African video films: Stereotypes and narrative crumple in the quest for transnationality in *Dar 2 Lagos*

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Abstract

This article takes a close-up look at *Dar 2 Lagos*, a film by Femi Ogedegbe, focusing on how the film attempts to feature transnational elements in filming across Africa. The film which demonstrates a new trend in filmmaking practices in Africa introduces possible multinational collaborations which are likely to offer opportunities for talents and producers to team-up and utilize not only talents and stories but also beautiful locations around the continent. However, such opportunities for the industry to cater for the demand of the audience with stories that people across the continent share and relate to is haunted by the film's stereotypical representation of women. While I read *Dar 2 Lagos* as the industry's effort to unite the two emerging film industries in Africa, Nigeria's Nollywood and Tanzania's Bongo Movies, I also highlight the way the film segregates women in the union process. I use a textual analysis to argue that although the current film practice in Africa attempts to ease border crossing, *Dar 2 Lagos* permits only male stories, ideas, narratives, talents and bodies to unrestrictedly move between African nation-states and beyond. The film's narrative denies free movement of the female bodies and their passions. This stereotypical practice of the medium perpetuates the past cultural practices and therefore jeopardises a clear envisioning of the future of film production in Africa.
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Introduction

For decades, locally produced films in Africa were hardly accessible beyond the borders of their countries of production. A small number of locally produced films in many African countries ended at festival screenings and remain unknown even in their countries of origin. Poor production facilities, a foreign monopoly in distribution and exhibition that capitalises on foreign films, and lack of political will among the policy makers to support the film industry are

among the reasons of inaccessibility of African made films. The socio-economic and political changes of the late 1980s in the continent are viewed as barrier breakers which have brought more freedom of movement of both the products and the human capital. Conversely, technological advancements, political flexibilities and a free-market economy have allowed the film industries of individual African nations to increasingly cross-country borders. Of course, this has been necessitated by the strong connections with local African distributors who make films easily available all over the continent and beyond.

The vibrancy of video film industry on the African entertainment scene has been occasioned by the decline in celluloid filmmaking and the development of sophisticated video technology and hardware. One of the most successful video film industries in Africa is the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, whose production has crossed boundaries, drawing audiences worldwide. As Africa's most recognised film industry, Nollywood reaches diverse African audiences with its video films distributed all over the continent and beyond. Facilitated by sophisticated and extremely cheap production and distribution technologies, political flexibilities, and a free market economy, these video films are available in videocassettes, DVDs and VCDs in most African major cities. These formats are sold by street vendors or rented out in video libraries. In fact, they tend to outnumber films from the Western countries and from India which, until recently, dominated the market in most African cities. Nollywood video films have not only demonstrated possible transnational African film production, distribution and exhibition but also have inspired many amateur filmmakers all around the continent. For Africans in the diaspora, Nollywood video films have become their bridge to connect with their roots offering stories they relate with and featuring characters they can associate with.

Tanzania's Film Scenario: A Background

In Tanzania, for example, the earlier talented filmmakers of the current commercial video films popularly known as Bongo Movies were inspired by these Nigerian video films. The recent socio-economic and political changes in Africa that are orchestrated by IMF and the World Bank have fuelled the video film industry boom in Tanzania. This boom has ended the dominance of foreign images on the screens that featured Bollywood musicals, American Westerns and Cold War films, and Hong Kong Kung Fu movies in Tanzania. These films were screened only in the country's major cities where movie theatres were available. Thus, mostly the elites and middle-class people had access to the theatres. Such an exhibition scene can be associated with the socio-economic circumstances and the political ideology that governed Tanzania by then. Suggestively, the socialist ideology had imposed a monopolistic and restricting structure in film importation, distribution and exhibition.

In the late 1980s, Tanzania embraced the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank induced strategic economic recovery programmes that included trade liberalisation which is based on capital competition. As result, the state loosened its policies on the importation and exportation of commodities, including electronic goods such as video and audio materials for playing, recording and dubbing earlier treated as luxuries. Trade liberalisation also allowed the government to relinquish its monopoly in the media industry, resulting in the establishment of the first privately-owned television and radio stations in 1993. Trying to appeal to the needs and aspirations of local audiences, television stations in Tanzania aired dramas from the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and later video films from Nigeria. These dramas and films provided characters and situations Tanzanians could easily relate to. Overall, this development provided a vital connection between the African audience and the image on the screen. As Krings (2010) explains, the popularity of Nigerian films was fuelled by its matching "the social and cultural realities of everyday life in Tanzania" (p. 76).

