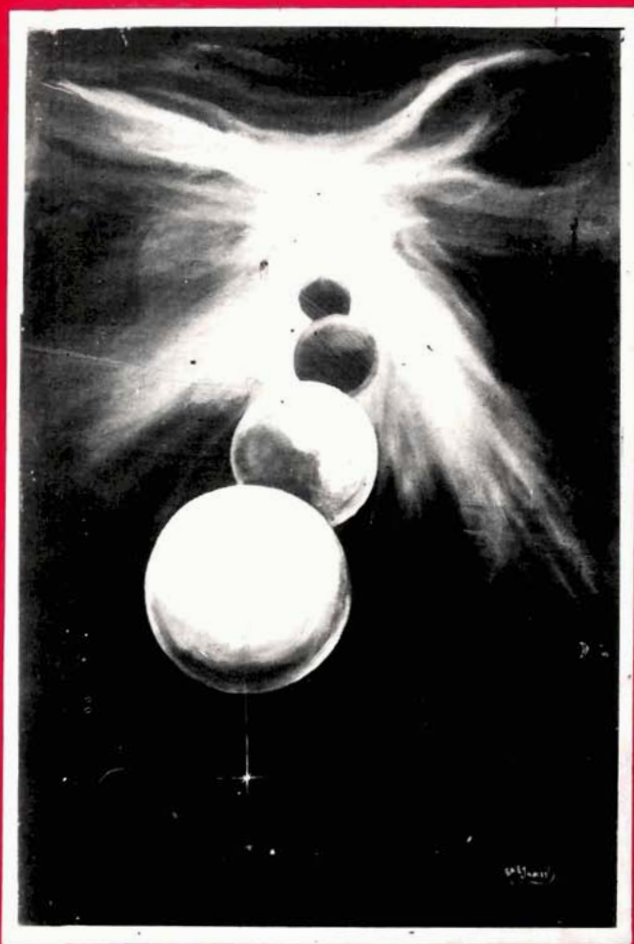




OKIKE

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING



36

OKIKE

An African Journal of New Writing

NUMBER 36, JUNE 1997

Patrons

Prof. Ulli Beier, Chief F.J. Ellah, Dr. Alex I. Ekwueme,
Chief (Dr.) Arthur A. Nwankwo, Alhaji Abdulaziz C. Ude.

Founding Editor
Chinua Achebe

Editor
Onuora Ossie Enekwe

Managing Editor
Obiora Udechukwu

Assistant Editor
Amechi Akwanya

Editorial Assistants
Nathan Nkala, Chika Nwankwo
Sam Onuigbo

Art Editor
Tayo Adenaike

Business Editor
Nnaemeka Ikpeze

Administration/Circulation Assistant
Emeka Agbayi

Secretarial/Administrative Staff
Philomena Ngene
Esther Ogadi

Computer Typesetting
Amuche Ngwu

Contributing Editors
Joe Bruchac, Chinweizu, Ernest Emenyeonu, C.L. Innes, Onwuchekwa Jemie,
Micere Githae Mugo, Emmanuel Obiechina, Joe Skerrett,
Michael Thelwell, Ada Ugah.

*Manuscripts (not more than 15 quarto pages long)
should be in duplicate, typewritten, double-spaced with ample margins.
A brief autobiographical note should accompany each submission.
Unused manuscripts shall not be returned, unless accompanied by
self-addressed, stamped envelopes.*

ISSN 0331-0566

Copyright 1996 OKIKE MAGAZINE, P.O. Box 53, Nsukka, Nigeria.

OKIKE

An African Journal of New Writing

NUMBER 36

June 1997

Contents

Poetry

IK Akonobi	Coup	1
Eze Chi Chiazio	The Other Sex Education	2
	The Soldiers are Marching	3
	At Last	4
Patrick Tagbo		
Oguejiofor	Solitude	5
Gbenga Ajileye	The Withered Rose	12
	They Have Problems Too	18
Yvonne King	Sunshine for His Other-Half	14
	Changes During the Change	15
	In the Garden of Life	16
Cecilia D. Kato	Our Children Are Coming	37
	It Will Rain Again	39
Biodun Sowemimo	Do Not!	41
Jekwu Ikeme	I have come of age	69
	Hell-bound noose descend	70
	Fetters are colourless	70
	Like the Inebriated Nza	73
	We were told	74
	Puzzles of our time	77
Osita Obi	A South African Negro Reminisces	97
	Here Comes the Snow	97
Agbo Eze	At War	99
A. Nicholas Akwanya	Village cemetery	102
Emeka Agbayi	Shrubs and Iroko	104

Stories

Osita Obi	The Spider and the Grave-Digger	6
Titi Adepitan	The House of Judas	42
Emeka Agbayi	Eclipse of Two Suns	79
Biodun Sowemimo	Welcome	100

Essays

Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome	Evolving Popular Media: Nigerian Video Production	18
A. N. Akwanya	Characterization in Soyinka's Fiction: A Study in Typology	53
Raisa Simola	The Image of Africa in the Finnish novel (1978-1988):	85

Book Reviews**Reviewers**

Osita Ezeliora
Sam Onuigbo

Books

Sesan Ajayi: Poetry and Spirituality 108
Bridges of Gold 117

Notes on Contributors

125

Art

James Onwurah Eneh is a painter, graphic artist and singer. A graduate of the University of Benin, he is currently the Studio Head of Dawn Functions Nigeria Limited, Enugu, Nigeria.

Cover: In the beginning

Acknowledgement:

This publication has been made possible by a grant from the
Heinrich Böll Foundation of Cologne, Germany.

Friends of Okike

Hon. Justice Nnaemeka-Agu (rtd)

Dr. George Obiozor

Agunze Chib Iko

Dr. Stanley Macebuh

Chief Greg Mbadiwe

Dr. Chris Ngige

Chief R. C. Okafor

Chief S. O. N. Okafor

Dr. Pat Okeke

IK AKONOB

Coup

Intoxicated
harmattan breeze
drums
on tree leaves.
An old music
an old dance begins.
Suddenly
season's pawns white-haired
swim the streets
drawing dust-curtains open
groping
for a pathway.
The season's coup ...
a new tenure
a new regime
another season
even so ...
flowers wither.

