African Video Movies
and Global Desires

A GHANAIAN HISTORY

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Contents

Introduction

African Popular Videos as Global Cultural Forms

The emergence of popular video industries in Ghana and Nigeria represents the most important and exciting development in African cultural production in recent history. Since its inception in the 1960s, African filmmaking has been a "paradoxical activity" (Barlet 2000, 238). Born out of the historical struggle of decolonization and a commitment to represent "Africa from an African perspective" (Armes 2006, 68), the work of socially committed African filmmakers has not generated a mass audience on the continent. Under current conditions marked by the international hegemony of dominant cinema industries, the dilapidated state of cinema houses in Africa, and the prohibitive expense of producing celluloid films, African filmmakers have become locked in a relationship of dependency with funding sources and distribution networks located in the global North. As a consequence, African films remain "foreigners in their own countries" (Sama 1996, 148), more likely to be found in Europe and North America on film festival screens and in university libraries than projected in cinemas or broadcast on television in Africa.

Though the film medium has failed to take root in Africa, video has flourished. An inexpensive, widely available, and easy to use technology for the production, duplication, and distribution of movies and other media content, video has radically transformed the African cultural landscape. In perhaps its most consequential manifestation, video has allowed videomakers in Ghana and Nigeria, individuals who in most cases are detached from official cultural institutions and working outside the purview of the state, to create a tremendously popular, commercial cinema for audiences in Africa and abroad: feature "films" made on video. Freed from the requirements for cultural

and economic capital imposed by the film medium, ordinary Ghanaians and Nigerians started making and exhibiting their own productions in the late 1980s. In Ghana, the tremendous success of William Akuffo's *Zinabu* (1987), a full-length feature shot with a VHS home video camera, sparked what those working in the Ghanaian video industry call "the video boom." Local audiences, who had been watching scratched and faded foreign films for years, responded to Akuffo's video movie with enormous enthusiasm. They crowded into the Globe Theatre in Accra for weeks to watch the video on the large screen. In a few years, film projectors in all of the major film theaters were replaced with video projection systems and hundreds of privately owned video centers, of various sizes and structural integrity, sprung up throughout the country to meet the growing demand for video viewing. Within ten years of the first local video production in 1987, as many as four videos in English were being released in Ghana each month, and over twenty years later, in 2009, Ghanaian movies appeared at the rate of approximately six per week, one in English and five in Akan, a Ghanaian language spoken across the country.

The Nigerian video industry, which began to take shape around the same time, soon became the economic and cultural power of the West African region. Now one of the largest movie industries in the world, the Nigerian industry releases a staggering 1,500 movies each year (Barrot 2009). Nollywood, the name popularly used to refer to Nigerian English-language movie production, speaks to the size and ambitions of the industry, but also obscures its diversity. Large numbers of Nigerian movies are also made in Yoruba. In fact, more Nigerian movies are produced in Yoruba than English, and in the city of Kano in Northern Nigeria, there is a well-established and prolific Hausa-language industry, called "Kannywood." Small numbers of Nigerian movies are also produced in Nupe and Bini (McCain 2011). Based on the models established in Ghana and Nigeria, budding industries in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Cameroon have emerged. Produced transnationally and broadcast on television, streamed over the Internet, distributed and pirated globally in multiple formats, African video movies represent, in the words of Jonathan Haynes, "one of the greatest explosions of popular culture the continent has ever seen" (2007c, 1).

The growth and expansion of African popular video has engendered a rapidly developing body of published work dispersed across three continents (Africa, Europe, and North America) and several

