

EYIMOFÉ

THIS IS MY DESIRE



A FILM BY ARIE & CHUKO

GDN Studios presents



EYIMOFE

THIS IS MY DESIRE

a film by Arie & Chuko

2020 / Nigeria / 5.1 / 1.66:1 / 110'



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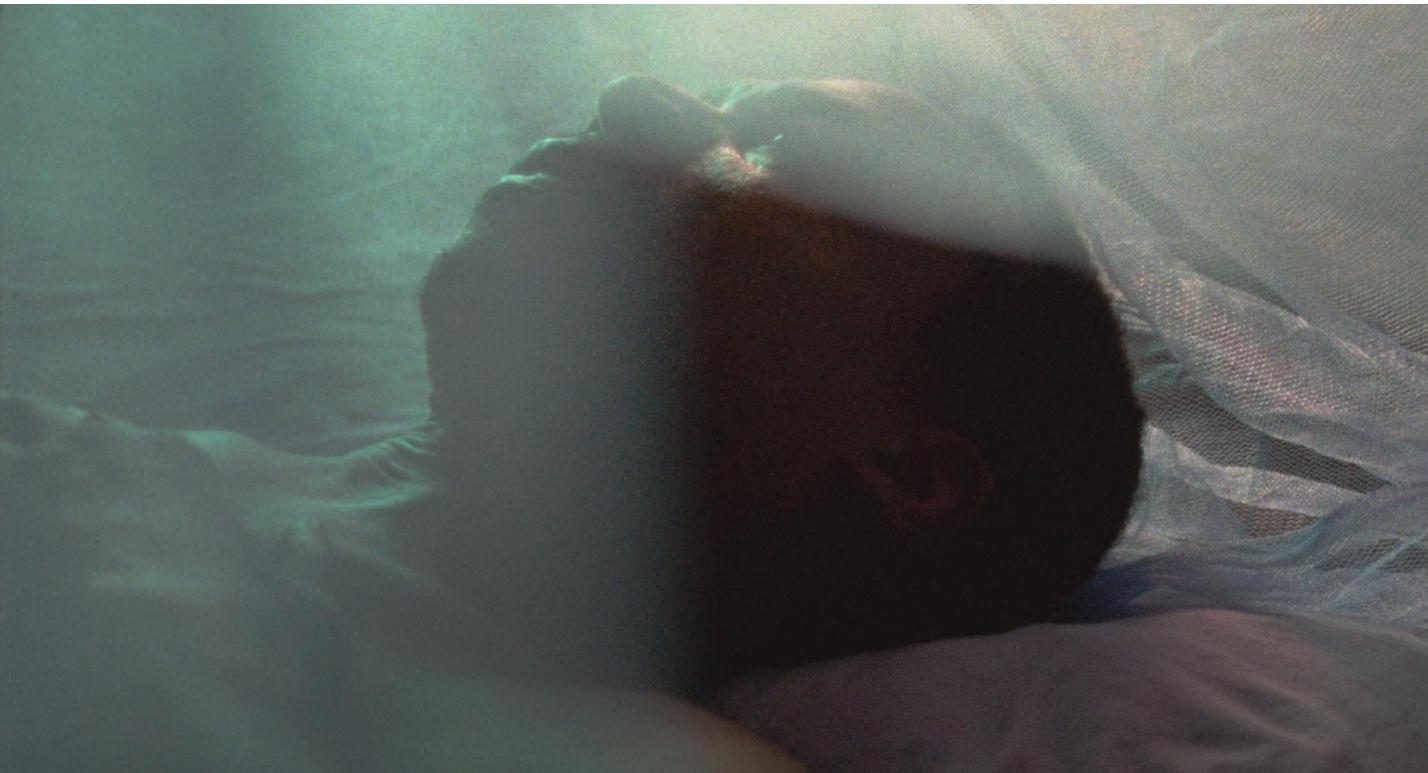
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SYNOPSIS

Tragedy and fate intervene as two Nigerians try to better the lives of their families. Eyimofe (This is My Desire) is a film about two people's quest for what they believe will be a better life on foreign shores.

After Mofe loses his family and Rosa fails to deliver on a promise, their travel plans collapse forcing them to reconsider living abroad. As time passes and wounds heal, they learn the future they desperately seek can be built at home.





Arie and Chuko Esiri were born 30 minutes apart in Warri, Nigeria. Growing up in Lagos their mother would put a padlock on the TV in a misguided attempt to make them more studious.