EZE CHI CHIAZO**the other sex education**

(for all the circumcised women of the world)

close your eyes
let's look for the way
use the veil, if you like

husbands have right
to their desires, daughter
we have not

every woman is for a man
therefore, daughter be
for your man

for what does the she-goat
have it behind?
avoid his eyes, the sight

women have no desires
...?
it is so, daughter, it is so

why then are we circumcised?
if not so

everyday
every means

The soldiers are marching

they march all the day long
night falls over us

they march and crush
flowers tremble
humus weep
butterflies recoil their lips

they march all the day long
children refuse to show their heads
even at the tenth month

the soldiers are marching
as though meteorites fall
the snails would not crawl out

soldiers are marching
we can no longer hear
the sweet laughter of children

the soldiers march and streets are empty
only prostitutes show their bodies
and they that have guns laugh

night falls
soon there will be
sighs
groans
barks
howls

will you march along with them?

at last

... and finally
the cock left the hen
and crowed loud

the hen looked at me
stretched the neck
to ask whether I witnessed

I saw it , hen
the earth saw it

PATRICK TAGBO OGUEJIOFOR**Solitude**

(for Vayo)

Must I be told of the impossibility
of returning to a most cherished reality?
Shamelessly I guess heavenwards
staring at the moon, pleading
for the return of the harmattan nights
to have you beside me in warm embrace.

But the grooves of the gods have been
deserted long before our love seasons;
you remember our nightly reading of the HOLY BIBLE
how we cannot open our books
until chapters after chapters of the Holy Scriptures
have been buried in our heart of hearts
But I can now see, Vayo,
the illusion of happiness
and the reality of sorrow
I can now see.

OSITA OBI**The Spider and the Grave-Digger**
(For Chinelo)

As soon as he sensed a sudden burst of sunlight in the silken threshold of his burrow, the spider stirred drowsily and woke up. He crawled to the entrance and thrust his head out into the cool air and the warm sun. The sudden vibrance and warmth of the forestbed lit up by spotlights of rays from the canopy pleased him; he couldn't have hoped for more. He came out quietly in the manner of one accustomed to dignity and solitude and crawled toward a piece of rotten wood, where with the chip of the sun falling on the other side, he rested himself.

But on this other side on which the sun fell, a plump little grasshopper began to chirp, having felt itself threatened by the presence of such a hideous predator. Then it took a swift leap into the air, spread its wide membranous wings out and flew away. The spider merely moved slowly backwards and settled himself again, apparently unagitated. For as aggressive as he was, he hardly attacked unless he was touched, hungry or threatened. But at the moment he was neither threatened, touched or hungry. The night before he had an extremely mouth-watering meal of a yellow-flecked, black millipede and wouldn't be hunting for a day or two. As he sat there, basking in the sun, it seemed nothing in the whole world could stir his peace or ruffle his repose.

Even in this quiet repose, the tarantula spider looked extremely hideous. His head was a rough creation. Thickly clothed with a mat of hair, his head easily appeared larger than it was, not in the least helped by a pair of blob-like compound eyes, a couple of coarsely gleaming fangs and a crack-shaped mouth made worse by some hairy protrusions called pedipalps. His large thorax, darkish brown

and speckled with tiny spots of ash and black, was equally thickly clothed with hair - some short and woolly, some long and stiff. It was from the sides, beneath this broad and tough expanse of the thorax that his eight solid legs protruded, counterbalanced further backwards by an equally large and bulbous abdomen, segmented and studded with hair right to his anus. Beneath this hair, from his head to his abdomen, he was well-clad with a horny skeleton which was impermeable to the attacks of his fellow lower species.

Yet the tarantula spider never left anything to chance; he was ever sensitive to his surroundings. Around him, the bush steamed with sunlight and warmth. Above, the canopy looked like one giant dome perforated with fingers of sun that prodded deep into the forestbed. The birds sang and the crickets chirped. The wind rustled the leaves and drops of yesterday's rain pelted the ground. And the glints of the sun on the wings of insects that flew above flashed intermittently across the sky of green. The forest once again teemed with life of varying shades: earthworms wriggled in their burrows and ants trooped out to forage for food. And in the pods and in the buds and in the loose ground around, caterpillars and larvae stirred ceaselessly to the sudden breath of life.

In all this, the spider relished his solitude reacting occasionally to the movement of the air around him, for he depended largely on the extreme sensitivity of his hairs for the continuous battle for life. And he knew how delicate and precarious existence had proved to be.

So when he presently felt a shadow fly across the sun overhead, he twitched his pedipalps and started. Again the shadow darted over his head. He needn't see what it was; his sight was poor. So his response was swift. He rose on his hind legs, lifted his front legs and brandished his fangs, his long and stiff hairs complementing this menacing posture. Ordinarily, he knew that this posture was a tremendous scare to his fellow spiders and insects alike and that even some rodents and birds readily flew from it. So when he again saw the shadow dart off toward the sun he felt his judgement vindicated. He however retained the posture awhile, then dropped back to the ground and walked a few paces backward.

But he was wrong. The digger wasp was never in the habit of backing off from a posture like that, especially when it was from a tarantula spider. She was equally a formidable creature, with as much an advantage of a really painful sting as had the spider; though not as fearsome but certainly as lethal if it went for the kill.

And it wasn't long before the wasp came buzzing again. This time she flew low over the ground, so low the wind of her broad wings rustled the dead leaves and twigs on the floor. Again, she flew over the spider and the sun shone on her wings. The spider took on his menacing posture once again. But the wasp flew a short distance away and perched on a dry leaf on the floor, then crawled toward him until she faced him.

It was like the meeting of the beauty and the beast: the spider hairy and monstrous with all his eight hairy large legs all about him, looking macho and immovable like marble, the wasp decked with a beautiful deep shiny blue all over, a stunning slim waist, slim legs, slender antennae and broad transparent wings over an oval shaped smooth abdomen. Although nature hadn't manifested any such depravity yet, still the thought of a courtship easily crept into the mind.