disciplines.[1] Prominent among the numerous journal articles and book chapters on African video movies are the ongoing contributions of the pioneers in the field, Haynes and Onookome Okome, and important articles by Moradewun Adejunmobi, Akin Adesokan, John McCall, and Birgit Meyer. Noteworthy too are anthologies edited by Jonathan Haynes (2000), Foluke Ogunleye (2003), Pierre Barrot (2009), and Mahir Şaul and Ralph A. Austen (2010), as well as Brian Larkin's brilliant monograph *Signal and Noise* (2008). Important research on African video movies has featured in special editions of the journals *Postcolonial Text* (2007), *Film International* (2007), *African Literature Today* (2010), and the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* (2010). African Studies conferences regularly include panels on African video movies, and specialists in the field have organized several international conferences dedicated to the dissemination and sharing of research on this new cultural form.[2] In addition, the many documentaries on popular video in Africa indicate a solid and growing interest among nonspecialists.[3] Without question, the largest part of this scholarship has concentrated on the Nigerian industry, and in particular the English-language video industry based in Southern Nigeria.[4] Too readily ignored or merely absorbed into Nollywood's dominant narrative have been the more minor industries in Nigeria, such as the Hausa-language industry, and in the region, the historically and aesthetically distinct video industry in Ghana, which is the focus of this book.

The focus on Nollywood, moreover, has overlooked the transnational interaction between the two industries and has tended to simplify and reify "*the* local" that Nollywood is said to represent, flattening the multiplicity of transnational cultural articulations that move through regional cultural economies in Africa and often in relations of disjuncture and competition. By subsuming all West African video under the example of Nigeria, the region's dominant national power, critics have erased the movement, complexity, and *contestation* that mark the West African regional videoscape, where "the local" remains a contested signifier, not a self-evident descriptor. Faced with the relentless onslaught of Nigerian videos in Ghana, some Ghanaian videomakers have come to regard Nollywood as a far more pressing threat to their survival than Hollywood. Seen from this point of view, Nollywood looks a lot like an invader, a regional cultural power whose success has endangered local production. This study of Ghanaian video, including its points of intersection with and divergence from Nollywood,

reminds us that margins, like centers, are multiple, relational, and shifting. *African Video Movies and Global Desires: A Ghanaian History* accounts for the singularity of the history of Ghanaian film and video as it has been shaped by national and transnational forces and strives to enrich our understanding of the diverse cultural ecology of West African screen media.

African Popular Video and African Film Scholars: A Brief Historical Overview

I first learned of the emergence of the local video industries in Ghana and Nigeria at the 1997 Annual Conference of the African Literature Association (ALA), the theme of which was *FESPACO* (Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou) *Nights in Michigan*, a decade after Akuffo screened *Zinabu* to audiences in Accra. Organized by Kenneth W. Harrow and hosted by Michigan State University, where I was a PhD student at the time, the conference was unprecedented: the first conference of the ALA dedicated to screening, discussing, and celebrating African cinema. Many African filmmakers were in attendance, and so not surprisingly, discussions and debates concerning the obstacles impeding African film production and distribution in Africa consumed a fair amount of time and energy. Looking back, it seems remarkable, given the preoccupation with funding and the limited availability of African films and functioning cinema houses in Africa, that not one paper was proposed on the thriving local, low-budget, commercial video industries in West Africa.[5] In the margins of the main event, video, mentioned by chance, came to represent little more than a notation. It was at the Women's Caucus luncheon that I initially heard about African video movies and only during the question and answer session that followed the well-received talk by Tsitsi Dangaremgba, the Zimbabwean novelist and filmmaker, who spoke on the making of her first feature film *Everyone's Child* (1996). After commending Dangaremgba for her sensitive and honest representation of AIDS and its impact on families and communities, an audience member who had recently been to West Africa spoke briefly about the booming market for locally produced videos in West Africa. Unlike *Everyone's Child*, an artistic African film animated by social justice and activism, the videos, she claimed, were brazenly amateurish and profit-driven. Influenced by Hollywood, they promoted stereotypical and extremely negative images of Africa. She reached out

to the audience with a sense of urgency, as if this example of local cultural production were a harmful, invasive pestilence that needed to be eradicated. She wondered how we, the experts and intellectuals, could intervene in the local cultural scene on behalf of Africa.

