# VIDEOS IN MOTION

*Processes of transnationalization in the southern Nigerian video industry:*

Networks, Discourses, Aesthetics

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Supervisor: Prof. Alessandro Triulzi (University of Naples  "L'Orientale")

Co-supervisor: Prof. Jonathan Haynes (Long Island University – New York)

Academic Year 2010/211

Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"

Dipartimento di Studi e Ricerche su Africa e Paesi Arabi

Tesi di Dottorato di Ricerca in Africanistica, IX ciclo - Nuova Serie

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INTRODUCTION

*Videos in motion*


The research that I discuss throughout the pages of this thesis, the way it was conducted and the direction it took are profoundly indebted to two episodes I experienced in the first few months of my fieldwork. I want to briefly discuss them here as a way of introducing the topic of this dissertation and its structure. When I wrote my PhD proposal I wanted to concentrate my research on the Nigerian video industry, but I was not yet sure about which aspect of the industry's complex reality I wanted to focus on. As a student of anthropology and media studies, I had studied African visual arts and the history of African cinema and I was fascinated by the way Nigerian videos were revolutionizing these disciplinary fields. The existing literature on the topic was already wide, and became even wider while I was conducting my research. Thus I was not sure about how to locate my work within this corpus of well-documented studies.[1] Somehow imprudently, my belief was that once arrived in Nigeria something would finally size my attention. With some kind of optimism I was following what I often considered an important epistemological principle, the principle of listening, suggested in a short quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty that I had once copied in my diary:

> the reflection is not to presume upon what it finds and condemn itself to putting into the things what it will then pretend to find in them; it must suspend the faith in the world only so as to *see it*, only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us; it must seek in the world itself the secret of our perceptual bond with it [...] It must plunge into the world instead of surveying it, it must descend toward it such as it is instead of working its way back up toward a prior possibility of thinking it − which would impose upon the world in advance the condition for our control over it. It must question the world, it must enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make it say, finally, what in its silence *it means to say…* (1968: 38 − 39).

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[1] I will discuss in depth the existing literature on Nollywood and the specificity of the Nigerian video phenomenon in relation to the history of African cinema in the first chapter.

Hence approaching my fieldwork I was hoping that within this "silence" I could recognize the right position to look at the intricate world of cultural production in Nigeria. The research was beginning and I was full of expectations and uncertainties.

Before going to Nigeria there were some logistical problems I had to solve. First, I had to give myself a solid background as a Nollywood videos *connaisseur*. I had already watched a number of Nigerian videos while I was living in London, a few years earlier, and those were the films that actually generated my interest in the topic. But evidently that was not enough. I needed to watch more videos and I was sure that this would help me in better understanding which direction my research should take. The problem was, however, where to get the videos.

I thus found myself walking through one of the many markets in the central part of Naples, close to the main train station, looking for some Nigerian videos to buy. Most of the African stands that I found were run by Senegalese vendors and were selling copies of what I thought were Francophone videos. Most of the DVDs exposed on the shelves were pirated copies, and at first glance it was hard to get an idea of their content. Thus, to satisfy my curiosity, I decided to buy a few of them. When I watched one of them at home I realized that its content was not, as I had imagined, a copy of some Senegalese or Ivorian television series. It was instead the copy of a recent Nigerian hit dubbed in French. In this version of the film, Nigerian video trailers, which precede most movies, were substituted for specific adverts oriented toward diasporic audiences. In addition, before the film's original credits sequence someone had included the logo of a francophone production company with addresses and phone numbers in Paris and Piacenza. When I rang the number, the head of the production company – a young Ivorian who moved to Italy a few years ago and set up a production and distribution business using his previous experiences in television and theatre in Abidjan – answered. It transpired that his company trades both Ivorian and Nigerian media products in Europe. While chatting with him, I discovered that the film I bought in Naples was a copy of a copy of a copy, whose biography was fascinating and difficult to retrace. The video was shot in Lagos around 2005. Probably only a few weeks later, a pirated copy of it was acquired by a television studio in Abidjan and dubbed by professional artists. The Ivorian producer based in Italy managed to get access to a copy of the dubbed version and replicated it, in partnership with an Italian digital media company. The film was then sold in Italy, Switzerland, France, Belgium and Germany. One of these "original" pirated copies ended up in the hands of some other, presumably Senegalese, entrepreneur who pirated it once again and put it on the market in Naples. This was the version I finally bought.

As I advanced in my research, this episode progressively assumed a particular relevance. Before discussing the influence it had, however, I want to describe the other episode I mentioned. The second problem I had as I was beginning my research concerned the organization of my fieldwork in Nigeria. I wanted to create a network of relations that would help me to get accommodation and a number of contacts in Lagos and within the video industry's environment in Nigeria. My university did not have any particular contact with academic institutions in southern Nigeria, and thus I decided that the best thing to do was to start from what was closer to me. The Nigerians I met earlier in my life always told me that there is no place on earth where you would not find a Nigerian. Thus I told myself: "Naples, Lagos or New York: the place does not matter at this stage of the research!". A few months before starting my PhD I accidentally bumped into a newspaper article that mentioned the existence of a Nigerian production company based in the northern part of Italy. I thought that this was a good starting point for my trip to Nigeria.

Through a friend of mine I got the telephone number of a Nigerian singer living in Turin, the same city where the Nigerian production company I heard about was based. According to my friend this singer was in touch with most of the artists and cultural entrepreneurs of the Nigerian diaspora in Turin.[2] She seemed to be the best vector to get in touch with the production company. We fixed a meeting and I organized my trip to northern Italy, full of anticipation and curiosity. I booked a bed and breakfast and I took the night train from Naples. It was my first visit to Turin and I took a day off to visit it before meeting with the singer. Unfortunately, during the two days I spent in Turin for one reason or another the singer never showed up and I ended up walking around as a tourist. Just before catching my train back to Naples, I was disappointedly walking with some friends in the neighborhood of the train station when I accidentally passed in front of a video shop. From a distance it looked like a blockbuster video shop, but as soon as I went closer I realized it was a Nigerian shop, much better organized and presented than any of the stands I frequented in Naples. I entered and started discussing with the few Nigerians that were hanging out in it. I wanted to obtain the telephone number of the production company I came to Turin for. I spent the first few minutes trying to convince my interlocutors that I was not a policeman, there to create trouble for the shop-

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[2] The debate about the definition and the use of the term diaspora is large and complex, and goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. My use of the term throughout this thesis is based on the definition proposed by Paul Zeleza, which suggests that diaspora "simultaneously refers to a process, a condition, a space and a discourse: the continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade, the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself, the places where it is moulded and imagined, and the contentious ways in which it is studied and discussed" (2005: 41).

owner or any of his friends. Once they finally started trusting me, one of the people in the shop approached me with a smile on his face. He told me that he had played a role in one of the Nigerian productions shot in Turin. He then took his phone, dialed a number and I suddenly found myself speaking with Rose Okoh and Vincent Omoigui, the founding members of the production company I was desperately searching for. In the following months they let me discover Turin from the perspective of the Nigerian diaspora living there and introduced me to the complex world of "Nollywood abroad", the parallel video phenomenon that emerged in many Western countries as a consequence of the success of the Nigerian video industry.

In many ways these two episodes assumed a determinant role in shaping the trajectories of my research. They highlighted the fact that Nollywood is not only a local or regional phenomenon. It is instead a transnational entity, whose ramifications, in terms of both production and distribution, are complex, multiple and profoundly dynamic. I started to ask myself what was the impact that informal networks of circulation had on the Nigerian video industry's economy, what role was piracy playing in it, and what position were the diasporic production companies assuming within this landscape.

These questions became more relevant once I finally went to Nigeria to start the African section of my fieldwork. When I arrived in Lagos at the beginning of 2010, I found that the video industry was traversing a difficult moment. The section of it producing videos in English – on which I had decided, as I will better discuss in the first chapter, to focus my research – was almost collapsing. The crisis of production had multiple reasons, and within them precisely the informality of videos' circulation and reproduction seemed to have become one of the most influential. Within this framework the role of transnational networks of production and circulation appeared to have assumed a particular role. The experiences I had had before going to Nigeria started to assume a new light in the economy of my work. I was finally ready to identify the topic of my thesis.

When I came back from the first part of my fieldwork in Nigeria, I tried to systematize the numerous interesting points that emerged from the research experience. I wanted to find a central question that could organize the ideas I was formulating around the Nigerian video industry. As the episodes I just discussed suggest, the transnational dimension of cultural production and circulation became a central area of interest in my work. I thus decided to focus my research on the analysis of the way the *transnational mobility of cultural products affects and transforms a specific cultural industry's modes of operation*. This is of course a general and extremely open question. To tackle it, within the context given by the specific segment of the Nigerian video industry I decided to focus

on, I had to fragment it into a number of more precise and pertinent topics of interests, which ground the different chapters and sections of this thesis (see also the last section of the first chapter).

*Transnational mobility and cultural industries' transformations*

Each chapter of this thesis tends to be autonomous and to have a specific focus, but each of them is connected to the others in relation to the keyword around which the thesis is organized: *mobility*. This term has been the subject of both sociological and anthropological enquiry since the birth of these academic disciplines. The body of works dedicated to this topic is thus too wide to be coherently discussed here.[3] As underlined by Greg Urban, whose work constitutes an important theoretical reference in this dissertation (see chapters four and five), "culture is always already in motion" (2001: 15), since it is always the result of processes of social interaction. Hence, before starting my analysis I had to better define what kind of mobility I wanted to focus on. A cultural product, in fact, can travel as an object (in this case as a VHS or a DVD), as a discursive construction or as a repertoire of aesthetic and narrative patterns canonized over years of cultural production and circulation. To face this variety of phenomena I divided the thesis into three sections, each of them dealing with a different kind of mobility: material, discursive and aesthetic.

These three sections are preceded by an introductive chapter whose aim is to provide the historical, theoretical and methodological background to this work. It is divided into numerous brief sections organized around two main focuses. In the first part of the chapter I present the already existing academic literature on the Nigerian video industry, the defining attributes of the video phenomenon and some of the conceptual tools that have been used to analyze it. In the second part I discuss a few theoretical concepts that I used to give an order to my research, highlighting their operational value, their ambiguities and their relevance within the context of this work.

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[3] The theoretical concepts I discuss in the next chapter all relate, directly or indirectly, to the concept of mobility and they constitute the main theoretical references that grounded this work, within a wider body of anthropological and sociological works dedicated to the topic of mobility. For an interesting discussion of the body of literature related to mobility and circulation of cultural products see Himpele (2008: introduction).

a) FIRST SECTION. Beyond the video boom: Informal circulation, crisis of production and processes of transnationalization in the southern Nigerian video industry

The main focus of the first section is the material mobility, and thus the specific modes of circulation of Nollywood videos. This section analyses the economy of the video industry. It interprets the way particular regimes of mobility affected the industry's economy and participated in accelerating its transformations. In the almost twenty years of its existence, the video industry reached a widespread international success, sanctioned by a UNESCO report in 2009 which classified the Nigerian video industry as the second largest film industry in the world in terms of the sheer number of films produced.[4] This success has been the result of largely informal strategies of production and distribution. Unfortunately, while making the industry internationally successful, the informality of the videos' circulation and the piracy affecting it eroded the video business and brought the segment of the industry under my analysis to a situation of crisis. The main thesis explored by this section is that once the domestic video market started to implode because of the excess of informality and the lack of a formal distribution framework, an important section of the industry explicitly decided to target the transnational audience generated by the global informal circulation of Nigerian videos.

The transnational mobility of videos, within this context, played multiple roles. While it participated in creating a transnational market for the consumption of Nigerian videos, both within the "Black" diaspora worldwide and in other circuits (i.e. the academia and the global cinema arena), it did it through unofficial networks of circulation which progressively weakened the video industry's economy. Once this economy entered a period of recession, transnational formalized markets started to assume a new role. As a result, the transnational mobility of videos activated a process that is making the industry move from the informal to the formal sector of the local economy.[5]

This transition is having multiple consequences. On one side it is generating a particular "anxiety" within the video industry's environment related to the redefinition of the video industry's economy and the level of inclusion it would allow (chapter two). The video economy was

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[4] The validity of this survey and of the methodology used to compile it have been criticized. I will discuss the importance of the survey's publication in the international and Nigerian discussion around Nollywood in chapter four of this text.

[5] Formal and informal sectors are not radically separated within the Nigerian economy. However a distinction still seems to be useful. For a discussion of the concept of "informality" within this context see the second chapter.

traditionally characterized by a high degree of accessibility, but the transformations it is undertaking seem to push it toward a more structured and rather exclusive system, which could drive away a large number of people that work in the industry. On the other side, the transition from informal to formal strategies of production and distribution is transforming films' accessibility, shaping new viewing practices and generating new audiences (chapter three). If the video phenomenon was particularly appreciated for its socially-transversal popularity, the new phenomenon emerging in the past few years suggests more elitist forms of viewership, which reflect the progressive consolidation of the high-middle-class in contemporary urban Nigeria.

b) SECOND SECTION. The "Nollywoodization" of the Nigerian video industry: Discursive constructions, processes of commoditization and the industry's transformations.

The second section of this thesis looks at the discursive mobility of Nigerian videos, that is, at the way Nigerian videos have been represented, named and branded while travelling through different discursive regimes. As the title of this section underlines, the branding as "Nollywood" of the Nigerian video industry is here considered as a process of commoditization. The two chapters of this section try to identify the actors involved in this process and the stages they went through. As I mentioned earlier the name "Nollywood" was introduced ten years after the birth of the video phenomenon and, after an initial local resistance, it was widely accepted. The act of naming, as much postcolonial theory has argued (cf. Derrida 1976), is a powerful act which is able to influence profoundly the life of objects and phenomena within the realm of language, and thus, within the realm of existence. The introduction of the term Nollywood implied a transformation in the way the video phenomenon was conceptualized and discussed. From being a local phenomenon shaped by specific cultural, economic and infrastructural conjunctures, the video industry gradually came to be considered as a film industry to be compared with Hollywood and Bollywood. The introduction of the new name thus implied a transformation in the way the industry was conceptualized in relation to other transnational media. This transformation was radicalized by the recent release of the above mentioned UNESCO report, which defined Nollywood as the second largest film industry in the world, behind Bollywood and ahead of Hollywood. This international recognition further influenced the way Nigerian video practitioners interpreted their position within the global mediascape (see chapter four).

To highlight the processes of Nollywoodization of the video industry, within this section I look at the multiplicity and complexity of the Nigerian video phenomenon that is hidden behind the term

Nollywood. From this analysis it transpires that the Nigerian video phenomenon is hardly comparable with other films industries like the Indian or the American one. The specificity of its features demands instead the elaboration of categories that could go beyond the rigidity of well established categorization about media production. However, the location of the Nigerian video industry within a discourse comparing different instances of cinema had an influential role in driving the ambitions of many Nigerian video-makers and it thus had real consequences in the transformation of the Nigerian video industry's production.

This process was further influenced by the "commoditization by diversion"[6] of Nollywood within the global cinema arena which generated the formulation of a reified definition of the Nigerian video industry (chapter five). Since the video phenomenon has become internationally known, a large number of documentaries were produced which participated in creating a rigid (and in some cases stereotypical) definition of Nollywood. Furthermore several international film festivals dedicated specific windows of their program to present the Nollywood phenomenon to international audiences, often screening the documentaries instead of the Nigerian videos themselves. In this way they participated in a further reification of a pre-constituted definition of Nollywood. The term has progressively become the synonym of a specific expression of African urban modernity and it has been used throughout the world as a brand to sell products which often have nothing to do with the industry itself.

In this case, the mobility of Nigerian videos throughout different regimes of discourse has had the effect of freezing the Nigerian phenomenon into a rigid category. Many video practitioners have reacted to this definition, protesting the autonomy and complexity of their work as opposite to the stereotypical conception of it. Hence transnational discursive mobility impacted on the industry's production and participated in accelerating its transformation.

c) THIRD SECTION. Global Nollywood: Nigerian videos' openness and the videos' diasporic transformations.

The third section is focused essentially on the analysis of the way mobility affects the formulation of specific narratives and aesthetics within the context of Nigerian video production. I conduct this analysis in two main directions. First, I look at the way transnational mobility of cultural products influenced the formation of Nigerian videos' narratives and aesthetics, and at the

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[6] This is a concept formulated by Arjun Appadurai in his essay on the social life of things (1986). For an extensive discussion of it see chapter one.

way it defined their capacity of crossing social and cultural boundaries (chapter six). Secondly, I analyze the way the mobility of videos themselves, and particularly the reproduction/reinvention of the video genre within diasporic settings, transformed the main features of Nigerian videos narratives' and aesthetics (chapter seven).

Intertextuality, remediation and creolization (cf. Hannerz 1987; Cohen and Toninato 2009) are processes that have characterized the formation of mainstream Nollywood aesthetics and narratives since the early days of the industry. Nigerian videos are, in fact, the result of various national and transnational cultural influences (such as local television series, Yoruba travelling theatre, Onitsha Market Literature, South African photo romances, South American soap operas, Indian and Chinese films, Spaghetti westerns, Hollywood B-movies) that shaped the main genres of Nollywood. As a result of these processes Nollywood films are deeply transnational products, which incarnate the cosmopolitan modernity of contemporary Nigerian cities. An analysis of the film language of mainstream Nollywood releases suggests that, because of their creolized and transnational nature, it is difficult to categorize the films into existing genres. Videos are characterized by a specific genre's *openness* which is an important element to consider in analyzing the videos' capacity to travel and be enjoyed by audiences outside the boundaries of Nigeria and of Africa. This openness is the defining aspect of the particular "addressivity" (Barber 2007: 138) that characterizes Nigerian videos. This consists in a specific way of addressing the audience that permits engaging multiple geographical and demographical strata (the ethnic, the national, the transnational) and which has had a fundamental role in shaping Nollywood's transnational success.

If Nigerian videos' capacity to travel can be related to the implicit openness of their aesthetics and narratives, transnational mobility itself has had an impact on the transformation of these aesthetics and narratives. In my research I focus particularly on the production of Nigerian videos within the Nigerian diaspora in Europe. The central area of interest is Italy, and specifically two Nigerian production companies based in the peninsula. Each of them have adopted different aesthetic and narrative choices that reveal diverging marketing strategies. Through the analysis of their work and through the comparison with the films produced by other Nigerian production companies emerged in Europe, the last chapter of this section intends to propose a definition of the "Nollywood abroad" phenomenon. If in fact the Nigerian videos produced in Europe by diasporic production companies share a number of elements with the videos produced in Nigeria, they also present numerous original aspects. Some of the European production companies market their products as part of the Nollywood phenomenon, trying to achieve a recognition through the strategic use of this branding. Others contest the international understanding of the Nollywood

phenomenon, affirming new aesthetic and production values. The differences between these positions are connected to diverging experiences of migration as well as to different ways of relating with local national cinema industries and with local Nigerian diasporic communities. Throughout this section I argue that for the Nigerian production companies active in Europe, Nollywood has worked as a brand to gain recognition. However, the position of these production companies in relation to the video industry in Nigeria is ambiguous. They found themselves stuck in between European and Nigerian audiences, styles, production and distribution strategies. Their in-betweenness is at the same time their strength and their weakness. They would hardly exist without such a condition, but this same condition condemns them to a radical marginality toward both Nigerian and European cinema.

*Conclusion: Research in motion*

As much recent anthropological scholarship has underlined (Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1997; Marcus 1995), we live in a world of increasingly deterritorialized cultures. Exponential development of media technologies, growing globalization of capitalism, and gigantic transnational fluxes of people have transformed the world in the past few decades. Mobility has become the key word around which new "cultures of circulation" (Lee and LiPuma 2002) are politically, socially and economically organized. Within this context ethnographic research cannot but be mobile itself. As George Marcus pointed out, an ethnographic research of this kind, a "multi-sited ethnography" as he defines it (1995), has to "follow" its object of interest, trace its movements, recognize its transformations, define its attributes in relation to its complex biography.

The research I present throughout these pages has been organized in a similar way. I moved from the periphery of Italian cities, to the centres of video production in Nigeria, from film festivals in London, Ouagadougou, Milan and Bayelsa, to the video clubs of some remote neighbourhood of Lagos and Accra. I interviewed ambitious directors in the courtyards of their homes, and I discussed the future of Nigerian cinema in the halls of intimidating government offices. I was welcomed in the houses of numerous people, in Nigeria, Ghana, Italy, England and the United States, to learn more about the history of Nollywood by the people that made it, and I attended seminars and conferences in universities around Europe, West Africa and the United States, to hear the official formulation of this same history.

All these experiences were possible only thanks to the warm and friendly help of a long list of people, that guided and assisted me along this itinerary. Alessandro Triulzi and Jonathan Haynes

CHAPTER I

*Defining the field of enquiry: History, concepts, questions*


The Nigerian video industry is anything but a homogeneous phenomenon. It is instead a fragmented reality, composed of a number of almost autonomous segments which are organized along ethnic lines in a way that is "quite unusual" in other parts of the continent (Haynes and Okome 1998: 125). The three main segments of the industry, the English/Igbo one, the Yoruba one and the Hausa one, evolved following different patterns.[7] They have different cultural references to ground their aesthetics and narratives, and their production systems – even if at times interrelated – are based on different dynamics of social solidarity. Because of my poor knowledge of Nigeria's most widespread languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and because of my specific interest in the transnational mobility of cultural products, I decided to focus my research on the segment of the industry producing films in English. This segment is in fact the one that experienced the widest popular success in the African continent and within the African diaspora. It is the one that has reached the highest level of economic development and the largest network of transnational circulation. Furthermore, because it uses English as its principle means of communication, this segment has attracted people from many minority groups (particularly from South-Eastern Nigeria) "who may prefer to identify themselves with a generalized (and often idealized) image of modern Nigeria rather than refer to any deeper, and therefore more particular, cultural roots" (Haynes 2000: 21). Within the context of video production, English, as a non-ethnic language in an overtly ethnicized country, became synonymous with globalized, cosmopolitan and transnational narratives and aesthetics. Considering these elements, I decided to focus on the English section of the industry,

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[7] In the past few years a number of smaller segments producing films in other local languages have emerged. Within them the most prolific are the ones producing videos in Edo, in Ibibio and in Efik. It is also important to consider that a large number of the films produced by the English/Igbo segment of the industry are in pidgin-English.

As Hyginus Ekwazi (2007) has underlined, it is important to remember that, even if these segments of the industry tend to be labelled through ethnic attributes, the environments within which they operate and out of which they have emerged are generally highly multiethnic. As emphasized by the Kano-based film magazine, Tauraruwa in relation to the Hausa branch of the industry, for instance, "whenever you mention Hausa home videos, it is assumed these are videos made by the ethnic Hausa ... The ethnic tribes that overrun the Hausa home video industry include Kanuri, Igbos and most significant of all, the Yoruba ... About 42% of the Hausa home video producers and artistes were of Yoruba extraction, 10% were Kanuri, 8% were Igbos ... Only about 40% are true ethnic Hausa" (quoted in Adamu 2005: 13).

seeing in it the means to look at local popular conceptions of modernity, whose analysis is one of the aim of this thesis (see chapter six).

The term "Nollywood" apparently appeared for the first time in 2002 in an article by Norimitsu Onishi in the *New York Times.* I will discuss in depth the genealogy of this name and its role in the local and international representation of the Nigerian video industry in the fourth and fifth chapters of this text. Here it is important to clarify the use I make of this term within the context of this study. In the common debate, the term Nollywood is often used to refer to the totality of the Nigerian video production, but this has often created some confusion in the discussion around the video industry and its internal differentiation. The "Nollywoodization" of the Nigerian video production undermined the specificity of the different segments that compose the video phenomenon and the complexity of the video industry's historical transformations.[8] The video industry based in the northern part of the country and producing videos in Hausa, for instance, always claimed its autonomy, and is often referred to as "Kannywood" (from the name of the city of Kano, in Northern Nigeria, where the Hausa industry was originally based, before moving most of its production facilities to Kaduna for political reasons). This section of the industry grew within a cultural environment profoundly influenced by Islamic values and its evolution was largely influenced by the local political and religious environment (cf. Adamu 2007; Larkin 2008). The same can be said of the Yoruba section of the industry, which also repeatedly emphasized its specificity. Its aesthetics and narratives are directly related to those that used to characterize Yoruba travelling theatre and early instances of celluloid filmmaking in Nigeria. The settings and themes of the videos the Yoruba section of the industry produces are often rooted in the local culturalist discourse oriented toward the defense and affirmation of Yoruba cultural values and traditions (cf. Haynes 1995; Ogundele 2000).

In relation to these distinctions, throughout this text the term "Nollywood" will refer exclusively to the section of the Nigerian video industry based in southern Nigeria producing videos in English. Even if most of the production companies within this section have at least a *pied-à-terre* in Lagos, this segment of the industry has other three production and distribution hubs (Aba, Enugu and Onitsha). However, the Nigerian section of my fieldwork has been focused on Lagos because it is the economic capital of video filmmaking in southern Nigeria, and the unrivaled center of the Nigerian star system.

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[8] A similar process took place within the Indian film industry, as emphasized by Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2004). For further discussion on this argument see chapter four.

*A brief review of the academic production on the Nigerian video industry* [9]

The academic interest in the Nigerian video industry emerged a few years after the birth of the video phenomenon. While, as I will discuss in the next sections of this chapter, the birth of the video industry is commonly dated 1992, the first academic articles discussing it were published in 1995 and 1998 (Haynes 1995; Haynes and Okome1998) by the two scholars that probably became the most relevant academic references on the Nollywood phenomenon, Onokoome Okome (1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2010; Haynes and Okome 1995 and 1998; Krings and Okome forthcoming) and Jonathan Haynes (1995; 2000; 2002; 2003a; 2003b; 2006, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d; 2007e; 2008; 2010a; 2010b; forthcoming; Haynes and Okome 1995 and 1998). A few articles appeared in the first five to ten years from the emergence of the industry, but the academic interest in Nollywood witnessed a veritable boom around the mid-2000s, as testified by the publication of two special issues of academic journals (*Postcolonial text* and *Film International*, both published in 2007), numerous edited collections of essays[10] and a large number of articles on academic journals worldwide (see Haynes 2010a). In Nigeria the evolution of the industry has been followed principally on the pages of the main national newspapers.[11] Local academic interest, on the contrary, has developed more slowly, with the exceptions of the contributions by Hyginus Ekwazi (1991, 2000, 2007; Ekwazi et al. [eds] 2001), who has created the film studies curriculum at the Nigerian Film Institute in Jos in 1994 and has then chaired the institute for several years. Relevant Nigerian contributors like the already mentioned Onokome Okome, Moradewun Adejunmobi (2002, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011) and Akin Adesokan (2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009) have left the country and teach in Western universities. However, some established Nigerian scholars, who approached the field of Nollywood studies from other disciplines, are still in the country and have importantly contributed to the debate in recent years (see, for instance, Ogunleye [2003, 2008] and Oha [2000, 2001, 2002]). Furthermore, an important

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[9] In this section I will outline only the essential features of the existing literature. For a wider in depth literary review see Haynes 2010a.

[10] The collection edited by Jonathan Haynes (2000) has been the first and still stands as one of the most interesting. In the following years several edited collections appeared: Barrot (2005), Ogunleye (2003 and 2008), Krings and Okome (forthcoming).

[11] As part of my research I conducted an in depth archival research at the Guardian Newspaper's library, in Lagos. In relation to this experience I had the chance to appreciate the volume of the journalistic contribution to the study of Nollywood. Particularly significant within this corpus are, in my view, the articles by Jahman Anikulapo, Steve Ayorinde, Justin Akpovi-Esade and Benjamin Njoku.

wave of young scholars interested in the video phenomenon have emerged over the past few years.[12] While the research output of this new generation of Nigerian academics has still some troubles in becoming internationally visible, it undoubtedly testifies a renewed interest in the study of popular culture within Nigerian universities.

As emphasized by Jonathan Haynes, in the work produced on Nollywood outside of Africa, "what is perhaps most striking is the salience of anthropology or an anthropologically-influenced cultural studies" (2010a: 110). Within this framework the work of Brian Larkin (1997, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008) and Birgit Meyer (1998, 1999, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2010)[13] is particularly significant. On the one hand, Larkin's appreciation of the material environment of Nigerian media production, and particularly of the role that specific infrastructures and urban configurations had on it, has become a classic in the field of anthropology of media and has provided useful tools for the analysis of media production, circulation and consumption in both Western and non-Western societies. Furthermore his formulation of a theory of "parallel modernities" (1997), as a way of interpreting South-South cultural circulation, brought to light a wide set of phenomena yet poorly addressed in the field of anthropology and media studies. On the other hand, Meyer's focus on the role of Pentecostalism in modern West African cultural production, and her specific analysis of the aesthetics of Pentecostal videos emphasized the influential role of new religious organizations in shaping social and individual behaviors, tastes and moral attitudes.

"Surely it is unprecedented for the study of a major world film tradition to be launched under the aegis of anthropology" (Haynes 2010a: 110), and this inevitably gives to Nollywood studies a particular flavor. As for the field of film studies, Nollywood studies analyze the world of moving images. But they do so while looking particularly at the social, political, religious and economic environment that surrounds the production and consumption of the images themselves. This specific perspective produced very interesting results, as the body of existing works testifies, but at the same

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[12] The two symposiums about the Nigerian video industry organized in Lagos in 2011 are a good example of this trend. The first one, titled "Reading and Producing Nollywood: An international Symposium", took place at the end of March at the University of Lagos (UNILAG), while the second one, titled "Nollywood in Africa, Africa in Nollywood: an international conference", took place at the end of July at the Pan-African University of Lagos. In both occasions a large number of young Nigerian scholars presented original research works on the video industry.

[13] Birgit Meyer's work is focused on the Ghanaian video production, which started before the Nigerian one, but has progressively been overwhelmed by Nollywood's superior commercial success. Today the two industries are profoundly interrelated and thus the literature on the Ghanaian industry is inspiring also for a research that focuses on the Nigerian video phenomenon.

time it generated a number of lacunas. As Haynes emphasizes for instance, there is a very poor number of studies that focuses on "auteurism, film history and genre" (2010a: 112), themes that, on the contrary, are central in the body of studies about other film industries. This lack can be related to the late interest on Nollywood shown by African cinema scholars. For many years, in fact, Nigerian video production was considered by many African cinema scholars and directors as an inferior variety of filmmaking, a cheap and embarrassing product whose widespread popularity was hardly worth understanding. Since the emergence of celluloid filmmaking in the continent in the early 1960s, the academic interest in African film production have been framed by the Third Cinema theory (cf. Solanas and Getino 1976; Guneratne, and Dissanayake 2003; Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994), a paradigm profoundly indebted to Marxist ideology and to the intellectual environment surrounding anti-colonial/anti-imperialistic struggles. Under this perspective films had to be driven by nationalist sentiments, had to be politically relevant and had thus to have an influential role in the consolidation of freshly-born independent nations. It is evident that a field of studies built on such theoretical framework could hardly accept to legitimate a strictly commercial enterprise like the one Nollywood videos resulted from. However, after a few years the transnational popularity of the video phenomenon and its capacity of building new highways for the development of local forms of cinema had to be acknowledged and Nollywood studies were progressively accepted within the larger framework of African cinema studies. The way was opened by one of the most established scholars in the field, Frank Ukadike, who defined the video phenomenon as the "manifestation of First cinema" in Sub-Saharan Africa (2003), and thus recognized its value, even if as a commercial and popular, rather than intellectual and politically engaged, cinematic tradition. In 2007 for the first time a conference putting together African cinema and African videos scholars was organized by Mahir Saul and Ralph Austen at the Institute of African Studies, University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, and it resulted in the publication of a book that became the first edited collection to openly connect the two disciplinary fields (Saul and Austen 2010). Initiatives of this kind have, since then, multiplied and the influence of the video phenomenon on African celluloid production became a relevant topic of interest within the field of African cinema studies. As summarized by Lindiwe Dovey (2009 and 2010), it is time for a switch from the old paradigm dividing cinema and video studies to a more up-to-date disciplinary definition that could take into account the study of "African screen media" and their reciprocal interactions.

*"Small screen cinema": The history of Nollywood's media format*

In relation to the debate I just mentioned, it is useful to define the specificities of Nollywood media format to better understand its position between television and cinema. The wide popular success of Nigerian videos can be in fact largely related to its "inbetweenness", an attribute that made Nollywood particularly adaptable to the reality of contemporary urban Nigeria. To define these specificities a brief itinerary through the history of television and cinema in Nigeria can be helpful.

Because of its size and its political and economical influence in the sub-region, Nigeria has always been at the avant-garde of media development in sub-Saharan Africa, and was in fact the second sub-Saharan African country where a film screening was organized (in 1903, after Senegal in 1900) and the first to introduce television (in 1959). However, while cinema technology appeared early in the country, it wasn't until 1970 that the first Nigerian film was produced. Likewise, television was under strict state control (both at the national and at the federal-state level) until the market was liberalized in 1992 (Esan 2009). Hence, in Nigeria the development of both cinema and television was profoundly influenced, as in many other areas of the world, by political power structures (colonial in the case of early cinema, and postcolonial for TV).

The history of cinema and television in Nigeria is wide and complex and there is not enough room to discuss it in depth here.[14] For this reason I will emphasize only the historical aspects that are relevant to the present discussion. In regards to cinema, it is interesting to firstly note that film consumption in Nigeria has been historically dominated by foreign products. As emphasized by Oduko in 1980 "a study of films screened in Lagos theatres during a two-weeks period […] showed that out of 246 films screened, only 2% were Nigerian, 25% were of Western origin, 31% were Indian and 42% were from Hong Kong" (1980, reported in Odukomaiya 2005: 43). Film distribution was dominated often by entrepreneurs of foreign origin (mostly Nigerian citizens of Lebanese descent), and it remained so also after the Indigenization Decree approved in 1975 to boast local control over film production and distribution. Nigerian productions were thus at the margins of local networks of film distribution, and Nigerian filmmakers, who in most cases had backgrounds in traveling theatre, tended to distribute their films independently. The directors would typically accompany their films around the country, protecting the copy from piracy and controlling the incomes that the screenings would produce.

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[14] For a precise account of the history of cinema in Nigeria see Balogun (1984), Ekwuasi (1987) and Haynes (2000), while for an account of the history of television in Nigeria see Esan (2009) and Ugubojah (1985).

With the progressive enforcement of the Indigenization Decree the number of imported films was drastically reduced,[15] but this did not lead to a proportional growth in local productions. On the contrary, the decree led to an explosion of pirate cinema theatres screening foreign films.[16] However, the economic crisis brought about by the application of Structural Adjustment policies and the spread of social insecurity that followed it progressively eroded cinema-going culture in Nigeria. In the early 1990s only a few cinema halls were still open in Lagos, while most of them had been transformed into churches and shopping malls.[17]

While the cinema market in Nigeria was largely dominated by foreign products, the first television channel, created in 1959,[18] was introduced as part of the nationalist project and, at least in the intentions of its founders, it was supposed to show mainly local programs. Nigeria was at that time still a British colony, and the political parties fighting for independence considered television as a tool for the transformation of Nigeria into a modern independent nation. Within this history, what is particularly relevant for my analysis is the way in which the introduction of television participated in shaping specific viewing practices. When the first Nigerian channel started broadcasting, in fact, only a very small percentage of the Nigerian population could actually afford a television set, and those who could were concentrated in the main urban conglomerations in the South Western region of the country, Lagos and Ibadan. As reported by Oluyinka Esan (2009), an important study conducted by the station in 1962 established the difficulties faced by rural audiences in accessing local programs. As a result, the regional government started a campaign to introduce community viewing centers in small villages. "At these venues television sets were procured for the community, powered by petrol generators and located in central places where

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[15] As Françoise Balogun reported, the number of imported films in Nigeria passed from 716 in 1975 to 25 in 1982 and 0 in 1983 (1984: 30).

[16] These were cinema halls without any license. According to Ekwuazi in the mid-1980s there were around 40 of them in Lagos, compared to 28 legal halls (1987: 44).

[17] While the crisis of cinema culture in southern Nigeria has been particularly dramatic, theatre halls never completely disappeared in the northern region of the country. For an analysis of the cinema-going culture in northern Nigeria see Larkin (2008). In the southern part of the country, and particularly in Lagos, Yoruba video films continued to be screened at the National Theatre all throughout the 1990s and the 2000s. In regards to the Igbo/English section of the industry, in the mid 1990s some directors, like for instance Zeb Ejiro with the release of *Domitilla*, tried to revitalize cinema going culture, but they obtained poor results and finally decided to stick to the consolidated straight-to-video strategy of distribution.

[18] Television was firstly introduced by the western Nigerian government in 1959 (Western Nigerian Television – WNTV), followed by the creation of the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Television (ENBC-TV) in 1960 and the Radio Television Kaduna (RTK) in 1962. For further details see Esan (2009).

villagers could assemble to watch" (Esan 2009: 49). As this example shows, then, since its early stages television was not a technology destined for individual or private use. It was instead a social experience or, as Larkin suggests in his analysis of the introduction of radio in Nigeria, a "public technology" (2008: 48). There was "a measure of communal reception" (Esan 2009: 40) which made the Nigerian experience of television closer to that of cinema-going: a crowd would assemble in front of a screen (in this case a small one) to share a space, a soundscape, a specific atmosphere, and inevitably a number of comments and impressions about the contents of the images projected on the screen.

In the early years of television some local productions emerged, and progressively imposed themselves as models for a local television format. An outstanding example is that of Segun Olusola's drama series *Village Headmaster* which ran from 1968 till the mid-1980s. Apart from the specific contents of the drama, what is relevant to this analysis is the fact that "until the 1980s there were no field cameras, so all productions were studio-based. The 50- or 60-minute productions were recorded in one straight take, and there was no opportunity for editing because of the recording format employed" (Esan 2009: 90). This means that the serial, like most of the cinematic productions of that time (for instance the work of Hubert Ogunde and Adeyemi "Ade Love" Afolayan), was strictly connected to local theatre traditions. Both television series and local celluloid production were, then, remediations of theatre performances, which were transplanted into a new technological medium to meet larger audiences. When new recording technologies were introduced in the 1980s, camera techniques were transformed and improved, but the way of constructing narratives and aesthetics maintained a strong continuity with the previous experiences of film and television making.

In the early years, and up until the end of the 1980s, television was controlled by state authorities. It had a mainly educational function, and it was largely used as a tool of political propaganda. However, the already mentioned economic crisis that followed the application of the Structural Adjustment policies affected also the economy of television broadcasting. The budget for local productions had to be cut, pushing the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to interrupt the production of Nigerian series and to augment the importing of cheap foreign television programs. Thus, from the mid-1980s, the production values of local programs began to drop, the audiences started to be disappointed and most of the professionals that made the fortune of that age of successes moved toward new job opportunities outside the national television. In 1992 the government decided to deregulate broadcasting and to open the television market to private investment. This was part of a global trend toward liberalization imposed by the International

Monetary Fund, but it was also the first move by the government to try to resurrect the fortunes of the Nigerian television sector. However, even though deregulation was introduced in 1992, private channels started to become competitive only four-to-six years later.[19]

Between the end of the 1980s and the mid-1990s all these factors (progressive collapse of cinema-going culture, decline of national television production, the slow take-off of private television) participated in creating a gap within the Nigerian mediascape, a gap that Nollywood tried to fill. When in 1992 Kenneth Nnebue produced *Living in Bondage* – widely acknowledged as the first breakthrough Nollywood hit – and distributed it straight-to-video in the Nigerian market, the emergence of a new media format was sanctioned and a product that could fill the gap left by cinema and television seemed to have emerged.

The history of Nollywood has been narrated several times (see for instance Haynes 2000 and Barrot 2005), and I do not intend to reproduce it once again in this chapter. What interests me here, instead, is to construct a genealogy of the Nollywood media format to point out its specificities and to better understand those that today have become its peculiar weaknesses. Nollywood is the result of a complex process in which global modernity has been recycled through the prism of the local (cf. Sundaram 1999). It is the result of simultaneous dynamics of remediation, hybridization and contamination that characterize the postcolonial metropolis. As AbduMaliq Simone emphasized,

> "if production possibilities are limited in African cities, then existent materials of all
> kinds are to be appropriated – sometimes through theft and looting; sometimes through
> the 'heretical' uses made of infrastructures, languages, objects, and spaces; sometimes
> through social practices that ensure that available materials pass through many hands"
> (2004: 214).

What are, then, the specific features of this "heretical" media format?

First of all, a defining aspect of Nollywood is its mode of circulation. Nollywood videos are, in fact, products that are directly distributed to markets (in the first few years via VHS cassettes, later on VCD[20] and DVD). This mode of circulation authorized Nollywood producers to provide local

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[19] The history of two of the most influential Nigerian private channels is an interesting example for this discussion: Channel Television was created in 1993, but started broadcasting at the end of 1995, while the African Independent Television (AIT) was introduced in 1996 but started broadcasting in 1998 (Esan 2009: ch.5).

[20] VCD stands for Video Compact Disc. According to Darrel Davis "VCDs first caught on in Hong Kong when Japanese serial dramas, or *dorama*, were circulated in the mid-1990s" (2003: 166). Since then, thanks to their low cost

content to an audience disappointed by the poor quality of television programs. This content was provided in a format that, in an era of widespread social insecurity, could be watched without leaving the comfort of the family's compound or of the local neighbourhood. Nigerian videos became most popular among the lowest classes of the Nigerian society, who could not always afford to buy their own copies. Thus, local rental shops and video clubs (the so-called video parlours, see Okome 2007), as opposed to private homes, became the most popular viewing venues. In these places, as in the community viewing centres I mentioned earlier, the audience would experience a communal rather than an individual reception, something closer to the experience of watching a film in a theatre hall rather than in a private living room. If since the beginning of the 1980s the commercialization of VHS recorders and pirated cassettes of foreign films had created the space for the growth of rental shops and video clubs, Nollywood videos consolidated this viewing practice, transforming it into the mainstream vector of circulation of locally produced contents.

The informality of this mode of circulation was also related to the above-mentioned practice, within Nigerian filmmakers, of distributing films independently. While at the time of celluloid, filmmaking directors were privately bringing their films around the country to better control piracy and screening revenues, in the VHS era the straight-to-video strategy allowed them to bypass the restriction imposed by the crisis of television budgets and by the collapse of theatre halls. On one side, this informal modes of circulation reduced the level of availability of the product on the market (a director could not go as far in distributing his film as an official celluloid distributor could do, and a VHS marketer could hardly reach the same amount of people that would have access to a television channel), but on the other, it proportionally augmented the director/producer's revenues, reducing the number of intermediaries involved in the process.

In this way, Nollywood's video format borrowed something from the modes of circulation and exhibition that characterized celluloid cinema and early television in Nigeria (communal reception and informal distribution). But at the same time it introduced some specific elements, such as a new spatial/temporal relationship with the audience.[21] The video format could travel and be screened

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of manufacturing, their versatility and their disposability they became extremely popular in most of non-Western countries. In Nigeria they arrived around 1999/2000, apparently thanks to the initiative of a marketer who decided to pioneer in the business of selling Chinese VCD readers and consequentially invested also in distributing Nigerian videos in this format (Ajirire 2000).

[21] Tom O'Regan makes a similar point while discussing the transformations of the global mediascape due to the introduction of VCR and VHS technologies (1991: 6). However, in my view, the transformation introduced by Nollywood is slightly different. In the case analyzed by O'Regan, in fact, what circulates on video format are copies of celluloid films or television programs. The spatial/temporal shift they introduce is the kind of shift that piracy generates.

independently from television programs' palimpsest. This shift implicitly allowed Nollywood videos to bypass the postcolonial state's infrastructures of control. No censorship board was in fact ready to deal with this new media format, and even if there were already censorship offices that had the mandate to monitor television and celluloid production, nobody was sure about the category in which the new medium had to fall (cf. Ugor 2007). A new censor board was thus created in 1994, but as the figures of its first years of activity show, it took some time for it to become effective.[22]

In relation to cinema Nollywood videos introduced a shift in terms of budget and technology. Video films were inevitably much cheaper to produce, and digital technology much easier to use than celluloid. Filmmaking, thus, became an extremely accessible activity and videos became potentially a *tabula rasa* for the reformulation of the Nigerian public sphere. At the same time, the fact that videos were typically watched in communal settings increased their capacity to catalyse public debate. With their complex combination of portability and communality they became an original node of articulation between private and public spheres.

Nollywood's "heretical" recombination of cinema and television generated what I call here a "small screen cinema". Accessible, interstitial and informal in its modes of production, portable in its materiality, communal in its modes of exhibition, difficult to regulate and thus accidentally political in its circulation, Nollywood managed to create a formula that responded to the challenges of the local reality. As the result of processes of remediation, Nollywood appropriated "the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media […] to rival or refashion them in the name of the real" (Bolter and Grusin: 2000:68). And exactly its ability to act "in the name of the real" made it locally and continentally successful.

### Nollywood's narrative and aesthetic defining attributes

As mentioned above, in most of the academic and journalistic production about the Nigerian video industry, the release of Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* in 1992 is considered as the

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It is a way of bypassing the cinema industries' windowing system. In the case of Nollywood, on the contrary, video is the main medium of circulation for the films. It does not have a cinema or television life prior to its video circulation. For this reason, the spatial/temporal shift it introduces has, in my view, a more radical character.

[22] In the first years of existence of the Censors Board, only a very small percentage of video production passed through censorship. For instance, in 1994 only 3 films were censored at a time at which the industry was already burgeoning (data from the Censors' Board official website www.nfvcb.gov.ng/statistics.php accessed on 25th March 2010).

event that *made* the industry. While this was not the first video film ever released in Nigeria,[23] it was undoubtedly the first one to have a great commercial success, and thus the one that established those that have become the defining features of Nollywood aesthetics, narratives and economic strategies. I will discuss these defining features throughout the thesis, but it might be useful here to quickly summarize them before further developing this argument.[24] As I discussed in the previous section, in terms of production and distribution strategies the success of *Living in Bondage* marked the migration of informal modes of operation from the periphery of Nigerian media economy to the mainstream (cf. Larkin 2004). Cheap budget of production, low-cost recording and editing facilities (VHS camera recorder, non-professional editing instruments, artisanal lighting and sound), and straight-to-video distribution strategies became thus the defining attributes of the economy of the emerging industry, while melodramatic stories, urban and domestic settings, luxurious cars and clothing became the aesthetic and narrative constant of video production.

In terms of Nollywood's storylines, the plot of *Living in Bondage* can be seen as the model of what later became the defining aspects of the Nigerian video melodrama. As Onokoome Okome pointed out (2004a), these stories are concentrated around the feeling of anxiety that characterizes Nigerian postcolonial cities, an anxiety due to the desire for a better living, a better job, social freedom from the ties imposed, even within the city, by family, gender and religious obligations. In the Nigerian melodrama the locus of anxiety *par excellence* becomes the family. It is within the family, in fact, that the deepest insecurity is manifested and the conflicts that dominate the urban jungle are internalized. As Brian Larkin emphasized "in Nigerian films the family is often the source of the deepest treachery, and family members are represented as corrupt, cheating people of money and betraying them as well as offering love and support" (2008: 171). In *Living in Bondage,* for instance, at the beginning of the film the protagonist, Andy, is frustrated because of his

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[23] A number of Yoruba video films circulated in Nigeria since the late 1980s. Keneth Nnebue himself invested in Yoruba video production before turning to the production of *Living in Bondage*, which was the first video film ever produced in Igbo (even if with English subtitles to spread its circulation across ethnic and linguistic boundaries). The same Kenneth Nnebue two years later, in 1994, produced the first video film in English, *Glamour Girls*. For further details see Haynes and Okome (1998) and Haynes (2007d).

[24] A description of these features is given in many academic articles that have the goal of introducing the Nigerian video industry to wider international audiences (see for instance Haynes 2000 and 2007a; McCall 2004 and 2007; Okome 2007a and 2007d ). It is important to report and acknowledge here Haynes' warning against "the dangers of generalizing about these films. They are myriad-minded, the expression of a huge country of more than 100 million people who speak some 250 languages, a country with unlimited capacity to astonish and bewilder its most devoted students" (2000: 2).

economic condition. At first glance there are no explicit signs of the harshness that characterizes his life. He has a beautiful and lovely wife, Merit, and he lives in a comfortable house, as shown by most of the scenes of the first part of the film shot in Andy's nice living room. But Andy is suffering. His ambitions and expectations are disappointed and the insecurity of his future obsesses him. He thus gets himself involved in a secret society, that guarantees him huge profits if he accepts to sacrifice his wife in a money-making ritual. The insecurity of the social and economic situation is projected within the family, and the violence of urban life is metamorphosed into the violence that Andy agrees to commit on his own wife.

After the success of Nnebue's film, similar plots became common in Nollywood films. They depict the anxiety and instability of urban life but they do it through a transposition within the sphere of the intimate. As Achille Mbembe has emphasised in his essay on the aesthetic of vulgarity (2001), the postcolonial ruling class and the regimes it produces are characterized by the open manifestation of excess and exaggeration, something close to what Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) has defined as the grotesque. But, as Brian Larkin has interestingly pointed out, Nollywood films take this grotesque dimension "away from the figure of the postcolonial dictator and place it back into the family […] There the grotesque plays out within and between family members, and the dense political field Mbembe identifies is sublimated into personal relationships" (2008: 184). Through this process, the hardship, the violence and the excesses of the postcolonial condition are emotionally internalized and become the ground for what Brian Larkin identifies as the defining aesthetic of Nigerian melodrama, an "aesthetic of outrage" that uses "spectacular transgression, luridly depicted, to work on the body, generating physical revulsion" (2008: 186). It is through this language of excesses that, according to Larkin, Nigerian videos develop a critic attitude toward the society because the revulsion "provides a public witnessing to the sorts of activities people in society are involved in and, through the bodily reaction to them, enacts a moral commentary on society itself" (2008: 186).

In the years following the release of *Living in Bondage* Nigerian videos became extremely popular all over Africa and throughout the African diaspora. The widespread transnational popular success of the video phenomenon was documented in recent years by a number of academic and newspaper articles. Nigerian videos started to influence the way people dress and behave in place as different as Zambia (Muchimba 2004), Uganda (Dipio 2008), Tanzania (Boheme forthcoming; Krings 2010b, forthcoming), South Africa and Namibia (Becker, forthcoming). They have become widely popular also in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they are often screened during

Pentecostal churches' Sunday services as tool of evangelization[25] and where they are broadcasted by local television with a voice over in Lingala (Pype, forthcoming). Their popularity also travelled across the ocean, making them extremely successful in the United States (Ogundimu 2009), in Canada (Njoku 2009d) and in the Caribbean, where according to Philip Cartelli "at least 80 percent of the music or videos being sold come from Nigeria" (2007: 112). Nollywood films became also popular among the African diaspora in Europe, above all in England (Esan 2008), but also, as the episode mentioned at the beginning of this introduction has shown, in Italy, France, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany. As Jonh McCall emphasised, because of its transnational success, Nollywood became "a primary catalyst in an emergent continent-wide popular discourse about what it means to be African" (2007: 94). Nigerian videos, and the debate that they generated in the public sphere of many African nations, participated in the creation of a popular discourse about the definition of African modernity(ies) which, as mentioned earlier, constitutes one of the areas of interest of this thesis.