But it soon became evident that the wasp had other things in mind as she quickly skirted the spider and again walked up to him and began to stroke him with her slender antennae. She stroked his hairy legs and she stroked his hairy abdomen. But he just stood there dumb and immobile. Yet she would not be discouraged. She walked over to the other side and tickled his pair of hind legs. That did it. He immediately jerked up on all his eight legs, hanging up there as if he were on stilts. One would have expected an immediate and a swift attack. But the tarantula did nothing else! Was this really a wasp? Was there a spell involved or some kind of sexual stimulation? Which insect in this world could molest a tarantula like this without instant repercussion? What was this that defied sense and reason? Tarantula spiders, to say the least, were never known for tolerance. And this one, he neither lacked the vigour nor the venom of his species. Sluggish as he appeared he was designed for speed and always he counted on it. It was

awesome to imagine that his attack and seizure of prey could be so swift that a motion picture taken at the rate of 64 frames per second could only show the result and not the process. His reflexes hardly failed him. But here he was hanging high above in this unfolding drama.

Suddenly the wasp became more urgent, more daring, her movement sharply rhythmic. She crawled around him prodding him with her antennae and her legs. She scurried under him, she walked over him and all he did was walk this way and that way. Then she flew a few inches away and settled herself. As quickly as she did that she set to dig the ground. With her legs and jaws she undertook the task, working so rapidly and diligently as if she worked for time. Then and again she stopped to look at the spider and then went on with her digging. She worked so feverishly that she soon disappeared in the hole she was digging. But again and again she popped out to get a glimpse of the spider. Then she went in again and continued her digging. After a while she crawled out and took a look at what she had done and wiped her limbs.

And somewhere in the bush a wild pigeon broke into a husky tune which rumbled vibrantly in the belly of the canopy. The sun now larger and crimson kept its slow but steady descent down the horizon. The wind came on strong, shaking boughs and tearing down yellow leaves. Insects chirped and flew across the wind. Bugs curled up to rest inside petals of graying flowers. In silence caterpillars ate their crunchy meals, while larvae stirred in their cocoons patiently waiting for the day they could flirt with the wind and frolic in the sun. And somewhere at the back of a serrated leaf a little swallow-tailed butterfly went on laying a bunch of cream-coloured eggs. Life went on best as life could indifferent, disinterested.

Again the wasp flew toward the spider and began another assault. With her antennae she felt him all over again. Then she bent her abdomen and shot out her sting. The spider sensing the renewed urgency in her actions began to back away. Dramatically, the wasp turned on her back and slid along the ground trying to get under his belly. The spider quickened his sideward retreat, the wasp

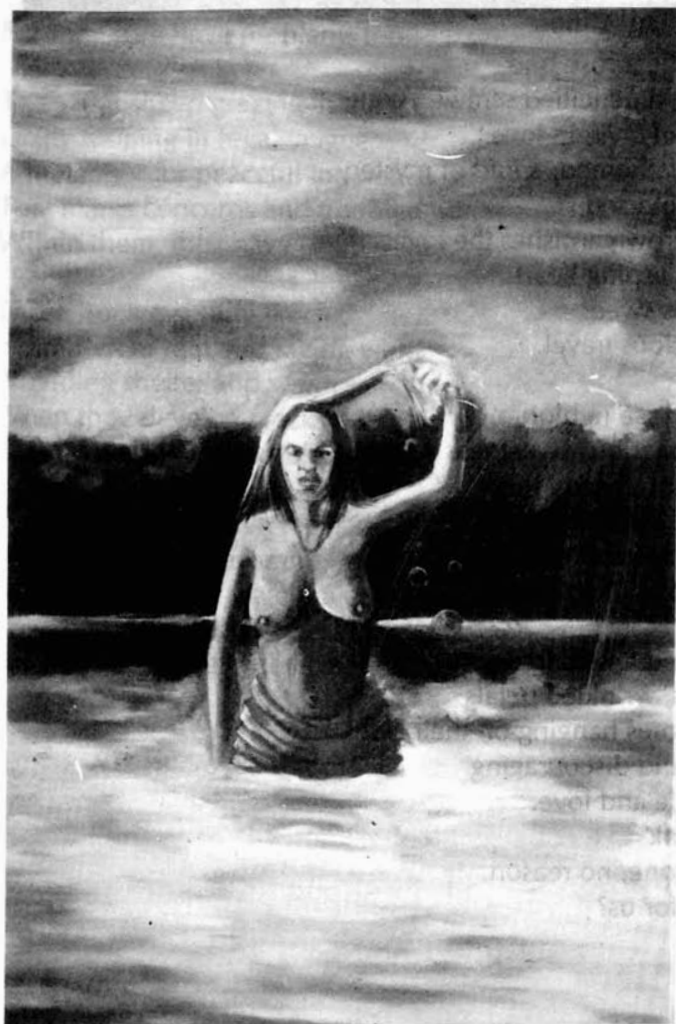
relentlessly pursuing him, until he came to a dead stop, obstructed by the rotten wood. Then he felt the wasp's powerful jaws on one of his legs. It was then that the venom shot into his blood; this provocation couldn't be tolerated any longer. He thrashed his burly hairy legs about in defence. But the wasp yielding no ground dug herself further into position. He kicked forward, he trashed backward. He dragged her this way, he dragged her that way unto the rotten piece of wood. But the wasp held on, all the while searching with the protruding sting for the membrane at the point where the spider's leg was hinged to his breast – the only spot through which his horny armour could be penetrated. Fiercely engaged now they tumbled from the top of that wood and began to roll over and over on the ground. It was more than apparent now that this interlocking of legs and the snapping of jaws had nothing sexual to it; it was the fight for life pursued with such terrifying viciousness that sent the dust up high.

For many frightful minutes they continued this combat with no less pertinacity as when they began. Then suddenly the wasp got the spider wedged to a stump of grass. Swiftly she thrust her sting into the soft spot of his leg and squirted her poison into him. Instantly, a hazy stillness in time swept over both combatants, like in the dropping of the great bomb at Nagasaki. The spider stiffened and fell over on his back, paralysed to his hairs.

