

FILM REVIEW

Faraday Okoro, director. *Nigerian Prince*. 2018. 104 minutes. English and Igbo. Nigeria and United States. Vertical Entertainment. Streaming on Netflix. No price reported.

The film *Nigerian Prince* was written and directed by Faraday Okoro, a Nigerian-American based in the United States, and funded through US sources. In terms of its technical quality, notably its picture and audio quality, it is quite well made. The film was shot largely in Nigeria, and the setting of the scenes, particularly those at the airport, contribute a level of authenticity to the story.


Nigerian Prince tells a compelling story. Eze, a Nigerian American teenager, reluctantly comes to Nigeria for what he believes is a short stay with his aunt. Upon realizing that his mother has deceived him, and that he is meant to remain in Nigeria for a much longer period, he turns to his cousin Pius for help in getting back to America. Pius is a fraudster who is involved, among other fraudulent activities, in the advance fee email scam, popularly referred to as the Nigerian prince scam, from which the film derives its title.

The film's positioning as a Nollywood product is debatable, as the film appears to lack that self-reflection that Nollywood films typically embody. According to O. Okome ("Nollywood: Spectatorship, audience and the sites of consumption," *Postcolonial Text* 3 (2), 2007), "One of the characteristics that marks Nollywood as an autonomous local cinematic expression is that it looks inward and not outward." C. Okoye ("Looking at Ourselves in our Mirror: Agency, Counter-Discourse, and the Nigerian Video Film," *Film International* (28), 20–29, 2007) refers to this as "one of the truly successful strategies in the postcolonial agenda of constructing a sovereign framework." The viewpoint of *Nigerian Prince* is outward-looking, in that the stories of Eze and Pius appear to be told from the outside and for outsiders. As a consequence, the film falls into the trap of what Chimamanda Adichie refers to as the single story: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" ("The danger of a single story" [Video], TED Conferences, 2009). While it is true that corruption is a reality in Nigeria, it is not the sole reality, which is the main impression that the film leaves its viewers with.

Not much is done to portray other aspects of Nigerian society; on the contrary, there is a rather heavy use of the tarring brush, such as in the moment when Eze, after taking a mouthful of what, ironically, appears to be a burger rather than any recognizable Nigerian dish, expresses his revulsion at “Nigerian food” and spits it out. Attention is drawn to infrastructural problems such as poor water and electricity supply, but insufficient consideration is given to the development of the characters. Due to the film’s failure to flesh out the characters, they come across as one-dimensional—the spoiled/rude teenager always wanting his way; the greedy unscrupulous scammer; the wicked unsympathetic aunt. The failure to provide backstories to explain why these characters are the way they are and their lack of growth during the film emphasize the notion of the single story. These are stock characters whose importance in the story derives solely from the need to confirm the stereotypes held by the external viewer. As such, the characters largely lack authenticity. For instance, Eze’s aunt is said to be a university professor, but her dingy one-bedroom apartment, her piggybacking with Eze on the same motorbike, and the use of a kerosine lantern for light denote a much lower economic status. Also, Pius, played by a Nigerian American actor, speaks with an unconvincing accent that comes across as anything but Nigerian.

Nigerian Prince ends with Pius, in a bid to escape a threat against his life, stealing Eze’s American passport and bribing the person at the airport check-in counter to be allowed to board with it. This rather implausible ending echoes the trope of “salvation-from-the-West” that is introduced in the first few minutes of the film. Following Eze’s arrival in Nigeria, he is scammed of ten dollars by an airport official on the grounds of being able to help him get through customs. When he relates this to a white Australian whom he meets at the baggage claim, the Australian goes to recover Eze’s money, arrogantly stating that he can do it because he is white. On this point, the film, perhaps unintentionally, betrays the great achievement of Nollywood—the ability to overcome obstacles by looking inward to find solutions. While it is true that the desire to escape to foreign shores features prominently in many Nollywood films, the characters of those films are generally portrayed as doing so under their own agency.

As previously noted, *Nigerian Prince* demonstrates a high technical quality. Thus, these various flaws regarding the characters and the treatment of its subject could indicate indifference, disdain, or simply ignorance. One is tempted, however, to think that the source of the film’s funding and the intended channel of distribution did not leave room for the independence required to tell the nuanced story that the characters of *Nigerian Prince* deserved, the independence that prevails in true Nollywood productions.

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