### *Nollywood as popular culture*

As I pointed out earlier, Nollywood has hardly been considered part of the "African cinema" tradition, and only recently scholars coming from this field of studies began to be interested in the Nigerian video production. The video phenomenon has instead been interpreted in most of the cases as part of what is commonly described as popular culture (cf. Haynes and Okome 1998, Haynes 2000; Larkin 2008), a set of cultural phenomena whose analysis became particularly relevant within the field of African studies in the past thirty years, thanks to the theoretical efforts of such scholars as Johannes Fabian (1978, 1996), Biodun Jeyifo (1984, 1985), Ulf Hannerz (1987), Karin Barber (1987, 1997, 2000) and Christopher Waterman (1990). According to this perspective, popular arts and cultures are unofficial, informal, fluid and highly mobile. In Karin Barber's words

> they are arts that seem to exhibit a preoccupation with social change which is in effect their
> determining characteristic, they do not merely allude to innovation or make occasional use of

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[25] Even if today their number reduced, religious videos use to be the largest percentage of the Nigerian production. They are often centered on the radical  contraposition between the Good and the Evil, and they are framed by rigid moral principles (see Meyer [2001, 2004] and Oha [2000, 2002]). They represent also interesting contrapositions between rural tradition, conceived as synonym of idolatry and sin, and urban modernity, conceived as the locus of conversion and emancipation from idolatry (see Wendl 2001, 2007).

novelties: they derive their energies from change, are constituted out of it, and are also, often quite consciously, about it […] what are identified as popular arts are in effect the new unofficial arts of colonialism and post-colonialism, produced by the profound and accelerating social change that has characterized these periods (1987: 13).

As Jonathan Haynes (2000) emphasized, however, this perspective is problematically exposed to two ideological preconceptions. On one side, the position of a politically engaged leftist criticism which considers popular culture as worthless of academic consideration because it is a "repository of false consciousness that prevented the masses from seeing the truth of their condition and acting to change it" (Haynes 2000: 15). And on the opposite side, the position of those who, particularly within the field of cultural studies, risk falling into a romanticized understanding of the popular, considering it as inherently oppositional and liberating vis-à-vis hegemonic/imperialistic culture. While analyzing Nigerian video production it is then important to consider that it stands in the middle of these conceptual extremes. As a popular culture product it is neither apolitical nor consciously engaged, and it thus demands that "we rethink well-established assumptions about what constitutes 'the political' in African film" (McCall 2007: 94; see also. Haynes 2003a, 2006). Because it is profoundly related to the emergence of new forms of both Christian and Islamic religiosity, the videos' attitude toward society tends to be *moralized* rather than *politicized*, but this does not reduce the videos' potential for social denunciation and criticism, as testified for instance by the countless number of films that thematize political corruption, social violence and sexual abuse.[26]

In relation to this issue it is important to consider also the differences existing between the societies within which the concept of popular culture was formulated and the specific context of Nigerian political history. While in Antonio Gramsci's and Stuart Hall's countries the processes of class-formation have long been achieved historically and discussed, analyzed and implemented by political parties and movements, in the Nigerian society the process of class formation is far from achieved. As Haynes and Okome have emphasized

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[26] It must be underlined here that the moral polarization that characterizes most video films is not only connected to the influence of religious beliefs on videos' contents. As it will be better discussed in chapter six, it relates also to the influence of previous forms of local popular culture on videos' genres and to the nature of the "melodramatic imagination" (Brooks 1976) that defines Nollywood videos' aesthetics and narratives.

the essential heterogeneity, fluidity, and unboundedness of social groups in Africa makes it difficult to talk of fully formed "classes" in the European sense at all. In Nigeria the class situation is further destabilized because of extreme underlying economic instability, the possibility of rapid mobility for a limited few, and nearly universal aspirations for individual advancement which tend to inhibit the formation of class consciousness (1998: 120).

As a consequence, within the Nigerian context the concept of "popular", since its earliest applications, was modified to include, as Biodun Jeyifo emphasized, "the entire range of occupational and socio-economic groups and classes" (1984: 1).

Within the framework of this discussion, video's specific technology and its inherent mobility and portability added an ulterior dimension to the just mentioned concept of popular-as-socially-transversal within the Nigerian context. As Brian Larkin (2000) suggested, in fact, through the use of cassette, and later digital, technologies Nollywood participated in shaping a new audience, new modes of social organization and new public spheres. In a context in which cinema theatres were mainly male spaces, where morally dubious activities would take place, video technology opened the space for new forms of viewership, and thus for the formation of new categories of audience.[27] Video as a home-entertainment technology created avenues of participation for women, youngsters and all those people that used to see their access to cinema denied in relation to their class, gender or religious belonging.

### *Transnational mobility of Nollywood: What theoretical framework?*

Now that the context of the existing literature about the Nigerian video phenomenon has been described, it is useful to identify a few of the theoretical concepts that framed this research. While each section of this work has a specific theoretical orientation, it is possible to identify a number of keywords that help create a conceptual continuity throughout the entire thesis. These concepts are Nick Couldry's definition of *media as practice* (2004); Arjun Appadurai's theorization of the *social life of things* (2006) and Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's concept of *remediation* (2000).

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[27] Cinema attendance and the moral evaluation of the cinema space change profoundly according to the Nigerian region one is looking at. While, as underlined by Larkin (2000), in northern Nigeria and among Hausa people the cinema space has always had a bad moral reputation, in southern Nigeria, and particularly among Yoruba people, cinema-going culture was widespread since the late colonial era. Nevertheless, in my opinion, Larkin's remark about the new forms of viewership opened by Nollywood videos remains broadly applicable and relevant for this analysis.

a) Media as practice

The study of media has often been oriented toward three specific perspectives: the analysis of media texts (content analysis); the analysis of media production (production studies); and the analysis of media reception (audience studies and media effects theory). These paradigms tended to compartmentalize the discussion about media, focusing it on specific features of media-related phenomena rather than on their organic interrelation. In an article published in 2004, Nick Couldry suggested a different theoretical perspective which became particularly influential within the landscape of media studies worldwide and that influenced particularly my own research. In his formulation of a theory of "media as practice" Couldry suggests treating

> media as the open set of practices relating to, or oriented around, media.[…] to decentre media research from the study of media texts or production structures (important though these are) and to redirect it onto the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media. This places media studies firmly within a broader sociology of action and knowledge (or, if you prefer, cultural anthropology or cognitive anthropology), and sets it apart from versions of media studies formulated within the paradigm of literary criticism (2004: 117).

According to this perspective the study of media has to be grounded on anthropological methodology and has to look at the way people interact with media at many levels. Media products in fact are produced in specific contexts, circulate through different infrastructural regimes, are purchased and consumed within localized social and cultural environments which constantly transform and interact with each other. The definition of a specific medium, of its content, of its production and circulation has thus to be done while looking at the interaction between the complex set of practices that surrounds the medium itself. It should also consider the way people make sense of media practices. "What types of things do people do in relation to media?" – asks Nick Couldry. "And what types of things do people say in relation to media?" (2004: 121). These questions are particularly relevant within the context of this research because they suggest applying a specific bifocality to the research about media. According to this bifocality media are analyzed both in relation to their production, circulation and consumption, and in relation to the discourses existing around the use and the interpretation of the media themselves.

b) The social life of things

When considering media as practice mobility of objects and meanings assumes a particular importance, and Appadurai offers an interesting theoretical apparatus to analyze it. In the introduction to the collection of essays *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* edited in 1986, Arjun Appadurai proposes to look at commoditization as a process resulting from the social and cultural mobility of objects. Under this perspective "things" are not immanently considered as commodities but they become such in relation to their specific social history and cultural biography (see also Kopytoff 1986). Throughout its life an object can thus enter and exit the commodity status according to rapidly changing balances in the politics of commercial demand. According to Appadurai, then, we have to "approach commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that characterizes many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives" (1986: 13). Following this perspective, the "regimes of value" (1986: 14) within which a certain object travels transform the way the object itself is consumed, conceptualized and discussed. This constitutes an important methodological shift toward the study of the materiality of things (see also Miller 2005). It suggests, in fact, taking into account the specific materiality of objects to understand and interpret the constantly changing social meanings embodied by the objects themselves. In Appadurai's words, "even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the thing-in-motion that illuminates their human and social context" (1986: 5).

It is important to note here that Appadurai recognizes the articulation of two different ways of conceptualizing objects-in-motion, that is, through the analysis of long-term and short-term mobility. He defines them as "social history" (long-term mobility) and "cultural biography" (short-term mobility, specifically analyzed by Igor Kopytoff in his article within the same collection). As Appadurai suggests,

> the social history of things and their cultural biography are not entirely separate matters, for it is the social history of things, over large periods of time and at large social levels, that constrains the form, meaning and structure of more short-term, specific, and intimate trajectories. It is also the case, though it is typically harder to document or predict, that many small shifts in the cultural biography of things may, over time, lead to shifts in the social history of things (1986: 36).

If we consider the subject matter of this thesis, the Nigerian videos, we can see numerous examples of this differentiation.[28] From a cultural-biography-of-things perspective we can follow the videos travelling from hand to hand, as suggested for instance by the fieldwork example quoted in the introduction to this thesis. We can discuss the transformations that this specific regime of mobility (informal, pirate, unregulated) provokes in the materiality of the videos themselves (cf. Larkin 2004) and in the economy of their production and circulation processes (see the first section of this thesis). This short-term analysis is strictly linked to the long-term one, in which we see the way Nigerian videos shift from one commodity regime to another. Born as popular culture artifacts for local consumption, they migrate to the global arena and enter different regimes of meaning and value. On the one hand, they become transnational representatives of "African" localized forms of modernity, which are consumed within academia worldwide and in the global cinema arena (see chapter five). On the other hand, they represent imagined homelands for African diasporic groups and imaginaries of global mobility and success for masses of young marginalized people in African gigantic urban conglomerations (see chapter seven). While they move across boundaries they are reinvented, re-localized and vernacularized within specific diasporic settings (see chapter seven) and they are rearticulated into marketing brands which open highways of economic entrepreneurship for local, diasporic and foreign cultural entrepreneurs (see chapter four).

Going further in his analysis of the processes of commoditization through mobility, Appadurai focuses on another concept which is particularly influential within the context of this work, the concept of "commoditization by diversion." According to Appadurai, one of the possible ways of transforming a thing into a commodity is through the diversion from its original context of production to a different context of reception. This process of decontextualization adds a particular value to the object, a value that makes the object marketable in relation to its peculiar extraneousness to the context of consumption (see also Huggan 2001). In Appadurai's words,

> the best examples of the diversion of commodities from their original nexus is to be
> found in the domain of fashion, domestic display, and collecting in the modern West.
> […] in the logic of found art, the everyday commodity is framed and anesthetized, these
> are all examples of what we might call *commoditization by diversion*, where value, in

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[28] In relation to this discussion it is important to remember here that Nollywood videos are commodities since the beginning of their social existence. Appadurai's discourse is then relevant here more as a general model than as a specific argument. What particularly interests me in Appadurai's argument is its focus on the *cultural effects of objects' material mobility.*

the art or fashion market, is accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts. It is the *aesthetic of decontextualization* (itself driven by the quest for novelty) that is at the heart of the display. […] in these objects, we see not only the equation of the authentic with the exotic everyday object, but also the *aesthetics of diversion* (1986: 28).

As I will discuss in depth in the second section of this thesis, this process assumed a particularly influential role in the internationalization of the Nigerian video industry, structuring the way Nollywood was represented and received outside the contexts of its ideal reception.

As Wim van Binsbergen underlined, "the consistent emphasis on the ongoing circulation of things in Appadurai's 1986 Introduction prefigures his later work on globalization and on global flows of not only goods, but also people and images" (2005: 15). This brings us to another concept formulated by Arjun Appadurai which is strictly connected to the one just discussed and which also assumed a particular relevance within the context of this work. His well-known identification of "mediascapes" as one of the constitutive features of a "modernity at large" (1996) is, in fact, important to understand the role that media production and consumption plays within diasporic contexts (see chapters seven). As Appadurai extensively discusses in his book, media are playing a determining role in redefining notions of identity and belonging in the era of globalization. Various studies have shown how media production and consumption can participate in maintaining, creating or inventing the relationship with the home country (cf. Karim 2003; King and Wood 2001; and Thussu 2007). At the same time, the media have a role in redefining collective identities, critiquing aspects of the culture of origin and initiating a process of de-mythologization of the homeland (Aksoy and Robins 2003: 95). The transnational circulation of Nigerian videos and their specific re-invention within diasporic contexts constitutes an interesting case study to look at the articulation of local and global mediascapes, and to analyze the transformations that happen through mobility and commoditization.

c) Remediation

While moving, media products do not only traverse different "regimes of value", they also transform their specific attributes as cultural artifacts. While travelling, they enter processes of creolization (cf. Hannerz 1987) which determine their capacity of adapting to new social and cultural contexts. In relation to this aspect of their mobility Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's concept

of remediation (2000) is particularly illuminating, and played an important role in the economy of this work. According to Bolter and Grusin's seminal argument, "no medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces" (2000: 15). From this perspective, the emergence of new media is always the result of an act of remediation, the creative combination of elements previously existing within a specific media environment. "A medium," they emphasize, "is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real" (2000:68). By "the name of the real" here they do not mean only the appeal to realism and "immediacy" (or absence of mediation) that drives much technological transformation. They point instead toward the idea of new media as expression of a specific historicity. As Teri Silvio suggests, "to be compelling, a new media product must capture the psychic and social experiences of a particular time and place, and these include the experiences of older media, as well as the hopes and anxieties around the introduction of new media technologies themselves" (2007: 286).

This definition is particularly significant in the context of the Nigerian video industry. As I have emphasized earlier, in fact, the emergence of the video industry can be read as the remediation of pre-existing media experiences into a new media format to respond to local social and economic transformations. And the further remediation that is taking place today is in itself also the result of a progressive recombination of older media formats to respond to further social and economic mutations (see chapter three). According to this perspective, rather than seeing Nigerian video as an inferior variety of previous experiences of cinema and television in the country (as it has been done for instance within the perspective of African cinema studies), it is possible to consider it as a new medium that has emerged from the historical, economic and social specificities of the Nigerian context. This media format, like those from which it emerged, is open to constant redefinition. The analysis of its genealogy and of its present transformations is thus relevant to understand the fluidity of processes of media formation and institutionalization. Television, cinema and video are in fact often considered as rigid entities, but the new media theory, through the concept of remediation, offers an extremely productive tool for the deconstruction and reformulation of these categories and for an open analysis of their mobility and fluidity. As this thesis wants to demonstrate, the in-betweenness of Nollywood, and its implicit vulnerability and interstitiality represent an interesting example of how media travels and transform through space and time, creating new possibilities of communication.

*Questions*

Nollywood, as a phenomenon, is in itself an open question mark. How did such a successful media industry managed to grow in a context of economic and infrastructural scarcity like the one that characterized post-Structural-Adjustment Nigeria? How did it manage to conquer the hearts and the minds of millions of Africans around the world? What are the secrets of its success? What are the narratives, the aesthetics, the ideologies that this powerful media industry has deployed to achieve such success? What is the future of this industry and what is the role that video films can play in re-imagining the destiny of a continent often represented through metaphors of failure and disaster?

Many of these questions have already been addressed, and I reported in the previous sections of this chapter some of the answers that have been formulated. The existing debate around the video industry is rich and diverse. But this does not exhaust the capacity that Nollywood has of interrogating us. As I had the privilege to observe directly, the video industry is an extremely fast-transforming entity. You look at it today and tomorrow you might not be able to recognize it. For this reason, the scholarly debate is very lively and needs fresh contributions to keep up with the industry's accelerative motion. These transformations are probably the aspect of the Nollywood phenomenon that intrigued me the most. I considered them as a prism through which I could understand some of the behind-the-surface dynamics that traverse the universe of African cultural productions in the digital era. As I will outline throughout this thesis, these transformations are intrinsically related to the mobility of the videos as cultural products.

What is the effect of the unregulated mobility that characterizes Nollywood videos' circulation on the economy of the industry? What are the rules that regulate this informal economy? How are they interpreted and discussed and how do they transform over time? These are the questions that the first section wants to discuss. They are particularly relevant because they look at the material conditions of possibility of the industry itself. They try to understand how the industry developed adapting to specific economic, social and political factors and how then the industry responded when these factors transformed. As the first section argues, a transformation in the social and economic structure of the industry necessarily provokes a number of modifications in the way the films circulate. These transformations modify the social, economic and cultural significance of the films themselves. To draft a very general thesis, we can say that the process this section looks at is circular. Unregulated mobility generates transformations in the economic organization of the

industry, which in turns produce new forms of formalized circulation that affect the social and cultural significance of films themselves.

While these are the dynamics the first section looks at, the second moves the focus towards the intangible aspects of videos' circulation, and particularly towards the videos' mobility throughout different regimes of discourse. The central questions here are: How do the industry and the films it produces move within the realm of discourse? What are the effects of this mobility on films themselves and on the way the industry transforms? As Couldry (2004) suggested, to analyze media as practice we need to look at the way people make sense of them and talk about them, because these discursive activities have important effects on the way media are produced, circulated and consumed. The thesis that this section proposes is rather linear, and suggests that discursive practices around media tend to have an accelerative effect on media themselves. To follow Greg Urban (2001), whose work is a central reference for the second section, we can say that "metaculture" (that is, the culture about culture, the discourse about cultural production) influences cultural production by giving it an accelerative boost, something that ultimately produces a transformation in the cultural product itself.

These transformations are the object of the last section. How does mobility impact on the films' aesthetics and narratives? How does it shape them? And how do the videos manage to move so easily across cultural boundaries? Is there anything in their nature as cultural artifacts that makes their mobility somehow easier? As this sections suggests, video films thematize mobility in many ways. On the one hand, they intrinsically represent it through their aesthetics and their narratives, which are themselves the result of countless contaminations. On the other, they often quite explicitly discuss issues related to mobility. But processes of contamination hardly have a beginning or an end. While they move, videos are subject to countless reformulations of their aesthetic and narrative patterns. How then do these constantly reformulating aesthetics and narratives help us in understanding the itineraries of mobility that videos incarnate and often thematize? How do they relate to experiences of migration, exile, displacement that so commonly define the life of the people that make and consume them outside Africa? Here rather than a linear or a circular interpretation, this section suggests a kind of rhyzomatic model. As the analysis of Nigerian video production in Europe suggests, the ways aesthetics and narratives transform when videos migrate to other contexts are extremely different and isolated from one another but at the same time interconnected. In some ways they testify to the fragmented, deterritorialized experience of the diaspora.

Throughout the three sections that compose this dissertation the idea of mobility represents a metaphor of the contemporary globalized, hyper-connected world. But throughout the thesis this metaphor is constantly interrogated. Often processes of globalization are looked at from European-American perspectives, from the centers of the (today probably weaker than ever before) Western imperialism. How then can a non-Western cultural industry help us in interrogating processes of globalization and transnationalization? How do these processes work when their center of operation is based in a sub-Saharan African country?

SECTION I

**BEYOND THE VIDEO BOOM.**

*Informal circulation, crisis of production and processes of transnationalization in the southern Nigerian video industry*

**Introduction**

When I first went to Nigeria in January 2010, I was prepared to approach an industry at the height of its development. Most of the literature I had been reading to prepare my research was celebratory in its tones. Even the articles that expressed criticism about the videos' contents were explicit in acknowledging the economic success of the industry and its unstoppable growth. The situation I encountered, however, was profoundly different. Since the first interviews I conducted, I realized that, since at least a couple of years, the video industry was traversing a deep production crisis. I realized how dramatic the situation was when, before my interview with Amaka Igwe, one of the most famous Nollywood directors, I asked her if she could give me the contact of someone

who was shooting a video in those days. I wanted to follow the shooting of a film as part of my fieldwork and I did not know where to go. With a sad smile on her face, she simply replied: "Nobody is shooting at the moment, the industry is completely blocked!"

Amaka Igwe's answer stayed in the back of my mind for the following days and pushed me to investigate the reasons behind the production crisis. People were busy discussing the strategies to get out of this complicate economic impasse, and I was lucky to be there in that precise moment. The situation at the end revealed itself to be particularly favorable for my research. Before arriving in Nigeria some colleagues had prevented me that the video industry is not an easy field of research and that it is difficult to meet directors and producers: "Nollywood people are always too busy, and they would hardly meet you unless you have a good deal to propose!". But the production crisis gave me a good chance. Considering that there were almost no films being shot in those early months of 2010, people were incredibly disposed to talk. Thus I managed to meet several key industry players and the discussions I had with them helped me in understanding the causes of the production crisis and the new tendencies emerging from it.

When I went back to the country almost one year later, in December 2010, the situation had radically changed. Even if the crisis had not yet been completely overcome, it was much less dramatic than one year before and people were back on set. Hence I had much more troubles in organizing my interviews, but I easily ended up on set and I followed the shooting of several videos. At this point, some of the ideas that people had discussed with me during my first fieldwork had already been realized. Nollywood was transforming itself in front of my very eyes and the focus of my research during the second fieldwork changed accordingly. The video industry was moving toward new production and distribution strategies which could be read as the mirror of a larger spectrum of social transformations happening in the country.

The contrast between the two fieldwork experiences I had in Nigeria, and the transformations that happened during the time in which I was not there are the focus of this section. As I mentioned in the introduction, this section looks at the material aspects of videos circulation and particularly at the way in which the specificity of Nollywood videos' modes of mobility influenced the video industry's economic transformations. As I have mentioned in the introduction, in the past ten to fifteen years the Nigerian video industry grew exponentially, becoming, as confirmed by a UNESCO report released in 2009, the second largest film industry in the world in terms of the sheer number of films produced. Nigerian videos traveled all over the world, and Nollywood transformed into a transnational and global phenomenon. However, as my fieldwork experiences made me

realize, behind the UNESCO-sanctioned success the reality of the video phenomenon is complex and rich in nuance.

After an initial decade of prosperity, the immense popularity of Nollywood began to have a perverse effect on the industry itself. The market became saturated, generating a negative spiral which brought the industry to a critical impasse. Paradoxically, the international recognition of Nollywood's success coincided with the worst crisis ever faced by the industry. This crisis affected particularly the section of the industry producing films in English, forcing it to experiment with new production and distribution strategies. While I was in Nigeria the official figures of films released in the last two years had not yet been delivered by the Nigerian Censors Board, but the drastic drop in the English language production was commonly recognized and it had also been underlined by the Director General of the Nigerian Censors Board, Emeka Mba, in interviews with local media (cf. Njoku 2009b). In his 2010 inaugural lecture at the University of Lagos, Duro Oni provided some data, which give a clear idea of the scale of the crisis. According to them, the English section of the industry went from 639 films produced in 2006 (42% of the total production), to 114 (13% of the total) in the first ten months of 2010 (Oni 2010: 39). [29]

The reasons for this crisis, as well as the strategies that the different economic actors involved in the industry have adopted to overcome it, are multiple, and I will analyze them throughout this section. Ironically, the informal structure of production and distribution that determined the initial success of Nollywood, turned out to be the major threat to the survival of the industry itself. For this reason, some of the strategies that the actors are taking to solve the crisis imply radical transformations that will probably change the face of Nollywood in the coming years. These transformations are emphasizing the internal differentiation of the industry, tracing a deeper demarcation between the multiple segments that compose the Nollywood puzzle. Within this context, one of the aims of this section is to analyze the role that processes of transnationalization are playing in relation to the economic landscape defined by the mentioned crisis of production.

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[29] The figures that Oni uses, as well as those that I will use throughout this section, are produced by the Nigerian Censors Board. Even if they help to provide a general idea of the industry's tendencies, they cannot be considered as completely reliable. In the first years of existence of the Censors Board, for instance, only a very small percentage of video production passed through censorship. This explains the small number of films censored in 1994 (only 3) at a time at which the industry was already burgeoning (see also chapter I, footnote 21). Furthermore, today a number of films go straight to the market, without passing through the official control, making the official numbers inevitably imprecise. However, the Censors Board statistics are the only official figures existing and it is useful to consult them as a general reference.

The Nigerian video industry has long had a transnational dimension. Thanks to the informality of Nollywood's distribution networks, pirated copies of Nigerian videos circulated throughout the world since the early 1990s. As chapter two highlights, this informal transnationalism played an important role in shaping the economy of the industry and in making the industry recognized outside the African continent and within the global cinema arena. The main thesis explored by this section is that once the domestic video market started to implode because of the excess of informality and the lack of a formal distribution framework, an important section of the industry explicitly decided to target the transnational audience generated by the global informal circulation of Nigerian videos. Hence, the informal mobility of Nigerian videos and the consequences it had on the economy of the video industry participated in progressively transforming videos' production, circulation and consumption.

This section is divided into two chapters. The first discusses the role of piracy within both the development of Nollywood's transnational success and the present crisis. Piracy assumed a prominent role in recent debates about the Nigerian video industry and particularly in the analysis that tried to interpret the causes of the production crisis. However, its role in the general balance of the video economy is more ambiguous than what is often said. Through an analysis of the history of piracy and copyright regulation in Nigeria this chapter highlights the ambiguities of the actual debates on these issues. Piracy is a long-term phenomenon in Nigeria and its definition has transformed according to the laws that have progressively being promulgated. Furthermore the economy of the industry itself developed from piracy networks which existed since the introduction of new recording technologies in the country. The anxiety that today surrounds the debate about piracy in Nigeria seems thus to depend on deeper controversies around the future development of the video economy and its social basis.

The second chapter of this section looks at the way the video industry reacted to the production crisis and analyzes the role that the diasporic market has assumed in it. As I mentioned above, when the excess of informality and the saturation of the local market started to erode the economy of the video industry, part of the industry's entrepreneurs decided to orient themselves toward new production and distribution strategies. They started producing high budget films for circulation mainly in theatre halls, both in Nigeria and in the diaspora, contributing to the emergence of what I define in this section a "new wave in Nigerian cinema". While the production value of the films produced within the frame of this new wave is much higher than the one that characterized earlier Nollywood productions, the accessibility of these new films is much smaller. Theatre halls are still few in Nigeria and the entry fees are unaffordable for most of the population. Hence, this chapter

tries to understand how the transnationalization of Nollywood productions and the reintroduction of theatre halls are transforming the videos' accessibility and the social structure of the industry itself.

CHAPTER II

*Regulating mobility, reshaping accessibility: The production crisis and the piracy scapegoat.*

When the UNESCO report I mentioned in the introduction was published, the reactions expressed in the Nigerian press were contradictory. Some articles presented the news with a sentiment of pride in the achievement of this result, but at the same time, the majority of the articles also underlined the risk of a premature celebration. To many, the publication of the survey sounded almost ironic, considering that the industry was going through a difficult period of crisis (Awoinfa 2009; Nzeh 2009). For instance, just few months earlier, the newspapers were dominated by articles such as "Nollywood is dying" (Njoku 2009a) or "Nollywood: Stuck in the middle of nowhere" (Husseini 2009), paying witness to the economic impasse in which the video industry had progressively fallen since the mid-2000s. The perverse irony of this situation is the result of the problems that the industry traversed in the past few years, and it is strictly related to the specificity of the Nigerian video industry's economic organization and the impact that the introduction of new technologies has had on it.

As I have suggested in the first chapter, Nollywood's economy and media format are the result of the combination of specific material conditions, media experiences and technological transformations. However, Nigerian economic and social reality has quickly evolved in the past few years, and the successful formula represented by early Nollywood's economy is not able to interpret the present Nigerian reality as well as it used to do. The crisis of production this chapter focuses on may then be seen as the expression of this discrepancy, and the economic transformations that the video industry is undertaking can be read as the progressive adaptation of the video industry's structure to the new social, political and economic reality that have emerged over the past few years.

As underlined by Jane Guyer, Nigeria has a commercial economy in which

> at least 60 percent of the currency, once issued, *never goes back through the banking system again.* These two economies – that in which the formal financial institutions monitor the entire money issue every day, and that in which 60 percent of it is never monitored again in its entire life in circulation – coexist, interrelate, and reconstitute one another (1997: 3).

The video industry developed along the line of contact between these two economies. Its structure is rhizomatic,[30] as that of most of informal economies, and it relies upon the unregulated interactions between a large number of small segments. While film industries elsewhere in the world tend to be organized around the activity of a few big production and distribution companies, the Nigerian video industry comprises a constellation of small enterprises, which disappear and reappear according to the economic condition. While the flexibility of this structure made the video industry able to emerge within an economically-adverse environment, the emergence of the production crisis pushed Nigerian video entrepreneurs to rethink the economic basis of their activity.

As a matter of facts, within the widely informal environment in which the video industry has developed, the unregulated, and often illicit, reproduction and circulation of goods were the rule rather than the exception. The (pirated and informal) modes of circulation that emerged from this situation generated two opposite results. While, on the one hand, by multiplying videos' circulation, they transformed Nollywood into a locally and internationally successful phenomenon, on the other hand, by excluding original producers from enjoying the benefits of videos' success, they paved the way for the production crisis that developed in the past few years. As a result, while the industry achieved a global recognition, the economic fragility of its success provoked a growing anxiety, concentrated around issues of piracy and copyright protection.

This chapter intends to investigate the causes of this anxiety and the role that piracy has had in catalysing them while shaping the economy of the industry. To do so, it is important, first of all, to analyze and understand the elements that brought to the production crisis and, particularly, the role that the introduction of new digital technologies has played within this context. While media piracy has existed in Nigerian since the emergence of new recording technologies in the mid-1970s (cf. Larkin 2004), the introduction of faster and cheaper digital reproduction facilities has made illicit reproduction a much more affordable business. The emergence of the production crisis and the anxiety about videos' modes of circulation that followed it are thus deeply related to the technological and infrastructural environment within which the video industry operated.

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[30] I borrow the concept of "rhizome" from Deleuze and Guattari (1988). According to their definition, "unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature […] the rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor to the multiple. […] it constitutes linear multiplicities with *n* dimensions having neither subject nor object (1988: 21).

*The production crisis*

When the video phenomenon began, very few people were in the market and the profits were surprisingly large. For instance, the Igbo businessman Kenneth Nnebue, who invested no more than N 2000[31] to shoot his first video production, made "hundreds of thousands back" (Haynes and Okome 1998: 109). Amaka Igwe and Fidelis Duker, two of the most established directors within the video industry's environment, reported the same thing in recent interviews (Duker 2010; Igwe 2010), underscoring the fact that in the first five to ten years of the industry's existence the producers could invest more money in films because they were certain of high profits. Even if, as Haynes and Okome emphasized as far back as in 1998, piracy was already a serious threat to the industry in that earlier era, the number of copies sold legally on the market was large enough to allow producers and marketers continue to invest money in filmmaking.

According to Fidelis Duker (in an interview reported in Nzeh 2009), the problems started around 2002 when the popularity that Nollywood managed to establish in its first years of existence, and the common belief that Nollywood was a get-rich-quick system, attracted to the industry a large number of people who did not have any experience of cinema. As the figures published by the Nigerian Censors Board attest, the number of videos officially released in Nigeria passed from 389 in 1999 to 1018 in 2002, with a production increase of almost 300%.[32] Inevitably the market became saturated and the incomes generated by film releases dropped dramatically. If in the first few years of the industry one film could easily sell between 100.000 and 150.000 official copies, from the beginning of the 2000's producers needed to release at least two or three films to sell the same total number of copies and make the same amount of money. Consequentially they had to cut the costs and the time of production to release more films. The situation became even worse in the following period. In only four years, between 2004 and 2007, the Nigerian Censors Board's figures report 5889 films officially released, which is more than the total number of films officially released since the creation of the Censors Board in 1994 (with 4837 films released between 1994 and 2003).

The industry progressively entered a vicious circle in which the producers had to produce more films to maintain the same level of incomes, participating in an even more dramatic saturation of the market. Films' narrative quality thus decreased, even if the technical quality was increasing thanks to the introduction of new recording technologies (HD cameras, cheap editing facilities and

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[31] In the early 1990s this amount corresponded to around 200 USD.

[32] Figures from the Nigerian Censors Board official website: www.nfvcb.gov.ng/statistics.php (accessed on the 25th of March 2010). See footnote 29 of the introduction to this section.

so on). Both Amaka Igwe (2010) and Fidelis Duker (2010), underscored in interviews that from the beginning of the 2000's, as a consequence of the overproduction and excess of competition in the market, the quality of the scripts as well as the quality of the shooting became poorer. According to the interviews I conducted with spectators of the films in Nigeria, many people had the feeling that the taste and the critical capacity of the audience was underestimated. As a result, the level of success that some of the early films enjoyed thanks to the quality of their storyline and the level of the acting was rarely repeated.[33]

Within this framework the introduction of new digital technologies had a particular impact. It in fact made the illicit reproduction and circulation of videos easier, augmenting the incidence of piracy on the video economy and reducing the number of official copies sold. As I mentioned in the first chapter, in the early stages of Nollywood's evolution, the introduction of technologies such as cheap video cameras and VHS cassettes had a positive and influential role. They made film production, circulation and exhibition much cheaper and affordable, and thus made the birth of the video phenomenon economically possible. On the contrary, the introduction of new digital technologies that occurred in the following years tended to have a rather problematic impact on the economy of the industry.[34]


*The video industry's vulnerability and the introduction of new media technologies*


As I mentioned in the first chapter, the Nigerian video industry is based on a straight-to-video mode of distribution, significantly different from the modes of distribution of other film industries around the world. This mode of distribution implies that films are not released in theatre halls but are recorded in digital format and sold in the street markets. While this distribution strategy has constituted the condition of possibility for the existence of the industry itself, because it permitted avoiding the high costs of celluloid production and bypassing the collapse of cinema infrastructures in the country, it also condemned Nollywood to a high level of vulnerability. Even if equally affected by piracy, in fact, other film industries can rely on the incomes generated by a regulated system of cinema screenings. The Nigerian video industry, on the contrary, has no other window of

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[33] Examples of these early films are Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* (1992), *Glamour Girls* I and II (1994 and 1996), and *Rituals* (1997), Amaka Igwe's *Rattlesnake* (1995) and *Violated* (1996), Zeb Ejiro's *Domitilla* (1997) and Andy Amenechi's *Mortal Inheritance* (1996), which all became "classics" of Nollywood.

[34] For a general discussion of the relationship between cultural production, technological transformations and piracy see also Altbach (1986).

distribution than the video format (in VHS,[35] VCD or DVD),[36] and thus the incidence of digital piracy on its economy is much higher. When VCD and DVD began to replace older VHS technology, the duplicating process became quicker and cheaper, and the reproduction and sale of unauthorized copies became an easier and more attractive business. While at the time of VHS the incidence of piracy on the video economy was relatively acceptable, with the introduction of digital technologies its impact became unbearable for official producers and distributors.

Furthermore, as Amaka Igwe underlined in a recent interview, the switch from VHS to VCD technology introduced another problem. During the VHS era producers tended to make a large number of copies (at least 100.000 par film) and then, if the film was not successful, they would reuse the unsold tapes for the following release. In this way, the economic losses generated by an unsuccessful film were reduced. With the introduction of VCD this was not possible any more.

> You couldn't invest in a 100.000 copies because if you don't sell them you are in trouble, so people started making just 5/10.000 copies, but for a market of 150 million people, what is it to make 5000 copies? And meanwhile we didn't create a solid distribution… and a VCD as soon as you buy you can put it in your computer and dump it, so piracy became a big problem (Igwe 2010).

The small number of original copies available on the market opened unexpected highways for pirated products.

With the introduction on the Nigerian market of "combos", compilations of 12 to 40 films in compressed format, the situation worsened.[37] These compilations are sold for the same price as a single VCD of a Nigerian new release and offer a much larger amount of contents.[38] According to

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[35] The introduction of VHS technology on the Nigerian market has profoundly contributed to the birth and growth of the video industry. The inexpensiveness, mobility and facility of use of this technology has dramatically extended the accessibility to media production and circulation. For a discussion of the role that the introduction of VHS technology had in reshaping the global media environment see O'Regan (1991).

[36] By the terms "window" and "windowing" the cinema industries indicate their control of circulation over time. In global film industries like Hollywood or Bollywood a film is normally released firstly in cinema halls, then after some time on DVD, then on Pay TV and finally on normal television stations.

[37] The word "combo" comes from a compression of the word "combination". They appeared first on Asian markets and, according to my records, were introduced in Nigeria around 2005/2006.

[38] The price of a single VCD is between 200 and 250 Naira, which at the current (2011) exchange rate corresponds to around USD 1,25/1.50.

the Nigerian Copyright Commission, there are no DVDs replicating plants in Nigeria, and thus combos are supposed to come from outside the country, mainly China and Malaysia (Ogundiran 2011). The thirteen officially recognized replicating plants existing in the country are authorized only for the replication of VCDs, CDs and CDs-rom.[39] However there is no guarantee that other unregistered replicating plants do not exist in the country or that some of the registered plants do not reproduce illicit DVD copies overnight.

According to many practitioners, the impact of the introduction of combos on the Nigerian market has been devastating for the video industry's economy.[40] This effect has coupled with the impact of the exponential increase of internet piracy of Nigerian videos that happened since the early 2000s. While the introduction of combos affected primarily the Nigerian market, the mushrooming growth of internet sites offering free streaming of Nigerian videos eroded mainly the diasporic market. In fact even if Nigeria has one of the highest percentage of internet users in Africa, the quality of the connection only rarely allows people to access heavy contents like high definition images and videos. Therefore the largest percentage of people accessing Nollywood films through internet websites is based in the diaspora and internet piracy has significantly eroded the incomes that diasporic markets used to generate.[41]

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[39] The replicating plants have been obliged to register with Nigerian Copyright Commission after the authorization of the Optical Discs Plant Regulation in 2006. Most of them are owned by Asian entrepreneurs, either Chinese or Indian. Since their registration, they also created an association to protect their interests, the Optical Disc Replicators Association (www.odran.org).

[40] Some people, however, believe that the introduction of combos resulted also from marketers' specific strategic calculation. According to Tunde Kelani, for instance, the arbitrary composition of video compilations in combos DVD is used by marketers to reintroduce on the market the less successful releases (this opinion has been expressed by Kelani during the discussion following the CODESRIA workshop "African film, video and the social impact of the new technologies" held on the 27th and 28th of February 2011 in Ouagadogou (Burkina Faso) as part of the 22nd FESPACO festival). According to this perspective, then, the introduction of Nollywood combos on the Nigerian market is not the uncontrolled initiative of unknown pirates, but the result of a precise (but also partially self-destructive) marketing strategy.

[41] According to Bic Leu's report "two international submarine cables were landed in Nigeria in 2009: Main One, operated by privately-owned Main One Cable Company, and Glo 1, operated by Globacom. The cables link Lagos to Europe and other West African countries with the goal of providing affordable and high-speed Internet services across the continent" (2011). During my fieldwork these new infrastructures were hardly operative, and thus they did not have any relevant effect on Nigerian videos' consumption. But it is easy to imagine that in the coming few years the quality of internet connection in Nigeria will radically improve, and distribution via internet streaming would become a factor to be taken into account also in what concern the local distribution of Nigerian videos.

As Jora emphasizes through a number of interviews with Nigerian video sellers in Europe, the impact of internet streaming has deeply damaged their business, obliging them to cut the number of videos ordered weekly from Nigeria. Sunday Omobude, a Nigerian businessman who owns a video store in Amsterdam, for example, is reported to have cut his orders from 8000 films a week to 1500, while the internet site onlinenigeria.com, which broadcasts Nigerian films for free is reported to have up to 700.000 visitors in 45 countries around the world (Jora 2007). The report of an anti-cyber crime operation conducted by the Nigerian police in 2006 stated that, at the time the operation was undertaken, more than twenty five websites were showing Nigerian videos free of charge (Ezigbo 2006). According to the report, most of them were registered in the UK and in the US and were owned by Nigerians living abroad.

If illicit internet streaming participated in eroding the diasporic video market, local and satellite televisions' unfair competition progressively weakened local retail markets, the real basis of Nollywood's economy. In fact, while television could have been video producers' ideal ally in developing a more solid economy, it ended up becoming a shady adversary. As I have emphasized in the first chapter, Nigerian videos' modes of production and distribution emerged in a period in which the National Television Authority (NTA) was traversing a deep economic crisis, and was thus cutting the budget for the production of local programs. At the same time, the new private channels created after the deregulation of the television sector in 1992 were still economically weak and thus could not support the economy of the emerging entertainment industry. As a result, Nollywood, in its first years of existence, did not develop any advantageous business relation with television channels. Audiences could access videos only by buying VHSs in the market and the video economy did not explore any alternative mechanism of circulation.

Videos success, however, progressively attracted the interest of television channels and videos started to be screened by local broadcasting stations. The first television to enter the market in 1998 was AIT, one of the freshly introduced private channels, quickly followed by a bunch of other local stations, like LTV, LWT, MITV and DBN (Adeleke and Oresegun: 1998). But all these televisions never paid screening fees. As the president of the Independent Television Producers Association of Nigeria (ITPAN) explained to me in a recent interview, movie producers were instead expected to give the channels the right to screen their old films in return of advertising slots to promote their new productions (Holloway 2011).[42] This bargain economy created an atmosphere of general

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[42] Because of the erratic provision of power in Nigeria (cf. Olukoju 2004) running a private television channel is an extremely expensive initiative. Electricity must, in fact, be produced privately. For this reason most local television channels do not have enough funding to produce independent programs. They have thus to rely on this bargain

suspicion between television channels and Nollywood's producers (Adeleke and Oresegun: 1998), making the possible partnership between the video and the television industries harder. Even if television screenings augmented videos' popularity, they also reduced videos' selling rate without giving anything in return. Many local audiences, in fact, stopped buying original copies and started watching videos on TV.

In the following years the introduction of satellite channels screening Nigerian videos further complicated the media landscape. The first satellite channel to emerge was "Africa Magic", a 24-hours African–content channel lunched by the South African company Multichoice in 2003.[43]. As Moradewun Adejunmobi notes, the line-up of films on this channel "was (and remains) so heavily dominated by Nollywood films that some commentators have suggested that the channel should be called NigeriaMagic" (2011: 70). Even if, by making videos available to audiences all over the African continent, Africa Magic had a very influential role in spreading Nollywood's popularity, its action did not have any substantial return on the video economy. The channel in fact pays to Nigerian producers extremely low fees for screening rights' acquisition,[44] and thus videos' satellite circulation accounts only for a very small percentage of the video industry's revenues.[45]

The introduction of Africa Magic and other satellite television screening Nigerian videos like Daarsat and HiTV has progressively transformed the Nigerian and sub-Saharan media landscape. Today satellite television decoder are becoming extremely popular, and those who cannot buy a decoder for themselves, can easily access satellite TV contents in local neighborhood video clubs, bars and restaurants.[46] As mentioned above, then, this situation has inevitably had a powerful

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economy, which ends up delegating most of the economic weight of programs' production to independent producers and advertisers.

[43] Multichoice is a company that provides digital satellite service all over the African continent, in parts of the Middle East, Greece, Thailand and China (Teer-Tomaselli et al. 2007: 156). It emerged in 1993 from M-Net, South Africa's first private television channel. Digital satellite service was launched in 1995 across Africa and Multichoice rapidly became the most popular satellite provider on the market, especially in Anglophone countries.

[44] Apparently directors and producers were not able to find a common strategy to protect their interests, thus today every director, producer or marketer has a different deal with Africa Magic, which usually pays an average US$1000 for unlimited, but not exclusive, rights to the film (Njoku 2009c).

[45] It must be emphasized that, from a different perspective, the creation of Africa Magic had an important role in increasing the average technical quality of the films by imposing a technical standard on the films selected for broadcasting. It also offered a number of training opportunities for Nigerian crews and stimulated co-productions and artistic exchanges between different African countries (Njoku 2009c).

[46] The satellite television market is expanding very rapidly, and the prize of a decoder is becoming more and more accessible. During the first part of my fieldwork in Nigeria (early 2010) a Multichoice decoder was worth 29.000 Naira

impact on the video industry's economy. People today increasingly access videos through distribution channels which the industry's practitioners hardly control, and retail markets, which used to be the main economic resource of the video industry, have become less and less effective.

The particular impact that the introduction of new technologies has had on the video industry's economy is profoundly related to the high level of informality that defines this economy. Within such a framework, video industry's practitioners hardly had the legal and economic instruments to protect their interests and solidify the structure of their enterprise. Once the video industry's economic success became evident, the commercial competition multiplied, new actors entered the business and the market quickly got saturated. New tensions arose around the already blurred demarcation of the limits between licit and illicit practices of production and distribution. Within this context, as I mentioned earlier, a growing anxiety around issues of piracy and copyright regulation emerged. To understand and interpret the causes of this anxiety and the consequences that it is producing, it is important to develop a more precise definition of the economic environment that characterized the video industry's activity since its birth.

### *Focus on informality: Defining the video industry's economy*

In the debates existing around the definition of the economy of the Nigerian video industry, as well as in those related more generally to the analysis of West African economies, the word "informality" appears countless times. But its use and definition have often been contested.[47] As Janet Roitman emphasized, "the adjective 'informal' has become a catch-all term to describe many economic pursuits and logics that are part and parcel of capitalist relations in both 'the West' and 'the rest'" (2005: 19). This widespread use made the definition of the term blurred, almost

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(176 USD), and thus was, in a country where the largest part of the population lives with less than a dollar a day, an extremely elitist product. However, the introduction around the mid-2010 of the new satellite television company Star TV, owned by the Australian tycoon Rupert Murdoch and providing contents mainly produced in China and South Korea, transformed the situation by increasing the level of competition on the market. Star TV decoders were sold for 12.900 Naira (78 USD), and were thus much more accessible than Multichoice's ones. By the end of my second fieldwork (march 2011), as a result of the commercial competition, the price of a Multichoice decoder had fallen to 9000 Naira (54 USD), less than a third of what it used to be just one year before.

[47] The debate around the definition and the applicability of the term "informality" within and beyond the borders of the African continent is wide and complex, and its analysis goes beyond the scope of this chapter. For a general overview of this debate see Losby *et al* (2002), while for its articulation within the field of African studies see Meagher (2005).

inconsistent. While Roitman goes so far as to describe the term as "misleading" (*ibid*), I still think that the term has an important operational value.

In what concerns the video industry, the indiscriminate use of this attribute has participated in creating a particular representation of the video phenomenon, which has widely circulated in the global cinema arena through film festivals and documentaries.[48] According to this representation, the video industry is a largely deregulated economic venture in which improvisation and unprofessionalism are the rule rather than the exception. Within this framework, the specificities that define the industry's modes of operation are generally seen as the contingent result of a number of social and economic factors and the industry is considered as an exploitative system regulated by a "get-rich-quick" mentality.[49]

This definition of the video industry's modes of operation has provoked numerous reactions within the industry's environment (Ayorinde 2004). It has in fact been seen as an attempt to disqualify and marginalize Nollywood, defining it as a second-class film industry. Hence, as this debate emphasizes, the definition of informality within the context of the video industry's economy needs to be addressed carefully in order to avoid the risk of transforming it into a term perceived as disqualifying. At the same time, as I underlined above, this is a term whose definition can importantly help us in understanding the specificities of the video industry's modes of operation.

In common use, "informal" has become synonymous with unstructured or unorganized systems of economic relations, and it is often connected to the idea of marginality and illegality. However, a closer analysis of the phenomena that are classed as informal shows that, in most cases, informal economies and informal networks of circulation are highly organized, they often occupy a central position in the economy of a country (particularly in the African context but also in European regions like Southern Italy or in the Post Soviet area) and they constantly fluctuate between regimes of legality and illegality, foregrounding the fact that spheres of lawfulness and illicitness are socially constructed (cf. Altbach 1986; Roitman 2005; Yar 2005). In the case of the Nigerian video industry, this is illustrated by the fact that, even if the economic structure of the industry is largely unregulated, the relationships between the numerous economic actors involved in it (marketers, producers, directors, actors, technicians) are robustly structured. When the informal (but structured)

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[48] I am referring here at documentary films such as Franco Sacchi's *This is Nollywood* (2007), Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal's *Nollywood Babylon* (2008) and Saartje Geerts's *Nollywood Abroad* (2008). For an in depth discussion of the representation of the Nigerian video industry that these films have circulated see chapter five.

[49] It is significant within this context to remember the title of a retrospective on the video phenomenon organized during the Berlinale 2004: "Hollywood in Nigeria, or how to get rich quick" (see chapter five).

systems of rules that regulate the interactions between these agents enter a period of transformation, violent conflicts can erupt, as shown by several episodes in the recent past.[50]

As Roitman suggests, when we talk about "informal" we mainly refer to "unregulated" or "unofficial" economic activities (2005: 19-20) that is, activities that are not monitored and that do not fall into the fiscal framework of the nation-state. However, this does not exhaust the meaning of informality in the present context. When I refer to informal modes of production and distribution, I do not mean only that these modes of production and distribution are unregulated. This would be a negative definition, whereas it might be more useful for this discussion to suggest a definition that positively identifies the specific aspects of informality within the video economy.

Hamid Naficy's description of exilic modes of film production within the Iranian diaspora may be relevant for an analysis of the Nigerian video industry. These modes of production, which he defines as "interstitial" or "artisanal", "operate both within and astride the cracks and fissures of the system, benefiting from its contradictions, anomalies and heterogeneity" (1999: 134). This definition is useful to understand how the Nigerian video entrepreneurs act within an economic system that does not foresee their existence. They are obliged to adapt and creatively react to a context in which their activity is systematically undermined by the authorities. Nollywood has in fact developed without any governmental support, in a context that has often considered the industry a problem rather than a resource for the development of Nigerian economy and society.[51] The interstitiality of Nigerian video entrepreneurs' modes of operation is, thus, a constitutive element of the informality that defines the economy of the industry.

Another central feature to be considered is the rhizomatic organization of the industry's economy, and of informal transactions in general. While formal economies tend to have cephalic structures, in which it is possible to identify an organizational centre, informal economic systems tend to work according to a segmented structure, in which networks of reciprocal connections interact with each other through a myriad of nodal points and transform themselves constantly, in unmonitored but meaningful ways. This aspect implicitly foregrounds another defining attribute of Nollywood's informality: fluidity. The economy and the structure of the video industry transform

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[50] For instance, in 2004 the Film and Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria banned some of the most famous Nollywood stars (included Ramsey Nouah and Genevieve Nnaji) for one year for alleged indiscipline. They were accused of demanding excessive salaries and thus influencing the development of the ongoing crisis of production.

[51] In recent times the Nigerian government has modified its position, instituting in 2010 a USD 200 million fund for loans to Nigerian entertainment entrepreneurs. The fund, partly the effect of an IMF loan, is administered by a state body, the Bank of Industries, which started assigning loans at the beginning of 2011 (Osae-Brown 2011).

quickly, as a way of adapting to fast-changing economic conditions. This fluidity is a resource, but can also be seen as a weakness. The fluidity and openness of the video industry as a system, in fact, makes it profoundly vulnerable.

As Ravi Sundaram emphasizes in his study of piracy in contemporary urban India,

> as a phenomenon that works on a combination of speed, recirculation and dispersal, pirate products are consumed by the possibility of their disappearance – by more imitations and versions. This is a constant anxiety in small electronic enterprises, the first past the post stays there for only a few months. New copies follow, from rivals and former collaborators. The doctrine of the many is haunted by its own demise – all the time. Just as Marx once wrote that the only limit to capital is capital itself, so piracy is the only agent that can abolish piracy (2010: 138).

As I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, in a context like the Nigerian one, where copyright regimes were and still are weak, the unregulated imitation and reproduction of products that are particularly successful on the market drives the video industry's informal economy toward subsequent cycles of saturation and collapse. As noted by Ramon Lobato, from this perspective "it becomes possible to read piracy [and, I may add, informality] as the quintessential form of free enterprise" (2009: 22), in which the absence of regulation brings competition to levels that constantly menace the survival of the entire system.

The last point worth highlighting here is the fact that the line that divides formal and informal sectors within the Nigerian context is anything but rigid. The fluid informal sector is constantly interacting with segments of Nigeria's formal economy, and the sporadic funding of films by private banks and corporations is a clear example of this dynamic.[52] At the same time, in the Nigerian context the wave of economic formalization through privatization introduced by the Structural Adjustment policies has unexpectedly generated a remarkable growth of informal transactions and has participated in transforming informality into a back-door route to globalization

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[52] Even if the level of economic engagement of private corporations in Nollywood productions is still very low, some examples can be found. For instance, Izu Ojukwu has directed four films financed by Amstel Malta beer (*Sitanda, White Waters*, *Cindy's Note* and *The Child*) and Fidelis Duker, Charles Novia, Chico Ejiro and Fred Amata created the association "Project Nollywood" which has produced four films thanks to the sponsorship of Ecobank (Fidelis Duker's *Sensless*, Charles Novia's *Caught In The Middle*, Chico Ejiro's *100 Days in the Jungle* and Fred Amata's *Letter to a Stranger*).

