

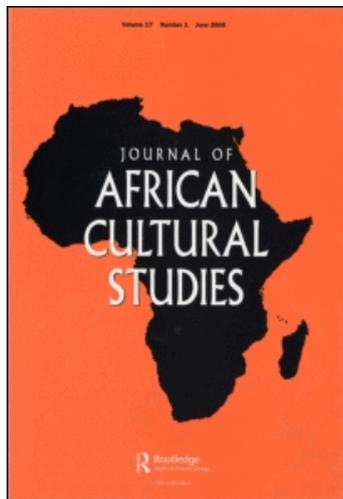
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A literature review: Nigerian and Ghanaian videos

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The main purpose of this review of the published academic literature on Nigerian and Ghanaian video films is to foster self-awareness in this new field of study. This literature has been produced on three continents and out of many academic disciplines; in consequence, scholars tend to make few references to others working in the field, debates have been rare, and there has been a great deal of repetition. African Cinema studies, as it had already been constituted, has been slow to recognize and adapt to the video revolution, and film studies in African universities has suffered from the decline of those institutions. Anthropologists have done much of the groundbreaking work in describing the video phenomenon, though Nigerians from a variety of disciplines have also made valuable contributions. Theoretical analyses, cultural interpretations, reception studies, and detailed, extended readings of particular films are all on the agenda for the future.

Keywords: Nollywood; Nigeria; Ghana; film; cinema; criticism

The explosion of video production and distribution in Nigeria and Ghana has produced a delayed echo in scholarly attention and academic publishing. This article takes stock of this new literature and comments on its shape.¹ My main purpose is to foster self-awareness of and in this field of study. Such self-awareness has been impeded, structurally, by the remarkably widespread, or one might say dispersed, character of the field. The field is widespread and dispersed in two senses. One is geographical: publication takes place in Africa, North America, and Europe in approximately equal measure, and papers have begun to appear on other continents too. The other is disciplinary: the sheer size and myriad dimensions of the video phenomenon give rise not only to one-sentence references to Nollywood in hundreds of academic discussions of global media and of the Nigerian economy, but also to articles in publications ranging from the *International Quarterly of Community Health Education* (Aina and Olorunshola 2007–2008) to the *Transcultural Music Review* (Kaye 2007) and the *Journal of Human Ecology* (Omoera 2009). The videos are present in the lives and minds of many Nigerian academics, wherever they are making their careers, and are a natural subject for their research in whatever discipline they work, so we have studies of everything from their impact on drug use to their linguistic aspects (a flourishing branch of study, whose *doyenne* is Moradewun Adejunmobi (2002, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008)).

The problem is compounded by the lack of a natural disciplinary home for the study of the videos. Film studies itself, of course, is something of a floater: if it is not housed in a free-standing department, in North American universities it may march under the flag of English, media and communications, theatre, fine arts, or performance. African Cinema studies, like the other institutions (from film festivals to distributors to audiences) of what has been constituted as ‘African Cinema’ – that is, the sort of celluloid filmmaking often supported by European non-commercial sources and showcased at FESPACO (the Pan-African Film Festival of Ouagadougou) and other international film festivals – has only slowly begun to

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come to grips with the video revolution. I have written elsewhere about the mismatch in ideologies, intellectual equipment, and cultural desires between 'African Cinema' and the video films (2000). It has been common to begin discussions of the videos by contrasting them with the rest of 'African Cinema'; the chasm and potential relationship between the two fields of study was central to a 2007 conference at the University of Illinois and is the main subject of the consequent volume of proceedings (Austen and Saul forthcoming).

Shifting from viewing or analyzing 'African Cinema' to the African video films is to enter a different horizon, at least to a considerable extent, and West African intellectuals have generally had to overcome strong class prejudices against this popular art form. Such prejudices have eroded to a considerable extent as the videos have come to permeate African life and the educational level of its personnel has risen, but it is still common to hear dismissive talk about filmmakers as 'interlopers' and 'stark illiterates' and expressions of resentment at their success.² As the size and undeniable significance of the film industries have grown, many people – film scholars and others, Africans and others – have hovered at the edge of the video phenomenon, repeating the same things over and over: it is a fine thing that Africans have finally managed to create a popular, successful film industry and the filmmakers must be applauded for doing so, but the films are embarrassing in terms of quality and mentality. The people who repeat these things often do not seem to be able to get past this point, to figure out how to plunge in and do some useful work.