Lately, transnational collaboration, whose production involves casts and locations of two or more African countries, has become a trend. One of the products of this trend is Femi Ogedegbe's *Dar 2 Lagos* (2006), a twenty-first century version of the biblical parable of the prodigal son. This article takes a close look at *Dar 2 Lagos*, a film shot in Tanzania and Nigeria, involving cast and production teams from both countries, and featuring multiple languages, to demonstrate transnational elements in the current filmmaking practices in Africa. I admit from the outset that the present local and international success of African video films is in the film industry's ability to provide the audience with stories that people across the continent share and relate. I argue that, although the stories can be shared across Africa due to free trade that allows free movement of goods, ideas, narratives and talents between the nation-states, the border crossing process, as the film suggests, is primarily guaranteed to male characters as the female characters are denied a similar privilege, an anecdote for continued male-dominated narratives in African productions.

Focus of the Dar 2 Lagos Film

The story in *Dar 2 Lagos* centres on four main characters, two males and two females. Kanumba (Steven Kanumba), a young man and a street video vendor in Tanzania, is adopted by a retired army officer, Mr. Maganga (David Manento). He is later sent to Nigeria to trace and bring back Mr. Maganga's two daughters, Mihayo Maganga or Stella (Bimbo Akintola), and Misoji Maganga or Esther (Mercy Johnson) who fled with their Nigerian mother that was once married to Mr. Maganga. During this assignment, Kanumba is also informed about Mr. Maganga's son, Raymond (Emmanuel Myamba), who is suspected to have fled to Nigeria after a dispute with his father. On his arrival in Lagos, Kanumba becomes

the object of desire for Stella, the managing director of the hotel where he resided. Later, Stella convinces Kanumba not to continue renting a hotel room and instead stay with her in the house she shares with her sister, Esther.

Unaware that these are Maganga's daughters he is tasked to trace, Kanumba mentions their old names whenever he makes a call to brief his employer on the developments in the case, an act that makes his hosts suspicious of him. In a dramatic twist, Kanumba accomplishes his task after preventing Esther and her half-brother, Raymond—who had been unaware of their blood relationship—from committing incest. Instead of taking Mihayo and Misoji back with him, which was his primary mission, he travels back with Raymond to his father, whose anger dissolves as he welcomes back his son with pride.

Dar 2 Lagos is the first Tanzanian film shot in Nigeria with real Nollywood actors; it was also directed by a Nigerian. Theoretically, this coming together of the two national video industries demonstrates the merging of the two video industries, primarily aimed at harnessing economic benefits for the people investing in the industry. In a broader sense, however, such a filmmaking encounter presents a political argument. It symbolically echoes the ongoing efforts made by African politicians to strengthen the African Union towards a borderless Africa. This is addressed in several ways both within and outside the text. For example, the DVD cover for *Dar 2 Lagos* features the shaking of hands, each actor has a wristlet in the national colours of the two nations, detailing the names and facial expressions of the actors. Moreover, Tanzanian and Nigerian maps merge behind the images of these two leading actors as if ignoring the real distance between the two countries. Within the narrative, the two countries are only introduced using the names of their international airports with their capitals repeatedly mentioned.

Erasure of borders under transnationalism
In a more practical way, these details suggest an erasure of borders to allow a free movement of products between two nation-states, a typical characteristic of a free market economy basically influenced by globalisation. Mackie (2001) holds that globalisation "involves the circulation of capital and commodities, information, signs, symbols and representations and also the movement of people" (p. 187). In fact, the very sense of co-production involves a movement of people and the distribution of the product within the two countries and beyond, entailing the circulation of both commodities and capital. For example, Game 1st Quality Nigeria Limited is a branch of a Tanzania based video production company.

Its extension to another country is made possible by liberalisation policies associated with globalisation. Similarly, the physical movement of actors from Tanzania to Nigeria and the act of Nollywood stars appearing in a Tanzanian production signal possible trade deals between the two countries. The film thus

becomes an artwork that does not only sell itself in terms of the story and images on screen but also constitutes an important forum to publicise the actors' personalities and the expertise of the director. This development opens transnational possibilities for people to work outside their national boundaries, a rare feat for local production companies in Africa. It also expands the possibility for the movement of symbols, images and manpower as commodities necessary for the advancement of individuals and the film industry.