I have included this anecdote because it expresses the moralistic overtones that dominated the initial responses of African film and literature scholars to popular video and that, although far less frequently, continue to color criticism of the videos. Carmen McCain's (2011) description of the position assigned to Nollywood at FESPACO 2011 attests to its ongoing marginalization. The founding figures of African cinema set the still widely held notion that popular or commercial cultural products were little more than imitations of Western forms that provided distraction in the form of cheap entertainment, and as Alexi Tcheuyap notes, these governing ideologies mandated that African cinema "was meant not for pleasure, but for (political) instruction" (2011, 7). Unabashedly commercial and melodramatic, video movies have frustrated expectations of what African film is supposed to be. Frank Ukadike has described video productions as "devoid of authenticity" (Ukadike 2003, 126), and Josef Gugler argues that these "market-driven" products promote the "political processes that engender extreme inequalities" (2003, 78). Lindiwe Dovey states that commercial videos "tend to affirm" violence, while serious and oppositional African films "[explore] restorative, nonviolent means of resolving social and political problems" (2009, 23). Most problematic is that these generalizations are stated without substantiation or reference to any of the thousands of popular movies that have been released in Ghana and Nigeria since the late 1980s. They demonstrate little awareness of the incredible range and variety of popular movies or interest in the audiences who consume and take pleasure from them. These criticisms, it seems, have functioned chiefly to produce and police a particular idea of what African screen media is or should be.

African film scholars' reluctance to engage popular video in a serious way explains why the earliest and some of the best work, with the noteworthy exceptions of writing by Haynes and Okome, has been done by anthropologists. Tcheuyap (2011) has shown that the governing ideologies of African cinema, though animated by proletarian and emancipatory desires, were instituted and have been policed by elite intellectual institutions, which I would emphasize, remain detached from African sites of cultural consumption. Like the makers of other popular products in Africa, the producers of popular videos,

in most cases, are not affiliated with intellectual institutions or institutions of official culture; most have not attended film schools or university, have little formal training in video or film production, and so have not been initiated into the political and aesthetic disposition and conceptual vocabulary of African cinema.[6] As Haynes remarks, "The international dimension of their cultural horizon is formed more by American action films, Indian romances, and Mexican soap operas than by exposure to English literature" (2003a, 23). The makers of popular movies have never been principally concerned with authenticity, cultural revival, or cultural preservation, the founding motivations of elite African cinema. Addressing a popular, mass audience in Africa, the videomakers are not obliged to speak on behalf of an African minority community to an audience of outsiders and remain unencumbered by "the burden of representation" (Desai 2004, 63) that inflects the criticisms voiced by makers and scholars of serious African film.[7]

Since the 1990s, the differences between African popular video and serious African film have become less pronounced. Advances in digital video technologies have obscured the lines separating film and video, and over time, as the Ghanaian and Nigerian industries have become more formalized and videomakers have developed significant expertise and experience, the disparities between "amateur" videomakers and "professional" filmmakers have diminished. In content and form, recent big-budget, flashy African films such as Gavin Hood's sentimental drama *Tsotsi* (2005), which won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Picture, and Djo Tunda Wa Munga's gangster thriller *Viva Riva!* (2010) resonate more with Nollywood than politicized African film, further troubling simplistic binaries between the two forms of African screen media. The features of Nigerian moviemakers Tunde Kelani and Kunle Afolayan, which grow from and are marked by Nollywood aesthetics and modes of production, self-consciously invoke and revitalize Yoruba cultural antecedents and move in and out of film festival and academic circuits if not quite effortlessly, than with less and less resistance.[8]

As technologies and forms change, the divide between critics of popular video and elite African cinema has started to close, too. Several important books on African film have discussed the unparalleled significance of the local video movie phenomenon to the study and production of African film and media (Harrow 2007; Dovey 2009; Tcheuyap 2011). Tcheuyap's *Postnationalist African Cinema* (2011),