(Meagher 2003: 59). Informal markets all over sub-Saharan Africa have, in fact, come to play a pivotal role in generating technological and cultural innovation through the introduction into the public arena of last-generation products smuggled in from abroad.

Within the context of the Nigerian media environment, informality can be defined as an economic mode of operation which is interstitial, segmented, fluid, rhizomatic, structurally vulnerable and which occupies a central rather than marginal position on the wider landscape of the Nigerian economy. This informality, and the mobility of technologies, contents, and narratives that it allowed, had a fundamental role in activating the processes of remediation that generated Nollywood's specific media format (see chapter one). However, as I suggested earlier, the fluidity and openness of this economic structure have also participated in making the boundaries between licit and illicit practices blurred. Within this context, the terms of informality and piracy have often been used interchangeably. This has created a problematic confusion which, as I will better discuss in the last section of this chapter, constitutes one of the main reasons behind the tensions that perturb the video industry's environment since the eruption of the production crisis.

### *Piracy and copyright in the Nigerian video industry*

In order to continue this analysis, it is necessary to specify the differences existing between informal and pirate forms of production and circulation. Furthermore, it is important to define the role that piracy had in shaping the economy of the video industry. Within the context of the video economy, in fact, the connection between informality and piracy is particularly complex. To summarize it briefly, it is possible to say that the legitimate, but informal, economy of the video industry has originated directly from its illegitimate, and as well informal, counterparts: the economy of media piracy (cf. Larkin 2004).

Following Brian Larkin's analysis of the development of VHS cassettes business in Kano (2004), it is possible to point out three main factors in the evolution of film piracy in Nigeria. First of all the suspension, in 1981, by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) of the distribution of Hollywood films in Nigeria, in response to the nationalistic cultural policy assumed by the Nigerian government. Secondly, the effects of the oil-boom on the consumption of media products, which allowed "the mass-dissemination of cassette-based technologies" (Larkin 2004: 294). Finally, the century-old centrality of Nigeria in the continental transnational trading networks which facilitated the exploitation of new digital technologies for the development of the commercial possibilities related to the factors mentioned above.

The combination of these elements rapidly pushed Nigeria into the global network of pirated goods, providing Nigerians "a vast array of world media at a speed they could never imagine, hooking them up to the accelerated circuit of global media flows" (Larkin 2004: 297). Till the beginning of the 1980s Hollywood, Bollywood and Hong Kong films were, in fact, available in Nigeria only long time after their official release and in badly damaged celluloid copies. Complex networks of media piracy, which often touched the Emirates (Dubai, Abu-Dhabi) or the Eastern Asian metropolises (Singapore, Kuala Lumpur), suddenly made them available to a larger audience in a much shorter time. The availability of these media products increasingly influenced the imagination of video makers, who created a creole aesthetic formula in which local and transnational elements converged (see chapter six).

Piracy influenced Nigerian videos aesthetics also by shaping their technical quality. The interferences and breakdowns accumulated during the reproduction process, in fact, became a constitutive feature of first Nollywood videos, as they were already for all pirated media circulating in Nigeria since the end of the 1970s. As Brian Larkin (2008) has interestingly pointed out, in Nigeria infrastructures' breakdowns and failures profoundly affect the way media are produced and circulated. Nigerian audiences experienced global media through the filter of piracy, and thus never appreciated their full technical and aesthetic quality. They instead experienced them within the framework of what Yuri Tsivian defined as a "semiotic of interference" (1994, quoted in Larkin 2004), a semiotic according to which scratches on the film, background noise recorded during the shooting, and unpredicted breakdown of the recording equipment become "part of the 'message' of films themselves" (Larkin 2004: 308). Being used to this kind of viewing experience, Nigerian audiences hardly showed any intolerance toward the initial technical deficiency of Nollywood videos. Piracy thus created the media environment that enabled the videos to emerge and to be accepted within a media market dominated by foreign products of much higher technical quality (see also Adejunmobi 2007).

Apart from influencing the aesthetics and narratives of the video industry and creating the media environment for videos' reception, piracy also provided the infrastructures that allowed media goods to circulate. Media piracy in fact established the production modes and the distribution networks upon which the local video industry developed. Most of the traders that invested in video production and distribution in the early days of the industry developed their business through the commerce of pirated VHS cassettes of foreign films. The places where Nigerian videos were duplicated, as well as the venues where they were sold, were initially used as reproduction and

distribution points for pirated goods. The video industry thus grew and became established as a branch of a business based on piracy whose position between legality and illegality was ambiguous.

In the years that preceded the emergence of the Nigerian video industry, piracy of foreign media products was largely tolerated and, when local video productions began to emerge, legitimate copies of locally produced films were distributed and sold together with pirated copies of foreign productions. As soon as the local industry started to become economically successful this became a problematic issue because of the confusion created by the overlap between legal and illegal circulation of media products.[53] How to distinguish legitimate from pirated copies in a system in which in most of the cases they are reproduced in the same replicating plant, shipped in the same package, and eventually sold in the same place? The confusion surrounding the distinction between original and fake products, legitimate and illegitimate copies, pirates and legal distributors, became one of the main reasons for the anxiety that started traversing the Nigerian video industry a few years after the beginning of the video boom.

In general terms the definition of what piracy actually is and what moral value it has varies profoundly from place to place and in relation to the moral and political orientation of the person that proposes the definition.[54] Within the Nigerian context a concern with phenomena that can be defined in the "modern" terms of piracy firstly appeared consistently in the public sphere when the first Copyright law was promulgated. This happened, as in most Commonwealth countries, during the colonial time through the extension of the 1911 English Copyright Act, to protect the interests of British firms in the colonies.

As Bankole Sodipo underlines,

> whatever form of writing, art or music prevailed in British colonies at that time, it appears that 'local piracy' never became an issue […] It therefore follows that the 1911 Act was not initially aimed at protecting local publishers or other local copyright interests from piracy […] rather [it] was primarily aimed at protecting the trade in

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[53] It is important to underline that piracy started affecting the local industry very early in its history, as testified by Haynes and Okome in one of the first academic articles written on the video industry. "The main constraint on the market is piracy – they write - […] Popular videos are rapidly pirated, sometimes by the marketer entrusted with distributing the film. But the greatest problem is piracy by video rental clubs, which rent out films with no mechanism for paying royalties to the producer. There are said to be two thousand such video clubs in Lagos alone" (1998: 115).

[54] As Philip Altbach has underlined, "copyright as a world issue is of recent origin. Nations have used copyright for their own purposes for a very long period of time. The United States [...] was one of the world's major 'pirates' until it had securely developed its own cultural industry in the late 19th century" (1986: 1644).

British books, art, music, films and broadcasts, which constituted reasonable trade interests in [the colonies] as a result of the assimilated British culture (1997: 26).

Hence for many years after the introduction of copyright in Nigeria the violation of copyright law was associated with the circulation of foreign cultural products. Most of local cultural production was not industrialized at that time[55] and its informal circulation was hardly conceptualized as piracy. As suggested in general terms by Bankole Sodipo (1997) and confirmed by the in depth anthropological fieldwork conducted in the Calabar region by Ute Röschenthaler (2011), forms of regulation of intellectual properties' circulation existed already in pre-colonial Nigeria and continued to exist parallel to modern Western-inspired copyright laws. However, what is important to underline here is that until significant local cultural industries started to emerge the local concern about modern forms of copyright laws and piracy was relatively low. Within this framework, piracy was often conceived as a form of appropriation and redistribution of foreign cultural products that would otherwise be unavailable on the local market.[56]

A different situation emerged when local cultural industries started consolidating throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with the boom of the music industry, the phenomenon of the Onitsha market literature and the progressive development of cinema and television. It is around this period that the public concern around copyright and piracy began to grow. The first court case related to intellectual property rights in the field of cultural production happened in 1972, just after a new copyright Act was approved, but the discussion gained momentum around the mid-1980s, when the first IP-related court case got to the Supreme Court (1986) and the artists (particularly musicians) started to demonstrate publicly to ask for a better enforcement of their rights.[57] The intense lobbying

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[55] The newspaper industry might be here considered as an exception. As discussed by Karin Barber in a recent article (2010) the newspaper industry in English and in local languages was very well developed in early-1920s Lagos, and forms of plagiarism and illicit reproduction of already published material used to happen. However, these phenomena were hardly conceptualized and discussed in terms of piracy.

[56] According to Uche Ewelukwa-Ofodile, this legacy is still particularly influential in the present Nigerian debates around IP laws and copyright: "The question is how to effectively protect the creative works of ordinary Nigerians in a cultural climate that largely views intellectual property right as a Western concept viable only in developed countries and exported to developing countries to further Western interests" (2010).

[57] The law approved in 1970 had in fact many weaknesses and did not offer a strong framework to protect artists and producers from the growth of piracy that followed the boom of music and book industries in the late 1970s. As underlined by Babafemi (2006: 5 - 6), the 1970 Act did not create any administrative structure to deal with IP rights, it established minimal criminal sanctions for the infringer and did not allow police to intervene to enforce the law.

conducted by the numerous artists' associations existing in Nigeria resulted in 1987 in the institution of a National Planning Committee for the revision of the Copyright Act. A new law was therefore approved at the end of 1988, just a few weeks after a nation-wide protest march organized by artists' associations.

The approval of this law shows the peculiarity of the Nigerian case which is different to those of most of other African countries. In fact "the genesis of the 1988 Act […] was not driven by pressure from foreign governments or trade associations. Rather, it developed out of the lobbying of the indigenous copyright industry" (Sodipo 1997: 27). After the approval of this law, however, piracy did not reduce consistently. On the contrary, it mushroomed, becoming, as discussed above, an important element in the processes of evolution of the Nigerian media environment.

To tackle the increase in media piracy that, as I described earlier, had been provoked by the introduction of new digital technologies, in 2005 the Nigerian Copyright Commission enforced a new anti-piracy campaign, the Strategic Action Against Piracy (STRAP). As its name clearly states, the objective of this campaign was to reduce the incidence of piracy on local entertainment industries in order to create a healthier environment for media entrepreneurship in the country. Compared to earlier governmental actions on issues related to intellectual property protection, the STRAP stands out for its insistence on police actions. Numerous anti-piracy raids were in fact carried out since the campaign took off. According to a World Intellectual Property Organization's report, between May 2005 and May 2007, 115 operations were achieved, 373 suspects were arrested and 15 cases were brought to court.[58]

Since the STRAP started to be enforced, anti-piracy raids were highly mediatized, participating to the increase of the anxiety about piracy that, as I mentioned earlier, emerged in relation to the progressive worsening of the production crisis. The number of newspaper articles discussing the issue grew exponentially, as testified by the fact that one of the most influential Nigerian newspapers, *The Guardian*, opened in 2007 a section of its archive on piracy and copyright, to give a coherent archival order to the debate happening on Nigerian newspapers' columns. However, this mediatization served the government's propaganda more than the video industry. The incidence of piracy on the video economy did not reduce consistently, and the production crisis, instead of being solved, reached, as evidenced above, its most dramatic peaks.

As Eyinaya Nwauche, head of the Nigerian Copyright Commission in the early 2000s, underlined, "a weak system breeds a culture of piracy. An enormous amount of resources would

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[58] Data from the WIPO official website: http://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2008/05/article_0009.html, accessed on the 18th of may 2011.

have to be spent to change this attitude when the country decides to institute a stronger level of protection" (2003). As mentioned above, piracy of foreign films has generally been tolerated in Nigeria. For long time it constituted the only available option to access foreign media products. Media piracy's networks and infrastructures shaped the emerging local video industry and when piracy started to consistently affect also locally produced videos and the need to stop this phenomenon became a priority, the line separating the infrastructures of piracy from the legitimate industry's economy had become hard to draw.

Furthermore, as emphasized throughout this section, Nigeria modern copyright law developed along the line that divides old colonial interests and emerging local forms of cultural entrepreneurship, imperial forms of capitalism and postcolonial attempts to create self-efficient entertainment industries. This ambiguous position made the debate around copyright and piracy often confused and politically problematic.[59] As suggested by Uche Ewelukwa-Ofodile, a Nigerian expert on IP-related issues, a central question in this context becomes the following: "How can countries in Africa deal with the growing internal demand for stronger intellectual property protection and at the same time maintain their opposition to attempts by developed countries to coerce them to adopt Western-style law?" (2010).

The unclear definition of the line that divides informality from piracy within the Nigerian context is the result of this complex dynamic. However, it is precisely around this distinction that most of the conflicts that emerged from the production crisis are concentrated.

*Mobility, accessibility and the piracy scapegoat*

In Nigeria issues concerning piracy and copyright infringements often catalysed nodal controversies. For instance, the continuity/discontinuity between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial forms of IP regimes generated intricate debates around the definition of communal and individual ownership of intangible goods and around the legitimacy of the application of modern intellectual property rights to the Nigerian context. Furthermore as in many other non-Western countries, the fact that IP laws have often been used to protect Western capitalistic interests created an atmosphere of widespread suspicion toward the protection of copyright. This generated debates around the position of Nigeria within the global framework dictated by Western capitalism and

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[59] As underlined in general terms by Bruce Carruthers and Laura Ariovich, the respect of Intellectual Property laws is related to how legitimate people consider a specific legal regime to be. "Voluntary compliance [to copyright] depends on the perceived legitimacy of the rules, and without legitimacy enforcement is difficult" (2004: 29).

imperialism. In many cases the combination of these factors created multiple problems for modern non-Western cultural industries in asserting their rights and making them respected. Piracy has also been the highway for the participation of the Nigerian society to technological globalization. The fast introduction of new technologies and the participation in global networks of media informal circulation, however, generated both positive and negative effects for local cultural industries. It shaped cultural industries' economies, giving them a high degree of flexibility, but it also imposed on them a high level of vulnerability.

Each of these controversies revolved around complex and particularly relevant issues, such as the articulation of local and foreign conceptualizations of ownership, the position of Nigeria within the framework of global capitalism, the role of new technologies in knowledge accessibility and in the development of non-Western cultural industries. Within this context, the recent growth of anti-piracy anxiety can be read as the expression of another nodal controversy, the one that sees the Nigerian video industry's economy suspended between informal and formal economic strategies. This controversy is the result of the competition between two conflicting paradigms, opposing different segments of the Nigerian society, as well as different groups of interest.

As Ramon Lobato argued in his analysis of media piracy, the alternative between informal and formal networks of media circulation can be seen as the expression of the tension between

> two competing models of capitalism: on the one hand, an oligopolistic, vertically integrated, top-heavy capitalism that perpetuates itself through collusion with the state via technical standards, trade deals, copyright regimes, and so on; and, on the other, a less formal, often extra-legal variety of enterprise that operates between the cracks in existing economic structures and frequently outstrips its legally sanctioned counterpart in efficiency, speed, and flexibility (2009: 23).

A similar kind of tension can be observed in the present situation of the video industry. The worsening of the production crisis that I have analyzed earlier, and the tensions provoked by the institutional interventions proposed to solve it, have polarized the industry around two main orientations.

On the one hand, there is a section which is pushing toward a formalization of the industry. This section would like the industry to have limited accessibility, high entry investments, a highly regulated system of circulation and an effective copyright regime. The members of this section are mainly established directors and producers, who are interested in producing high budget films,

capable of targeting both the international and the local market. To do so, they need to rely on a solid and formal film industry's infrastructure that can guarantee them that the money they would invest will not be lost because of piracy and informal circulation. On the other hand, there is a section that would like the industry to keep a more horizontal structure, with high accessibility, low entry investments, weak copyright regime and porous legality. The members of this section are mostly small marketers, video rental shops' operators and all those who fear that the transition to formality will push them out of the business.

The anxiety that is growing around issues of piracy and copyright infringement is thus the symptom of the battle that is being played within the field of Nigerian cultural industries. Those who are lobbying for the implementation of the new governmental policies to regulate the video economy are those who see economic opportunities arising from the formalization of the system, while those who are opposing the transformation are those who have scarce opportunities to keep a foot in the industry's business if anything will change. Within this framework piracy plays the role of the scapegoat. It is an argument that can catalyse the tensions traversing Nigerian society at many levels, tensions that oppose horizontal systems of solidarity to new forms of capitalistic interests. The debate around piracy, as well as the anxiety surrounding it, catalysed the attention of the media and the public sphere, displacing the discussion from the field of economics to the field of legality. The use of moral arguments (good vs evil, legal vs illegal, legitimate vs pirated) radicalised the position of many actors involved in the debate and participated in hiding more problematic issues related to the economic accessibility of both the production and the consumption of videos.

An example could make this point clearer and drive this chapter to a conclusion. When speaking at the opening ceremony of the 2010 edition of the Eko International Film Festival in Lagos, the governor of Lagos State, Babatunde Raji Fashola, suggested looking for a constructive solution to the issue of piracy. If the pirates can be actively introduced into the legal business, "they would become your distributors, marketers and agents and everybody will have a win-win situation", suggested Fashola (Abodurin 2010). With this statement Fashola tried to move the focus from legality to economic sustainability, suggesting that a solution can be found if "pirates" can be integrated into a new formalized video industry's economy. But the radicalization of the debate around piracy that happened in recent years has made a solution of this kind harder to find. The reaction of the audience to Fashola's statement was in fact cold, if not hostile, as exemplified by one of the many comments that his statement has provoked on line:

Governor Fashola seems to be losing the plot. How on earth can he advise film producers to befriend pirates who reap where they have not sown? He could as well ask us to befriend armed robbers for both are criminal behaviours. If Mr. Fashola has forgotten his responsibility let me remind him here. It is the duty of the State to prosecute criminals and to ensure that appropriate sanctions are meted to anyone found guilty to serve as a deterrent to others. Asking film producers to befriend pirates is tantamount to abdication of responsibility.[60]

As the title of an article by Majid Yar rightly puts it, we need to ask if " the global 'epidemic' of movie 'piracy' [is a] crime-wave or [a] social construction" (2005). Patterns of legality and illegality move according to the transformations of local and global spheres of interests and social balances. Piracy is a construction, whose definition varies according to these parameters. The economy of the Nigerian video industry is rapidly transforming and this transformation needs to be addressed openly, while the anxiety surrounding the issue of piracy risks to orient the focus of the debate somewhere else.

As the recent history of the Nigerian video industry shows, a high degree of informality and a low level of copyright enforcement tend to create a suitable economic environment for the emergence of a new cultural industry, particularly in non-Western countries. But when this same cultural industry reaches a remarkable size, as in the case of Nollywood, it tends to orient itself toward processes of formalization that can protect the interests of those who control the largest part of the industry's capital. As Lawrence Liang (2005) has shown in relation to the music industry in India, in some cases those who have benefited the most from the economy of media piracy can become the most aggressive supporter and enforcer of stronger copyright regimes. In these contexts the rhetoric of piracy and the paranoia that it can generate become tools to protect and further specific interests.

As I have shown throughout this chapter, within the context of the Nigerian video industry a similar process has taken place. Over the past few years, those who thanks to the initial high accessibility of the industry's economic structure managed to accumulate important economic and professional capitals are today among the most vocal supporters of a restructuration of the industry's economy, which would imply a regulation and limitation of its economic accessibility.

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[60] Comment to Fashola's intervention published on the Next newspaper's website by Odiri Oghre: http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/News/Metro/Politics/5645190-146/befriend_pirates_fashola_tells_filmmakers_.csp accessed on the 12th of February 2011.

Within this context, the instrumental use of discourses around piracy has an impact on the way institutions and private actors relate to the production and the distribution of media contents. By mobilizing moral and legal arguments, in fact, these discourses generate interventions that tend to modify the degree of economic accessibility of the video industry. The economic structure that results from this process favours specific interests allowing for the accumulation of larger capitals which can be spent in developing the cultural industry's profitability. The result of this dynamic cannot but be ambivalent: in the coming years Nollywood might become one of the leading film industries in the world, but this might happen at the cost of a radical reduction of its economic and social accessibility.

CHAPTER III.

*From Nollywood to Nollyworld: Paths of formalization of the video industry's economy and the emergence of a new wave in Nigerian cinema*

The scenario defined by the production crisis and described in chapter two seems to offer a very dark portrayal of the present situation of the Nigerian video industry. The crisis is in fact profoundly affecting the balance that defined the industry's economy since the beginning of the video phenomenon. At the same time, it must be recognized that the Nigerian video industry has emerged from one of the hardest economic and political crisis that has ever affected the Nigerian society (the post-Structural-Adjustment crisis I referred to in the first chapter) and since then it has frequently moved from one to the following crisis, each of them marking the ground for a new important development. Headlines like "Video: a year of pain and penury" (Aihe 1997), "Before the video eclipse" (Onoko 2001), "Nollywood is sinking" (Sowole 2005), "Nollywood is dying" (Njoku 2009) have cyclically appeared in the Nigerian newspapers, testifying to the structural vulnerability of the video industry's economy that I described in chapter two. According to many observers, the current crisis was long needed and it will have a positive effect on the future of the industry. Odia Ofeimum (2010), Steve Ayorinde (2010) and Jahman Anikulapo (2010), in the interviews I conducted with them, all agreed on this point. Paraphrasing Jahman Anikulapo's words, it is then from the ashes of the video boom that a more solid and qualitative film industry will originate.

As I emphasized in the previous chapter, the crisis of production that emerged in the past few years has showed the limits of the economic organization that has defined the video industry since its early days. The video industry's size has grown as well as the volume of the business the industry generates, and the informal modes of operation that used to organize its economy have become a limit to the industry's further expansion. To react to this situation numerous video industry's practitioners have insistently asked for an institutional intervention. As a consequence, the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board has introduced a series of measures to regulate the video economy. As I will discuss in the first section of this chapter, however, these interventions did not achieve any durable result. On the contrary they participated in further radicalizing the tensions that, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, have emerged in the video industry as a result of the production crisis.

The failure of these institutional measures pushed the industry's practitioners to experiment with independent solutions. New production and distribution strategies thus emerged and a series of private initiatives to formalize videos' circulation were introduced. Within this framework, the

transnational circulation of videos assumed a new role, and diasporic markets became particularly influential on the video economy. While Nigerian videos have traveled all over the world since the early days of the video industry, today a section of Nollywood has made the global cinema arena its main target. As with the Indian film industry, the role played by diasporic groups in the production, circulation and consumption of Nigerian videos has become progressively more influential. In their 2005 edited collection, Raminder Kaur and Ajay Sinha suggest that Bollywood has now to be considered a transnational industry − a "Bollyworld" as they name it − in which local and transnational aesthetics and narratives, formal and informal modes of production and distribution find original interceptions. When looking at the Nigerian industry today, a similar process can be observed, even if it is probably still in its early stages. This chapter intends to investigate this dynamic through the analysis of the different strategies that an influential even if still numerically limited number of Nigerian producers and directors have adopted over the past few years. As I will underline throughout this chapter, while the introduction of these transformations is still the expression of a small group of entrepreneurs within the industry's environment, the consequences of their action might become particularly relevant in defining the future of the video phenomenon and its relation with local and transnational audiences.

### Regulating videos' mobility: Institutional interventions

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the local and transnational circulation of videos has been characterized, since the early days of the video industry, by a high level of informality. Within this context no centrally-directed system to monitor media circulation was in place. The absence of a structured distribution scheme affected inevitably the economy of the industry in many ways. First of all, it made it impossible for the authorities to pursue pirates, because in the industry's informal system no distributor was officially licensed and no figure of the official copies released was published.[61] VCDs were not encoded, thus they did not have digital protection, and could easily be duplicated and pirated. No video shop or video club was licensed either, and anyone could decide to start to sell videos without authorization. Furthermore, the lack of an organized structure had made it impossible to produce official statistics about the industry's economy. Marketers, producers and directors usually tended to deliver figures that followed their personal interests: directors used to mention larger numbers to promote, and sometimes create, their popular success, while marketers

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[61] As Emeka Mba, DG of the Nigerian Censors Board, says "we don't know who is distributing for you […] so you can't come and say they've pirated my movie. Who do I chase?" (Ajeluorou 2009).

on the contrary tended to reduce the figures to escape the fiscal control. The lack of official statistics made the economy of the industry deeply unreliable, discouraging any sort of external private investment from banks or other private corporations.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, these factors largely contributed to the emergence of the production crisis. For this reason, when the government, through the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board, decided to intervene, it focused its action on the distribution issue. In 2007 the Censors Board approved a new distribution framework, which aimed at regulating videos' circulation in order to make illicit practices of videos' reproduction and sale traceable and the economy of the industry more solid. As the General Director of the Censors Board emphasized, "it is distribution that drives contents, not the other way around. Contents always find their way [...] but it is distribution that monetize their circulation... and monetization is what helps creating better contents in the future!" (Mba 2010).

In order to formalize the video economy, the new distribution framework imposed the acquisition of a license on all distributors, video shops and video clubs. It also insisted on the marking of every VCD put on the market with official stamps delivered by the Censors Board, in order to trace videos' circulation and produce statistic figures of the number of official copies released and bought. Furthermore, to better structure the local and transnational commerce of videos, the framework distinguished five categories of distributors (national, regional, state, Local Government Area, community) with license fees that ranged from N 500.000 for the national license to N 15.000 for the community one. Moreover, it imposed on distributors an insurance bank bond ranging from N 30 million for the national distributors to N 1 million for the LGA one (the community distributors had only to guarantee a N 100.000 operating fund).[62]

This point created many controversies. The function of the insurance bond was largely misunderstood and its amount was contested.[63] Many practitioners accused the Censors Board to be

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[62] Data from the text of the Distribution Framework, National Film and Video Censor Board 2007 (accessible at the Nigerian Censors Board headquarter in Abuja). At the current exchange rate, N 1000 corresponds to around 6 USD.

[63] Emeka Mba explained this point during an interview with the Nigerian newspaper *The Guardian*: "If you are going to be in the business of distributing intellectual content across the country, which might have cost the producer N 5 to N 10 million, you must have capacity to do that. So we decided that all those who wished to be distributing films in this country must show the Board that they have the capacity to be able to do that. We said we want to see capacity in terms of offices, equipment and alliances that will amount to about N 30 million. It wasn't money that the marketer or distributor had to pay to us. It was for him to justify his business by declaring that as a distributor, he is worth N 30 million and with evidence to prove that. But in the absence of that evidence, we advised them to go and take an insurance or bank bond to show that they have ability to do these things" (Agbedo 2009).

corrupted and to use the distribution framework as a way to put its hands on the lucrative video business. As a result of this tension, in the first months after the framework was approved a violent clash took place between the marketers and the Censors Board, leading to the arrest of some marketers and, in response to that, to a legal procedure against the Censors Board (Akpovi-Asade 2008 and 2009). The violence of the clash was extreme, and it was the consequence of the conflict existing between the different ways of conceiving of the Nigerian economic development that I have emphasized at the end of the previous chapter. Two members of the Censors Board staff were killed, one in Makurdi and the other one in Niger State, and others were stabbed and injured (Ajeluorou 2009).

After a few months of tension, the Censors Board staff managed to quieten the conflict with the industry's practitioners, and a number of influential distributors and video renters enrolled for the license. Unfortunately, their acceptance of the framework did not make their ventures' economic situation improve, and they progressively became suspicious toward the real applicability of the new system. As Francis Onwochei, a Nigerian successful director and producer and the member of numerous industry's practitioners' associations, has emphasized, the new framework "needed the old one to die in order to be able to work" (2010). And the fact that not all the industry's practitioners accepted to enrol progressively compromised the efficacy of the new system. In Onwochei's words,

> because the new framework is enforced by a government agency, the people that have created it don't care if it doesn't work immediately. Its efficacy does not have an impact on them.... but for the practitioners this is the problem, because if you come in and erase the old system you have to propose something that works immediately, otherwise you make everybody run out of business (2010).

The incompatibility between formal and informal distribution systems made the two of them become ineffective, practically bringing the Nigerian video economy to a standstill. Three of the most influential characters of the industry, Amaka Igwe (2010), Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen (2010) and Don Pedro Obaseki (2010) have emphasised during interviews that – after the initial misunderstanding – they supported the framework, but today the lack of results has made them profoundly critical. The most common complaint is that the framework has been designed at an institutional level, without consulting the protagonists of the industry. Thus it resulted in top-down action which does not sit easily with a very complex and informal context like the Nigerian one. As

Emmanuel Isikaku, the president of the Film and Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria (FVPMAN), has underlined, the framework has been formulated by people that do not have a direct experience of the video industry's environment and it is too heavily inspired by Western models.

> Maybe what they are trying to introduce sounds as the best thing on paper, but in reality it may not be the most suitable solution. Because the society in which they are trying to make the framework fit is different from those from where they copied it. Economics is not natural science. Laws depend from contexts! So something that is successful elsewhere can be a failure when applied to Nigeria. Because the societies are not the same (Isikaku 2010).

Censors Board's attempt to regulate the video market progressively lost most of the video industry's practitioners' support. As a result the video economy became, if possible, more fragmented than it used to be and different production and distribution strategies emerged in order to face the crisis.

### *Out of the ashes of the video boom: New tendencies in the video industry*

The tendencies that emerged from this situation can be schematized in two diverging orientations, similar to those that I have identified in the previous chapter when discussing the video practitioners' different positions in relation to the piracy debate. While this schematization is inevitably the result of an act of conceptual simplification, it is useful to understand the way the industry is transforming. It is in fact within the field defined by these opposite poles that Nollywood's future is going to be shaped.

On the one hand, there is a section of the industry, part of which strongly resisted the enforcement of the framework, that still finds the informal structure of the video industry convenient, because of the freedom and the economic mobility that it allows. For this section, the local market is still large enough to make the business worthwhile, and the quality of the products tends to be a secondary issue. The videos produced by this section are in fact oriented toward circumscribed shares of the local audiences, which hardly have any other entertainment product directly targeted to them. The production system applied by this section of the video industry is based on low budgets of production and high levels of productivity. Each video produced according

to this system tends to create little margins of profit (the copies produced for each video are few, normally no more than 10/20.000), but the high level of productivity acts as a multiplier, and at the end the enterprise is generally profitable. This is the model that developed throughout the recent history of the video industry as a result of the extremely high level of competition in the market. It tends today to be the model applied by both a section of the English language industry (for instance the one producing religious films) and by the local language segments, which appear to have only marginally suffered the impact of the crisis of production.[64]

On the other hand, there is a section of the industry, part of which initially supported the introduction of the new distribution framework, that wants the industry to meet international standards of filmmaking. In this way it would be possible to enlarge the market and distribute the films through festivals and mainstream cinema releases around the world, bypassing the crisis of the internal market. For this section of the industry, the model of production to be adopted is very similar to the one adopted in Hollywood or Bollywood, which is grounded on bigger budgets, fewer films released, and wide organized international distribution via cinemas and DVDs. The activity of this section of the industry, which will constitute the main focus of the second part of this chapter, participates in multiple processes of transnationalization. The film produced by this section, in fact, do not only tend to significantly target diasporic distribution, they are also often produced within diasporic contexts and thematize the issue of migration and displacement.

The two tendencies are opposite because one tends to increase the number of films produced while addressing very specific audiences, while the second one tends to reduce the number of films, trying to bring them to the largest international audience possible. In his analysis of the Nigerian video industry, Biodun Jeyifo defines these two tendencies as a direct opposition between marketers and producers on one side, and directors on the other:

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[64] As I mentioned in the first chapter, my research does not analyze the situation of the local language sections of the industry. However it is possible to say that these segments enjoyed a larger loyalty from their audiences which see in them the only available entertainment in their own language. While the English language films had to compete with the film production of the Anglophone world (such as Hollywood, and the Anglophone Bollywood films), local language films were the only available product of this genre on the market. Furthermore, local language films tend to be shown less on satellite television channels. However, the introduction by M-Net in March 2010 of two thematic channels, one broadcasting only Yoruba films and the other only Hausa films, is quickly transforming this situation, producing important consequences on the economy of these branches of the video industry.

you now have two distinct formations of Nollywood, one is controlled by the marketers and producers, the other one is an independent formation of truly creative people not driven by the profit motive or the zeal to win souls for Jesus (Jeyifo 2009).

This distinction may portray part of the situation, but at the same time appears to be too radical. In the debate about Nollywood, the marketers are usually considered as illiterate people whose only objective is to make money. This portrayal is inevitably partial. Emmanuel Isikaku, who, as head of the FVPMAN, represents marketers and producers since the end of the 1990s, underscored the fact that Nollywood's success is largely due to the role of the marketers, who first saw the economic advantages that investments in video filmmaking could have. As he emphasised, what actually established the difference between Nollywood and other instances of filmmaking in Africa is precisely the fact that local investors became interested in the movie sector, and started investing in it (Isikaku 2010). If Nollywood is so popular throughout Africa, it is largely because it tells stories that sell to an African audience. The marketing element is thus inseparable from the success that made Nollywood the phenomenon that we know today.

For this reason, Jeyifo's opposition between marketer-driven and director-driven filmmaking risks to understate the complexity of the situation. The people who are trying to make films that abide by international standard, like Kunle Afolayan, Mahmood Ali Balogun, Jeta Amata and many others that I will reference more extensively later, are "truly creative people", as Jeyifo says, but they also have a clear business concept in mind. In the same way, even if their main preoccupation is economic, many marketers are well aware of the need to improve the quality of the filmmaking to enlarge their potential markets. Hence, the distinction between the two tendencies mentioned above is not only a distinction between a creative side of the industry and its commercial counterpart, but it is a distinction that has to be made in terms of economic strategies and targeted markets.

While the first section that I have identified might be considered as more conservative, in the sense that it tries to keep the economic structure of the video industry unchanged, the second might be labelled as progressive because it tries to introduce a large number of transformations. As I have already emphasized earlier, these transformations implies a radical formalization of the video industry's economy. This process is still in its very early steps but, in my opinion, it might transform the video industry in radical ways in the years to come. For this reason, in the next sections of this chapter I will focus particularly on this emerging tendency, in order to define its main features and to identify the mechanisms that are participating in the progressive formalization of both the local and the transnational circulation of Nigerian videos.

*Paths of formalization (I): The reintroduction of cinema halls in Nigeria*

As I emphasized earlier, throughout the evolution and consolidation of the Nigerian video phenomenon, the defining aspect of the video economy has been its specific, straight-to-video system of distribution. However, in the past few years, with the emergence of the production crisis, the economic vulnerability of this mode of circulation became evident. In a distribution system of this kind, in fact, producers and marketers hardly control the circulation of their products, thus losing a large part of their investments to the benefits of pirates and illicit distributors (video rental shops and video clubs). The progressive reintroduction of cinema halls in the country offered a potential solution to this problem.

Within this context, the Silverbird media company appears to be the most influential actor. It in fact played a central role in re-introducing cinema culture in southern Nigeria, and in suggesting cinema distribution as an alternative to straight-to-video circulation. The first Silverbird multiplex cinema was inaugurated in Lagos in May 2004. It was the first cinema hall to open after the collapse of theatre halls in southern Nigeria between the end of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.[65] When the Silverbird Galleria was inaugurated, not many considered it as a possible turning point for the video industry. The cinema was in fact located in one of the most expensive neighbourhood of Lagos, Victoria Island. It had very expensive entry fees (1500 Naira a ticket, almost 10 USD), it used to program only foreign films, and inevitably addressed elite audiences.

However, the new multiplex had an incontestable success with upper-middle class audiences and its example pushed other companies to enter the business. In few years a number of multiplexes opened in the main Nigerian cities (Genesis Deluxe in Lekki-Lagos, Ozone cinema in Yaba-Lagos, Silverbird in Abuja, Genesis Deluxe and HiTV cinema in Port Harcourt). All of them concentrated their program on foreign, and particularly Hollywood, films. This commercial orientation provoked controversial reactions within the video industry's environment. Producers and marketers accused the new cinema companies to explicitly ignore the local video industry, while cinema owners defended their criteria of selection by underlining that Nigerian videos' technical standards were not suitable for wide screens projections.

Even if it initially took unpleasant tones, this debate progressively produced important results. Facing what they considered as an unpopular accusation (the lack of nationalist solidarity with the local entertainment industry), Silverbird and the other Nigerian cinema companies declared their

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[65] See also the first chapter, footnote 16.

willingness to screen Nigerian films with required technical standards. As a consequence, a growing number of Nigerian marketers and producers began to invest on higher budget productions in order to access theatrical distribution. Within this context the theatrical release of the Nigerian film *Through the Glass* (2007)*,* directed and produced by the Nigerian star Stephanie Okereke, marked an important turning point. As I will better discuss below, this was in fact the first film, among the Nigerian productions that accessed theatrical distribution in this period, to achieve a real economic success. Its box-office achievement convinced numerous producers that the return to cinema distribution could be a real solution to the production crisis.

As a result, the number of Nigerian high budget productions augmented, defining the emergence of what I define below as a "new wave" in Nigerian cinema. I will describe the main features of this new generation of productions in the following sections of this chapter. Now it is important to underline that the success of local cinema releases also pushed a number of local entrepreneurs to invest in the construction of new cinema infrastructures. During the second part of my fieldwork in Lagos (December 2010 – March 2011), I counted not less than seven different Nigerian companies investing in the construction of new cinemas (both multiplexes and neighborhood halls). Apart from already established companies such as Silverbird, Genesis Deluxe, Ozone and HiTV (which all have plans of building new halls), there are a few other projects oriented toward the reintroduction of both commercial and community cinemas throughout the country.

Kene Mkparu's Filmhouse Limited ([www.filmhouseng.com](www.filmhouseng.com)) is probably the most developed venture amongst them.[66] By the end of my fieldwork in Nigeria this company had two cinemas almost ready for inauguration, one in Ikeja-Lagos and another one in Surelere-Lagos, and had plans for the construction of at least three other theatre halls in the most important cities of the country (Mkparu 2010). Beside this venture, a number of other projects emerged in the past few years. For instance, the FameCorp Limited, a company created in 2009 by a group of seventy Nigerian entertainment artists and presided by Tee Mac Omatshola Iseli, presented a project which envisages the construction of community entertainment centres and cinema halls in each Federal State, with low entry fees and mainly dedicated to local film screenings and entertainment performances (see

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[66] Mkparu's biography is an interesting example of the role that the Nigerian diaspora is playing in the recent transformations of the video industry. He worked as general manger at Odeon UK (one of the largest cinema chains in the United Kingdom) for several years and he was one of the people behind the organization of Nollywood films' premieres in UK cinemas (see next section of this chapter). Around the mid-2000 he came back to Nigeria and set up, together with some other people, the cinema company Genesis-Deluxe. In 2010 he left it and created his own company, Filmhouse Limited, which is today investing in the construction of several cinemas around the country.

Balogun 2010). Moreover, the CEO of the AMA awards Peace Anyiam-Osigwe and her business partner Dayo Ogunyemi have declared in several occasions to be in the process of setting up a fund for the construction of community halls ("cinemarts" as they call them) in rural and low income areas of the country, with largely accessible entry fees (around N 250, almost 1 USD).

When (and if) these projects will be completed, theatrical distribution will be able to offer a radical alternative to the old straight-to-video systems of circulation. For now, however, the two systems are still obliged to cohabit within an economic environment that, as discussed in chapter two, is defined by a complex articulation of formal and informal practices. As the General Manager of the Ozone Cinemas, Patrick Lee, underlined in a recent interview, "cinema is a business that might not expand as quickly as people tend to think" (Lee 2011) because the time needed to build the infrastructures and to generate the commercial demand is often longer than what the investors expect. As a consequence, considering that the number of cinema halls in Nigeria is still too low to entirely support the economy of the industry, many producers looked for other solutions to the problems created by the production crisis. Within this framework, the diasporic market progressively assumed a particular importance. While the internal market seemed still far from achieving an acceptable level of formalization, diasporic networks of circulation appeared to offer better opportunities.

In the interviews I conducted during my fieldwork in Lagos, many directors supported this position. The following comments are indicative. Femi Odugbemi, a director and producer based in Lagos, for instance, suggested that "every filmmaker from Nigeria must look at the diaspora audience very carefully because that is really where the market is" (2010). Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, a very popular Nollywood director, confirmed Odugbemi's point of view by underlining that "diaspora must become an important window of distribution for Nigerian videos" (2010). Finally, Emem Isong, one of the most successful Nigerian producers in recent time, reiterated the concept revealing that she releases her films first in America and then in Ghana and Nigeria at the same time. "Nigeria – she said – at this point is the worst market we have" (2011).

This is not the first time that producers turn their attention to foreign audiences. Diasporic and international markets had been targeted since the early stages of Nollywood's evolution. As Ayorinde reported, for instance, the Peckham market in South London throughout the mid-1990s was even "stronger than the Idumota and the Onistha market outlets" (1999). However, since the Nigerian internal market was still working well, no real attempt was made to formalize international distribution. The situation became different ten years later, in the second half of the 2000s, after the production crisis had eroded the internal video market.

*Paths of formalization (II): The diaspora as a market*

Processes of formalization take a long time to develop, and pirate networks that spread Nigerian videos all over the world are probably destined to maintain a central role in Nollywood's circulation in the future. But in the past few years, initiatives to formalize the Nollywood diaporic market have emerged, and these could have a significant impact on the economy of the industry. My focus here is on two specific experiences: the Filmmakers Association of Nigeria's campaign against piracy in the United States, and the Nollywood premiere system developed at Odeon cinemas in the UK.

The Filmmaker Association of Nigeria was created at the beginning of the 2000s in New York by Tony Abulu (a Nigerian director and producer based in the United States since the mid-1980s), together with Rabiu Mohammed (at that time the owner of a small video shop in the Bronx and today the owner of Sanga Entertainment, one of the biggest distributor of African videos in the US), Bethel Agomuoh (one of the first to sell Nigerian videos online) and Caroline Okoli (another Nigerian with a background in management). Abulu decided to create this association after producing his first film, *Back to Africa,* in 1997. Once the film was ready to be released, Abulu realized that there was no viable distribution framework for it in the US. At that time Nigerian videos were in fact circulating mostly through piracy and informal networks. The main objective of FAN thus became, since its creation, the organization of a solid infrastructure for the distribution of Nigerian films in the US. To do so, FAN had first of all to tackle the issue of piracy and organize a proper system to collect copyright royalties on the behalf of Nigerian filmmakers (Abulu 2010a). To achieve this result, FAN sponsored a copyright conference in Washington in 2005 in which a delegation of representatives from the video industry met a delegation from the US department of Justice, the International Intellectual Property Institute (IIPI), the Public Interest Intellectual Property Advisors (PIIPA) and the African Artist Collaborative (ACC, a non-profit institution created by Abulu himself). The most important outcome of this meeting was an agreement that PIIPA would provide free assistance to denounce and litigate copyright infringements in the country on behalf of Nigerian filmmakers who had registered the copyright of their films in the US. As a result of the agreement, in the following years FAN started a campaign to encourage Nigerian filmmakers to lodge such registrations in the US through ACC.

As noted in the previous chapter, the diasporic market was (and still is) deeply affected by internet piracy, and particularly by the activity of internet sites offering free streaming of Nigerian videos. Through the support of US anti-piracy institutions, FAN started suing internet pirates systematically. Some of them reached a settlement and started to collaborate with FAN to distribute

Nigerian videos legally.[67] Furthermore, once a conspicuous number of films had been registered, and following the repeated complaints about piracy of Nigerian films in Brooklyn, FAN put pressure on American police to act. At the beginning of November 2010 a large anti-piracy raid was conducted, nine illegal video shops were investigated, and 10,000 pirated Nollywood videos were seized, marking a remarkable and highly visible success for FAN's anti-piracy campaign.

Numerous Nollywood producers are actively taking advantage of the results of FAN's initiatives. During a recent interview Emem Isong (2011) gave me the details of the economy of an average straight-to-video film she produces. While before the crisis an average film budget was N 5 million (around 32.000 USD), today it is around N 2.5 million (16.000 USD). Normally she distributes directly the first 20.000 copies, getting around N 2 million back,[68] and then she sells unlimited rights of distribution to a Nigerian marketer for a fixed price, usually around N 1 million if the film did well at the first round of sales.[69] She then makes an average N 2 million by selling the rights in the United States[70] and another average N 1 million by selling the film to satellite television, both in Africa and elsewhere.[71] The total income of a N 2.5 million budget film is then around N 5.5/6 million, with a neat profit of around N 3 million. This means that the American market, formalized by FAN's action against piracy, is currently worth one third of the revenues produced by an average Nollywood film. Another commercially successful producer, Vivian Ejike (2010) confirmed the same data, underlining that, because of this situation, producers tend to release their films first in

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[67] The case of the internet site onlinenigeria.com is particularly interesting. It was in fact considered until recently the largest pirate online platform of Nigerian videos (Abulu 2010b). After being publicly attacked by FAN, the owner of the website, a Nigerian based in the US, proposed to settle the matter and to use his successful platform for legal distribution (Abulu 2010a).

[68] She sells the VCDs for N 100 per copy to the street vendors, who then make an average 100% profit by selling them at N 200/250.

[69] According to Isong the marketers that buy the film at this point, three/four months after the first release, sell it to the street vendors at what they call the "carnival" price, which is 70% cheaper than the first release (around N 20/30 per copy). Isong suggests that, at this stage of the process, films can sell up to 100/200.000 copies, but the original producer cannot have any trustable figure of the amount of copies sold, because the rights at this point belong directly to the marketer.

[70] Her distributor in the US is Executive Image, a Ghanaian company based in New York, that buys the exclusive rights for distribution in the United States for 10/15000 USD ( N 1.5/2.5 ml).

[71] The average price she sells a film to the satellite channel Africa magic is 700/1000 USD (N 100/150.000) but she said that for particularly successful and expensive films she has been able to sell the rights for up to 5000 USD (N 750.000). She also often sells her films to the UK-based sky satellite channel nollywoodmovies.tv, but she did not mention how much they pay for the rights.

the United States and then in Ghana, Nigeria and other African and European countries. In this way they protect one of their best markets from piracy.

Emem Isong and Vivian Ejike are today two of the most successful producers and distributors within the Nigerian video industry's environment. Their work receives high consideration in the economic transactions that take place in the diaspora. The economy that surrounds their ventures is thus better structured and inevitably produces better results than the economy of many other less successful Nigerian productions. It is possible to imagine, then, that less affirmed producers might get a less advantageous treatment when they try to commercialize their products on diasporic markets. However, the example provided by Isong's and Ejike's ventures underlines the growing influence that diasporic markets have in defining the future development of the Nigerian video economy.

In the United Kingdom, home to the second largest group of Nigerians in the diaspora after the United States, most circulation of Nigerian videos was also routed through pirated networks. Even if in the early 1990s a number of marketers (Afelele and Sons, Alasco Videos, Bayowa) invested in the legal distribution of Yoruba videos in London (Ayorinde 1999), in the following years the popular success of the videos, and the small number of legal copies available, opened the market to piracy. The action undertaken by a number of Nigerians living in London in recent years has focused on the idea of taking Nollywood off the shelves and the pirate websites and bringing it to the cinemas. The introduction of scheduled movie premieres at Odeon cinemas was intended to progressively create a demand for the theatrical release of Nollywood films, with a view to moving them into the mainstream cinema distribution network (Babatope 2010). Since it began in 2006, this system has had three main goals: (a) encouraging diasporic Nigerian audiences to watch Nollywood films in the cinema; (b) compiling economic data that could reflect the theatrical demand for Nollywood films and then convince mainstream cinema distributors to invest in them; (c) inducing Nigerian producers to upgrade the technical quality of their films to make them conform to cinema standards.

This theatrical exhibition system has precedents. Various cinema screenings of Nigerian films had been organized in the UK, as in the US, since the early years of Nollywood, but they were not formally structured. In most cases films were shown in privately hired screening rooms and conference venues or in neighborhood cinemas. With the introduction of the Odeon premieres (at Odeon Surrey Quay, near London Bridge, in the first three years, and in Odeon Greenwich during

2010), the premieres became a more sophisticated ritual, centered on the star system.[72] The premieres are designed as social events: journalists and media partners gather around a red carpet area two hours before the beginning of the screening, and fans queue near the cinema entrance in anticipation of the stars' arrival. When the director and the actors arrive, the tension rises, the atmosphere becomes glamorous, and people move in for a closer look. The aim is to create something that the audience can perceive as unique. As the experience of attending the premiere of Emem Isong's *Bursting Out* in October 2010 made me realize, it is a successful formula. That evening, the Odeon Greenwich was overcrowded – probably also because of the presence of superstar Genevieve Nnaji, who rarely attends public events even in Nigeria. Two additional screening rooms had to be provided at the last minute to accommodate all the Nollywood enthusiasts, and celebrations went on until late at night.

The progressive formalization of Nigerian videos' diasporic circulation evidenced by these examples, made diasporic markets particularly attractive for Nigerian producers. As a consequence, the aesthetics and narratives of the films produced transformed in order to meet the demand of this section of the market. An analysis of the defining features of the high budget Nigeria films produced over the past few years will help in understanding these transformations.

### A new wave in Nigerian cinema

According to some commentators, the higher budget productions that I have mentioned several times throughout this chapter represent a new Nigerian cinema, or a "new Nollywood" (Ebere 2011; Ekunno 2011).[73] However, the debate around the definition of this new trend is still open. On the one hand, those who propose the term "new Nollywood" tend to emphasize a relation of continuity

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[72] The Afro-Hollywood awards, organized by a group of Nigerians in London since 1996, can be seen as the forerunner of star-centered type of events for the Nigerian diaspora in the UK. Since the first edition, in fact, the organizers brought to London numerous Nigerian stars and participated in consolidating the ties between diasporic audiences and the Nigerian video industry.

[73] In October 2010 the Virgo Foundation, a foundation created by Wale Ojo, a Nigerian actor based in London, and aimed at the promotion of Nigerian contemporary arts in Nigeria, organized the "New Nigeria Cinema" event at the British Film Institute in London. During this event some of the new releases discussed in this section have been screened, and the emergence of a new wave in Nigerian cinema has been discussed, promoted and explicitly sanctioned. Interestingly enough all the filmmakers present at the event were Nigerian diaporic filmmakers. The act of sanctioning the existence of this new wave, thus, assumed a transnational dimension that emphasized the role of the diaspora in shaping the video industry's new developments.

between the video-boom era and the new releases, and argue that the emergence of this new trend is a direct consequence of the video phenomenon. On the other hand, those who stand for the use of the term "new Nigerian cinema" underline the specificity of this new trend and its distance from the defining aspects of the video phenomenon (low budget of production, straight-to-video modes of distribution, popular and populist narratives and aesthetics). Personally, I prefer to define it as a "new wave" in Nigerian cinema, to underline that it does emerge from the experience of the video phenomenon but it is, at the same time, a trend whose defining aspects differ from those that characterize mainstream Nollywood releases. These films have, in fact, high budgets and high production values, are shot with an international crew, are often set in the diaspora and target mainly cinema audiences. Three films in particular can be seen as the avant-garde of this new wave: Jeta Amata's *Amazing Grace* (2006 – image I), Kunle Afolayan's *Iràpadà* (2007 – image II) and Stephanie Okereke's *Through the Glass* (2007 – image III). These films represent three different levels at which processes of transnationalization are transforming the video industry: modes of production, audiences, and settings.

