

Wicked Villagers and the Mysteries of Reproduction: An Exploration of Horror Movies from Ghana and Nigeria¹

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A poster of *Hellraiser 3*, painted by the Ghanaian artist Joe Mensah, portrays the antihero Pinhead in front of a cityscape at night. In his mouth is a tiny human figure decorated with two large fangs, who is obviously meant to be swallowed (Wolfe 165). The movie does not have such a scene; it is a fantastic addition out of the artist's own imagination. Clive Barker, the author of *Hellraiser*, writes:

There is [...] something immensely satisfying about seeing an image [...] reworked and rediscovered this way. What more could any artist ask for than to find that his creation has been claimed by another culture, wholly unlike his own; claimed and hopefully understood. (164)

The distribution and mass consumption of foreign screen imagery (from the Americas, Europe, China and India) which predated the emergence of local African video productions in the 1980s has not yet received the scholarly attention it deserves. Most references are cursory in nature and only provide glimpses. Tierno Monénembo's novel *Cinema* (published in 1997), an African tribute to the Western genre, is rather exceptional in giving a vivid account of how the often disjointed and exotic images of the "Wild West," conveyed through Hollywood B-pictures, were appropriated and re-interpreted in rural Guinée in the 1960s. Earlier, Hortense Powdermaker presented some local readings of movie plots and characters. She quotes a Copper Town moviegoer from the 1950s who claimed: "The cowboy has medicines to make him invisible. Cowboys show respect. And Jack is also the son of a big man" (263). By taking the 1940s and 50s cult-phenomenon of the 'Copperbelt Cowboys' as his point of departure, Charles Ambler has demonstrated the pervasive penetration of Hollywood films into even the remotest corners of what was then British-ruled Africa (81-105). Although the impact, especially of Westerns and of Indian romance, has received some attention in recent years (Fuglesang; Larkin "Hausa Dramas" and "Indian Romances"), not much has been written about the fantastic, especially about horror, science fiction and fantasy, which provided other strands of images

¹ I am grateful to the German Research Foundation (DFG) who has generously funded the 10-months field research in Ghana (2000/01) on which this paper is based. For their comments on an earlier version, I would like to thank Kerstin Pinther, Heike Behrend and Onookome Okome.

that have strongly stimulated and shaped the emergence of what is now called the African video film. The ubiquitous flow of fantastic imagery increased dramatically after the introduction of cassette technology in the early 1980s, and it can still be seen in the many locally-painted posters which circulate along with the films they promote.²

1. Art-Horror—The Anatomy of an African Movie Genre

In this paper, I want to argue that the current glut of locally-produced videos in Ghana and Nigeria (often referred to as “popular” cinema) comprise three distinct major genres: melodramas, comedies and horror films. Every genre overlaps with its neighbors and the boundaries, at times, are blurred. In Ghana such blurs often occur between comedy and horror, so that it would make sense to speak of “horror-comedies.” In Nigeria (at least in the English language Igbo films that I have seen so far) genre-crossover is more common and elaborate between horror and melodrama. There is also a fourth genre that is evolving which, at times, is referred to as “epic film.”³ The appeal of art-horror⁴ is a very wide-spread phenomenon, transcending cultures, artforms and media. According to Mark Jancovich, “different groups will represent the monstrous in different ways and representations will develop historically” (9). While local traditions differ significantly in their narratives, motifs and iconography, they always provide clashes between supernatural evil and ordinary folks. Horror films are works that involve disturbing their audiences, that prompt and stimulate reflections on evil and otherness. In his famous essay, titled *Das Unheimliche*, Freud contributed to the issue by stating that it is the “uncanny” which arouses dread, horror and fear (229). Freud’s hypothesis, that uncanny experiences are the return of repressed infantile complexes, has been famously (albeit loosely) adapted by film theorist Robin Wood who writes: “One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is all that our civilization represses and oppresses” (*Hollywood* 75). Wood also coined the famous horror film formula: “Normality is threatened by the monster” (*Introduction* 175). Noel Carroll has proposed to define the horror genre in terms of the emotions it is designed to elicit from the audiences: emotions like fear, repulsion, dread and disgust (28). The monsters, again, remain essential. But Carroll goes beyond Wood in explaining that monsters are threatening primarily because they are impure creatures, or in his own words “categorically interstitial” (32). They are neither human nor

² See Wolfe *Extreme Canvas*, especially the images pp. 50-215 and Wendl “Try Me!”.

³ Although it seems that the Ghanaian video industry started a little bit earlier, the Nigerian industry has (at least since the mid-90s) taken the lead. While the current volume in Ghana oscillates between 40 and 50 new local releases a year, the Nigerian output has recently reached the magical number of 500. For a more detailed overview of the history and economic conditions of video making in Ghana see Wendl “La retour” and “Le Miracle”; Aveh; Meyer “Popular Ghanaian Cinema”; and Haynes.