In the academic work written by specialists, there has also been too much repetition, for some structural reasons. One is that the world's ignorance of African videos needs to be repaired piecemeal, one audience at a time, so we keep writing general descriptions. I fear I have sinned in this respect, egregiously (1995, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, Haynes and Okome 1998). Perhaps we already have enough attractive introductory materials. John McCall's *Transition* article (2004b) is a fine piece to put into the hands of the curious. A spate of documentary films on Nollywood and the Ghanaian industry provide an excellent audiovisual feel for the phenomenon (see the appended filmography of documentaries). Pierre Barrot's *Nollywood*, a work of Gallic higher-order journalism like Olivier Barlet's *African Cinemas* (2000), is now available in English translation (Barrot 2009) and also should save us from having to reinvent the wheel. A second reason for repetition is that West African academic culture tolerates and even enforces it. A third is that when Nigerians go abroad for graduate work and want to work on the videos, or when North American or European students get interested in the videos for whatever reason, they likely will have a thesis director and committee to whom the whole topic is new and who have their own disciplinary agendas. As a consequence, projects get designed with little knowledge of or consideration for the shape of the existing literature in this field.

So far, the field has developed more as a series of pioneering expeditions than as a series of professional debates. There is a sharp division between the denouncers alluded to above, who in general do not inform themselves well enough to be able to enter into a true academic debate (there are honorable exceptions, such as Ogundele (2000)), on the one hand, and on the other hand those who have committed themselves to the study of the videos and who sometimes take their sympathetic partisanship so far as to resent any criticism of African popular culture. The two sides are so far apart that they do not communicate with or (therefore) challenge one another very much. We could use, for instance, a vigorous, sustained, and steadily deepening debate about foreign influences in the videos, which would take us beyond the polarities of cultural imperialism versus creative hybridity to theoretically-informed evaluations of specific cases. A lively and sometimes heated debate, extending beyond academic circles and often taking place in Hausa, is occurring in northern Nigeria around the cultural influences on and of Hausa video films (Abdalla Uba Adamu 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, forthcoming a, forthcoming b, forthcoming c, 2010 (this volume); Abdalla Uba Adamu *et al.* 2004; Yusuf M. Adamu

2002; Barau 2008; Furniss 2003, 2005; Krings 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2008; Larkin 1997, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2008).

The pioneers have worked in collaboration and agreement, for the most part, with some powerful consensuses developing, for instance the shared notion that the videos are to be read as responses to the anxieties of contemporary West African life. This is a particularly useful idea because it provides at once a hermeneutic, a thematic, to some extent even a stylistic, and a hypothesis about social function. It leads to strategies of interpreting the films as forms of social or political criticism, thereby returning us to terrain that should appear interesting and important to the 'African Cinema' community. Examples are Birgit Meyer's work on the register of spiritual representations (1998; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002a, b; 2003a, b; 2004a, b; 2005a, b; 2006a, b, c; 2007; 2008a, b, c; forthcoming; 2010 (this volume); Meyer and Moors 2006); Onookome Okome's evocations of the videos as the voice of the urban subaltern (Okome 1997, 1999, 2000a, 2001, 2003c, 2007b, d, forthcoming c); Abdalla Uba Adamu's and Brian Larkin's previously cited discussions of Hausa videos as sites of 'parallel modernities' where gender and generational roles are contested and the norms of Islam and Hausa culture are debated; Barrot's insistence on the desires of the audience as the prime mover in the video universe (2009); McCall's reading of vigilante films as a popular demand for justice (2004a); and my string of articles on forms of political critique in the videos (2003b; 2006; 2007a).