referencing Nollywood, illustrates that entertainment and performance have always been features of serious African cinema, even if rarely discussed by critics more concerned with history and politics. A conference at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign in 2007 provided the opportunity for comparative analyses of the two forms and cultivated dialogue between scholars of local video and African film, and two significant publications, a special edition of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* (2010) edited by Lindiwe Dovey and *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* (2010), a collection of essays edited by Mahir Şaul and Ralph Austin, the conveners of the conference, grew from that meeting. Manthia Diawara's *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (2010) combines analyses of film and video, treating them with equal attention and rigor. In *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (2011) Akin Adesokan situates African cultural production, including literature from Africa and the diaspora and the films of Sembene Ousmane and Tunde Kelani, along the transition from decolonization to globalization, reading across several genres to demonstrate the interpenetration of the material, the historical, and the aesthetic. These efforts have gone a long way toward bridging the divide between scholars writing about different forms of African screen media, provoking critical methods and theoretical questions attuned to the spirit of Kenneth Harrow's (2007) call for change. And although I agree with Dovey, who argues that the opposition between local video and elite African film has been "rendered obsolete" (2010, 2), I do think we can attend to the meaningful differences among African cultural forms without falling into binary logic. Rather than elide these differences, we should probe their sources and effects. Whether subsidized or produced commercially, African screen media circulates and has value symbolically and economically, and as in all cultural forms, these different configurations of value overlap and interact. Serious African film, African popular video, and the many hybrid forms that fit neatly into neither category are enabled and constrained by different material conditions of creation, circulation, and consumption. To my mind, the study of video movies has been crucially important to African film criticism because the videos have resisted incorporation into the field's dominant critical discourse and engendered methodologies attentive to materiality. Looking seriously at African video movies, and with critical scrutiny, has facilitated exciting new ways of defining, analyzing, and teaching many types of African screen media.

Whether adopting the theoretical language of Marxism, feminism, cultural nationalism, or psychoanalysis, critics of African film, in the main, have practiced what Julianne Burton (1997) has called an immanent criticism, a critical methodology that locates meaning within the world of the film text. Typically, in order to amplify the African film's political message, the critic positions herself beside the film text, carrying out a formalist analysis of the text or describing its explicit content. Even when the critic sets out to engage history, that history is understood to be located and made present in the film. This methodology has functioned primarily to facilitate African cinema's founding objective, which, as Harrow explains, was to be "a genuine expression answering the needs of the people through a cinema of struggle and cultural representation" (2007, 42). Yet, immanent criticism, as Burton convincing shows, abstracts and reifies the film text, sealing it off from the "dynamic historical and social forces" (1997, 167) it is intended to transform. A committed intellectual, Burton sets out to reroute politicized critical practice as it applies to oppositional filmmaking. In particular, she calls for the implementation of a more "constructive and meaningful critical relationship to the tradition of oppositional filmmaking in Latin America" (1997, 167). This relationship is based on a contextual criticism, a practice that charges the critic with "attempt[ing] to demonstrate how interacting contextual factors impact upon the film text itself and the interpretation of that text at a given point of reception" (168). Though Burton addresses her critique to politicized critics and has developed this methodology for Latin American oppositional filmmaking, her intervention inspires the method adopted in this book about African video movies. Contextual criticism attempts to account for the fluidity and complexity of context, which Burton describes as "a mutually influential dynamic between the film product, the organizational structure in which it is produced, the organizational structure in which it is consumed, and the larger social context" (Burton 1997, 170). As practiced here, contextual criticism posits a dialectical relationship between the cultural form and its many contexts and investigates how those contexts shape the text and how the text affects its context. Far from abandoning close reading, it couples that reading with the investigation of the materiality and social life of the video-text. An inherently interdisciplinary method, it recognizes that meaning is contingent and variable, constructed by the text's modes of production and consumption and the dynamic circuits it migrates along.

Whereas the critical discourse of politicized African cinema has privileged the film-text, what have yet to be fully accounted for in the scholarship on popular video movies are their formal properties and aesthetics. This is not to discount or diminish the importance of Birgit Meyer's provocative analyses of Pentecostal modernity or Brian Larkin's brilliant discussion of the aesthetics of astonishment that inflect Nigerian videos. Nor do I want to ignore Esi Sutherland-Addy's article in which she describes the affiliations shared by video movies and West African oral forms. Still, much more attention needs to be paid to the videos as texts, to the narrative conventions and generic modes they deploy, to the anxieties they seek to quell, and to the spectatorial processes they put in motion. This book brings the insights of literary and film analysis to bear on a range of video movies. Close readings of select video features highlight the ambivalent significations produced by Ghanaian movies amid profound material and ideological transformation and investigate how Ghanaian video reconstitutes, even as it is complicit with, the grand narratives of modernity and globalization.

