



January 2023

Bravo Burkina!

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Recommended Citation

Lyden, John C. (2023) "Bravo Burkina!," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 27: Iss. 1, Article 30.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol27/iss1/30>

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Bravo Burkina!

Abstract

This is a film review of *Bravo, Burkina!* (2022), directed by Walé Oyéjidé.

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Author Notes

John Lyden is the Department Chair and Blizek Professor of Religious Studies at University of Nebraska Omaha. He has been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



Bravo Burkina! (2022), dir. Walé Oyéjidé

This film tells the story of Aimé, a boy from Burkina Faso who migrates to Italy as an adult, but who travels back and forth in time between the various stages of his life. This allows the audience to see the tensions that he feels as one who has left behind his country and family for an immigrant experience that is at times lonely and isolated. Like any immigrant, he left to find new opportunities and success that is sometimes elusive, and at the cost of lost identity and connections to his people.

Aimé meets Asma, whose request for asylum has been refused, and so must leave Italy in ten days. As his experiences with her and his memories of his old life merge, his relationship with her is a cipher for his ambivalent relationship to his immigrant status. A mysterious figure in a mask gives him advice, when he is still a child: “You will gain everything and lose everything, by crossing the water.” Later, we learn that the masked figure is himself at a later time in his life, and that he has traveled back in time to give himself this advice.

The masked figure also haunts his dreams, telling him that it is he who wears a mask, as he is running away from himself. He wears flamboyant Italian clothes that mask his African past, and ignores other immigrants who are locked behind a gate. When he finally lets them out, they become a team of workers for his business, which prospers as a result, producing beautiful boxes that emit light and the sound of the ocean—somehow magically capturing their African past in an artifact that travels with them.

The lesson seems to be that one can hold onto one's former country even as an immigrant, and that it is important to do so. The film's narrative is a bit muddled due to its reliance on suggestion and evocative images which are not always meant to be taken literally, so that it is not always clear what is supposed to be happening, and I find this is a flaw in the film: it could have been told in a way that is just as poetic and expressive, without this level of confusion. Nonetheless, it is a beautiful film to watch, and expresses well the dual nature of the immigrant who wants to remember both their past and present experiences.