, there are connecting threads parallel to international migrants that my family experiences, several of which I will list, but will discuss at length in my thesis. Like immigrants, migratory African-American groups maintain familial networks that assist families resettling that are thriving in my immediate and extended family. Also, black intra-migrants[119] like my African-American kinship, stress educational excellence like immigrants who transplant themselves for better educational

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[118] A shortened term for "bourgeoisie" often used in African-American dialect to describe a person who is perceived as performing snobbish or elitist. Also, class issues within African-American community can sometimes automatically designate people with higher degrees as elitist.

[119] Native-born blacks or African-Americans who migrated within the United States.

opportunities (Arthur, Takougang, Owusu, & Thomas, 2012). Importantly, African-American migrants have heavily relied on media to construct and regulate their identity in these shifts. And lastly, migrant African American southern migrants have higher records of success in urban areas that native born blacks Wilkerson (2011); similar to reports regarding immigrants are noted for career and academic success (Waters, 2001; Kasintz, 1994).

It is important to emphasize a parallel between African-American migrants and black migrant members because most perceptions regarding African-Americans are that they too possess collective identities that are homogeneous. On the contrary, regional differences that are conflated with cultural, historical, political, and economic contrasts show the heterogeneity in these populations. When you add the heterogeneous groups of black Caribbean migrants and continental Africans with the differences in African-Americans, you acquire a rich context to explore identity.

APPENDIX B: NEWARK THE FIELD SITE (EXENTENDED)

Newark first appealed to me as a field site while I was walking through its downtown perimeters during my first winter there. Growing up in Los Angeles and spending most of my life in Southern California, I had not become accustomed to the gloomy New Jersey days, biting cold winds, unforgiving winters, pristine snow turned into dingy heaps, grimy sidewalks pockmarked by gum, and commercial buildings left in different stages of decay with cluttered and unkempt awnings littering the beautiful old-architecture. Nevertheless, I chose to live in Newark intentionally. I was one of the gentrified caste who heard the call of Cory Booker in an appearance on C-Span. While preparing for my relocation from Atlanta to New Jersey, I saw Booker speaking about the changes occurring in Newark. Inspired by his passionate speech on the progress of the city, I decided to live in Newark.

Shortly after unloading my belongings in October 2007, I quickly discovered that Booker's speech did not capture the imbalance of power and wealth in Newark. From my perspective, there existed multi-layered and multi-generational hostilities underscoring deep fissures which left many under-represented people and institutions as casualties in a long-time war. In my eyes, Newark was part abandoned, part refurbished, and part exploited. Portions of the downtown landscape sat lifeless, while certain sections brimmed with stellar upkeep and newness. On one side of Broad Street — the main thoroughfare of the city — high rises and commercial buildings teemed with activity. On the opposite side, structures stood vacant and deteriorating from years of neglect. This sight is typical throughout the city. Some blocks were so blighted and abandoned, it is as if there is not any life. However, traveling several blocks in any direction, one finds

neighborhoods that have refurbished buildings with the lively hum of residents out-and-about.

Troubled by the blatant inequities overwhelming my daily life as a resident, I also could not get used to the custom of not speaking to or smiling at passersby on the street. The rule of thumb when walking in Newark are four directives rolled into one, "Look straight, mind your business, do not say hello, and definitely, do not smile." I managed to break one rule or all daily, and continue to do so. Coming from a city operating on polar opposite principles, and reared in migrant southern culture that emphasized the acknowledgement of the people around you, the etiquette established in Newark clashed with my tendency to, "Look everywhere, be considerate of those around you, greet people, and definitely smile, it is good for the soul." Indeed, in Newark I was an outsider, looking at an old city through untarnished, naïve eyes.

Before I decided to pursue this project, I would walk through the downtown area, discovering the nooks and crannies of the city. As a curious new Newarker adapting to life in the northeast, I visited a number of the shops and street vendors. I thumbed through mountains of knickknacks placed in plastic bins at one of the many dollar stores or carts lining the streets. I looked for some type of anything to help me connect or belong—to feel like a Newarker, or at the very least, some semblance of an insider. I was grounded by happenstance. It occurred when I simply looked for another route to take home.

One day while walking south on Broad Street, I passed the recently built sports and performance arena, the Prudential Center. The back of the building faces the main

street; an intentional act to build all the openings away from the locals.[120] T*he Pru*, as locals refer to it, is a stark reminder of the shifting landscape. Instead of traveling my usual route, I eschewed passing by the federal building and decided to look at the mishmash of shops on the smaller avenues. I turned on a side street and passed several dollar stores and an African textile business with an adjacent African braiding shop. Two blocks down, I arrived at an intersection where a popular soul food restaurant then (but has since closed in 2012).