The booming commercial video industries in Ghana and Nigeria, which produce movies meant first and foremost to entertain, have brought pleasure into visibility as a crucial dimension of analysis. Early scholarship on video movies, drawing on the explanations offered by the videomakers themselves, explained their appeal as representational. Video movies presented Ghanaian and Nigerian audiences with characters who looked and talked like them and with stories that were familiar. Meyer explains that Ghanaian popular video "was born out of people's desire to see their own culture mediated through a television or cinema screen" (1999, 98). Recent writing has associated the appeal of the movies with not only their content, but their function, as well. Adesokan offers that the lavish displays presented by Nollywood domestic dramas fulfill "a mass desire for wealth and power" (2004, 191), and Larkin (2008) has associated the appeal of Nigerian videos with their capacity to express and imaginatively contain the vulnerabilities and desires associated with everyday life in the African postcolony. Moradewun Adejunmobi (2010) has considered the transnational reach of African popular movies to audiences outside the countries where the movies are made and has theorized the specific types of identification audiences find in Nollywood movies and the various pleasures spectators across Africa and the diaspora, from a variety of places and backgrounds, derive from watching them.

Adejunmobi uses the term "phenomenological proximity" to capture this transnational appeal. She explains, "Nollywood films in English are able to generate audiences in diverse locations in Africa because they present recognizable struggles, they appeal to widespread fears and familiar aspirations" (Adejunmobi 2010, 111). Audiences identify with the hardships that drive characters to corrupt and immoral acts, and they admire the lifestyles achieved through illicit means. Both Adejunmobi (2010) and Larkin (2008) associate the appeal of videos with their adoption of melodramatic narrative and visual conventions. Melodramatic movies "provide a medium for rationalizing" the attractions of global modernity in the face of the extreme poverty and distress that signal Africa's exclusion from the status of modernity (Adejunmobi 2010, 114).

In this book, I draw from and build on this research to more closely examine the pleasures the movies offer and the ambivalence they generate. Statements about audiences' responses to video movies are grounded in extensive ethnographic research conducted over a ten-year period during numerous stints in Ghana, which included formal and informal conversations with ordinary Ghanaians, as well as with producers, distributors, marketers, and others involved in the video industry. Film reviews and commentary published in local newspapers have also contributed to my understanding of audiences' responses. In close readings of the videos, I have tried to pay attention to the televisual and cinematic codes that suture the spectator to a particular point of view or subject position. In other words, I think it is crucial to attend to the subject positions created by the video-text in our attempts to understand the responses of real audiences and to acknowledge the role of the unconscious in pleasure and identification. Although I do not draw directly on psychoanalytic film theory to elaborate on the functioning of the unconscious, this theory informs my analyses. My use of the word "desire" in the title and throughout the book is meant to signal the interpenetration of the psychic and the sociopolitical in the formations of pleasure, anxiety, and aspiration.

Addressing spectators similarly marginalized by global modernity, the videos offer a multiplicity of pleasures derived from the oscillations between mimesis and fantasy, proximity and distance, desire and revulsion. Audiences imaginatively experience the fantasy of a glamorous lifestyle far removed from their everyday experiences. They identify, too, with a character's struggles to escape poverty and

suffering and *dis*identify with the immoral practices that the same character engages in to get rich. Again and again, the videos generate profound ambivalence; they issue strong moral condemnations of greed and the immoral attainment of wealth and yet position the spectator as a consumer, one who gazes on and desires the movie's extravagant commodity displays. They criticize the dehumanizing impulse of capitalism and, simultaneously, produce spectator-subjects who desire the luxuries exhibited. Daniel Jordan Smith (2007) identifies similar expressions of ambivalence in Nigerian witchcraft accusations and stories of the occult. On the one hand, they articulate discontent with the appropriation of wealth and power by a privileged few and illustrate "the continuing power of moralities that privilege people and obligations of social relationships above the naked pursuit of riches" (Smith 2007, 138). On the other hand, they "highlight the intimate connections between popular condemnation of the unequal accumulation of great wealth and the widely shared fantasies about being rich" (142). Here, I argue that a split between narrative condemnation and visual desire commonly structure the movies. Narratives denounce and punish the greedy or selfish protagonist, engaging the spectator as a moral witness, while a visual economy of pleasure that aestheticizes consumption addresses the spectator as a desiring subject. Produced and consumed under circumstances of dire shortage and scarcity, video movies narrate and domesticate the desires and anxieties engendered by Ghana's incorporation into the global cultural economy. They are fertile ground for the growth of an "imaginaire of consumption" (Mbembe 2002, 271) and of a morality that is highly critical of materialism and capitalistic values.

