



Nollywood and the Nigerian City: Contending Ideologies between the Centre and the Hinterland

CLEMENT OSHOGWE MAMUDU

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Nollywood's representation of the contending ideologies between the postcolonial city and its hinterland. It particularly sets out to examine the role of Nollywood films in the construction of urban subjects and urban boundaries in relation to the traditional norms and cultural values of the rural hinterland. It explores the tensions of representation occasioned by the contending ideologies of environmental legibility, modernity, migration, traditional practices and cultural identities, urban and rural typologies as well as urban governmentality in relation to governance and power as portrayed in *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*, *Taxi Driver: Oko Ashewo*, *The Figurine*, and *Isoken*. The paper disrupts global conceptions that envisage cities or the urban environment generally as the 'Island' while their hinterlands constitute the Other. It concludes that the Nigerian city, or African modernity generally, is not and does not have to be constructed within so-called global paradigms, and that it is neither an alternative modernity nor a parallel one but a uniquely hybrid modernity, one that fuses the centre and hinterland features in a functional and vibrant relationship and interdependence as depicted in these Nollywood films.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Clement Oshogwe Mamudu

Igbinedion University, Okada,
Nigeria

mamudu.clement@iuokada.edu.ng

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INTRODUCTION

This work is a critical investigation into Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry's representation of the contending ideologies between the postcolonial city and its hinterland, with particular attention to the role of cinema in the construction of urban subjects and urban boundaries in relation to the traditional norms and cultural values of the rural hinterland. Nollywood, one of the world's most prolific film industries, occupies a singular position as a cultural archive of the Nigerian urban experience. Its films do not merely document city life; they actively construct, contest, and imaginatively mediate the meanings of urban space, identity, and the relationship between modernity and tradition. It is within this context that the present paper situates *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (dir. Ramsey Nouah, 2019), *Taxi Driver: Oko Ashewo* (dir. Daniel Oriahi, 2015), *The Figurine* (dir. Kunle Afolayan, 2009), and *Isoken* (dir. Jadesola Osiberu, 2017) as its primary objects of inquiry. Each film, in its own way, stages the encounter between city and hinterland, dramatising the ideological negotiations that urban subjects, particularly rural-to-urban migrants, must navigate in pursuit of legibility, belonging, and prosperity.

Over time, the postcolonial city has continually been presented as a chaotic and unworkable urban space crippled by overcrowding, decaying infrastructure, absence of essential services, high crime rate, and so on. Emerging urbanism, however, has seen this image as an inaccurate representation and has proffered a reconfiguration or re-theorisation, since postcolonial city dwellers have devised means of acquiring or creating agency in spite of crippling living conditions. It is within this theoretical tension that the selected Nollywood films operate, their narratives, characters, audio-visual grammar, and symbolic registers giving form to what this paper conceptualises as hybrid modernity. The paper proceeds, accordingly, by introducing the films and situating them within their broader urban thematic concerns, before deploying the theoretical frameworks of hybrid modernity, urban legibility, emergent urbanism, and governmentality as analytical lenses through which the films are examined.

NOLLYWOOD, THE NIGERIAN CITY, AND THE HINTERLAND

The selected films span a decade of Nollywood production and together chart a consistent pre-occupation with the tensions between the values of the city, namely, individualism, rational ambition, material comfort, and cosmopolitanism, and those of the hinterland, namely, communal belonging, traditional belief, ancestral obligation, and cultural continuity. As Onookome Okome rightly notes, "we live in the age of the city. The city is everything to us – it consumes us, and for that reason we glorify it. We may like it or hate it, but we must live in it. Sometimes we defeat the city and reshape it to suit our whims and caprices. We invent the city and it reinvents us" (316). These films bear Okome's observation out in their distinct cinematic ways.