The wasp quickly unlocked her grip and surveyed her enormous victim whose legs twitched momentarily and ceased. She cleaned herself on the ground and wiped her slim legs. She saw the blood oozing from the wound on the spider's abdomen and sucked it dry. Then with her jaws she clasped his leg and dragged him deep into the hole she had dug. Whatever ritual it was that she undertook deep in that dark hole for hours, no one would perhaps ever know; since laying her egg and attaching it to the spider's abdomen never took beyond a few minutes.

Soon afterwards, she crawled out of the spider's grave and began bit by bit to fill it up with soil. When satisfied she trampled on it and on the ground around, evidently without spite or malice but with obvious intention to conceal any evidence that a fight for the

continuity of her species was fought and won on that piece of ground. She never thought it worthwhile to erect a statute or leave behind a memorial slab to what was easily a milestone to humans. She quietly spread out her wings wide and flew off, once more in the direction of the vanishing sun.



Deep River Woman

GBENGA AJILEYE**The Withered Rose**

Once you sent me a rose bud
Attached with it, a pencilled scrawl
Poetic message of a virgin love
Unexplored, unfathomed, a fold of mystery.
Guarded and protected
The poisoned arrow garnishes the foyer
Of my excited, gasping heart
But this poison is sweet
In its slow, delicious travel.

Next you sent a rose in bloom
Betraying its mysterious sweetness
Intoxicating, warm, heady flush
Submerging and incapacitating
Reasoning faculties and reasons
If this is life in love, then I yield.

But now you send a withered rose
Faded, scentless, wrinkled petals
Like brown tongues hanging on their sides
Disenchanted and discouraging
The beauty of life and love.
The sheet is blank
My senses are gone, no reason.
Or is it all over for us?

They Have Problems Too

See the butterflies of this world
Flitting and flaunting their pretty wings
Be not deceived by their dainty flips
Everything is not all roses and nectars
For they sure have problems too.

The silent sheep grazing in the green
Lazily moping in regal fatigue
A metaphor for peaceful indolence
That marks concerns and troubled minds
Within them, they have troubles too.

Those houses solidly erected
Indifferent to rain and raging wind
Providing shelter and warm sanctuary
When they develop cracks then you'd know
That they also have problems too.

The eagles high above the earth
Gliding with eyes ever untiring
Belligerent in their watch over the world
Companions in your distress they are
For they sure have problems too.

YVONNE KING**Sunshine for His Other-Half**

His brilliant yellow belly and
Deep olive arms with an
Exotic black mask that
Fails to hide his uniqueness.

He appears out of nowhere,
Visiting daily, And
Whenever she hears the
Familiar knocking at their
Special window,
She goes to greet him.

He peers at her through the glass,
And sometimes through the opening
Their eyes meet
But, he never accepts
Her invitation to come inside ...

His visits are brief but consistent
Just long enough to know she is well,
And to feel her warm utterances,
"Oh, my beautiful, brilliant, yellow bird."

She believes he was sent by her other-half
To watch over her until he is able
Otherwise, he brings sunshine into her life -
As beautiful and brilliant as the masked one.

Transcending the pain of the past
She fell in love with him again

He reciprocated and told her that
"Old love is like old wine -
Stronger, purer, tastier, perfect."

She used to think that
She loved him too much
But later realized that
She was just being honest,
Following her heart
Instead of only her mind

Love can transcend anything
She and her other-half believed
And, now he sends her
A bit of sunshine every day
With a yellow belly, deep olive arms
And an exotic mask.

Changes During the Change

She changed her scene before the Change
Went to Africa hoping to make a home
He wasn't ready and neither was she
Still going through too many changes

Being in Accra was not being in Chicago
And eastern Nigeria was hardly like any part of the States
She had ever lived in.
She had never heard the sound of monkeys
Running across a zinc roof

Or seen them playing outside her kitchen window
Or swing on banana and mango trees and eating guava
She discovered a rhythm within her that flowed
With the changes in nature's tunes.

Five years later they got back together
Talked again about making a home.
Changes before the Change
His culture requires a child from her womb
He wanted to wait, so they did.

After parting, she began to plan and pray
Will it be too late?
Her biological clock was ticking away

At home she has no alarm clock
It broke four years ago and was never repaired
Because the birds wake her every morning, never late
There are certain ones, as if they've been assigned
Mother Nature always seems to provide

Her heart soared dreaming about the renewed chance
To be with him and to make a home
But, then her clock stopped ticking.

He doesn't even know because
He stopped writing
Ironically, the same month it stopped flowing.
Changes during the Change

Has he changed his mind?
Unfortunately, Mother nature never does.
Thank God, every morning the birds still sing.

In the Garden of Life

The sweet smell of the gardenias
Is one of the best rewards of the rains
Remember how she used to keep freshly-cut
Gardenias in the parlor?

The rains finally came this year
And when the first gardenia bloomed
She became nostalgic for the time
When their love blossomed
In and between the lines of their letters
and during the precious few reunions
Under the awesome African sun.

Now she puts freshly-cut gardenias
In a vase inscribed
"Friends are the flowers
In the garden of life."
But, friendship has yet to blossom
As their love once did
Even though the gardenias remain
As beautiful with their sweetness.

JONATHAN HAYNES and ONOOKOME OKOME**Evolving Popular Media: Nigerian Video Production**

Unlike in most of the rest of Africa, in Nigeria (and something similar seems to be happening in Ghana also) film production has been absorbed into the realm of popular culture. Elsewhere, particularly in the francophone countries, film makers have been, for the most part, educated, self-conscious artists, often with political or social motivations, and the system for producing films has included a crucial role for European funding sources and international distribution to film festivals and other non-commercial outlets. In those venues at least, African films tend to be categorized as "art cinema."

In Nigeria, what have proved successful are films, but, since film-making has become prohibitively expensive, dramas are shot directly on video and sold as video cassettes, produced by artists from the Yoruba Travelling Theatre tradition. These artists work outside the international circuits, sustaining themselves, instead, as a form of popular culture in immediate relation with the working classes in Nigeria's cities, particularly those with a considerable Yoruba population. We will briefly discuss this art form and the concept of the African "popular arts" as it has been elaborated by scholars such as Biodun Jeyifo, Karin Barber and Christopher Waterman, before turning to our main theme, which is the recent boom in Igbo video production. This is a very new phenomenon, dating only from 1992 or so. Our remarks on it must be very preliminary, but it appears to be markedly different from the Yoruba Travelling Theatre kind of production, aesthetically and – perhaps even more strikingly – in terms of economic and social organization, and the evolving class and ethnic character of Nigerian popular culture.