The geographical and disciplinary dispersions of those studying the videos are partially responsible for the relative absence of debates. Most articles do not have very full references to existing work on the videos in their bibliographies – the average is perhaps three citations.³ (One reason for the paucity of references, of course, is that scholars working in African universities may have great difficulties in getting access to research materials.) There is something to be said for writing out of untrammelled personal experience, and there is some danger of a premature concentration on an agreed canon of films from prematurely settled points of view as we all quote one another. Still I think the slenderness of references is unfortunate. Beyond the pedantic pleasures of marshalling an intimidating amount of information, a full bibliography helps us to be aware of one another as a community. Such awareness should encourage us to integrate and coordinate our efforts, test and refine our arguments, and specialize our studies.

The growth of the field has provided an increasing number of occasions for researchers to meet face to face. At first, papers on the video films were marginalized at conferences, frequently being dumped into catch-all panels. Now we get our own panels and even conferences, with published proceedings. The landmark conferences have been: 'Modes of Seeing: The Video Film in Africa' (2001), organized by Onookome Okome and Till Förster at Iwalewa Haus, University of Bayreuth, Germany, where visual anthropology provided much of the disciplinary orientation; the 'First International Conference on Hausa Films' (2003), organized by the Center for Hausa Cultural Studies in Kano, which had a large academic component but also included influential figures from many other sectors of Hausa society; 'The Nigerian Video/DVD Film Industry: Background, Current Situation, and International Prospects' (2007) at the Open University in the UK, the culmination of the collaborative research project between the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies at the Open University and the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, with support from the British Film Institute and the Nigerian High Commission, London; 'African Film: An International Conference' (2007), organized by Mahir Saul and Ralph Austen at the Institute of African Studies, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where the academic study of what was being called 'FESPACO films' and Nollywood scholarship met for the first time on equal terms; 'African Video Film Arts Festival' (2007) and 'The 2nd Ife International Film Festival' (2009), both organized by Foluke Ogunleye at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, which were academic conferences as well as film festivals, and which included a number of papers on video production elsewhere

in Africa; and 'Nollywood and Beyond: Transnational Dimensions of the African Video Industry' (2009), organized by Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany, which built up a complex and fascinating picture of the spread of Nollywood films and of the Nollywood example across Africa and around the world.

Academics have also sometimes played a mediating role in the profoundly awkward relationship between the video film industries and international film festivals, which have at last felt the need to take notice of Nollywood but are uncomfortable screening its low-budget videos in competition. This has given rise to a typical formation: a roundtable including some academics, or perhaps even some full academic panels, and (more recently) a documentary film about Nollywood made by foreigners introduce and dignify the phenomenon before audiences are exposed to some of the actual films. The first (2005) of the annual Nollywood Foundation conventions in Los Angeles, 'Access Nollywood: Origins, Directions and Developments in Contemporary Nigerian Cinema', had a substantial academic wing organized by Sylvester Ogbechie and Jude Akudinobi. Now that the video industry has become increasingly visible and of interest to the Nigerian Government, banks and other potential investors, media professionals of all kinds, and foreign governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such organizations sponsor frequent conferences and workshops in Nigeria with more or less academic orientations. The papers from these occasions are seldom published. It would be a fine thing to have a website to which such papers could routinely be posted (Umar Faruk Jibril, personal communication 2008).

The Nigerian video industry and the Ghanaian video industry are twins, and the Ghanaian one is actually *Ata Paynin* or *Taiwo* – the firstborn. The two cases are so closely parallel and intertwined that good work on either will be suggestive for everyone. The body of work on the Ghanaian film industry, like the industry itself, is very much smaller than the Nigerian equivalent, but much of it is of the highest quality. Birgit Meyer is a major force in framing our understanding of the whole video phenomenon; Tobias Wendl has made a documentary film (*Ghanaian Video Tales*) as well as written provocative essays (1999; 2001; 2002; 2003a, b; 2004; 2007); Esi Dogbe's essays (2003a, b) are studded with suggestive ideas; Africanus Aveh (2000) and Esi Sutherland-Addy (2000) did important early work in charting themes; Steffen Kohn's book has recently appeared in German (2008); Carmela Garritano has published a major article (2008) and is completing a major book (forthcoming). Nollywood is more similar and closely connected to the Ghanaian industry than it is to the northern Nigerian Hausa film industry, and this is reflected in the scholarly literature. The relationship of Nollywood and the Hausa industry is asymmetrical: Hausa filmmakers, film audiences, and film scholars are generally aware of their southern Nigerian equivalents, but the opposite is much less true. The great exception to the above rule of separate spheres in the domain of scholarship is Brian Larkin, whose work is or should be familiar to everyone working on videos from anywhere. Matthias Krings' work on intercultural transcription in Hausa films (already cited), as well as his current work on Tanzania (Krings forthcoming a, b), is also of general interest.

