

Movies on the Move: Transnational Video Film Flows and the Emergence of Local Video Film Industries in East Africa

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Abstract:

In this article, I systematically look at transnational video film flows and the emergence of local video film industries in key hubs for the physical distribution of video films in major cities of *Kiswahili*-speaking East Africa.¹ There is evidence of decentralized processes of homogenization: pirated *Hollywood* films, and, to varying degrees, films from Hong Kong, *Bollywood* and *Nollywood* were available in all hubs,² although they especially dominate the smaller markets. In addition to this homogenous flow, in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kampala, there are also processes adding heterogeneity to the markets: oral translations and emerging new video film industries inspired by the *Nollywood* business model (*Riverwood*, *Bongowood*, *Ugawood*).³ In the late 2000s, this caused a decline in the popularity of *Nollywood* video films on these markets. After a short boom, these new industries themselves suffered from the prevailing media piracy and from the growing popularity of local and *Nollywood* content on television.

¹ Throughout this contribution, the term video film is used for productions that are inspired by the *Nollywood* business model (discussed below). In the literature, conversations and shops in East Africa, different terms are used (e.g., movies or moviez, films, videos, video films).

² The term *Nollywood* was coined by a reporter in an American newspaper in 2002 (Haynes 2016: xxiii). It refers to films produced in Lagos or certain Eastern Nigerian cities (Onitsha, Enugu, Asaba, Aba), using (Nigerian) English and/or *Pidgin English*. Video films produced in other languages and in other areas in Nigeria are not considered *Nollywood*. The Nigerian video film industry is thus bigger than *Nollywood*.

³ *Ugawood* is a portmanteau of *Hollywood* and Uganda, while *Bongowood* combines *Hollywood* with the slang term *bongo* (brain) and refers to Tanzania in general and Dar es Salaam in particular. Other terms used in Tanzania are *Bongo movies* and *filamu za kibongo*. In some rare cases, *Tollywood* is used.

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Introduction

At the Rwanda Film Festival (*Hillywood 2009*), the video film *Zeinabu Rudi Nyumbani* was screened. Directed by its co-producer Alexandros Konstantaras, who is of Greek origin, the video film was financed by British-Kenyan capital and shot by a Kenyan team. According to the director, who has a degree in film studies from the International Film School of Wales, the story is based on the Finnish film *Juha* directed by Aki Kaurismäki (personal communication, 22 June 2009). The screening was attended by a small expat and Rwandan urban middle-class audience. The more popular video halls in Kigali were then showing mostly US-American and Asian action films, with the occasional Indian film. Such films were also sold at film stalls, sometimes with added comments and oral translation into the *Kinyarwanda* language. Film stalls furthermore sold Nigerian and, sometimes, Tanzanian and Ugandan video films.

The festival's *Hillywood* label is, of course, reminiscent of the established movie industries in the USA (*Hollywood*), India (*Bollywood*) and Nigeria (*Nollywood*). However, while Rwanda has a small film industry, it does not serve a mass market. Konstantaras, for his part, made no secret that his video films are inspired by *Nollywood*. He considered producing TV series and in 2012 announced a reality TV show called "Meet the Konstantaras", whose first episodes were finally uploaded to the internet in 2016.

These observations point to a number of interesting flows of video films, of which two are the main focus of this study. First, films flow into Rwanda from a number of production centers, including several regional ones. Second, *Nollywood* served as a business model for the emergence of a local video film industry that nourished regional media flows. The business model centers on producing low-budget video films based on a rough scenario and shot within a few days with limited technical means (numbers of cameras, sound). The video films are rapidly edited, multiplied and sold in numbers as quickly as possible to recover the costs and make a profit before pirated copies flood the market. Genres and series emerged and successful stories are retold. This helps to cut production costs and is seen as a way to increase audience interest. Sales are also increased with an emerging star system. Sometimes, oral translations and comments are added locally. This study aims at systematically looking at these two kinds of flows in East Africa, a research gap as the following literature review will show.

A review of the literature on video film production in sub-Saharan Africa

The video film sector in sub-Saharan Africa is notoriously dynamic and the scientific literature tends to lag behind current developments. There is a considerable amount of literature on the video film sector and the following literature review is only able to give a rough sketch of some major lines of inquiry. The main focus of the literature is on the Nigerian video film industry (see also the biographies in Haynes 2010, 2012). Authors such as Haynes (1995; Haynes/ Okome 1997) or Ogundele (1997) point to the *Travelling Theatres* performing in the Yoruba language, whose performances were filmed and increasingly replaced by screenings of these filmed performances. In 1988, *Travelling Theatre* artists began to produce and sell video films for private consumption. While a Yoruba video film industry emerged, it never reached the same international visibility as its neighbor *Nollywood*.