There have been a number of excellent studies of the Yoruba Traveling Theatre; the seminal work of Biodun Jeyifo (1984) and then Karin Barber (1986, 1987, 1994) have been the most sophisticated in theorizing its relation to popular culture. Jeyifo argued for the term "popular" (rather than "folk"), as meaning not only that the audiences were large and enthusiastic, but, more specifically, that they embraced "the entire range of occupational and socio-economic groups and classes" (1984:1); the troupes "substantially played to the people as a whole", rather than to exclusive, partial groupings or strata of the population, as is the case with the modern English language, literary theatre" (2). In fact, because class formation in Africa is far more complete, this theatre was also "popular" in the sense of expressing the point of view of the mass of the people as a whole, rather than of some ruling stratum:

the emergence and growth of the Traveling Theatre [are] bound up ... with the rise and phenomenal expansion of "certified" populations in modern Nigeria whose division into distinct groups and classes on the basis of education, status, wealth and political influence have so far been so fluid that no particular group or class has created a hegemonic culture, art form or life-style. In other words ... no integral, dominant ruling class "high culture" has been created in the modern Nigerian society (though there are definitely aspects and fragments of elite culture and life-style largely based on a composite mix of Western middle-class forms and neo-traditional approximations) (3-4).

In her lucid essay "Popular Arts in Africa," Karin Barber gives a summary definition of what she means by "popular art":

Popular art can be taken to mean the large class of new unofficial art forms which are syncretic, concerned with social change, and associated with the masses. The centers of activity in this field are the cities, in their pivotal position between the rural hinterland on the one hand and the metropolitan countries on the other (23).

Barber develops the common tripartite model for defining the popular arts, as being located in the shifting, indeterminate zone between the "traditional" and the Europeanized/elite, both of which

work through more clearly defined conventions and institutions. The popular faces both ways at once – hence the vibrant eclecticism of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, which draws at once on “deep” Yoruba verbal arts and the traditional cosmography evident in the works of Chief Hubert Ogunde, and at the other extreme, the conventions of American situation comedies.

As they straddle cultural origins and genres, the Travelling Theatre practitioners also straddle several media: Barber points to how the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes might be simultaneously involved in stage productions, film, television records, and photo-play magazines, as a way of diversifying their resources in an intensely competitive, marginal economic niche (1987:31). It is of course because the Travelling Theatre troupes had already established a relationship with their audience, outside the commercial cinema distribution system, that they survived as film and video makers while the collapsing economy drove nearly everyone else out of business (on the move into the film and video, see also Balogun, Ekwuazi, Richard, Okome and Haynes). While the formal characteristics of their work have undergone rapid metamorphoses (Jeyifo 17, Barber 1986: 8), Barber sees their socio-economic origins (she follows Waterman and Jewsiewicki in pointing to the nascent petit bourgeoisie as the social layer most involved in producing this sort of art) and their socio-economic organization as the more or less constant elements.

The Yoruba theater companies are small business enterprises operating like others in the Nigerian informal sector. The conditions of their artistic production affect their relations to the mass media; their structure as organizations and, correspondingly, the structure of their plays; and their relations to tradition and modernity The company retains its organizational integrity in relation to television, importing its personnel, its production methods, its style, and its subject matter more or less intact into the new medium. Rather than imposing the uniform stamp of mass culture on these plays, the television seems to be invaded by chunks of the living popular culture that flourishes around it (1987: 65).

As Jeyifo says, the Travelling Theatre practitioners have a strong artisanal, guild consciousness – “extensive relationships of coöperation and competition between the companies [have led] to the very strong sense of corporate group identity and vocational distinctiveness that exists among them today” (7). This has helped preserve their integrity, but it has also proved a limiting factor: their method of distributing their films restricts them to an artisanal basis rather than an industrial and international one (Richard, 163-4); they have seldom attempted to master cinematic technique on a fully professional basis, and have tended to have rocky relationships with cinema professionals or those perceived as interlopers.

It has always been problematic simply to equate the work of the Travelling Theatre artists with “Yoruba” cinema or video production – such ethnic labels are always dangerous, and we will come back to these issues at the end of this paper. The social basis of Yoruba-language production seems to have blurred as the professional video production houses in Lagos entered the picture, along with actors and directors who came from television or elsewhere, and who have tended to produce dramas set in the glamorous urban environment that are characteristic of the new Igbo videos.

In any case, the production of the Igbo videos is organized very differently. To begin with, Igbo video production can be much more highly capitalized – instead of relying on the resources of a struggling small-scale entrepreneur, the actor/manager of a theatre troupe, these videos draw on the wealth of the Igbo business class. They may be backed by big merchants from Onitsha or Aba or elsewhere, and the properties used to represent the lavish lifestyles which are a normal feature of these videos come through business networks of fashion houses, real estate brokers, car dealers, and so on, who are often eager to provide sponsorship for its publicity value. Directors and technicians are drawn from a pool of professionals, and there is a concerted effort to build a star system of actors with name recognition, whose presence (as in Hollywood) will guarantee the investment in the project. Current stars have mostly made their reputations through television appearances, but vehicles such as the magazine *Nigerian Videos* are designed to

create an arena of publicity based in the videos themselves. Drawn by the prospect of relatively huge salaries (stars can make ₦50,000 for an appearance in a video), would-be actors are flocking to the new industry from modelling careers, State Arts Councils, and the universities. The financial muscle behind these productions is also brought to bear on the distribution end: large numbers of copies of the cassettes are made at once and distributed through numerous channels, to discourage pirates and maximize publicity. There are large profits to be made: in an interview the producer Okechukwu Ogunjiofor said that with the ₦1,500 he had on him and a loan of ₦3,000, he immediately embarked on the shooting of *Circle of Doom*, from which he was able to buy a Benz and secure a comfortable home (*Nigerian Videos*, Vol. 2 No. 1, p.20).