What is the hinterland and what relationship, if any, does it have with the city or the urban environment? Is the city the island while the hinterland constitutes the Other? Hinterland constitutes the rural and communal environment with simple lifestyles anchored on strict cultural norms and traditional beliefs and practices. The hinterland boasts of little or no facilities; neither does it boast of the vibrancy, wealth, and flamboyance of city life. Hence, it is the norm for its subjects to migrate to the city having imagined it as an abode of comfort. Studies have shown that there are actually more rural migrants in postcolonial cities than the actual 'city people' or original population (Gilbert and Gugler; Gupta and Ferguson). These migrants from the hinterlands arrive in the city with their rural ideologies, practices, and ways of life. While interacting with the city and its subjects, they navigate their boundaries, construct their identities, and impose their local and hinterland legibilities on the urban environment. These interactions engender a constitutive presence of the hinterland in the city and generate tensions of representation as a result of the rural migrants' traditional values imported into it. The migrants from the rural hinterland thus pass on their ideologies to the city's original dwellers

and in turn imbibe the modern ideologies of the city as well as contribute, through their activities, to its functionality and continuous evolution. Neither the city nor the hinterland can thus extricate themselves, one from the other, in their symbiotic relationship.

Living in Bondage: Breaking Free, directed by Ramsey Nouah and released in 2019, portrays the Nigerian city of Lagos as a site of ambition and resultant wealth. Nnamdi, the main character, in his desperate bid for material wealth and affluence, gets himself involved in rituals and occult practices. The allures of the city and the values of material wealth which it represents are vividly showcased through the film's visual grammar, its mise-en-scène of luxury interiors, expensive costumes, and gleaming props that signal Nnamdi's aspirations. The film, hence, portrays the negative consequences of greed, corruption, and the desperation for wealth and material success. Much more than these, however, it foregrounds, through its narrative and character construction, the consequences of the loss or abandonment of traditional values which the hinterland represents. The hinterland, as represented by Nnamdi's village, is portrayed through a contrasting visual register of open communal spaces, natural light, and simple rhythms of daily life, underscoring a site of traditional values, spiritual beliefs, and simple lifestyles. The cultural ideologies of the hinterland are thus at variance with the modernity and materialistic values which the city represents. The film accordingly underscores the tensions and conflicts generated by these contending ideologies when the city subjects navigate between them, representing the possibility and need for subjects to combine the best aspects of both ideologies by striving to uphold the traditional values and cultural practices of the hinterland in their quests for the material success and comfort offered by the city.

Taxi Driver: Oko Ashewo, which was directed by Daniel Oriahi and released in 2015, similarly depicts the contending ideologies between the city and the hinterland, exploring urban and rural intersections vis-à-vis the tensions arising from different social and cultural backgrounds of the city subjects. Adigun, the film's young, naïve, and inexperienced protagonist, moves from the rural hinterland to the city of Lagos in search of a better and comfortable life. In the course of his hustles as a taxi driver, one of the jobs readily available in the city, he encounters various people with diverse attitudes and ideologies regarding Lagos life. These characters represent the urban ideology with focus on the exciting opportunities, fast-lane lifestyle, and the activities that define the city. His naivety is often exploited, for selfish ends, by the characters he encounters. Adigun, conversely, represents the hinterland ideology of simplicity, uprightness, and the upholding and preservation of traditions and cultural norms and values, as a result of which he is overwhelmed by the city's complexities. The film's sound design captures this dynamic with precision, rendering Lagos through a persistent, overlapping urban soundscape of traffic, argument, and commercial noise that contrasts sharply with the more open ambient sounds associated with the hinterland. Camera framings similarly register Adigun's initial smallness within the urban frame before gradually according him greater visual authority as his local legibility develops. By clinging to his cherished hinterland ideologies, Adigun struggles to navigate through the city's corrupt, desperate, and immoral behaviours, and his experiences accordingly illustrate the clash between the rural simplicity of the hinterland and the chaos of the city. The film examines the conflicts, contradictions, tensions, and dissonance between the city-hinterland ideologies as well as the negotiations that must be undertaken by the city subjects, especially the rural-to-urban migrants, who find themselves navigating these ideologies in their quest for legibility and happiness in the city while maintaining the traditions and cultural values of the hinterland.