Nollywood was also influenced by earlier forms of popular culture, in this case the under-researched short comic videos sold at Onitsha Market (Haynes/ Okome 1997: 32). While two video films were produced in 1986 and 1988, the commercial potential of video films was recognised a few years later by an Igbo electronics dealer and film promoter, Kenneth Nnebue (Haynes 2016). In 1991, he produced a very successful Yoruba video film, *Àjé ni iya mi*. This video film was also the starting shot for what later became known as *Nollywood*: The following year (1992), Nnebue produced *Living in Bondage*, the first famous video film in Igbo, later synchronised in English (Haynes/ Okome 1997: 29).⁴ Since then, *Nollywood* video films are mostly produced in (Nigerian) English and/or *Pidgin English*, as there is a larger market for video films in these languages.

There exists a considerable body of literature on the different genres that emerged within *Nollywood* (for overviews, see Künzler 2009; Haynes 2016 and Miller 2016). Genres include occult or money ritual films (see also Ekwuazi 1997), family films, and, since the turn of the century, vigilante action films (McCall 2004), epic films and political films (see Gruber 2005; Haynes 2006; Adesokan 2009). Another genre that became more popular after the turn of the millennium is comedies (Künzler 2007). Of course, these genres are not clear-cut and video films cross genre boundaries.

⁴ This production was not only influenced by the success of *Àjé ni iya mi* and early Ghanaian videos like *Zinoba*, but also by the fact that a huge supply of empty videotapes from Taiwan was not selling well.

The turn of the millennium saw not only the emergence of new popular genres, but also the replacement of VHS by VCD and a partial shift of video film production from Lagos to Southeastern Nigeria (Haynes 2016). The number of video films produced reached a climax in 2007, but this proved to be unsustainable and the production declined considerably in later years (Jedlowski 2013). While the business model described above continued to dominate the Southeastern Nigerian video film production, in Lagos a new business model emerged and was called *New Nollywood* after 2010 (Haynes 2016: 285). In this business model, the production budgets are bigger and the small group of *New Nollywood* producers aim at screening their films in expensive multiplex cinemas and for diasporic audiences rather than selling them immediately for domestic home consumption. This, however, is a risky business model and only few screenings actually generate revenue (Ryan 2015: 63f.). *New Nollywood* is also partly financed by corporate sponsorships (Ryan 2015: 68; Miller 2016: 36f.), but this benefits a few high-profile actors more than producers (for the *Nollywood* star system, see Tsika 2015). While *Nollywood* video films generally had several parts on several VCDs, *New Nollywood* video films are stand-alone films with international standard length. *New Nollywood* is clearly part of the formal economic sector.

A potential channel of distribution for *New* and, to a certain extent, also other *Nollywood* video films described in the recent literature are companies that offer internet-based streaming or download services (see e.g. Miller 2016). The most popular, iROKOTv, started in 2010 as a YouTube channel called *Nollywood Love*. Backed by venture capital from the US and Sweden, it created a stand-alone website offering streaming and, later, the more accessible mobile download of video films from *Nollywood* and other African production centers. iROKOTv buys the distribution rights and then tries to generate revenue from subscriptions.⁵ Video films have been subtitled in languages such as French or Swahili to broaden the audience in Africa. However, while iROKOTv has some success in Diasporic markets, it struggles to build a viable base of subscribers in sub-Saharan African countries. The business model has been copied by other companies such as the short-lived francophone Afrostream or newcomers such as Linda Ikeji TV, Magic Go or BuniTV.

⁵ YouTube channels dedicated to *Nollywood* still exist, some of them run by collectives of *Nollywood* marketers, others by former iROKOTv employees (Miller 2016: 141).

While *New Nollywood* producers might earn some money from licence agreements with satellite and national television stations, online streaming services or the producers of in-flight entertainment programs, most *Nollywood* video films rely on the sales of physical copies on the domestic market (Miller 2016: 49). However, since around 2012, the increase in broadcasting of *Nollywood* video films on transnational TV networks such as DStv's satellite channels Africa Magic diminished the demand for physical copies.

