



T A P E PRESENTS: BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?

Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)

The stunning feature debut from the Esiri twin brothers, Arie and Chuko, opens on a chaos of red, yellow, green and black electric cables, echoing the currents of desire which animate the film. *Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)* is a tale of restless mobility and broken dreams of migration across Lagos, told from the perspective of Mofe (Jude Akuwudike) and Rosa (Temi Ami-Williams). Passports function throughout as sacred objects to be touched, caressed, circulated, displayed, constantly asked about and gazed at silently, religiously – the green tones of the Nigerian passport haunting Arseni Khachaturan’s cinematography.

While these documents individualise, the movie exposes the intricate web of entanglements Mofe and Rosa find themselves in, making migration as an individual journey difficult, even impossible. (Mofe dreams of Spain, in the film’s first part; Rosa of Italy, in the second.) Mofe takes care of his siblings in lieu of his stingy father. Rosa looks after her pregnant sister Grace (Cynthia Ebijie), sent to live with her from the village. Both characters are engulfed in the Kafkaesque nature of Nigerian bureaucracy and the constant need for copious naira banknotes to kickstart the machine.

Despite the attempt to establish a symmetry between Mofe and Rosa, her part feels a bit less textured and intimate than Mofe’s. Rosa is a hairdresser by day and waitress by night. While we get a sense of the craft at play in Mofe’s profession, with long takes following the intricate pathways of the electric circuits and close ups of his hands at work, hairdressing does not get the same focus. Instead this kind of minute attention is shifted onto Rosa’s relationships and the material gains she makes from them, as well as the all too familiar scripts of juju oaths and her future prospects, whether marriage in Lagos or the implication of prostitution in Italy.

Shooting on 16mm film, the Esiri brothers and DP Khachaturan powerfully redefine visual representations of Lagos, giving it a timeless feel, similar to Edward Yang’s immortalisation of another megalopolis in *Taipei Story* (1985). In contrast to the proliferation of distanced, drone-like and high angle perspectives of the city, they give us a sense of proximity and intimacy, capturing something of Lagos’s indomitable spirit and quotidian hopes, beyond typical images of yellow danfos (informal private transport vans). In the rare moments shot at a high angle – from a building, for instance – there is still a sense of groundedness as the camera, far from a depersonalised gaze, follows Mofe or Rosa, walking in the vibrant and coloured environment of Oshodi Market or the streets of Mushin.

We get a sense of the hustle and bustle Lagos is known for through the relentless labour of the protagonists, night and day. This temporal duality is visually expressed through the work of costume designer Daniel Obasi. He selects a rich red velvet uniform for Mofe’s diurnal electrician uniform and a more terse, black fabric for his night-time security job. The hustle takes on at times sisyphal qualities, as the film touches on the sad reality of carbon monoxide poisoning from generator fumes, which regularly affect a significant number of people in Lagos. As we leave Mofe and Rosa on a bittersweet ending, highlife musician Ifeanyi Eddie Okwedy’s tune ‘Happy Survival’ lingers with us.

As the first film supported by new Lagos-based production company, GDN Studios, *Eyimofe* is part of a promising new wave of Nigerian cinema which seeks to break away from the shadow of Nollywood. It is bold, unafraid of proposing new cinematic languages while engaging complex social issues.

Chrystel Oloukoï, *Sight & Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound, 16 October 2020

Arie & Chuko on 'Eyimofe'

What inspired you to write Eyimofe?

Chuko: In earnest I wrote the film over three years and it evolved quite a bit from its very first iteration, but I would say that at the heart of the first version of this film and the final version of this film was a story about Nigeria really. About migration and about the way in which the country, and Lagos particularly, interacts with its citizens and how that can on the one hand give you opportunities and on the other hand push you out. I remember reading James Joyce's book *Dubliners* and in reading it Joyce said that he aimed to put up a well-polished looking glass into Dublin and the Irish people, and that for me was a moment that really crystallized what I was trying to do in the story, in the screenplay of this movie. It really came out of a time when I was wondering what sort of future I could have in Nigeria and was wondering what sort of future Nigeria could have for itself, and I was really beginning to understand this allure of getting out, and I put those feelings on paper and into this.

Nigeria is formed of over 200 tribes. What was it like telling the story of the everyday person and best representing this dynamic?

Chuko: I personally don't consider tribalistic factors. I think the notion of tribes, particularly in the South is very much an inheritance from a darker time. The story was told in Lagos and Lagos is located in what can be referred to as a 'Yoruba' region of Nigeria, but every tribe is represented in Lagos. So I didn't have ethnic or religious concerns. In day to day lives you'll see Igbos mixing with Yurobas; married to Yorubas. Christians mixing with Muslims. It's a melting pot. The notion of tribe and religious division are things that were used as weapons by colonials and today they are used as weapons by politicians.