The Figurine, directed by Kunle Afolayan in 2009, explores the same conflicts and tensions arising from the contending ideologies between the city and the hinterland. It revolves around a figurine with supernatural powers which the main characters, Femi and Sola, discover hidden in an abandoned rural hinterland shrine. The two university friends take the figurine with them to Lagos and, after invoking it, discover that it bestows success and wealth on them but also comes with a curse. The film's cinematography is attentive to the ideological weight of its spatial settings. The rural forest where the figurine is discovered is rendered with a dense, organic visual texture that signals its connection to traditional forces, while Lagos is shot with cleaner lines and harder surfaces. When the figurine enters the city, the film introduces visual anomalies that signal the hinterland's disruption of the urban rational order. The figurine's supernatural powers thus challenge the urban characters' rational and modern worldview.

The different perspectives held by the two friends represent the contending nature of the city-hinterland ideologies. Femi embodies urbanity and is the quintessential city man who relies solely on logic and reasoning; hence traditions and cultural practices hardly mean anything to him. Conversely, Sola represents the hinterland, which is an embodiment of adherence to cultural norms and traditional beliefs. Their dialogue consistently stages this ideological clash, with Femi's rationalist dismissals presented with enough irony that their inadequacy is registered well before the narrative confirms it. The conflicting worldviews necessitate a moral dilemma as the men contend with the figurine's powers and its repercussions on their lives. The film thus illustrates the contending issues of tradition and modernity, superstition and rationality, contrasting beliefs, as well as the consequences of challenging traditional norms and customs. Ultimately, the city subjects devise ways of negotiating and coping with the contending issues, having acknowledged the reality of them being two sides of the same coin.

Set in the vibrant city of Lagos, *Isoken*, directed by Jadesola Osiberu and released in 2017, represents the urban environment and its allied ideologies or values of modernity, logic, and rationality, and presents a protagonist who grapples with contrasting issues of societal expectations and her personal career aspirations and desires. In spite of the urban setting of the film, there is the persistent challenge and influence of the values of the hinterland. *Isoken* is a modern and independent woman who pursues her professional and career aspirations but is nevertheless expected to conform to the cultural values and traditional norms and beliefs of the hinterland which her family and community hold tenaciously dear. Marriage is an essential expectation, and *Isoken* is especially expected to marry as a matter of honour for her family, and as the ultimate achievement for herself as a woman, no matter her level of professional achievement. Her family, [Emwinromwankhoe Osakpolor](#) notes, felt that "getting married to a man, the man's true character notwithstanding, is a great and unprecedented achievement for *Isoken*" (132). She is accordingly under societal pressure, especially from her mother, to marry in conformity with the traditional norms of the rural hinterland. The film's costume and production design are meticulous in evoking both urban Lagos, through contemporary apartments, corporate spaces and upscale settings, and the warmth and cultural density of family life rooted in Edo traditions, each visual register carrying its own ideological freight. The ensuing conflict emphasises the intersection between urban or city values prioritising individualism and empowerment and traditional values that prioritise marriage, family, and community. *Isoken*'s ability to successfully balance these in the end emphasises self-discovery and the achievement of the best of both contending ideologies.

CONTENDING IDEOLOGIES

Modernity with emphasis on transformation and industrialisation is usually seen as the marker of cities; hence any city that does not meet these preconceived paradigms is considered chaotic and illegible. There is therefore the essential question regarding the extent to which the post-colonial city fits into the taxonomy of the modern or global city. A convenient starting point is to examine [René Descartes](#)' classification of cities into ancient and modern, whereby the former are conceived to be products of conurbations, that is, of villages that have metamorphosed into big but unplanned or poorly planned urban environments over time. The tension of representation between the 'city' and the hinterland is thus set in motion by [Descartes](#)' classification that conceives modern cities as "those well-ordered places that an engineer traces out on a vacant plain as it suits his fancy" (7). The city of the planners or the well-ordered town, carefully planned and laid out on the architect's vacant canvas or plain, has thus become the universal paradigm by which the modern city is read and imagined. The implication is that any structure, construction, extension, or alteration of any kind disrupts its environmental legibility. Where, then, does this leave postcolonial or so-called third-world cities? Are they wholly but strictly traditional cities bereft of modernity? In the context of this paper, is the Nigerian city like Lagos bereft of modernity because it is not structured along the Cartesian model, whose underlying inference is that the modern city is a closed urban space with preconceived appurtenances that must not be altered and in which any deviation from this constitutes 'the Other'? The postcolonial city which, for instance, a Nigerian city like Lagos represents, appears to rupture this model.