⁴ “Art-horror” is the counter-piece of “natural horror” which I will not consider in this article. When the term horror is used in what follows, it should be understood as “art-horror.”

animal, but both (like, for example, werewolves); they are neither truly alive nor truly dead, but “living dead” (like vampires or zombies). Carroll’s cognitivist approach owes a lot to Mary Douglas’ pioneering study on *Purity and Danger*, where she explored notions of pollution as resulting from anomalies in cultural systems of classification. While Carroll’s focus is primarily on the nature of monsters as disturbing and interstitial entities, Felicia Freeland argues in her more recent book *The Naked and the Undead*, that the horror genre should not be restricted to stories featuring monsters but also include other discursive formations about the evil as well (10-11). The evil (as a moral category) is not always incorporated in a monster (as an iconographic category), and monsters on the other hand are not always evil, although this is, of course, the rule. In this paper, I will follow Freeland’s proposition and try to explore how horror films from Ghana and Nigeria prompt and stimulate peoples’ reflections on and understandings of evil. My focus is on narratives and iconographies and how the videos constitute a growing and bubbling mythology of the modern.⁵

The topic of the evil is huge. It has been addressed and debated over centuries by theologians, philosophers, politicians and, of course, by artists, in Africa as elsewhere in the world. While Western horror films continue earlier traditions of gothic literature, freak shows and church-painting (for example, the depiction of infernal scenes in Catholic iconography), African horror films, too, draw on earlier representations of the evil in traditions like sculpture, masquerades, theatre (for example, in Ghana we have the *concert party* genre which is famous for its many monsters [Gilbert 1-33]) and, of course, on story-telling. An additional source of inspiration is imported horror films, especially after the introduction of cassette technology, when the national states were no longer able to effectively control the circulation and consumption of foreign films. Locally-produced horror films not only transmit their stories from other local media configurations (such as theatre, pamphlet literature or pavement radio), they increasingly adapt foreign films, partly by borrowing, transforming and processing motifs and iconographies, partly by directly copying, quoting or by making inter-textual allusions. This process of stitching together the most diverse cultural models and forms (from Hong Kong to Hindi Cinema, from Brazilian telenovellas to classic Western horror films and Christian Fundamentalism) resembles to what in music is known as “sampling.” The result is a highly original, hybrid cocktail; and in this respect the current video production can aptly be conceived of as a “local address” for re-configuring and re-articulating the global flow of images for new local audiences.⁶

⁵ For a somewhat similar theoretical approach see Coleman and Johnson.

⁶ Jean-Cristophe Servant, in a recent article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, comments on the development in Nigeria: “Un véritable marché de la vidéo d’horreur se développe alors. Les films enchaînent les histoires de sectes maléfiques, d’envoûtements et de magie noire, s’inspirent des faits divers et de sorcellerie relatés par les quotidiens populaires: sexe qui rétrécit, enfants transformés en chien, sacrifice d’écolier... Entre théâtre filmé et “série Z”, la vidéo-juju (magie en yorouba) aux effets spéciaux concus sur ordinateur devient un nouveau genre, dans la lignée des films d’horreur

The Evil, as it is staged and re-staged in endless variations, is diverse and shifting. It can be localized in a monster as in Richard Quartey's *Abaddon*—a hairy giant who blends traits of both King Kong and Godzilla—or it might dwell inside humans—within a witch⁷, a jujuman⁸, a satanic pastor⁹, corrupt village chiefs¹⁰ or power-hungry and wealth-aspiring businessmen who kill innocent people to use their organs and bodyparts for occult money rituals.¹¹ But the evil may also be of a more floating, generalized cosmic nature, caused by local gods or spirits who dwell in the surrounding and are angry because the humans have neglected them or deprived them of their sacrifices.¹² Each new video is seen against the ground of peoples' expectations about the type of evil being created and their memory of other versions. The interest and the surprise lie precisely in what is omitted or altered in comparison with other versions. The obvious repetition of plots and iconography in contemporary video releases is troubling to critics who want to define creativity in terms of originality and ignore their inter-textual density.

2. Wicked Villagers and the Horror of Tradition

Unlike the better known Malian or Senegalese films, videos from Ghana and Nigeria are rather negative about tradition, cultural heritage and village life. This is one of the reasons why the videos have yet to be appreciated by academic film critics.¹³ As Birgit Meyer has emphasized, the videos neither propagate the idea of a return to roots nor do they call for resistance against alienated Western lifestyles; "Modernity," she writes, "forms the context of life rather than an option to be adopted or rejected" ("Popular Ghanaian Cinema" 110). The village is usually represented as backwoods, poor, dangerous, pagan and uncivilized. It serves as the opposite of the city, which is depicted as bright, prosperous, modern and dynamic. As Onookome Okome has observed: "Videodramas now form one of the most significant ways in which the city discusses itself [...]. It is a medium of the city, created and nurtured in the city" (58). The dichotomy of "village" and "city" is a central issue in most of the videos; and it is, of course, a transformation of the older topographic dichotomy between "wilderness" and "village," with the difference that the village, which is now constructed and represented from the perspective of the city, appears itself in the position of the wilderness.¹⁴ This creates an

mexicains, des giallos italiens ou des gore indonésiens, le tout martiné de télénovellas brésiliennes."

⁷ See the videos *Demonia* and *End of the Wicked*.

⁸ See the video *Ogboo*, Parts 1 and 2

⁹ See the videos *Endtime* and *Candidates for Hell (The Satanic Pastor, Part 1)*.

¹⁰ See the video *Nkrabeah - My Destiny*.

¹¹ See the videos *Rituals*, *Blood Money* and *Time*.

¹² See the video *Cover Pot*.

¹³ Jonathan Haynes writes: "African film criticism and the Nigerian videos are not well suited to one another: the videos are not what is wanted by the criticism, and the criticism lacks many of the tools necessary to make sense of the videos" (13).

¹⁴ For a more general discussion of the cosmological implications of this dichotomy see Kramer.

elusive paradox, because nobody can really trace his origins to the city; when you ask a Ghanaian for his (or her) “hometown”, he (or she) will always name a village, but never say for example “Accra”, even if his (or her) family has lived in Accra for many generations. There is a scene in *Above Death* when a messenger from the village arrives in the city to deliver a letter. Confused by the traffic and the bustling speed of citylife, he introduces himself by apologizing that he is from the “village.” Zack Orji, the new urbanite, who wants to find out what the message is about, calms him down by saying: “Oh, that’s what we all are!” In a temporal dimension the “village” marks the past, whereas the city marks the present. In Freudian terms, the village forms part of the “uncanny,” of what the city has repressed, and what now returns from time to time into the consciousness of the city-dwellers as “the horror of tradition.”