While it did not manage to achieve significant popular success, Amata's historical film about slavery has to be considered here, as it was the result of an international coproduction and was explicitly oriented toward international and diasporic markets. Amata's artistic biography is in itself an interesting example of the transnational trajectories happening within the video industry. His career was boosted by his participation in the BBC documentary about the video phenomenon, *Nick Goes to Nollywood* (2004). During this project he developed a strong friendship with Nick Moran (a British actor who then had one of the main roles in *Amazing Grace*) and Alicia Arce (the producer of the BBC documentary and of Amata's *Amazing Grace*). This experience rapidly gave him a number of chances to develop his skills and to access international funding for his projects. *Amazing Grace* was developed explicitly around the idea of pushing the video industry to a new level, improving technical standards (the film was shot in 35mm) and targeting international audiences through film festivals (the film was presented at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006). This film initiated a trend that today some new releases are following. Mamood Ali Balogun's *Tango With Me* (2011) and Jeta Amata's *Black Gold* (2011), for instance, are both shot on celluloid and produced in Nigeria with an international crew, and they both target international film festivals as a way of entering mainstream theatrical distribution.
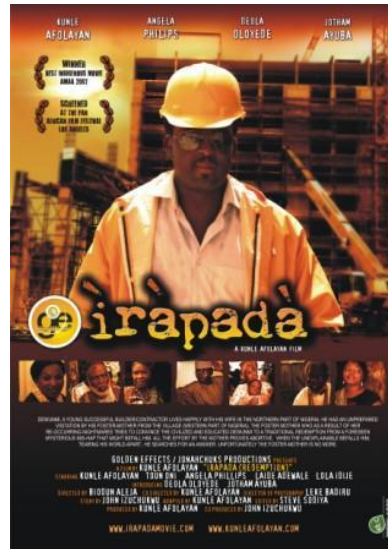
I: The *Amazing Grace*          II: *Iràpadà*          III: *Through the Glass*
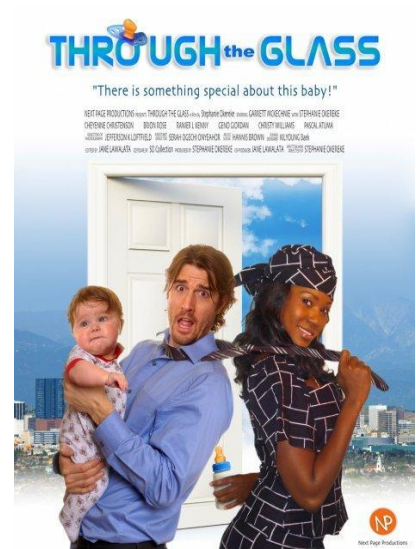
Even if entirely Nigerian in terms of production, Kunle Afolayan's film *Iràpadà* represents the section of Nollywood that is trying to restructure the economy of the industry from within, practicing an innovative funding strategy and developing formal modes of distribution that imply a new role for the diasporic market. *Iràpadà* is, in fact, one of the first films to have achieved mainstream release in Odeon cinemas in the UK in 2007, at a time when the premiere system that I discussed earlier was only beginning (Ayorinde 2007). This film was also one of the first to be released in DVD a few months after its theatrical release and not, as usually happens in Nigeria, going straight-to-VCD at the same time as the theatrical release. It also managed to circulate in a number of international film festivals, anticipating the success of Afolayan's subsequent release, *The Figurine* (2009), and opening the way for a growing number of medium/high budget films shot in digital that intend to target local, pan-African and diasporic audiences simultaneously, like Vivian Ejike's *Silent Scandal* (2009), Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's *Home in Exile* (2010) and Teco Benson's *High Blood Pressure* (2010).

Stephanie Okereke's *Through the Glass* reflects another tendency within the framework produced by processes of transnationalization. The film, a light comedy set in Los Angeles, is in fact shot in a diasporic context with transnational crew. When released in Nigeria this film managed to make more than 10 million Naira (almost US$65,000) in three weeks, solely through theatrical release in the handful of existing Nigerian cinemas. As I anticipated above, it was the first theatrical success of this kind and it made many industry practitioners understand that the return of cinema-going culture was a phenomenon to be taken seriously. Furthermore, through its diasporic setting this film anticipates an important trend common to many of the recent high-quality releases. As I

will discuss further below, many of these films place the diaspora at the center of their plots. While diasporic settings are not new in the video industry (Ayorinde 1999; Haynes 2003 and 2009), the prominent role they have played in the new wave testifies to the growing influence of the diaspora on the video industry as a site of production, a textual device, and a market.
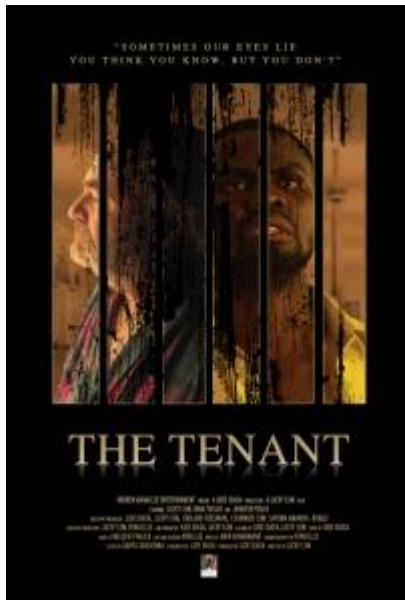


IV: *The Tenant*
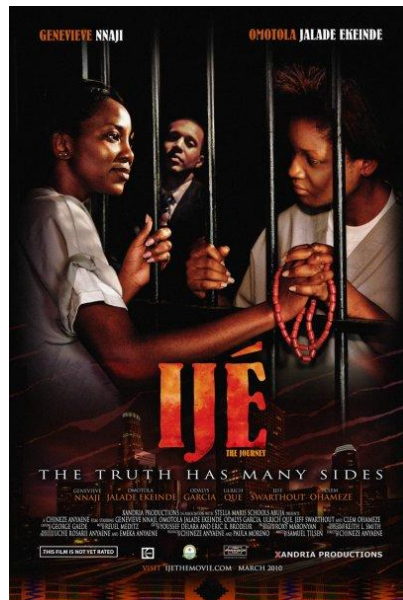


V: *Ijé, the journey*
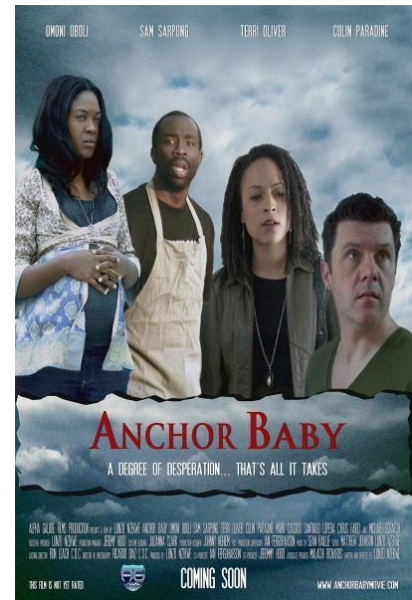


VI: *Anchor Baby*

Within the recent releases that achieved cinema screening a large number of films are shot in the diaspora. Onyekachi Ejim's *The Tenant* (2008 – image IV), Chineze Anyeane's *Ije, the Journey* (2010 – image V), Lonzo Nzekue's *Anchor Baby* (2010 – image VI), and Obi Emelonye's *The Mirror Boy* (2011), for instance, are all shot abroad and have transnational cast and crew. Within this list, the film *Ije* is particularly interesting. Shot in California (USA) and Plateau State (Nigeria), *Ije* is a thriller whose tension is built around the contrast between the illusion of the American dream and the harsh realities of racism and sexism that characterize American society. The film stars two extremely popular Nigerian actors (Genevieve Nnaji and Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde), with the rest of the cast mainly composed of American and African-American actors. The film is shot in 35mm with international crew. The budget has never been disclosed, but it is likely that it could easily reach the record level (for a Nigerian film) of a million dollars. Once released in Nigeria, in July 2010, the film became the greatest box office success since the reintroduction of cinema halls in Nigeria, more successful than mainstream Hollywood films like *Pirates of the Caribbean*. It made around 60ml naira (US$380,000 dollars) in three weeks of screening in just five cinemas in Nigeria: Silverbird, Ozone and Genesis-Deluxe in Lagos, Silverbird in Abuja, and Genesis-Deluxe

in Port Harcourt. If, as mentioned before, the box office success of *Through the Glass* had brought the economic potential of theatrical release to the attention of Nigerian producers a few years earlier, the incredible success of *Ije* made them see it as more than simply a potential. Furthermore, after its release in Nigeria, the film was successfully released in other African countries, and a Western distributor negotiated to buy the rights for mainstream release in Europe and in the US (Babatope 2010).[74]

*New films, new forms of circulation, new audiences*

As underlined above, the Nigerian video industry's economic structure has usually been defined by high levels of accessibility. In relation to this aspect, videos have circulated widely and transversally in the Nigerian society, becoming an extremely popular product. On the contrary, the forms of circulation that I just described, which emerged as a reaction to the production crisis, tend to reduce videos' accessibility in order to directly control the revenues that the video films' circulation creates. As a result, the progressive migration of a segment of the video industry from informal to formal modes of production and distribution is introducing new kinds of viewing experiences, cinema-going cultures and audience formations, that profoundly differ from those that characterized Nollywood as a small screen cinema (see chapter one).

The new multiplexes in which the new wave of Nigerian films is usually screened, for instance, are in most cases located on the top floor of expensive shopping malls. Cinemagoers have to pass through numerous bars, restaurants, supermarkets and shops of all kind to access the theatre halls. As in many other countries where, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, multiplexes replaced old single-screen cinemas (cf. Aucland 2003; Athique and Hill 2010), cinemagoing in Nigeria is thus becoming explicitly connected to a larger set of social and cultural experiences. Going to the movies has transformed into a complex social ritual in which families, young couples and groups of students experience the world through global consumerism. Compared to the video clubs where

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[74] As Kene Mkparu, MD/CEO of Filmhouse Limited, rightly pointed out in a recent interview, the success of *Ije* is particularly interesting also because it shows how a formalization of the internal distribution system can attract Western distributors by providing them figures of a film performance in the local market. As he emphasized, "*Ije* just obtained a ten cinemas release contract in the UK. How did it happen? *Ije* was supposed to be released in Odeon in the UK in October, but Odeon refused. The minute *Ije* finished playing in Nigerian cinemas and the figures of its success came out, Odeon agreed… It's all about business!" (Mkparu 2010).

Nollywood is normally consumed, shopping malls and multiplexes express a spatial-temporal gap in the everyday life of Lagosians, a gap between the hardship of everyday urban life in Nigeria and the dream of Lagos as a global city. The new wave films screened in these spaces inhabit this gap, and provide to the audience voices and moving images to populate its imaginaries.

The encounter between new screening spaces and the new Nigerian cinema productions that are emerging in the past few years is surrounded by a cosmopolitan aura that gives the audience the feeling of being part of a larger world, something that brings them beyond the limits of their everyday experience and projects them toward an imagined universe of mobile possibilities. However, these cosmopolitan imaginaries are defined and shaped by a complex system of social differentiation and discrimination. Because of their high entry price and their geographic location in the city, multiplexes are accessible only to specific segments of the population. And the films screened in them differ from the mainstream Nollywood productions by incarnating the dreams and fears of an elite middle class rather than those of a large popular audience.

Within this context, the question that Jeff Himpele has posed in his study of film circulation in urban Bolivia becomes relevant: "How does circulation itself distribute difference by dispersing audiences?" (1996: 48). New media formats and new screening venues generate new audiences, which in return consume these products and frequent these new social spaces to seek a confirmation of their social status. Within this context, the "multiplexes commodify new social aspirations, prioritizing cleanliness, safety and congeniality, and providing a sensory environment that distances the well-off consumer from the immediate past of fear, discomfort and scarcity in public space" (Athique 2011: 155).

Going transnational and going back to cinema are two movements on which a part of the industry is concentrating most of its efforts. As I have just underlined, there are reasons to believe that that these transformations will bring the video industry away from the popular audience that made its emergence possible. But this might equally not be the case. The future of the industry is an open question mark. Important transformations are underway and it is probably too early to make a coherent evaluation of their impact on the Nigerian mediascape.

While I will address the issues that this open question mark leaves unanswered throughout the following chapters, the words of one of the distributors I interviewed during my research can offer a conclusion to this section. It suggests a hopeful future for the video industry, while recognizing the complexity of the present situation:

I would say that Nollywood needs this phase, I don't think it would be permanent […] I hope I'm not being too optimistic, but I believe that this is a phase which the entire entertainment sector has to pass through, a process to filter off the negative elements that blocked the industry. I see a proliferation of cinema in the next 3-4 years, and there will be more affordable cinemas as there are everywhere in the world. There are too many stories to tell, too much demand to restrict the potential of the films, and hopefully this phase that we are seeing is only a necessary phase that would bring us to a next step. We would be able to discover technologies that will help us combat piracy better […] and I think that in 3-4 years we will have technologies in place, laws in place that will make films again more accessible (Babatope 2010).

SECTION II

**THE "NOLLYWOODIZATION" OF THE NIGERIAN VIDEO INDUSTRY**

*Discursive constructions, processes of commoditization and the industry's transformations*

## Introduction

During the first year of my PhD research, and before beginning the fieldwork in Nigeria, I attended a number of conferences and seminars on Nollywood. I thought this was a good way to become more familiar with the topic and to have a picture of Nollywood studies' state of the art. Unexpectedly the experience of attending these conferences also guided my attention toward another important dimension of the video phenomenon that later became particularly important in my work. I realized the importance of the discursive mobility of the Nigerian video industry and the impact this circulation has had on the industry's recent transformations. A short digression into two episodes that occurred to me during the early stages of my research is useful to introduce the argument that I will develop in the next two chapters.

The first episode happened during the cinema retrospective "African screens" organized by the Portuguese foundation *Africa.cont* in Lisbon and curated by Manthia Diawara. The retrospective, whose twelve day program was spread along two months (April-May 2009), dedicated a week-end to the Nigerian video industry ($8^{th}$ – $10^{th}$ of May). The program included a panel discussion with Manthia Diawara, Jahman Anikulapo (editor of the newspaper *The Guardian Nigeria*), Dorothee Wenner (director of *Peace Mission*, a documentary about Nollywood), John Akomfrah (a British-Ghanaian film director), Francois Belorgey (Head of the "Bureau de la Coopération Cinématographique" of the French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs) and some Portuguese directors and producers. The discussion was focused on a comparison between Nigerian and Francophone infrastructures of filmmaking, and was intended to suggest Nollywood as a model for developing independent strategies of fundraising and distribution in other parts of the continent. This model was discussed in contrast with the one proposed by the French cultural cooperation system adopted in other African countries (the model behind the so-called FESPACO African cinema, see Austen and Saul 2010). The discussion was paralleled by the projection of a number of documentaries on Nollywood (Dorothee Wenner's *Peace Mission*, Jane Thorburn's *Nollywood, Just Doing It* and Awam Amkpa's *A Very Very Short Story of Nollywood* – for a discussion of these films see chapter five). The panel session's leitmotif was the celebration of Nollywood's popular success and of its informal economic strategies. Within this context, Jahman Anikulapo's presentation seemed to be slightly out of tune. The Nigerian journalist told the audience that the video industry was traversing a deep crisis of production. He underlined that, while that celebratory discussion was going on, no film was being shot and Nollywood was on its knees, very close to a final collapse. I was struck by his words, but even more I was struck by the almost general indifference they provoked. The celebratory tone of the panel did not change. The way Nollywood was constructed as an object of knowledge in that context, through the panel debate and the screenings, was not open to challenge and transformation. What was important in the economy of the discussion that was going on was to emphasize the informality of Nollywood's system, its specific "locality" and its popular success. The discourse around Nollywood suddenly appeared to me as a circular construction, something that had become self-sufficient enough to ignore the fluidity and transformability of the reality it was supposed to refer to.

The second episode happened a few days later, at the international conference "Nollywood and Beyond" organized by Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome at the University of Mainz ($13^{th}$ – $16^{th}$ of May 2009). On the third day of the conference the organizers included the screening of a documentary on Nollywood, Saartje Geerts' *Nollywood Abroad* (2008). This documentary looks at

transnational reformulations of the Nollywood phenomenon, and it does so by analyzing the production of Nigerian videos by a company based in Belgium, the Anabeel Production (see chapter seven). I will discuss in the fifth chapter the representation of Nollywood that documentaries of this kind have circulated. Here it is enough to say that the reaction of the Nigerian scholars and filmmakers in the hall was explicit: what was presented in the film had little or nothing to do with Nollywood. According to most of the interventions that followed the screening, the film was mystifying and its representation of Nigeria stereotypical.[75] The vehemence of that reaction attracted my attention. On a personal level, in fact, I had enjoyed the film, and I was surprised by the reaction I witnessed. In the following months, during my fieldwork in Nigeria, the unease that my experience in Mainz had created became stronger. I encountered in fact similar reactions to the international representation of Nollywood, focused particularly on the way documentary films and festival retrospectives about Nollywood were presenting the video industry to international audiences.

The experiences I just discussed brought to my attention the tension existing between the way the video industry was discussed and represented, both locally and internationally, and the way the industry itself was evolving. While in fact the discursive constructions that I had observed tended to produce a rather static and rigid definition of the industry, the reactions to it that I observed seemed to emphasize the strong fluidity of the video industry and its implicit resistance to definition. During my research, the tension existing between these two poles (the fluidity of the industry's reality and the rigidity of the discourse about it) appeared to have an interesting role in propelling and shaping the transformations that the industry itself was facing.

The next two chapters deal with these and similar issues, which all centre on the analysis of the relationship between the discursive mobility of Nollywood and the transformations the video industry is experiencing. As Greg Urban (2001) has pointed out, it is possible to identify numerous ways in which cultural production interacts with the discursive practices formulated in relation to it. To trace these interactions our analytical attention has to be focused on what Urban defines as the "metaculture" of cultural production, that is, the "culture about culture", the corpus of discursive constructions about a specific cultural product. The documents that permit to analyze and discuss the evolution of metacultural discursive constructions take various forms, and their analysis requires a multidisciplinary approach. Hence, the next two chapters will be based on the analysis of various

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[75] I remember particularly the comments by Frank Ukadike (a Nigerian scholar based in the United States), Afolabi Adesanya (the president of the Nigerian Film Corporation) and Bond Emeruwa (a Nollywood filmmaker).

types of documents (documentaries, festival programs, newspaper and academic articles), which all can be related to the "metaculture" of Nollywood produced since the birth of the video industry.

As Greg Urban underlines, metaculture is particularly significant "because it imparts an accelerative force to culture. It aids culture in motion through space and time. It gives a boost to the culture that it is about, helping to propel it on its journey" (2001: 3). The discourse about a cultural object, in fact, often precedes the object itself and opens for it new paths of circulation. But while doing this, it also defines the direction and the horizon that these paths will have to follow. For this reason, metaculture has both accelerative and restraining effects on cultural objects' motion: while on the one hand it pushes the object toward new frontiers, on the other it creates the structures of knowledge that will guide (and limit) the reception of the given cultural object within a new environment.[76]

Beside these effects, and in relation to them, Urban identifies another important way in which cultural objects and the metacultural constructions about them interact. In fact, while on the one hand, metaculture internalizes and circulates some of the object's attributes, on the other hand, it also penetrates and transforms the object itself. This tension is clearly addressed by some of the questions that Urban asks in the introduction to his book:

> if something of the cultural object finds its way into the metacultural interpretation – that is, if the interpretation is not arbitrary relative to the object – does the metacultural interpretation find its way into the object? Might not the metacultural interpretation actually influence the cultural object and fashion it, at least in some measure, after its own image? (2001: 37).

According to this perspective, a given metaculture, even if sometimes imprecise and misleading, does portray a number of aspects of the object it refers to. It is not, then, an arbitrary representation, even if it is inevitably the result of processes of essentialization and generalization. At the same

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[76] This second effect is the one on which many postcolonial and cultural studies critics have concentrated their attention in recent times. As the work of scholars such as Edward Said (1979; 1994) and Valentin Mudimbe (1988; 1994) has importantly emphasized, the Western-generated discursive constructions about non-Western cultural productions have often played a central role in reproducing defined structures of power and knowledge. Even if I am sensible to this kind of criticism, however, it will occupy a rather marginal position in the economy of the next two chapters. As I have emphasized in the introduction to this thesis, my interest is in fact more specifically oriented toward a definition of the way metaculture and discursive mobility interact with the industry's transformations.

time, metaculture tends to develop an autonomous life, which produces specific impacts on the life of the object that was initially represented. As the next two chapters will underline, when we apply this model to the case analyzed here, we can observe a similar dynamic. On the one hand, the metaculture of Nollywood produces a representation of the video phenomenon that identifies correctly a number of the industry's defining features. On the other hand, this same metaculture, through processes of essentialization and generalization, produces an original object (the discourse about Nollywood) whose circulation importantly interacts with the life of the object the metaculture refers to. This dynamic is explicitly defined by Urban as follow:

> the culture of the object moves into the response, which in turns determines […] what new objects will be produced. Culture here travels from the original object to the new one via the response. In other words, the pathway of the motion is: cultural object → metacultural response → new cultural object (2001: 240).

In this perspective, metaculture becomes the bridge that connects a cultural object to its successive manifestations. It is in fact by responding to metaculture that the cultural object transforms itself and acquires new forms and cultural meanings. To have an idea of this kind of dynamic, one can think at the way newspaper reviews of film and book releases influence the market, which in turn influences the contents of future films and books. Or similarly, we can think at the way fanzine magazines and television programs interact with the show business, orienting cultural production toward specific aesthetic and narrative tastes.

In the first chapter of this section I will analyze the discursive constructions around Nollywood starting from the genealogy of the name "Nollywood" itself. My intention is to understand how the discourse around the video industry has progressively polarized diverging tendencies already existing within the industry and within the Nigerian public sphere. On one side, we can observe a tendency toward internationalization and globalization, which responded positively to the introduction of the word "Nollywood" and which participated in transforming it into a self-sufficient commercial brand. On the other, we can observe a tendency which points its attention toward the internal differentiation of the video industry and toward the specificity of the Nigerian media environment. As I will argue in this chapter, these two opposite poles have created a specific field of tension within which most Nollywood practitioners had to position (explicitly or implicitly) their work. These two opposite discursive constructions have thus importantly influenced the

evolution of the video industry by providing both criticism of the status quo of the industry, and new models for future transformations.

In the second chapter of this section, I move my focus toward the international representation of Nollywood, to understand the way the Nigerian video industry has been positioned within the global cinema arena. To do that, I point my attention specifically toward the way Nollywood has been discussed and represented in documentaries, festival retrospectives and photographic exhibitions over the past few years. In a dynamic similar to the one observed in the first chapter of the section, the international discourse on Nollywood has been oscillating between criticism and fascination, and the tension between these poles has importantly influenced the way the industry has transformed. In many cases the representation of the video industry that has circulated within the global cinema arena has been contested. But the reaction it has provoked has had an interesting role in pushing a section of the industry toward the new commercial, aesthetic and narrative strategies described in the previous section.

*When the Nigerian video industry became "Nollywood": Naming and branding in the videos' discursive mobility*

The name "Nollywood" apparently appeared for the first time in a *New York Times* article by Norimitsu Onishi in September 2002[77] and was republished by the Nigerian newspaper *The Guardian* few days later. As Jonathan Haynes (2007c) has underlined, it quickly became irresistible for the local press and fans who started using it ubiquitously. By the beginning of 2003 the Nigerian newspaper Daily Times already had a week-end column called "Inside Nollywood" and around the same period the term started appearing consistently on numerous internet sites and forums. While suggesting this name, Onishi's article explicitly made reference to Bollywood and Hollywood ("Step aside, Los Angeles and Bombay, for Nollywood", is the title of the article), giving a voice to those that in Nigeria and elsewhere were asserting the global influence of the video phenomenon. By doing that, the article also created a brand that quickly became a tool to commercialize the video industry transnationally.

It is important to note, however, that the formulation of the term "Nollywood" does not represent the first time in which the Nigerian video film industry was compared to other film industries in the world. And it does not represent the first attempt of giving it a "–hood" attribute either. Already in 1996 a diasporic Nigerian cultural entrepreneur created in London an award ceremony to celebrate the achievements of what he called "Afro-Hollywood" (Odjegba 1996). And in 1999 a Hausa newspaper proposed to define the northern Nigerian branch of the industry "Kannywood" (see Adamu 2007). In fact, the local discourse around the video production was, almost since the production of *Living in Bondage*, considering the video phenomenon in terms of "film industry", something that would have soon been able to rival its Indian or American counterparts (cf. Ayorinde 1999; Husseini 2000).

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[77] For few years people thought that the name was firstly introduced by another *New York Times* article by Matt Steinglass ("When there's too much of a not-very-good thing", 2002a), that came out few months earlier than Onishi's one (see Shaka 2011). As Steinglass himself recognized (2002b), however, even if referring to the video industry, his article does not mention the term Nollywood. This confusion might have influenced the controversies that developed in the following years around the use and the significance of this term. Steinglass' article, in fact, is slightly derogative in its title, while Onishi's one celebrates Nigerian video industry's astonishing success, predicting for it a bright future. Throughout this chapter I will use the term Nollywood in brackets when referring to "Nollywood" as a brand, and without when the term will stand, more generally, for the video industry.

Compared to these early discursive constructions, the word "Nollywood" was able to better capture and amplify the wide popular success that Nigerian videos were encountering both within and outside the African continent. Hence, it was able to give an expression to the sense of achievement and enthusiasm this success had generated. The term "Nollywood" could easily resume in one word all the claims emerging within the video environment: the fact that the video phenomenon should be considered "a film industry"; that this industry had a transnational, if not global, impact (resumed in its acquired "–hoodness"); and that, because of the combination of these attributes, it deserved to be compared to the two most successful film industries in the world, Hollywood and Bollywood.

While many rapidly embraced the new name, a number of people within the industry opposed its introduction. As postcolonial criticism has emphasized, the act of naming is in itself an act of symbolic control. Some of the people that rejected the name thus did it to refuse the imposition of a foreign label on a local phenomenon, a semiotic violence that the history of colonialism had made intolerable to many. As Olushola Oladele Adenugba underlined in a blog article on this topic, "many are opposed to the appellation because, according to them, it is a form of neo-colonization, another Western propaganda. They wonder why a film culture that has built itself by itself must be labeled after Hollywood" (Adenugba 2007, quoted in Shaka 2011).

In one of the few academic interventions in this debate, however, Jonathan Haynes has evidenced how "some of the objections one hears to the term 'Nollywood' are less important than they may seem" (2007c: 106). Even if the term has a foreign origin, it is "here to stay" (*ibid*), and the people who today use it the most are Nigerians themselves. Furthermore, its direct reference to Hollywood and Bollywood does not position it inevitably on an inferior rank, "it points rather to the fact that we live in a multipolar world where the old patterns of cultural imperialism have changed and viewers have a much greater choice in the media they consume" (*ibid*). As I mentioned above, this is a term that managed to situate itself at the height of the Nigerian video industry' aspirations, and probably for this reason it was very successful as a commercial brand. In fact, in the years that followed its appearance, the name "Nollywood" progressively began to live an autonomous life and became the sign for a large number of profoundly different signifiers.

I will explore in more details the history of the circulation of "Nollywood" as a brand in the following sections of this chapter. Before that, however, even while accepting and embracing

Haynes' skepticism about "name" controversies,[78] it might be useful to further discuss the theoretical debate existing around the power implicit in the act of naming. This issue is central to the development of this and the next chapters' arguments. In Jacques Derrida's words:

> to name, to give names, […] such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. To think the unique *within* the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of the arche-writing: arche-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence, in truth the loss of what has never been given but only dreamed of and always split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance (1976: 112).

As this excerpt evidences, the act of naming hides a complex and dense process of intervention on and transformation of the object itself. The object is "inscribed within a difference", it is classified and thus put in relation with other names, other objects. This is an inevitable process of abstraction and generalization that relates to the implicit impossibility of a total correspondence between the word and the object the word is supposed to signify. To speak is to pronounce names, and each name is inevitably the result of an act of reduction and generalization. However, when the name has a social, cultural and political provenance different from the one of the object, the act of naming can be charged with specific hegemonic connotations. This is true particularly in colonial and neo/post-colonial contexts. As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have suggested, "hegemony" should be understood as a process rather than as a fixed social reality. It is a political type of relationship that has to be traced following its articulation through "a variety of hegemonic nodal points" (1985: 137). The act of naming, as well as the act of canonizing, are both nodal points in the articulation of hegemonic processes. They establish the system of relations and the horizon of meaning that frame the interpretation and the transmission of a specific cultural enunciation.

At the same time, as Derrida also points out, the act of naming generates a sense of loss, a sense of distance from the "original", from the "true reality" of the object. But this reality is in itself an illusion, something "incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance". Thus, the act of naming, in Derrida's analysis, rather than hiding the "vocative absolute" (the essence of the object), creates the illusion of its existence. The introduction of the term Nollywood operated a

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[78] At the beginning of his article Haynes writes: "The word [Nollywood] seems a bit silly to me, but then names are often silly or strange. I'm an American, and my continent is named after Amerigo Vespucci, a fifteenth-century Italian of no particular importance. He bumped into Brazil and then probably lied about when he did it" (2007c: 106).

generalization, an essentialization of the video phenomenon. It reified the basic features of the video production, creating a "catchy" brand. At the same time it produced an illusion, the illusion that something different, something original and "pure" existed behind and despite the label.

This is in my view an important point, because it highlights the ambiguity of the process this section is looking at. The "Nollywoodization" of the Nigerian video industry operated on two diverging and partially contradicting levels, which will be analyzed in the following sections of this chapter. On one side, it operated an abstraction, whose result ended up becoming an autonomous object, the brand "Nollywood". On the other side, it generated a sense of loss related to the obliteration of different instances of Nigerian filmmaking into a single homogenous definition. The existence and peculiarity of these instances however are defined precisely in relation to Nollywood itself. To be more precise, the second level of effects the act of naming provokes can be observed, within the context of this research, by looking at the way a number of Nigerian directors, as well as the branches of the industry producing films in local languages, claimed their distance and difference from "Nollywood" (see below for precise examples). The act of differentiation produced in these cases is operated precisely in relation to the name whose legitimacy is negated.[79]

To summarize, we can say that the act of naming has, then, a double productivity. It produces both reification and its opposite, that is, fragmentation and differentiation. The process of Nollywoodization of the Nigerian video industry thus evidenced two diverging dynamics within the industry itself: a tendency toward the general, the global, the transnational; and an opposite one, pointing toward identification, singularization, differentiation.

### Nollywood as a brand: Commoditization and discursive mobility

For many years the Nigerian government barely dedicated any interest to the video phenomenon, but throughout Olusegun Obasanjo's two terms presidency (1999 – 2007) the idea that Nollywood could become an instrument to rebrand Nigeria internationally became common within the Nigerian political establishment. It is during Obasanjo's presidency that the name "Nollywood" was first introduced by the foreign press and that a first report classifying Nigeria as the third largest film producing nation in the world appeared (Vasagar 2006). It was as well during the early 2000s that the international interest on the video industry started to grow consistently. The academic

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[79] It is important to underline here that a high level of internal differentiation has characterized the Nigerian video production since its early stages. However, as I emphasize here, the introduction of the term "Nollywood" has polarized this differentiation, accelerating a process of construction and reification of the already existing differences.

production about the phenomenon started to develop, numerous international film festivals dedicated a retrospective to Nigerian videos, and some documentary films about the video phenomenon were shot (for details see the next chapter). And, again around this period, a campaign titled "Nigeria Image" (later renamed "Heart of Africa") was launched by the Minister of Information and National Orientation (cf. Nworah 2006). One of the main axes of this campaign was to promote a new image of Nigeria and to attract international investments and tourism using the video industry as a tool to achieve these goals.

As Melissa Aronczyk has emphasized (2006; 2009), processes of local and national branding have become particularly influent in global politics.

> As national leaders try to re-assert their jurisdictional boundaries they have drawn heavily on their countries' cultural identities to promote their constituencies as exemplars of both domestic distinction and international fitness. [In this context] a country's intangible wealth — its 'good reputation' — is increasingly evoked as a means to gain the most prominent seat at the appropriately high-stakes table (Aronczyk 2009: 291)

Unfortunately for the video practitioners, the Nigerian government's interest in the phenomenon quickly manifested itself as superficial and instrumental. Obasanjo underlined in several occasions that the industry "was too important to be ignored" (Akpovi-Esade and Onyedika 2006). He often paternalistically repeated to the video community: "You have done well as number three in the world, but I want you to do me a favor, move up to the number two position so that we know it is only America that we have to contend with" (Ayorinde 2005 – for more details on the ranking of Nigerian video industry's productivity see below). But behind these statements, only a small number of episodic and highly mediatic initiatives to support the industry economically and logistically were taken. Most of them appeared to be tools of political propaganda rather than sincere attempts to sanitize the industry's economic environment.[80]

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[80] For instance, in 2007 the Censors Board and the Heart of Africa campaign sponsored a "Nollywood goes to London" event, to create a platform of exchange between Nigerian and British filmmakers and to advertize the successful history of Nollywood. Similar sponsored trip were organized also in the United States and elsewhere. According to many, these resulted to be highly expensive initiatives largely ineffective for the industry's development (cf. Husseini 2008). Other government's interventions under Obasanjo's presidency include a 100 million Naira special fund for the movie industry approved in 2004 (cf. Husseini 2005) and the contruction of the Tinapa Studios in Calabar (cf. Ajirire 2007).

The government's attempt to use the video industry's as a strategic instrument of propaganda was the result of the acknowledgment of Nollywood's international success. The story of a video film industry born out of an economically ravaged post-Structural-Adjustment society and, only a few years later, worth hundreds of millions of dollars had by then made the round of the world. In the international discourse, the video industry was mostly considered as an interesting phenomenon (or worse, a curiosity), whose important aspect was its trajectory of success within a continent humiliated by poverty and corruption. Rarely would the interest go beyond this line, and deep enough to observe the internal differentiation of the video industry, the trajectories of its development and the challenges of its everyday survival. The Nigerian government mostly aligned itself with this position. As I will better highlight below, this orientation participated in creating a discrepancy between the idea represented by the word "Nollywood" (a symbol of Nigerian potentialities, a successful brand to export the country's image and to attract investors) and the complex "reality" of the video phenomenon (a fluid, highly transformative and hardly controllable expression of popular culture).[81] This discursive disjunction, and the conflicting "metacultures" of Nollywood existing behind it, have interacted in multiple ways with the transformations that the video industry have undertaken over the past few years. It is in fact in the hiatus existing between these two opposite discursive representations of the video phenomenon that the industry's practitioners had to operate.

The "Nollywood" discursive construction that I just outlined had a widespread circulation both in Nigeria and amongst Nigerians in the diaspora, where the term was quickly, and often proudly, embraced as a symbol of belonging and as a highly valuable commercial brand. As Anandam Kavoori and Aswin Punathanbekar emphasized introducing Madhava Prasad's article on the genealogy of the name "Bollywood", the term "carries the weight it does because of its pivotal role in articulating definitions of national identity to the figure of the Non-resident Indian" (2008: 7). It is possible to suggest that a similar dynamic surrounds the extensive reproduction and commoditization of the word "Nollywood" in the diaspora, as well as in Nigeria itself. The term "Nollywood" stands, in fact, as one of the few positive things a Nigerian can identify with to

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[81] Throughout this section I will use the word "reality" in brackets when referring to the video industry. It is in fact impossible to describe the reality of this phenomenon without acknowledging its fluidity and constant mobility, that is, the impossibility of fixing it in a without-brackets definition. However, the use of this word helps to focus on the discrepancy existing between Nollywood as a discursive construction, and the Nigerian video industry as a historic phenomenon.

represent his national identity, both in the diaspora and back home. A few examples might be useful to support this argument.

Some time ago, while I was in Germany for a conference, I found myself in front of a Nigerian restaurant, in the neighborhood of Frankfurt's main train station. Beside the door there was a shining green sign: "Nollywood restaurant, Westafrikanische Spezialitäten" ("Nollywood restaurant, West African food" - see image I). At first this image made me smile, but later I could not avoid thinking at the way it perfectly represented the transformation of "Nollywood" into a self-



I: Frankfurt: Nollywood restaurant

sufficient brand. The restaurant had in fact no specific reasons to be named after the video industry. The owners had never shot a film, nor acted in any video. But they had other good reasons to appropriate the brand. Firstly, they identified themselves with what the term "Nollywood" represented, a truly Nigerian and globally recognized story of success. Secondly, they sought in the term one of the few Nigerian cultural exports that a passing-by customer could recognize, and eventually patronize. Aguele Renatus Imhafidon, one of the owners, confirms this point in a recent interview for a Nigerian internet site. In the interview he explains that he choose to name the restaurant after the video industry because "it's something to identify us with Nigeria. Once a Nigerian or African visiting Germany or Frankfurt sees it, he would know that this is home. And we've also had customers who, on passing by, identified us as a Nigerian restaurant because of it" (Akaeze 2011). But, as the Nigerian journalist that made the interview disappointedly underlines, the restaurant, which is popular amongst both people of African and European descent, does not even show Nigerian videos or music clips.

This experience helped me in interpreting a few other episodes I experienced during my fieldwork. In the previous months I had bumped into a series of products and trademarks that were explicitly referring to "Nollywood" to commercialize objects that had little or nothing to do with the Nigerian video industry itself. In Lagos, while walking around in the Silverbird Galleria's bookshop in Victoria Island, I found a comic book whose title was *Nollywood's finest* (image II). I bought it, expecting to find in it some form of fictional reinterpretation of what is normally the content of fanzine magazines: stars' private life spiced up with some gossip. To my surprise the comic was

nothing like that. It told instead an original story, that of a young Nigerian girl, Sessi George, who works as ghostwriter for a Nigerian newspaper and struggles to make her living in Lagos. The story was well written and the drawings beautiful. However, apart from a distant inspiration it drew from Nollywood melodramatic narratives, the comic had little connection with the video industry. A similar thing can be said about the South-African publishing house "Nollybooks" (image III) I found out about a few days later. In this case probably the "nolly" attribute directly referred to the idea of "African melodrama", the series being a sort of South African version of "Harmony". In both cases, however, I could see a mixture of the two feelings I outlined above, the aspiration to belong to the story of success represented by the Nigerian video industry, and an explicit and conscious use of its commercial success.
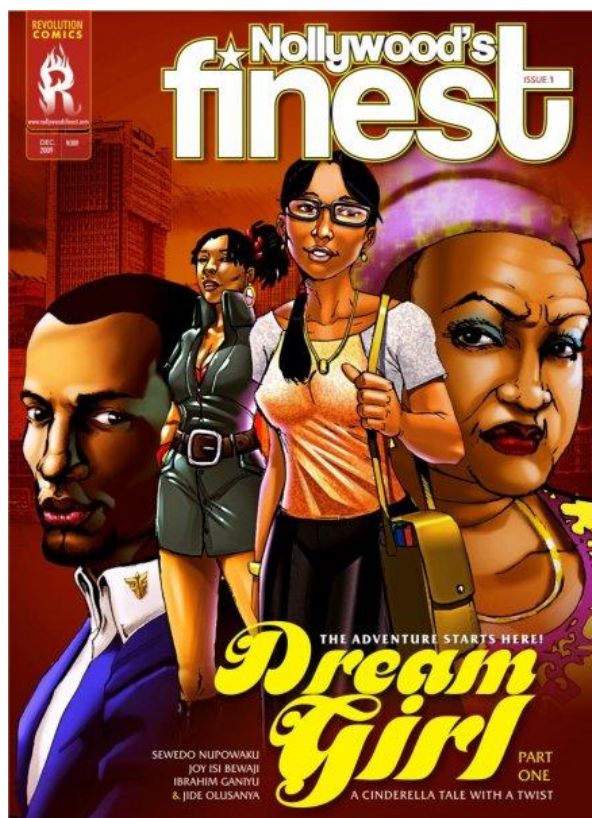


II: the cover of *Nollywood's finest* no.1          III: the cover of the Nollywbooks novel
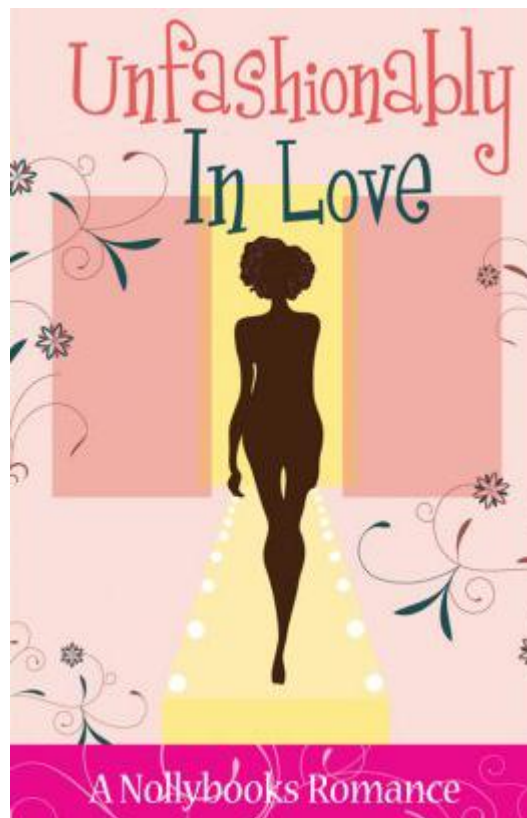
Beside these examples of disconnected use of the "Nollywood" brand, we can observe a number of more coherent uses. For instance several Nigerian production companies in the diaspora used the term "Nollywood" to gain legitimization, in some cases putting it also in their official name.[82] This

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[82] Obi Emelonye's "The Nollywood Factory" is probably the best example of this dynamic. See chapter seven for further discussion on this issue.

happened even if, as I will discuss better in the third section of this thesis, many of these production companies can hardly be considered to belong fully to the Nigerian video industry. Similarly, the brand invaded the internet, where one can find countless sites that contain the name "Nollywood" in their title.[83] Most of them are fan forums and file sharing platforms which gain reasonable (in some cases remarkable) amounts of money by selling advertising space on their pages. As one can easily imagine, the advertising space's price is directly connected to the daily number of accesses to the site, which partially depends on the site's name itself. In fact, while some people may decide explicitly to enter the site, many do it by accident while searching for information on Nollywood or while trying to access other Nollywood platforms.

As these examples show, "Nollywood" has thus become a partially autonomous sign that signifies different things in response to variable cultural and commercial motivations. As Paul Manning has emphasized, "because brand is […] everywhere, and yet nowhere, the phenomenon comes to be represented as an essentially immaterial form of mediation, a kind of globalized interdiscursivity, an indexical icon of the virtual nature of the global capitalist economy itself" (2010: 35). "Nollywood" as a brand has become an element of mediation between different instances of modernity and globalization. It exemplifies the gap existing between two distinct and diverging orientations within the Nigerian public sphere. On the one hand, a position that sadly looks at the reality of the Nigerian society, the depth of Nigerian population's disillusionment and the violence of Nigerian politicians' voracious patrimonialism. On the other hand, a position that proudly nourishes the ambition of transforming Nigeria into the leading African country for the achievement of a non-Eurocentric project of modernity and globalization. For those who support and embrace the brand, it comes to represent specific expectations of success and international recognition. While, as I will better show in the next section of this chapter, for those who reject it and take a distance from it, it is a symbol of mystification, a kind of opium for the masses, something that give the illusion that Nigeria and its popular culture have gained a place in the world's encyclopedia of cinema culture while, on the contrary, the video industry continues to deal with profound economic instability and widespread lack of professionalism. The fact that "Nollywood" is a brand that does not belong to anybody (the term is in fact not registered as a trademark), leaves the brand open to constant processes of re-signification. The debates that in Nigeria have surrounded the definition of what Nollywood actually is, can offer meaningful examples to understand this dynamic.

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[83] Just to name few of them: www.nollywood.com; www.nollywood.net; www.nollywoodmovies.com; nollywoodlove.com; nollywoodforever.com; nollywooduncut.com; www.nollywoodwatch.com.

***Behind the brand: The controversies that surround the Nigerian video industry's success***

The international circulation of the "Nollywood" brand and the use people have made of it progressively created and reinforced the discrepancy existing between the idea of what Nollywood could represent and the "reality" of the video phenomenon. While on one side, as I showed above, the idea of Nollywood as a highly successful enterprise became reason of pride for many Nigerians, the actual representation of Nigeria that films were offering and the international reactions this representation often provoked generated a complex debate within the Nigerian political and intellectual environment (see also Okome 2010). As several examples from fieldwork researches in other African countries showed (cf. Dipio 2008; Ondego 2005; Pype forthcoming), Nollywood videos' representation of Nigeria reinforced already existing widespread stereotypes about the violence, the corruption, the moral and political disorder of Nigerian society as well as about the influence played on it by witchcraft and occult rituals. While Nigerian videos became extremely popular in many places exactly for their "transgressive" contents, they also came to represent Nigeria as the "hell" on earth. As Katrien Pype (forthcoming) has emphasized in relation to the consumption of Nigerian videos in Kinshasa, for instance, in Congolese Pentecostal audiences' eyes Nigeria became a land of intense "spiritual battle" between God and the Devil, a nation where the presence of magic and evil is "overwhelming" and thus requires the constant intervention of God. Similar interpretations of Nigerian videos' contents became common above all amongst religious audiences, and they provoked a growing concern amongst Nigerian intellectuals and politicians, fueling the emergence of numerous debates within the Nigerian public sphere. Some examples can be useful to understand the arguments these debates were and are built upon.

The first example refers to the diverging positions assumed in relation to the video industry by two prominent Nigerian intellectuals, Femi Osofisan and Odia Ofeimun. The position kept by Osofisan over the past few years is clearly expressed in a keynote address he wrote on the occasion of the 6th Independent Television Producers Association of Nigeria (ITPAN)'s meeting held in Lagos in 2006. In this text he recognizes the popular success of the video industry, acknowledging the influence videos play on people's imagination and, more generally, on the representation of Nigeria at both local and global levels.

> Precisely because they have deservedly won ovation everywhere the Nollywood films
> have come to assume an authority over our values and our lives, such that what people
> see in them comes to be taken not as just a fictional projection by one imaginative

consciousness, but as the true, authentic mirror of what we really are, as a veritable marker of what our society represents, and much worse, of the ideal that we aspire, or must aspire, towards (Osofisan 2006: 2).

If this is the case then, Osofisan suggests that Nigerians should pay careful attention to the contents these films circulate, because from them partly depends the future of the nation, of its international reputation and of its people's dreams and moral aspirations. Here, he underlines, lies a dilemma of great concern for all those who care about the future of Nigeria, because, as he underlines,

we cannot but remark that [...] the picture that the majority of them [the videos] present of our world is one that we must not only interrogate, but indeed reject very strongly. [...] They show us scenarios where the brutish African cults and priests are overpowered and devastated by the agents of Christianity! Thus one mythology replaces another – this time the one imported from abroad simply replaces the barbaric local variant. Tarzan is reborn, only this time in black skin, and wearing a cassock! And it is a sign of the deep damage done to our psyche and our consciousness by decades of European proselytizing that the filmmakers themselves are blissfully unaware of the racist and cultural implications of this fare they offer to the public (*ibid*).

According to Osofisan, Nollywood videos have internalized the worst stereotypes and exotic interpretation about African cultures produced by centuries of Christian and colonial propaganda. This uncritical acceptance of a Western perspective on Africa and its progressive internalization are, in Osofisan's eyes, extremely dangerous processes, which Nigerian intellectuals should feel compelled to fight. A way to correct this alarming situation is, in Osofisan's opinion, the implementation of the collaboration between Nigerian writers and filmmakers. Hence the quality of the stories the videos tell and their moral value, as well as the representation of Nigerian culture and society they circulate, would become acceptable. In this way, Osofisan implicitly suggests, the successful story that Nollywood represents would be matched by an equally commendable representation of Nigeria. The "reality" of the videos could thus coincide with their idealized image, the globally successful brand "Nollywood".

In relation to these issues, Odia Ofeimun's position is profoundly different. He has expressed his feelings about the Nigerian video industry on numerous occasions (cf. Ofeimun 2003, 2010 and the documentary *Nollywood Babylon,* 2009). The keynote he presented at the 2nd National Film Festival

in 2003 is probably the clearest amongst them. In this text, after tracing the history of cinema in Nigeria, Ofeimun underlines that, whatever one may think about the videos' contents, "it is sometimes better to tell your story even incompetently and badly than for it to be mis-told by others" (2003: 9). Furthermore, he argues that Nollywood videos, even if often in imprecise or unrefined ways, do express a profound truth about the Nigerian society:

> love it or hate it, there is a super-logical rendering of the way we are, the way we live, the messiness and high tension of our dream-seduced realities in the rhetoric of the home video. [It does] represent a deep psychological implant pressed into place by so many untold and even unspeakable events in our history. It looks like an underdeveloped prong of the collective mind of a whole nation (2003: 11).

The Nigerian society, Ofeimun emphasizes, is as violent and messy as the one the videos portray, if not worse. And video films are "giving back" Nigerians a "mirror image" of the way they are while also "reflecting the difficulties" they have "in admitting it" (2003: 12, 13). The central question to ask thus become related, in his analysis, to the hidden agenda of the people that do not want this image to circulate. As he emphasised, "rather than seek to change the society so that the untoward elements that figure in home videos may be removed there seems to be too much of an attempt to create a consensus around the need to make things look better in the films than they are in real life" (2003: 13).

Ofeimun's point directs again our attention toward the distance between what some people, and especially the political establishment, want Nollywood to be (a symbol of Nigeria, a successful brand to export the country and to attract investors), and what the video phenomenon is (an expression of popular culture, a controversial mirror of Nigeria's potentialities and problems). Another example may be useful to further develop this argument. Throughout the recent history of the video industry, Nigerian newspapers have hosted a debate that has opposed two generations of Nigerian filmmakers and two different conceptions of cinema. On one side stands the so called "first generation" of filmmakers, composed by Nigerian directors such as Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugbomah, Ladi Ladebo and others. These are those that used to produce their films in celluloid and that were ruled out of business by the economic crisis provoked by the application of Structural Adjustment policies in the mid 1980s. On the other side stands the "new generation" of Nollywood video filmmakers, people whose approach to filmmaking has been filtered by the introduction of digital technologies and that thus developed a profoundly different conception of what cinema is or

is not.[84] This debate has often assumed very nasty tones, but it can equally be considered useful to describe the conflicts existing behind the definition of "Nollywood" and of the video phenomenon in general.
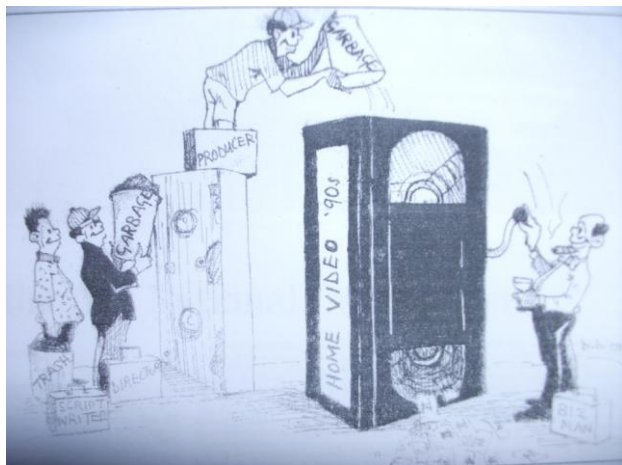


IV: *The Guardian Nigeria* 29/09/01
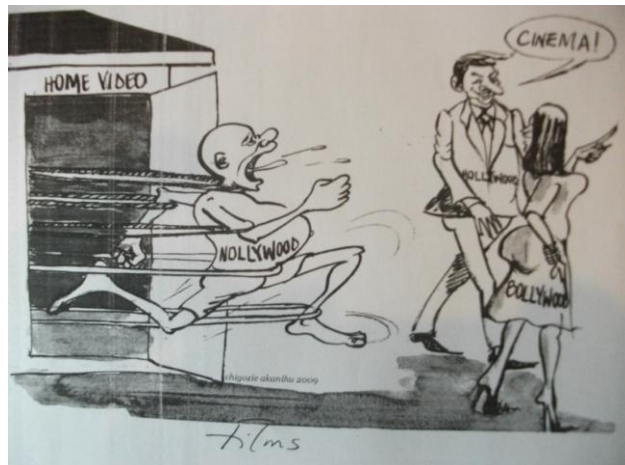


V: *The Guardian Nigeria* 01/02/09

The most visible representatives of the first generation's point of view are undoubtedly Ola Balogun and Eddie Ugbomah, even if the latter has, over the years, decided to adhere to the video phenomenon and had since become an active, as much as controversial, member of many video industry's associations.[85] In their view the video phenomenon can by no means be labelled as a film industry. "The word industry – Ugbomah is reported to say in an interview in 2000 – is too big for us. [...] There is nothing called Nigerian film industry. We just have video film producers. Before we used to have Nigerian film makers" (Mentor and Kolawole 2000). A similar position has been expressed several times by Ola Balogun (2001a, 2001b, 2005a, 2005b). "Does Nigeria actually have a film industry or not?", he asked repeatedly in his articles, and he concluded: "there is something going on that can be located somewhere in-between a purely commercial trading activity based on

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[84] The definition of these two generations is particularly rigid. The only remarkable example of a director who managed to occupy a flexible position between the two generations is Tunde Kelani. Trained as a cinematographer in the late 70s at the London Film School, he participated actively in the production of many Nigerian celluloid films of the first generation. When the digital technology took over, he created his own production company, *Mainframe*, and produced several video films that managed to circulate largely outside Africa. For a discussion of his position in relation to the use of the word "Nollywood" see below.