In Lagos, journalists produce a wealth of material on Nollywood. Only part of the rather thick Lagos daily papers gets posted to their websites, and one can measure the rise in the general cultural prestige of Nollywood in the increase of articles about it that are selected for posting: a few years ago such articles seldom appeared online, but now they routinely do, though still only a fraction of what is in print. Oji Onoko's useful book *Glimpses of our Stars* (1999) grew out of profiles he did for the *African Concord* magazine and *ThisDay*. Chidi Nebo, a columnist for *The Vanguard*, wrote a satirical book about Nollywood, *Reel Blunders* (2000). Shaibu Husseini has been doing a series of interviews with film people, publishing them weekly for more than five years in *The Guardian*; his editor, Jahman Anikulapo, is editing some of them into a book. *The Guardian* also carries frequent reports by Justin

Akpovi-Esade on the organizational side of the industry, including issues of copyright and distribution. Clemantine Olomo of *ThisDay* keeps up with actors and actresses. Ezechi Onyerionwu of *The Vanguard* has been interviewing academics on Nollywood and the study of it; he has published the first issue of an academically-oriented journal, *Film Nigeria: An International Journal of the Nigerian Film* (2008), based at his academic institution, Abia State Polytechnic. Steve Ayorinde, formerly of *The Guardian*, whose reports on the Nigerian video industry as it began are essential reading, recently completed an MA on the videos at Warwick University before being elevated to the editorship of *The Punch*. It would be productive if more journalists were coaxed into academic settings with fellowships and residencies, both because they are a valuable resource for writing the history of the development of these film traditions and because it would raise the level of coverage of the industries.

Nigerian newspaper articles get posted to websites catering especially to Nigerian and Ghanaian expatriates such as *naijarules*, *nollywood.net*, *Nollywood.com*, *nigeriafilms.com*, *nigeriamovies.net*, and *modernghana.com*. These sites also generate original content, transmit news about the industry, and serve as a window into the fan base. *Africultures.com*, the website run by Olivier Barlet, while not pretending to cover Nollywood production in its entirety (and in fact maintaining a tone of condescension towards the videos), is useful as a source of information on European involvements with the Nigerian industry in the form of forums and workshops, on international film festivals where Nigerian films are shown, and on what is being made of the Nigerian example in other places in Africa.

The tragic condition of the Nigerian universities, which imposes a maddening array of obstacles, deprivations, frustrations, and distractions on everyone trying to produce scholarship in them, has taken its toll on film studies as on every other field. Academic film studies was especially vulnerable because its roots in Nigeria are so shallow. Hyginus Ekwuazi, the senior Nigerian figure in the discipline (1991), established the curriculum at the National Film Institute in Jos and then served as Managing Director of the Nigerian Film Corporation from 1999 to 2004 before returning to his academic post in the Department of Theatre Arts of the University of Ibadan. Femi Shaka is almost the only other international-level scholar in film studies still based in a Nigerian university (the University of Port Harcourt) (Onyerionwu 2007), and he too was diverted into administration. In general, Nigerian film scholars over the age of forty have been slow to jump into the study of the videos with both feet and base themselves there, so we do not yet have the major contributions one would have expected from them. The most conspicuous examples of this are Ekwuazi, though he does have a string of publications on the videos (2000, 2001, 2007; Hyginus Ekwuazi, J. Sokomba, and O. Mgbejume 2001); Shaka, whose recent book (2004) is an overview of African Cinema, with little to say about Nigerian videos (but see 2003a, b); and the prominent emigrant Frank Ukadike, author of the landmark general study *Black African Cinema* (1994), who has only gradually and with apparent reluctance turned his attention to video in Nigeria and elsewhere (Ukadike 2000, 2003, forthcoming). Only Onookome Okome (another prominent emigrant) made the move to the study of the videos early and decisively, becoming the most ubiquitous academic interpreter of the Nigerian video phenomenon at film festivals and conferences, guest-editing issues of *Post-colonial Text* and *Film International*, co-editing a forthcoming book (Krings and Okome forthcoming), and publishing widely (Haynes and Okome 1998; Okome 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, forthcoming a, b, c). This slow conversion by the trained film scholars is all the more remarkable because Nigerian celluloid filmmaking collapsed definitively seventeen years ago and for more than a decade the video industry has been the main thing on the minds of their students. The result is a serious problem with the training of the next generation of Nigerian film scholars, who need the proper tools with which to create appropriate, useful criticism of the film tradition