The increased airing on transnational TV networks and struggling domestic sales can also be observed for Hausa video films. This third main center of video film production in Nigeria is sometimes called *Kanywood*. Among other topics, the literature discusses the start of this video film production in 1990 (Adamu 2010a), its infrastructure (Larkin 2008), earlier forms of popular culture such as *Soyayya* novels (Larkin 1997), its emergence as an industry whose stories, dancing scenes and film music are heavily inspired by *Bollywood* (Adamu 2010a, 2010b), or debates on censorship (Klings 2015). Video films produced in other Nigerian languages receive hardly any attention in the literature.

There is more literature on the video film production in Ghana, sometimes called *Ghallywood* or *Ghollywood*. While several versions of its beginnings are presented, there is general agreement that the video film production started in Ghana before *Nollywood* emerged (Haynes 2007; Köhn 2007; Garritano 2015; Meyer 2015). Among many other topics, the literature points to:

- itinerant theatres called *Concert Parties* as an important source for the emergence of a Ghanaian video film production, initially predominantly in English (Meyer 2001),
- the production of early video films, which was not meant to be sold for domestic consumption, but as a substitute for celluloid (Meyer 2015),
- a strong focus on Christian moral lessons in the movies (Meyer 2015),
- a growing fascination after the turn of the millennium with more explicit and lavish Nigerian video films that caused a decline in Ghanaian production around 2005 (Meyer 2006; Garritano 2015).

As a reaction to this decline, Ghanaian genres were refashioned (Meyer 2006). There was also a boom in comedies in the Twi language. Indeed, in addition to Accra, a second production center emerged in Kumasi with a focus on Twi language video films (Garritano 2015: 172). Producers attempted to control their output and sometimes chose to focus on cinema

screenings instead of distributing VCDs for domestic consumption (Garritano 2015: 199). However, the literature does not describe the emergence of a *New Ghallywood* business model. Since 2011, the broadcasting of Ghanaian and Nigerian video films on private television channels caused massive difficulties in the Ghanaian video film industry (Meyer 2015: 75).

The literature on the Ghanaian video film industry points to the mutual influence of *Ghallywood* and *Nollywood*. Such transnational links are the topic of another strand of the literature (see e.g. Künzler 2007 and several contributions in Ogunleye 2008; Şaul/ Austen 2010 and Krings/ Okome 2013).⁶ However, as Jedlowski (2017: 674f.) mentions, the transnational distribution of video films in Africa is somewhat neglected in the scientific literature. While a few publications about East Africa discuss aspects of video film distribution, they do not systematically examine transnational video film flows in the region and the emergence of local translations and video film industries inspired by the *Nollywood* business model. The contribution of existing publications to these two main questions will be discussed later. It will then become evident that Tanzania received the most scholarly attention, while only very few publications on Uganda and Kenya exist. The rest of the region is neglected by existing scholarship.

Much of the work that covers distribution is not interested in theory. Thus, in a first step, the key theoretical positions on flows of media products, focusing either on processes of homogenization or heterogenization, are presented. The next section then introduces multi-sited observations in East African urban centers. As discussed in the subsequent sections, there is evidence of homogenization, as pirated *Hollywood* films, and, to varying degrees, films from Hong Kong, *Bollywood* and *Nollywood* were available in all sites, although they especially dominate the smaller markets. In Dar es Salaam, Kampala and Nairobi, in addition to this homogeneous flow, there are also processes that add heterogeneity to the markets: oral translations and an emerging new video film industry inspired by the *Nollywood* business model. However, after an initial boom, these industries somewhat suffered from the prevailing media piracy and the growing popularity of local content on television. As television content is increasingly dominated by transnational companies, the paper finally argues that the success of

⁶The latter three publications resulted from academic conferences.

heterogeneous local content is inextricably linked to potentially homogenising market forces.

An overview of theoretical perspectives on flows of media products

An influential approach to conceptualize the flows of audiovisual products is the discourse about post-colonial cultural imperialism. The term 'cultural imperialism' has been used with a certain theoretical fuzziness far more often than it has been clearly defined (Tomlinson 1991). I will present some competing approaches to post-colonial cultural imperialism with the aim of giving a rough overview of the central arguments in the debate, well aware that some of these arguments are rather patronizing.

The term cultural imperialism was mentioned *en passant* by Fanon (1987: 117) in 1961. Without initially using the term, Schiller (1969) described the central elements of what later became known as cultural imperialism. The idea that the homogenization of the production and distribution of cultural products in general and media content in particular leads to a homogenization of consumption and has a uniform impact became current in the context of the emerging dependencia and world system theories. When Schiller later started to use the notion of cultural imperialism, he focused on the structural position of the USA as a hegemon of the world system and defined cultural imperialism as "the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes even bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system" (Schiller 1976: 9). The center includes not only the hegemon, but also the former colonial powers of England and France as well as other industrialized countries. In other words, these approaches assume a one-way flow from the West to the rest and thus also a process of homogenization.