The Nigerian video *Agbako—in the land of 1000 demons* portrays a village called Omudu before the coming of the missionaries. The village is tyrannized by witches and rival jujumen who commit cruel acts and practice human sacrifices to pacify their wicked gods. The villagers are depicted as pitiful savages living in darkness. In the very beginning we see a kind of stone-age coffin in which a crying mother and her child are placed in order to be sacrificed to the weird crocodile spirit. Later, this very woman, who has survived in a miraculous way, consults a pastor in the city; together with some fellow-Christians, the pastor travels to the village. They resemble a ghost-buster commando with Bible and cross and finally succeed through the power of their prayers to put an end to the pagan savagery and reign of terror. Obviously, this film is full of Christian fundamentalist propaganda; but it illustrates that Christianity has become, once more, an important producer and provider of horrific images.¹⁵

Another Nigerian film of the ‘horror of tradition’ subgenre has the significant title *I hate my village*. The film does not use a Christian framework, but draws on another trope of savagery: cannibalism. In the beginning we are shown a written insert stating that “What you are going to see in this film happened in some parts of the country in the past. The practice has since then stopped completely.” We are then moved into the wealthy sitting-room of an urban nuclear family. The father comes home and brings a new video: “the latest thing in town!” The mother carefully reads the cover and detects that this film is not suitable for children under 18. Daughter Nancy has to go upstairs into her room. The cassette is put in the VCR and the “real” film starts. Again, we find ourselves in a poor and dilapidated village. The villagers are cannibals; they trap strangers, kill and slash them, prepare their flesh and eat it. The strangers are botanists from the city looking for rare plants, tax collectors and a female missionary. The title song talks about “bloody traditions.” The protagonist is the daughter of one of the cannibals, named Ngbo. Once we see her talking to her brother:

¹⁵ The relationship between the evolving video industries in Ghana and Nigeria and Christian fundamentalist (especially neo-pentecostal) ideologies has been explored by Birgit Meyer “Popular Ghanaian Cinema” and Ukah.

"I hate this village! You have to stop! I don't like it—killing and eating our fellow human beings!" The brother responds: "You know, this is our tradition. I am a man and I am expected to maintain it." The daughter decides to leave the village for Lagos. After some irritating experiences in the city, she falls in love with Benny, a wealthy store-owner in town. They have a nice time together, and Ngbo is "initiated" into modern city-culture. One day, they decide to return to the village to ask Ngbo's father for permission to marry. When they arrive, it is the day of the village festival, and the elders immediately decide to make Benny their next victim. When Benny becomes aware that two of the mask dancers are trying to capture him, he runs away into the bush. Unfortunately he falls into one of the cannibals' traps. We neither see how he is killed, nor how his flesh is prepared. We only see Ngbo who is desperately searching for Benny. When she returns to the house, the cannibals are noisily eating. She is invited and tastes a small portion of her boyfriend's flesh. Then she discovers Benny's clothes in the kitchen! The picture freezes and we are again among our family members from the beginning. They are scared and scandalized. The mother says: "this village needs purification, gospel and salvation!" The elder daughter asks: "does it mean that these things really happen?" And the father wisely concludes: "This is why films are there—they help us to know the unknown!"

The horror of tradition, as it is staged in *I hate my village*, is hardly to be beaten: the city-dwellers are in danger of being trapped and eaten by their wicked fellow village-folks. Metaphorically this would still make some sense; literally, however, it is quite weird. From an iconographic point of view, this video (which also has aspects of a comedy) seems to have been heavily influenced by the films of the Italian *Mondo Cannibale* Gore cycle of the late 70s and early 80s.¹⁶ Many of these films like *Eaten Alive*, *Cannibal Terror* or *Trap Them and Kill Them* have been shown in video centres and are sold in local video-shops.¹⁷ The major difference between these foreign models and *I hate my village* is that the Italian cannibals are located very far away, in the deep Amazon and in New Guinea, whereas the Nigerian cannibals are from the protagonist's hometown. A second difference is that the hometown-cannibals are much more decent and less ferocious and at least cook their victims' flesh, whereas the Italian cannibals eat their victims raw. Cannibalism is a famous trope of "othering" worldwide; as a rule it has been used to denigrate, defame and

¹⁶ The genre was started by Umberto Lenzi in 1972 with *Man from Deep River*. Later Lenzi directed *Eaten Alive* (1980) and the very controversial *Cannibal Ferox* (1981) which was banned in more than 30 countries. An other important contributor to the genre was Ruggero Deodato who came out with *Jungle Holocaust* (1976) and *Cannibal Holocaust* (1979). Joe D'Amato contributed *Trap them and kill them* (1977). Other classics include Jess Franco's *White Cannibal Queen* (1979) and Julio Tabernero's *Cannibal Terror* (1981).