that is flourishing all around them. The universities do no better at training their students to find employment in the industry. A recent study of the connections between the universities and the film industry declares them to be 'feeble' (Adeoti 2008; see also Ajibade 2008 and Ola-Koyi 2008). The University of Lagos does best in this respect (witness Tunde Kelani's film *The Campus Queen* (2003), made in association with students of the Department of Creative Arts) and has plans to expand its film programmes. Pan African University in Lagos, an outgrowth of the Lagos Business School, has a School of Media and Communication, headed by Emevwo Biakolo, which has recently begun a Master's programme oriented towards linking the film industry with formal sector institutions.

Fortunately, seasoned Nigerian academics coming to the videos from other fields, especially (but by no means only) Theater Arts and English, have written significant and in many cases excellent articles and books, and many are involved in training students. Those based in Nigeria include Abdalla Uba Adamu and Yusuf Adamu at Bayero University in Kano, Foluke Ogunleye (2003a, b, c, d, e; 2004; 2008a, b), Wole Ogundele (2000), and S. T. Adeyemi (2004; 2006) at Ife, and Chukwuma Okoye (2007a, b), Obododimma Oha (2000; 2001; 2002; 2007), and Durotoye Adeleke (2003; 2007) at Ibadan. Duro Oni, at the University of Lagos, anchored one end of the collaborative project on Nollywood with the Open University in Britain, with Tope Omoniye and Françoise Parent-Ugochukwu on the British end (<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/nollywood-uk/index.html>). Important figures now outside Nigeria include Moradewun Adejunmobi (2002; 2003; 2004; 2007; 2008), Akin Adesokan (2004a, b; 2006; 2007; 2009a, b), and Franklin Ukah (2002; 2003; 2004). The major literary critic Biodun Jeyifo has turned his attention to the videos and has begun to speak about them, though not yet to publish on the subject. (The big masquerade does not come out early, as they say.) There is also a sporadic stream of commentary on the videos by leading Nigerian cultural figures such as Femi Osofisan (2006) and Odia Ofeimun (2003), for whom the videos are not and never will be their field of study, but who get asked for their take on the phenomenon and often have interesting things to say.

In the work produced outside of Africa, what is perhaps most striking is the salience of anthropology or an anthropologically-influenced cultural studies. Surely it is unprecedented for the study of a major world film tradition to be launched under the aegis of anthropology. We are dealing here not with the kind of ethnography that Sembene thought treated Africans as insects, but (at least in large part) with the new field of anthropology of media, a field whose thinking about forms of media and how they exist in relation to people's lives corresponds to a historical moment when the dominant twentieth century media regimes are being refigured in the First World as well as the Third. The freshness of these reflections tends to make the paradigms that have governed African film studies seem old-fashioned.

The two leading figures are Brian Larkin and Birgit Meyer. I have already mentioned Larkin's work on the 'parallel modernities' created by the Hausa videos. He is our most creative thinker about the social and material circumstances of the videos. His recent book *Signal and Noise* (2008) extends his published work by providing a history of the media environment in northern Nigeria, dealing both with the succession of regimes of technology and with the contested social character of media forms. His article on the infrastructure of piracy (2004a) (included in *Signal and Noise*) is a brilliant description of the technological materiality of the video films and of their insertion into the global economy and systems of distribution. Larkin came to the study of the videos with a strong background in media studies; Meyer came from the anthropology of religion. Hers is the most powerful theory we have of the spiritual dimension of the videos, which is arguably their crucial defining feature among the world's film cultures.⁴ She makes a broad, rich, and compelling argument, extending from the rise of Pentecostalism in the newly privatized media environment of Rawlings' Ghana to the forms and purposes of melodrama and the

magical aura that has always hovered around the most modern of art forms, film. All this conceptual work is so important that it needs to be carefully evaluated (Meyer's claims for Pentecostalism's colonization of the representation of the supernatural should be tested in the realm of Yoruba films, for example), but clearly it is going to remain as a foundational element in the field.