The traded commodities in *Dar to Lagos* include music, which is used to interlace the narrative in addition to giving the movie a sense of mobility that transcends its spatial and temporal settings. In one of the scenes shot in Dar es Salaam, a conversation between Kanumba and Maganga is accompanied by background music of a Nigerian tone. The film uses this piece of music to invite the audience to connect Dar es Salaam and Lagos, the cities where the film is set, as Mr. Maganga narrates the sad story of his three children who have moved to Lagos out of his will. This Nigerian popular beat played in a Tanzania setting is an interpolation aimed at evoking the Nigerian setting in advance. In a scene in Lagos, Kanumba is welcomed with a popular Kiswahili song, *Malaika*, sung by the character of Stella, a hint at her Tanzanian roots. Both diegetic and non-diegetic sounds conversely bring together two cultures by acknowledging their popular musical pieces. Reggae music sung in Kiswahili follows Kanumba whenever he walks the Lagos streets in his search for Mr. Maganga's children. These overlapping sceneries demonstrate the mobility of the cultural products, here represented by the songs.

The film advances the general concept of transnationality as it weaves the plot and setting that involves two major locations, Dar es Salaam and Lagos, representing two African countries, Tanzania and Nigeria, respectively. The film begins and ends in Dar es Salaam, the residence of the two male protagonists. The middle is set in Lagos where the two female and one male protagonist live. In effect, we are invited to follow the primary protagonist, Kanumba, who becomes a transnational figure, and later explore the life of Raymond, another male character, described in the film as a successful businessman. Raymond is a foreigner in Nigeria who has managed to so successfully adopt the Nigerian culture that it becomes difficult to unmask his true nationality. The seamless cross-border mobility of the male characters in the film, however, does not extend to the female characters as well. Katarzyna Marciniak (2007) refers to such treatment as "unequal playing field" (p.4).

Yet, the film fails to provide any details on what kind of business Raymond is engaged in. His mention of travelling to different countries also makes him a transnational figure. His luxurious life, visually seen in terms of the material possession he owns such as expensive furniture in his apartment, expensive

clothes, and an expensive attest to his success and validate his freedom to choose where and how to live. On the other hand, neither Stella nor Esther, whose legal residence is in Nigeria, enjoys this success and freedom. The denial of movement for the female characters in the film illustrates Jan Nederveen Pieterse's (2004) argument that "as some boundaries wane, others remain or come in" (p. 111).

Transnationality is emphasised not only by physical visualisation of the geographical locations but also by using at least three languages: Kiswahili, Igbo and English. Whereas Igbo is used only once to exclude Kanumba from a conversation between hotel attendants bent on cheating him on the rate for an international call, English and Kiswahili, the pan-national languages, dominate the scenes. All Dar es Salaam scenes are in Kiswahili with English subtitles. The Lagos scenes are predominantly in English with notable moments of Kiswahili, hence giving the language of one main character an opportunity to cross the border.

This directorial decision to favour one language over another and ignore the use of Igbo provides different interpretations. One interpretation pertaining to the use of Kiswahili in both countries is recognition for its being selected as one of the African Union languages. A Nigerian language chosen for the same purpose is Fulani, which is not used in the film. Thus, introducing Nigerians to Kiswahili gives the film an additional value that also draws their attention to this trans-national lingua franca. Krings (2010) holds that the use of Kiswahili could "spread some knowledge about Tanzania and its national language, Kiswahili, to a Nigerian audience and— since Nigeria exports video films far beyond its borders—to audiences in almost every corner of the continent" (Krings, 2010, p. 89).

Another interpretation is that such a setting is intended to create a transnational layer of identity for the Tanzanians who are meeting away from their country of origin. Such layering plays a fundamental role in connecting the characters and, in a more explicit way, the people who have migrated as well as their homes. In this case, language is viewed as a "social and symbolic tie" of the characters in the film that have moved to a new place which can be "used to classify different types of spatial mobility on the domestic and … across different administrative units such as nation-states" (Faist, 1997, p. 215). Kiswahili, therefore, becomes a reference point whenever the characters feel like flavouring their discussion or the need to create a sense of being socially or culturally connected.