Legibility is a problematic concept that literally entails readability. Accordingly, a legible city should normally be one which is “readable” (Lynch 3). Legibility in urban studies refers to the perspective from which cities are read and interpreted. Urban legibility thus has to do with a people’s interaction with their urban environment. It is a central issue in urban thought as cities have come to exist both as physical and mental forms (Deriu 794). I examine the problematic from diverse or varying persuasions vis-à-vis the extent to which these persuasions are represented or depicted in Nigerian home video films.

Legibility, as an urban concept, was propounded by Kevin Lynch. Lynch considers the legibility of a city to be its visual quality in terms of the mental image held by its citizens, with emphasis on the cityscape’s clarity in terms of “the ease with which its parts can be recognised and can be organised into a coherent pattern” (2-3). He accordingly relates the legibility of a city to a printed page, which “if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols” (3). He argues that “a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern” (3).

There is, however, a need to problematise and interrogate Lynch’s legibility criteria as they tend to carry some oversights. Thankfully, he concedes that urban legibility can only be understood in relation to the perception of the city by its inhabitants rather than the city as a construct in itself. I do not contest the accuracy of his findings in the study of three American cities, namely Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles, but such findings cannot be said to be the same of all cities, even in the unlikely situation that they are the same of most cities. Lynch’s theories, drawn from his study of these three American cities, cannot be appropriated for all cities. In the context of this discourse, the theories cannot be appropriated for the postcolonial African city and hence cannot be appropriated for the Nigerian city.

It is important, however, to nuance the question of Lagos’s legibility rather than assert it categorically. Lagos is a conurbation that grew from a network of villages into a sprawling metropolis, and it presents formidable challenges of overpopulation, traffic congestion, unplanned growth, and navigational difficulty in many of its communities. Communities such as Ajegunle, Makoko, and Agege are largely unplanned, and by Lynch’s criteria, such areas would register as illegible. The claim this paper advances is not, therefore, that Lagos is legible in Lynch’s externally imposed terms, but rather that it possesses a local legibility, one generated by and for its inhabitants rather than imposed by planners or external observers. I have argued elsewhere, in my interrogation of Lynch’s theories, that “the nature of the city, its morphological configuration, local legibility and the invisible fabrics through which the city functions have largely been left unaddressed” (Mamudu 30). Urban subjects also constitute an important factor in the conception, configuration, and mapping of cities. Urban legibility, and indeed environmental legibility generally, is essentially local. African cities generally are thus legible on their own terms. Accordingly, the Nigerian city, the focus of this essay, is legible on its own terms. Its urban subjects, as such, are not mere observers or fragments of the city but constitute fundamental elements in its metamorphoses, its growth, development and functionality, given their crucial roles as human infrastructure (Simone 407). This becomes a crucial consideration in view of the different histories, complexities, and experiences between African or so-called Third World cities and the cities of the West. Any approach, therefore, that suggests the so-called globally ideal city or urban environment as that created principally by planning and design without recourse to its subjects’ perceptions of (or interactions with) it, or what Magdalena Zmudzinska-Nowak considers “the subjective valuations and opinions of the users of space” (20), is faulty and misleading, as African cities are uniquely functional.

This local legibility is enacted in the selected films with considerable precision. In *Taxi Driver: Oko Ashewo*, Adigun’s gradual acquisition of urban literacy, registered through the film’s shifting visual grammar and his growing confidence in navigating Lagos’s social landscape, dramatises exactly the distinction between Lynch’s externally imposed legibility and the internally generated legibility of urban subjects. The city remains, by any Cartesian measure, disorderly and overwhelming. Yet Adigun eventually learns to read it through social knowledge, moral resilience, and human connection, which is a mode of legibility that neither the planner’s blueprint nor Lynch’s cognitive map accommodates but which the film presents as genuine and functional.