¹⁷ Compare the relevant *Mondo Cannibale* video-posters (Wolfe 6, 166, 168, 169.)

demonise other peoples, now it is used by the class of the new urbanites to distance themselves from their own village past.¹⁸

3. Witches—The Destroyers of Reproduction

In a certain sense we could say that witches are cannibals or “spiritual cannibals,” because they don’t literally eat their victims but do it in spirit. In *Agbako—In the land of 1000 demons* they are referred to as “Mothers of the night, those who greet in the morning and kill at night: the bird that devours its own eggs.” Witchcraft films are a subgenre of their own. In Ghana they were very common at the end of the 1980s and early 90s. The *Zinabu*-series by William Akuffo and Richard Quartey (1987-1992) marks the beginning. The series’ protagonist *Zinabu*, a man-destroying “femme fatale”, was originally modelled on Rider Haggard’s novel *The Great She*, but the story was then given a distinctively Ghanaian witchcraft touch (Quartey). Others like *The Cult of Allata* and *Witches* followed. The subgenre was discussed in very controversial ways, and there was a time in 1991-2, when *Zinabu 3 The Revenge of the Witches* was several times rejected at the censorship board (Akuffo). Filmmakers were blamed by politicians and journalists of turning a medium meant to serve for “education” and “development” into a vehicle for the expression of ugly and superstitious things which should have no place in modern Ghanaian culture! (“Popular Ghanaian Cinema” 95-96). As a result, producers were systematically discouraged and stopped their witchcraft films or at least integrated the witchcraft plots in more complex—often melodramatic—narratives like it is the case in *Fatal Decision*, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, *Demonia* or *Remember your Mother*.

The films *Demonia* and *Deliverance* both feature a girl who later turns into a witch. *Demonia*, whose real name is Nerteley, is the victim of a curse. She is born with smouldering red eyes. After having struck down a boy with her horrifying gaze, she is captured by the village community and ostracized. Wandering through the deep forest, she encounters the occult and is initiated into the witch society. Finally she moves to the city and starts her bad game of seducing innocent men and destroying them one after the other. The temple of the “Grand High Witch” is located behind the discrete facade of a suburban bourgeois house. She is depicted as a soulless slave-holder maltreating her captives and ferociously bossing around her palace guardians. The scenography heavily draws on American action and Chinese Kung Fu films. This becomes most obvious in the final apotheosis, when the protagonist of the Good, the pastor Chris Taylor, enters the witch’s palace in order to rescue the soul of his beloved Nerteley. He kills one bodyguard after the other and eventually chops off the head of the monstrous “grand high witch.” In *Deliverance*, the girl protagonist first loses her parents in a mysterious way. After a series of other

¹⁸ For somewhat similar developments in the Ugandan cannibal discourse (which is less integrated in the dichotomy between city and village, but seems to form part of a modernized witchcraft idiom) see Behrend.

misfortunes, one sees the desperate girl alone in the nightly forest trying to hang herself. She is saved by a roaming witch whom she follows until she becomes herself a witch: the particularly wicked “Sister Destroyer”. Two iconographies of the witch empire alternate like flip sides of a coin. In the first version, the witches meet at night under a mighty witch-tree to devour their victims’ flesh during a common cannibalistic ritual. Since the witch empire is considered a world turned upside down, the colours of these episodes are blurred into their reverse. The second iconography is more complex. Here the motif of the enigmatic *Mami Wata* world (Wendl *Mami Wata*; “Visions of Modernity”) at the bottom of the sea blends with the Christian idea of hell. When the witches go on a journey to visit their master Satan, they start swimming at the sea shore and dive away. Their arrival in the aquatic underworld takes place in a swimming pool. *Mami Wata*, the mermaid, acts as a doorwoman and accompanies the new guests into Satan’s hall. Satan is depicted wearing a carnival mask with Caucasian features. His costume is a bizarre mixture of a bishop’s robe and that of a bat. He drinks red wine from a skull which is then passed around the guests. The protagonist “Sister Destroyer” is awarded a prize for her atrocities on the occasion of an “All-African Witch Meeting.”

In Nigeria the situation seems to be a little bit different, because filmmakers obviously did not have to face the same pressure from journalists and politicians worried about Nigeria’s image abroad.¹⁹ The witchcraft subgenre still continues to proliferate. I just want to quote *End of Wicked*, *Witches* and *Above Death*. Helen Ukpabio’s *End of the Wicked* is a technically very sophisticated movie, full of suspense, spectacular computer-generated special effects and a gorgeous soundtrack. In the beginning, we see the witches flying through the air to their master’s underworld place. The witch master, played by Alex Usifo, welcomes them and gives the order to fill the empty blood-bank within the next 24 hours. After this exposition we are introduced into the family of the protagonist, Lady Destroyer, a wicked grandmother who sacrifices her own son Chris and destroys the womb of her daughter. When Chris is being slaughtered in the form of a goat in the underworld, we see him having a nightmare, then we see him dying of pains on his bed in an exiting parallel montage. The daughters’ womb is graphically removed and brought to the underworld, where it is kept as a wicked trophy. In order to carry the transgression to extremes, Lady Destroyer, who disposes of a magic giant penis, rapes Stella, her own daughter-in-law. The main plot has a series of side stories, in which the evil and gruesome acts of a group of child-witches are told. *End of the Wicked* has a Christian framing, especially in the last thirty

¹⁹ In an article titled “Home Videos and African Mythology,” Jackson Iniobong-Lincoln writes: “Most of our local movies sound like something out of fantasy islands. Their plots are laden with myths, legends and mythology. In our tradition the world of the known and the unknown are inseparable.” He quotes Emeka Odigbo of NEK Video Link who acknowledges “that works of art are the products of environment”, but in the same time affirms “that the movies produced by his company do not propagate witchcraft, sorcery and juju” (15).