20 years later both would enroll at film school. Arie graduated from Columbia University and Chuko NYU. During their time in New York they collaborated on a pair of short films; Besida which premiered at the 68th Berlinale, and Goose, at the LA Film Festival. Eyimofe is their first feature film.



INTERVIEW WITH **ARIE & CHUKO**

What inspired you to write Eyimofe?

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

(ARIE): The film changed a lot since the first draft Chuko wrote, but ultimately I feel I've always had a hold of what it is that he was trying to say and those things are things that we have talked about consistently. His frustrations about what we go through; what everyone in the country goes through on a daily basis, particularly the everyday person. We've always been frustrated by that, so the work resonated with me and it was my job to try to help Chuko make the writing as concise as possible and strike at the heart of some of the issues the film is trying to highlight. You know, the byzantine nature in which we go about doing things here that frustrates people to such an extent that they are willing to risk their lives at sea to find new shores, wherever that may be.



You touch on migration and other social issues, what is your hope for this film?

(CHUKO): I just want people to experience this part of the world that they probably don't know or have never seen. To recognize themselves in the characters; to go on an emotional journey with the characters. And also to recontextualize what you may or may not have heard about the reasons why people are leaving the country.

(ARIE): We don't set out to make films to prove a point or make people think a certain way, but more to show in as much truth as we can what a certain situation is like. Or what the quotidian here in Lagos entails. And that lends itself to the way we shoot which is very objective, almost like documentary style, as we are just trying to convey a truth about a situation. And I mean through that you have people understand or identify, you hope, with these characters who come from a different place and culture, and while they are appreciating or appreciative of the adversities one hopes that there is some beauty in what you are seeing, and just being brought to a new place can be inspiring.

I mean we had friends come to Lagos after seeing the film. They were attracted to this city. It's a very alluring place. The city is very much a third character in the film.



The story is told in separate chapters. What was the process that led you to that decision?

(CHUKO): The story evolved quite a lot from the first draft. I ended up in chapters because we were in our last year in film school and one of our classmates sent around I think it was the very first study that the Geena Davis Institute at USC had done on Gender Representation in Film, and in reading that and looking at my work I found that I was actually quite guilty of minimizing the role of female characters. And then that led me to start thinking about the character of Rosa and about her journey and about her life and about what that's like as a woman in Nigeria and how that compares to Mofe as a man in Nigeria. And then it slowly sort of built out of there. I wanted to make her a larger character and in doing so she ended up gaining her own chapter.

I think when you're working on something, or when you're in a space where you're inspired, you sort of draw it from everywhere. And during scripting I read Charles Dickens' novel Bleak House and he did this thing where he made central locations characters and tying people to those locations and that sort of led me to the idea of broadening the scope of the piece which is really how Rosa ended up with her chapter. I'd also watched a couple of films, Fatih Akin's Edge of Heaven and Wong Kar-wai's Chungking Express, and these films are also divided up. And putting this all together gave me the confidence to divide the story up. I guess that's a very long way of saying Rosa's character needed more space and so I gave her more.

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

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

What was your biggest challenge when making this film?

(ARIE): The biggest challenge in shooting in a place like Lagos will always be infrastructural. This is a city of twenty million people with no organized public transport system and exceptionally bad traffic, very few traffic lights at intersections and all these kinds of things. Uneven roads, inconsistent power and water supply. So trying to tackle a film of this scale in which you're trying to make the city a third character, and shooting in over 40 something locations with a sizeable crew is very tricky to navigate.

There was also the additional challenge of shooting on film in a country that has no processing labs so for the most part we were shooting blind where you kind of shoot and don't get your dailies back immediately. We were seeing what we shot almost 5 days after the fact and that left a lot of work for our director of photography.

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

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

How did you go about selecting your cast and eliciting the best performance from them?

(CHUKO): A lot of the work with the actors was very collaborative. It was discussing who the characters were. We had about two weeks of rehearsals beforehand where we managed to get underneath the skins of who the characters were and drawing the actors closer to them. With Jude who had come in from England and hadn't been back home for a long time, I introduced him to an electrician who inspired the character that he's playing. Just putting him in the spaces where he could imbibe the people, the accent, and the mannerisms. With Jude he's a Nigerian, so it's in there somewhere we just had to remind him. With the girls it was really about understanding film language. We had an acting coach come in and work with them and he really taught them the specifics of camera and how much one needs to or doesn't need to emote in close-ups and wides; and so with the girls they had that crash course in acting for film, but everything was always going to come back to who the characters are and how close you can bring the actor to that character so that they react, emote and behave as that individual.