Another anthropologist who deserves mention here is John McCall, whose article on vigilante films (2004a) is to my mind the best study we have of a video film genre and is particularly deep and eloquent in its account of the emotions – desperate fear, a passionate thirst for justice – that fuse the audience to the films. His essay on watching videos with a native doctor (2002) is wildly suggestive for future fieldwork, and he has provided an excellent account of Nollywood as an informal sector industry (forthcoming).

Karin Barber – an exponent of Birmingham cultural studies, with a background in literature – has written relatively little about the videos, but the concept of the African popular arts she has done so much to develop (along with Biodun Jeyifo (1984), Johannes Fabian (1978), and others) has been the fundamental concept that has enabled the work of a number of us (Haynes and Okome 1998). Her book on the Yoruba travelling theater, *The Generation of Plays* (2000), is a large-scale masterpiece in a directly adjacent field and ought to impinge on all of our thinking. The methodological principles she lays out there for studying popular culture are challenging: she argues we cannot understand the way popular culture signifies without deep, participant observer-style immersion in both its production and its consumption.

I am afraid that the gold standard Barber sets cannot be the only standard. Conditions both in the Western academy and in Nigeria make the kind of education she herself has had increasingly difficult to attain, for one thing. More importantly, the third biggest film industry in the world is going to attract a lot of attention, as it should, and commentary on it cannot be restricted to a small priesthood of initiates. Moreover, there are significant differences between a live performance in Yoruba to a Yoruba audience and an English-language film with a multi-ethnic cast that is going to be sold in Nairobi, Brooklyn, and Guyana as well as in Lagos and Onitsha, far from its generative matrix.

Production structures are a well-developed aspect of the study of the videos. Degree and graduate programmes in Theater Arts Management in Nigerian universities have from early on generated a number of theses bearing on this topic. Following filmmakers around is an obvious strategy for foreign journalists and for foreign documentary filmmakers, nearly all of whose films are structured in this way. Production structures are a major focus for the Nollywood Project at Southern Illinois University, led by John McCall and Segun Ojewuyi (<http://www.siu.edu/~africa/nollywood/index.html>).

Reception studies are an increasingly important and integral branch of film studies, though with a somewhat different emphasis than in the anthropology of media. The anthropologist Jean-François Werner (2006), contemplating the enormous amounts of time Africans now spend in front of television sets and studying in particular the way Senegalese families watch together and comment upon Brazilian *telenovelas* (soap operas), sees social effects ranging from the acculturation of children to the way culture is defined, contested, and reinforced, to the channels of social communication, both new and old, that are mobilized in discussions of these programmes. Film studies scholars are apt to focus more on psychological consequences and the articulations between the formal structures of films and the psyches of their audiences. Both the social and the psychological sides need study, of course; the permeation of contemporary African life by electronic media has incalculable consequences, or rather consequences we need to try to calculate if we want to pretend to be able to talk in a comprehensive way about what African culture now is. The Southern Illinois University Nollywood Project has been conducting systematic interviews with filmgoers; Okome has been directing a study in the Niger Delta and has given a partial report on his observations there and in Lagos (2007d); Eno

Akpabio surveyed audiences in three representative Lagos neighbourhoods (2007). We need many, many more such studies to uncover what meanings are created when the films are watched by audiences in Nigeria, Ghana, the Niger Republic, Tanzania, Namibia, Germany, Jamaica, the UK and the US – where, the vendors in Brooklyn I buy films from tell me, the largest audiences are not African immigrants but African-Americans and people from the Caribbean. What is going on in these wildly diverse settings, among both spectators and local filmmakers who react to the Nollywood example? (Abdoulaye 2009; Ajibade 2007, forthcoming; Becker forthcoming; Boehme forthcoming; Cartelli 2007; Dipio 2008; Esan 2008; Fuita and Lumisa 2009; Haynes 2008a; Hoffmann forthcoming; Katsuva 2003; Krings forthcoming a, b; Krings and Okome forthcoming; Mistry and Ellapen forthcoming; Ondego 2009; Pype forthcoming).