minutes, when the producer Helen Ukpabio appears herself in the role of a female pastor to rescue Stella. In the very end, we see Lady Destroyer confessing: "I am a witch!" and a doglike creature comes out of her body. *Above Death*, another Nigerian movie of the witchcraft subgenre, starts with a computer animation of gory skeletons dancing and greeting each other in a way typical for the members of a secret society. Topographically, the movie has three distinct domains: the village, the city and the underworld in which a giant skull serves as shrine. The city and the underworld are connected through a kind of tube, reminiscent of the one in *Poltergeist*. Compared to *End of the Wicked*, *Above Death* is full of inter-textual references to other horror films such as *Psycho*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Addams Family* or *The Exorcist*. The evil, once more, originates in the village—with fountains of blood shooting out of a river—but subsequently spreads into the city. One night we see the witches arriving as birds from the village and entering the city-house. One of them re-transforms herself into an ugly old woman and infects the newborn baby Oli by giving him her witchcraft feeding bottle. As the boy grows older, he starts performing aggressive acts against his classmates and finally becomes a murderer of prostitutes. One day, we see Oli in a Lagosian night-club where he is recognized by one of his victims' friends. In a scene highly reminiscent of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1983), he is nearly trapped by the police, but escapes by shape-shifting (he transforms himself into his own victim!). In the end, he threatens to run amok and kill the whole family. He first drowns his sister in the bathtub, then he strangles his father and finally persecutes his mother. In a very bloody sequence, we see the mother, who took refuge in the kitchen, taking a meat cleaver and cutting off her son's hand. He is shocked but does not seem to suffer from strong pains. Surprisingly (and inter-textually related to *The Addams Family*), the hand stands up and starts walking. Oli follows the movements of his hand which again persecutes the mother. Finally the hand jumps into the mother's face and covers her with blood. A moment later, the hand jumps back on Oli's arm, from where it was removed. In the very end, Oli, the demon child, who had been conceived by his mother in the underworld by a spirit, returns to where he originated.

Witches are a prominent configuration of the evil in current horror movies. Phenomenologically, they are humans leading a double life, mainly women, but also children and sometimes men. They are shape-shifters, comparable to vampires, who leave their sleeping bodies at night to travel to their underworld home. Iconographically, the underworld resembles an inferno, and it is organized like a hierarchical secret society with different divisions and a tyrannical master who, at least in the Christian blend, is depicted as Satan. Witches are the epitome of the evil, or better, the epitome of the antisocial, because what they destroy is their own reproduction. In *End of the Wicked*, the mother not only sacrifices her only son, she also removes the womb of her daughter, so that the daughter, too, will not be able to have children. Witchcraft, as it is staged in the videos, is a menace for the new nuclear families. The witches' aggressions are directed against the

immediate ascending or descending generation: children sacrifice their parents, parents sacrifice their children. Their motive is pure malice. The witchcraft idiom still provides, as Jean and John Comaroff have put it: “narratives that tie translocal processes to local events, that map translocal scenes onto local landscapes, that translate translocal discourses into local vocabularies of cause and effect” (286).

4. Jujumen—African Versions of Mad Scientists

Another character, who at times resembles the “wicked villager,” at times collaborates with the witches, is the jujuman. In some of the films, he has striking similarities to the “mad scientist” of the Western horror tradition. Often referred to as “native doctors,” the jujumen do not stay in town, but practice in remote villages or places in the bush. Their compounds and shrines are often decorated with “traditional” masks and sculptures, with skulls, bones and medicine-pots; they look horrible and frightening. When the city-folks consult these shrines, they usually have to go on a long journey.

In *Ogboo*, a highly original, two-part Ghanaian horror-comedy by Sidiku Buari, we are told some of the reasons why people consult him: a woman wants to give birth to children, a desperate old man asks for juju-money, and a woman trader wants her business to prosper. What makes *Ogboo* so original, is that the jujuman does not even think of helping his clients, but transforms them all into helpless animals and locks them in his zoo-like enclosure. These malicious metamorphoses were so much appreciated by the Ghanaian audience that director Sidiku Buari nearly increased it to excess in his sequel *Ogboo 2* (1994). *Ogboo 2* opens with a sequence in which the jujuman’s humble servant, a dwarf, is liberating the wicked jujuman who is locked in a police station. What then takes its course is true mass metamorphosis. After twenty minutes of film, the first ghostbuster team, which was put up to fight the psychopathic jujuman, is completely wiped out. Helpless sheep and goats are roaming through the bush. The minister of Internal Affairs who is now coordinating the crusade with his mobile telephone calls for Sergeant Abanga and Caporal Adongo to set up a new team of experienced ghostbusters. Yet, the wicked jujuman no longer stops. He enters the minister’s house and turns him and his lover into horses. From the perspective of the urban folks, the primary target audience, the jujuman embodies the prototype of a backwoods villager. In the *Ogboo*-films, he is dressed like a shabby farmer. Nearly toothless, he likes to laugh scornfully and very quickly gets into violent outbursts of temper. His name is “Zanoo,” that of his freak-like dwarf and obedient servant is “Kpikpi.” Both their names are typical Ewe names, and Ewe culture in general serves as a kind of imaginary repository for illustrating pagan village ways of life. In the Akan imagination (Ghana’s majority population), the Ewes are quite a strange people who make a lot of fuss about their jujus, charms and occult traditions. The Ewe area, east of the river Volta and therefore often referred to as “Transvolta,” is a kind of Ghanaian “Transylvania” where people behave strangely and unpredictably. In the case of *Ogboo*, the iconography of the Evil obviously draws on ethnic

stereotypes, just as in the Western vampire films, which so often have depicted the blood sucking protagonists as Slavs and Jews (see, for instance, Murnau).