Emerging urbanism has challenged the prevailing deficit-oriented account of postcolonial cities, arguing that postcolonial city dwellers have devised sophisticated means of acquiring or creating agency in spite of crippling living conditions. Rather than reading urban Africa through a lens of failure, emergent urbanism directs analytical attention to the bottom-up, self-organising processes through which city dwellers create functional urban environments outside formal planning frameworks. [Edgar Pieterse](#) argues that “the real African city does not correspond to modernist biases about the physical fabric of cities” (8), and that the informal, self-constructed city is, in practice, the real African city. This is not a glorification of poverty or informality but a recognition that African urban environments possess their own logic, their own infrastructures, and their own modes of legibility. [AbdouMalik Simone](#) similarly insists on the self-organising capacities of African urban life, identifying the urban subject as a form of human infrastructure through which the city sustains and reproduces itself in the absence of adequate state provision:

I wish to extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people’s activities in the city. African cities are characterized by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These intersections, particularly in the last two decades, have depended on the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city. (407-408)

In *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*, the city’s emergent urbanism is rendered through the visual contrast between the gleaming towers of Victoria Island and the teeming informal networks of the mainland. The film’s mise-en-scène of ambition, expensive cars, luxury interiors, designer clothing, is consistently juxtaposed with the informal economy from which many characters have emerged, producing a visual argument about the coexistence of formal aspiration and informal social reality that is central to any account of the postcolonial city. In *Taxi Driver*, the taxi itself as an urban workspace, is a potent image of emergent urbanism. It is a self-organised, informal economic unit through which Adigun navigates the city’s social and moral landscape. Through its dialogue, sound design, and character interactions, the film maps an emergent urban economy that formal planning neither anticipates nor accommodates but which is, nonetheless, vibrantly functional, and through which the contending ideologies of the centre and the hinterland are daily negotiated.

MIGRATION AND THE SITUATION OF THE AFRICAN CITY

Migration, no doubt, remains a crucial issue in postcolonial metropoetics. One of the most significant and noticeable features of so-called Third World cities is that of overcrowding and its attendant slum life (Yaeger; Pieterse; Davis). Third World cities from Mumbai through Jakarta, across São Paulo, Lima, Mexico City, to Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Freetown, Lusaka, to Lagos and Ibadan reveal prevalent overcrowding and slum-dwelling. Mike Davis, citing the UN-HABITAT, reveals that:

[T]he world’s highest percentages of slum-dwellers are in Ethiopia (an astonishing 99.4 percent of the urban population), Chad (also 99.4 percent), Afghanistan (98.5 percent), and Nepal (92 percent). Bombay with 10 to 12 million squatters and tenement-dwellers, is the global capital of slum-dwelling, followed by Mexico City and Dhaka (9 to 10 million each), and then Lagos, Cairo, Karachi, Kinshasa-Brazzaville, São Paulo, Shanghai, and Delhi (6 to 8 million each). (23)

Slums in Third World cities have developed alongside uncontrolled migration. Formal planning has been unable to cater for the needs of people who have continued to flock to the cities for economic and other reasons. Not all urban poor live in slums, and neither are all slum dwellers poor. There has also been constant but uncontrolled rural-urban migration as a result of civil conflicts. Even natural factors compel people to flock to the cities. The result of this uncontrolled

migration is urban density, overcrowding, conurbation, and sprawling unplanned informal settlements. As [Ellen M. Brennan](#) discloses, “throughout the developing world, rapid population growth from continuing high rates of natural increase and rapid in-migration has resulted in a high rate of consumption of urban land” (74).

[Edgar Pieterse](#) offers an engaging answer to the question of how slums have impacted African urban growth by projecting that “almost all of the growth that will unfold in African cities will take the form of slum growth” (8). He is definite that “the shanty city is by and large the *real* African city,” maintaining that “[i]n fact, informal, ‘autoconstructed’, makeshift shelter responses house 62% of African urbanities (6). To Pieterse, therefore, the informal city is the real African city. He maintains that “the real African city does not correspond to modernist biases about the physical fabric of cities” (8). [Pieterse’s](#) position strengthens the propriety of the call for the African city to be configured along its own paradigms. It must be stressed that this position does not imply a glorification of the shanty or self-help city. Rather, he brings to the fore the pervasiveness of slums in African cities as indices of deprivation and want as a result of governments’ negative attitudes toward rural-to-urban migration as well as inadequate finance for infrastructure.