Across the street from the restaurant stood an African corner store with a church perched on the second floor. In the past, I noticed church members dressed in white congregating after Sunday and weekday evening ceremonies, but I never gave the gatherings much thought. I took it as fellowshipping seen in traditional black churches. Outside the storefront, several children between the ages of five and ten played with each other. One was on a tricycle, and the other ran half a block down the street, stopped as if he could see some invisible boundary, then turned around, running back. There were two older women sitting in shabby lawn chairs. They wore tops and skirts patterned with intricate, colorful designs signifying they were fashions from Africa. They wrapped their heads with a similar textile in a way that spiraled around their crowns in tucks and folds. They were speaking in a language that was not the common English, Spanish, West Indian Patois, or Haitian Kreyol you often heard while traversing the city. They moved

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[120] Notes from Migration and City course, Fall 2009, Sherri-Ann Butterfield. This observation was discussed by Prof. Butterfield in a class meeting looking at the urban layout of Newark and gentrification. At the time, The Prudential center just opened. Butterfield pointed out how all the openings to the arena were away from the Broad Street. To her, she surmised this was deliberate strategy to keep visitors of the Prudential away from the local shops and restaurants on Broad Street.

their arms and clapped at times in their conversation while taking turns shaking their head as the other one talked.

Two feet in front of the women was an open barbeque grill with corn still in its shucks roasting. The smell of slightly charred corn wafted in the air, and smoke slowly rose out of the pit. The women intermittently stood up to rotate the corn and fan the flames. Resting on a wheel of the grill was a sign on cardboard announcing, "Corn $1." Instantly, I was transported back to 2001 when I traveled through Nigeria, and occasionally stopped to purchase grilled corn and water in plastic bags from one of the many women vendors on the side of the road. Many of the women would have children playing in the background with some youth making loud kissing sounds to catch your attention and say through loud smacks, "Waaaatahhhh." Returning from my nostalgia, I pulled out a dollar and told the women about my trip in Nigeria. They smiled and one said, "Oh, you went to Africa. That is good, but we are not from Nigeria, we are from Liberia, West Africa." I laughed and felt at home. In my moment of emotion and connecting, these women were adamant about their belonging. Following that moment, I started passing this same shop on my way home. In seeing the worshippers after this encounter, I discovered they were not African American, but African. My search to ground myself in Newark came from African immigrants who brought some of their cultural performances to Newark.

Once I began to embed myself into the flow of people, and the unpredictability of a city in transition, I experienced Newark in ebbs and flows. Every Wednesday and Sunday in front of the old court, building on Market, just below the Abraham Lincoln statue, regular groups of local activists protested against the many injustices in the city.

They wore their trademark yellow shirts or hoodies promoting "power to the people." On Monday and Wednesday, vociferous residents packed city council meetings to challenge, applaud, expose, or insult the actions of city council members in speeches that go from controlled, one-note lectures to orations of cadenced fire. After Independence Day, every Thursday was a party in front of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center with live performances and local deejays spinning a range of Rhythm & Blues, soul, house, hip-hop, and world music. When Michael Jackson or Jersey house music spins into the musical rotation, the crowd danced lively in syncopated, ecstatic rhythms. Every October, the sounds of salsa and horns decorate the city during the Puerto Rican day parade. For three days in mid-July, The Lincoln Park Historical District thumps during its jazz, R&B, and hip-hop music festival. In between, public protests against shootings or escalated murders resurface, while local reverends and organizational leaders speak on the City Hall steps against the disproportionately high foreclosures, poverty, dismantling of Newark public schools and poor leadership by elected officials. Interspersed with these clashes are more festivals, plays, and parades celebrating culture, food, performing arts, and ethnic pride. Newark drips with untapped and unexplored identity frequently overlooked by so many who rush into government buildings and corporate offices to fulfill their quotas by day, only to dash out of the city by six or seven in the evening, right before the locals regain control over their terrain.

Wandering through the local shops and local life in Newark led me to Nollywood. On one of my usual treks home from Newark Penn Station, I stopped into an African shop to peruse their items. I had been thinking about how to explore African American, Caribbean and African identity using media as the focus. I had passed this shop many

times before, but never paid much attention to the movie posters covering the storefront glass. I walked in and noticed several shelves stocked with DVDs in jackets with black people on the front. They were dressed in contemporary clothes and traditional African clothes. Some of the women donned big puffy wigs and the men wore fitted sports hats and *kufi* caps.