Language and cultural bonds
Using local language instead of English implies sharing of a particular cultural aspect, that is, a strong bond only shared by those who speak it to the exclusion of others who can only communicate in a 'foreign' language. English is an official

and international language in both countries, and the commercial benefits of the language are not lost on the audience. The use of English facilitates reaching a broader audience in and outside Africa. However, within this setting, one important representation is overlooked: the language that is crossing is more associated with the male side. This is Kiswahili, a Tanzanian language that represents the birthplace of all the characters, the paternal side of Mihayo and Misoji. The maternal side could be represented by Igbo, but the language remains confined within the boundaries of their maternal home Nigeria. Making the language of the male characters dominate the dialogue in the scenes and substituting the maternal language with English evokes a sense of male superiority over female.

For Nigeria and Tanzania, crossing from one side of the border to another becomes an important characteristic. To control border crossing, governments have set up several control mechanisms at the ports of departure or entry. Central to these border curbs is the human body which can be subjected to maximum control, including military aggression at the national level, or sexual and physical abuse at the personal level. However, *Dar 2 Lagos* presents a different scenario. The film erases all interrogations at the port of departure and entry. For example, Raymond's journey to Nigeria and other countries he claims to have visited before settling in Lagos are not visualised. Kanumba's first airborne travel is marked by long exterior shots of the two international airports, Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere in Dar es Salaam and Murtala Mohammed in Lagos. These two shots represent Kanumba's departure and arrival, respectively. The next shot projects his arrival at the hotel. The implied borderless and welcoming cities due to the omission of interior shots allow the film to establish what constitutes ideal travel between these two countries.

One assumption for the omission of interior shots at the airport detailing the crossing process featured by submission of travelling documents to the authorities is that the film industry is still at an infancy stage in Africa and that freedom to shoot everywhere remains restricted. Hence, the audience assumes that the airport authorities did not permit shooting inside the airport. If this were the case, the interior processes at the immigration offices could have been shot at another location away from the airport. Another assumption is that the film seeks a complete erasure of the borders between African countries, impractical so far on the ground. Free trade is not developed enough to erase the physical border, particularly when the border is "not just a territorial marker of the modern nation-state—defining its geographical boundary—but an ideological apparatus where notions of national identity, citizenship, and belonging are articulated" (Behdad, 1998, p. 109).

Ignoring the borders as the movie does amounts to questioning the universality of Behdad's (1998) notion of the border and, at the same time, showing the possibility for a variable perspective of the border. The implied removal of the border in the movie can also be interpreted as a way of establishing male-hegemony as manifested by the male character's struggle that results in both national and transnational success. Thus, the removal of the borders for only the male characters perpetuates the idea of patriarchy since the crossing of female characters remains one-dimensional and merely implied—to Nigeria from Tanzania to settle in the land of their mother.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the film's setting limits the movement of female characters at both the local and international levels. One of the compositional techniques used to restrict their movements is featuring them only in the interior scenes. Despite their central role in the film, Misoji appears twice in the exterior shots and Mihayo only once. In these exterior shots, they are with their men, Kanumba and Raymond, preparing to get into the car. This visual representation of women is based on an old tradition that promote the idea that in most African cultures that women occupy a private domain despite their economic or academic success, a notion—that to a large extent—is no longer tenable in the urban centres where the film, the setting of the film. On this point, Bardan (2007) maintains: "[W]hereas in the past men were the ones who first ventured to foreign countries in search of better paid work, nowadays an increasing number of women travel alone, leaving their families behind" (95).

The film's inability to provide exterior shots featuring female characters alludes to broader gender-related politics. This stereotyping feigns ignorance of the presence of women in the public domain in the real-life situations, that is, outside the boundaries of their nations or homes in this matter. This notion of domesticating women makes the film have minimum shots featuring women, even as extras, in streets and other public places. In fact, the glaring absence of women in the film undermines their representation as characters. Stam and Spence (2004) argue that "at times the 'flaw' in the mimesis derives not from the presence of distorting stereotypes but from the absence of representations of an oppressed group" (p. 881). If women are not allowed to be outside their homes or offices, they are assumed to be absent and, thus, their travel beyond their national borders becomes irrelevant or unnecessary.

Limitations of transnationality in an African landscape
Transnationality is supposed to provide freedom and flexibility in the mobility of people. This flexibility is not meant to favour a particular group of people, in this case men. As Kanumba's primary task is to trace Mihayo and Misoji, Maganga's daughters born to a Nigerian mother, the audience expects them to benefit equally as they travel between the two countries. However, the successful

location of these characters does not culminate with the two girls boarding the Dar es Salaam-bound plane with Kanumba; they remain rooted in Nigeria. Instead, it is the notorious Raymond, Maganga's only son, who joins on the return trip home him in the final sequence of the film. Whereas the border is first erased for Raymond to get him into Nigeria where he flourishes as a successful businessman, and later erased for Kanumba to travel and find him, the doors remain firmly shut for Mihayo and Misoji. They cannot join their father immediately. The question of home thus becomes a puzzle and the border remains intact for the female characters. It becomes evident for them "home", to borrow Paul Monette's phrase, "is the place you get to, not the place you came from" (cited in Fortier, 2001, p. 409).

