



# **Nollywood from obscurity to the limelight - a bibliographical survey -**

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# A growing body of research on Nigerian video-films

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**Publications, a fair indicator of the growing awareness of the development of the Nigerian video-film industry. Among the landmarks:**

- a number of books coming from Nigeria since 1991, on the history and development of the Nigerian video-film industry
- the US edition of Haynes' book on the subject, published in 2000
- Barrot's book on the "le phénomène vidéo au Nigeria", published in France in 2005 (the first in French)
- Krings' paper on Nollywood in Africa, presented in Frankfurt, Germany, in 2001

# Where to find them?



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- A good number of articles have found their way into books on African cinema or global film studies.
- Others are published in learned journals, most of them written in English: Africa, RAL & many others
- Some prominent French Africanist journals such as *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines* and *Politique africaine* also feature some articles on the subject.
- Some others are published in the press or on the Internet



# **The most recent example**

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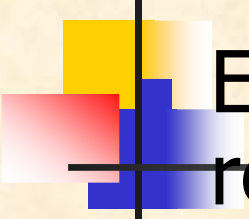
Akintunde Akinyemi

Oral Literature, Aesthetic Transfer and Social  
Vision in Two Yoruba Video Films

*Research in African Literatures*

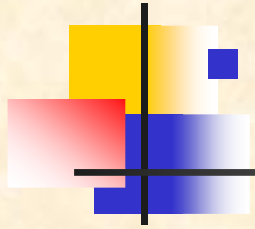
Fall 2007, Vol.38(3) pp.122-135

# In brief...



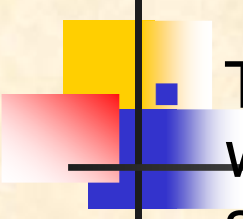
Edited books and articles give a voice to researchers and film practitioners from Nigeria while providing a meeting point between the vibrant Nigerian research culture and its European and American counterparts.

- They offer a kaleidoscopic view of the field, reveal a keen interest in historical reconstruction and display an effort to build critical tools adapted to the evaluation of this new audiovisual product.



- A number of publications present a comparative analysis of the mainly Francophone celluloid film industry and the Anglophone video-films, and weigh their respective local and global impact.
- Languages are brought to the fore in that venture as communication tools and cultural banners, and studies on that subject reveal the huge potential of language both to divide and to unite.

# A budding research field

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- The university sector took a long time to get involved in what it first considered a sub-standard production and a sequel to the Nigerian Onitsha market literature.
  - The academic belated surge of interest in Nigerian vidéo-films has led to a number of individual and collective research projects on the production and management of the home video, with Nigerian and African-American postgraduate studies at the forefront of this new push.
  - The Yoruba video-films, their cultural roots, development, form, content and style, and their audience reception are the subject a number of theses from the University of Ibadan, the first University built in Yorubaland. Nigerian video-films equally attracted the attention of research students in the US.

