

Osuofia in London, Part I (2003) and II (2004)

Uchenna Onuzulike

dir. Kingsley Ogoro; prod. Kingsley Ogoro, Kola Munis; screenplay Kola Munis, Emeka Obiakonwa, Kingsley Ogoro; photography John Ishemeke; music Kingsley Ogoro. color, 105 mins (Part 1), 72 mins (Part 2). Kingsley Ogoro Productions, distrib. Kingsley Ogoro Productions.



Osuofia in London is considered a comedy but features many melodramatic attributes as well. The film is a Nollywood classic—written, directed, and produced by Kingsley Ogoro, and casting Nollywood star Nkem Owoh as *Osuofia*—and is one of Nigeria's most popular film productions. The film is comprised of two parts: Part 1, *Osuofia in London*, was released in 2003, while Part 2, *Osuofia in London 2*, was released in 2004. The film's primary language is English, with some Igbo soundbites. The comedic and melodramatic story was filmed in Nigeria and Britain and is evocative of transnationality, seen, for instance, in its treatment of issues of gender, race, cultural practice, and emotion (Kilian; Krings and Okome; Onuzulike).

Nollywood (sub-)genres are continuously evolving but what remains consistent is an affinity toward explicit or implicit melodramatic themes and settings. Some of Nollywood's prominent genres and themes include: love and romance, comedy, drama, epic, the supernatural, action, and religion. Melodramatic plot lines, grounded in lived experience, are predominant in Nollywood films. Even though Nigeria has produced films in celluloid, it took the videocassette production of → *Living in Bondage* (1992), directed by Chris Obi Rapu (as Vic Mordi), to pave the way for the Nollywood film industry. When he directed the film, Rapu was working for the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). At that time, NTA workers were forbidden to engage in outside work—as a result, he was forced to use a pseudonym, Vic Mordi. The film production was a result of Igbo businessman Kenneth Nnebue's entrepreneurial mindset. Prior to 1992, the traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre of the 1980s, championed by directors such as Chief Hubert Ogunde, and his predecessors like Ola Balogun, had kept the Nigerian film industry alive.

Osuofia in London is about a village man, *Osuofia*, whose brother died in London. He receives the news that his only brother, Donatus, who was very rich, has passed, and that he has inherited his estate. Although *Osuofia* does not want anything to do

with his brother—as he never reached out to the family after travelling to London and did not even send a message when their father died—he changes his mind when he is informed that he is the benefactor of his brother's will. He then mourns Donatus' death and agrees to travel to London to inherit his estate. Upon his arrival in London, he experiences a »culture shock.«

The film opens with a melodramatic scene: Osuofia, a hunter, is aided by four of his five daughters, who are helping him to gain a clear view for shooting his prey, which will be used to prepare some soup. The scene is exaggerated, as his daughters use their heads and hands to support him while he clings to a palm tree with his legs aiming at the animal. When he eventually shoots at the animal, he misses. In the scene in which Osuofia first hears about his brother's death, he refuses to show emotion. But when he realizes that he is the benefactor of his will, he pretends to cry and asks his family to join him. When the family suddenly stops, he requests they cry harder, which they proceed to do. The scene's acting seems to be deliberately overstated, and they in fact appear to laugh while pretending to cry.

Another mockingly melodramatic scene is when Osuofia tries to capture pigeons in a London park. He runs after the pigeons countless times as passers-by watch with awe and laughter. The film shows multiple people, disturbed by his behavior, who try to call the police. Osuofia is arrested and still refuses to let the pigeon go. When the officers reach out to Osuofia's hand for the pigeon, Osuofia takes an oracle, or magic object, from his pocket, and then flashes it to one of the officers, who then becomes disoriented due to its magical power. The officer's reaction to these magical powers is clearly overstated. In fact, the entire scene is excessively overstaged, seen especially in the reactions of Osuofia and the police officers.

Similarly, during Donatus' fiancée Samantha's (played by Mara Derwent) stay in Nigeria, her attempt at poisoning Osuofia's food in order to obtain a signed bank check is depicted in dramatic excess. In this scene, Osuofia pretends that he is poisoned and passed out and is then rushed to the hospital. Upon the arrival of family members, including Samantha, to the hospital, Osuofia continues to pretend he is unconscious while tightly holding a signed check. The doctor's effort to open Osuofia's hand in order to obtain the check is to no avail. The doctor suggests that the only way to obtain the check from Osuofia's palm is to cut off his hand, to which Samantha agrees. In an attempt by the doctor to cut Osuofia's hand, he jumps up from an »unconscious« state and expresses his disappointment in both Samantha and the doctor. Samantha apologizes, and Osuofia forgives her and rewards her by declaring he will give her a portion of the money. He then throws a big farewell party for her return to England.

In sum, *Osuofia in London*, which is primarily considered a comedy, in fact demonstrates an abundance of melodramatic elements interspersed in its plot, just as most Nollywood films do. *Osuofia in London* uses melodramatic means, such as emotionally charged (over)acting, to evoke transnational emotions—as well as to challenge Eurocentrism, which the film also occasionally reproduces. The protagonist's exaggerated performance seeks to appeal to said transnational emotions, as he takes African culture to London while becoming acquainted with Western cultural habits and styles. Nigerians and other Africans in the diaspora relate to this film by remembering their lives both in the diaspora and in Africa. For example, the scenes set in Nigeria evoke traditional lifestyles, while Osuofia's scenes in London remind them about »culture shock« they may have experienced, especially upon entering Western countries. In

general, the film is interspersed with multiple transnational elements. The title, setting, characters, and plot are all distinctly evocative of transnationality, and elements of both African and Western music accompany the action of the film. The film's comic and melodramatic plot may have a long-lasting nostalgic effect on Africans in the diaspora. By now, *Osuofia in London* can surely be considered part of the canon of Nollywood, in the footsteps of such legendary films as *Living in Bondage*.

References

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