[85] Eddie Ugbomah, after many years in which he harshly criticized the video industry (he often defined it as "nothinghood"), finally decided to join the video phenomenon around the early 2000s. As he explained in an interview: "I was accused by some young people who said I should show an example rather than continue to criticize" (Iwenjora 2004b).

recycling easily predictable story formulae on video format and a loosely organized manufacturing pattern centring on video" (2001a). In both Balogun's and Ugbomah's point of view, what defines a film industry is first of all the format (celluloid), then the level of organization of the production, the system of distribution in place (particularly the existence of cinemas) and the availability of funding. In their perspective, then, the Nigerian phenomenon does not match any of the required standards that define a film industry. A number of Nigerian newspaper columnists had supported this position over the past few years, criticizing the industry for the quality of the video produced, for the incapacity of reaching non-African audiences and international festivals unless as a curiosity, and for sticking to a format, the video, generally considered as an inferior variety of the one used by other film industries (cf. Azuah 2008; Iroh 2009; Jideonwo 2006; Obi-Uchendo 2007). The vignettes reported in image IV, V, VI and VII, published in Nigerian newspapers in the past few years, give a visual representation of this kind of criticism.
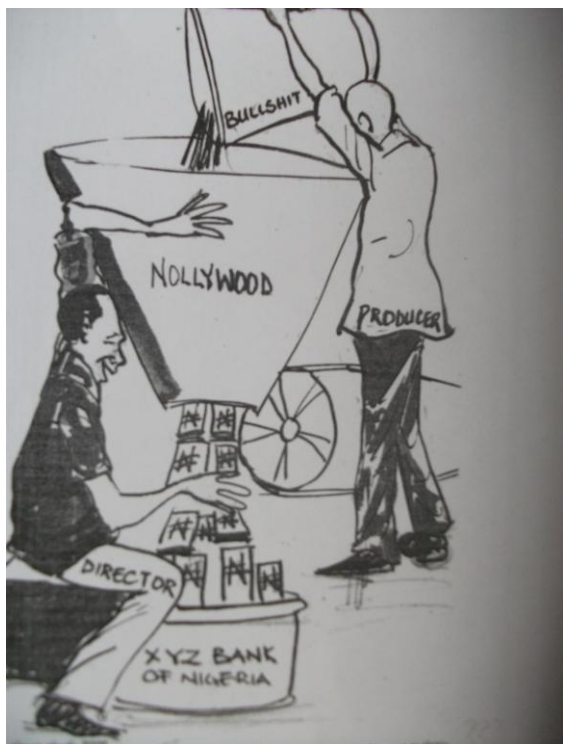


VI: *The Guardian Nigeria* 11/01/09



VII: *The Guardian Nigeria* 24/05/02

The position of the first generation directors has inevitably produced a reaction in the video industry expressed by numerous directors and actors, a reaction that often assumed the shape of a generational conflict. One of the most clear and explicit replies has been the one expressed by a very popular Nigerian video-maker, Charles Novia: "I'm sick and tired of the 'first generation' filmmakers (men of Dr. Balogun's geriatric age range) telling us that what we produce and show to

the world in our home videos is all crap" (2005). First of all, Novia suggests, the digital format is today recognized by most film industries in the world as equally acceptable as the celluloid one in terms of quality and visual definition. In this sense, Nollywood represents an avant-garde of the digital revolution that is happening in the global world of movie production. Secondly, Nollywood videos, contrary to Nigerian and more generally African celluloid productions, are produced autonomously, that is, without any governmental or international economic support. Even while in this situation, the industry managed to produce a large economic turnover and create thousands of job opportunities for young unemployed Nigerians.

As Novia emphasizes in another article,

> critics, more often than not, quickly compare Nigerian movies to American movies and summarize by saying we still have a long way to go. Therein lies the problem. There is no basis for comparison whatsoever. Can you compare banking or even the legal profession in America to what obtains in Nigeria? Nollywood never started with the intention to ape or rival Hollywood (2007).

Once again, through this debate, we can see the tension existing around the definition of what "Nollywood" represents or should represent, what the video industry is or should be. Novia's emphasis on the radical incommensurability between Hollywood and the Nigerian video industry seems to be the nodal point. At the same time, as an analysis of the debates on Nollywood existing both within and outside Nigeria shows, the radical difference existing between the Nigerian experience and the one of other film industries in the world seems to be often understated. As discussed in the first chapter, the success of the Nigerian video industry lies in the specificity of its format, what I defined earlier as the "small screen cinema" format. It is in fact largely thanks to the original way in which Nigerian entrepreneurs have remediated pre-existing media experiences into a new format that Nollywood has managed to establish itself as the main entertainment media product in the continent. But as the debates reported above testify, the ambiguity of Nollywood's format and contents continues to generate some confusion. Probably a considerable percentage of the responsibility for this misunderstanding lies in the name itself, "Nollywood", which inevitably put the Nigerian video industry on a comparative level with Hollywood and Bollywood.

It is important to consider, however, that this confusion is not only a problem characterizing the journalistic discussion around the video phenomenon. It is also fed by international agencies like the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, whose report on global film industries' output published in

2009 classifies Nollywood as the second largest film industry in the world in term of the sheer number of films produced. Even if the report underlines explicitly the countless difficulties of conducting such a census in non-Western countries where local figures about media industries are hardly available, it nevertheless proposes a number of general conclusions that have been reported by major newspapers around the world (cf. Krahe 2010; Mackay 2009; Onanuga 2010). To cope with the challenges created by the incomplete and often contradicting data collected, the report uses ambivalent criteria of calculation, which do not follow universal principles for all the countries under scrutiny. For instance, in the analysis of the Nigerian context the report recognizes the statistics produced by the Nigerian Censors Board which lists all videos produced in the country (872 productions in 2005). On the contrary, in the case of the United States, the report takes into account only the figures produced by the Motion Pictures Associations of America (MPAA), and thus excludes from the statistics the independent productions that are not listed in the MPAA's figures. As a result, the UNESCO report lists the United States behind Nigeria with "only" 485 films produced in 2006.

Furthermore, for Nigeria and some other countries such as China and South Korea the report's statistics acknowledge the growing rate of digital production, while the same format is not taken into account for other countries included in the report like Cameroun, Philippines or Mexico, where independent digital production is equally active (cf. Ashuntantang 2010; Lobato 2012). This difference depends on the data that each country provided to the Institute of Statistics, and these data do not seem to follow equivalent criteria of enquiry. For the same reasons, also the number of public screening venues by country counted in the report is problematic. In Nigeria the report registers 4,871 "cinemas" (more than Japan and the Russian Federation), while in Burkina Faso only 19 (UIS 2009: 12). Even if the authors underline that in Nigeria "99% out of 4,871 cinemas are 'video theatres'" (UIS 2009: 2), it is not clear why this category of screening venues is not taken into account also for Burkina Faso and for the other sub-Saharan African countries that the report includes in the analysis. If informal venues were counted also elsewhere, probably each of these countries would easily count more the 500 screening venues. As these examples show, the report's writers wanted to acknowledge the undeniable continental influence of the Nigerian video industry. But to do so, they made the entire report hardly acceptable on a scientific level.[86]

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[86] It must be recognized that the problems emerging from the report reflects the difficulties in defining what cinema today is or is not, a definition that has become much harder to draw because of the introduction and the constant improvement of digital technologies in recent times. As John Caldwell has emphasized in a recent presentation, his fieldwork research in Hollywood made him appreciate how much the introduction of digital technologies have

*"Nollywood" and the Nigerian video industry's internal differentiation*

My report on these debates emphasizes the level of indeterminacy that surrounds the meaning of the term "Nollywood" and of its definition in relation to other instances of filmmaking in the world. While on a general level (that of "Nollywood" as a brand) there is a general agreement around the positive character of the phenomenon and its importance for Nigerian cultural reputation, a number of problems arise as soon as the analysis reaches deeper levels. Furthermore, within the Nigerian video industry's environment, the degree of inclusivity of the "Nollywood" brand seems not to be clear, and many people play strategically with it, counting themselves in or out according to the context in which they are.

The growing debate on the internal differentiation of the video industry can be taken as an example here. On a general level, as I mentioned in the first chapter, the northern branch of the video industry, which produces videos in Hausa, tends to differentiate itself by the use of the term "Kannywood" (cf. Adamu 2007; McCain 2011). Similarly, the term "Yoruwood" or "Yorubawood" have appeared on the internet and in Nigerian newspapers to refer to the branch that produces videos in Yoruba (cf. Nuabuikwu 2010; Olupohunda 2011).[87] Both these branches of the video industry developed a complex relationship with the Nollywood phenomenon. While, on the one hand, they are jealous of the wide transnational circulation and global recognition that southern Nigerian videos in English managed to achieve, on the other hand, they proudly affirm a different ethical and cultural orientation, which supposedly gives them a higher level of legitimacy as spokesmen of their respective ethnic groups. Furthermore, both of them claim to have emerged earlier than the English-language branch of the industry and thus consider themselves to be the "true" (but often unrecognized) initiators of the video phenomenon.

While these claims are based on trustable and precise evidences,[88] it is important to underline that they risk to concentrate the debate on identity-based disputes between the Nigerian most

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transformed Hollywood's modes of production (2011). In his description, Hollywood's modes of operation sound to be today much closer to Nollywood's than they used to be at the time of celluloid predominance. Informality is assuming a new role in filmmaking and the introduction of digital technologies has a great responsibility in this transformation.

[87] See the first chapter footnote 6.

[88] As mentioned in the first chapter and as shown by numerous scholars (see Barber 2000; Ogundele 2000; Adesanya 2000), the origin of the video phenomenon can be connected to the progressive remediation, throughout the 1980s, of Yoruba travelling theatre plays from the stage to celluloid film, and later from film to television drama and video tapes. Yoruba videos are thus undeniably the forerunners of both Igbo and English language films that started emerging in early 1990s. In what concern Hausa productions, the first Hausa video film (*Turmin Danya*) was shot in 1990 (see

influential ethnic groups (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa), thus driving this analysis away from its main focus. Beyond the controversies around the "paternity" of the video phenomenon, what matters here is the fact that the international affirmation of the "Nollywood" brand progressively hid the narrative and aesthetic specificities that distinguish the three main branches of the video industry, thus generating movements of explicit differentiation.

As Ekwazi (2000), Ogundele (2000) and Adamu (2007) amongst others have underlined, these branches emerged from different experiences of popular culture production which left important legacies in the way videos' narratives are structured and developed. Within this framework the English language production presents a strong continuity with previously existing local television series and with the Onitsha market literature (see Obiechina 1971; Okome 2004). On the contrary, Yoruba videos, while also drawing from the experience of local television series, are mostly influenced by the tradition of the Yoruba travelling theatre and of the Yoruba novel (see Haynes 1995; Adesanya 2000; Ogundele 2000) and Hausa videos by Hindi Bollywood films, Hausa folktales and Hausa popular literature (the *soyayya* novels – see also Larkin 1997, 2000 and 2008; Adamu 2007). As a result, Yoruba videos, and especially early releases, often have a village setting and, as it happens in many Yoruba theatre plays, focus on issues related to the interaction between traditional forms of authority and supernatural deities. On the contrary, Hausa videos tend to concentrate their plots on love triangles and marital issues in way very much similar to those that define Hindi Bollywood films.[89]

In the eyes of some critics, these differences reflect the taste of specific shares of the local audience, which find southern Nigerian English videos' concentration on urban settings and issues of violence, witchcraft and sexual transgression immoral and socially inappropriate. As Abdalla Uba Adamu has emphasized, for instance, "to the general and average Muslim Hausa, Nigerian [Nollywood] films [...] are basically southern Nigerian and Christian – and thus to be avoided as they contain embedded cultural icons that run counter to his own cultural norms and values" (2011: 36). It is often in relation to this feeling that Yoruba and Hausa video makers proudly underline their specificity. They claim to produce local narratives, which, when compared to the southern

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Adamu 2007), thus two years before the Igbo/English video film (*Living in bondage*) that is normally mentioned to sanction the birth of the video phenomenon. In this sense, the emergence of the Hausa video industry seems to be a rather autonomous phenomenon, which resulted from the interception of local theatre and television experiences (see also Larkin 2000).

[89] It is important to underline that Bollywood films have influenced video contents and narrative structure all over Nigeria. However their influence is particularly felt in the Hausa region.

Nigerian productions in English, are considered to be more respectful of local "traditional" mores and beliefs.[90]

Beyond the general controversies that I just evidenced, on the individual level a number of directors have clearly stated their unease towards the meaning the term "Nollywood" has come to assume. Tunde Kelani's position is a good example in this context. As I underlined earlier, Kelani is an in-between character in the Nollywood landscape. He studied cinematography in London, he worked in many celluloid production throughout the late 1970s and all over the 1980s and, when celluloid production collapsed, he moved to the video format and produced several video films. Because of Kelani's professionalism and technical expertise his films are some of those with the highest production values ever produced in Nollywood. For this reason he has often been invited to festivals and retrospectives around the world as a representative of the video industry.[91] His work is in fact often considered by foreign festival directors and curators as more acceptable to Western audiences' taste. However, as he has clearly stated, his work is "different from mainstream Nollywood production" (Kelani 2010). He pays deep attention to the Yoruba cultural tradition and thus most of his films are shot in Yoruba and are adaptation of Yoruba novels or theatre pieces. He spends a long time on pre- and post-production work and the average technical quality of his films is therefore higher than mainstream Nollywood videos (cf. Leu 2010). However, he recognizes the merits of Nollywood as a phenomenon, its capacity of creating the infrastructures (even if informal) for the growth of a local film market, and consequentially its ability in raising a loyal and affectionate local audience (Kelani 2010).

Kelani's position, like that of numerous other directors in Nigeria, fluctuates between the acceptance and the refusal of the Nollywood label. On one side, "Nollywood" is accepted as a brand by Kelani particularly outside Nigeria or when talking to non-Nigerians. The brand is, in these cases, considered as a symbol of something good happening in the Nigerian mediascape, something that is revolutionizing the world of film production in the continent. On the other side, the label

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[90] It must be noticed, however, that both Hausa and Yoruba videos increasingly reproduce and imitate the transgressive contents that are believed to make southern Nigerian videos more successful, such as explicit sexual scenes, violence, and witchcraft (see Adamu 2010; Ogundele 2000).

[91] The New York African Film Festival, for instance, invited him several times and in 2004 dedicated a "mid-career" retrospective to his work (Okoli 2004). He was also invited at the Rotterdam Film Festival (in 2002 and 2004), at the London Film Festival (in 2009), at the Berlinale (2004 – but he refused the invitation because of the derogative perspective the festival had assumed on Nollywood [Ayorinde 2004], see next chapter) and at other film retrospectives around the world.

"Nollywood" is refused when it is a synonym of cheap contents and poor production values. In this case, the prevailing attitude is one of differentiation and singularization.

Other directors positioned themselves along Tunde Kelani's line. For instance, Kunle Afolayan, one of the most successful Nigerian directors in recent times, explicitly expresses the ambiguities he sees in the use of the term Nollywood :

> all the people that are doing something different will tell you that they are not Nollywood... so, then, what is Nollywood? I don't know myself! The entire Nigerian industry has been called Nollywood, but if Nollywood comes to mean something inferior, if Nollywood is only three lights and a cheap video camera, then I'm not Nollywood, because I don't do that. If the definition of Nollywood has to do with the contents I'm not within it, I'm just a Nigerian filmmaker who is doing his own work. But if Nollywood is just a name, that has nothing to do with the content, I'm fine with it (2010).

As Afolayan's words evidence, the definition of what the Nigerian video industry is and of what the term "Nollywood" means are enveloped in a general atmosphere of indeterminacy. Within this context individual strategies of self-positioning have acquired a particular importance. The conflicting discourses on the Nigerian video phenomenon that I highlighted in this chapter have importantly influenced the work of numerous Nigerian video entrepreneurs, pushing them toward more conscious and explicit choices.

The hiatus existing between what I labeled throughout this chapter as the "reality" of the Nigerian video industry and the ideal represented by the term "Nollywood", is the space within which the Nigerian filmmakers operate. These two diverging metacultures, the one of "Nollywood" as the second largest film industry in the world, and that of the Nigerian video industry as a cheap and disorganized business, have both interacted with the way the industry has transformed over the past few years. Many directors in fact consciously aspire toward making the "reality" and the ideal fit together. On one side, they are constantly challenged by the kind of criticism I discussed in the previous sections, and on the other they are inspired by the ideal they see in the international and local acceptance of "Nollywood" as a symbol of success. The metaculture of "Nollywood" as a successful brand and that of Nigeria as the second largest film-producing-nation in the world established themselves internationally more rapidly than the video industry itself. The "reality" of the industry seems in fact to be few steps behind what the label "Nollywood" make people imagine

in terms of both the industrial infrastructures in place and the average quality of the films produced. But many within the video environment are conscious of this discrepancy, and they are doing their best to fill it. The discourse around the video industry is then actively propelling the industry forward by providing, on one side, radical criticism and, on the other, seducing ideals of achievement.

*Nigerian videos in the global arena: The postcolonial exotic revisited*

Since the beginning of the 2000s the Nigerian video industry has been the object of a large number of documentary films and festival retrospectives around the world. Their objective was, in most of the cases, that of introducing the Nigerian video phenomenon to non-African audiences. As I have evidenced in the previous chapter, Nollywood's specific modes of operation made the Nigerian video industry almost incommensurable to other experiences of filmmaking in the world. As a consequence, during its first decade of existence, the Nigerian video phenomenon remained practically "invisible" to non-African audiences. The retrospectives and documentaries that appeared since the early 2000s had thus the objective of filling this gap and making Nollywood visible within the global cinema arena.

The first reports about the Nigerian video industry were produced by international television stations like CNN and BBC. The list goes from CNN's *Inside Africa, the Best of African Film in 2004* and BBC's *Nick Goes to Nollywood,* both produced in 2004, to *Nollywood, le cinéma africain dans la cours des grands* produced in 2008 by France Ô.[92] Since the mid-2000s also a series of author-documentaries emerged: *Welcome to Nollywood* and *This is Nollywood* in 2007, *Nollywood, le Nigéria fait son cinéma*, *Nollywood Just Doing It*, *A Very Very Short Story of Nollywood, Nollywood Abroad*, *Nollywood Lady* aka *Peace Mission* and *Nollywood Babylon* in 2008.[93] These documentaries circulated widely in film festivals and on DVD, and as I mentioned earlier, participated in defining a specific way of looking at the Nigerian video industry. The production of documentaries on the video phenomenon by Nigerian directors has been, on the contrary, almost nonexistent. The only exceptions is a number of promotional videos of the "making-of" genre, that goes from *The Making of "The Battle of Musanga"* shot in 1996 to the recent *Once Upon a Time in Nollywood, the Making of "Half Empty Half Full"* (2008) and *The Making of the "Return of Jenifa"* (2010). In the next pages I will mention the discursive construction suggested by these films as an alternative to the representation offered by Western-produced documentaries. However,

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[92] These are just a few examples but the list is much longer even if is hard to get precise data about each of the list's entry.

[93] A smaller number of documentaries about the Ghanaian video industry have also been produced. The Most important are *The Video Revolution in Ghana* (2000), *L'industrie audiovisuelle au Ghana* (2001) and *Ghanaian Video Tales* (2006).

it is possible to say that yet no Nigerian director has taken the initiative of telling the story of Nollywood from within.[94]

At film festivals, numerous retrospectives and special programs on Nollywood were presented all over the world. The most influential were those that took place in festivals such as the Berlinale (2004 and 2008), the Festival of African, Asian and South American cinema of Milan (2005), the Amien film festival (2001) and the Rotterdam film festival (2004) in Europe; the New York African Film Festival (2001 and 2004), the Houston WorldFest (2002) and the Los Angeles film festival (2006) in the United States; the Seoul Film Festival (2002) and the JapanExpo (2005) in Asia. Even if this list in not complete, it provides an idea of the wide circulation of Nollywood in the global cinema arena throughout the past few years.

Nollywood has also been the object of numerous film festivals and award ceremonies in Nigeria itself. The most representative is the African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA), created by the Osigwe Anyam-Osigwe Foundation in 2005 and directly forged on the American Oscar's format. Beyond the AMAA, a number of other film festivals have emerged in Nigeria throughout the 2000s such as the THEMA Awards (since the mid-1990s), Abuja International Film Festival (since 2004), the BoBTV (since 2004), the Zuma Film Festival (since 2006) and the Africa International Film Festival (since 2009). Like the difference between the Western-produced documentaries and the Nigerian "making-of" videos, the difference between international and local festivals is interesting and suggests diverging ways of conceiving and interpreting the Nigerian video phenomenon.

What kind of "Nollywood" did these forms of metaculture produce and circulate? And in what way did these metacultures influence the way the Nigerian video industry is transforming? These are the questions this chapter focuses on, and the answers are inevitably multiple and complex. In fact, as I will argue throughout this chapter, while introducing the video phenomenon to non-African audiences, these discursive constructions also proposed an interpretation of Nollywood which reveals a particular epistemological gesture. Within this framework the Nigerian video phenomenon becomes relevant as the representative of a specific declination of the modernization project. According to this perspective, Nollywood is considered as the expression of what we can call, applying a term used by Rem Koolhaas (2002a), a "junkspace modernity", that is, a modernity defined by the outcomes of its own failure. The formulation of this interpretation of the video

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[94] The documentary *A VeryVvery Short Story of Nollywood* is only partly an exception. Its director Awam Amkpa is a Nigerian scholar based in the United States, but the documentary, as the title suggests, is only 15 minutes long and was supposed to be the beginning of a longer project which has not yet seen the light. For this reason the docuemntary does not develop fully an identifiable perspective on the video phenomenon.

phenomenon is the result of a specific form of "postcolonial exotic" (Huggan 2001), one in which the fascination for non-Western declinations of modernity takes the place of the fascination for the archaic, the traditional, and the tribal.[95] As I will show in the last section of this chapter, in reaction to this kind of representation a number of directors and producers moved toward new economic and narrative strategies. By doing this they aim at moving Nollywood away from the marginal position in which postcolonial-exotic representations have positioned it.

*The untamable alterity of Nollywood: Recurring themes and images.*

To describe the defining attributes of the metaculture of Nollywood produced by the existing documentary films on the video industry it can be useful to identify a number of recurring themes and images. The list that will emerge from this operation can suggest interesting elements for the analysis that this chapter intends to achieve. In the first few minutes, most of the documentary films on the video industry introduce images of the city of Lagos followed by statistical data on the city's population, on the average income of Nigerian workers and in some cases on the average life expectancy. These sequences reveal what can be defined as an ethnographic approach, something that is rarely seen in documentaries on other film industries in the world. The target audience of these documentaries is, in most of the cases, the average Western film festival public, and probably for this reason most of the documentaries' directors considered it useful to provide basic information about a country that is rarely or badly represented in international media. In these introductory sequences the way Lagos is presented varies. However, the predominant image is one of chaos: views of gigantic traffic jams and overcrowded markets absorbed in dusty atmospheres and distorted sounds. This representation is probably not very distant from the truth of Lagos' everyday life, but what is relevant for this analysis is the fact that it comes first in the narrative construction of most documentaries. At the same time, the modernity of Lagos' infrastructures is clearly shown.[96] Long shots of the Third Mainland Bridge and of Victoria Island's impressive skyline appear often in these introductory sequences, but the camera tends to hesitate on buildings that are falling apart, on piles of rubbish burning at street corners, on overcrowded public transport,

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[95] Even if I am aware of the complex and multifaceted reality that the words "West" and "Western" hide, I will use them throughout this chapter for the sake of synthesis and clarity.

[96] The documentary *Nollywood Abroad* is an exception in this discussion. All the scenes shot in Lagos that appears in this film are in fact recorded in the poorest and most disgraceful neighborhood of the Nigerian economic capital, inevitably providing a very partial representation of it.

and on children selling snacks along the road (image I and II). As a result, in most cases the definition of Lagos is articulated around the juxtapositions of efficiency and disaster, of modernity and its failure.



I: *Nollywood Babylon*



II: *This is Nollywood*

Beyond these initial sequences, the films develop in different ways, but a pattern of recurring scenes is traceable. There are at least three sequences that recur consistently in most films. To make the discussion easier, I will define them as the "prayer sequence", the "trailer sequence" and the "sharp sharp, let's go let's go sequence".[97] The best example of the first type of sequence is the introductive scene of *Nollywood Babylon*, in which the Nigerian director Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen leads an emphatic prayer to ask for the blessing of the set, of all the people that are going to work on the film and of the technical instruments that will be used to shoot it (image III). Very similar scenes appear also in *Nollywood Abroad*, in *This is Nollywood* and in *Nollywood Lady* aka *Peace Mission*. Beside the scenes of the prayer on the set, most films dedicate some sequences to the massive Sunday assembly prayers that take place every week in the countless gigantic Pentecostal churches that populate southern Nigerian cities' landscape (image IV). The film that spends more time presenting and investigating the rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is again *Nollywood Babylon*, but more or less carefully taken scenes of this kind appears in most documentaries. The emphasis accorded to these scenes tend to drive the attention of the viewer toward a specific aspect of Nigerian society, that is, its deep religiosity. While this aspect is undoubtedly important for the understanding of the videos' contents and aesthetics, the way it is approached in many

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[97] I borrow this expression from one of the people interviewed in *Nollywood Babylon*: "Today we are working Nollywood style. We have 59 scenes to make… Nollywood style is the opp opp opp style, it's the sharp sharp let's go let's go style…".

documentaries creates the risk of overstating its influence and impact on Nigerian society and culture.



III: *Nollywood Babylon*



IV: *Nollywood lady*

In the attempt to provide an as wide as possible introduction to the video industry, most films try to include sequences from Nollywood videos. The criteria of selection are not homogeneous. In some cases the documentaries present video sequences from the repertoire of the interviewed directors and actors while in other cases they pick up some scenes from the classics of Nollywood canon. In some other cases the criteria of selection are less clear. The scenes, however, are inevitably short and episodic, and have the objective of giving a taste of Nollywood aesthetics and narrative to audiences that are not familiar with them. In almost all documentaries, and often toward the beginning of them, a number of clips from trailers of recent releases are edited together. Noisy and full of special effects, these trailers are condensed pills of Nollywood-style moviemaking. Made to catch the audience's attention as quickly as possible, trailers (in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world) often privilege rather transgressive scenes (violence, sex, witchcraft and spectacular special effects) put together in fast editing sequences with loud music and voice-over. But the reality is that beyond the trailers, many Nigerian videos are relatively slow and talkative, with fairly moderate amount of explicitly sexual scenes. Violence and witchcraft do appear frequently but the scenes presented in the trailers are often the most crude that a film can possibly have, the rest of a video being eventually a progressive escalation toward the sensational scene picked up for the advertisement. The trailer sequences included in most documentaries produce in the audience a shocking experience of Nollywood's aesthetics. This impact has an important and somehow refreshing role in the general economy of the documentaries. It gives in fact the editing some rhythm to balance the slower interview sequences. At the same time it cannot avoid giving the audience a polarized representation of the videos' aesthetics, one that suggests the figure of the "extreme" as the main aesthetic specificity of Nollywood style.

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To give their films a plot, many documentary directors decided to follow the making of a film from beginning to end. During the editing, then, they intercut these sequences with interviews that introduce the audience to Nollywood's history, sociology and aesthetics. This structure serves multiple roles. On one side, it gives the documentary a narrative pattern upon which the numerous diverging stories and characters that compose the industry's landscape can find a balance. On the other, it offers the directors the pretext to focus on all the behind-the-scene specificities of Nollywood, and particularly on the unpredictable challenges of making a film in Nigeria (electricity black out, location problems, main actor last-minute absence, etc). It is within this framework that the "sharp sharp, let's go let's go sequences" normally take place. They recur in almost all documentaries and they are often explicitly funny and self-ironic. They relate to two aspects of filmmaking in Nigeria. On one side they play with what is often ironically defined as the "Nigerian factor",[98] that is, the limitless infrastructural failures that crisscross Nigerian everyday life and that constantly remind Nigerians of the misdoings of their central government (cf Larkin 2008; Olukoju 2004). On the other side, they are used to define Nigerian filmmaking as a sort of "guerrilla" filmmaking: low budgets, very tight schedules of shooting, no studios, non professionals extras, and so on. In these sequences Nollywood is defined as an industry where films are shot in five to ten days and released straight into the market in less than a couple of weeks (image V).

The description of recurring images and themes that I just provided allows for some general remarks about the representation of the Nollywood phenomenon that these documentaries circulate. This representation tends to be centred on the idea of "Africa as a paradigm of difference" (Mudimbe 1994: XII). The aspects of the industry and of the Nigerian society that are repeatedly emphasized are in fact those that appear as the most curious, unusual and unconventional in the eyes of documentaries' filmmakers: the complex interrelation between tradition and modernity in the Nigerian urban landscape; the extreme religiosity of the Nigerian society; the overdramatic style of Nigerian acting and filmmaking; the high level of *bricolage* expertise that making a film in Lagos requires. The representation these documentaries transmit is thus organized, as it was the case for colonial documentaries (cf. Bloom 2008), around the idea of an untamable alterity.[99] The

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[98] This term seems to refer to a large variety of things in Nigeria. Generally it is used to ironically highlight the fact that even little and apparently simple things can become extremely complex and difficult to achieve in Nigeria because of the corruption and misdoings of the government.

[99] This idea has been expressed, even if in different terms, also by Onookome Okome during the round table "Motives of black consciousness in African documentary films" at the iRep International Documentary Film Festival (Lagos, 20-23 January 2011).

world of Nollywood is in fact sensationalized and spectacularized to provide a representation constructed around a system of differences.

As Jonathan Haynes puts it, Nigerian films are often "familiar in the wrong ways and strange in the wrong ways" and they do not respond to the exoticism of Western expectations (Haynes 2000: 2), while many of the documentaries about Nollywood manage to establish that sort of "postcolonial exotic" that achieves a "commoditization of the difference", through an "aesthetic of decontextualization" (Huggan 2001: 16 and 22 – see also next section of this chapter). The representation conveyed by most of these documentaries has contributed to creating a discourse about Nollywood that can easily be fed to audiences which are not familiar with the Nigerian context. Through this representation, "Nollywood" is exoticised as a cinema of adventurers, a sort of "Wild West" of filmmaking that might appeal to film professionals and audiences, tired of the heavy structures that usually characterize cinema industries in other parts of the world.

However, as many have emphasized during the interviews I conducted in Nigeria (cf. Anikulapo 2010; Duker 2010; Emeruwa 2011; Igwe 2010) this cannot but be a partial representation of the history and present-day reality of an industry that has been constituted, since its beginnings, by both professionals and adventurers, people who have long experience in show business and people who are only interested in making money quickly.[100] As Jahman Anikulapo pointed out, some of these documentaries have contributed to creating the image of Nollywood as a completely unstructured industry, in which films are shot in a few days on an extremely low budget. "Those people – says Anikulapo – saw Nollywood the way they wanted to see it."[101]

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[100] It must be recognized that at least three documentaries portray this internal differentiation, *Welcome to Nollywood*, *Nollywood, Just Doing It* and *Nollywood, le cinéma africain dans la cours des grands.* In the first the internal complexity of the Nollywood phenomenon is emphasized by comparing the work of Chico Ejiro (one of the most prolific among the low-budget directors) and that of Izu Ojukwu (one of the most technically skilled and ambitious Nigerian directors, who often works on high budget projects). In the second, the low budget trend is demystified by the example of Kunle Afolayan's work on the set of *Irapada*, his first high budget feature film that managed to obtain local and international recognition (see chapter three). Finally, in the third, the internal differentiation of the Nigerian video industry is evidenced through a long focus on the Hausa video film industry in northern Nigeria.

[101] In a recent interview, Anikulapo was particularly critical of one of the first documentaries shot about Nollywood, Franco Sacchi's *This is Nollywood* (2007). Even if the film contributed to make the Nollywood phenomenon popular in the United States, Anikulapo argues that "that film was telling a bunch of lies. That guy came in Nigeria, spoke with people who told him some lies and then he never came back to check […] He saw Nollywood the way he wanted to see it" (Anikulapo 2010).

Within this context it might be important to underline that, by coincidence, most of the documentaries were shot during the years of major productivity of Nollywood (2007/2008). In this period the industry was able to produce an average of five or six new films every day but, as I have discussed earlier, when analyzing the reasons behind the crisis of production (chapter two), these numbers correspond also to a period in which the average budgets and production value of Nigerian videos were decreasing as a consequence of the progressive saturation of the market. As the protagonist of the documentary *This is Nollywood*, Bond Emeruwa (2011), has pointed out in a recent interview, most of the documentaries produced over this period (between 2006 and 2008) tend to identify low budgets and extremely tight schedules of shooting as the defining features of the Nigerian video industry. Even if, as most of the people that have been doing research on the video industry would recognize, these data do portray part of the reality of the video industry, they also tend to reify the video industry's modes of operation, creating a rather stereotypical representation of filmmaking in Nigeria.

Most of these documentaries focus mainly on the most spectacular and entertaining (for an external eye) aspect of film production, the shooting, and they marginalize both pre- and post-production. But, as both Lancelot Imasuen (2010) and Emem Isong (2011) have emphasized in recent interviews, if it might be true that many Nollywood films are shot in ten to twelve days, not as many films go from their initial conception (writing of the project and found raising) to the market in less than three to four months. On the contrary, it is important to underline that an increasing number of films (the high budget film discussed in chapter three) easily reach the twenty/thirty days of shooting, with some film reaching the Hollywood average of two months. Early Nollwyood success also used to have longer shooting schedules (up to 30/40 days), as testified by Ayorinde (1997) for films like *Violated* (1996), *Glamour girls II* (1996) and *The Battle of Musanga* (1996).

V: *This is Nollywood*

VI: *The making of "The return of Jenifa"*

Even if "making-of" videos are hardly comparable with documentary films because of their different intentions and commercial orientations, a general overview of the "making-of" films recently produced in Nigeria is useful to highlight the specificities of an internal perspective on the video phenomenon. As a brief analysis of the existing "making-of" videos shows, in fact, the video industry's way of representing its own reality is rather distant from the one offered by international documentaries. In these videos the spectator is hardly reminded of the "Nigerian factor"-related problems. Nigerian omnipresent "spirituality" is assumed to be a normal thing and is barely represented. Lagos, if shown, is depicted through its most fancy venues (five-stars hotels, private beaches, top class houses and cars). A perfect example in this sense is *The Making of the "Return of Jenifa"* in which the objects on which the camera focus the most are the extremely expensive technical equipment (shooting crane, dollies, high definition cameras) that the production, Alasco Films, managed to put together for the shooting of the sequel of *Jenifa*, one of the most popular films in Nollywood's history (image VI). Far from representing anything similar to the guerrilla filmmaking emphasized by international documentaries, this short promotional clip evidences the large resources invested in the production, the coolness of the set atmosphere, and the extreme trendiness of the stars involved. In the rare cases in which the industry exposes its own weaknesses, it does it through self-derisory comedies like *Nollywood Hustlers* (2009). In this case, more than the Nollywood environment itself, the object of the parody is the large grey zone, populated by countless aspiring actors and directors, that surrounds the industry.

### *The aesthetic of decontextualization: Nigerian videos and international film festivals*

As I mentioned earlier, over the past few years Nollywood has been the object of a large number of retrospectives in film festivals around the world. The format of these retrospectives varies profoundly from festival to festival. To facilitate this analysis, we can define two opposite tendencies, between which more or less all retrospectives can be located: the author-focused program (like the one presented on Tunde Kelani at the New York African Film Festival in 2004) and the documentary-focused program (like the one presented during the African Screens retrospective in Lisbon in 2009, that I mentioned in the introduction to this section). I identify these models as opposite because the first is the result of an attempt to put Nollywood side by side with African celluloid cinema (a French-inspired author cinema), while the second tends to focus mainly on Nollywood as a phenomenon, underlining the economical, political and cultural specificities of the context the video industry has emerged from. In the first case, the people that are invited to

represent the industry are those that often differentiate themselves explicitly from the video phenomenon (like Tunde Kelani, Mamhood Ali Balogun, Kunle Afolayan), because of the technical and aesthetic standards of their work. In the second case, the production of the industry tend to be homogenized under the all-inclusive Nollywood label, that stands, as I have emphasized in the previous chapter, as a symbol of a successful African story, which is revolutionizing the idea of cinema in the continent. These perspectives equally and inevitably hide the complexity of the video phenomenon, and push the interpretation of it toward a rather idealized conception of what the video industry should be.

Between these two extremes we can find numerous in-between formulae, which all tend to share a similar subtext in which Nollywood is included in the program more because of its value as a phenomenon and as a brand (see previous chapter), than for the specificity of the stories it narrates and the aesthetics it proposes. As for many documentaries, the subtext of numerous Nollywood retrospectives tends to sensationalize some of the video industry' aspects (its guerrilla style of filmmaking, the extremes of its aesthetic and narrative style, the get-rich-quick mentality that seems to rule its economy) while marginalizing other aspects (for instance the internal differentiation of the industry, the professionalism of numerous video entrepreneurs, the Nigerian criticism toward videos' contents and the video entrepreneurs' answers to it). As in the case of documentaries, then, the issue at stake here is not one of coherence or plausibility of the representation these retrospectives offer. Many of these festivals do in fact represent appropriately numerous aspects of the video industry's reality. The issue at stake, on the contrary, is the fact that they act as filters for the reception of the Nigerian video production in the global cinema arena. The way they represent the video industry helps to determine the place in which Nollywood is positioned within the landscape of global cinema production. And the relevant question for many Nigerian filmmakers and video practitioners is precisely related to this issue: where is Nollywood going to be placed in relation to other film industries in the world? Is it going to be considered as a curiosity or as a serious film enterprise?

To interpret the answer international film festivals have given to these questions an example can be useful, that of the retrospective on Nollywood organized at the Berlinale in 2004 (image VII). This retrospective, whose title was "Hollywood in Nigeria, or how to get rich quick", had one of the widest and most complete programs about the video industry ever presented in Europe. Numerous Nollywood videos were presented side by side with a few television documentaries on the video phenomenon, and numerous lectures with both Nigerian and foreign experts were organized throughout a three days retrospective, held in a conference venue in Kreuzberg apart from the main

festival hall. As part of the retrospective, the Berlinale organized a workshop in which Jeta Amata, a young Nigerian director who is also the protagonist of the documentary *Nick goes to Nollywood*, taught German film students "how to make a film in ten days".[102] The film that resulted from this workshop, whose final title was *The Alexa Affair*, was screened in "World Premiere" during the retrospective, jointly with a round table on Nollywood's modes of production with both Nigerian and European filmmakers and professionals.

While the retrospective was well received by local audiences, numerous Nigerians did not approve the way it represented the video industry. As it was reported, for instance, Tunde Kelani declined the invitation to participate because "he disagreed with the organizers' view of the Nigerian film industry as being exploitative in nature" (Ayorinde 2004a). The journalist Steve Ayorinde, one of the people that participated at the event as part of the Nigerian delegation, commented:

> it is a great thing that a big festival open the doors to you, but where were we? Berlin festival was happening in Postdamer Platz and we were like 45 minutes away by train... that is, you are not allowed to be in the mainstream cinema, you are going to be on the periphery and they will call you just to tell you: "come and tell us how you make films in five days for less than 10.000 dollars". We thought this was not a celebration! And people at one point will be tired of you explaining what you do and how you do it… they will want to invite filmmakers and show films… They will wait just for few years, and, after that, they will want to see what you are really doing, and see if you can compete with the others... (2010).

As this comment emphasizes, the position in which most festivals put Nollywood is a peripheral one. No Nollywood film had in fact ever been presented in these festivals' main competition sections alongside films from other region of the world. In most cases, the Nigerian video industry has been presented as part of special programs, along a series of round-tables and documentary film screenings to give the audience the elements to interpret the specificities of the Nigerian phenomenon.

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[102] This is the expression used in the retrospective program. All the festival materials that I mention here were kindly made available by Dorothee Wenner (programmer of the Berlin International Film Festival and director of the documentary *Nollywood Lady aka Peace Mission*).

What seems to be the major challenge for the organizers of this kind of retrospectives is how to make Nollywood fit in the film festival format. The incommensurable distance still existing between mainstream Nollywood films and other instances of cinema underlined by Charles Novia in the article mentioned in the previous chapter is a central issue also in this debate. To expose Nollywood to an international film festival audience appears to be, in fact, the result of a problematic decontextualization. How to put in the same program an auteur-film made for festival audience and a hybrid product that often looks more like a South American soap opera than like a Hollywood film? Festival programmers might have asked themselves similar questions several times. And the solution that most festivals adopted is one that operates along the line of what Arjun Appadurai defined as the "commoditization by diversion" (1986). Nollywood was in fact proposed to European and American audiences often as a product that acquires value as an "art" object exactly through its displacement from the sphere of its ideal consumption (the sphere of popular culture to which Nollywood originally belongs) to the sphere of a decontextualized reception (that of the elite film-festival-kind of entertainment). Nollywood became thus accepted in the global cinema arena through an "aesthetic of decontextualization", which operated in ways similar to those that brought African "traditional" art in Western museums (cf Appadurai 1986).[103]

To achieve its commercial effect, the aesthetic of decontextualization emphasizes the differences while hiding the similarities between Nollywood and other instances of filmmaking around the world. As it happened several times in the history of the Western representation of Africa and African cultures, secret fears and explicit aspirations are projected in the image of Africa that is commercialized. As emphasized by Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin, within this context "images of people in the postcolony serve as interfaces for an oscillation of perspective, from one end to the other of the 'amazing difference': from alterity, to shared identity, and back again" (2002: 6). The representation thus created becomes a revelatory mirror of "European-American" speculations about Africa rather than a naturalistic portray of the reality of the phenomenon observed (cf. Mudimbe 1988 and 1994).

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[103] As Jonathan Haynes has interestingly commented, at the same time "decontextualization is exactly what festival programmers are afraid Nollywood films can't survive" (2011). This is thus the reason why Nollywood film screenings are always attached to round-table discussions about the video phenomenon and the screening of Western-produced documentaries on Nollywood. While I agree with this remark, I equally think that the fact of moving videos from their original consumption environment (that of popular culture networks of circulation) to the festival arena constitutes an act of radical decontextualization that transforms Nollywood (probably more as phenomenon than in the specificity and individuality of each video release) into an "exotic" piece of art.

As one can easily imagine, Nigerian film festivals represent the industry in a different way, which, however, is probably as partial as the one proposed by international retrospectives. In most cases, Nigerian film festivals tend to focus on the celebration of the video industry's achievements, while keeping some of the problems that affect it hidden behind the patina of movie stars' glamorous life.[104] In this perspective, the presumed similarities between Nollywood and Hollywood are underlined and emphasized, while the differences are eventually marginalized. These festivals affirm the positivity of the Nollywood phenomenon, and often function as self-assertive ceremonies in which the tale of the incredible trajectory of Nollywood's success is rehearsed for the benefit of local media and press. These festivals also have a pivotal role in the life of the star system. In fact, in most cases their programs marginalize film screenings in order to give a central position to award ceremonies and stars' parades.
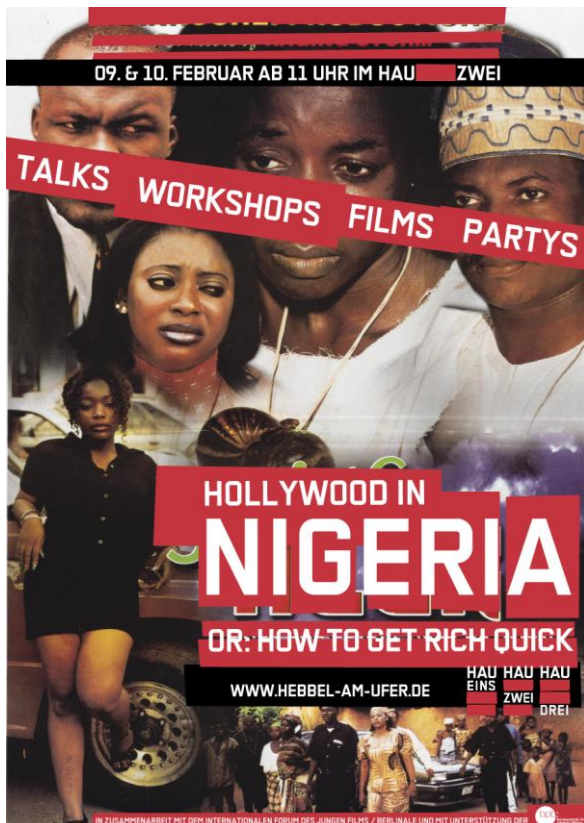


VII:  Nollywood retrospective (Berlinale 2004)
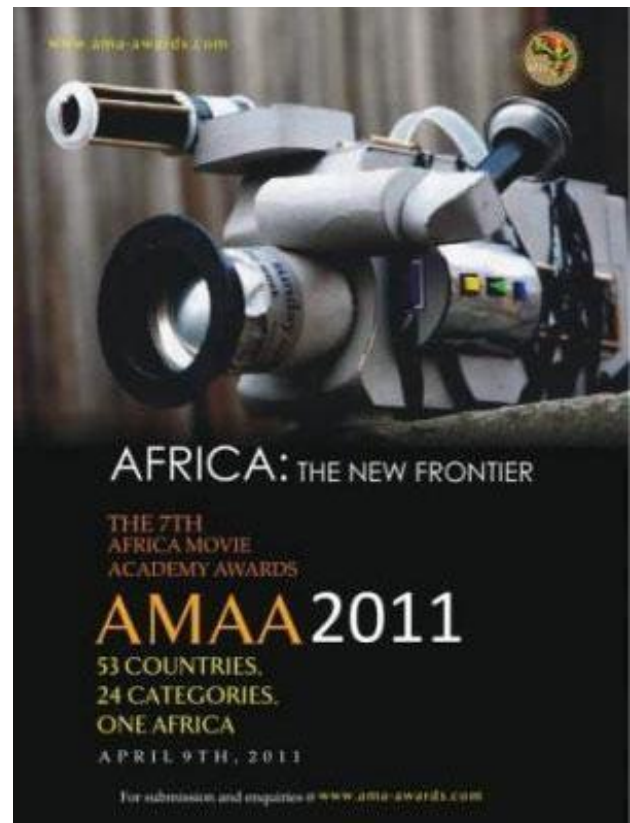


VIII:  poster of the AMAA 2011

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[104] The BOBTV festival, organized by Amaka Igwe, can be considered as an exception. Since its first edition, this festival gave itself as a focus the best of television production, underlining the distance still existing between Nollywood and other instances of cinema. At the same time, the festival always organizes, parallel to the screenings, numerous workshops and round tables to identify the existing problems of the video industry and to try to offer professional solutions to them.

Amongst the numerous festivals that emerged in the past few years, the one that became the most successful is the AMAA, which, as I mentioned earlier, is modeled after the American Oscars (image VIII). One of the main reasons for its success probably is precisely its capacity of embodying the "American dream" that traverses much of Nigerian popular culture, the dream of being for Africa what the United States is for the world. While in the first few editions AMAA remained a mainly Nigerian and Nollywood-centered affair, in the past three to four years it managed to achieve a Pan-African popularity. In this sense it interestingly exemplifies the distance that separates Nigerian festivals from international retrospectives on Nollywood. AMAA in fact expresses a precise statement: African cinema and African popular culture do not need Western legitimization to access global cinema and international audiences.[105] As the concern that the international representation of Nollywood generated amongst the industry's practitioners demonstrates (see below), however, this statement is still more a declaration of intents than an actual reality. But it interestingly points toward the nodal issue this chapter is looking at: the Western-generated discourse on African popular culture has no chance to go unchallenged.

### Postcolonial exotic and the construction of a Nigerian "junkspace" modernity

What are the effects of the international representation of Nollywood on the way the industry is globally received and on the way the video phenomenon is evolving? To answer these questions it might be useful to look at one of the most extreme and complex examples of decontextualization of the Nollywood phenomenon: Peiter Hugo's photographic exhibition "Nollywood" (Hugo 2009 – see images IX and X). This collection of photographs by the highly successful and very controversial South African photographer of the award-winning series *The Hyena and Other Men* (Hugo 2007), is in fact a very interesting case to look at to interpret the complex game of reflection and refraction the international discourse on Nollywood is based upon.

As Hugo has often repeated, his photographs do not have the intention of representing their object according to naturalistic conventions. Hugo in fact considers the possibility of realism in photography as a mere illusion:

> I have a deep suspicion of photography, to the point where I do sometimes think it
> cannot accurately portray anything, really. And, I particularly distrust portrait

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[105] An interesting example of this dynamic is the Congolese film *Viva Riva* (2010), which won numerous awards during its first international release at the AMAA 2011, and then went on to achieve global theatrical distribution.

photography. I mean, do you honestly think a portrait can tell you anything about the subject? And, even if it did, would you trust what it had to say? (Hugo quoted in O'Hagan 2008).

For this reason, Hugo's work entertains a controversial relation with the idea of documentary photography itself. As Stacy Hardy emphasized, Hugo's portraits make the distinction between "representation (of something real)" and "simulation (with no secure reference to reality)" blurred, to the point that "the normal relation between sign and referent [is] radically remixed" and we lose "the connection, once presumed to exist, between sign or image and the reality to which both were thought to refer" (2009: 32). According to this interpretation, what is represented in the "Nollywood" exhibition is not the Nigerian video industry, but a constructed image that is supposed to challenge and mirror Western imagery about African present-day reality. This imagery is conditioned by media's negative portrayal of the continent, a portrayal in which violence, poverty and wilderness are mixed together in what creates the illusion of an African "pathology of spectrality and transience" (Hardy 2009: 31). Hugo plays with the recurring features of this imagery. He makes them real through the use of a plainly documentarian photographic technique, and then throws them straight into the audience's face in an attempt to challenge the audience's own stereotypes and preconception about Africa and contemporary African cultures.

> Through this double play Hugo assaults divisions – white vs black, dominant vs submissive, author vs authority, *Alien* vs *Predator*, Ekwensu vs God – simultaneously embracing the worst stereotypes and snarling 'fuck you' at all of them. The result is […] not so much a deconstruction as a calculated destruction of representation itself (Hardy 2009: 31).