Ghallywood and Its Global Aspirations

About fifty miles outside of Accra on a vast track of land that sits beside the Tema-Accra highway, Ghanaian videomaker William Akuffo has been constructing a movie production complex called Ghallywood, which he hopes will become the creative center for video movie production in Ghana (see figures I.1 and I.2). When I traveled to Ghana in 2009, I drove out to Ghallywood to call on Akuffo, whom I had first met in 1999, and to tour this most ambitious project. Crossed by streets named after Ghanaian actors and filmmakers, the complex houses Akuffo's large office and editing studio, a restaurant, and a classroom building. Pushing through the tall grass were the

foundations of several other structures, which, when complete, will be the housing units for actors and production crews. Akuffo's plans also include the construction of a studio, several film sets, and an outdoor movie theater.

Of particular interest to me was the name Ghallywood, which like its predecessor Nollywood, aligns this marginalized, African video movie industry with Hollywood and Bollywood. During this trip to Ghana, I was struck by how often I heard the term Ghallywood,
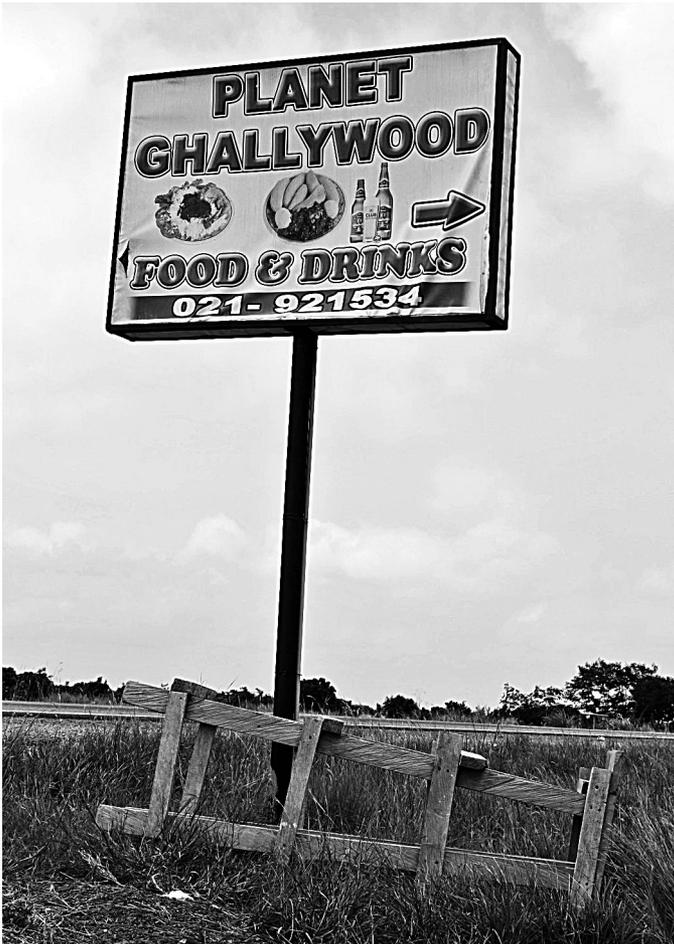

Figure I.1. Planet Ghallywood restaurant sign at entrance to William Akuffo's Ghallywood. (© Carmela Garritano, 2009)