Most articles on the videos do not have any such empirical research agenda, however. Many might be swept into two large categories. One is primarily concerned with the films as expressions of, and/or with their effects upon, the cultures that produced them. Such essays are often framed as being written from within those cultures and have a polemical dimension. The other category is of essays built (at least in part) around concepts emanating from postcolonial, gender, or cultural studies – the lingua franca of the Western humanities which has infiltrated African universities, though not without considerable opposition and critical reflection. (These categories are not mutually exclusive. The numerous articles on gender issues could be arranged along a continuum between these two poles, with many somewhere in the middle. The work of a sophisticated critic like Akin Adesokan also is fully engaged both with international theoretical debates and with a lived relation to Nigerian culture.) To date there has been surprisingly little work that could be called highly theoretical. (A standard has been set by a trio of geographers making an argument about globalization theory using Nollywood as a case study (Marston et al. 2007)). In many cases, the conceptual structure of the postcolonial-inflected essays is vitiated by lack of attention to the specific character and modalities of the video films: theoretical arguments that plug the films directly into the apparatus of foreign theorists are apt to be less useful and more prone to error than arguments that take into account an appropriate range of specific mediations, cognizant of the theoretical and descriptive work that has already been done around the videos. The culturalist essays also too often fail to mobilize detailed local knowledge: we could use informed studies of the iconography of the occult, say, or of the representation of political forms in the cultural epic, or of the video industry in a wider context that included adjacent contemporary cultural forms such as music videos, standup comedy, and television reality shows. In the companion piece to this essay (forthcoming) I comment on and call for the development of three standard branches of film studies in relation to the videos: auteurism, film history, and genre. Here I will simply note how few extended readings there have been of particular films, either describing them as art objects using the formal vocabulary proper to cinema studies, or as texts to be interpreted hermeneutically. I am not making a theoretical argument for the primacy of the individual art object, and in any case the field shows no sign of tilting dangerously in this direction. But surely the individual film text is a rich repository of meanings and deserves more attention than it has gotten.

In literary and film studies, one of the basic mechanisms of progress is the endless debates over the meaning of canonical works, from *King Lear* to *Things Fall Apart* and *Xala*, with competing purposes, concepts, tactics, and skills brought to the fray. Such debates have scarcely begun around the videos. One hopes that the blessed absence of personal competition, rancour, and asperity that has so far reigned over the scholarly community working on the videos will continue, but it is time for us to argue with one another more – not necessarily argue against one another, but argue in concert, in awareness of one another, so we can stop repeating ourselves, specialize our studies, refine our purposes and our conclusions, and make the field grow.

Notes

1. This essay was originally half of a conference paper, 'What Is To Be Done? Film Studies and Nigerian and Ghanaian Videos', presented at 'African Film: An International Conference', University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, November 2007. The other half is being published under the original title in the conference proceedings, Austen and Saul (forthcoming). I have tried to keep the overlap with this other essay to a minimum, but they sometimes run in parallel. See also Françoise Ugochukwu (2008), 'L'université et les films vidéos nigériens: Regard sur quinze ans de recherches' ('The university and Nigerian video films: Review of fifteen years of research'), *Ethiopiennes: La littérature, la philosophie, l'art et le local (Ethiopiennes: Literature, philosophy, art and the local)*. 80 1er semestre. http://www.refer.sn/ethiopiennes/article.php?id_article=1591 (accessed 15 November 2009).
2. For discussion of the Ghanaian case in this respect, see Garritano (2008) and Meyer (1999).
3. This lack of references and of bibliographical awareness has inspired me, in a somewhat tendentious spirit, to compile a bibliography, which will be available online at <http://www.africine.org>.
4. Occult themes have recently become less prevalent in the videos, though they continue to appear frequently.

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