Similarly, Galtung (1971: 83), in his far more systematic theory of imperialism, sees imperialism as a dominance relation where "there is *harmony of interest* between the *center in the Center* nation and the *center in the Periphery* nation" for the benefit of both, but to the detriment of the periphery in the periphery nation. Galtung's own focus in his discussion of cultural imperialism is on one of its subtypes, scientific imperialism. Applied to the example of films, Galtung's approach posits that the centers in the center nations sell outdated audiovisual products and communication

technologies to the periphery with the support of their comprador elite. In this perspective, we thus would expect to find outdated films from countries in the center of the capitalist world system in East Africa.

Roncagliolo (1986) departs from the state-centric perspective of the previous approaches and focuses on transnational processes instead. In his view of cultural imperialism, a culture-ideology of consumerism is spreading across the globe due to the interests of the global capitalist system. Following this perspective, we would expect to find films from multinational capitalist enterprises in East Africa for mass consumption, pushed by transnational advertising interests. This perspective also stipulates that the expansion of markets and the maximization of profit by multinational capitalism lead to cultural homogenization.

Implicit in these approaches is an equation of production with distribution and consumption that was severely criticized in the 1980s and 1990s. However, a second strand of criticism is more pertinent for our concerns: the models of cultural imperialism assume a one-way flow of films and ignore regional flows (Mattelart et al. 1986: 22f.). "In particular, the popularity of Indian films with Indian and non-Indian audiences (...) underscores the significance of alternative circuits of media flows that operate outside the West" (Ginsburg et al. 2002: 14). Further examples include Latin American telenovelas and films from several Asian production centers including Hong Kong. According to Appadurai (1996: 31), "the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes" beyond the existing center-periphery models. Appadurai's empirical focus is on transnational phenomena linked to migration and on popular culture imported from the center, and it hardly captures regional counter-flows that are not based on migration. Other voices warn that "media activity (...) may be multidirectional but is still very unequal" (Curran/ Park 2000: 6). Thus, we need to look at the relative mix of heterogeneity and homogeneity in the flows of media products beyond individual migration. How this was done in the context of this study is explained in the next section, which introduces the methodology.

Multi-sited observations in East African urban video film markets

As mentioned earlier, there is no systematic examination of the transnational distribution of video films in East Africa and the emergence of

local video film industries inspired by the *Nollywood* business model. This contribution looks at film flows within a region that can roughly be called *Kiswahili*-speaking East Africa. This, of course, is not a clear-cut and homogeneous area and too vast to be reasonably covered in-depth. Within this area, the focus is on major cities. As there is not much literature on video films in Kenya, the main area of empirical research was the city center of Nairobi, where repeated fieldwork has been done between 2004 and 2017 (see table 1). There is more literature on Uganda, and especially on Tanzania. Fieldwork in Dar es Salaam and Kampala complements this literature, especially with regard to recent developments. Finally, to get an impression of smaller video film markets, data were collected between 2008 and 2012 in Lubumbashi (DR Congo), Bujumbura (Burundi), Kigali and Huye/Butare (Rwanda), Moroni (Comoros), Juba⁷ (South Sudan) and Pemba (Mozambique). The data collected work like spotlights that do not cover long-term developments, but are nevertheless able to provide some insights.

Table 1: Overview of field research trips

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Main research area:														
Nairobi (Kenya)	x		x	X	x		x		x	x	x	x		x
In addition to literature:														
Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)		x				x					x			x
Kampala (Uganda)						x							x	
Spotlights:														
Kigali, Huye (Rwanda)					x	x								
Bujumbura (Burundi)					x	x								
Lubumbashi (RD Congo)							x							
Moroni (Comoros)									x					
Juba (South Sudan)									x					
Pemba (Mozambique)								x						

⁷The lingua franca in Juba is *Juba Arabic*. However, it is reasonable to consider Juba as the frontier of *Kiswahili*, as many South Sudanese learned it when living as refugees in Uganda or Kenya. Furthermore, the government wants to make it an official language.