Although the *Ogboo* cycle is highly original in the way it combines the stereotypes of villagers and psychopaths in a new configuration, it is not really representative of the jujumen subgenre. Most jujumen are not evil per se, rather they offer themselves as a human medium for their clients' wishes. What, from a structuralist point of view, makes the jujumen resemble the "mad scientists" (like Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll or Dr. Moreau) is that both attempt to transgress normality and manipulate the natural reproductive cycle. The jujuman operates in his shrine, the mad scientist in his laboratory. Generally, they both overestimate their powers and their creations (or transformative acts) go out of control. In the end, both become tragic figures and are destroyed. This is usually due to fate, (or to "God") who restores the rules of reproduction. A significant difference between the two is that the mad scientist is largely inspired and motivated by his own mad dreams, whereas the jujuman does not act out his own dreams, but those of his clients.

In the Ghanaian/Nigerian jujuman-subgenre we find three major issues that propel cityfolks to contact and engage a jujuman. The first issue is matters of the heart: (mostly) women who want to "snatch" a rival's husband or destroy their partners' affection for somebody else. The second issue is the wish for a child. Barren women (often accompanied and pressured by their mothers) want to get rid of their disgrace and ask the jujuman for manipulating her reproductive capacities, so that they can give birth to a child of their own. The jujumen normally agree, but the women either have to pay for this service (with money or sometimes later with blood²⁰); or the jujuman will at least announce some prescriptions to be carried out later on by the child (such as the observance of food taboos, or that they are not allowed to marry²¹). Children, conceived through the intervention of jujumen often later turn out to be demon-children. They create additional chaos and disaster, and the mysteries of their illegitimate conception is often revealed in flashbacks or is confessed by the mothers in the end.

A rather exceptional request for reproduction is brought to one of the jujumen in the Nigerian Video *Haunted House*. While consulting a customer, the jujuman is disturbed by a ghost. We, the spectators, can see this ghost as the jujuman can with his "third eye," only the client can't see him. The ghost says: "I need your help!" The jujuman responds: "What do you want, you are dead! Go where you belong!" The ghost belongs to a man who had been killed in order to be processed as a juju to protect the estate-house of an unscrupulous businessman. The jujuman thinks the situation over and since the man is a twin, it seems possible to reproduce him again. The jujuman says: "I can try it, but I warn you, it is very dangerous and the experiment

²⁰ See the video *Marijata*,

²¹ See the video *Satan's Wife*.

might fail!” He then drips water on a jujustone, and we see flames and somewhat later the man miraculously resurfaces from the place where the juju (made of his own blood) had been buried.

Another very common reason for the intervention of a jujuman is money. The issue forms part of an emerging wider transafrican cultural complex which has been referred to by Jean and John Comaroff as “an economy of the occult” (297). The authors write:

Occult economy may be taken, at its most general, to denote the deployment of magical means for material ends or, more expansively, the conjuring of wealth by resort to inherently mysterious techniques, techniques whose principles of operation are neither transparent nor explicable in conventional terms. These techniques, moreover, often involve the destruction of others and their capacity to create value. (297, n. 31)

In societies where the gap between rich and poor is so spectacular and is getting bigger every day, money and the ways of its production and accumulation represent an increasing social explosive and mystery. The theme of “juju-money”, “magic money”²², “blood-money”²³ (*sika duro* in Akan) has become a favourite topic of the videos.

Interestingly, the jujumen are never able to produce money out of nothing. They always need human material (body-parts like arms, heads, blood, unborn foetuses) which they can transform into money.²⁴ At times they offer their clients money on credit, but remind them to come back later to bring their sacrifice. When they fail to do so, they are haunted and eventually have to die. The transformation of human body parts into money is—as far as I know—never explicitly shown or staged in detail; it is taken for granted (and would—at least in Ghana—probably be rejected by the censors). But it remains an interesting alternative “paradigm of reproduction” (or more exactly of transforming the body as the organ of reproduction into a device for producing money)—a highly original African contribution to the world horror culture. At times the jujuman gives to his clients a snake-juju which will vomit money as in *Mutuuzu—Blood Taste*, a recent Ghanaian “remix” of older videos motives. In *Easy Blood Money* by Richard Quartey, the juju-money comes (like a baby) out of the womb of a woman, who starts feeling sick, after she had been “spiritually sacrificed” by her malicious husband. In *Time*, a very commercially successful Ghanaian-Nigerian co-production, the husband installs the dead body of his wife in the wardrobe of his bedroom, where the zombified remnants continue to produce and vomit money—much in the same way as the prostitutes do in William Akuffo’s *Diabolo* (1991).

5. *Diabolo* and the Prostitutes: Alternative Money-Production
Diabolo is a whole film cycle that includes four original parts by William Akuffo and three remakes produced by the main actor, Bob

²² See the video *Magic Money*.

²³ See the Nigerian video of the same title.

²⁴ For the situation in Ghana compare Birgit Meyer “Delivered from the Powers of Darkness.”

Smith.²⁵ William Akuffo wrote the original *Diabolo* inspired by John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). Akuffo was looking for a way to "africanize" the werewolf-story. Since there are no wolves in Africa, he decided to use a snake. He then combined the werewolf story with local rumors about snake-money and about Nigerian businessmen who were accused of having abused the bodies of Ghanaian migrant women to produce money.²⁶ The *Diabolo* story centers around a good-looking middle-aged man who sets out in the evening to the nightclubs of Accra to look for prostitutes whom he takes home. He secretly puts a powder in their drinks and after the prostitutes have fallen asleep he carries them to his bed. He begins to transform himself into a snake and intrudes into the prostitutes' vagina. After this surprising sexual intercourse, the prostitutes start to vomit money. Diabolo pulls the banknotes out of their mouths and arranges them into neat bundles. Usually the prostitutes die after Diabolo brings them to the roadside. In the first version from 1991 the central theme is introduced and varied three times. In the first variation, the trick does not work, because the prostitute spills her drink. The second variation shows Diabolo making "normal" love (not as a snake but as a man). The result is that the prostitute gives birth to snake-babies and dies. In the third variation the prostitute is herself a shapeshifter and transforms herself into a cat after having taken Diabolo's drink. We see a fight between cat and snake, in which the cat remains the winner.