As spectators, we are made to believe how simple it is for a man to cross a border to a country of his choice and make it his home which is beyond, as Fortier (2001) puts it, the "sequence between location of belonging and, location of residence or location of origin" (p. 411). The film does not provide any details on how Raymond arrived in Nigeria, let alone account for his immediate success. This omission in the visual narrative can be considered as evidence of the benefits men enjoy over women not only in travelling as though there are no borders between Nigeria and Tanzania but also in terms of class or status. Such a representation, Shohat and Stam (1994) would argue, makes the spectators "reserve the right to confront a film with their own personal and cultural knowledge", a desire perpetuated by "real-life prototypes for characters and situations" (p. 178).

Through both visual elements and dialogue, the film explores more of the irrationality and unequal privileges in crossing frontiers for people of different genders than its intended themes of "Re-union" and "knowledge before marriage." In fact, the film inadvertently questions our understanding of the concept of transnationality, particularly who is exactly benefiting from these transnational transactions when it comes to African video films. Marciniak, Imre and O'Healy (2007) observe that "transnational processes are inherently gendered, sexualized and racialized" adding that "the borders they erase and erect affect different groups differently" (p. 4). The failure to project Misoji and Mihayo travelling together with Kanumba demonstrates a bias towards protecting the male heir.

From the beginning of the film, the audience is aware that Mihayo and Misoji were born and raised in Tanzania. They are Tanzanians by birth and upbringing. Moving back to Nigeria, they acquire their Nigerian citizenship because their mother is Nigerian. Thus, they enjoy dual citizenship, which is allowed in Nigeria. However, only Kanumba and Raymond, who possess a single citizenship appear to benefit from the transnational exploits when the opposite could have been more plausible. When Kanumba and Raymond are about to leave for

Tanzania, Misoji accompanies them to the airport. Mihayo is absent from this scene. Bidding farewell, Misoji says, "Mihayo couldn't make it here but tell our father that we will be coming next week." They all get into the car and drive to the airport. The hint that they will travel to Tanzania soon remains a promise that could be set aside; more importantly that return would remain secondary to the primary return of the male heir. In fact, the absence of travel for the women in the actual film simply confirms the suspicions of patriarchal values imposing themselves on the film.

Krings (2010) claims that "the biggest Tanzanian genre consists of films exploring gender relations" (85). In recent years, gender related issues have received an enormous attention from women of different calibres and, more specifically, women activists. The filmmakers at their discretion try to join the movement although with a different intention. They generally target sales. Indeed, as Okwori (2003) observes, video films whose narratives are grounded in these issues invest in the rapid growing audience of women whose active participation "among the viewing public" is considered to have boomed the industry (11). To invite this group of viewers, the visual narratives ought to provide images that engage women more in their struggles and success instead of stereotyping their failure and dependency on the male, their limited freedom in going to wherever they want. It is true that Stella (Mihayo) is successful as a character so much that she can be viewed as a role model for other African women. Indeed, as a hotel manager she holds a position that would normally be occupied by men in Africa.

However, the presence of Kanumba in the hotel intrudes upon her sphere of influence and, hence, undermines her authority. In one scene, Stella intervenes as one female attendant is on her way to serve Kanumba with food. She takes the plate, goes to the kitchen and gives Kanumba a warm welcome and even moves him to her house. Even when Kanumba and Stella quarrel, the film sets a resolution that favours the male character since Stella bears the responsibility for the dispute. Also following the aborted attempt to commit incest between Esther and Raymond, Stella again shoulders the responsibility. These portrayals weaken the female characters as the female audience is likely to be moved by the narrative and the suspense the film provides but would shirk from identifying with such a female character, who appears to have an obvious flaw.