Informants were asked about the main video film distribution hubs within these major cities. This information was cross-checked. I then went to the hubs that informants indicated and systematically scanned streets for market and video film stalls and itinerant film traders. There, I observed what kind of video films were sold. "Video films" here functions as an umbrella term for commercial fiction films sold on different data storage devices such as VHS cassettes, VCD, DVD, or flash drives. The covers of the video films frequently allowed me to determine the origin of video films. The covers were printed in varying quality and added to the video film copies exhibited or produced on demand. When pirated copies were directly copied onto flash drives or telephones, the covers were frequently presented in a book. In addition to these observations, informal interviews with sellers helped to clarify the origins of video film and enabled me to systematically ask for translated video films and video films from non-observed regional centers of production. There was no attempt to measure the relative market shares. The main weakness of this method is that it is not able to account for other forms of distribution such as screenings on national and satellite TVs or in video halls. Interested in audiences, and not distribution, Meyer (2015: 125) encountered a similar problem.

Kenya's *Riverwood*: Nollywood as an inspiration

Kenya is the economic heavyweight of *Kiswahili*-speaking East Africa. It is thus somewhat astonishing that its video film market has been quite neglected in the scientific literature. This section presents some observations from fieldwork in the city center of Nairobi.⁸ At the beginning of fieldwork in 2004, there were pirated copies of films from the USA, Hong Kong and India. However, Nigerian video films were especially widespread, having arrived in Nairobi in the 1990s (Waliaula 2014: 72). In 2004, there were already some Kenyan video films (see also Maina 2015: 41f.). In Kenya, the emergence of video film production was also influenced by an earlier form of popular culture: In the late 1990s, stand-up comedians began to record their performances and sell their recordings. Filmed stage comedies and occasionally feature films followed. In the mid-2000s, mainly comedies and dramas in local languages became popular. These films were increasingly

⁸The film market in Nairobi's center is only to a limited extent significant for the markets in other neighborhoods such as Somali-dominated *Eastleigh* or other major cities such as Mombasa or Kisumu, let alone smaller cities and towns.

labelled *Riverwood*, referring to *River Road* in the *Central Business District*, where stalls with audio-visual products and producers are based.

While *Riverwood* drew on (street) theatre and local forms of comedy, it was also inspired by the success of *Nollywood*: "I consider *Nollywood*'s gifts to be a seminal moment for Kenyan video producers who, upon learning the fact that Nigerian VCDs were low-budget home-made films, began grappling with the question: 'If Nigerians can do it, why can't Kenyans do it?'" (wa Mungai 2008: 60f.). However, *Riverwood* differs from *Nollywood* and its offshoots *Bongowood* and *Ugawood* in two respects. First, it refers to a more heterogeneous audio-visual industry that also includes short films, different genres of local music and music videos. While some video films are produced in *Riverwood*, others are only distributed, e.g. popular comedies produced by theatre groups. Second, the video film production is mainly limited to comedies and dramas, and has not turned to or established other genres. Furthermore, it is important to note that there is an uptown production of films in Nairobi that is not considered to be part of *Riverwood*.

Since around 2006, films from Tanzania have been available in Nairobi, both in their original versions and in pirated *Dubai collections*. Occasionally, there are also films from *Ugawood* or from Kinshasa. However, the output of *Riverwood* films has grown steadily. In 2007, *Riverwood* films were occasionally shown on Kenyan television stations and this became more frequent in subsequent years. Kenyan soap operas were also produced for television stations. The post-electoral violence in 2008 was a setback for Kenyan video film production. However, in the following years, the number of video films from *Riverwood* began to rise again. The video films are mostly in *Kikuyu*, but also in languages such as *Dholuo*, *Kamba* or *Kiswahili*. Some have English subtitles. With the rising number of Kenyan video films on sale, Nigerian video films clearly became less prevalent in Nairobi. "The Nigerians have lost" was the comment of one film seller (personal communication, 25 January 2012), and others confirmed this observation. However, *Nollywood* video films are frequently shown on Kenyan and transnational TV stations. This was named as one of the reasons for the ebb of *Riverwood* video films in recent years. *Riverwood* video films are occasionally shown on the transnational satellite channel Africa Magic and available for download at iROKOTv, but due to the methodology of this study more precise statements about this are not possible. *Riverwood*

video films are occasionally sold in neighboring countries, but not on the scale of *Bongowood* films.