These videos reach an audience that is almost entirely different from that of the original Yoruba Travelling Theatres: the differences extend along axes of ethnicity, gender, age and class. The ethnic difference is the most obvious. Yoruba films and videos are fairly seldom subtitled, and only a few have been made in Pidgin (*Jagua* is a conspicuous exception); in general there has seemed to be little interest in making the concessions necessary to attract a non-Yoruba speaking audience. The Igbo community has naturally offered exciting support to its new cultural expression, but the videos are normally subtitled or contain a fair amount of English and/or Pidgin, as if aiming at an audience beyond that of the Igbo ethnic group.

The gender issue is perhaps less obvious but of deep if largely unexplored, significance. Everywhere in Nigeria cinema-going is predominantly a male activity, and, for that matter, an activity for younger, poorer, and rowdier males; it is considered of more or less dubious respectability for girls and women. As Brian Larkin has pointed out in the context of Northern Nigeria, the advent of television and then video cassettes has opened up to women a media environment that was largely closed to them before (25-27).

The class character of the audience also needs to be investigated through empirical research. It would of course be a serious mistake to imagine that the luxury that appears in these videos corresponds

at all to the life-style of its audience, in these days of SAP and the near annihilation of the Nigerian middle class. One might remember, for the sake of comparison, that Hollywood consolidated its role as dream factory during the depths of the Great Depression, and that *Dallas* and *Dynasty* had their greatest following among the American lower middle and working classes. One of the signs of the incomplete process of class formation in Nigeria is that – particularly in cultures like the Igbo (and for that matter, the Yoruba) where individual dynamics is much prized.– nearly everyone aspires to rise socially and imagines there is some prospect of doing so, however slim the chances really are, so that the dream vision of an elite lifestyle is in some sense common property (Barber 1987:18?, Waterman).

It is perhaps safe to make a couple of assertions. One is that ownership of a VCR and television set, while now a nearly universal aspiration, is in fact restricted to a large minority of the urban population. The younger and rougher cinema-going crowd may have access to these videos through video parlours, but in general one imagines this sort of production being consumed in a middle class sitting room, by small groups of people linked by family or close social ties. The audience is in any case assembled in a privatized manner quite different from that of cinemas or the live audience of the Yoruba nation. Without entirely inscribing this process within a sentimental narrative of the breakdown of an original, traditional, unmediated community into modern alienation, we must recognize that video cassette production is a much more commodified form, a fact that has deep social as well as aesthetic consequences. Gone is the excitement generated by the presence of the actors at screenings of their films, and the general excitation of a popular neighborhood by a sound track advertising the film or the performance. The best studies of the Yoruba performance arts, or indeed of African arts in general have stressed how central are the immediate contact between performer and audience in the moment of performance, and the characteristic emphasis on social process rather than isolated aesthetic object. Only more or less dim echoes of this can be caught on video cassettes; once the videos stop being

essentially records of performances in another medium it is natural for them to move towards an aesthetic formed on a different basis exploiting different values and potentials.

The rise of the Igbo videos also corresponds to, among other things, a decline in public safety which makes going out at night a dubious proposition for the middle classes. The Igbo middle classes did not for the most part have the habit of going out in the evenings to things like theatre or cinema anyway, so that in their case the video cassettes do not displace an anterior indigenous cultural form as much as they claim a share of the market in televised and recorded video products, most of which are imported. It is no accident that the new Igbo videos have stirred up this depth and breadth of excitement, not least in the fairly broad layers of society that have grown up saturated by products of the international, chiefly American, culture industry. They were ready to make a response.

"Hollywood" is constantly invoked as the model or inspiration. How are we to understand this? Partly it refers to the attempt to create a proper entertainment industry. The differences between Hollywood and Igbo video-making, in scale of finance and in specialization and intensity of labor processes, not to mention the aesthetic and cultural differences in the products, are much more impressive than the similarities. Nevertheless perhaps enough has been said to suggest that the emerging production structures represent an attempt on the part of dynamic and modern operators to set up audiovisual production on a full capitalist, industrial basis, aspiring to the technical capacity to copy the look of at least the minor Hollywood genres. This will have to develop gradually with the market, and will have to contend with formidable difficulties – the general parlous state of the Nigerian economy, for one thing, and the fact that most of the sources of Hollywood's revenue are currently unavailable (theatrical release in cinemas, video rentals as opposed to sales, and sale of television broadcasting rights). Still the beginning that has been made is immensely promising and perhaps will provide the basis for a true film industry at some point in the future when circumstances again permit sustained production of celluloid. This is no small thing.

"Hollywood" is also the name of a cultural aspiration, to imitate the world's most powerful cultural formation. This aspiration is ambivalent, as this sort of colonial/post-colonial imitation usually is. It is meant partly as an assertion of African cultural power and dignity within the world media environment: it is frequently said that the Igbo videos are meant to provide images of a modern and prosperous urban Africa for Nigerians abroad to show their white friends who imagine Africa as all bush, villages and wild animals. It seems unlikely that this scenario is actually enacted very often, but psychologically and symbolically it is important. This imitation also contains within it an admission of distance and insufficiency. From a certain point of view – a point of view pretty well represented among Nigerian film critics² – the invocation of Hollywood might seem like a betrayal of African culture in the face of the neo-colonial invasion of foreign media. The real object of imitation is certain American television genres (rather than block-buster films) – particularly melodramatic TV movies and evening soap operas. Generally this tends to exclude the sort of cultural spectacle patented by Chief Hubert Ogunde, created at an historical moment when it coincided with anti-colonial cultural assertion, providing an image of a "usable past" governed by a noble, colourful, and intact tradition. This has remained one of the resources of the Yoruba filmmakers and videographers. The new Igbo work certainly encodes responses to modernity, urbanism and so on that are specifically African, Nigerian, and even Igbo, but it mostly does without overt, formal reference to a "deep" ethnic tradition and world view. The main reason for this would seem to be historical. These works are the expression of an aggressive commercial mentality, whose fields of activity is Nigeria's cities – and not only the Igbo cities. Attention is resolutely turned towards sources of wealth and change; the villages tend to figure only in more or less cursory backwards glances or, in the case of *Ikuku* for instance (see below) the village itself is fully caught up in the process of change. The nation, the state apparatus and the ethnic political claims are invisible, doubtless mostly for generic reasons, but probably also because they are being by-passed in despair. Beyond Nigeria's cities are international circuits in which

Igbos are famously active as traders, from which a commercial cultural imagery is being imported. Nigerian video production itself has important material links with the Nigerian Diaspora: post-production may be done in London, videos are sold to the Nigerian community abroad, and, significantly, the magazine *Nigerian Videos* has a London edition.