# A unique array of specialists for an unprecedented phenomenon

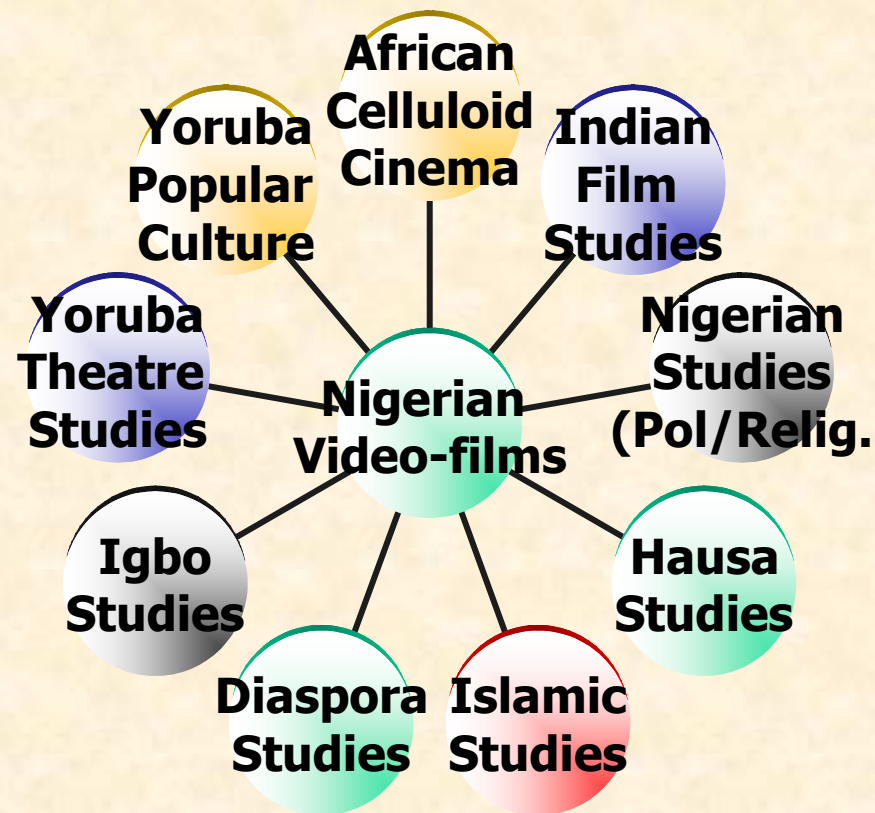


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- Researchers on the Nigerian video-film come from related fields such as Yoruba/Igbo/Hausa Studies, Popular Culture, Theatre Studies with a focus on Ghana and Nigeria, Film Studies with a focus on Indian or African films from French-speaking countries, Nigerian Studies focusing on politics and sociology, Islamic/Religious Studies and Diaspora Studies.
- The focus and line of study of publications have so far been more or less dictated by the original research fields and training of their authors.



# Convergent interests



# Nigerian films on the scene



Every year, HE Institutions now organise international conferences & film festivals, often held as joint events, which bring together academics, film producers, directors and well-known actors.

- Among recent conference venues: Nigeria, Burkina, USA, the West Indies, UK, France & Germany
- The growing and now more visible presence of the Nigerian film productions in these is the occasion for the public to discover a different medium, while more and more African countries adopt the video-film.



# **But how did it all start???**

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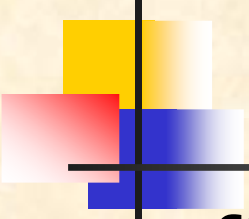
All publications prove interested in the retrieval and interpretation of the development of the Nigerian video-film, meant to shed light on its present growth and diversification. Studies published so far, keen to reconstruct the 'silent' birth of the Nigerian video-film industry away from the western gaze, usually start with an historical summary.

# Orality, theatre and TV shows

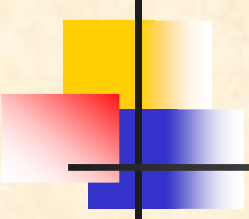
Within the historical perspective, some articles show how the video-film medium naturally emerged from Yoruba popular culture while others, coming from the literary scene, see these films, with their many indoor scenes, as yet another facet of the rich Yoruba theatre.

- A few articles present video-films as inspired by traditional orality. Others consider them in relation to Nigerian TV shows.

# Nigeria's leading role



Nigerians are clearly better placed to offer information on Nigerian productions, yet publications sometimes seem to lack a global view on the country's cultural scene. This has occasionally led to conflicting stances that have generated a healthy exchange of points of view in the printed media, if not yet in scholarly publications. Here again, one can see the need to explore cultural issues across linguistic barriers, both within Nigeria and beyond.



# Celluloid vs video: the Nigerian challenge

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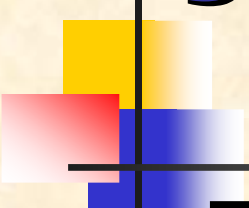
Celluloid productions are praised for their artistic and technical qualities and highly appreciated for the positive image they present of Africa, proving the continent's know-how and projecting their producers on the international scene. These films are proudly brandished by some African and even Nigerian producers as the right ambassadors to select and send to prominent film festivals around the world, in the hope of achieving global recognition, boosted sales in the West and substantial monetary returns.