What was your process when it came to the look and feel of the film; and in making Lagos a third character?

(ARIE): Lagos was the stage. We were very conscious of trying to fit it into our frames, so we were putting wider lenses and backing up so we could see more of what was happening, or rather more of the life around our characters. A lot of people mentioned about how much I obsessed over people walking in the background, whether it's the tailor with the scissors or the lady selling bread early in the morning – these are all things I wanted to include in our frames and a lot of times just putting people and kids on the street who were walking by and just getting them to be in the film and filling the frame up with life. But to accomplish that I thought about our language, the language we were using with our lenses and staging the characters in the heart of the locale. And the fact that we shot in over 40 locations just meant that you would see a lot of Lagos, so the city was scripted into the film. It exists in the script as a third character, so in that regard a lot of the work was already done for us when we went out to make the film.



What motivated your choice of music and sound design for the film?

(ARIE): Our composer, Akin Adebowale, who I worked with very closely on several projects is extremely generous and patient and so it meant that I could be very nitpicky with my references and he was very receptive to my ideas. But ultimately we looked at a lot of music from the East of Nigeria that emerged around the late 1960's early 1970's which was post the Biafra war. A lot of that music has elements of Blues and also the celebratory elements of Highlife, and a lot of that stems from the aftermath of the civil war where Igbos were trying to find their feet again and take a positive outlook on life and be grateful for having survived a very brutal war.

I just felt that a lot of their song messages resonated with the film – people trying to find a better life for themselves, trying to answer life questions. Trying to survive their circumstances and overcome their shortcomings, so that really was the fabric of everything we set out to make. We had a lot of Highlife guitars and riffs, and at the same time Akin would mix uplifting sounds musically and contextualize these in a Nigerian setting; giving them a traditional context if that makes sense.

DIRECTORS



ARIE

FEATURES

EYIMOFÉ (This is My Desire) (2020)

- Co-Director – Producer

SHORTS

Goose (2015)

Co-Director - Producer

- LA Film Festival

Besida (2016)

Producer

- Berlinale
- BFI London Film Festival
- London Short Film Festival
- Wassermusik



CHUKO

FEATURES

EYIMOFÉ (This is My Desire) (2020)

- Co-Director – Producer –
Writer

SHORTS

Goose (2015)

Co-Director – Producer – Writer

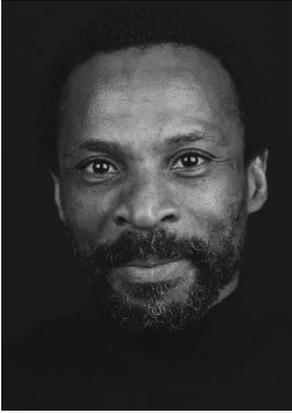
- LA Film Festival

Besida (2016)

Director – Producer – Writer

- Berlinale
- BFI London Film Festival
- London Short Film Festival
- Wassermusik

CAST



Jude Akuwudike
Mofe

Jude is a Nigerian-born actor educated in England. He trained at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and has since performed at some of the best theatres in the UK. His credits include **Moon on a Rainbow Shawl** directed by Michael Buffong for the National Theatre, **The Faith Machine** directed by Jamie Lloyd for the Royal Court, Anthony Nielson's **God in Ruins** at the Soho Theatre, **Macbeth** and **Macbett** at Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), and **Pericles** at The Globe. On television, Jude can be seen in Sky Atlantic's **Gangs of London**, BBC1's **Moving On**, Amazon's **Fortitude**, and Sky One's **In The Long Run**.

His film credits include **Beasts of No Nation**, **The Tempest**, **Touched By A Stranger**, **Whisper the Way of the Child**, **Sahara** and **A World Apart**. He has also done extensive work for **BBC Radio**, including a long run in the World Service's **Resident President** and **Westway**.

Jude lives in London and **Eyimofe** is his first film in Nigeria.

Temi was born and raised in Akowonjo, Lagos Nigeria. She developed an interest in acting through her father's love for foreign films which she also watched and would then experiment with accents and recite lines. She pursued her interest in acting at the University of Lagos enrolling in the Department of Creative Arts. There she featured in **Sad Pink** curated by the British Council for the Lagos Theatre Festival 2016, and **Strelitzia** by Donna Ogunnaike for the Lagos Theatre Festival 2018.