How then is modernity to be situated in Africa? African cities cannot be categorically situated within the Cartesian template of traditional and modern cities. It is instructive that the post-colony, in the bid to construct its own realities, has tended to reconstruct modernity to suit its own complexities. Accordingly, societies have tended to craft their own modernities. [Arjun Appadurai](#) conceives of an alternative modernity arising from new webs of migrations and spatial reconstructions. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), he rejects the classical view of modernity as a single, Western-originated project. He calls instead for the study of contemporary cultural forms “without logically or chronologically presupposing . . . the authority of the Western experience” (49). For Appadurai, modernity is now “decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced” (3). He characterises the present as a world “with its alternative, interactive modernities” (65). Central to this reconceptualisation is human movement. He observes that as groups “migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects,” identity loses its fixed territorial moorings (48). Even locality, once taken for granted, must now be actively produced under conditions “destabilized by human motion” (198). Modernity, for Appadurai, is therefore not a finished condition exported from the West. It is continually remade through the movements of people and the spaces they reconstruct. However, [Brian Larkin](#), in examining the influence of Indian cinema on the social life of the Hausa ethnic group in northern Nigeria as well as its nativisation into their world order, considers the reconstruction a “parallel modernity” in contradistinction to [Appadurai’s](#) conception of it as an alternative modernity, preferring instead the term “parallel modernities” to refer to “the coexistence in space and time of multiple economic, religious and cultural flows that are always subsumed within the term ‘modernity’” (407).

It is certain that African modernity is not constructed within so-called global paradigms. Yet it is neither an alternative modernity as used by [Appadurai](#) nor a parallel one as conceived by [Larkin](#). Instead, what is evident is a hybrid modernity, one that encompasses the planned and the non-planned, formal and informal, visible and invisible structures fused together in a vibrant relationship and interdependence. It is these structures’ relationship and interdependence that configure and direct African modernity and metropoetics, and it is precisely this hybrid modernity that the selected Nollywood films collectively articulate.

GOVERNMENTALITY, GOVERNANCE, AND POWER

Governmentality, a concept [Foucault](#) develops in his 1977-1978 Collège de France lectures, designates the rationality of government: the institutions, procedures, analyses, and tactics through which power is exercised over a population as its target ([Foucault, Security](#) 108). It is, in this sense, understood as the “conduct of conduct,” that is, the guiding of the possible actions of others ([Foucault, “Subject”](#) 341). Situated in this paper within the political rationality that guides the actions of the state toward its urban population, governmentality remains a key catalyst in the tensions generated by the contending ideologies between African cities and their hinterlands. It examines the ways in which the state regulates the activities of its urban population with a view to creating a social order. It primarily examines the extent and impact of

the state's relationship with its urban population and urban environment. This is necessary to determine the extent to which the state has contributed, often through its agents and privies, to the squalor of its cities and citizens as reflected in Nigerian home video films.

Although Patricia [Yaeger](#) rightly affirms the presence of poverty, squalor, and crime in postcolonial African cities largely due to overpopulation, she also avers that these do not necessarily presuppose urban illegibility (9-26). [Edgar Pieterse](#) notes that Africa is the region with the fastest rate of urbanisation in the world. Attention is also drawn to the United Nations projections that the region will double its present urban population of 400 million to 750 million by 2030, a figure that is expected to triple to 1.2 billion by 2050 (Pieterse 5). The implication of this is the escalation of the already squalid conditions of the region's urban dwellers, partly due to state neglect, administrative ineptitude, inequitable economic development patterns, and bad planning policies, all of which are emblematic of the "tangible legacies of the savage colonial experiments we were subjected to for most of the Enlightenment era" (Pieterse 5-6). Accordingly, a great majority of African urban dwellers live in slums. This is because the city developed with colonial templates did not envisage their presence. Hence, these subjects have no place in the city space, a situation that underscores the impropriety of imagining and mapping the city along the Cartesian model that envisions it as a finished work of art on a painter's canvas. Consequently, the grossly inadequate facilities are overstretched, and postcolonial urban dwellers are left to resort to self-help. The first direct result and easily noticeable feature of such self-help is the prevalence of slums in so-called Third World cities, as shacks and shanties fill up every available space. These slum dwellers live a life of poverty and survival. The slum space accordingly becomes a site of violence, fraud, prostitution, and drugs. The subjects become willing agents in the hands of desperate patrons. The organised or formal sector, especially the state and its agencies, considers the slum space undesirable; hence various terms are used to refer to its dwellers, including 'social miscreants,' 'thugs,' 'layabouts,' 'homeless,' 'undesirable elements,' and so on. The state, in response to these challenges, would then formulate policies or resort to actions aimed at reconstructing or 'cleaning up' its cities in the blind bid to 'reclaim' the city, namely to restore it to its 'original' plan and structure, or to achieve 'legibility,' 'modernity,' and 'globalization.' These are ultimately not achieved. Instead, the local legibility which the people have managed to achieve for themselves is disrupted to the extent that such actions undermine their devised method of interacting freely with their environment. Hence, the state's conception of the city, and indeed its environment generally, is flawed, panoptic, and ineffectual. In this regard, [Mike Davis](#) emphasises the position of [Alan Gilbert and Peter Ward](#) that "in such circumstances, little is to be gained by even trying to improve the system" (Davis 50). This is because the state continues to appropriate Western templates for assessing the African city without regard for the different complexities of urban spaces, a situation that has often proved counter-productive.