In the "post-colonial" theory being developed principally in the West, cultural hybridity and transitional networks are celebrated as positive values. The creative spirit of Africa is being looked for less in the form of an eternal, uncorrupted traditional cultural essence, and more as something realized through the historical process of interaction with other cultures, African and non-African. The story of the tortured relations between colonized intellectuals and European and traditional African cultures is familiar enough; interest is shifting to the apparently much less conflicting way in which popular culture has absorbed foreign influences – Barber is summarizing this train of thought when she lists syncretism as an essential feature of the popular arts. There is a long history, all over Africa, of the influence of American (and Indian) film culture, particularly among youth groups, who may construct an alternative culture for themselves out of such materials (sporting the names of movie stars and so on) (see for instance Jean Rouch's film *Moi, un noir*, and *Ranger*, 255; Bayart, 28; Hecht and Simone, *passim*). This is a way of playing, more or less subversively, with Africa's dependent position in the world system; it is also likely to be a strategy for escaping from the control of elders and other local authority figures. According to Jean-Francois Bayart, "extraversion" – pursuing resources from abroad – has been a game ruler and ruled have played competitively against one another throughout African history (21-29). It makes sense that the most extraverted of Nigeria's ethnic groups should turn to this strategy with a vengeance at a moment when the national situation is so full of trials and frustrations.

This dynamic popular culture is doubtless in play in the imitation of American forms, but still the situation has to be evaluated as a specific historical instance, which may certainly have negative

aspects. The producer Ogunjiofor himself sees the degree of imitation as a sign of immaturity:

It is Ogunjiofor's belief that the video-film world in Nigeria has not started yet.

We have a long way to go, he opined, adding that we are imitative; we produce in English and adopt western concepts which are lost on our people who buy our films. (*Nigerian Videos*, 21).

This is perhaps the price paid for being insufficiently rooted, abandoning the cultural nationalist project so completely that one abandons one's own culture and people. A model-turned-actor interviewed by *Nigerian Videos* expresses a dream of escape into a foreign fantasy world of individual advancement:

I'd always wanted to be famous and had always looked to a career in acting or sports as a way of realising this dream which, at the same time, I had felt could only be possible in either Europe or American. But when I wasn't making a headway in this direction I turned my sight inward and tried to see how I could achieve the same dream right here in Nigeria (14).

There does seem to be something alienated here – not the subversive play of a subordinated social group, but a strategy for finding an individual loophole in the world system. The nation becomes the place where a second-best imitation of the real thing can be constructed, using, as the *mise-en-scene*, the life-style of an elite which is detaching himself more and more decisively from the life of the rest of the nation.

The conjunction of the representation of a luxurious elite life-style and an incipient organization of video production might suggest that there is a serious tendency towards consolidation of a bourgeois art form that would detach itself from the category of the "popular arts." But this is probably misleading, or at most only partially true. The essential heterogeneity, fluidity, and unboundedness of social groups in Africa makes it difficult to talk of fully formed "classes" in the European sense at all. In Nigeria the class situation is further destabilized because of extreme underlying economic instability, the possibility of rapid mobility for a limited few, and nearly universal

aspirations for individual advancement which tend to inhibit the formation of class consciousness (Waterman, 223-28). In addition to the remarks quoted above on the failure of the African ruling class to create a hegemonic culture, Jeyifo has pointed out that, with a few exceptions, "the exclusive appropriation of theatrical form by a social group, or class did not, and has not historically advanced far in Africa." (31) This will almost certainly remain true for video production, even if sectors of it become more heavily capitalized and industrialized, given the existing models of very low-budget production and distribution in the formal sector. The popular audience is not apt to let video production slip entirely out of its control. Some of the ways in which the popular imagination asserts its sway over the videos are discussed below in reference to *Living in Bondage*.

Still the "popular arts" themselves are not a monolithic ahistorical formation, and in determining the specific class character of the Igbo video productions it helps to look at the elite from whom the money for these productions usually comes. This is not the older educated elite, tied to nationalist ideologies. It is also not the state institutions (including the universities), which had a deeper connection to the European elite culture which it also sought to displace. This is rather a commercial elite, much less educated but now exercising a considerable ideological hegemony over a generation that would previously have looked to the universities as a path for advancement. They may well be directly connected to the global economy through import trading or emigration, but culturally their commerce is with American mass culture. This social formation shades at one end into the culture of mushroom banks, 419, pirated American Videos, imitation car parts, fake electronics – all the products of the legendary Igbo wit for producing simulacra of the industrialized world.

At their worst the video dramas produced on this socio-economic basis, and with the plainest commercial motives, are thin and false, advertisements for unbridled acquisitiveness and an elite lifestyle which can hardly be attained honestly. But this is of course not the whole story. The spectacle of luxury is normally accompanied by a

moralizing commentary which appeals to more traditional values. In this they resemble Indian films, which have similarly vested forms of melodrama borrowed from the West with a conflict between a materially attractive modernity and a morally normative tradition, a conflict which is quite foreign to Hollywood (see Larkin, 9-12, and the references he cites).

Living in Bondage, which was the first Igbo video hit, exemplifies the characteristic handling of the urban scene. It takes place in Lagos. Andy, the main character, gets entangled with a group of upwardly mobile dubious Igbo business men. He is avaricious, gullible, and envious of them. He seeks to join their group, and is gradually let in to their secret world. Finally, the real price of membership is demanded of him: he must present his wife for sacrifice. Entered so far with them, he cannot opt out. He kills his wife in a bizarre ritual scene, and immediately begins to prosper.