As this brief analysis suggests, Hugo's attempt is interesting and complex, but unfortunately his sophisticate deconstruction of Western imageries passes often radically unnoticed, and the photographs end up being considered as an example of that same imagery they are supposed to criticize. In most of the cases, in fact, the exhibition is taken as a realistic representation of Nollywood. This misunderstanding is induced by at least two factors. On the one hand, the photographs are often exhibited on the occasion of some festival retrospective on Nollywood, giving the audience the idea that they are a natural extension of the round tables and documentary films programmed during the festival. On the other hand, the exhibition catalogue seems to have a

rather documentarian orientation, as exemplified by the publication of two essays on the video industry in the introductory pages of the catalogue itself (Abani 2009; Saro-Wiwa 2009).[106] The presence and the contents of these essays inevitably contradicts Hugo's claim of producing an anti-realistic portrait of Nollywood.



IX : Photo no.12 (Hugo 2009)



X: Photo n. 32 (Hugo 2009)

The result of this articulate dynamic is that, on one side, people that have no other knowledge of Nollywood than the one proposed by the exhibition tend to take Hugo's images as a likely representation of the video industry, while those that know the industry and are eventually avid videos' consumers, feel outraged by Hugo's representation. This is testified by some of the reaction Hugo's exhibition provoked. After viewing the exhibition in a South African gallery, Neelika Jayawardane wrote on a blog article:

> it's too obvious to say that Hugo's machete-wielding dwarves, suited men porting the
> innards of freshly slaughtered cows, and melon-breasted women offering their services
> to devil-masked men are hardly representative of whatever we might imagine as
> 'African fantasy' on film […] But I wonder what views of African popular cinema

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[106] Unfortunately, the essays are themselves problematic and contain misinformation on the industry which do not help in producing a more precise representation of the video phenomenon. In Abani's article for instance, Bond Emeruwa is considered to be the producer of *Living in Bondage* (2009: 13), a mistake that all Nollywood viewers would immediately remark (the producer is in fact Kenneth Nnebue).

Capetonian Gallery Lot-lizards carry away, with only Pieter Hugo to inform them? (2010).

In another blog article, Isaac Anyaogo commented on the exhibition in more bitter terms:

Mr. Hugo's collection of photographs about Nollywood evidences a conclusion based on a stereotype. It is an intelligent effort to creatively manage ignorance. […] The settings of the collection are dreary, bland or outright creepy. For emotion, there is dread and an uncanny melancholy. They seem to choke you as they gasp for air to breath. The subjects fly out at your face, you lock eyes with them and you will be the first to avert a gaze. In Nollywood films, we see palatial mansions, choice cars and pleasing sights. Nollywood destroyed the myth that Africans still lived on trees (2010).

However, beyond this intricate debate, the content of Hugo's exhibition can suggest some interesting points for the analysis proposed here. If we take the exhibition for what Hugo supposedly wanted it to be (that is, an ironic and excessive mirror of Western imagery about Nollywood and contemporary Africa), we can then use these photographs to discuss precisely the main features of this same imagery. Hugo's images, in fact, push to an extreme level some of the discursive subtexts we observed in both the documentaries and the retrospectives on Nollywood.

What could be considered as the ordering concept behind much of the discursive production analyzed in this chapter, and behind most of Hugo's photographs, is that of the *ruin*. The video industry is portrayed as the triumph of informality and of recycling, the result of the unexpected recombination of the pieces and debris left aside by failed modernization processes. In Hugo's pictures, as in most documentaries on Nollywood, Nigerian protagonists move in a world of collapsed infrastructures, to which they creatively react. In Hugo's representation this allegory goes so far as portraying the Nollywood actors (and the idea of Africa they represent) as zombies that emerge from a land of death to stare at the eyes of their ancient and present oppressors (the colonizers and the present-day postcolonial authorities). In this perspective Lagos, and the video industry that represents its glamorous cultural expression, are seen as the metaphor of the postcolonial ruin, something that is, at the same time, an idealized and haunting image of European past (the ruins of the Empire) and the projection of its potential future (the future collapse of the European project of modernity brought about by the economic crisis and the migrants' "invasion").

It is important to underline here that the European fascination for *ruins* is centuries-old. As numerous scholars have underlined (cf. Dillon 2011; Hell and Schönle 2010), ruins have in fact played a powerful role in the history of Western arts since Romanticism, and they are today the object of numerous contemporary artists' interest. As Brian Dillon has suggested,

[on the one hand] the ruin appears to point to a deep and vanished past whose relics merely haunt the present, reminding us of such airy and perennial themes as the hubris of Man and the weight of History. On the other, ruins seem to traffic with the modern, and with the future, in ironic and devious ways.[…] Ruins seem, in fact, intrinsic to the projects of modernity and, later, Modernism (2010).

It is within this context that we can read the subtext of the discursive practices I analyzed in this chapter. They construct Lagos and Nollywood as aesthetic objects that can fit within the contemporary Western fascination for the limits and fractures of the modernization process (cf. Amselle 2005). This kind of fascination is well described by Rem Koolhaas' definition of "junkspace" in conjunction with his early conceptualization of Lagos as the "city of the future".[107] Junkspace, according to Koolhaas, is the main figure of the contemporary age:

if space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, Junk-Space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet. The built […] product of modernization is not modern architecture but Junkspace. Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout (2002a: 175).

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[107] In the documentary *Lagos/Koolhaas* (2002), the Dutch architect says: "Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather, we may be catching up with Lagos . . .". According to this early analysis made by Koolhaas, Lagos represents the model of the post-modern city, a model toward which all cities in the world are inevitably going. In this city people have reinvented their life upon the ruins of the state-directed project of modernization and informality is the ruling principle of the city's organization (for a critique of this representation of Lagos see Fourchard 2011). As the same documentary shows, however, later in his career and after having spent more time in Lagos over a long term period, Koolhaas modified his ideas about the Nigerian megacity. Toward the end of the film he says: "the people of Lagos are interested in keeping the myth of Lagos alive, the myth of them being the only people able to survive it. But the reality of facts is that Lagos is changing and it might become a city much more normal than it used to be, a city like many others in the world".

While, according to Koolhaas, junkspace is visible and evident in contemporary Western architecture, its full realization is in cities like Lagos where, beyond the "gigantic rubbish dump" that parallel "entire roads", an intensively organized life takes place (Koolhaas 2002b: 175). This life, in Koolhaas' eyes, is structured around and in relation with the junkspace that failed modernization processes have left behind. Lagos (and the Nollywood industry, that interests us more closely) becomes in this perspective a laboratory for the construction of what we might call a "junkspace modernity", that is, a modernity never achieved, probably always dreamed of, and symbolized by the constant interconnection between failure and efficiency that is often used to portray it.

Once again, the objective of this analysis is not to evaluate if Koolhaas' idea of Lagos (and, together with it, the postmodern fascination for the postcolonial ruin) represents and portrays the Nigerian reality appropriately. Lagos might well be the metaphor of global cities' future, and Nollywood's guerrilla filmmaking the avant-garde of future developments in filmmaking worldwide. The issue here is that such a representation does not and cannot take into account the way Nigerian themselves dream about their future.[108] Even if in everyday reality Lagos and Nollywood might propose implicitly a different model of organizing a city and a film industry, the dream they are built upon is the achievement of those processes of modernization that the Structural-Adjustment-era has frozen. The way Lagos is transforming its urban organization and infrastructures since the election of Babatunde Raji Fashola as Lagos State Governor and the way Nollywood is developing over the past few years (see chapter three) demonstrate this point. As James Ferguson has emphasized,

> the application of a language of alternative modernities to the most impoverished
> regions of the globe risks becoming a way of avoiding talking about the non-serialized,
> de-temporalized political economic statuses of our time, and thus, evading the question
> of a rapidly worsening global inequality and its consequences (2006: 192).

A postcolonial-exotic-perspective on the video industry, such as the one that emerges as subtext of the documentaries and festivals discussed in this chapter, tends to idealize and reify the actual

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[108] As Peter Geschiere, Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels argue in their introduction to the edited collection *Reading in Modernity in Africa*, "many Africans might not be content with being placed in such a specific trajectory [that of the "alternative modernities", *nda*] and would prefer admission to the same modern life that brought so much prosperity to the West" (2008: 2).

economic and social reality from which the industry itself has emerged. By doing this, it inevitably opposes the transformations that this same reality might be in the process of achieving. A perspective of this kind thus hides the fluidity and complexity of the reality observed, modelling it as in a mirror-like reflection, along the shape of Eurocentric ideas of the African reality.

### *Discursive motion and the video industry's reactions*

Analyzing the interactions between Bollywood and the international audience, Kaushik Bhaumik writes that "the greatest influence that 'Bollywood' in world cinema has had, is on Bombay cinema itself. Entry into the club of world cinema has reconfigured the economic framework of the industry" (2006: 197). This interpretation can be applied also to the Nollywood case. The entry of Nollywood into the global circuit of film festivals and its success with diasporic audiences around the world has had an important effect in pushing part of the industry toward new economic and marketing strategies. Thus the impact of the representation of Nollywood on the development of Nollywood itself has become a major factor to consider when analyzing the transformations that the industry has undertaken in recent years. This impact can be schematized in at least two major tendencies, one concerning the Nollywood practitioners based in Nigeria and another one concerning Nigerian artists in the diaspora.

As I mentioned previously, the international representation of Nollywood has provoked numerous reactions amongst industry's practitioners in Nigeria. For directors, actors and producers that are considered and consider themselves as movie stars, it was hard to accept being treated as mere curiosities in the global cinema arena. As Kunle Afolayan has underlined, giving a voice to a widespread sentiment amongst industry's practitioners,

> if they are celebrating the fact that Nigeria has managed to find its space in the history of cinema creating its own way of doing it, then it's cool! But if they are trying to say that this is the best thing that could happen for a cinema industry in Africa, then I think they are wrong (Afolayan 2010).

In relation to this issue, many directors and producers have started, over the past few years, to be particularly concerned about the representation of their work in the international arena. Since 2004/2005 a growing number of Nigerian newspaper articles started investigating the way Nollywood was represented in international film festivals. In most cases the reports were bitterly

disappointed: either there was no trace of Nollywood films in the program or, if Nollywood was there, it was, as I underlined earlier, ghettoized in some marginal thematic retrospective. In the following years, each time larger Nigerian delegations attended international festivals such as the Berlinale (cf. Ayorinde 2004a; 2005; Iwenjora 2005) and the Cannes Film Festival (cf. Ayorinde 2004b; Husseini 2006; Oladunjoye 2005), with the explicit aim of understanding what the Nigerian industry was missing in order to have access to the global audience. This happened at a time in which, as I emphasized in the third chapter, the internal film market was imploding because of the excess of informality of the video economy, and an increasing number of producers were looking at the international market as the only viable economic solution to the production crisis. As Lancelot Imasuen well summarizes in an interview he gave just after attending an international film festival in Holland, the feeling Nigerian filmmakers got from their international exposure has been hard to digest.

> It would take me days – he said to the journalist that was interviewing him – to tell you what we learned technically and production wise. I just went into our hotel room and started weeping that we have been joking. It's like a dancer that thinks he is the best, who gets out and sees far better dancers everywhere (Iwenjora 2003a)

The acquired awareness of the industry's main weaknesses, however, had the effect of giving the industry a boost in accelerating the acquisition of new technologies, new technical skills, and better narrative and aesthetic values. The objective of this effort is, as Femi Odugbemi clearly emphasized, to take Nigerian cinema out of the ghetto in which the international discourse has positioned it:

> I believe that film language is a global language, you can make a silent film and be understood in Hong Kong if the language that is used is the right one… I think we should not make Nigerian films, but films in Nigeria! We have to make films that travel across borders, and to do that you have to make films in a language that people can relate with […] we should not insist on Nollywood being judged on its own, it would mean to be judged on a lower standard of quality and ability and I do not accept that. I think that every Nigerian director has the potential to do a film that has international standards, that can win in international festivals and so on… (Odugbemi 2010).

The reaction that the international representation of Nollywood provoked in Nigeria has been complemented by the concern this same discourse generated amongst Nigerian artists in the diaspora. Many of them, in fact, felt directly implicated by the way the Nigerian video industry has been portrayed. If Nollywood, as a brand representing a positive and successful story, was making them proud of being Nigerian, the international way of portraying the industry became progressively a reason for discomfort. Wale Ojo, a Nigerian actor and musician based in London, well summarized this feeling:

> I worked for long time as an actor and everywhere I go, from South Africa to Los Angeles, people tell me "Hey man, Nigerians are really talented, good actors… what the fuck is going on with the movies though?!" And I look around myself and I say: "I have no idea!"… and everywhere I go they keep on telling me the same thing, so I told myself: "You know what? I'm going to do something about it! (Ojo 2010)

Like Wale Ojo, many Nigerian film professionals in the diaspora have been exposed to similar reactions and decided to get involved in the video industry to bring back to Nigeria the international experiences acquired throughout their careers. The Hollywood actor Hakeem Kae-Kazim, the French-based Nigerian fashion designer Andy Amadi Okoroafor, and the UK-based theatre and television actor Razaaq Adoti all represent examples of this trend (cf. Ajiboye 2011; Ilevbare 2008; Okusami 2010). However the integration of these characters and of their experiences within the Nollywood arena has not been as simple as one might think. On the one hand, the video industry is in fact a more structured and rigid environment than what it is often believed and Nigerian marketers and producers in some cases did not respond enthusiastically to the homecoming of Nigerian expatriates. On the other hand, the international experiences that the returning Nigerians accumulated in their careers did not easily match with the everyday reality of the Nigerian video industry. I will further discuss this topic in the third section of the thesis. However, Wale Ojo's experience can significantly illustrate this issue:

> in Nigeria I was in a Nollywood film (*Six demons*)… it was a disaster! It was terrible! I showed it to a friend of mine in Denmark and he said it was the worst film he had ever seen… I did it because the press in Nigeria, when I went back there, told me: "You know, you are from London, you don't know what is going on in Nigeria, you are very elitist, and blablabla, and once you leave here you go back to London and you have a

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good life and blablabla…" I said: "Fine! Give me a movie, I'll show you that I'm not arrogant and whatever". So they said: "Work with this guy" and they introduced me to Teco Benson. And even if I have to say that Teco was a good director, he was driven by a demand, something like: "I have this kind of budget, these days to shot, and this is it!", and these are not the conditions for the best kind of work… but it was very interesting to work from the inside, to work with actors there… look there is so much talent there, but things are not done right, you know? (Ojo 2010)

The gap existing between the experiences coming from the diaspora and those developed in Nigeria produced important effects on the development of the video industry that I will better explore in the next section.

It is however important to underline that the overall effect of the international representation of Nollywood on both local and diasporic film practitioners has been one of acceleration. As the two chapters that compose this section have underlined, in fact, the videos' motion has been faster within the realm of discourse than within the realm of production. Nollywood's story of success has circulated and evolved more quickly than the industry itself, and the Nigerian video industry has become "Nollywood" before realizing what this could actually mean. The defining features of the Nigerian video industry and its peculiar aesthetics and narratives have had a problematic impact within the global cinema arena. Some people might argue that this clash has been provoked by the fact that, according to many, Nollywood proposes a radically different approach to filmmaking. Other would say that Nollywood was simply not yet ready for international cinematic exposure; it was not even aiming at it. However, as this section has shown, whatever the truth might be, the impact of the discursive constructions that the circulation of videos have generated has provoked an acceleration in the transformations that the video industry is experiencing. This acceleration will probably modify the way Nollywood is defined in both the local and global arena in the years to come.

SECTION III

GLOBAL NOLLYWOOD

*Nigerian videos' openness and videos' diasporic transformations*

**Introduction**

As I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, during the early days of my PhD research I met a Nigerian couple based in Turin, Rose Okoh and Vincent Omoigui, who created a video production company in Italy in the mid-2000s. Their friendship guided the early steps of my research and the long discussions we had in the courtyard of their home suggested to me many of the ideas that I later developed in this dissertation. This section is the one that is most indebted to this friendship. The two chapters that compose it are in fact tentative answers to some of the questions provoked by the discussions I had with Rose and Vincent over the past three years.

As I will discuss in chapter seven, after a few autonomous production experiences, Vincent and Rose started a collaboration with two Italian young people: Simone Sandretti, a film director, and

Marco Perugini, a sound and light technician. During the discussions that I had with both Vincent and Simone, the challenges connected to their collaboration became a recurrent topic. While Simone's previous experiences as a filmmaker were mainly related to documentary film and video installation, Vincent's main experiences of cinema, both as a member of the audience and as a director, were related principally to Nollywood. As both of them explicitly told me in numerous occasions, their ideas of cinema were profoundly different and each session of shooting and editing that they had together was an experience of complex and delicate intercultural dialogue. The solution that the duo reached after endless discussions is a kind of in-between film language, a hybrid style that has the intention to target both Italian and Nigerian audiences.

I will discuss in chapter seven the specificity of the formula with which Vincent and Simone experimented. Here it is relevant to underline that, to make their work progress, both directors had to constantly question their deep assumptions about the rules of film language and the solutions that have to be taken to address a specific audience. However, on numerous occasions Vincent expressed a specific concern about the fact that Simone's interventions would make their videos become unrecognizable for Nollywood audiences. This concern intrigued me, and I often discussed it with Vincent, trying to understand what, in his opinion, would be the film language that Nollywood audiences would better recognize. The more we advanced in this kind of discussions, the more I became aware of the fact that one of the reasons behind Nollywood's transnational and pan-African popular success was exactly this specific, and often underestimated, film language. What Vincent was afraid of losing, because of his collaboration with Simone, was the adherence to a language code that Nollywood audiences share and recognize. This issue became central for me, as I was questioning myself about the reasons for Nollywood's local and transnational success. What are, I started asking myself insistently, the narrative structure, the aesthetic specificities and the original "addressivity" that characterize Nigerian videos' film language? How can we define them? And what is the role that this specific code has had in making Nollywood able to circulate both locally and transnationally?

The first chapter of this section deals with these questions. My focus, though, is not, as it might seem, on audience's reception, but on the films and on the specificity of their language. My interest is in understanding whether there is anything peculiar to Nigerian videos' film language that makes these films able to cross borders easily, something that goes beyond the specific economic patterns, analyzed in section one, that define the videos' production and transnational circulation. As I will argue in this chapter by analyzing a corpus of early Nigerian videos, Nigerian videos' film language is positioned at the cross-road between melodrama and realism. Videos are characterized by a

specific genre's openness that gives them a particular "addressivity", an attribute that makes them able to appeal to audiences situated both within and beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. As Karin Barber underlined, when looking at specific cultural texts or media we need to ask ourselves "why, at a certain time and place, we find *these* textual forms and not others; and how specific textual forms participate in constituting specific historical forms of consciousness" (2007: 41). As I will underline in this chapter, the early Nigerian videos that I analyze in this chapter, and which inspired much of the following production, are the result of a specific historical environment during which post-independence modernization projects showed their limits and their potential failure. Nigerian videos thus express a certain relationship to modernity which informs their aesthetics and narratives and which makes them "speak" the reality of their time.

Vincent's concern about the collaboration with Simone opened up the space for another set of questions. If in fact the collaboration between Simone and Vincent was moving their videos away from the mainstream Nollywood's film language, at the same time it was producing something new. Observing Simone's and Vincent's work and watching their videos, I realized that the transposition of Nollywood's film language and production strategies in the diaspora had generated important transformations in the Nollywood narrative formula Vincent was referring to in our discussions. I became aware that Vincent's and Rose's production company in Turin was not an isolate case. Numerous Nigerian video production companies, directly inspired by the Nollywood model, had emerged all over Europe since the end of the 1990s. I thus decided to analyze them comparatively to understand how the Nigerian video industry's main characteristics can transform when production takes place in the diaspora. I realized that something like a "Nollywood abroad" phenomenon had emerged and I became curious to understand what was its specificity vis-à-vis the "Nigerian" Nollywood.

The production ventures that emerged in the diaspora all share a particular condition of in-betwenness. They refer to Nollywood as a model, but they are situated at the margin of it. Thus they have to constantly experiment with new strategies that can place them in a better position in relation to either the Nigerian or the European film market. Each production company that I have analyzed adopted a different solution. In some cases the mainstream Nollywood formula has been accepted and reproduced in order to compete on the video market in Nigeria. In other cases the film language has been transformed in order to access different shares of the audience, both locally and transnationally. As I have mentioned in the third chapter, some of the films that were produced in the diaspora managed to access theatrical distribution, both in Nigeria and in Western countries. The film language transformations that they have introduced parallel those that have appeared

within Nollywood since the re-introduction of theatre halls in the country. They both are likely to have an impact on Nollywood mainstream's aesthetics and narratives in the years to come.

CHAPTER VI

*The openness of Nigerian video genres: Melodrama, realism and the creation of a pan-African public*

In the article he wrote for the special issue of *Film International* dedicated to the Nigerian video industry, the American anthropologist John McCall described Nollywood as one of the few popular discourses that, in African recent history, can rightly be labeled as pan-African (2007). Since the early twentieth century numerous artistic and political movements considered pan-Africanism, and the shared conception of "African identity" that would come with it, as the prerequisites for the achievement of the cultural and political independence of the continent. The attempts that these movements produced remained in most cases unaccomplished, and diverging political, economic, ethnic and religious interests prevailed over the ideal of unity. However, what a strong ideological and intellectual commitment did not manage to achieve, seems today to be in the process of happening as the result of an autonomous and spontaneous dynamic. The pan-Africanism that is emerging from the continental circulation and consumption of Nigerian videos may not be, as McCall underlines, "the monolithic ideology that pan-Africanists envisioned", but it is undeniably participating to the creation of a "continent-wide popular discourse about what it means to be African" (2007: 94).

The forms and contents that this discourse has assumed derive from the very specificity of its genealogy. This is in fact a pan-African discourse whose roots are based on a series of social and historical factors that have emerged in the past twenty years, such as the technological transformations that revolutionized African infrastructures of communication; the intense processes of urbanization that traversed most African countries; the economic crisis that hit sub-Saharan Africa since the mid-1980s; the tremendous demographic growth and the consequential increase of the number of youth on the average African population. Nigerian videos emerged from these dynamics and created a formula that made videos able to "speak" these transformations, to narrate them giving them a format, a specific language and a recognizable look. With some degree of simplification, we can say that Nigerian videos incarnate a specific era of African social and cultural history, and this might well be the main reason for their continental success. But even if this sentence may be true, it keeps our analysis to a superficial level, and thus needs to be challenged by a number of more precise questions. What are the elements that made Nigerian videos travel throughout the continent? How are they organized together? What narrative and aesthetic language do they speak and how did they manage to address a pan-African public?

My intention in this chapter is to deal with these complex issues by focusing on the videos' specific film language. While, as I will discuss in the first section of this text, there are a number of elements in the videos' contents that participated importantly in building their transnational success, my opinion is that Nollywood videos' film language has had a pivotal role in this dynamic. "The addressivity of texts – their ways of 'turning to' an audience – not only reveals cultural assumptions about how people exist together in society, but also plays a part in constituting audiences as particular kinds of collectivity" (Barber 2007: 202). As Benedict Anderson (1983) has demonstrated, this dynamic has played an important role in nation-building processes worldwide. The emergence of print capitalism and the addressivity of the texts it produced have in fact played a pivotal role in transforming dispersed audiences into national "publics". However, as Karin Barber underlines, these dynamics have worked differently in different geographic contexts. In Nigeria for instance, the emergence of new forms of literature, oral culture and media production during both the colonial and the post-colonial time, generated transversal rather than national publics. As Barber puts it,

> these new imagined constituencies did not necessarily coincide with the nation. In the formative years of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, externally defined nations of Africa, emergent classes of literati experimented with new genres of print capitalism in order to convene shifting publics, whose boundaries seemed to shrink and expand from moment to moment, sometimes consolidating ethnic linguistic communities far smaller than the national entity, at other times bypassing the nation to convoke a pan-African, black, or pan-human audience (2007: 202).

When we analyze the pan-African circulation of Nigerian videos, this debate becomes particularly relevant. We can in fact interpret Nigerian videos as a medium that, by way of its specific film language, addressed audiences that do not coincide with the boundaries of the post-colonial nation-state. To develop such a kind of addressivity, Nigerian videos' film language incorporated elements coming from an extremely large spectrum of narrative experiences. As much academic literature has demonstrated, a high degree of heterogeneity and intertextuality characterizes most forms of popular culture around the African continent and elsewhere (cf. Barber 1987 and 1997; Cohen and Toninato 2009). Nigerian videos are not an exception within this context, and while they surely introduced a number of original narrative and aesthetic elements, they also internalized several aspects coming from preexisting forms of local and transnational popular culture. As Karin Barber

emphasized, "new modes of addressing audiences were not established overnight, and they did not wholly displace other, longer-established conceptions of audience. *Different kinds of addressivity cohabited*" (Barber 2007: 202 – italics added).

Within this context, my focus is on two specific narrative modes: melodrama and realism. By making these diverging modes come together, Nigerian videos' film language developed a particular kind of textual and generic openness, whose analysis and definition constitutes one of the main foci of this chapter. Before entering the core of this analysis and investigating the nature of melodrama and realism within the context of Nigerian video production, it is important to give an account of the theoretical attempts that have been produced to analyze Nigerian videos transnational circulation. The first section of this chapter is thus dedicated to this task, while the following ones will develop the arguments that I have anticipated above.

### *"Phenomenological proximity" and "family resemblance"*

As I have already emphasized throughout this dissertation, evidences of Nigerian videos' success with African audiences all over the continent have been provided by numerous academic and journalistic articles (Abdoulaye 2005; Baku Fuita and Bwiti Lumisa 2005; Becker, forthcoming; Boheme, forthcoming; Dipio 2008; Katsuva 2003; Krings 2010b; Muchimba 2004; Ondego 2005; Pype, forthcoming). Most of them recognize the fact that, when they appeared in the early 1990s, Nigerian videos filled a consistent gap within the landscape of Nigerian and African popular entertainment.[109] In most sub-Saharan African countries, independently-produced audiovisual contents (that is, not conditioned by the governmental propaganda) produced locally and targeting popular audiences were almost nonexistent. This is surely an important factor to consider when looking at the fast and successful dissemination of Nigerian videos in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Namibia and Zambia. Furthermore, within this context, racial proximity and solidarity also played an important role. Videos were in fact the first "Black" and African entertainment product that was able to compete

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[109] It must be acknowledged that the tremendous success of Nigerian video films also created some problem to local emerging popular culture industries such as the local video industry in Ghana (cf. Aveh 2010) and the industry of television drama production in the Democratic Republic of Congo (cf. Baku Fuita and Bwiti Lumisa 2005; Pype, forthcoming). According to some interpreters, the video industry reproduced a Hollywood-kind of hegemony on sub-Saharan African local markets, which in some cases generated reactions of cultural resistance and the final rejection of Nigerian videos' circulation (cf. *The Economist* 2010; Lobato 2012: chapter 4).

with foreign "White" media contents, whose overwhelming presence on African screens had participated in creating various forms of cultural alienation. However, while these factors have been incontestably important in generating videos' continental success, in my opinion they should not be considered as the only reason for audiences' enthusiasm vis-à-vis these cultural products.

Beyond acknowledging Nollywood's transnational circulation, some of the articles I mentioned above also provide tentative analysis of the reasons for videos' success. The hypothesis proposed are numerous. They go from the straightforward assumption that generic African audiences are attracted by Nollywood videos in relation to their "cultural proximity" (Katsuva 2003; see also Straubhaar 1991), to more elaborate discussions of the specific kind of moral and religious values that videos assert and reinforce (Abdoulaye 2005; Dipio 2008; Pype, forthcoming). These explanations, however, leave a number of questions open.

As Antonio La Pastina and Joseph Straubhaar have argued (2005), while cultural proximity is often an influential factor in audiences' choices, it is hardly an unfailing principle. As Brian Larkin has demonstrated (1997), for instance, in some cases the perceived cultural proximity might differ from the actual geographical vicinity. Bollywood films have been extremely successful in northern Nigeria all over the second half of the twentieth century, and they continue to be so even after the birth and growth of the southern Nigerian video industry. The narrative and aesthetic structure and the pattern of moral values upon which Indian films are constructed seem to resonate profoundly with northern Nigerian audiences. They incarnate a model of modernity that is "parallel" to the one proposed by western popular culture and by southern Nigerian videos, a model that northern Nigerian audiences consider as more proximate.

Furthermore, if audiences can find the proximate in the geographically remote, they can as well explicitly search for the culturally remote as a strategy to locate themselves in relation/opposition to the local environment. James Ferguson's example about cultural consumption habits amongst Zambian mine workers is relevant here. According to his analysis, in some cases we can read "cosmopolitan" cultural consumption preferences not so much as symbols of global cultural homogenization and Western hegemony, but rather as ways of "seeking worldliness at home" (1999: 212). Moradewun Adejunmobi raises a similar point in a recent article about Nollywood's transnational circulation. As she argues, audiences might

> have an appreciation or preference for texts marked as foreign in content and style in order to experience displacement vicariously, in order to engage with practices seen as desirable but not yet applicable to the local environment, in order to have temporary

access to, while distancing oneself from practices seen as not desirable for the local environment (2010: 110).

As these examples show, then, the reasons behind audience's preferences are not transparent and the factors that explain Nollywood videos's pan-African success are not self-evident.

Within this context, the most relevant attempt to explain Nollywood's pan-African circulation is, in my opinion, the one that Moradewun Adejunmobi proposed through the formulation of a theory of "phenomenological proximity". As I discussed above, Straubhaar's concept of "cultural proximity" fails to explain a number of audiences' consumption behaviors. To overcome these limits Adejunmobi suggests we move our focus of analysis from the sphere of the culturally significant to that of the experientially relevant. In fact, while they might not express shared cultural values, Nollywood videos refer to a field of experiences that is common to audiences throughout the continent. In Adejunmobi's opinion

> these films travel so well across state and cultural boundaries in Africa because the conflicts they represent and the resolutions they offer are perceived to be experientially proximate for postcolonial subjects. The situations depicted are within the realm of possibility and could occur in the societies where the viewers live even if they have no personal experience of such crises. The stories are true to expectation if not precisely to history and cultural heritage (2010: 111)

Nollywood videos create a platform of discussion about the phenomenological attributes of the postcolony and people throughout the continent, no matter what ethnic group they belong to or what language they speak, tend to be familiar with them. "Africans may not all share the same wedding rituals, but most know what it is like to lead one's life in a place where the output of various technologies is highly unpredictable" (Adejunmobi 2010: 116).

Adejunmobi's point underlines the fact that Nigerian videos incarnate a form of modernity which is phenomenologically proximate to that experienced in most of sub-Saharan African countries. While political, economic and cultural differences among African nations have persisted and even widened over the past few years, there is something about the way processes of modernization have worked in Africa, something about the illusion of their achievement and the reality of their progressive failure, that makes videos relevant to audiences throughout the continent. Using a concept made popular by Ludwig Wittgenstein's work, we might say that there is a "family

resemblance" ([1953] 1986: 32) between the modernity that Nigerian videos incarnate and the one that most sub-Saharan African countries have experienced. This resemblance, which, as Adejunmobi has rightly emphasized, is phenomenological rather than cultural, constitutes the basis of Nollywood's resonance with pan-African audiences.[110]

But while this interpretation sheds some light on the audiences' immediate connection to the videos, it does not tell us much about the videos' intrinsic way of addressing the public. This factor is central for the understanding of the kind of pan-Africanism that Nigerian videos have produced. To be able to understand this aspect of the problem we need to look at the videos' film language and try to define its main features.

### *Approaching the study of Nigerian videos' film language*

Before advancing in the study of Nigerian videos' film language two epistemological problems need to be addressed. The first one has to do with the nature of the conceptual tools that are

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[110] It is important to underline here that the debate on the definition of modernity in Africa is extremely wide and complex (see for instance Comaroff and Comaroff 1993 and 2004; Ferguson 1999; Geschiere 1997; Mbembe 2001; Piot 1999 and 2010). Western theories of modernity generally centered their focus on Europe and North America, considering non-Western regions of the world as mere receivers of the modernization "package deal" produced in the West (Geschiere, Meyer and Pels 2008: 2; see also Eisendstadt 2000; Gaonkar 2001). But, as numerous scholars have underlined, Africa has been inextricably connected to the rest of the world for centuries (Bayart 2000; Cooper 2001) and its position in relation to the emergence of Western modernity is that of a co-author rather than that of a passive receiver. As Geschiere, Meyer and Pels emphasized, if we approach the study of modernity in Africa with a "genealogical" and "relational" perspective, we realize that "modernity developed some of its most characteristic features in the longer history of the relationship between Europe and its others: in the long-distance trade of mercantilism and the original accumulation of capitalism by slave labor in Caribbean agro-industry; in the colonial roots of nationalism in eighteen century Africa; in the emergence of statecraft or 'statistics' from eighteenth century expedition to Siberia or the nineteenth century administration of India; in the orientalist imaginations of despotism against democracy, or tradition against individuality; in the European invention of racism; and so on" (2008: 3). Furthermore, as Barber and Waterman among others have evidenced, "Europe continues unhesitatingly to put down to 'Western influence' everything that fits its own paradigm of modernity" but at the same time "particular developments in European philosophy, such as deconstructive and postmodernist criticism, make partly visible particular, hitherto unperceived, dimensions of certain African cultures". This dynamic suggests "that the 'endogenous' and the 'exogenous' should not be too hastily identified on formal grounds and from an external perspective". This would allow us to recognize how "some of the features [of African modern societies] unhesitatingly identified by social science as typical of Western modernity may be produced by other processes and have other meanings" (Barber and Waterman 1995: 242).

available for such analysis, while the second is related to the material conditions that characterise Nigerian video production.

As many scholars have emphasized, a fundamental epistemological problem traverses most of contemporary intellectual production about the African continent. As Valentin Mudimbe puts it,

> Western interpreters, as well as African analysts, have been using categories and conceptual systems that depend on a Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly "Afrocentric" descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order. What does this mean for the field of African studies? (1994: xv)

In disciplinary fields as different as literature, history, film studies and philosophy, scholars have found themselves dealing with this question.[111] The definition of academic disciplines, as it is utilized today in most universities throughout the world, is in itself the product of a specific and geographically-localized history of ideas. Similarly, concepts such as authorship and genre in literature, materiality and spirituality in philosophy, or authority and power in history and political sciences, just to name few examples, become problematic when applied to the African context without epistemological precaution. Their application seems to be inevitable, but at the same time it cannot but impose an epistemological gesture which risks hiding more relevant local readings and categorizations of the phenomena observed. In what concerns the analysis presented here, the use of concepts such as genre, melodrama and realism is based on the same dilemma. My objective, then, is to question the relevance of these concepts within the Nigerian context and to modify their definition accordingly. However, the objects analyzed here maintain an epistemological resistance which cannot be completely eliminated and whose existence needs to be kept in mind while advancing in this research.

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[111] The most interesting debate in this sense is probably the one that has traversed the field of African philosophy over the past few decades and that relates to the nature and the definition of philosophy in Africa. On the one hand, a number of philosophers have aligned themselves to the ethno-anthropological position that sees African philosophical though as the expression of a "collective mind" whose custodians are traditional priests and elders (cf. Temples 1959; Griaule 1975). On the other hand, a number of philosophers have radically criticized this approach, that they define as "ethno-philosophical" (Hountondji 1983 and 2002; Mudimbe 1982), and have focused their analysis on issues related to the analysis of African epistemologies through researches on African languages (e.g. Gyekye 1987), ethics (e.g. Wiredu 1996) and cultural productions (e.g. Appiah 1992; Mudimbe 1994).

The second problem relates to the specific material conditions that characterize Nigerian video production. In this chapter I will analyze and interpret the aesthetic and narrative strategies that define Nigerian videos. While doing this, it is important to consider that in many cases these strategies are adopted as a matter of necessity rather than as the consequence of a conscious and explicit decision. An example from the interview I conducted with Amaka Igwe, one of the most successful video director and producer within the video industry, might make this point clearer. When I questioned her about the relationship between Nigerian videos' contents and the country's everyday reality, and particularly about the role of witchcraft within this context, she emphasized that in many cases the final narrative structure of a film plot depends more on the specific scriptwriter's working conditions (tight schedule, parallel work activities, degree of literacy) than on his or her actual intention to portray some aspects of the reality.

> If a scriptwriter has a problem with his script, the only way to solve it is to bring God in, either through a spiritualist or something else… for me this is easy writing! You could solve the problem without bringing God into it! [But the fact is that] when the story is too tough, and you cannot solve it convincingly, then you are forced to bring in some magic element to solve the plot… they bring in a spiritualist to easily create a solution to the narrative (Igwe 2010)

As this example shows, then, when analyzing the videos' film language it is important to keep in mind that external observers' speculations can, in some cases, overemphasize aspects whose origin is contingent rather than essential. This does not mean, however, that these contingent aspects are not a relevant part of the analyzed film language. On the contrary, as I will argue below discussing the nature of realism in Nigerian videos, they might have an important role in defining the very specificity of this language. They are in fact one of the ways in which the context of production penetrates and modifies the medium and its content.

*From melodrama to the "melodramatic": "Semantics" and "syntax" of Nigerian videos' film language*

Nigerian videos' narrative structure has usually been defined by scholars as melodramatic.[112] It is important to consider, however, that within the field of film studies the notion of melodrama is particularly disputed (cf. Langford 2005; Singer 2001; Vasudevan 2010). Thus, while a number of attempts to define its specific articulation within the Nigerian context have been produced (e.g. Haynes 2000; Larkin 2008; Adejunmobi 2010), in my opinion an aura of indeterminacy still surrounds the meaning of the term melodrama when applied to Nigerian videos. As Jonathan Haynes has emphasized, "more than most genres, melodrama takes different forms in different times and places, and developing the term in this context would certainly not be to cram the Nigerian videos into some precise preexisting model" (2000: 22-23). This is why, in this and the following two sections of this chapter, I will try to define the specificity of Nigerian video melodramatic attributes and their position in relation to foreign forms of melodrama. I will do this by focusing on a specific corpus of videos that appeared during the first few years of the video phenomenon (1992 – 1998), because  these videos directly participated in setting a series of narrative and aesthetic patterns that were later adopted, at least in their general aspects, by most southern Nigerian productions.

To be able to analyze the specificity of melodramatic attributes within the Nigerian context, it is important to define our theoretical approach to the study of film genre. This is in fact the theoretical framework that grounds this analysis. In his influential article on film genre theory, Rick Altman (1984) made an appeal for the use of a multiform approach to the study of genres. In his opinion, film studies have usually defined genres according to two main diverging schools of thought, based either on semantic or syntactic criteria of analysis. Categorizations of the first kind privileges formal similarities, while analysis of the second kind focuses on deeper structures of meaning. While the first has a stronger consideration for historical differentiations and diachronic transformations, the second inherits from structuralist theory a rather synchronic perspective. The two approaches have different analytical value, which influences the level of inclusivity of the categories that they produce:

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[112] While scholars often use the term melodrama in their descriptions of Nigerian video genres, the term is hardly used by local practitioners and audiences. As Jonathan Haynes has underscored, "melodrama is obviously the literary genre most relevant to the bulk of the videos, but while the word sometimes comes up in adjectival form, it is virtually never used in Nigeria as a generic term to describe the video films" (2000: 22).

while the semantic approach has little explanatory power, it is applicable to a larger number of films. Conversely, the syntactic approach surrenders broad applicability in return for the ability to isolate a genre's specific meaning-bearing structures. This alternative seemingly leaves the genre analyst in a quandary: choose the semantic view and you give up *explanatory power*, choose the syntactic approach and you do without *broad applicability* (Altman 1984: 11)

According to Altman, rather than supporting one of these diverging perspectives disqualifying the other, the best strategy is to conciliate the two methodologies and develop a "semantic/syntactic" approach. This will make genre analysis theoretically more solid, it will allow analysts to "deal critically with differing levels of genericity" and it will permit "a far more accurate description of the numerous inter-generic connections typically suppressed by single-minded approaches" (1984: 12).

The application of this approach to the case of Nigerian videos can help us in addressing two sets of different questions that arise once we try to define the central features of Nollywood videos' film language. On the one hand, in fact, it is important to define the recurring semantic aspects of video films, that is, identifying the most relevant "signs" that constitutes videos' film language and interpreting their meaning. On the other hand, to understand the relevance that this specific film language has in relation to the Nigerian and pan-African audiences, we need to analyze videos' syntax, that is, films' deep structures of meaning and their relationship with Nigerian and African reality and history. The interception of these two spheres of analysis, the formal and the structural, will help us in defining the specificities of the melodramatic in Nigerian videos and its role in the pan-African success of Nollywood.

As I have underlined earlier, melodrama is a disputed category. Its definition has been largely applied so as to risk transforming this word into an empty signifier. Within Hollywood-centered film studies melodrama has moved from an almost derogatory category to a kind of meta-genre which is "at once before, beyond and embracing the system of genre in US cinema as a whole" (Langford 2005: 31).[113] At the same time, according to Ravi Vasudevan, the term has often been

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[113] In Linda Williams's terms "melodrama is the fundamental mode of popular American moving pictures. It is not a specific genre like a western or horror film; it is not a 'deviation' of the classical realist narrative; it cannot be located primarily in women's films, 'weepies', or family melodramas – though it includes them. Rather, melodrama is a peculiarly democratic and American form that seeks dramatic revelation or moral and emotional truths through a dialectic of pathos and action. It is the foundation of the classical Hollywood movie" (1998 : 42).

used, both by Western and non-Western scholars, to differentiate Third World cinema from Hollywood, becoming then a kind of second-class catch-all category within which films as diverse as those that come from India, Egypt or Latin America could fit. The conflict between these two conceptions of the term obliges us to question the definition of this category. As Vasudevan rightly asks, "how do we situate the move to make over American cinema *tout court* into melodrama in relation to the differently calibrated rendering of melodrama in post-colonial situations?"(2010: 31). These two conceptions seem in fact to be almost irreconcilable: one of them considers melodrama as the basis of Hollywood cinema while the other uses melodrama as the defining element of what Hollywood is not.

A way of overcoming this complex debate is to recognize the fact that, as Jonathan Haynes puts it "no one particular culture 'owns' melodrama at this point in history" (2000: 25). While as Peter Brooks (1976) among others have demonstrated, melodrama as a specific theatrical form has a precise history which originates in eighteenth century post-revolutionary France, melodrama as a generic category has become today a popular culture meta-genre, something that informs different narrative genres in literature, theater and cinema all over the world. In this sense Peter Brooks's effort to move from the substantive (melodrama) to the adjective (melodramatic) seems particularly useful. It is in fact by identifying the attributes that define what Brooks calls "the melodramatic imagination" within the context of Nigerian video production that we can move forward in this analysis. Furthermore, moving our focus from the melodrama to the melodramatic, we can make sense of the continuity that characterizes Nigerian videos' film language, a continuity that transversally cuts through most Nigerian video genres, from the family drama, to the comedy, from the epic to the religious videos. In fact, while no one specific Nollywood genre seems to be a melodrama in the full, classical sense of the term, all genres contain within them melodramatic attributes which make them easily recognizable for largely diverse audiences. Within this framework, melodramatic attributes can be identified according to both their formal (semantic) and structural (syntactic) elements.

### *The formal attributes of the melodramatic imagination in Nigerian videos*

The formal attributes of the melodramatic imagination in Nigerian videos tend to confirm the general definitions of melodrama as formulated by numerous scholars in the field (cf. Langford 2005; Singer 2001), and as emphasized by Jonathan Haynes (2000), Brian Larkin (2008) and Moradewun Adejunmobi (2010) among others in relation to Nollywood. As I will show below,

however, the structure of meaning these attributes refer to tends to differ from that of the melodramatic imagination defined by Brooks, which much Western film criticism has adopted. Before looking at the specificities of the Nigerian videos' melodramatic syntax, however, it is necessary to define the formal melodramatic attributes that Nollywood incorporated.

Here it is important to underline that what we define as melodramatic attributes put together elements that come from the incorporation of both transnational narrative models and local forms of popular culture. As Jonathan Haynes puts it, "the claim here is not for any particular pure indigenous tradition of melodrama" or for an unfiltered acceptance of foreign melodramatic models, "but rather for layers of influence and adaptation going back a long way, of which contemporary televised forms are only the most recent" (2000: 23). As I have emphasized above, popular cultural texts are characterized by a high degree of intertextuality and heterogeneity. This is also, according to many, a defining aspect of melodramatic narratives. The encounter of these different forms of narrative openness is, as I will demonstrate below, a fundamental aspect of Nollywood's film language and one of the elements that constituted the specific addressivity of Nigerian videos. Before developing this stream of our analysis, however, we need to clarify what constitutes the melodramatic in Nigerian videos.

A first general attribute that defines the melodramatic imagination in Nigerian videos is what Peter Brooks calls the "logic of the excluded middle" (1976: 18). The narrative is constructed around a system of radical polarizations. Every narrative device is pushed to excess, and transitions from one extreme to the other tend to be rare, if not absent. This system of oppositions can be detected in relation to at least three main aspects: the characters' psychological development, the articulation of the plot's structure, and the interrelation between different narrative elements. In all these cases, the melodramatic imagination erases the possibility of the transition by negating the existence of a "middle" space, and thus accentuating a Manichean logic in order to create a radical moral tension.

The characters' psychology is rarely investigated in depth, thus characters' main psychological features are overstated and, to represent them, actors are required to overdramatize their performances.[114] The evil become devilish, and the good become angelic. In Kenneth Nnebue's *Rituals* (1997), for instance, one of the main character, Chief Pedro, played by the Nigerian star Pete Edochie, is a Nigerian powerful politician and the head of a secret brotherhood. This character

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[114] As discussed by a number of scholars (cf. Barber 2000; Ogundele 2000) over-dramatization in Nigerian videos, and particularly in those produced by the Yoruba section of the industry, is also related to the important theater tradition that existed in Nigeria before the explosion of the video phenomenon.

incarnates popular fantasies about the violent and occult nature of power, and according to the rules of melodramatic imagination, his defining attributes are pushed to their extreme. During the film, for instance, we see him commanding human sacrifices to achieve his political goals (image I). A few scenes later, as if nothing had happened, we see him celebrating his social ascendancy, dancing and spreading dollars on people's head, after receiving an international merit award (image II).[115] Through the extremes of his behavior, this character goes beyond the reality to become an archetype of political violence, a devilish mask which inhabits popular imaginations of postcolonial authorities. A similar narrative operation happens also for the opposite kind of character, the angelic one. In Amaka Igwe's *Violated* (1995), for instance, the character of Tega, the boyfriend of the film's protagonist Peggy, passes through all kind of proofs to show the authenticity of his love for her. In numerous scenes his behavior transforms him into the ideal of a Prince Charming. He tolerates all outrages and supports his girlfriend in all situations, even when she insults him and abandons him without giving any explanation. Like the devilish character, the angelic one becomes an archetype, in this example a man that in his exceptionality can incorporate popular fantasies about the ideal male (as partner, father or/and brother).[116]



| I: *Rituals* : Chief Pedro orders human sacrifices | II: *Rituals*: Chief Pedro celebrates his social ascendancy |

As a consequence of the melodramatic imagination around which they are constructed, most Nigerian videos hardly investigate in psychological terms the characters' transformations during the plot. These transformations, on the contrary, appear in their immediate dramatic consequences.

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[115] Further examples of this kind of characterization are the character of Chris in *Died Wretched* (1998) and the character of Andy in *Living in Bondage* (1992).

[116] Further examples of this kind of characterization are  the character of Andy's wife, Merit, in *Living in Bondage* (1992) and the character of Chris's brother in *Died Wretched* (1998).

According to the same melodramatic principle, the plots often develop in unsystematic ways and play freely with different genres. As it happens in soap operas and telenovelas (cf. Allen 1995) and as it is also common in popular storytelling, videos often develop multiple parallel plots, which are barely connected. This makes the videos have an episodic rather than linear narrative structure, which accommodates audiences that cannot give the text full concentration.[117]

The analysis of Amaka Igwe's *Rattlesnake 1, 2 & 3* (1995, 1995, 1999), one of the most successful films in early Nollywood's history, can provide a good example of the melodramatic attributes I just mentioned. In the first part of the film, Ahanna, the main character, and his brothers are abandoned in the village by their mother, who moves to Lagos with their uncle (her husband's brother), after the death of their father. In this part of the film Ahanna is the victim: he is constantly abused by his uncle, he is defrauded of the part of the heritage that his father left for him and he is obliged to sacrifice his autonomy to take care of the younger brothers (image III). In the second part he moves to Lagos and after discovering that his mum lives with his uncle and is pregnant by him, he becomes an "area boy" (street criminal) and progressively transforms into a violent gangster. Even if we guess that his psychological mutation is related to the discovery of his mother's condition, the evolution of this aspect is left aside in the development of the plot. After a few successful coups, Ahanna and his accomplice, Peter, are arrested during one of their robberies. In the following scene we see them six years later, getting out of prison. The balance of their relationship suddenly changes. While before being arrested Peter was clearly the bad guy and Ahanna the naïve young boy whose life had been badly influenced, when they come out of prison Ahanna has become the more determined and violent of the two. He sets up, together with Peter, an armed commando and carries out a series of robberies, while at the same time he secretly organizes a mortal vengeance on his uncle and his mother. While the first part of the story was centered on a family-drama kind of narrative, in the second part the film turns to a gangster movie, in which Ahanna plays the role of the irredeemable killer. The second part ends at the moment of its highest

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[117] Some scholars (cf. Adejunmobi 2003) see in Nollywood videos' serial narrative a clear connection to the *telenovela* and soap opera format, imported from abroad by local televisions. Others consider it as a strategy to open to a partial degree of irresolution the classic melodramatic and evangelical rigid moral structure that characterizes, as I will discuss below, most of Nollywood videos. As John MacCall has written, "while one might treat the new tendency toward sequel cycles in Nigerian movies as merely another structure borrowed from the American soap opera, I would argue that the endless sequels also result in a Brechtian structure of irresolution, a striking departure from the evangelical conclusions characteristic of the genre" (2002: 90). It must be underlined, however, that in many cases, the irresolution of the plot is due to contingent aspects (i.e. the impossibility to market the sequel because of unpredictable production problems), rather than an explicit narrative choice.

pathos (image IV), with Ahanna preparing his vengeance, but the third part starts a few years later. At the beginning the spectator has some trouble figuring out what has happened between part II and part III, but progressively it becomes clear that Ahanna, after accomplishing his vengeance project, has changed life and cleared up his reputation. He is again the good guy he was in the first part of the film. He is in love with a young and wealthy lady, who ignores his past, and he has built a fortune investing the money he made with his previous criminal activities. Once again the elements that pushed the character to these deep psychological transformations are not emphasized. On the contrary, the film goes back to the family drama register of the first part, and the plot revolves around the problems Ahanna and his fiancé encounter to get married. However, another plot twist happens when Peter gets out of prison and starts blackmailing Ahanna, threatening to reveal his past to his fiancé. Here the film moves suddenly back to the gangster-type of genre, and particularly toward a specific narrative formula, common in Hollywood films (e.g. *Carlito's Way* [1993]), in which the redeemed criminal is haunted by his past and becomes a victim of it. Peter asks Ahanna to participate in a last robbery because he needs money and Ahanna has to pay a debt of loyalty to him. Peter promises to Ahanna that after the coup he will be free from his past. But during the robbery Ahanna is killed, and he dies in his fiancé's arms.



III *Rattlesnake*: Ahanna is harassed by his uncle          IV *Rattlesnake*: Ahanna prepares his vengeance

This kind of narrative construction, highly intergeneric, discontinuous and serialized, is part of what we can define as the melodramatic in Nigerian videos. By operating a "logic of the excluded middle", this narrative structure tends to prefer evidences over nuances, facts over psychological subtleties, *coup de théâtre* over subliminal details. It is populist rather than artistic or intellectual. It aims in fact at giving the audiences an easy, immediate and reassuring pleasure, rather than demanding an effort of interpretation. Through its high degree of intertextuality it manages to

develop widely accessible stories, that resonate with audiences that have different cultural backgrounds.