# Video-films,

## Cinderella or hidden treasure?

- Video-films on the contrary have often been derided for their meagre budgets, poor quality and rather unimaginative plots. Yet all acknowledge that Nigerian directors and actors have achieved fame and international recognition for now immensely improved productions.
- Closer to the grassroots than scholarly articles, the press now increasingly tends to relegate African celluloid films to the past while listing the huge advantages of the video-film medium, using Nigerian productions as examples to show their reconciling African audiences with local productions

# Nigeria's languages on screen




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- The Yoruba film industry
- Igbo video films, actors & producers
- Hausa films keeping to the language
- Other Nigerian languages: Pidgin, Edo, Efik, Igala, Isoko
- Engligbo and other mixed means of communication & all-Nigerian teams
- Language, target audience and distribution
  - the role of subtitles



# The language issue



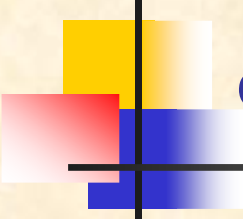
The language of the video-films, its choice, subtitling and dubbing, have so far largely escaped scrutiny. Yet the central importance of this issue cannot be overemphasised:

- It has led to what may be perceived as a possible imbalance between the presentation of the various Nigerian cultures.
- It has acted as a barrier to a quality study of film contents.
- It has rendered a proper historical account of the development of Nigerian video-films difficult.
- It has occasionally generated a unhealthy competition for recognition among the three main cultures of the Federation.

# Who will do better?

**Those scholarly studies that chose to consider particular linguistic sectors of the video-film industry highlighted four main facts:**

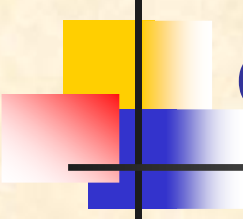
- The paucity of information on Hausa video-films, most of them without subtitles, that seem to have kept to Hausaland, with very few crossing the linguistic barrier.
- A growing awareness of the distinctive features of the Yoruba production, focusing more on their Yoruba signature, as revealed by the language and ethnic origin of producers, directors and actors, than on the themes treated and their circulation.
- A total disinterest about the few video-films produced in Igbo language, which contrasts with the huge attraction for the many productions in 'Engligbo', English & Pidgin
- A blank on the few video-films in other Nigerian languages.



# Subtitling – a marketing technique

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Subtitling seems to have been overwhelmingly preferred to dubbing, and applied to both Igbo and Yoruba video-films since the early 1990s. An interesting example of subtitling is that of *Love in vendetta*, a video-film of Chiko Ejiro featuring an Igbo-Hausa couple in love, struggling against their parents' memories of the 1987 Kano riots. The film is subtitled in French and thus evidently destined to reach out to neighbouring countries.



# Improved medium, shifting contents, mixed languages

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- Aim: to attract foreign audiences while retaining local fans
- Subtitling and dubbing films in French for the West African market
- Enligbo & Pidgin on the rise
- Putting the UK on the map : *Osuofia in London* (2003), *Fateful Love* (2004) & *Manchester Bound* (2007)
- The American dream & nightmare: *One Dollar* (2002), *African Youth* (2007)

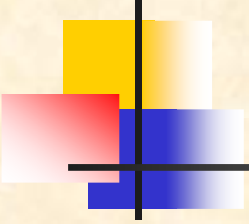


# Reports on the reception of Nigerian films abroad

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- In Africa: Cameroon, Benin Republic, Niger, Chad & East Africa
- In South America, the Yoruba Diaspora
- In the US: the Nigerian Diaspora
- In Britain: the London connection & exploration of new markets – Birmingham & Manchester
- In Europe: France as an outreach to French-speaking countries


# From view to imitation



Media reports suggest that several African countries have now taken to producing their own video-films, inspired by the Nigerian model.

On 14th July 2007, as part of a cultural exchange between Kenya and Nigeria, ten Kenyan producers went to Nigeria on scholarship to undergo a professional training in film-making – a South-South cooperation bound to boost the competitiveness of Nollywood while lifting the international profile of African cinema.

# Predicting a bright future

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- Nigerian video-films as linguistic support – Cf. the development of Igbo language through viewing Igbo video films in the Congo
  - The strengthening of cultural, linguistic & religious ties between Niger and Nigeria through Hausa video films
  - A growing number of all-Nigerian productions
  - New ventures from the French-speaking world now encouraged by the prospect of film-making on minimal budgets in exchange for substantial returns, with the additional bonus of reaching out to local audiences in countries severely deprived of cinema houses.

# As research develops...



## One can expect

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- the fast growing University interest in Nigerian cinema generating more MA, MPhil & PhD theses & worldwide publications on the subject
- Reports & studies from a growing number of African countries on the reception & local/regional/national impact of Nigerian films
- A fresh and healthy interaction across the linguistic divide, that will bring the Anglophone & Francophone worlds closer on the subject