Diabolo 2, subtitled "Vengeance" from 1992 does introduce only one variation of the main encounter: we see the snake attacking a nurse and intruding into her womb. She seems to die without vomiting money, and it is only later (in the second remake from 1997) that we learn that she has turned into a zombie-ghost who starts haunting the snakeman. The sequel confirms the spectators' hypothesis, that Diabolo's trick only works with prostitutes who have dissociated their own sexuality from procreation in order to embrace money. *Diabolo 3*, subtitled "The Beginning" starts with a graphic animation of a snake vomiting the title on the screen. Until now we don't know Diabolo's genealogy. He doesn't seem to have relatives, children or parents; he seems to be a stranger, and from the way he dresses, Ghanaians perceive him as a Nigerian.²⁷ Now we learn that Diabolo is himself the

²⁵ The title *Diabolo* goes back to Richard Quartey who wrote a script in 1983 titled *The Egg of Diabolo*, which was later produced and released as *Abaddon*. For further details see Wendl "Die verkehrten Welten des Diabolo."

²⁶ In an interview, William Akuffo mentions that there were rumors in the late 80s about Nigerians practising similar atrocities with Ghanaian prostitutes in Madina, a north-eastern suburb of Accra. Akuffo also makes reference to the 1979 events, when J. J. Rawlings destroyed the famous Makola Marekt No. 1 in Central Accra and huge quantities of hidden consumer goods were discovered in illegal underground stocks. The Makola traders were blamed of having created artificial shortages of goods in order to increase the prices. Raging pillages followed and the traders were scapegoated. At about the same time, malicious rumors about the Makola women started to circulate. The women were said to be barren and to host snakes in their wombs. The snakes would nourish themselves by the women's lovers' sperm and subsequently come out of their host's bodies to vomit money for them.

²⁷ Depicting Diabolo as a (supposed) Nigerian national is of course a subtle way of othering, similar to what is seen in *Ogbo*.

son of a prostitute, who (after the birth of her son) stopped prostitution and went into selling food at the roadside. To improve her business, she consulted a jujuman, who gave her a snake which she put into a pot with red oil. The jujuman warned her to make sure that the son would never eat of this oil. One day the inevitable happens: little Diabolo transgresses the food taboo and starts transforming into a snake. When the mother comes home and discovers the disaster, she immediately dies. The jujuman explains, that the only way to protect little Diabolo would be to have a hair of his father; but since the mother was a prostitute, the father is not known and Diabolo is condemned from now on to regularly change into a snake. He is very angry and decides to make the prostitutes pay for his own dishonour. From a mythological point of view, the most striking aspect of his genealogy is that it is incomplete and faulty—since he does not know his father—and it is through this very fault that the evil has to continue. After this flash-back into Diabolo's childhood, we see him again pursuing his business. In a nightclub, he encounters a Dutch prostitute and takes her to his hotel room. The sexual intercourse goes as usual with the only difference that the foreign prostitute no longer produces Cedis (the Ghanaian currency), but foreign exchange (in the form of 100-Dollar notes).

In 1994, director William Akuffo and the main actor Bob Smith put an end to their collaboration. The reason was a quarrel about money. Bob Smith, who became very popular through his role in Diabolo and was subsequently nicknamed "Ghana Christopher Lee," predicted that William Akuffo would not be able to continue the story without him. In order to prove to Bob Smith "that an actor is an actor and not a creator," William Akuffo decided to first protect the title *Diabolo* at the copyright-office and then to come out with part 4 (Akuffo). In the beginning, we see the jujuman listening to the devil who commands that the snake spirit should get a new protagonist, namely a pastor. And in fact, this proves very soon to be a genius move, since the good and evil forces are now confined within a single body. The "snake-pastor" (played by Eddie Coffie) turns into a strange creature, devouring raw eggs and suffering from hallucinations. Only in the very end does a senior pastor come to his help. In an exciting parallel montage we see the jujuman on the one side, and the senior pastor on the other, struggling over the control of the snake demon. Finally the pastor is delivered by vomiting the snake.

In Italy, where Bob Smith has partially lived from 1992 onwards, he soon discovered that he was a real star in the Ghanaian diaspora. He received many invitations to appear as a "special guest" for parties and was paid good money for his appearances as "Diaboloman" (Smith). In 1996, he came out with his own *The Return of the Snakeman*. Here, the earlier version of Diabolo's childhood and genealogy is revised. Interestingly, this revision is now very closely modelled on the *American Werewolf in London*. In the beginning, we see two small boys performing stupid things. They snatch a blind beggar's sack and get cursed; they steal fruits from a woman-seller's stand and smoke cigarettes in a cemetery. Suddenly a snake appears and bites both of

them; one dies on the spot, the other is brought to the hospital. One night (significantly it is full-moon) the dead boy appears in his rotten body and the living starts twitching and transforms himself into the snake. The dead one takes the snake in his hand and says: “you are my only brother!”²⁸ The main difference to the older Akuffo-version, in which the shape-shifting results from the transgression of a food taboo, is that a new way of infection is proposed: in correspondence with the original model, this is the bite of a were-animal. However, this new way of infection has consequences for the prostitutes, too. They no longer die after vomiting their banknotes, but have now contracted the shape-shifting quality, and can turn themselves into snakes every fullmoon. The result is obvious: we have a multiplication of the snakes and the evil.