### *The syntax of the Nigerian melodramatic imagination*

As many have emphasized (cf. Brooks 1976; Singer 2001), melodrama entertains a particular relationship with the emergence of European modernity. In Peter Brooks's words, melodrama is a "peculiarly modern form" that can be located "within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath", and thus in relation to the emergence of a precise epistemological moment which melodrama itself "illustrates and to which it contributes" (1976: 14). This epistemological moment is defined by the affirmation of Enlightenment philosophy, by the "final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch)" and by "the shattering of the myth of Christendom" (Brooks 1976: 15). Within this context melodrama is a narrative form that explores and gives an expression to the "moral occult", which is, in Brooks's terms, "the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality" (1976: 5). This is not, as Brooks emphasizes, "a metaphysical system; it is rather the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth" (*ibid.*).

When we look at Nigerian videos, this interpretation of melodrama's deep structures of meaning needs inevitably to be questioned. As Ravi Vasudevan has emphasized in relation to the melodramatic aspects of Indian cinema, "if we are to theorize the validity of the melodramatic mode in the Indian case, it must be in such a way as to reformulate the terms of the modernity within which melodrama emerges" (2010: 42). A similar argument can be advanced also in relation to Nigerian videos. While it is undeniable that videos are deeply concerned with the ethical questions arising from the sphere of what Brooks calls "the moral occult", the reasons for this concern in my opinion diverge from those that inform eighteenth century French melodrama, and the narrative forms that have been subsequently defined in relation to it. This profound difference makes the Nigerian melodramatic imagination communicate a radically original structure of meaning, which resonates particularly with pan-African audiences.

As I have emphasized on multiple occasions throughout this dissertation, the birth of the Nigerian video phenomenon is deeply related to the economic crisis that affected the country, and the sub-Saharan African region more generally, throughout the 1980s. In many ways, this crisis generated amongst Nigerian population a widespread disillusion toward the promises of welfare, wealth and general social and economic development that the idea of post-colonial modernity

represented. Thus, while melodrama in Europe appeared as the result of the dreams and anxieties that the new arising modern era had generated, in Nigeria video films' melodramatic narrative emerged from the failure of the ideals that that same era had universalized and spread throughout the world. If European melodrama arose from the affirmation of a new society, Nigerian videos developed from the acknowledgment that the project of a new society had partially fallen apart. This clearly does not mean that the project of modernity was radically abandoned or refused (see also chapter five and conclusion). The ideal of modernization persisted and continued to work, but, as I will further discuss below, it started to be inhabited by the awareness of its limits, of its fragmentation, of its haunting opposites (the magic, the irrational, the violent). Borrowing Charles Piot's words, we might say that in this phase of Nigerian history, the failure of modernization promises generated a growing "nostalgia for the future" (2010), as if the possibility of dreaming and imagining a better future had become in itself an attribute of the past.

This is in my view a radical difference, which gives Nigerian videos' narrative a profoundly original syntax. If eighteenth century European melodrama produced the dislocation of the sphere of the moral from the sacred to the secular, Nigerian videos played on a much more ambiguous ground. As the Nigerian poet Odia Ofeimum underlined in a recent interview, the economic collapse that hit Nigeria in the 1980s produced the "failure" of the national "Enlightenment project" (2010). In Ofeimun's opinion, the political measures that were considered to be the prerequisites of the achievement of the nation-building process (mass literacy, secularization of the institutions, modernization of infrastructures) failed to obtain any durable result, and progressively disappeared from the Nigerian political agenda. The pillars upon which the French Enlightenment project, and the European melodrama with it, had been built, that is, the ideal of the individual and of the inviolability of his or her rights, collapsed under the weight of the post-Structural-Adjustment crisis. Thus, Nigerian videos' melodramatic imagination did not emerge, as it is the case for eighteenth century European melodrama, from the affirmation of the individual over the collective, of the secular over the sacred. It is instead the result of an affirmation of the religious[118] over the secular, of the collective over the individual. For this reason, if the European melodrama is "the drama of morality" (Brooks 1976: 20) that the individual has to play when he or she enters the modern

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[118] What emerged from the ashes of the collapsed project of modernity was not the sacred, but the religious. The sacred had in fact been erased by the violence of the crisis, while the religious, that is, the hierarchical, bureaucratic and institutional counterpart of the sacred, took over and conquered the highly profitable "market of souls" opened by the crisis.

condition, the Nigerian videos' melodramatic imagination represents "the drama of morality" that the collectivity has to face once the ideal of a linear and progressive modernity has collapsed.

Incidentally, it is important to underline here that, by the use of the dichotomies "collective/individual" and "religious/secular" I do not intend to reproduce mystifying dualisms whose use in African studies has been widely criticized (see for instance Piot 1999: Introduction). I refuse theoretical schemes based on an evolutionist conception of time (from collective to individual, from religious to secular), according to which the return of the "religious" and the "collective" at the centre of social organization would symbolize a step back on the linear itinerary of progress. My intention, on the contrary, is to underline how, within a highly modern context such as the Nigerian one, the ideal of modernity itself can progressively be dissociated from the aspects that are often considered to be its key attributes, that is, secularism and individualism. As much scholarship on African modernity has shown, the large propagation of ethnic conflicts, occult practices and Pentecostal believes in contemporary African societies does not represent the "end" of modernity in the continent, or its radical failure (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993 and 1999; Geschiere 1997). It represents instead the fact that, with the failure of state-driven initiative of modernization, the ideal of modernity has become, if possible, more complex, hybrid and plural than ever.

In relation to this debate, it might be useful to underline that the differences between European melodrama and Nigerian videos' melodramatic imagination that I just outlined find a confirmation in the analysis of the videos' contents and aesthetics produced by two major analysts of the video phenomenon, Onookome Okome and Brian Larkin. Both of them connect their analysis of Nigerian videos' film language and narrative structure to the specificity of the Nigerian post-Structural-Adjustment, and more generally post-colonial, reality. In Okome's terms (2004a), Nollywood videos revolve around a radical sentiment of "anxiety", which is the result of the postcolonial urban experience. Paraphrasing Chinua Achebe, Okome identifies anxiety as the defining condition of the African man,[119] and the postcolonial city as the locus of anxiety *par excellence*. In most video films the city is the universe of limitless possibilities, but also of limitless frustration. Within the city, the postcolonial subject faces the modern consumerist world but he is positioned (in most cases) on its margins, deprived of any purchasing power. Thus comes the anxiety that characterizes this

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[119] In his essay on "Africa and her writers" Achebe writes that the condition of the "anxious African […] is the source of all our [of African people] problems" (1982: 27 quoted in Okome 2004a: 316). According to his analysis Africans are anxious because "Africa has such a fate in the world that the very adjective 'African' can still call up hideous fears or rejection" (*ibid*).

condition, an anxiety created by the contrast between an excess of ambitions and desires, and a limited possibility to achieve them. Within this context, as Moradewun Adejunmobi has underlined, "the melodramatic narratives of Nollywood provides a medium for rationalizing the continuing attractiveness of modernity as an ideal notwithstanding the increased poverty and social dislocation that have come to characterize Africa's experience of modernity" (2010: 114).

In Brian Larkin's analysis, this idea is pushed further. As I discussed in the first chapter, in his view, by applying melodramatic narrative structures Nigerian videos translate the grotesque violence of postcolonial regimes into the sphere of the family. By doing this they amplify and push to their excess the attributes of the melodramatic imagination and they create what Larkin defines as an "aesthetic of outrage" (2008: ch. 6), a film language that uses extreme narrative devices to morally scandalize and physically shock the viewers in order to make them critically aware of the existential condition that defines the postcolony. In this sense, the melodramatic in Nigerian videos is inextricably connected to the specificity of the post-colonial, post-Structural-Adjustment situation, a situation in which, as I mentioned above, the ideal of modernity is defined by the awareness of its potential, looming failure.

### *"We tell it the way it is!": Explicit and contingent realism in Nigerian videos*

The specific syntax of the melodramatic imagination in Nigerian videos that I have just outlined is connected to the particular relationship that Nigerian videos entertain with realistic modes of representation. On a theoretical level, Western film criticism tended to consider melodrama and realism as opposite (cf. Langford 2005: 38; Hallam and Marshment 2000: 6). While, as I have evidenced above, melodrama tends to recur to archetypal characters, realism prefers to focus on highly nuanced protagonists, whose behavior and psychological features develop in naturalistic ways in front of the eyes of the video camera. While melodrama tends toward universalistic settings which could apply indifferently to all geographical and cultural contexts, realist film languages and plots, by trying to present a naturalistic representation of reality, are bounded to the specific context in which they are set and they maintain a certain aesthetic "crudeness" which emphasizes contents over form. In aesthetic terms this means that a realist film language prefers long-take shots to fast editing and close ups (which on the contrary define mainstream cinema and melodrama), in order to make the action develop in front of the camera in its natural *durée*. Long-take shots, in fact, leave the time and the space for the action to develop in their entirety, without being artificially cut by frame alternation. Moreover, they do not drive the attention of the audiences toward a specific

dramatic item, but they allow them instead to freely choose where to focus their attention, leaving the complexity of the real untouched and opening larger possibilities of interpretation. To make their representation of reality more credible, realist films hardly use artificial sound and lighting, and in most cases they are shot in open natural settings. Furthermore, they employ in many cases non-professional actors, who are employed to play the roles they live in their everyday lives (cf. Bazin 1971).

In relation to the attributes that define realist film language, Nollywood occupies an ambiguous position. While being profoundly informed by a strong melodramatic imagination, Nigerian videos are also implicitly and explicitly connected to a strong concern for sincere and naturalistic representations of reality. This aspect transpires evidently from interviews with video-makers and producers. For many of them, realism is the key aspect of Nollywood videos' film language. According to Lancelot Imasuen, one of the most successful Nollywood directors,

> we (Nigerians) surpass every other film industry in our realism […] people need to be able to relate with the movie, the crowd wants to be committed with the story. This is one aspect of Nollywood that you cannot take away! Every time you don't use it, then it's not Nollywood. We cannot lose our realism! That is the beginning of our cinema, that is the end of it! (2010)

This particular concern with realism manifests itself both through explicit narrative and aesthetic choices and through contingent technical aspects that make the reality "interfere" with the construction of the videos' film language. In this sense we can talk of both an "explicit" and a "contingent" realism in Nigerian videos.

The explicit realism can be identified as a direct consequence of the specific concern for "real-life stories" that Imasuen's statement summarizes. It is connected to Nigerian directors and producers' widespread preference for plots inspired by newspapers articles and street rumors, and it tends to reinforce what many defined as the educational role of Nigerian videos.[120] As many forms of popular culture in Africa, in fact, Nigerian videos tend to have a didactic orientation, which takes inspiration from everyday life episodes (see also Obiechina 1971; Barber 1987, 1997 and 2000; Newell 2006). Like many directors have underlined in the interviews I collected during my

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[120] The Nollywood director Bond Emeruwa, for instance, during the documentary *This is Nollywood* (2007) defines Nigerian videos as "edu-enterteinment". In a similar way, Teco Benson, another successful Nigerian director, labeled Nollwyood as a "message-oriented film industry" (2010).

fieldwork, Nollywood films focus on what preoccupies Nigerian people in their everyday existence, that is, family matters (infertility, infidelity, jealousy, widowhood, polygamy and orphanhood), political problems (corruption, political violence, injustice, ethnic tensions and illicit money-making practices) and issues related to the everyday survival in the city (how to make money, how to get a job, how to get a woman/a man, etc). While the representation of these issues is in most cases informed by the melodramatic imagination and thus metamorphosed by it, the original concern for these real, actual, everyday problems makes Nigerian video-makers claim that their films are purely and simply about reality. As Nelly, an assistant director interviewed in the documentary *Nollywood Babylon* (2008), says toward the end of the film

> you can never tell the story of Nigeria by propaganda […] You can never say [it] by sending a communication minister to go and talk on CNN. The world is not stupid […] They know politicians can say anything, but they want to see it from the people who are feeling the pain. And that's what Nollywood does, that's what is unique about us, *we tell it the way it is*. Even though people come out and say they don't like this, they don't like that, *we tell it the way it is*.

This statement is confirmed by what many audiences feel. During fieldwork I conducted numerous informal conversations with Nigerian videos' habitual viewers, and most of them were almost literally repeating Nelly's words: "Nollywood videos tell it (the reality) the way it is, and this is the main reason why we watch them".

The nature of this realistic representation, however, is not transparent. How can in fact a narrative language be, at the same time realistic and its opposite, that is, melodramatic? The particular answer that videos offers to this question constitutes, in my view, one of the most original features of the film language that Nigerian videos developed. As I will discuss below, the videos' portrayal of reality is strictly connected to their intention to create, through their specific address, a moral collectivity, that is, a unity that goes beyond ethnic and national borders. Before discussing this aspect of videos' film language, however, it is important to investigate what I defined as the contingent realism of Nigerian videos.

Because of the restricted production budgets and the limited availability of high quality technical infrastructures, many Nigerian videos are defined by the use of natural or minimal lighting, digital handy cameras and nonprofessional extras. Natural sounds, when not covered by heavy digitally recorded soundtracks, emerge strongly, and often in ways not directly related to the plot (car horns

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on the background, the sound of the power generator, the noise of people chatting in the set's vicinities, churches' bells and mosques' calls to prayer). Camera movements and shooting angles, when not directly inspired by the classic soap opera style (highly dramatic close ups and quick frame alternation), tend to reproduce the basic technique used in the early years of Nigerian television to film local programs and theatre shows (see Esan 2009: 90). This technique privileged long take sequences in order to simplify the editing process and reduce the post-production's time and budget, thus involuntarily subscribing to one of the key features of neorealist film language as defined by Bazin (1971). Furthermore, in early videos the special effects and make up tend to be handcrafted and, when they are not overstated (image V), they participate in creating a sense of crude naturalism (image VI).



V: *End of the Wicked*: one of the witches



VI: *Living in Bondage*: the sacrifice of a goat

Intuitively we would be pushed to think that, in general terms, the combination of the elements that I listed above would make the film look more artificial, because of the absence of the specific craft (in what concerns special effects, extras' acting skills, sound and light tuning, camera technique) that makes the technicality of filmmaking, its "artificiality", almost invisible. But, surprisingly, the result is exactly the opposite. The evident artificiality of some scenes, the fact that the reality that is behind the camera continuously reemerges and interferes with what is being filmed, give the videos a particularly realist flavor, contingent but significantly effective.

An instance of this contingent realism is given by two of the best known scenes in *Living in Bondage* (1992). The first represents one of the numerous occult rituals to which Andy, the protagonist of the film, participates throughout the film. In the particular scene that I have in mind, which happens toward the end of the film, a goat is decapitated right on Andy's head (image V). The bare naturalism of this scene is related to the fact that there is no technical mediation to it. The

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relatively artisanal special effects added to further dramatize the action (an un-naturalistic neon-like green light and an unsettling electronic soundtrack), while creating an almost hallucinatory atmosphere, do not filter the violence of the scene. Again, paradoxically, the imperfection of the special effects, instead of reducing the images verisimilitude, ends up, at least in my view, accentuating it. The goat is physically killed in front of the camera and the scene has a strong impact on the viewer, who feels directly involved in the sacrifice.[121]



VII: *Living in Bondage* : Andy's madness      VIII: *This is Nollywood*: turning a generator on after a power disruption

The other scene plays on a different level. In this case Andy, who has become mad because his wife's ghost keep on haunting him, walks around the market harassing street vendors and digging into the rubbish bins in search of food (image VII). The absence of professional extras and of artificial lighting, the shaky camera movements, and the people's reactions to Andy's behavior make the scene, like the previous one, look particularly "true". Again, we have the feeling that there is no mediation between the scene and the reality that surrounds it. In this case, the way the people in the market react to Andy's movements make the artificiality of the scene evident (they look into the camera, they crowd around Andy starring at him in a definitely non-naturalistic way), but as I underlined earlier, this particular artificiality, by marking the intrusion of the behind-the-camera reality into the film, has a powerful effect which makes the scene appear as "real".

The intrusion of the behind-the-camera reality into videos' film language thus marks videos' production at all levels. As numerous scenes in the documentaries about Nollywood evidence, for instance, Nollywood producers and directors have often to deal with unpredictable events that can

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[121] Brian Larkin's above mentioned formulation of an "aesthetic of outrage" which creates a particular sentiment of revulsion in the viewer seems to be particularly fitting in this context (Larkin 2008:: ch. 6).

profoundly condition the production processes and the contents of the videos produced.[122] As a result of this situation, in many cases, directors have to integrate the elements that the reality "imposes" on them into the videos' narrative structure. In *This is Nollywood* (2007), for instance, we see the director Bond Emeruwa obliged to cope with power failures, generators' noise, songs and prayers coming from a mosque near the set (image VIII). All these elements are creatively integrated into the film production, and inevitably find their way into the final result.

### *Nigerian videos' addressivity: Constructing a pan-African public*

As the analysis that I developed throughout this chapter evidences, Nigerian videos' film language is the result of an original encounter between melodramatic and realist narrative modes. Developing a highly intergeneric and intertextual formula, Nigerian videos have both local and transnational appeal. Their melodramatic formal attributes make them highly recognizable, while the specific meaning of their melodramatic structure and their inclination for realism give them social and phenomenological relevance in contexts that share geographically-located historical experiences (colonialism, post-Structural-Adjustment crisis, postcolonial [disrupted] processes of modernization).

As I have emphasized above, the melodramatic imagination's formal attributes have universal vocation and global circulation. Within the African context, we can find them in traditional oral narratives as in modern written and theatrical expressions (cf. Barber 2000; Obiechina 1971; Ogundele 2000), in the Indian films that African people have watched since the mid-twentieth century as in the local television series, the Latino American *telenovelas* and the American soap operas that people consume since television became part of African people's everyday life. Hence, people are familiar with melodramatic narratives. The popular audiences' media literacy is profoundly connected to them; in many cases it is simply based on them. In this sense, for many people the melodramatic imagination *is* the narrative imagination *tout-court*. The interference of realism within this framework, however, gives to this melodramatic imagination a specific accent, something that makes Nigerian videos able to address the audiences in ways that are relevant and familiar to them.

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[122] As I mentioned in chapter five, these documentaries have been shot during the period of the production crisis, which is also the period in which probably the contingent technical problems related to low budgets and tight shooting schedules affected Nigerian videos' aesthetics the most.

As Ravi Vasudevan underlined discussing the melodramatic attributes of Indian popular cinema, while we can hardly analyze melodrama in terms of precise national variations,

> there is a case for considering the way melodrama, its public/private architecture, and its backward looking temporality, is mobilized to drive epically-scaled works that stage an engagement with the reconfiguration of national imaginaries. […] these emerge at critical moments in the transformation of social, cultural, and political circumstances, and are bodied forth in key works which place the home, interpretable as a zone of primary affective attachment, at the critical intersection of the narrative relationship between community, public life, and political structure (2010: 58).

As emphasized in the course of this chapter, Nigerian videos emerged in what we could define, following Vasudevan, a "critical moment in the transformation of [both local and regional] social, cultural, and political circumstances". They did in fact appear in the period in which the Nigerian post-colonial nation-state, after years of intermittent successes (the years of the early independence and of the oil-boom), gave up its role as the modernization-process driving force. Within this context, national imageries that were already unstable and precarious (the Biafra war being the most striking evidence of their precariousness), traversed "epically-scaled" processes of reconfiguration.

Nigerian videos are both the driving force and the instruments of these processes of reconfiguration. The melodramatic focus on the house, the family, the sphere of the intimate, that videos develop is functional to the re-articulation of the balance between individual and public sphere. In ways similar to those identified by Vasudevan in relation to Indian cinema, Nigerian videos "scatter families and individuals" in order to "bring them back together again in differently cadenced public format" (2010: 48). Within this process of reconfiguration, the sphere of the national acquires a secondary role. What instead emerge as primarily relevant are the diverging spheres of the ethnic (mainly in the case of local language videos) and the pan-African (mainly in relation the English language videos analyzed in this dissertation), which both inevitably transcend the sphere of the national to replace it with transnational and global orientations. These spheres are evoked by the specific addressivity of video films, which is, at once, *open* and *direct*, and which is a consequence of the encounter of melodramatic and realist narrative modes.

The openness of Nigerian videos' addressivity is the result of the already-mentioned high level of intergenericity and heterogeneity of Nigerian videos' film language. As Karin Barber underlined, text's openness plays a particular role in transforming audiences into publics. The public is in fact

"experienced in 'reading' and collaboratively reconstituting the specific textual and discursive field surrounding different genres, while recognizing and appreciating the enormous level of intergeneric borrowing that goes on at all levels" (2000: 420). Thus, the multi layered structure that characterizes videos' film language addresses audiences in multiple ways, offering to them different levels of engagement. As Ashis Nandy underlined in relation to Indian cinema,

> the popular film ideally has to have everything – from the classical to the folk, from the sublime to the ridiculous, and from the terribly modern to the incorrigibly traditional, from the plots within plots that never get resolved to the cameo roles and stereotypical characters that never get developed. […] An average, 'normal', Bombay film has to be to the extent possible everything to everyone. It has to cut across myriad ethnicities and lifestyles of India and even of the world that impinges on India (Nandy 1998 : 7).

As in the case of Indian cinema, then, the high level of intergeneric borrowing that characterizes Nigerian videos tends to orient them toward universal rather than localized forms of viewership. Being an expression of what can be defined generally as popular cinema, Nollywood videos try to address the largest audience possible, and to do so, they shift their focus from the *cultural* to the *moral.* Videos' structure, in fact, through its melodramatic polarization and didactic realism, intend to coagulate audiences around the definition of transversal, potentially pan-African, moral constituencies, within which social and cultural differences become secondary. This moral enunciation is oriented, by way of videos' direct address, toward both the collectivity and the individual within it. By playing on both level, videos extend the inclusivity of their modes of address. But they do it giving always to the collectivity a morally higher reconciliatory status.

In melodramatic narratives, direct addressivity comes from the heritage of theatrical traditions. It is in fact the result of "frontal, iconic modes of characterization of the popular theatrical format" that are "carried forward into the cinema" (Vasudevan 2010: 38). In Nigerian videos, this form of address takes multiple forms. While there are a number of examples in which one of the protagonists directly address the audiences looking straight into the camera,[123] direct address in Nigerian videos mainly takes the form of a general orientation of the narrative, which tends to invoke audiences' engagement and participation through the enactment of a moral drama. As I have underlined above, the family is in most cases at the center of this drama, but through the film its

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[123] See for instance *Europe by Road* (2007), *The Liquid Black Gold* (2009) and *Reloaded* (2010).

unity is disintegrated in order to be reassembled and to become the symbol of a larger entity. The drama, through the pathos of its resolution, evokes the audience's direct participation, and transforms dispersed individual viewers into a "public", defined, as I underlined above, as a transnational, pan-African moral community. Within this framework, the space that is given to the individual is functional to his or her subsequent reintegration into the moral frame that structures the narrative. Most videos are in fact centered on individual dramas, but in most cases it is the excess of hubris of the individual that pushes the plot to its dramatic picks, creating the field for the intervention of the moral community.[124]

An example from *Living in Bondage* will help to better clarify this point, while driving this discussion to a conclusion. As I mentioned several times in this dissertation, this is the first Nigerian video that achieved great popular success and thus the one that managed to set the narrative patterns of much of the videos that followed. The film's initial focus is on a young modern Nigerian family, composed of Andy and his wife, Merit. In the first part of the film, Andy's social and economic frustration and his ambitions of wealth and welfare drive the plot to a dramatic crisis, that physically scatters the original nucleus of the family. For Andy to achieve his ambitions, Merit is killed in a money-making ritual. The central part of the film shows Andy's quick social success, which nourishes further desires of wealth and further violent sacrifices to achieve them. At this point, Merit's ghost starts haunting Andy's dreams. It starts appearing to him throughout days and nights, progressively driving him to madness. The hubris of Andy's behavior leads him to a ruinous end. He abandons himself to desperation and gets lost in Lagos's suburbs. He becomes homeless and survives by eating the food he finds in the rubbish bins. But when he is near to a final collapse, there is a redeeming turn in the plot. One of Andy's old acquaintance sees him, rescues him and helps him in getting reintegrated into the collectivity. Andy rediscovers the reassuring and warm feeling of being loved an accepted for the person that he is. The initial nucleus of affection that was represented by the family, after being scattered and destroyed, is reconstituted into a larger and transversal constituency, that of the moral collectivity. The individual, within this context, is tried for his excesses, his insatiability, his ambitions. What prevails at the end is a rather conservative

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[124] It is important to underline here that, while this kind of plots is evidently informed by a general religious mentality, the role of religion in defining Nigerian videos' film language and narrative structures should not be overstated. The centrality of didactic moral structures of feeling is common to popular culture in Africa and elsewhere (see Barber 1987; 1997; 2000) and religious contents tend to adapt to this already existing patterns rather than modify them in radical ways.

and stable moral constituency whose stability is precisely the consequence of a measured control over individual hubris.

Through the specificity of their film language and their narrative structure, Nigerian video films offer an answer to the social, cultural and economic crisis that defined the post-Structural-Adjustment era in Nigeria and in many other sub-Saharan African countries. In this sense their appeal for the creation of a pan-African moral constituency is an antidote to the widespread anxiety and disillusionment that the suspension of modernization processes have generated. It is in this sense that videos' film language and narrative structures are coherent and adherent to their time. This is probably one of the main reason of their transnational success.

What, however, is left to understand is for how long the interpretation of reality, of modernity, and of society that videos have produced will still be relevant. For how long will these formula be able to speak to Nigerian and pan-African audiences? The crisis of production that have emerged in the past few years and, more generally, the progressive audience's disaffection toward a number of the defining elements of Nigerian videos' main genres (which I have mentioned in the previous chapters) could be read as an answer to this question. New narratives are coming up, and new film languages are being formulated in order to produce new, more relevant interpretation of the Nigerian and pan-African present. It is probably too early to be able to read and understand the social and cultural transformations that new films are "speaking", but their existence is the sign of a ongoing, large-scale transformation. If classic Nigerian videos' film language emerged from a specific disillusionment with the promises of modernity, it is legitimate to imagine that new films are expressing new projections toward the future, projections which inevitably imply the reformulation of the ideal of modernity within the Nigerian and African context.[125]

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[125] For a further development of this discussion see the conclusion.

CHAPTER VII

*Nollywood abroad: The transformations of Nigerian video production in the diaspora*

As the Nigerian journalist Steve Ayorinde (1999) has underlined, Nigerian videos have circulated amongst Nigerian and other sub-Saharan African people in Europe and in Northern America since the early days of the industry. As is often the case for the consumption of indigenous media in diasporic contexts, Nigerian videos became the vector through which people managed to create and maintain multiple forms of connection with the homeland. Videos participated in the construction of an Afrocentric transnational and diasporic mediascape that today appeals to people of African descent throughout the world. As I have discussed in the first section of this dissertation, while videos have often circulated through informal and pirated networks, the industry has progressively realized the economic potential of the diasporic market and it is today trying to formalize it. Beside this recent development, however, the diaspora has played an influential role in the general economy of the industry almost since the beginning of the video phenomenon.

First of all, the diaspora has been used by Nigerian directors and producers as both a setting and a narrative device. As discussed by Jonathan Haynes (2003; forthcoming), films that thematize the experience of living abroad and that are partially or integrally set outside Nigeria and Africa have almost become a genre on their own over the past few years. The production of films of this kind has witnessed a remarkable increase after the great popular success of two Nigerian videos set in Europe, *Osuofia in London* (2003) and *Dangerous Twins* (2004). The success of these films gave Nigerian producers an idea of the commercial potential of stories of this kind, and countless diaspora-centered films started to emerge.

While Nigerian producers used foreign settings as a narrative device, the diaspora became also an autonomous site of production. The success of Nigerian videos amongst diasporic Africans gave to some Nigerian entrepreneurs based in Europe and in North America the idea of setting up autonomous ventures. Production companies of this kind emerged in many European countries (Holland, Germany, Belgium, Italy and the United Kingdom), as well as in the United States and in Canada. This phenomenon presents numerous interesting aspects and seems to constitute a rather original development in the recent history of diasporic and migrant filmmaking.[126] While in fact the

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[126] In the definition proposed by Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, the terms "diasporic" and "migrant" are used to define forms of film production that emerged from different experiences of mobility but which share a number of important aspects. In Berghahn and Sternberg's words, "'migrant' ('first-generation') film-makers have themselves been part of a migratory movement and departed from a place of birth or residence in search of better economic

emergence of diasporic and migrant cinema in both Europe and North America is a long-term, widely documented phenomenon (cf. Berghahn and Sternberg 2010a; Rueschmann 2003), the creation of independent production companies that intend to reproduce the format and the structure of an indigenous popular culture industry in the diaspora is something that has happened rarely. The central aim of this chapter, then, is to describe this phenomenon and propose a definition of its main features. The central focus is on the Nigerian production companies that emerged in Europe, but a few examples from Canada and the United Sates will also be mentioned.

*From Nigeria to Europe: The historical, sociological and theoretical contexts of Nigerian diasporic video production*

The history of Nigerian people's mobility beyond the boundaries of the African continent is centuries-long, and goes well beyond the consolidation of Nigeria as an identifiable political and cultural unity. The history of slavery, in particular, brought many Yorubas, Igbos and people of other Nigerian ethnic groups to the Americas since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Linguistic and cultural traces of this connection are still present today, and they are one of the explanations for the consumption of contemporary Nigerian cultural productions amongst African-American and Caribbean people.

Beyond these centuries-old macro-itineraries, more complex and fragmented paths of migration started to emerge since the end of colonialism. While also during the era of the British Empire small groups of Nigerians moved temporarily to Europe and the United States for education, it is mainly after the end of colonialism that a larger number of people went abroad. During the early years of independence most of them tended to come back after a period of education and work experience in Europe or North America. Till the end of the 1970s the Nigerian economy was booming and the opportunities to enjoy good standards of life in the home country were numerous. The Nigerian migrants that arrived in Europe and North America over this period often belonged to Nigerian society's wealthiest social groups. They used to move to Western countries to study and develop

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conditions or a more secure and stable socio-political environment. 'Diasporic' film-makers are typically of the second, third or a later generation. They were born or raised in a disaporic setting and have no, or only a very remote, first-hand experience of migration" (2010b: 16). Most of the directors and producers whose work is discussed in this chapter belong to the "migrant" category. However, I rather use the term "diasporic Nigerian production" referring, in Homi Bhabha's terms (1994), to diaspora as a "third space", a space of hybridity within which the encounter between different articulations of identity and culture generates original solutions.

business networks. Those of them who decided to settle abroad are today, in most cases, well established in their professional and social milieu. They represent a first wave of Nigerian migrants, small in number and generally well integrated in the social and cultural fabric of the hosting country.

At the beginning of the 1980s the Nigerian economy began to collapse and in 1986 the government was obliged to accept the reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the so-called Structural Adjustment I already referred to on several occasions throughout this text. The Nigerian economy entered a period of deep and long recession which brought some of the darkest years of Nigeria's recent history, those of the Abacha military regime (1993 – 1998). Over this period, the number of Nigerians that moved abroad increased tremendously and patterns of mobility started to differentiate. While the United Kingdom and the United States tried to regulate the migration flux by introducing policies that would control the number of new entries while promoting and favoring high skilled migration, other countries became the destination for larger numbers of less skilled migrants. As Blessing Mberu and Roland Pongou have emphasized analyzing Nigerian migrants' average level of education,

> as desperation in the country continued, many less-educated youth became significant part of the emigration stream. By the early 2000s, an increasing number of Nigerians had migrated to countries such as Spain, Italy, Ireland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, as well as the Gulf states (2010: 2-3).

The specificity of these patterns of migration generated different social realities. While in North America (USA and Canada) and the United Kingdom Nigerians tend to be in relatively advantageous social conditions, in continental Europe they tend to occupy a rather marginal position. If the unequal average education level between diasporic groups is probably the main reason for this difference, the linguistic issue might also have an important role. While all Nigerians who have received at least a few years of education in their country can speak English, most of them have never studied another European language. Within the Nigerian diaspora in continental Europe this factor has participated in further isolating Nigerians from the local population. These historical and sociological factors have played an important role in shaping the forms and contents of video production that emerged within different Nigerian diasporic groups. Before analyzing them, however, it is important to discuss the theoretical framework within which we can situate Nigerian migrants' video production.

Migrant and diasporic filmmaking have emerged in Europe at least since the mid-twentieth-century when important fluxes of migration from southern European and extra-European countries began to modify the demographic structure of the continent. The first experiences of this kind emerged inevitably in the more industrialized European countries: United Kingdom, France and Germany. These countries became the destination of most of the first-wave migrants both because of the level of their economic development and the social heritage of their colonial past. It is in relation to the experiences that emerged in these countries that the first academic attempts to conceptualize migrant and diasporic cinema were formulated. As Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg have underlined, the way these forms of filmmaking have been theorized varies in relation to the principles used to differentiate them from mainstream cinema production. Migrant and diasporic films have in fact been analyzed through multiple prisms, such as

> social categorization (*Migrantenkino*), racial or ethno-national emphases (*Cinéma du métissage*, black and Asian British film, French *beur* cinema), linguistic or spatial concepts (accented cinema, *banlieu* films, cinema of double occupancy) and transnational approaches (Third cinema, black films, cinema of the South Asian diaspora). (Berghahn and Sternberg 2010b: 12).[127]

Each of these categorization, because of the specific focus of its analysis, has emphasized a different aspect of the phenomenon.

In most cases the main interest of analysis has been oriented towards the narrative and aesthetic specificities of the films produced. Even if by focusing on different case-studies, most of the authors that analyzed diasporic and migrant cinema have agreed on the high level of political engagement of this production. Within this framework, diaspora and migration are seen as

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[127] Within the framework of most of the studies discussed here, diasporic and migrant filmmaking are not defined (only) in relation to the biography of the filmmakers. On the contrary, the definition depends also on the infrastructures of film production employed and the aesthetic and narrative contents of the films produced. This differentiation is important to give an account of a set of experiences that contradict a biography-centered approach. On the one hand, for instance, there are migrant directors who managed to access mainstream structures of production in the host countries and who make what might be defined as "first cinema" films that reproduce the structure and contents of the hegemonic national cinema discourse. On the other hand, there are also numerous non-migrant filmmakers who focus on issues related to migration and that operate according to informal and independent infrastructures of production and distribution who, for these reasons, might be taken into account while discussing migrant and diasporic cinema (cf. Berghahn and Sternberg 2010b; Girelli 2007; Grassilli 2008).

phenomena that inhabit a "third space" within the social architecture of a country's population (Bhabha 1994), that is, a place situated at the same time within and beyond the sphere of the nation. The existence of this space, and of the subjects inhabiting it, implicitly and inevitably challenges the integrity of the nation-state and the homogeneity of the discursive constructions that constitute it as an "imagined community" (cf. Anderson 1983). By reflecting this condition, migrant and diasporic forms of cinema are bounded to a condition of doubleness and in-betwenness. In Abdelmalek Sayad's analysis, in fact, the experience of migration is characterized by a "double absence" (1999), an existential condition generated by the fact of being neither completely "here" nor completely "there", somehow "a foreigner" everywhere. In Thomas Elsaesser's words, this kind of condition generates a cinema of "double-occupancy" (2005: 118), a cinema which narrates the experience of being "here" while constantly referring to the fact of belonging "there".

In aesthetic and narrative terms, the peculiarity of this condition has generated specific cinematic languages which have been described through numerous interesting conceptual formulations. In Laura Marks' terms (2000), migrant and diasporic films position memory at the centre of their narrative and visual alphabet. Marks suggests that most of the films under her analysis "begin from the inability to speak, to represent objectively one's own culture, history and memory" (2000: 21). For this reason, in these films memory cannot be directly problematized and discussed. It is silenced, but it constantly reemerges through a visual emphasis on objects, landscapes and atmospheres charged with the flavor and the smell of the homeland. This aesthetic and narrative strategy generates what Marks calls an "haptic visuality", a film language that "represents the 'unrepresentable' senses" and that evidences the fact that "meaning occurs in the body and not only at the level of signs" (2000: xvi – xvii). This kind of film language is hybrid, "imperfect" (Espinosa 1979), "accented" (Naficy 2001), "multiple" (Mirzoeff 1999), "dialogic" (Mercer 1988) and "polycentric" (Shohat and Stam 1998). It is based upon what Sujata Moorti defined as a "diasporic optic", that is, a "visual grammar that seeks to capture the dislocation, disruption and ambivalence" of the diasporic experience suggesting a "way of seeing that underscores the interstices, the spaces that are and fall between the cracks of the national and the transnational as well as other social formations" (Moorti 2003: 359, quoted in Berghahn and Sternberg 2010b: 26).

Beyond the mentioned studies of the aesthetic and narrative features of diasporic and migrant cinema, a smaller number of scholars analyzed the specific modes of production and distribution that define these instances of filmmaking. Within this context, the work of Hamid Naficy is probably the most influential. His analysis underlines the complex position that most diasporic and migrant filmmakers occupy in relation to national cinemas' infrastructures of production and

distribution, a position that he defines as "interstitial" (2001). According to Naficy, "accented films are interstitial because they are created astride and in the interstices of social formation and cinematic practices. Consequently they are simultaneously local and global, and they resonate against the prevailing cinematic production practices, at the same time that they benefit from them" (Naficy 2001: 4). Being positioned, as I have underlined earlier, in a space of social and existential in-betwenness, migrant filmmakers are obliged to play strategically with their "double occupancy" and multiple identities. They are thus pushed to experiment with transnational and unconventional funding strategies, whose use places their work both at the periphery of national cinema infrastructures and at the centre of transnational and global interactions. Because of this position of intrinsic fragility and fluidity, migrant and diasporic cinema's modes of production are often collective and informal. As Mariagiulia Grassilli has emphasized, within this framework

> film-makers very often […] perform multiple functions (film-maker, director, editor,
> scriptwriter, etc.) and personally invest in their films, directly financing a share of the
> budget, either through personal funds or in-kind by waving the fee for scriptwriting and
> directing, and by involving families and friends in the production or as actors to keep
> the costs down (Grassilli 2008: 1244).

The limited budgets that tend to define these films push migrant and diasporic directors to constantly experiment with new, more affordable technologies. Furthermore, the specificity of these technologies, in most of the case digital, portable and economically accessible, has an important role in making the circulation of migrant and diasporic films possible even amongst largely fragmented and dispersed audiences. In relation to this aspect, the circulation of these films hardly happens along conventional networks of distribution. While the most successful films might manage to circulate in film festivals and thematic retrospectives, a large part of migrant and diasporic films are distributed informally, through the rhyzomatic networks traced by what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have defined as "minor trasnationalism" (2005).

Beside the theoretical framework defined by the corpus of academic studies on migrant and diasporic cinema, another useful reference for this analysis is given by the researches on the growing influence of Non Resident Indian (NRI) films within the economy of the Indian film industry (cf. Desai 2004; Kavoori and Punathanbekar 2008a). Even if this phenomenon presents numerous differences if compared to the case analyzed here, it equally suggests a number of important points for this discussion. As I reported above, migrant and diasporic cinema have in

most cases been looked at through the prism of Third-cinema-inspired theory, which emphasizes the political importance of this film production, its intrinsic value as an act of resistance, and its potential for the subversion of the Nation-state's official discourse. On the contrary, the researches on NRI films highlight the role of popular culture in processes of identity transformation and re-articulation in the diaspora. Hence they give us useful elements for the analysis of diasporic popular culture's contents and structure, and suggest a focus on the connection between these cultural formations and the industrial economy of cultural production in the homeland. As Aswin Punathambekar (2005) has underlined, Indian people in the diaspora watched Indian films collectively since the 1960s/1970s as a pretext to gather together, to reassert their connection with the homeland and their existence as a community. Since the mid-1990s, however, in relation to a number of transformations that affected the economy of the film industry in India and that pushed its organization toward higher levels of formalization, the role of diasporic audiences became economically more significant, accounting by 2004 for almost the 30% of the industry's earnings (cf. Thussu 2008). This produced a number of important transformation in Bollywood films' contents and in the industry's economic organization. Furthermore it opened for the Indian film industry new avenues of circulation within the global cinema arena. As many scholars have emphasized (cf. Desai 2004; Kavoori and Punathanbekar 2008b), in fact, the massive consumption of Bollywood films in the diaspora and the progressive transformation of the narrative and aesthetic features of Indian films that occurred to accommodate the tastes of diasporic audiences worked as a bridge to introduce Bollywood into the global cinema arena and to make Western audiences familiar with it.

In relation to the contexts that I described above, the emergence of Nigerian video production companies in Europe presents numerous specificities. Thus the analytical concepts that I have just discussed, even if useful and inspiring, are not sufficient to describe the complexity of the phenomenon that I intend to analyze. In many ways, the emergence of Nigerian production companies in Europe can be located in between the production of migrant and diasporic cinema and the progressive transformation of the role of NRI films in the Bollywood economy. It does in fact share some aspects with both of these phenomena, while at the same time presenting a number of peculiarities.

*Nollywood abroad: Defining the history and the specificities of Nigerian video filmmaking in Europe* [128]

The first Nigerian production company to appear in Europe is the Double 'A' Entertainment, created by Tony Dele Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odekhiran in Eindhoven, Netherlands, around 1998. As reported by Sophie Samyn (2010), the two Nigerians met soon after arriving in Holland at the beginning of the 1990s. They were both partly involved in the entertainment sector before leaving Nigeria (Akinyemi used to work for one of the local televisions and Ajayi-Odekhiran was a dancer and a singer) but at the time they left the country the video industry was not yet born. As reported in the interview that Samyn conducted with them (Akinyemi and Ajayi-Odekhiran 2010), they discovered Nollywood while in Europe and they became enthusiastic fans. Drawing inspiration from the Nigerian video films they have watched, they decided to set up their own production company and in 1998 they produced their first video, *Under Pressure.* Shot with derisory means, the video reinterprets the biographical experiences of the two producers and narrates the story of a young Nigerian who moves to Holland and struggles to settle down and build a new life for himself. I will better discuss the content of this and of the other videos produced in Europe in the next sections of this chapter. Here it is important to underline that the video managed to have a wide informal circulation amongst diasporic audiences. This kind of circulation did not pay back what had been invested, but gave the two producers the motivation to continue their venture and to produce, in the years to come, three more videos: *Dapo Junior* (2000), *Holland Heat* (2002) and *From Amsterdam With Love* (2003).

In the early 2000s diasporic Nigerian video production exploded and new production companies emerged in numerous other European countries. In the United Kingdom, Obi Emelonye, a young Nigerian living in London since the early 1990s, created a production company, Basic Input, and released his first video, *Good Friends* (2000). After spending a short period in Nigeria, he returned to the UK, created a new production company, The Nollywood Factory, and went on to produce several films, such as *Echoes of War* (2003), *The London Successor* (2006), *Lucky Joe* (2006) and *The Mirror Boy* (2010), some of which managed to be released in mainstream cinemas all over the United Kingdom.

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[128] For the contents of this section of the chapter I warmly thank the kind collaboration of Sophie Samyn, who made available to me the video films of the Nigerian production companies active in Holland, Germany and Belgium, and the transcription of the interviews she conducted during her MA dissertation research in these countries.

In Germany, Isaac Izoya, a Nigerian journalist based in Berlin since the end of the 1990s, created in 2003 the production company Ehizoya Golden Entertainment which has released three videos since then: *Zero Your Mind* (2003), *Love in Berlin… The Meeting Point* (2007) and *Run but Can't Hide I & II* (2008). Izoya's videos enjoyed a good success both in Nigeria and within the Nigerian diaspora in Europe, thanks to the specific production and distribution strategies that Izoya introduced, which included hiring successful Nollywood filmmakers to direct the videos and organizing promotional tours in Europe with some well-known Nollywood actors and stand-up comedians. I will better discuss these strategies below, but it is possible to say that thanks to them Izoya is today probably the diasporic producer best known in Nigeria and the one who, together with Emelonye, has managed to reach the largest audience, both in Nigeria and in the diaspora.

In Italy two production companies emerged in the mid-2000s, the IGB Film and Music Industry, created in Brescia by Prince Frank Abieyuwa Osharhenoguwu in 2001, and the GVK, created in Turin by Vincent Omoigui and Rose Okoh in 2006. As I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, the two companies developed different production and distribution strategies. Osharhenoguwu was involved in the video industry before leaving Nigeria and had already produced three video films before arriving in Italy. Since he established IGB, he released four new titles (*Kiki Marriage* [2003], *Abroad Wahala* [2005], *The Only Way After Home but It's Risky* [2007] and *The Hard Nut to Crack* [2008]), that circulated mainly amongst Nigerian diasporic audiences in Italy and within the regional market in Edo State, the region of Nigeria where the producer come from. The creators of GVK, on the contrary, had no experience of filmmaking and film production before moving to Italy. After the release of their first video film, *Efe-Obomwan*, in 2006, they decided to transform their venture to target both Nigerian and Italian audiences. Hence they started a collaboration with an Italian filmmaker, Simone Sandretti, and produced four new films: *Uwado* (2008), *Akpegi Boyz* (2009), *We Are Not Slaves* (unreleased) and *Blinded Devil* (unreleased). The videos had a rather limited circulation, mainly through small film festivals and privately organized screenings, but they enjoyed good support from local press and institutions.

Finally, the list of the Nigerian production companies that emerged in Europe over the past few years is completed by the Anaabel association, created in Antwerp, Belgium, by John Osas Omoregie in 2003. Like Vincent Omoigui and Rose Okoh, Omoregie did not have any experience of filmmaking before moving to Europe, but as evidenced by Samyn (2010: 47), while in Belgium he became familiar with the work of Tony Dele Akinyemi, Leonard Ajayi-Odekhiran and Isaac Izoya and got inspired from it. Hence he set up his own production company and since then released five videos: *Igho Evbue Ebo* (2003), *Desperate Heart* (2007), *Mama Why Me? I & II* (2008) *The*

*Immigrant Eyes* (2010) and *Amazing World* (2010). After an initial period of economic hardship related to a number of personal problems, Omoregie received an important boost in his work from the release of the documentary *Nollywood Abroad* (2008), a film directed by the Belgian documentary filmmaker Saartje Geerts entirely dedicated to him.[129]

An overview of the history of these production companies allows for a comparative evaluation of the production and distribution strategies that they have developed. Like other migrant and diasporic cinema, these production companies inhabit a space of social and cultural in-betwenness. If compared to migrant and diasporic cinema, however, their in-betweenness is made more radical by a number of factors. On the one hand, being fashioned on the model of the Nigerian video industry, a popular culture industry with commercial rather than artistic orientation, these production companies could not find a space in the European funding system. This system in fact promotes cultural diversity while at the same time setting specific aesthetic and narrative standards which are oriented towards author-cinema rather than popular entertainment (cf. Grassilli 2008). On the other hand, by trying to make commercial films from a peripheral position, these companies found themselves in a position of unfair competition in relation to both European national film industries and Nollywood. Being at the margin of these industries in fact, they hardly managed to compete on the same level with mainstream commercial film productions of both traditions.

To cope with this complex situation, each production company has tried to develop strategies that could open for it the access to already established structures of funding and distribution, either in Nigeria or in Europe. These strategies are profoundly different and their goals are partly diverging. While some companies have tried to transform their modes of operation to target cinema festivals and international black diasporic audiences, others have tried to get themselves connected to the video industry in Nigeria and to access the market that surrounds it. While some managed to achieve their goal, many others remained stuck in their position of in-betweenness, barely surviving in very critical economic conditions. As Toni Abulu, a Nigerian diasporic filmmaker himself, has emphasized referring to Nigerian diasporic productions in the United States,

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[129] Beside the production companies that I have listed, there are few more ventures whose existence is important to mention here, even if I do not have the data needed to analyze their work in depth. These production companies are Andi Amadi Okoroafor's Clam Films based in France, Andy Omoregbe's Zenith Entertainment based in Spain and Kennedy Uyi Oviahon's Komic Relief Pictures based in Italy (recently extinguished because of Oviahon's death).

[they] are lost in between! They didn't manage to do mainstream American movies and they didn't build a niche market for themselves [in the US]. But they still don't have a strong market [in Nigeria]. They are lost in the middle of two worlds! (2010).

Abulu's remark is valid also for the diasporic production companies based in Europe. Some examples will provide the elements to further develop this discussion.

As I mentioned above the two most successful diasporic production companies are, at least in my view, Isaac Izoya's Ehizoya Golden Entertainment and Obi Emelonye's The Nollywood Factory. They developed opposite production and distribution strategies, whose analysis will help in identifying the main tendencies within the landscape of Nigerian diasporic filmmaking. Being a popular culture industry, Nollywood is based upon a well consolidated star system. Videos tend to sell more in relation to the "faces" that are printed on the VCD's and DVD's jackets than because of the solidity of films' plot and narrative structure. Diasporic filmmakers inevitably had to come to terms with this reality to be able to position their work in the Nigerian market. Isaac Izoya is probably the diasporic director that adhered more explicitly to this system. To compete with mainstream Nollywood releases he hired a very successful Nigerian filmmaker, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, to direct most of his productions and he often included well known Nigerian stars in the cast. Tony Dele Akinyemi and Leonard Ajayi-Odekhiran had already applied this strategy a few years before, when they brought the Nigerian stars Saint Obi and Liz Benson to Holland for the shooting of *Dapo Junior* (image I). But the production costs that this initiative required (the actors' fees, the travel and accommodation expenses, and the visa fees) were hard to recover, and the participation of these actors was not enough to make the film economically profitable. To avoid similar problems Izoya paralleled the production of his videos with the organization of entertainment events in which the stars could meet their fans. The first event of this kind was organized in Germany in 2003 (Iwenjora 2004a) and, because of its success, it was repeated a few times over the following years, each time adding new destinations in other European countries.[130] Often, the stars brought to Europe for these kinds of events were also included in the cast of a new production, thus cutting the costs for travels, accommodations and visa procedures, and multiplying

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[130] The tours included shows in Germany, Holland, Greece, Spain, Italy and Belgium. Something similar had already been done in the UK since the mid-1990s with the organization of the award ceremony called "Afro-Hollywood", in which Nollywood stars were invited to meet their diasporic fans and receive special audiences awards (Odjegba 1996). However, this kind of events was not related to the activity of diasporic production companies. See also chapter three (footnote 72).

the profits (image II). Furthermore, by applying this strategy Izoya created for himself a name as Nigerian cultural ambassador, and was often portrayed by the Nigerian press as the man whose contribution to make Nollywood known throughout the world will be remembered (cf. Iwenjora 2003b and 2004a). This gave him solid connections within the Nollywood environment, making the marketing of his films in Nigeria easier.



I: *Dapo Junior*: the Nigerian star Saint Obi        II: *Love in Berlin*: the Nigerian star Patience Okonkwor

The strategy adopted by Obi Emelonye was profoundly different. As underlined in a recent interview, since the beginning of his career as a filmmaker he wanted to differentiate his work from Nollywood mainstream productions. Hence he oriented himself toward higher budget films which could open for Nollywood a space in the global cinema arena.

> Once I started making films in Nollywood – he underlined in an interview – I told myself that […] I wasn't going to use the so called stars. I wanted to create my brand, up to the level that my name carries the film as opposite to have a star to sell it (Emelonye 2009).

To achieve this goal Emelonye got involved in transnational co-productions (i.e. UK/Nigeria/Sierra Leone for *Echoes of War* and UK/Nigeria/Gambia for *The Mirror Boy*), used expensive shooting and recording equipment, and targeted cinema audiences. Applying this production and distribution strategies he managed to be the first Nollywood director who saw his films been released by Odeon cinemas all over the UK. Together with a number of other diasporic Nigerian artists in 2010 he promoted an initiative at the British Film Institute in London to sanction the birth of "New Nigerian cinema", a movement that intends to promote higher production values for Nollywood films while

targeting the global film market.[131] By applying this strategy, Emelonye aligned himself with a number of Nigerian diasporic directors active in the United States and in Canada who have decided to produce higher budget films to target international cinema audiences.[132] While the work of these directors is making Nigerian cinema and Nollywood gain a new position in the World cinema landscape, their films are introducing important aesthetic and narrative transformations which, as I mentioned several times throughout this dissertation, are progressively moving these films away from Nigerian popular audiences.