What was your biggest challenge when making this film?

Arie: The biggest challenge in shooting in a place like Lagos will always be infrastructural. This is a city of 20 million people with no organised public transport system and exceptionally bad traffic, very few traffic lights at intersections and all these kinds of things. Uneven roads, inconsistent power and water supply. So trying to tackle a film of this scale in which you're trying to make the city a third character, and shooting in over 40 something locations with a sizeable crew is very tricky to navigate. There was also the additional challenge of shooting on film in a country that has no processing labs so for the most part we were shooting blind where you kind of shoot and don't get your dailies back immediately. We were seeing what we shot almost five days after the fact and that left a lot of work for our director of photography

Was there any particular reason you chose to shoot on film?

Arie: For starters I had been shooting exclusively on film for about a year before we began production on *Eyimofe* and I felt like my work had transformed. The texture of film is unbeatable and film has had a very recent

resurgence with Kodak, and I had started conversations with them then about getting their support to shoot on film and to get myself acquainted with the medium, and Kodak was very helpful. A lot of people that are shooting on digital now are trying to emulate what film does and they are getting closer and closer but they still can't get that same quality that film gives you. I think shooting on film also changes the discipline on set; it changes the dynamic as people are a lot more focused and you have to be a lot more precise. But ultimately the filmmakers we love like Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien, pretty much all their movies we loved were shot on film. And you just see what it does to a place, you see how it brings places like Taiwan to life – which is something we wanted to emulate in our film. Again because Lagos is very central to the story.

Production notes

What's in a Name?

In this documentary short, Brits explore the challenges they've encountered with their non-Western names.

EYIMOFÉ (THIS IS MY DESIRE)

Directed by: Arie & Chuko

©: Eyimofe LLC

a Kimiera production: Kimiera

Production Companies: GDN Productions, Ominira Studios

Presented by: GDN Studios

Executive Producers: Albert Esiri, Maiden Alex Ibru,

Toke Alex Ibru, Salman Zoueihed, Kayode Akindele,

Ifeoma Esiri, Olorogun Oskar Ibru, Christopher Ibru

Produced by: Melissa Adeyemo, Arie Esiri, Chuko Esiri

Location Manager: Bernard Awele

Script Supervisor: Lilian Ukwu

Casting by: Kemi Lala Akindoju

Written by: Chuko Esiri

Director of Photography: Arseni Khachaturan

Practical Effects Supervisor: Victor Akpan

Edited by: Andrew Stephen Lee

Production Designer: Taisa Malour

Art Director: Abisola Olarenwaju Effiong

Set Decorator: Suja Ono

Costume Designer: Daniel Obasi

Music by: Akin Adebawale

Sound Mixer: Pius Fatoke

Cast

Jude Akuwudike (*Mofe*)

Tomiwa Edun (*Seyu*)

Temi Ami-Williams (*Rosa*)

Cynthia Ebijie (*Grace*)

Jacob Alexander (*Peter*)

Chioma Omeruah (*Mama Esther*)

Nigeria/USA 2020

116 mins

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Director: Runyararo Mapfumo

UK 2020

11min

T A P E PRESENTS: BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?

Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)

Thu 1 Jul 20:30; Fri 9 Jul 17:40

Black Girl (La noire de...)

Sat 3 Jul 11:40; Mon 12 Jul 18:20

Burning an Illusion

Sat 3 Jul 14:20; Thu 8 Jul 17:45

While We Live (Medan vi lever)

Sat 3 Jul 17:30; Tue 20 Jul 20:30

Binti

Sun 4 Jul 18:20; Mon 19 Jul 20:40

Pinky

Sat 10 Jul 20:50; Sat 24 Jul 11:40

Head-On (Gegen die Wand)

Sun 11 Jul 18:30; Tue 27 Jul 20:40

The Namesake

Wed 14 Jul 17:40 (+ live spoken-word performance);

Wed 21 Jul 20:40

What Will People Say (Hva vil folk si)

Fri 16 Jul 20:30; Sat 31 Jul 17:30

In Conversation with Nikesh Shukla

Fri 23 Jul 18:20

Lilting

Sat 24 Jul 17:20; Fri 30 Jul 20:40

Shoot the Messenger + Q&A with director Ngozi Onwurah,

hosted by T A P E's Angela Moneke

Thu 29 Jul 17:45

Culture Shock: Short Film Programme + Q&A with UNDR LNDN

Fri 30 Jul 17:40

T A P E was founded in 2015 as a response to the lack of representation on screen. Find out more about this curatorial collective at

tapecollective.co.uk

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780