Some *Riverwood* films are subtitled in English or, in rare cases, in *Kiswahili*. There are also *DJ movies*, where delayed voice-over is used to add oral translations and comments. The first to record this in Kenya was likely James Muigai, who started in 2003 under the name of DJ Afro, initially using *Kikuyu*, then *Kiswahili* and later *Sheng* before finally returning to *Kikuyu* again. He tells two different – and in no way mutually exclusive – stories of what inspired him. To the foreign researcher, he emphasised his global movie proficiency by citing a Hong Kong film he saw as his inspiration (personal communication, 25 January 2012). In the film *The Young Avenger*,⁹ the protagonist, waging a vendetta, enters a film screening where somebody interprets the action of a silent movie to the audience, which interjects and reacts to this interpretation. To the Kenyan journalist (Wanja 2016), DJ Afro points to Kenya's movie-going heritage by emphasizing the mobile cinema projections of *Factual Films* that started in the 1970s and that had a running commentary as his inspiration.¹⁰

Hired by video hall owners, DJ Afro started with live shows in Nairobi. After being accused of lying because of incomplete translations, he moved to Kenya's fourth biggest town, Nakuru. He later started to record his live translations directly and sell the copies in his two shops in Nairobi as well as to shop owners who duplicate and sell them. Contrary to the practice in Tanzania and Uganda and stung by the accusations of lying, he tries not to remove any information in his translation: "If you try to remove, you're out of business" (personal communication, 25 January 2012). This is somewhat in contrast to other translators mentioned below who translate more selectively. DJ Afro translates *Hollywood* movies, but also movies from Hong Kong, Japan or Thailand, whose original language he does not understand and which mostly do not qualify as known blockbusters. He avoids *Bollywood* movies because he considers them too long. However, because of his popularity, he is invited to perform in Kenya and abroad, where pirated copies of his *DJ movies* are also sold (see also Englert and Moreto

⁹ *The Young Avenger*. Dir. Tong Wai Shing. English Language Version. 1983.

¹⁰ Film narrators were already used in the 1930s, when, as part of the *Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment*, a lorry toured British East and Central Africa to screen movies and observe audience reactions (Smyth 1979: 443f.). Informal narrators also emerge from the audiences of video film screenings (Waliaula 2014).

forthcoming). Gikuyu TV showed DJ Afro's translated video films, but they were banned in September 2018 by the Kenya Film and Classification Board because they were not submitted to its rating.¹¹ Other artists also make *DJ movies*.

An update on Tanzania and Uganda

As mentioned, there is a fairly considerable amount of literature on films in Tanzania. Pirated films from the USA, Hong Kong and India were readily available in Tanzania when Nigerian films were introduced. These rapidly became very popular, but their popularity declined dramatically around 2006-2007 as Tanzanian films became popular (field notes 2005, 2009). While comedy and theatre performances had already been filmed and sold since the 1990s, from 2003 on, the Nigerian model inspired an emerging Tanzanian video film industry called *Bongowood*: "When Nigerian movies entered the country around 2000, they functioned as a *changa moto*, an 'initial spark', and inspired many young Tanzanian artists to make movies with their own stories" (Böhme 2013: 328). This happened mainly in Dar es Salaam, but later on also in other towns (Englert 2010: 142f.; Böhme 2013: 344).

Bongowood differentiated into different genres. Some of the *Bongowood* video films are produced by theatre groups, other by filmmakers with actors who are cast (Böhme 2013: 328). While there were more Tanzanian video films available in 2009 than during my first visit in 2005, their visibility was considerably lower in 2017. However, during research, I could easily find *Bongowood* films in Kigali, where they ousted *Nollywood* movies around 2009, in Pemba (2011), in Moroni (2012), and in Nairobi, especially between 2006 and 2012. They were hard to find in Nairobi after 2012, in Bujumbura (2008, 2009), Kampala (2009, 2016), Lubumbashi (2010), and Juba (2012).

Another category of films is locally called "translated film" (*filamu zimezotafsiriwa* or *filamu zilizotafsiriwa*), *DJ version* or *Swahili version*. As in Kenya, screenings included live translations and comments. This started in the colonial era where promotional and educational films were shown, and it continued later in video parlors. Lufufu (Derek Gaspar Mukandala), a trained naval officer, started a mobile cinema in the early 1980s and used to interpret the films he showed: "(...) the initial idea came to him in 1971/72

¹¹ I thank Amiel Bize Melnick for making me aware of this.

whilst watching a Chinese live interpretation of a North-Vietnamese propaganda movie” (Krings 2009: 3). In 1996, Lufufu started to record and later sell dubbed versions of films. Lufufu focused on American and Chinese action movies and interpreted them accurately and in Standard *Kiswahili* (Englert 2010). He died in 2015 (Macmedianews 2015).¹²

Others followed him and carved out a special niche for themselves (Englert with Moreto forthcoming), either by focusing on certain films (e.g. Indian films, for Juma Khan Rich, or *Nollywood* films, for King Rich) or through the use of non-Standard slang *Kiswahili* (e.g. DJ Mark). Quite similarly to Kenyan DJ Afro, DJ Mark is not deterred from translating films in languages he does not know, but avoids Indian movies as he also considers them too long (Englert 2010: 149f.). While most films are translated into *Kiswahili*, there are also English translations and subtitles for *Bongowood* films (Englert with Moreto forthcoming). Since 2011, Chinese television dramas dubbed in *Kiswahili* are shown on television in Tanzania (Lei, this volume).