While Izoya's production strategies try to reduce the distance between mainstream Nollywood films and diasporic productions by accepting the rules of the Nigerian video market, Emelonye's attitude is oriented toward the creation of a space for the emergence of an author-cinema movement within Nollywood, a movement which aims at repositioning Nollywood within the global cinema arena. The other production companies that I mentioned above can all be located between the opposite poles represented by Izoya's and Emelonye's works. Some of them, such as IGB in Italy and Anaabel in Belgium, tend to reproduce the mainstream Nollywood formula, but they suffer from the lack of connections within the industry's environment in Nigeria. The works they produce hardly circulate outside the diasporic circles. Thus they are not economically self-sufficient, and survive thanks to the constant dedication of their creators and the support of the local diasporic communities. Other companies, such as GVK in Italy, tried to move beyond the boundaries traced by the Nigerian and African diaspora, but even if their attempt to create an intercultural film language that could appeal to both African and European audiences has been well received, they found themselves stuck in an ambiguous position. The films they produce are not "Nollywood-style" enough to captivate Nigerian popular audiences, but are not "European" enough to access cinema distribution in the West.

### *A focus on Nigerian video production in Italy*

The production and distribution strategies that diasporic Nigerian companies embraced conditioned the contents of their films. But inevitably, the specificities of the narrative and aesthetic choices that have been adopted oriented the product toward specific segments of the audience,

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[131] See also footnote 73 in chapter three.

[132] I refer here to Nigerian diasporic directors based in the United States, such as Toni Abulu (*Back to Africa*, *Crazy Like a Fox*), and based in Canada, such as Lonzo Nnzekwe (*Anchor Baby*) and Onyekachi (Lucky) Ejim (*The Tenant*). See also chapter three.

while excluding others. To better discuss the transformations of Nigerian videos' aesthetic and narrative features in the diasporic context, in this section I will focus an the analysis of the work of the two production companies active in Italy, whose activity I have been following closely since the beginning of my PhD research. Later on, in the next section of this chapter, I will enlarge my analysis to the narrative and aesthetic choices adopted by other diasporic production companies to produce a tentative categorization of the different film genres emerging within this context and to define the audiences they aim to address.

As I mentioned above, IGB Film and Music Industry was created by Prince Frank Abieyuwa Osharhenoguwu in Brescia in 2001. As reported in a recent interview (2009), Prince Osharhenoguwu used to work for a local television in Benin City before setting up his own production company in 1994. His first three films were shot in Nigeria and distributed mainly in Edo State.[133] When he managed to move to Italy in 2000, he decided to try to continue his business abroad. While keeping his video shop in Benin City open to maintain a connection with the Nigerian market, he started to invest both in music and film production, and in a few years released another four video films, this time shot in English to appeal to a wider audience (Osharhenoguwu 2009).

Probably because of the fact that he was involved in the video industry before migrating to Europe, when he started producing films in Italy Osharhenoguwu decided to keep the melodramatic narrative and aesthetic style that characterized his productions in Nigeria and he did not try to address the Italian market. This attitude is demonstrated by the fact that only one of IGB's films has been subtitled in Italian (*The Only Way After Home but It's Risky*), and this because it had to be presented during a thematic retrospective on Nollywood in Verona. As with most of the other films directed by Osharhenoguwu, this film narrates an intricate melodramatic story, whose location in Italy seems to be almost incidental. The central elements of the plot are the multiple love-affairs of the main character, Benny, who easily moves from one partner to another, eventually provoking the anger and jealousy of his previous girlfriends and leading one of them to take revenge on him.

As this example highlights, most of IGB's productions fit into what Jonathan Haynes has described as the constitutive elements of the "African Abroad" genre within the Nollywood canon. IGB's films, in fact,

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[133] *Aroghavbegbe* (1995), *Omo-sigho* (1997) and *Ukpokpouwa* (1999).

are located in an expatriate African subculture, with strictly limited interest in the surrounding white culture; usually there are one or two white characters important enough to have names […] in general, the problems the plots are built around are generated from within the African community (2003: 24).

The audience can understand that the story is actually taking place in a foreign location mainly through what Carmela Garritano has defined as moments of "cosmopolitan spectacle" (2008, quoted in Haynes forthcoming) and what Jonathan Haynes has called "tourist sequences" (forthcoming). In these kinds of scenes, the protagonists are placed in iconic foreign landscapes,[134] usually walking around and doing shopping, filmed in long-take shots, and accompanied by stereotypical soundtracks (image III). Targeting the Nigerian and, more generally, the African diasporic audience, Osharhenoguwu focused on what he considered to be popular plots (marriage problems, issues of infidelity and infertility, jealousy over a neighbor's wealth), often used within the Nollywood mainstream production. The fact that the films are produced through a network constituted of the director's closest friends (mainly Nigerians) contributes to creating a remarkably Afrocentric atmosphere. For instance, in *The Only Way After Home but It's Risky* the only two white characters in the film have very marginal roles (one is a taxi driver and the other one is the private secretary for a Nigerian entrepreneur) and one of them speaks in English with a remarkably Nigerian accent.

III *The Only Way After Home but It's Risky*: doing shopping
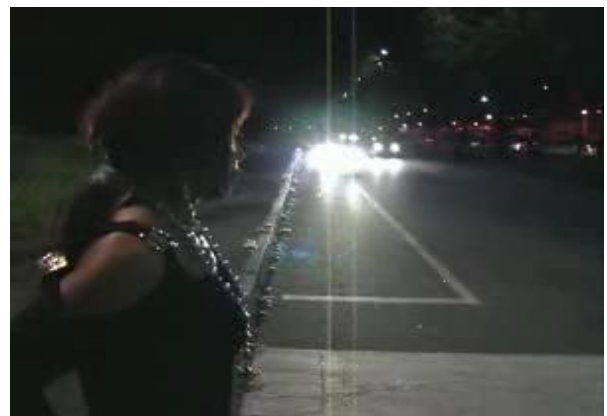
IV *Akpegi Boyz*: Nigerian prostitution in Turin

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[134] In IGB's films, for instance, there are recurrent shots of Milan central station, of the Arena in Verona, of a pretty path along the Como lake and, inevitably, of the shopping area around Via Montenapoleone in Milan.

As I mentioned above the work of GVK developed in a rather different way. The activity of this company began with the production in 2006 of a video film in Edo language, *Efe-Obomwan*, directed by Vincent Omoigui and produced by Rose Okoh. The film, which was distributed in few copies in Nigeria and throughout the diasporic communities in Northern Italy, did not achieve the economic result that the young couple was expecting. Acknowledging the fact that Vincent's lack of training as a director played an important part in the unsuccessful result of their first production, the couple decided to look for a more expert co-director and, as I mentioned before, they started a collaboration with Simone Sandretti, a video artist and anthropologist who studied partly in Austria and partly in Italy. If Okoh and Omoigui were interested in improving the technical quality of their productions, Sandretti was fascinated by what he knew about Nollywood, and by the possibility of applying the Nollywood informal production and distribution system to the Italian context. As I mentioned above, from this point on GVK produced another four films, two of which are not yet completed.

Compared to the work of IGB, GVK's films openly try to address issues related to the experience of migration, at the same time trying to preserve the particular aesthetic and narrative formula that made Nollywood films popular (see chapter six). Thanks to his insider's perspective within the Nigerian community, Omoigui tried to mix into his work as scriptwriter both his own personal experience and the analysis of the situation of Nigerian migrants in Turin, aiming to produce what he defined as 'docu-fiction films' (Omoigui 2009). *Efe-Obomwan*, for instance, addresses the relationship between new and already settled migrants, underlining the way the latter often exploit the lack of experience and the precarious condition of newly arrived Nigerians. *We Are Not Slaves* gives voice to the frustration that many migrants feel toward the repeated demands for remittances from relatives and friends back home. It is interesting to note that, despite what the title suggests, the film uses the term "slavery" mainly to address the exploitation of labor that occurs within the Nigerian community itself, while it confines the larger question of the exploitation of migrant labor within the Italian context to the background.

Of all GVK's films, *Akpegi Boys* can be regarded as the one in which the complex balance between social critique and a popular cinematic style is best established. The film is a Nollywood-style gangster movie, set in underground Turin, where the situation that many Nigerians experience once they arrive in Italy is represented in detail. Drug dealing and prostitution (image IV), violent fighting between different Nigerian gangs, Italian police corruption and racism are all issues that the film touches on, mixing them with traditional Nollywood-style narrative elements, such as the intervention of supernatural powers and the determining role of religious belief. In this film the two

directors of GVK, Omoigui and Sandretti, tried for the first time to address both Nigerian and Italian audiences and thus took the first steps toward the construction of a rather intercultural film language. As the two of them have emphasized in interviews (Sandretti 2010 and Omoigui 2010), during the shooting of this film the first conflicts about different ways of conceiving of filmmaking emerged, pushing the directors to find original compromises. The debate they had over the choice of the soundtrack is an example of this process. Sandretti, for instance, contrasted the use of a typical Nollywood-style soundtrack (usually computer-made music, often over-dramatic and continuous) and pushed for the introduction of an Afro-beat-style soundtrack, inevitably resonating with Italian audiences, who are familiar with musicians such as Fela Kuti and Tony Allen and who could thus better respond to this type of music. Omoigui opposed this solution because he considered the typical Nollywood-style soundtrack indispensable to drive the audience's attention toward the melodramatic peaks of the plot. At the end, the result is a interesting mix, in which the Afro-beat sound is used to give an aura of coolness to the main gangster character, while the Nollywood-style sound intervenes in the most dramatic and emotional scenes of the film.



V: the shooting of *Blinded Devil*



VI: the shooting of *Blinded Devil*

The trend GVK started with *Akpegi Boys* was consolidated through the production of *Blinded Devil* (image V and VI). While on one side the film keeps a popular and entertainment-oriented style, at the same time it engages in a social realism type of narrative, inspired by the Italian filmmaking tradition of Neorealism and politically engaged documentary.[135] The film focuses on the problems that a young Nigerian couple experiences in Italy while trying to settle down and obtain regular documents. The bureaucratic difficulties the protagonists encounter, the obstacles

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[135] The personality of the Italian director Vittorio De Seta and his last film *Lettere dal Sahara* (2006) can be considered examples of this tradition.

created by the language barrier, and the consequent impossibility to find a job are all elements that make them fall into illegal business. While the man is arrested and repatriated, his wife is forced to become a prostitute to raise the money she needs to feed their child. At the end she is also arrested and put into a temporary detention center, while the child is adopted by an Italian family.

Compared to the early GVK's productions, whose criticism was mainly directed toward the Nigerian community itself, the story told by *Blinded Devil* is mainly a brickbat aimed at the Italian migration policies and the racism connected to them. Through this narrative, Omoigui and Sandretti address the Italian audiences, inviting them to analyze the transformation that Italian society is undergoing. However, they do so through the prism offered by the experience of a young couple of Nigerian migrants, thus addressing also the Nigerian audiences through a critique of the narrative of success often connected with the phenomenon of migration.

The narrative and marketing choices that the two production companies adopted can be understood as a consequence of a condition of both marginality (in relation to both Nigerian industry and the Italian filmmaking tradition) and convergence (between different styles of filmmaking – on the one hand, a popular cinematic style and, on the other hand, a politically committed cinematic style as the one that often characterizes migrant and diasporic cinema). Within the framework of this precarious condition, IGB and GVK took different paths, which led to them representing the liminality of migrant experience in different ways. The chosen modalities of representation depended on the directors' personal ideas and ambitions, but were also significantly influenced by the target audience/market to which each production company oriented itself.

In films such as *The Only Way After Home but It's Risky*, IGB gave voice to a sort of *Eldorado* narrative about migration, in which the elsewhere is *socially Africanized* (there are almost only African characters in the film and white people speak in English with Nigerian accent), and *aesthetically exoticized* (through stereotypical images of beautiful buildings and large shopping malls). The protagonists of the film's life incarnate the common African dream about Europe, a place of success and quick money where the problems affecting the characters are due to family intrigues and love affairs. This kind of narrative tries to follow the formula applied in popular Nigerian melodramatic videos, adding to it just a bit of exotic flavor through the foreign setting. This formula, even if it seems plainly commercial in its nature, has its own implicit potential for social critique, because it literally puts Italy (and in general Europe as an elsewhere) on the periphery of Nollywood, dislocating it from the position where it is usually located by Eurocentric discourses. For an average European audience the experience of watching an Afrocentric film of this kind maybe likened to looking at one of those maps in which Europe is not located at the center

of the image, but on its margin. The near absence or evident marginality of white characters, the stereotypical or inaccurate representation of European settings, the Africanization of the plot and of its structure (even within a European setting) are all elements that potentially push the European viewer to perceive the partiality of his/her own perspective, and have an experience of non European forms of –centrism, in which Europe is a province rather than the center.

In GVK's films, on the contrary, the decision to target both Italian and Nigerian audiences pushed toward a different kind of narrative and aesthetic, which shares some elements with what Grassilli identifies as the emerging migrant cinema in Italy, a "guerrilla cinema" which draws inspiration from the experience of Third Cinema directors and post-independence filmmaking manifestos. Within this tradition, represented in Italy by experiences as diverse as those of Theo Eshetu, Dagmawi Yimer and Hedy Krissane,[136] films tend to be charged with strong social and political messages which are expressed through hybrid and experimental film languages. As discussed earlier, in films of this kind the condition of marginality due to the experience of migration and exile becomes the place from where to question the rhetoric of identity and belonging that constitutes the modern idea of nation-state.

What radically differentiates GVK's production from this tradition is the fact that its main cinematic reference remains Nollywood, a film tradition based on an entertainment-oriented style of filmmaking. GVK's productions combine thus a strategic mixture of politics and popular appeal in which, as discussed above through the example of *Blinded Devil*, the use of the two registers has the objective of enlarging the potential audience of the films produced. For GVK to produce a film that could appeal to an Italian audience meant to move toward a more politically explicit register, in which the issue of migration had to be openly discussed and problematized. As Paul Gilroy (1987) suggested in his analysis of Black British cultural production, cultural policies and public funding strategies deeply influence migrants' cultural production. Even in a country like Italy that, as Grassilli has emphasized (2008: 1238), still lacks coherent and effective cultural policies to support emerging experiences of migrant cinema, the influence of cultural policies on migrants' cultural production is a factor that can assume a significant relevance. For GVK to access Italian institutional funding and eventually reach the Italian audiences, its films had to become socially relevant for Italian audiences. Moving toward an inclusion of the Italian market meant entering an

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[136] As an example of this tradition see Theo Eshetu's *Il sangue non è acqua fresca* (1997) and *Africanized* (2001) , Dagmawi Yimer's *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008) and *Soltanto il mare* (2011), Hedy Krissane's *Colpevole fino a prova contraria* (2005) and *Ali di cera* (2009). See also Jedlowski 2011.

arena in which in most of the cases stories of migration have to be dramatic and films about them have to be political.

While IGB's films will hardly be screened in Italian festivals and televisions because of their Afrocentric contents and their entertainment-oriented style, GVK's films (and especially its last project, *Blinded Devil*) are likely to be able to receive funding and distribution in Italy thanks to their specific approach to migration and their strategic alignment with some aspects of migrant cinema aesthetics. IGB's films put Italy at the periphery of their universe and their Afrocentric narrative challenges Eurocentric discourses, but they do so mainly because they have to please the already established tastes of Nollywood popular audiences, thus confirming the existing exotic representation that characterizes Nollywood's imagery of the elsewhere. GVK's films, on the other hand, problematize the experience of migration and challenge Italian policies around this issue, but this is partly the result of a strategy not eminently political but commercial, devised to access Italian audiences and public institutions' funding.

### *Genres and audiences of diasporic Nigerian productions*

By comparing the analysis of the Nigerian production companies in Italy with the work of the other companies active in Europe it is possible to produce a tentative categorization of the aesthetic and narrative transformations of Nigerian video's genres in the diaspora. Among the different solutions that characterize each of the films produced by diasporic companies, it is possible to identify at least three main genres, which are connected to specific production strategies and are oriented toward different shares of the audience. Most of the production companies experimented with more than one genre during their activity, in order to find the solution that could better position their products on the film market, in Europe and in Nigeria. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the boundaries between film genres are flexible, and the categories that I propose below work more as a model than as a rigid taxonomy. A film's affiliation to a specific genre is in fact hard to define, and a film can present in itself elements that belong to different genres at the same time. However the categorization that I suggest below might be useful to draw some general conclusions.

The first genre that I have identified might be called the "Nigerian melodrama abroad". The films that belong to this category include most of those produced by IGB in Italy (*Kiki Marriage*, *Abroad Wahala, The Only Way After Home but It's Risky*) and some of those produced by Double 'A' Entertainment in Holland (*Dapo Junior, From Holland with Love*) and by Ehizoya Golden Entertainment in Germany (*Love in Berlin*). As I have underlined while describing the work of IGB,

this genre resembles closely to the one described by Jonathan Haynes in his articles on Nigerian videos set in the diaspora (2003 and forthcoming). Mainly oriented toward audiences in Nigeria, these films use the foreign setting as a way to add an exotic spice to the film plot, whose focus is hardly oriented toward migration-related issues or to the experience of living abroad.



VII: *Dapo Junior*: mixed couple in Holland

VIII: Love in Berlin: mixed couple in Germany

While the videos produced by IGB in Italy provide probably the best example of this genre, the other films that I mentioned in the list above present some specificities and constitute almost a subgenre within the Nigerian-melodrama-abroad category. In films like *Dapo Junior* and *Love in Berlin*, in fact, while the plot presents the melodramatic attributes that define most Nollywood mainstream videos (see chapter six), the focus is on issues that could particularly interest diasporic audiences, namely intercultural marriages and the family conflicts related to it (image VII and VIII). However, even if at a first glance these films give the impression to focus on migration-related issues, the register that prevails is a rather entertainment-oriented melodramatic style. The accent on intercultural marriages, and particularly on love affairs between Nigerian males and European women, does address a social issue that is relevant in the life of many Nigerians that live abroad. But the overall melodramatic tone make this subgenre resembles closely to mainstream Nollywood videos that thematize interethnic relationships in Nigeria, such as, for instance, *Mortal Inheritance* (1996) and *Across the Niger* (2004). In these films, the plot tends to be organized around a Romeo-and-Juliet type of story: the families oppose the union of the couple who, as a consequence, has to pass through a series of dramatic episodes to be finally able to crown its love dream. As in all films that belong to this genre, then, the "elsewhere" is hardly explored in its specificities, but it has an important role in creating the commercial value of the film. In fact, it adds to the film an exotic element that makes it more marketable by insisting on Nigerian popular audiences' desire of

Afrocentric images from and of the elsewhere. At the same time, being set in the diaspora, these films give diasporic audiences a sense of proximity with the story that is narrated. This proximity makes them feel represented and thus closer to the content of the video itself.



IX: *Zero Your Mind*: a Nigerian just arrived in Berlin



X: *Blinded Devil*: prostitution trafficking

The second genre that I have identified might be defined as the "migration drama". The films that belong to this genre are quite common. Almost all companies at one point during their activity have experimented with this narrative category. Films of this kind include *Under Pressure*, *Zero Your Mind*, *Desperate Heart*, *Mama Why Me?* and most of GVK productions (image IX and X). These films are in most of the cases explicitly based on the life experiences of the director/producer of the film, and intend to show to Nigerian audiences the reality of the migration experience beyond the *Eldorado* imaginary that characterizes much of the Nigerian popular discourse about Europe. These films often emphasize the hardship of the immigrant life and the violence that characterizes it. They underline the sacrifices that a migrant has to pass through to be able to send some remittances home, and they highlight the psychological pressure that family's and friends' expectations back home put on the person that lives abroad. As I have discussed earlier in relation to GVK's productions, by centering their plot on migration-related issues these films also try to address European audiences and funding agencies, that, when it comes to migration, usually support socially-oriented rather than entertainment-oriented productions. This strategy can also be observed in relation to some of the recent Nigerian productions in Northern America, such as Lonzo Nnzekwe's *Anchor Baby* and Onyekachi Ejim's *The Tenant*. Both films try to address American and African cinema audiences by developing highly dramatic socially- and politically-oriented stories. In these films the attempt to reach Western audiences is strengthened by the use of Western actors in central roles and by the relevance that these characters have in the plot.

Within this genre, crime stories and prostitution-trafficking-related plots constitute a kind of subgenre, which is particularly developed in continental Europe, probably in relation to the specific social reality that Nigerian migrants experience in countries like Italy, Belgium, Holland and Germany. In films such as *Akpegi Boyz*, *Holland Heat* and *Run but Can't Hide*, the drama of the migration experience is transformed into a gangster type of story, in which the problems that many Nigerians experience abroad (criminality, rivalry between Nigerian gangs, drug dealing, prostitution trafficking) are both addressed and commoditized. The dramatic aspects of these experiences are largely shown, but this is done while also following the rules of the gangster movie genre, in which the gangster is often a charismatic and fascinating character and the female protagonist (in these cases often a prostitute) has some elements of the *femme-fatale*-kind of character in Hollywood movies. However, the plots of the migration-drama films, in both the autobiographic-type and the gangster-type subgenres, maintain an aspect that is common to most Nigerian videos, that is, a strong moral pattern that polarizes the narrative in terms of a radical opposition between the Good and the Evil. Within this framework, the difficulties a character goes through are interpreted as the consequence of his wrongdoings, and the solution of the drama comes as a sort of redemption in which the "right" moral behavior prevails.

The third genre that I have identified during my research might be called the "identity-centered drama". This genre is yet rather underdeveloped and it characterizes particularly the work of the companies that have addressed the international market most radically, and that are particularly interested in attracting African diasporic audiences of the second, third and further generations, such as for instance the Black British and the African American audiences. Good examples of films of this kind are Obi Emelonye's *The Mirror Boy* and, in the United States, Toni Abulu's *Back to Africa* (image XI and XII). In these films the protagonist is always a second generation African (in Emelonye's film a Gambian and in Abulu's film a Nigerian) who is pushed by various reasons to explore his African identity through a trip to Africa. The strong focus on identity-related issues tend to make these films relatively unsuccessful in Nigeria, where being "African" is hardly as problematic as it can be for a second generation migrant. As Abulu (2010) has underlined in relation to his film *Back to Africa* and as the Nigerian journalist Derin Ajao (2011) has reported in relation to *The Mirror Boy*, these films did not have the expected success when shown in Nigeria, but they achieved significant commercial results abroad. In ways similar to those identified by numerous Indian scholars in relation to Bollywood's NRI films (cf. Punathambekar 2005), the Nigerian diasporic films of the identity-centered-drama genre tend to reify the concept of "African culture" and put forward rather conservative systems of values. Within this context, an idealized

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version of "Afrocentric" traditions intervenes in the plot to provide a cultural model that can help the audiences to cope with the identity-related problems that they encounter in their everyday life, and which are connected to the "double absence" and existential in-betweeness that, as I discussed earlier, characterize the experience of living in the diaspora.
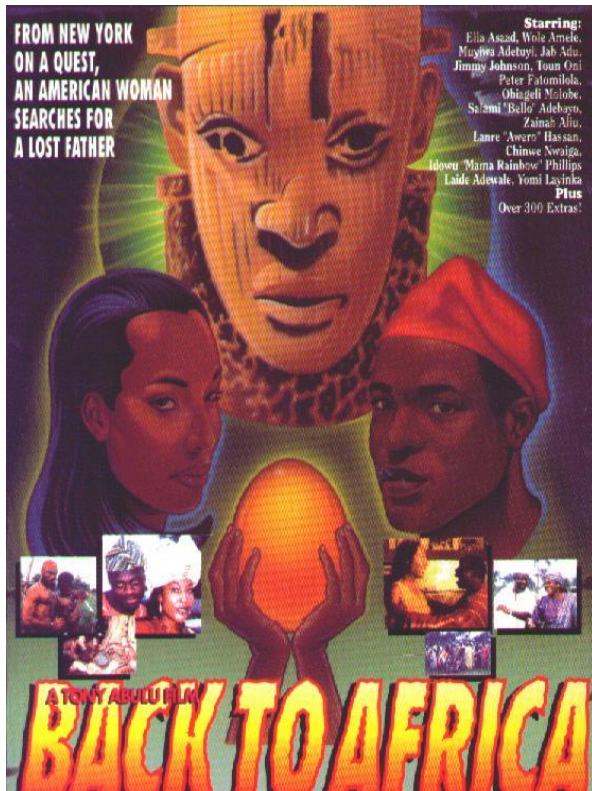


XI: the poster of *Back to Africa*
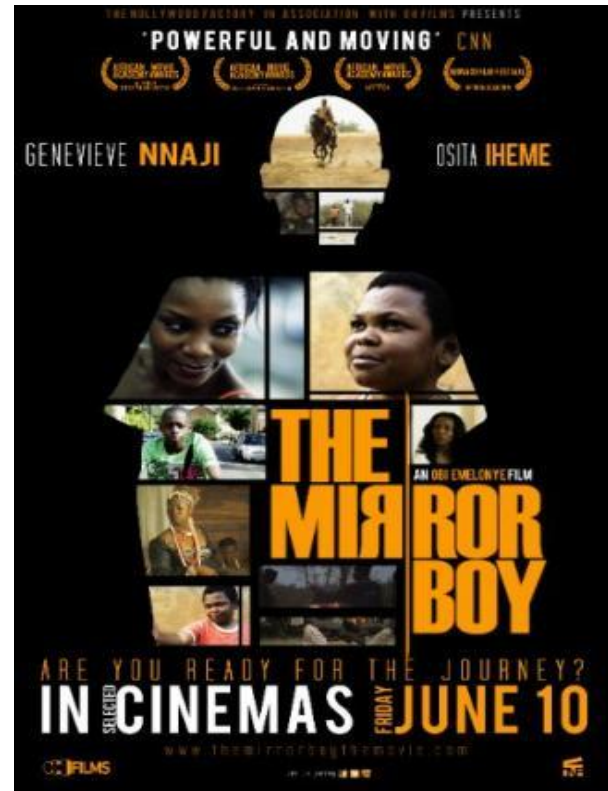


XII: the poster of *The Mirror Boy*

As discussed throughout this chapter, the specific position in which Nigerian diasporic production companies found themselves obliged them to creatively experiment with different commercial strategies and narrative choices. In this context the relationship they entertained with the video industry in Nigeria has been ambiguous. As I have evidenced, most of the diasporic producers did not have any experience of filmmaking before creating a production company and, in most cases, they did not have any structured contact within the video industry's environment either. However, all of them clearly drew inspiration from the Nigerian video phenomenon and used their (often self-appointed) affiliation to Nollywood as a brand to gain some kind of recognition in front of both Nigerian and European audiences. While they would have probably struggled to emerge and survive autonomously, their constant reference to the Nigerian video industry gave them some sort of legitimacy and the strength to further pursue their initiative.

However, the position of marginality occupied by these diasporic production companies in relation to both the Nigerian video industry and the European cinema infrastructures, has obliged them to reinvent their assets in order to find a position in the film market in Nigeria and, eventually, in Europe. They thus developed commercial, aesthetic and narrative strategies that borrow some elements from Nollywood while at the same time establishing a distance from it. Their peculiar position has transformed them into the bridge that could connect European audiences to the Nigerian video phenomenon. The aesthetic and narrative transformations that some of these ventures adopted, as well as their commercial strategies, are in fact giving to the Nigerian video phenomenon a higher visibility and a stronger international acceptance.

CONCLUSION

## *Videos' mobility and Nigerian socio-cultural transformations*

On one of the last days of my fieldwork in Lagos, in early 2011, I was attending a film premiere at the Silverbird Galleria, in Victoria Island. The film that was screened was one of the high budget productions that have began to appear in Nigeria since 2006/2007 and that, as I suggested in chapter three, are defining the emergence of a new wave in Nigerian cinema. I was standing on one of the internal terraces of the Galleria's monumental building and, while waiting for my friends to join me, I was observing the audiences that were crowding in the main hall (image I and II). This image stayed with me while I was writing this thesis. New production and distribution strategies were emerging. New audiences were being shaped. Probably a new phase in the video industry's history was slowly emerging. The contrast between the high budget films released while I was doing my research and those that defined Nollywood's aesthetic and narrative standards in the early years of the industry, between the new monumental multiplexes that started emerging over the past few years and the informal screening places that defined Nigerian videos' relationship with the audiences since the industry's birth (image III and IV), between the vertical and increasingly formalized structures of production that appeared as a response to the production crisis and the segmented, horizontal, rhyzomatic constellation of production ventures that defined Nollywood's economy since its beginnings, stayed with me all through the years of my research. This contrast is the consequence of a series of profound transformations whose analysis became one of the central focuses of my work, and whose cause is mainly related to the processes of transnationalization that affected the video industry over the past few years.



I: Silverbird Galleria: main hall

II: Silverbird Galleria: premiere of the film *Tango with me*

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III: People watching a video in a video club in Lagos



IV. A video rental shop in Lagos

Throughout this dissertation I tried to define these transformations by analyzing them under different perspectives. In my analysis, the concept of *mobility* has occupied a central role and it has provided an ordering principle to interpret the dynamics that I observed during my fieldwork. Each of the three sections that compose this dissertation focused on a different aspect of mobility and tried to understand the role that each of them had, on the one hand, in generating the video industry's popular and transnational success and, on the other, in activating the transformative processes that are taking place.

In the first section I looked at the economy of the video industry and I closely explored the relationship existing between the production crisis and the specific regimes of mobility that characterized videos' circulation since the birth of the industry. Within this framework the concepts of informality and piracy occupy a central role and I thus tried to define their specificity within the video industry's context in order to understand the role they had in shaping Nollywood's economy. The emergence and growth of the video industry can be largely related to the flexibility that informal modes of operation allowed. As I mentioned several times in this dissertation, the industry emerged during one of the hardest crisis of Nigerian economic and political system. It is largely thanks to informal strategies of economic survival that media entrepreneurs with different backgrounds managed to develop new business possibilities and created products that quickly imposed themselves on the local and regional market. Within this framework, informal and pirated networks of circulation made videos travel long distances and create for the industry a transnational audience. However, as I showed throughout the first section, informal production and distribution strategies and their vulnerability to piracy progressively eroded the industry's economy. Those who were initially benefiting from the high level of deregulation of the industry's economic environment became the most vocal advocates of an increase in videos' production and circulation's regulation.

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New modes of operation emerged, and new screening and selling venues were created. A new wave of high budget productions saw the light. The videos' patterns of mobility transformed, and with them also the social constituencies that defined the videos' production and consumption since the early days of the video industry.

In the second section, I analyzed the way videos' discursive circulation (that is, the way in which videos, and the video phenomenon in general, have been portrayed, discussed and analyzed both in Nigeria and elsewhere) impacted on the video industry's transformation. As with the material and economic circulation analyzed in the first section, videos' discursive circulation interacted with the video phenomenon in at least two ways. On the one hand it made videos travel. It made them cross boundaries and reach audiences they did not even envisaged to reach. On the other hand, it opened for the video industry a field of dynamic confrontation. Videos have been compared to other instances of filmmaking, they have been criticized, in some cases misunderstood. The video phenomenon has been celebrated for some of its achievement, and it has been mocked for some of its weaknesses. This complex interaction has produced numerous effects on the video industry. Videos entrepreneurs' ambitions to stand proudly on the global cinema arena made them react to criticism. It made them engage into active processes of transformation that could make the video industry reach international production standards in order to make Nollywood emerge from the marginal, ghettoized position within which much of the mentioned discursive constructions had positioned it.

In the third section I moved my focus to the videos' aesthetics and narrative structures. Mobility impacted on them in multiple ways. On the one hand, mobility (seen as a particular vocation to intergenericity and intertextuality) gave videos a high degree of aesthetic and narrative openness which made them able to address dispersed audiences and reconstitute them into what we can define as a pan-African public. Through their specific film language, contents, and forms of address videos activated a debate on what it means to be African and shaped it around the social, cultural and historic specificities of the post-colonial, post-Structural-Adjustment era in Nigeria and, more generally, in sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, mobility (seen this time as actual, physical displacement) intervened in the reformulation of videos' narrative and aesthetic patterns. The video phenomenon has been adopted and reinterpreted by Nigerian diasporic groups in Europe and elsewhere. The specific social and economic condition associated with the experience of living in the diaspora interacted with the videos' production strategies and defined particular narrative and aesthetic solutions. Diasporic video production companies positioned themselves both at the margins and at the centre of the Nigerian video industry's main transformations. Being physically

on the periphery of the video phenomenon their condition has always been defined by a high degree of economic vulnerability. For this reason they experimented with different production strategies and narrative solutions in order to differentiate their market. However, when the Nigerian video industry entered the production crisis these production companies found themselves in the position of an avant-garde in what concerns the transnational expansion of the video industry. They had in fact already experimented with economic and aesthetic solutions that could open Nigerian productions to global audiences. In this sense, they became potentially the bridge that could connect the Nigerian video industry to transnational, non-African audiences.

As discussed throughout this dissertation, while processes of transnationalization have shaped Nollywood since its beginnings, they are today assuming a particularly influential role in the video industry. The three sections that I summarized above all evidenced this dynamic and tried to analyze the causes behind it. However they inevitably leave a number of questions open. During my research I observed a process in the act of happening. The transformations that I described and analyzed are still on their way, and their consequences are still not completely manifest.

What will the processes of transnationalization that I underlined throughout this dissertation mean in terms of the social impact of the video industry on local audiences? And what is going to change in terms of the popularity and accessibility of Nigerian videos? As evidenced several times in these pages, the success of the Nigerian video phenomenon has in fact been based on its capacity to interpret the dreams, the fears, and the expectations of its local popular audience. The informality of Nollywood's specific modes of production and distribution have had a fundamental role in making videos accessible for the lowest classes of the Nigerian social pyramid. Even if the formalization processes that I have described (the construction of new theatre halls, the formalization of the distribution) are still underway, they will inevitably affect the popular accessibility of Nigerian films, transforming the very nature of the video phenomenon and its social impact.

Moreover, what is going to happen to the aesthetics and narratives of Nigerian videos if producers start considering the Nigerian and worldwide African diasporas as their main audiences? What if the video era must die for cinema culture to be born again? The new wave of high budget films that has emerged in the past few years has in fact shifted its focus from a local-popular to a transnational-elitist audience, an audience whose economic support might prove to be vital for the survival of the industry itself, but whose tastes, interests, social and cultural values probably differ profoundly from those of the popular audience that patronized the videos since the early days of the

industry. This shift is provoking important aesthetic, narrative and economic transformations which are destined to transform the very nature of the Nigerian video phenomenon.[137]

Nollywood has received much international scholarly attention in the past few years, and part of it has been attracted precisely by the features of the industry that are now seen as liabilities: the informality of its modes of production and distribution, the specificity and localism of its aesthetics, the impact of straight-to-video distribution on the viewers' experience. What will then the recent transformations represent for the industry as a whole? And how are they going to influence the way the video phenomenon is represented and discussed?

Nollywood revolutionized African screens in the past fifteen to twenty years, arguably because it was a commercially driven initiative in which no ideological project has counted more than the pragmatic and economic calculations made by the people that invested in it. The growing transnationalization of the industry appears to be commercially driven as well. It might be a phase, or it might be a solid development. It might mean the end of the video industry, but it could also represent a further revolution in the geography of media consumption in the continent and throughout the diaspora.

In the last few pages of this dissertation I will formulate some tentative answers to the questions that I just raised through the analysis of two films that I see as representative of the new trend identified throughout this dissertation. This analysis will allow for the formulation of some final thoughts about the transformations that videos' discourse on modernity is undertaking.

### *Toward a reformulation of Nigerian videos' film language*

Among the recent Nigerian releases that represent a new trend within the Nigerian video phenomenon (see chapter three), two films attracted my attention particularly, *The Figurine* (2009) and *Ije, the Journey* (2010). They are probably the two most successful releases among those that I have mentioned and they are probably those that enunciate in most clear terms the direction toward

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[137] It might be important to underline here the existence of a wide literature, within the field of African studies and beyond, which criticizes radical narratives of social and temporal rupture (see, for instance, Cooper 2001; Guyer 2007). As Piot has underlined, these critiques "warn that by jumping on the 'today is new and different' bandwagon, scholars risk being taken in by the ideology of the moment" (2010: 13). Recognizing and sharing this concern, my analysis of the current transformations taking place within the video industry's environment does not intend to draw the line of a definitive rupture. On the contrary, it tries to evidence patterns of continuity and discontinuity in order to highlight the paths of potential transformation that are emerging within the industry itself.

which part of the Nigerian video industry is heading. I have already emphasized in chapter three the production and distribution strategies that define the difference between these films and mainstream Nollywood modes of operation (higher production budgets, theatrical release, structured system of distribution, participation to film festivals, international circulation). Here, as a way of concluding this research's itinerary, I intend to analyze the aesthetic and narrative strategies that these films develop. As I will argue, they represent an important shift from the film language that informed Nollywood videos throughout the video industry's history.

As I have emphasized in chapter six, the structure of videos' film language can be related to the specific historical period within which Nigerian videos emerged. The syntax of this language is in fact profoundly influenced by the crisis of modernization processes that characterized Nigerian society since the mid-1980s. This crisis oriented videos' narrative and aesthetic choices toward specific contents and modes of address whose objective was the reorganization of dispersed, fragmented national audiences into new transversal moral constituencies. The formula that emerged from this context is characterized by a particular openness, whose structure of meaning resonates with pan-African audiences that share similar experiences of modernization. Within this context, videos are organized around the moral drama of the protagonist and of his or her family. Throughout the drama, the intimate structure of the family is usually scattered by external and internal forces, to be later recomposed in a new order thanks to the intervention of the surrounding moral collectivity or that of the supernatural forces symbolizing it. Within this framework, the destiny of the individual is usually marked by his or her moral wrongdoings. The collectivity intervenes to monitor the individual's behavior, and eventually to correct it, in order to resurrect the individual to its role within the society. As I intend to show below, in both *The Figurine* and *Ije* this narrative structure is profoundly modified. Both films in fact marginalize the role of the moral collectivity in the resolution of the conflict the film is based on, to centralize the role of the individual.

Before advancing in this analysis, however, it is important to underline that by using the terms "collectivity" and "individual" I do not intend to reproduce a highly controversial theoretical model based on radical dichotomies, such as "local vs foreign epistemologies", "traditional vs modern social organizations" and "indigenous vs cosmopolitan cultural habits" (see also chapter six). As Charles Piot rightly pointed out, in fact, "individualistic theories not only misconstrue others but also misrepresent the West itself. Westerners appear [to be] far less individualistic and self-

authoring than our ideology and our theories suggest" (1999: 20).[138] On the contrary, my intention here is to highlight the unfolding of internal processes of social transformations. These processes are profoundly connected to the modification of a wide range of social, economic and political factors that happened in Nigeria throughout the recent past. In relation to this point, we can say that, in general terms, the reemergence of the individual-as-protagonist-of-its-destiny narrative at the center of recent film releases is connected to a progressive, disillusioned, reprisal of the 1960s/1970s modernization project, rather than to the affirmation of any particular foreign model. At best, this process is the result of an articulate and complex combination of the two mentioned dynamics, rather than the affirmation of one of them upon the other: it is thus the outcome of the complex articulation of both endogenous and exogenous factors.
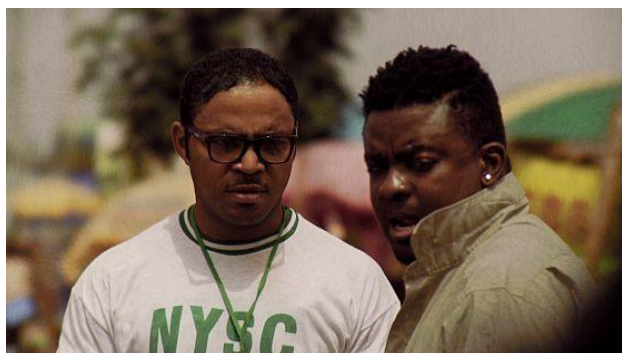
V: *The Figurine*: Femi and Sola

VI: *Ije, the Journey*: Chioma and Anya

The analysis of the two recent releases mentioned above will make this discussion clearer. In *The Figurine* the two protagonists, Sola and Femi, played by the Nigerian stars Kunle Afolayan and Ramsey Noah (image V), are good friends, even if it transpires from the beginning that Femi feels a subtle jealousy for Sola's self-confidence and success with women. This jealousy becomes evident when Sola manages to seduce Mona, the girl Femi has always been in love with. This happens while the two friends are doing their NYSC (Nigerian Youth Service) camp, in a rural youth center, far away from Lagos. In the same period, during a training in the forest, the two friends discover by

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[138] See also Barber and Waterman (1995), Geschiere, Meyer and Pels (2008) and chapter six (footnote 110). In what concerns particularly the position of the individual in relation to the collectivity, and generally the role of individualism in African societies' socio-political organization and ethics, Barber and Waterman, amongst others, have participated in deconstructing linear combinations that associate the West to individualism and Africa to collectivism. Karin Barber's work is particularly significant within this context. Her analysis of the Yoruba *oríkì* praise poetry tradition has in fact evidenced the role played by individual and individualism in "traditional" Yoruba culture (Barber 1991; Barber and Waterman 1995).

accident an abandoned statuette of a goddess, Araromire, which is supposed to bring seven years of good luck to the person that finds it. They decide to keep the idol and in the following years they achieve great fortunes. Sola marries Mona and becomes a rich entrepreneur, while Femi, after a few years abroad, becomes a successful business man. At the end of the seventh year a number of inexplicable accidents starts to happen, and all the elements seem to indicate the statuette as the responsible for them. Sola, who has kept the idol in his house since he and Femi found it seven years earlier, refuses this kind of interpretations, while Mona is terrorized and wants the statuette to be destroyed. A number of plot twists happen, which give the audiences the idea that the film would finally reproduce a rather classic conclusion: Sola will be punished for his acts of hubris and moral excesses (during the film we see him betraying Mona and getting involved in a number of dubious activities), and then he will be redeemed through a moral solution of the drama. But, on the contrary, through a final radical twist, we discover that the one responsible for most of the accidents that affected Sola's and Mona's life is Femi who, moved by his frustrated jealousy, has planned a vengeance that the superstition for the statuette's power has covered.

Through this twist, the film centralizes the role of the individual, in both its positive and negative tones, marginalizing that of the conservative moral collectivity that, in this case, accepts and reproduces irrational superstitions. Through its radical violence, Femi's vengeance puts the force of the individual above the power of the irrational and the moral. It thus represents, even if by excess, an affirmation of individual possibilities to modify one's destiny. Sola has not been punished because of his moral wrongdoing or because he went against the will of the goddess Araromire. Actually he has not been punished for anything specific. On the contrary Sola's ruin is the consequence of a specific human action. It is the result of his former friend's vengeance. Moral and irrational solutions are replaced by a rational system of causes and consequences, in which the final resolution is contained and delimited by human interactions. The film's end, however, is deliberately ambiguous. After the last scene, in fact, the audience is confronted with a direct question that challenges its interpretation of the plot: "what do you believe?" While this ambiguity might be read, as Jonathan Haynes (2011) proposes, as a way of opening the film to foreign audiences,[139] I think that the formulation of the question itself marks a remarkable departure from most of Nollywood releases' narrative structure. The open question mark at the end of the film asks

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[139] As Haynes puts it: "is the studied ambiguity of the final question about belief a mechanism for accommodating the belief systems of both a domestic Nigerian audience, which is thoroughly accustomed to divine interventions on screen, and the foreign audience the film is also designed to conquer, which might enjoy playing with the notion of exotic spiritual forces while distancing itself from actual belief?" (Forthcoming a: 3).

the audience to interrogate the film in order to problematize its plot critically, a movement that Nigerian videos had rarely done before. The move toward open rather than closed endings establishes a distance from the classic melodramatic imagination that uses to characterize Nollywood videos (as seen in chapter six), creating the space for the emergence of new individualized spectator.

In *Ije* the story is organized around the relationship between two sisters, Chioma and Anya, played by the Nigerian stars Genevieve Nnaji and Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, and particularly around Chioma's attempt to save her sister from a murder accusation. Chioma lives in Lagos, while her sister has moved to the US in order to achieve her dream to become a singer and an actress. But something terrible has happened to Anya, who has found herself on the scene of a triple murder, in which her husband and two of his friends have been killed. The police have arrested her even though she claims to be innocent. Chioma travels to Los Angeles to try to save her sister, and the film develops as a thriller in which Chioma progressively manages to discover the truth about the killings. Racist prejudices and gender discriminations make the investigation harder and, by the time the truth is discovered, the illusion of the American dream that brought Anya to the US is replaced by a much harder reality. Anya has been the victim of rape and sexual abuses committed by her husband and his friends and, as the dynamic of the murder becomes clearer, her character moves from the role of the perpetrator to that of the victim. The killings that Anya committed appear thus under a new light, they become an act of revenge that Anya takes over the violence of the situation she has found herself in.

If compared to mainstream Nollywood narratives, the accent here is marked on the individual's capacity to react to the violence that is imposed on him/her, rather than on the collective and moral resolution of the crisis that the act of violence has produced. Probably in a classic Nollywood plot, Anya's behavior would have been portrayed as arrogant, an act of defiance to the collective moral order. Her choice to try her fortune abroad, to accept certain kinds of friendships and to get accustomed to certain kinds of environments would have been portrayed as inevitably dangerous and morally misleading. Her misfortune would have thus been described as the result of her behavior, and would have been probably interpreted as an ordeal for Anya to overcome in order to be able to gain acceptance in a new (moral and moralized) collectivity. On the contrary, in *Ije* Anya is showed as a heroine. She reacts to the violence that she has suffered. She takes her destiny in her hands and frees herself from the regime of sexual slavery within which her husband had put her.

If we compare this film's plot to, for instance, the plot of a highly successful Nollywood classic, *Rattlesnake* (1995), the transformation that *Ije*'s narrative represents becomes clearer. As I have

discussed in chapter six, the protagonist of *Rattlesnake*, Ahanna, experiences a very hard adolescence. His father dies when he is still young, and Ahanna's mother abandons him with his siblings in the village. After moving to the city to search for his mother, Ahanna becomes a thug, and later a gangster and an armed-robber. As in the case of Anya, the violence he commits is clearly connected to the hardship he has been obliged to go through. In both cases, the narrative construction makes the viewer sympathize with the protagonist, seen as a victim rather than a perpetrator. However, the films' endings are radically different. While at the end of *Rattlesnake* Ahanna dies, perpetually haunted and inevitably caught by the violence of his past, in *Ije* Anya survives. She wins the trial, is freed from prison and starts a new life. While in *Rattlesnake* the individual act of hubris, the rebellion against the violence of the established social order, is punished (Ahanna dies), in *Ije* a similar act produces a moral success (Anya wins the trial).

The moral that we can draw from *Rattlesnake* tends to be conservative. Ahanna's attempt to be reinserted in the moral collectivity (he changes his life, investing the money he got from robberies into legitimate businesses and setting up a family of his own) fails because the violence he committed cannot be forgiven. The film, rather than emphasizing the possibilty of transforming a person's own destiny, focuses its attention on the consequences of moral wrongdoings. The failure of Ahanna's life is the consequence of multiple acts of hubris against the community's cohesion: on the one hand, the iniquitous behavior of Ahanna's mother (she left her children after her husband's death and started a relationship with her husband's brother, getting finally pregnant of him and causing Ahanna's desire for vengeance) and, on the other, Ahanna's ambition for wealth and welfare which pushes him to leave the village in order to move to the city (where he commits vengeance on his mother and accumulates great fortunes as a result of the illegal activities he gets involved in). Ahanna's tragic end is thus a moral warning to the spectator: excesses in pursuing selfish interests bring a person's life to failure. On the contrary, Anya's life itinerary, while equally tragic, produces a profoundly different result. Her individual impetus is finally rewarded. Her status as a victim is recognized. The violence she committed becomes secondary. What instead prevails as the narrative's moral is the example of Anya's personal strength and courage, which made her overcome the obstacles she has encountered throughout her life and gave her the possibility of a new life.

*Toward a redefinition of Nigerian cinema's modernity*

What does the emergence of this kind of narratives means in terms of videos' relationship with Nigerian reality and history? Does it tell us anything about the direction toward which Nigerian society is heading? Inevitably, as I underlined at the end of chapter six, it is too early to draw definitive answers to these questions. The films that are emerging within the new wave are still too few and their circulation too little to generalize the thoughts that they might provoke. However, some tentative conclusions can be proposed in order to define possible scenarios for the development of the video industry.

As I have suggested in chapter three, the new wave in Nigerian cinema that *The Figurine* and *Ije* represent tends to be characterized by rather vertical structures of productions (bigger production companies, higher budgets, transnational co-productions) and circulation (cinema halls, satellite televisions, international festivals) that have generated new forms of viewership (elitist rather than popular, transnational rather than local). The new wave's film language incarnate these transformations by addressing constituencies that differ from those that classic Nollywood videos used to target. What seems to be at the center of new wave films' concern is the successful, entrepreneurial upper-middle class Nigerian, someone who positively and proudly incarnates a reborn ideal of African modernization.

The new wave of Nigerian films that emerged in the past few years, the film language that characterizes them and the addressivity that they are progressively developing are the result of the progressive, even if still fragile and delicate, consolidation of the Nigerian economy that followed the re-introduction of democracy in 1999. This process, which is felt in more radical terms in a city like Lagos, but which is still far from showing any result in more provincial areas of the country, is producing the consolidation of an urban upper-middle class which has regained faith in the modernization process and has proudly embraced its promises. This new wave of modernist ambitions (and illusions) is built upon the awareness of the devastating effects provoked by the disruption of modernization processes that Nigeria experienced between the early 1980s and the end of the 1990s. What results from this dynamic is the formulation of an "alternative modernity" (Gaonkar 2001) which is not based on a blind, unconditional acceptance of a Western-originated conception of what modernity should be. It is a formulation of modernity haunted by the memory of what frozen, collapsed modernization processes look like in terms of social and cultural consequences. It is, thus, an ideal of modernity that contains the possibility, or better, the experience, of its opposite, that is, its collapse.

This ideal of modernity, however, while being, as I just emphasized, "alternative", is also very much "similar" to Western models. It does in fact mimic a model of success very much inspired, in general, by the United States as a symbol of capitalist economic achievement and, in particular, by Hollywood movies. Within this context, Western models, while being partially mistrusted because of the years of social, economic and political impasse that they implicitly provoked (the post-Structural-Adjustment crisis), are also enthusiastically embraced. The transformations in videos' film language and economic structures that I explored throughout this thesis clearly reflect this evidence. The Nigerian video industry is in fact moving from a rather peculiar and locally-defined media enterprise to something that resembles closely, at least in its intentions, to other instances of film industry all over the world, and particularly to the Hollywood experience. What the video industry (or, better, a section of it) is becoming, then, is a much more formalized and regulated economic initiative compared to what it used to be. And video films (but only the high budget productions I have referred to when defining the new wave) are becoming homogenous rather than heterogeneous cultural products which, instead of being radically open, are progressively becoming definable through already-existing generic categories that respond to specific marketing strategies

This act of embracement of Western-originated models, however, does not carry, at least in my view, the sense of cultural alienation that defined the failure of early projects of modernization. This is a projection toward the future that emerged from a local dynamic, that is, from what classic Nollywood has represented. It is a projection toward modernity that is independently formulated and conceived as the result of previous experiences of both failure and reinterpretation of modernization projects. It is a tension that belongs to a specific era that Nollywood has, somehow, participated to create: an era, the present one, in which people, places, objects that used to be located on the periphery of the global system are gaining new geopolitical and geocultural roles in the general balance of this world.

*Filmography*

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