This governmental dynamic is represented in the selected films, most conspicuously in *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*, where the state is notably absent as a protective or regulatory force. The Lagos that Nnamdi inhabits is one in which governance has largely retreated from the spaces where ordinary people live, leaving a vacuum filled by criminal networks, ritual power structures, and informal patronage. The film's narrative structure implies consistently that the city's dangers are not merely individual moral failures but structural conditions produced by governmental neglect. In *Isoken*, the absence of adequate structural support for women's professional aspirations is rendered visible through the pressures the Lagos setting places on Isoken. The city offers professional opportunity, but the governmentality at work is diffused, operating through social rather than strictly political mechanisms, and it is no less consequential for being so.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Cultural diversity is a significant feature of the postcolonial city and hence of the Nigerian city. The city is normally constructed as a sphere of international cultural influences and a fusion of different cultures, while the hinterland is constructed as a rural sphere whose focus is essentially on agriculture and traditional cultural and moral practices with emphases on the core values of traditional or local heritage and identity. The Nigerian city, as portrayed in Nollywood films, is however a fusion of the so-called global features of the urban environment and those of

the rural hinterland. There is therefore a convergence of ideologies over time which generates tensions of representation, or what may be called the tensions of rural and urban typologies. For instance, the city advocates urban lifestyles and underscores cities as drivers of social and economic progress while the hinterland, conversely, places emphasis on agriculture, simple rural lifestyles, and a connection with ancestral lands and communities.

Isoken offers the most sustained cinematic exploration of this cultural fusion. The film's costume and production design serve as precise cultural signifiers. *Isoken*'s tailored professional attire marks her as a city subject, while her family's traditional dress codes, especially at ceremonial occasions, signal the persistent weight of hinterland values. The tension the film dramatises is not between modernity and backwardness but between two equally legitimate value systems whose coexistence requires ongoing negotiation rather than resolution in favour of one or the other.

CONCLUSION

All of the selected films in this paper reflect the ideological struggle between 'modernity' associated with the urban environment and the preservation of rural cultures, norms, and traditions by those who migrate or relocate to the city. In depicting the contending ideologies through their characters, visual strategies, narrative structures, sound, dialogue, and symbolic objects, Nollywood films foreground the challenges and complexities of urban migration and cultural preservation and assimilation, and offer insights into the current debates regarding the city as the island with the hinterland constituting the Other. The theoretical frameworks of hybrid modernity, urban legibility, emergent urbanism, and governmentality have proven productive analytical lenses for reading these films, each of which participates actively in constructing the meaning of the Nigerian city and its relationship to the hinterland. Overall, the Nigerian city and its hinterland are, much more than their differences, like the different but mutually interdependent sides of the same coin, as the selected films depict. In this regard, Nollywood urban movies depict a blurring of the ideological boundaries between the city and its hinterland, and in so doing articulate a vision of African modernity that is neither a failed Western ideal nor a simple persistence of tradition but a distinctive, vibrant and uniquely hybrid formation that demands, and merits, serious critical engagement.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has a no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Clement Oshogwe Mamudu
Igbinedion University, Okada, Nigeria

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