In *Judgement Day*, the second part of the *Prince of Doom* series, Diabolo forms a kind of secret society with the prostitutes and together they crusade against the hypocrite Christians. The story develops around a pursuit plot in which the comedian Wakye (alias Prince Yawson) tries to capture the snakeman. It is a horror comedy with many slapstick elements that are well known from the Concert party genre. From a mythological point of view, there are two minor episodes of interest. The first one shows Diabolo when a group of thieves ask him for the time and snatch his bag. In the small turmoil that follows, one of thieves pretends that Diabolo has stolen his penis.²⁹ The other episode takes up again the motive of the nurse who was raped by the snake in *Diabolo 2*. The nurse come out of her grave as a mummy, transforms herself into a prostitute and starts chasing Diabolo. In the hotel room, she comes back from the bathroom (again as a mummy) and says: “You have maltreated women too much. Today is your judgement day. I will punish you for every single woman!” In the meantime, the pursuers have arrived from Accra and Diabolo is arrested.

The last part (or at least the preliminary) last part from 1999, subtitled *The Doom's Day*, introduces a dwarf-woman (marvellously played by Adjoa Smart). She falls in love with the snakeman without knowing his true identity. When he rejects her advances, it is she who turns the tables. She puts a powder in his drink and makes him bend to her will. After their intercourse (which is not shown), both of them have dreams: she dreams that she lies next to a snake in her bed, and

²⁸ In John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) the two students, Jack and David, were both bitten by the wolf; Jack died on the spot, David was brought to a hospital in London. One night the decomposed Jack appears, and during the next full moon, David becomes himself a werewolf for the first time. His transformation is a milestone in the history of horror. David Skal writes that “Individual wolf-hairs sprouted from human skin in microscopic close-up, while the actor David Naughton's complete skeletal structure was stretched and animalized beneath his exposed and vulnerable flesh” (315). The film also had great influence on Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1983).

²⁹ According to Bob Smith the scene is a reference to the epidemically circulating complaints of men about the loss of their penises in the 1990s, but also an allusion to a true incident which happened at Kaneshie market in Accra, when a group of robbers staged such a situation in order to steal their victims' bags.

he dreams that a jujuman tells him: “you are doomed, now you no longer can change into a snake. If you will do so, it will be a rubber-snake!” The dwarf-woman becomes pregnant and is brought to a maternity ward. After giving birth to a baby, she dies and the film ends. The only thing we know is that the baby is alive! And what we expect to see very soon is a new demon child growing up and starting to do evil things.

The snakeman-cycle is a fascinating example of how locally produced horror-videos constitute new mythologies that combine local fairytales, Western horror films and elements of the expanding “occult economies” in order to respond to the issues of modernity and reproduction. Once Diabolo has reproduced biologically, he no longer can transform himself into a snake and abuse the prostitutes to produce money for him. The cycle depicts modernity as a world turned upside-down: the sexual union of snakeman and prostitute no longer leads to new life but to money; and the money (as the perverted equivalent of life) no longer comes from the woman’s womb, but from her mouth. Diabolo is culprit and victim in one; in his person the contradictions of modernity and cash-economy take on a concrete form. The slippery snake has become a dominant Turnerian symbol that blends old pagan notions of fecundity with the Christian notion of the devil into a new hybrid horror image of “diabolical fertility.” As David Skal has put it: “all monsters are expressions or symbols of some kind of birth process, however distorted or bizarre” (287). If we accept his view that to continuously provide new imaginary encounters with alternative reproductive paradigms is one of the horror genre’s genuine appeals (Skal 159), then *Diabolo* should be put in one line with the classics of the genre in the West. Just as Dr. Jekyll, Diabolo has found ways to split in two and similar to Dr. Jekyll, Diabolo acts both, civilized and savage. Whereas the vampire Dracula migrates from his castle in the Carpathians to modern-day London in search of fresh blood, the snakeman Diabolo leaves his suburban villa to the nightlife centre of Accra to pick up prostitutes whom he subsequently turns into cash machines. While Dracula eschews normal sex in favour of necks and Frankenstein pieces together the dead, Diabolo turns himself into a slippery monstrous snake before he has sex. Although the similarities are many, Diabolo’s modern ambiance remains unique—as does the money he gains by putting the human reproductive cycle on its head.

6. Conclusion

Horror is the modern equivalent of the greek *phobos* (or “shiver”) which in combination with *eloes* (or “pity”) allows for *katharsis*. Although I do not claim that horror films seek to arouse pity, they have a powerful potential in disturbing—even if in the end the disturbers are punished. They provide what Bob Smith in an interview has aptly called “our daily food for thought”; they allow their audiences to (at least) mimetically transgress and think what is forbidden and taboo—through safe participant screen-observation. According to James Twitchell, horror films are cautionary tales and serve as modern substitutes for rites of passage; they demonstrate the dangers of

transgressions and thus restore cultural values. Or, as Linda Badley writes: “horror returns to preliterate, somatic modes of knowing, and the cinema, television, and rock concerts most completely articulate this experience. Sitting in the darkened theatre, which replicates the den or campfire, we re-encounter our earliest dreams” (8). Although the appeal of horror is probably part of the universal human condition, there are very diverse cultural ways of staging and iconographically depicting horror. And the same goes, of course, for the ways of creating suspense as well as for the elements of the “uncanny” which can be used for being staged and depicted on the screen. I admit that, technically and aesthetically, the horror genre (as it has evolved in the 1990s in Ghana and Nigeria) is still very weak and clumsy, but it marks (at least in my perception) the most significant and original contribution of both countries to our contemporary world film culture.

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