

# FILM REVIEW

**Bolanle Austen-Peters, director. *The Bling Lagosians*.** 2019. 98 minutes. English, Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin. Nigeria. BAP Productions. No price reported. Streaming on [9jaRocks.com](http://9jaRocks.com).

*The Bling Lagosians* is a colorful, engrossing, refreshing, and multidimensional take on the elite Lagosians. Bolanle Austen-Peters (BAP) offers a unique perspective that encompasses the corruption, consumption, rivalry, and pretension of the corporate elite. Austen-Peters has a sophisticated style which aligns her with the group of significant New Nollywood directors. *The Bling Lagosian* is a directorial debut for BAP, even though she has previously been a household name in theater and film productions.

The film centers on the Holloway family, a name that sounds like “hollow ways”; this elite wealthy Lagos family has created a quagmire by living a lavishly expensive lifestyle which is well above their means. While they pretend to be wealthy and happy, they are in reality beset by dwindling wealth and family crises. Their family name speaks to their hollow, pretentious, immoral, and corrupt lifestyle, all except for the last daughter, Tokunbo, who seems to break away from the family notoriety in forging her own pristine identity.

Akin Halloway (Gbenga Titiloya) runs St Ives, a corporate entity that is deep in debt while the family owners are living an extremely consumerist and materialistic lifestyle. St Ives is representative of the deep-seated corruption of Nigeria’s corporate sector. The film exposes the stereotypical day-to-day drama of “partying and ostentatious social gathering” (James Yeku, “In Praise of Ostentation: Social Class in Lagos and the Aesthetics of Nollywood’s Owambe Genre” [*African Studies* 2021:1–17]) which is commonplace among the rich and famous in the city. *Bling Lagosians* is partly a semiotic signifier of the ostentatious trope of “the Owambe,” which permeates the city of Lagos among the powerful and glamorous. The film implicates the Nigerian “well-to-dos” and how they invest resources in ostentatious consumption, as at the birthday party for Mopola Holloway, while exhibiting the subtlest

inconsiderate attitude toward their poor but diligent and dedicated workers, who have to beg for their salaries to be paid.

The Lagos corporate elites are depicted as envious, covetous, and callous. Akin engages in an amorous affair with his associate's wife; this reveals the extent of the character of consumption of everything and everyone that is ingrained in the Lagos elites. They associate closely with one another but nurture hatred among themselves. They throw cryptic ironic compliments at each other, but yet seize every opportunity to ridicule and expose their compatriots out of envy and rivalry. For instance, Oge's act of envy toward (and her open humiliation of) Mopelola Holloway at a public gathering forces Mope into a confrontation with her. Mope, livid with anger, reminds Oge of her earlier reputation as a prostitute.

The film also focuses on the juxtaposition between the perceptions of the Nigerian "well-to-do" and the lower class, as exemplified by the discussion between Nnamdi (Alexx Ekubo) and Tokunboh Holloway (Sharon Ooja) about the relative merits of different kinds of art. The elites are cast as consumerist, serious, and chaotic against the lack of focus and "unseriousness" of the ordinary Nigerians. In the same vein, Nnamdi sees art from both a utilitarian and pragmatic perspective. He wants to make a film that will earn him money and also make the ordinary Nigerians laugh, as they "need to laugh" because "the country is very hard." On the contrary, Tokunboh desires the materialism and validation that comes with filmmaking. She just wants to win awards, and like the rest of Nigeria's political elites, she does not care about ordinary Nigerians.

The Holloway household is a monument to generational and inherited wealth, an indication of the economic insulation enjoyed by certain classes of Nigerians and the exclusion of certain others. In the film, wealth is predetermined for the elites, while for the likes of Nnamdi, wealth is only obtained through hard work and tenacity. Nnamdi has conquered the Asaba film market and wants to break into the metropolitan Lagos market through the production of a blockbuster epic thriller. There is no respite for anyone who wants to break away from generational poverty. As Auntie Joy (Helen Paul), one of the domestic staff of the Holloway household, tells Brother Shaggy (Samuel Animashaun) in Pidgin English, "cuddle no be for poor people." Enjoyment is only for those who are rich.

In *Bling Lagosians*, Lagos is presented as a city inhabited by characters of many different lifestyles and social orientations. As a postcolonial society, such lifestyles remain significant to the way we perceive how inequality is represented, and how the city is partly defined by such a dichotomy. In films such as *Bling Lagosians* the viewer is well aware of its sense of urbanity, and the revelation of sites of the "distinctive social, spatial and cultural characteristics" (Anthony King, *Postcolonial Cities* [Binghamton: New York, 2009:1]) that make up a postcolonial city.

As such, Austen-Peters's *Bling Lagosians* is an essential addition to the Lagos genre of Nollywood film.

Babatunde Onikoyi  
University of Regina  
Saskatchewan, Canada  
[Boo919@uregina.ca](mailto:Boo919@uregina.ca)

Chikwurah Destiny Isiguzo  
Abia State University  
Uturu, Nigeria  
[isiguzocdestiny@gmail.com](mailto:isiguzocdestiny@gmail.com)

doi:10.1017/asr.2022.123