The narrative brings us to this point very quickly. Now we watch Andy enjoying his wealth for a time, in the style of his upwardly mobile friends: philandering in bars, frequenting posh hotels, and generally conspicuously consuming in the most crude and flagrant manner. This is the sign of his "arrival", as he accumulates the markers of his new social position.

But even as it records the lifestyle of this dubious and thieving elite, the story turns towards teaching a moral, as it must do. Andy's problems start when he tries to marry a new wife. His first wife begins to haunt him as a nightmarish apparition. For a while he copes with this, but eventually goes mad, raving and picking morsels from rubbish heaps in downtown Lagos. The news gets to his village, where a family council is summoned and a delegation sent to bring back the mad son from the city. The rest is a story of rehabilitation. Andy is taken to one of the Pentecostal churches, and when nothing else works he is removed to a *dibia's* home for herbal cures and spiritual exorcism.

The threads of the story which are left unexplored are revealing. Many social issues are touched upon but then dropped immediately, such as the options open to Andy as he initially faces the problems

of unemployment and coping with the city and its attractions, or the episode in which his wife is thrown out of her job because she will not sleep with the boss. Her death does not lead to a criminal case, and the fortunes of the other members of the group of ritual killers are not investigated. When Andy goes mad he is not sent to a modern asylum for the mentally ill, but back to the village, the church, and traditional healing practices. Once Andy's personality breaks down the scene and point of view become that of the village community, for whom the city and its attractions are of little importance. Personality and identity are thus presented as complex and layered, and it is the more modern and individualized part that falls prey to the devouring city, and has to find redemption from tradition. One might be tempted to say that it is a traditional moral scheme and narrative imagination that figures the drama of city life as one of ritual murder – except that the urban vampire story is one propagated in the cities, by city dwellers, to make sense of their own condition. It has passed through various ethnic groups, forming part of the mixed, modern culture of the cities – many parallel instances can be found in Yoruba films and videos, or even those being produced in Ghana.

We are then not really dealing with a polarized opposition where modernity and the urban scene are on one side, and tradition, magic and the rural village are on the other, and serve as the answer to all problems. Andy's story doesn't intersect with modern legitimate institutions which would solve problems of mental health, missing persons, sexual harassment or unemployment, because such institutions aren't available to the mass popular audience, which has only family, traditional healers and churches to fall back on when the city overwhelms them.

The representation of the city is subsumed by a logic of acquisitive desire and magic because this same vast floating desperate mass of the population needs figures for the social processes of post oil boom Nigeria, which seem occult because they have so little to do with work or productive social processes (Barber). They are organized by cliques and cabals enriching themselves at the expense of others, following the slogan "chop make I chop."

Upward mobility is everything, and there are very few people in a position to demand, or even interested in, accountability or transparency from those who have made it. Andy repeatedly replies, to questions about his identity, "I am a businessman" – a supremely vague description in this situation where it means everything and nothing. There is little in the way of available political ideology that really makes sense of this mess. Popular consciousness, built on a disposition in traditional Igbo culture to favor individual dynamism and ambition, is fascinated with the art and strategy of getting ahead in this world, and of course admiring of the spectacle of luxury that accompanies it, even as it registers horror at the moral anarchy. It is therefore very easy for the video dramas aimed at this audience to misrecognize the real social and political issues facing the urban masses, representing them in a way that falsifies the problems and makes solutions unimaginable. In Hollywood and the Indian film industry, both under the control of a consolidated bourgeoisie, mass culture is certainly designed to have a politically soporific effect. In Nigeria the problems are rooted more in limitations inherent in popular consciousness, though it is possible that in so far as something like a culture industry is set up in Nigeria it will begin to resemble these other cases.

One recurring form through which this anarchy is expressed is the sacrifice of marital relations on the altar of greed, to support a glamorous urban lifestyle. This happens with allegorical clarity in *Living in Bondage*, but it also features in a number of the other most popular Igbo videos, such as *True Confessions* and *Glamour Girls*; it is given a mythological turn in *Nneka I* and *II*. These dramas all invest their female characters with immense frightening power – the nightmare projections of the males who control video production, but which resonate with everyone whose psychological relationships have been rendered insecure by the precarious struggle for existence.

While the urban scene is dominant in the Igbo productions, we do not mean to suggest that they are limited to any one location, physical, social or ideological – their openness is one of the most promising things about them. *Ikuku/Hurricane*, written and directed

by Nkem Owoh (*Andy Best Productions, 1995*), is set in a village, and takes a village perspective on things; but it does something that is quite rare in the Igbo productions, which is to present the village in historical fashion, as being in an uncompleted relation to the forces of modernization, rather than as being a pure repository of uncorrupted values or as the scene for essentially timeless stories of magical encounters.

The village is beset by a terrible wind (which is never really represented) because the priest of the Ikuku shrine has died without a successor. A diviner says the priesthood will fall on the Ezigbo family, and eliminates as a candidate one of its members, the town drunk Osuofia. The only other known male is Dr. Raymond, a nuclear physicist living in Lagos, recently recalled from abroad by the Government. Nobody knows that a boy called Stephen is the illegitimate son of Osuofia – he's obviously the right candidate as he suffers visions of the oracle and of his father, but the film never gets around to a discovery scene which would resolve this situation. A délégation is sent to visit Dr. Raymond in Lagos. Found in his luxurious home, he treats the delegation rudely, with no respect for kinship, let alone the shrine to whose priesthood he has been called. Eventually, however, he is forced into returning to the village by a series of catastrophes that befall his life in Lagos: his chickens all die, somebody poisons his dog, his grant letter goes missing, and the engine of his Volvo car knocks.

Much comedy is made of his cultural alienation once he returns to the village. He speaks English to the oracle, puts on surgical gloves to handle kola nut, expects there to be files on the job as priest and a bank account to support sacrifices, and allows his foreign wife to commit various sacrileges, for which she suffers magical retribution.

In a parallel plot, the Igwe's son and heir has also returned: Jeff has acquired a fake American accent in Lagos, along with the dress and manners of a street hustler, and he brings along a fiancée called Jenny who can't cook and has no intention of learning how to. Jeff will clearly never be able to succeed his father. The theme of acculturation to the wider world is carried on throughout the film