In Uganda, a new private television station started to make video films of drama group performances in the 1990s. (Dipio 2010: 237). Filmed stage performances were thus already prevalent when the boom of Nigerian films inspired local film production around 2005. As trained dentist and pioneering director Ashraf Semwogerere put it: “When Nigerian films came on the scene in 2004 it gave me an idea to make my own full-length movie. (...) I realised that if people like Nigerian stories they will be more excited by well-made local movies” (Kasule 2011: 60f.).¹³ *Ugawood*, also sometimes called *Ekina-Uganda* or *kinauganda*, became popular, again at the expense of Nigerian films. Similarly to *Bongowood*, *Ugawood* gave rise to different genres. The films are mostly in the *Luganda* language, but some are also produced or subtitled in English. While *Ugawood* films were quite visible in 2009, there were clearly fewer shops in 2016. Outside Uganda, limited numbers of *Ugawood* films can be found in Nairobi and Kigali.

Some producers distribute *Ugawood* movies with oral translations. In Uganda, as in Tanzania, live translations date back to the screening of colonial education films (Smyth 1979: 443f.; Dipio 2010: 235) and re-emerged in 1988 in video halls (*bibanda*), inspired by comments from the audience

¹²I thank Birgit Englert for making me aware of this.

¹³Other sources would date the arrival of *Nollywood* movies earlier, e.g. the 1990s (Dipio 2010: 240).

(Larriga 2007; see also Dipio 2014). It became popular in the mid-1990s and these live translations have been recorded and sold since 1998. In 2009, the video shops in Kampala's center sold "translated movies" from the USA, Hong Kong and India, but also from *Nollywood* and elsewhere. The "translator" is known as a VJ, short for "videojockey" or "videojoker". "Translated movies" were sold in neighboring countries (Dipio 2014: 94), but this became less frequent with the advent of local forms of translation. *Ugawood* (since 2012) and translated or original *Nollywood* video films (since the late 1990s) are shown on free national and payable transnational TV stations (Dipio 2014: 98f).¹⁴ In video halls, the peak hours are now dominated by football screenings.

Isolated attempts to build a local film industry in smaller markets

Pirated copies of US-American films were available in all seven smaller film markets I visited. In Kigali (2008, 2009), Bujumbura (2008, 2009), Lubumbashi (2010) and Moroni (2012) there were also films from Hong Kong, *Bollywood*, and *Nollywood*. The offer of films coming from these areas was very limited in Pemba (2011) and Juba (2012). While there were a few locally produced films available in Kigali, Bujumbura, and Moroni, these were rather isolated attempts and did not resemble a local film industry based on the business model of *Nollywood*. The same is true for Lubumbashi, where there is a long tradition of filmed theatre performances in *Shaba Kiswahili* but no significant film production beyond that. In Juba, an attempt to build a local film industry faltered after one film was produced in 2011 by a group of young South Sudanese, inspired by the Nigerian video film industry and the East African video films they saw while living in a refugee camp in Kenya (personal communication, 30 January 2012).

There were also isolated attempts to locally add oral translations to foreign movies. In Huye (Butare), in 2009, I found *Kinyarwanda* versions of a few *Hollywood*, Asian action and Nigerian movies. Conversations suggested that there was a short boom of films translated by two Ugandans into simple *Kinyarwanda* in 2008. On the Comoros, a translated Jackie Chan movie was on the market in 2012, with reports about other isolated translation

¹⁴The transnational TV network hosting Africa Magic supported Dipio's research (2014: 105).

attempts. I did not find any locally translated films in Bujumbura (2008, 2009), Lubumbashi (2010),¹⁵ Pemba (2011) and Juba (2012).