She lives in Ilupeju, Lagos and has an identical twin.

Eyimofe is her first on screen performance.



Temi Ami-williams
Rosa

CAST



Tomiwa Edun
Seyi

Tomiwa has been working in Film, TV and Theatre since he graduated from Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). He played the first ever black Romeo at the Globe, starred in the hit BBC drama **Merlin**, and Abi Morgan's **The Hour** alongside Dominic West and Ben Whishaw. He has featured in a number of shows in the US including **Bates Motel**, **Lucifer**, and **Elementary**. Films include **What Happened To Monday** alongside Noomi Rapace, **The Dying Of The Light** with Nicolas Cage, and **In The Cloud**, a feature pilot for Crackle. He is star of the smash-hit **The Journey** trilogy in the FIFA video-game franchise.

Last year he appeared in SkyOne's **A Discovery Of Witches** and played in a run of **Translations** at the National Theatre, directed by Ian Rickson, receiving rave reviews. Most recently he can be seen in **Botticelli In The Fire** at the Hampstead Theatre and **The Capture** for BBC, and will be seen in the television series **Trying** for Apple TV+.

Jacob started his acting career on stage in Chicago, Illinois US. His theatre credits include theatres such as **A Red Orchid Theatre, Facility Theatre, Strawdog Theatre, Mary Arrchie Theatre, Trap Door Theatre, Collaboration, Shattered Globe Theatre, The Attic Playhouse**. *'I acquired the most essential experience at A Red Orchid Theatre. I was working their box office at the time and I snuck into a rehearsal to watch Michael Shannon while they were working **Simpatico** by Sam Shepard. Hard to explain...I guess you had to be there'*

His TV credits include HBO's **Girls** and CBS's **Elementary**. Other film credits are **Echo Boomers, The Art Police, I Don't Know How She Does It, The Seashell, and The Return Of Joe Rich**.

Jacob lives in Chicago and **Eyimofe** is his first film in Nigeria.



Jacob Alexander
Peter

CAST



Cynthia Ebijie
Grace

Cynthia is from Edo State, Nigeria. She started acting in 2018 attending several auditions before being cast in the Mnet series **My Siblings And I** before going on to play the lead in Chibuike Ibe's **Sade Takes Lagos**.

In her spare time she attends acting master classes to hone her craft and learn new things. Whether it's on the internet or in real life she's always ready to do better and be better. She loves spending time with family and hopes to one day work with Taraji P Henson. She lives in Lagos and is a final year accounting student at Lagos State University.

Chioma best known as Chigul is a master of ceremonies, singer, TV host, actress and comedienne. Breaking into the Nigerian entertainment scene through a series of viral songs and videos, the Chigul persona was born.

She co-hosts **EL Rated** on Ebony Life TV, and the Nigerian version of the American hit show Kids Say The Darndest Things. She has appeared in the feature films **Remember Me**, **Out Of Luck**, the Genevieve Nnaji produced **Road To Yesterday**, and **Lagos Men**. Her first lead role was in BB Sasore's 2017 comedy **Banana Island Ghost**.

A seasoned stage actress, Chioma has performed in Nigeria and the US. She is proficient in Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, English, Spanish and French.



Chioma 'Chigul'
Omeruah
Mama Esther

CREW

Directed by Arie and Chuko

Written by Chuko Esiri

Director of Photography Arseni Khachaturan

Production Designer Taisa Malouf

Edited by Andrew Stephen Lee

Music by Akin Adebawale

Costume Designer Daniel Obasi

Casting by Kemi Lala Akindoju

Produced by Melissa Adeyemo, Arie Esiri and Chuko Esiri

Executive Produced by

Maiden Alex Ibru, Toke Alex Ibru and Salman Zoueihed

Kayode Akindele, Albert Esiri and Ifeoma Esiri

Olorugun Oskar Ibru and Christopher Ibru

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Filmfestspiele
Berlin

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OF INTERWOVEN TALES"

FRIEZE

"A NEW AFRICAN NARRATIVE"

ARSENAL

"A CLEAR-EYED PORTRAIT
OF A VIBRANT CITY
INFORMED BY TWO TALENTED NATIVE SONS"

VARIETY

"A REAL REVELATION
OF THIS YEAR'S BERLINALE"

SLATE

"REMARKABLE
DEBUT FILM"

DER TAGESSPIEGEL

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