Figure I.2. Portrait of William Akuffo (© Carmela Garritano, 2009)

or another variant of it (Gollywood or Ghanawood), used by movie producers to refer to the Ghanaian commercial video movie industry. The name had also appeared in numerous movie and entertainment publications and, on one particular occasion, inspired a provocative debate among members of FIPAG, the Film and Video Producers' Association of Ghana. Among those reluctant to adopt the label was Richard Quartey; he voiced the minority opinion that Ghallywood is inappropriate to Ghana's movie industry because it is imitative. "Shouldn't we tap into our unique cultural reserves to find a better name?" Quartey asked. "Maybe Sankofa?" Supporters of adopting Ghallywood as the official name of the industry argued that imitation was precisely the point. Videomaker Socrate Safo answered, "We have Hollywood, then Bollywood, now Nollywood. Why not Ghallywood, too? We can be as good as those!" This sentiment was echoed by many others. Safo's adamant support for the label Ghallywood, like Akuffo's substantial investment in the creation of a Ghanaian movie production center, demonstrates the reach and intensity of the aspirations of moviemakers in Ghana. For those who have adopted the label, Ghallywood is a call to be taken seriously in the global arena of commercial cinema. Quartey's reluctance replays a concern familiar to African cultural producers, a concern about maintaining African authenticity and originality. James Ferguson has noted that the authenticity of

African aspirations to be modern have consistently been called into question out of fear "that the [African] copy is either too different from the [Western] original or not different enough" (2006, 16). In both configurations, Africa is the shadow of the West, its distorted and empty projection. In his book called *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (2006), Ferguson insists on a different way of reading Africa's shadowing of the West. He torques the metaphor to show that a shadow is not only a distorted double; it also "implies a bond and a relationship. A shadow, after all, is not a copy but an attached twin. . . . Likeness here implies not only resemblance but also a connection, a proximity, an equivalence, even an identity" (2006, 17). This conceptualization of shadowing glosses Safo's proclamation: "We can be as good as those," reading it not merely as an attempt to imitate or assimilate to the Western model, but as an expression of a desire for proximity, a desire to attain the status and success of global film industries and to stand beside those global media industries as equal partners. The difference is worth elaborating on. To dismiss the ambitions of Ghanaian videomakers as iterations of cultural imperialism means disregarding their efforts to overcome their marginalization and participate fully as producers of their own cultural forms in the field of global culture.

Borrowing from the conceptual vocabularies of Ferguson, Achille Mbembe, and Sarah Nuttall, this book treats African popular video as a practice through which Africans articulate "worldliness." Worldliness, as defined by Nuttall and Mbembe,

> has to do not only with the capacity to generate one's own cultural forms, institutions, and lifeways, but also with the ability to foreground, translate, fragment, and disrupt realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere, and in the process place these forms and processes in the service of one's own making. (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008, 1)

As cultural forms and commodities, popular video movies, like other forms of African popular culture, embrace foreign influences as sources of newness and singularity (Barber 1987). Their appeal is linked to their enormous capacity to recontextualize and localize forms and styles associated with global mass culture, and much as in the African urban environments in which video movies circulate, it is the meeting of the local and the global that generates the energies and uncertainties that drive their production and consumption. As

modern African cultural articulations, they participate in the "world-ing" of Africa (Simone 2001) and the "indigenizing" (McCall 2002) of global technologies, styles, desires, and discourses.[9] As global vernacular forms, they trouble generalizations about an African or national identity because they emerge from, are shaped by, and reshape "a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space" (Appadurai 1996, 6).

Despite the expressions of global membership they convey, African popular videos have gone unnoticed outside African area studies by critics and scholars of world cinema. Largely attuned to cinematic forms and flows predominant in the first world institutions of global cine-literacy—film festivals, art-house cinemas, classrooms, and libraries—the current configuration of global media and cinema studies has included scholarship on elite African cinema, but eclipsed minor and commercial cultural forms and circuits that never intersect with these institutions.[10] Produced and disseminated through decentralized, private, and nonlegal circuits that variously have been called "minor" (Lionnet and Shi 2005), "unofficial" (Adejunmobi 2007), and "parallel" (Larkin 2004), African video movies move across local landscapes as well as through global cities (Sassen 2001) and media capitals (Curtin 2003), but travel along networks located under, around, and adjacent to major commercial and academic institutions and networks of exchange. They are among the multiplicity of unmapped media flows and forms that have emerged in the wake of the many changes linked to globalization: increased privatization, a proliferation of new, small media and electronic technologies, including video, satellite TV, and the internet, and the expansion of informal markets. Centered on this new African grassroots media form, and the uncharted media migrations and publics in West Africa and the African diaspora it has created, this study deepens our understanding of globalization and its cultural ecology. It pries open the closed circuit of the academic domain of cultural production by investigating a popular and commercial visual form that circulates within the space of the African everyday.