Popular local content and potentially homogenizing market forces

This conclusion starts with the first research question about transnational video film flows into East Africa. Regarding these flows, there is some evidence of homogenization. Pirated *Hollywood* movies were available on all markets I studied, but also – to varying degrees – films from Hong Kong, *Bollywood* and *Nollywood*.¹⁶ In the smaller film markets, this homogeneous offer dominates. However, contrary to the theoretical approaches to homogenization discussed, the flow is not dominated by the US government or by corporate interests, as there is no real attempt by these production centers to increase their market and sell legal copies in East Africa. It is, rather, piracy-driven and decentralized, as there are hardly any legal copies. While some films are outdated, in contrast to Galtung's (1971) arguments, the latest releases were also available. Furthermore, in East Africa, *Bollywood* films have been popular since as early as the 1930s; during the 1970s, when theories of cultural imperialism were *en vogue*, films from Hong Kong became popular. In addition, these rather linear theories struggle to account for the rise of *Nollywood* in East Africa and the end of its boom. This observation is in line with more recent theoretical arguments about the multidirectionality of media flows, put forward by Appadurai (1996) and others.

This point becomes even more evident when looking at the second research question. In Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, there is a second flow of video films that adds heterogeneity in two forms. First, oral translations and comments are added locally to the homogeneous flow just described. Second, in these three countries, the flow of *Nollywood* films served as a business model for the emergence of a local video film industry that was not supported by the government or multinational companies. Ironically, this caused a decline in the popularity of *Nollywood* video films. *Bongowood* video films especially nourished regional media flows and were available in

¹⁵ The literature however describes different kinds of film commentators at screenings (Mpungu Mulenda 1987; Bouchard 2010).

¹⁶ While in the theory section, films from Hong Kong were used to criticize the assumption of one-way flows, their widespread popularity nevertheless contributes to the homogenization of film flows.

varying numbers in all cities I visited. The *Nollywood* business model even inspired the production of one film in Juba, but - unsurprisingly, in this context - no South Sudanese video film industry emerged (yet). A few locally produced films are available in Kigali and Bujumbura, but there is no regular output of video films based on the *Nollywood* business model. This is also the case in Moroni and Lubumbashi, where theatre performances are filmed, but no video film industry emerged, in contrast to *Nollywood*, *Ghallywood*, *Bongowood*, or *Riverwood*. No locally produced films were available in Pemba during research in 2011.

Local video film productions became popular in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kampala, but their popularity somewhat ebbed. Among the reasons for this are piracy and reduced sales of original film copies due to the growing popularity of local and regional content on national television, fuelled by content quota for television in Kenya and Uganda, and, since the mid 2000s, transnational TV networks. The success of heterogeneous local content however might inextricably be linked to potentially homogenizing market forces. In contrast to Appadurai's view (1996), counter-flows are not necessarily based on migration. Furthermore, they go beyond physical distribution and also include adaptations through local translation and the adoption of business models.

The distribution of local and regional content on national and transnational TV stations points to an important methodological limitation of this study. By only looking at physical sales of video films, newer forms of distribution are underexplored. Further research should thus systematically examine newer forms of distribution. However, a cursory look at some recent developments will potentially add important insights on contemporary processes of homogenization.

Transnational TV networks such as DStv (with satellite channels such as Africa Magic and Maisha Magic East), Zuku or Netflix, online platforms for film distribution such as iROKOTv, and pay-per-view channels such as Nollywood.tv, are all owned by companies with international shareholders. In addition, French TV 5, owned by public television channels, increasingly shows African content. Selling films to TV stations and websites has become an important source of income for a few video film producers. However, transnational media corporations increasingly not only distribute local content, but also produce content in Africa. Examples include M-Net (distributed through DStv) and Netflix. These developments are at least

partly in line with Roncagliolo's (1986) version of cultural imperialism which, as discussed above, focuses on a culture-ideology of consumerism spreading across the globe due to the interests of the global capitalist system.

However, the picture might be more complicated than this. The Chinese government provides translated content to African TV stations (Lei in this volume). Commercial companies belonging to the Chinese Star Times show Chinese dramas and increasingly also European football in addition to African content in several sub-Saharan African countries. Further research on the distribution of media content in sub-Saharan Africa thus must tackle a central question in International Relations: Are we witnessing the emergence of a multipolar economic system that opposes China to Western core countries?¹⁷ Or is there a transnational capitalist class emerging? Whatever the answer, it is important to bear in mind that most of the video films produced in East Africa are currently still outside these transnational flows. The local video film industries in East Africa can thus not be reduced to helpless passive victims of outside influences.

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¹⁷ Chinese investment in *Hollywood* questions the conventional focus on the physical location of companies according to which *Hollywood* is US-American.

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