I asked the store clerk, "What type of movies are these?" He said, "Nigerian movies," as he walked toward me. I replied with astonishment, "Nigerian movies! I haven't seen these in years." He looked at me and said, "You know about Nollywood?" I responded, "Nollywood, what is that? Nigerian Hollywood?" He nodded his head in affirmation and I laughed. "Those Nigerians are something else," I said and grunted in amazement, "umpf umpf um." He smiled and commented, "Yes they are mami."

APPENDIX C: DEFINING DIASPORA

In defining diaspora, the fundamental element is migration and movement (Zaleza, 2005). And, the consigning and appropriating of diaspora have been scattered like the dispersal of the peoples that it describes. Diaspora assumes religious and cultural denotation as well as economic and political application (Tololyan, 1996; Edwards, 2001; Butler, 2001; Hintzen & Rahier, 2003). It also describes the "multidirectional, dynamic movement" (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010, p. 5) of groups from exile to asylum (Butler, 2001; Patterson & Kelley, 2000). Additionally, it is caught in the "in-between" spaces of performance (Bhabha, 1994), and blurred in the act of imagining and negotiating "personhood" (Gilroy, 1993). But, in its origin, diaspora is situated in the Greek words *diá* — meaning through, between, across, by, of, and akin to — and *sporá* — meaning sowing, or scattering and planting seed.

In an attempt to accommodate the nuances of diaspora and the transnational exchange of information and activity by diasporans (Georgiou, 2006), this project uses two definitions, one proffered by Zaleza (2005) and the other by Karim (2003). Zaleza writes:

> Diaspora, I would suggest simultaneously refers to a process, a condition, a space and a discourse: the continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade, the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself, the places where it is moulded and imagined, and the contentious ways in which it is studied and discussed . . . Diaspora is simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings. It is a mode of naming, remembering, living and felling group identity moulded out of experiences, positionings, struggles and imaginings of the past and the present, and at times the unpredictable futures . . ." (p.41).

Zaleza (2005) uses the mutability of movement to provide a context of the difficulty in conceptualizing, defining, and studying the complexities and formations of diasporas. He

presents diaspora as both a perception and an organic entity that is in constant state of

flux; however, there are sites or instances in which diaspora is captured. Though fleeting,

diaspora becomes a static concept and figurative object. It can be the observations of a

simple gesture of an African-American and Jamaican smiling at each other while

watching the inauguration of Barack Obama, or an active, consistent relationship between

the same two people that includes various ongoing forms of interactivity, such as

conversations or the sharing of cultural products. This research aims to unpack these

flashes of diasporic animation, but with the familiarity of its shifting capabilities. Karim

(2003) uses materiality in contextualizing diaspora when he describes it as:

> a group that has participated in a forced or voluntary migration that has strong
> emotional links to a homeland and [throughout migration have] "exchange[d]
> symbolic goods and services, including media content, among each other, thus
> sustaining global networks'" (p.3).

Karim (2003) identifies rituals and interactivity as the definition of diaspora. In

particular, he uses the formation of identity vis-à-vis belonging and shared experiences

that occur across borders and in compressed time and space such as those instances of

connectivity that take place in media culture. Like Georgiou (2006) and Naficy (1999),

the exchange of media and its consumption become intertwined with diasporic activity.

Karim (2003) implies that to be diasporic, or to identify as such, means to participate in a

distribution network that maintains ties.

Another critical criterion of Karim's (2003) definition is "forced or voluntary."

When speaking about the African diaspora in the U.S., it is critical to employ this

designation in order to provide a rich platform in studying how identity is negotiated

from the different positions that diasporans understand home and homeland (Naficy,

1999). It is an attempt to illuminate the complexities regarding identity formation about a

population that, for much of its group members, have never travelled to Africa, never will travel to Africa, and as a result of American slavery, have been disconnected from direct kinship to a specific nation, geography or ethnic group (Tettey, 2005). Simultaneously, the phrase "forced or voluntary" incorporates diasporans who have willfully, and more recently, immigrated to the U.S. and, in some instances, maintain explicit familial and nation-state relations as detailed in the later descriptions of the main black ethnic groups in the country.

The members of the African diaspora are a people who trace all or a part of their ancestry to Africa. In the U.S., it is comprised of a native-born and immigrant, mostly black population mainly consisting of the following sub-groups: African-Americans, Caribbean/ Caribbean-Americans, and continental Africans. The three main subsidiaries have settled in the U.S. under different circumstances and at different times. The height of migration activity for each group is called a "wave" to indicate the "influx of visibility and large numbers" (Tillery & Chresfield, 2012, p. 546) that occur in distinct diasporic group members spanning from colonial America to after the passage of the Hart-Cellar Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Though, each group experiences different phases of resettlement, their interactions and histories in the U.S. are intertwined and overlap (Lewis, 1995).

APPENDIX D: MAP OF NEWARK