Dar 2 Lagos stresses continual negotiations of the female characters within themselves and members of their family. Although such an emphasis demonstrates the strong family bonds of women compared to those of men because their decisions have much broader implications, it also makes the spectators fail to identify with female protagonists. Faist (1997) argues that "decisions over moving or staying made by families and individuals not only influence later decisions made by other individuals and households but also the

long-term social and economic arrangements within the families, households and the sending communities" (212). This sounds like an important strategy for all family members without showing any bias towards one group. However, the film suggests that only women cannot decide by themselves. The family ought to be involved. In one scene, Esther seeks advice from her sister, Stella, on whether to accept or reject Raymond's proposal for marriage. Although this becomes instrumental in delaying the consummation of love that could have come with marriage—hence avoiding committing incest—the action of seeking advice from a family member limits the ability of this female character of making an informed and independent decision. For the male characters it is different because Raymond unilaterally decides to marry Ester without seeking the opinion of any family member or anybody for that matter.

Even the whole notion of bringing the girls home to their father has a possessive connotation. It is a paternalistic gesture that ignores their freedom and sounds more paternalistic. The film is silent on their mother. They live alone as adults. However, the omission of the mother-figure while the father-figure looms large again shows a bias towards male chauvinism that the film unwittingly embraces. The film wants us to sympathise with the paternal concerns for making the father appear responsible, a common practice in many African cultures. When the father calls them home, the audience invited to identify with the desperate father and sympathise with him for his loss of his children. This in turn gives him authority to claim ownership over them because he really cares for them, the fact that they are now adults notwithstanding.

As spectators, we offer him the right to look for the missing children, hence becoming complicit in sanctioning male hegemony. Does it mean that what the mother feels for her children is irrelevant? Does she not matter at all? Indirectly the film is imposing on the audience the idea of male superiority over the female, hence the glaring absence of the mother. The fact that neither Misoji nor Mihayo travels to back to Dar es Salaam leaves the audience to speculate whether their maternal bond—as females—is stronger bond as Lagos represents their Motherland, or as females they are secondary since the wayward male heir has returned ahead of them as a prodigal son.

Conclusion
Dar 2 Lagos attests to the presence of vibrant efforts by the video industry in Africa to broaden their spheres of audience. These efforts attempt to reach beyond their national borders with the primary intention of financial gains. This is manifested in the use of multiple languages and a cast drawn from two different countries. This positive strategy aims to establish a sustainable video film industry also indicates possible transnational expansion that has implications beyond economic growth of individuals investing in the industry. Productions of

films such as *Dar 2 Lagos* is a manifestation that the cinema experience which had a relatively early start in Africa but with severely limited cross-border distribution of locally produced films has taken a new scene. Common distribution problems include inadequate funding; the monopoly of foreign companies in film production, distribution, and exhibition of commercial films; and the tendency of African nations to compel the film industry to work for the government instead of developing it as independent institution for mass entertainment. These problems have generally been eliminated, hence the transformation in the African transnational film industry. The new film experience in Africa indicates possible extensive collaboration between local producers and distributor across the continent. Indeed, this is the economic benefit of multinational co-productions.

The transnational benefits, however, extend beyond the material benefits. These include the movement of ideas, cultures, narratives, talents and people between nation-states. The border crossing process articulated *in Dar 2 Lagos*, for example is to a larger extent a manifestation of economic and political liberalisation, a global phenomenon. But film-makers also need to be gender-sensitive to avoid perpetuating gender-stereotypes of the by-gone years largely linked to traditional African norms and values. Indeed, *Dar 2 Lagos* vastly privileges male characters, Mr. Maganga, Kanumba, and Raymond, visually and through dialogue, characters who can move around space with porous borders and receive an extensive exposure outside their homes. However, the same narrative that overtly promotes trans-nationalism denies female characters, Esther and Stella, equal opportunity to explore this malleable space. It also takes the issue to extremes by locating the female characters only in enclosed areas, such as hotel rooms and lobbies, the restaurant, or the living room.

On the other hand, male characters dominate the exterior scenes of the narrative, enjoy the transnational border crossing privileges, including a complete erasure of border crossing procedures. They also dictate the direction of the story by allowing the narrative to follow one character through which we explore other main characters. On the whole, the male figure is more flexible, and transnational in a sense, in the film than the female figure, who appear rigid and rooted in one space, hence lacking the cosmopolitan aspect that engender the film in the promotion of the male ideals. This suggests inequality in the representation of male and female characters. Noticeably, the film suggests that the female character is tradable in this trade liberalisation era, not the male character, who can seamlessly move in and out of the transnational space. The male characters' mobility is equated with other narrative elements, such as music and language which—to a large extent—are marked in the film to serve beyond their countries of origin, and primarily serve the male interests.

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