My notion of the everyday evokes Ravi Sundaram's description of the electronic everyday of Indian technoculture (1990).[11] Sundaram describes the electronic everyday as "a space" wrought from vast inequalities of wealth "where practices of quotidian consumption, mobility, and struggle are articulated" (1990, 48). It is a space of non-legality maintained in large part outside the reach of the state, where mobility and innovation are rewarded, and much as in the Ghanaian

video industry, its agents exploit new technologies to improvise creative survival strategies and practices of piracy. The fragmented and dispersed networks of production and distribution of the everyday are organized by small entrepreneurs, or the petty-commodity sector. Part of the informal economy, "the actors in this space have simply ignored the state as the regulator of everyday life" (Sundaram 1999, 64), and they take little notice of the official conventions that govern the formal economy.

In the Ghanaian video industry, the space of the everyday shares several important characteristics with Sundaram's electronic everyday. Most obviously, its networks and processes operate in a zone of nonformality, which can frustrate the researcher's attempts to gather numerical data and precise information. Transactions are conducted without documentation. If records are kept, they are often irregular and not reliable. Very little in the system is codified. Artists and crew negotiate their fees with producers, directly and privately; payments for equipment or services rendered are often made in an ad hoc manner. On the set of a movie, money is readily exchanged informally for favors, as small loans, as gifts, or to fulfill social expectations. Producers always seem to be waiting to receive their money from distributors, and the people involved in the making of a movie, at every level, always seem to be waiting for the producer to pay them an outstanding balance. The ubiquity of piracy, the expansion of opportunities for domestic viewing, and the fluidity of the multiple sites for consuming videos publicly confound attempts to figure out how many people actually see any one video movie. Neither the state nor independent producers could possibly regulate the public, informal sites of movies consumption, which include the video parlor, "tie-in spaces" (Ajibade 2007), and numerous, temporary "street corner" gatherings (Okome 2007b) that assemble unpredictably throughout the city. It is also nearly impossible to state with certainty how profitable a movie might have been. Haynes and Okome note, "All figures on sales and profits need to be treated with extreme caution, as they are frequently inflated for publicity purposes, or deflated in order to defraud partners" (2000, 69). And because money and favors are continually being exchanged, and because the financial life of one movie project runs right into the next production, producers themselves have a hard time knowing exactly how much profit they might have made from any one movie. It is perhaps for these reasons that the everyday tends to be an overlooked space, one largely absent in the critical discourse on

global cinema, which, like the discourse on technological globalization, has tended to center on "elite domains of consumption and identity" (Sundaram 1999, 63) and, I would add, the artistic and politicized products that move through those domains. This book sketches the broad parameters and shifts of the everyday culture of Ghanaian video movies, while conceding that its fluidity and informality continually disrupt this aim.

Adding to the many articles that examine, and often criticize, the representation of women in Nigerian and Ghanaian movies, this book attends to the enunciation of gender difference in the videos. In other words, it analyzes not only the ways women are portrayed but uncovers the gender norms and ideologies that the movies produce. Without question, video technology has expanded opportunities for women to work as producers of media in Nigeria (Haynes and Okome 2000; Okome 2007c) and in Ghana. As I note in chapter 4, no Ghanaian women had directed or produced a documentary or feature film before the advent of video movies. Yet, today in the Ghanaian industry, the number of men who hold positions as producers, directors, editors, screenwriters, and so on is far, far larger than the number of women in the same roles. That the products of a male-dominated media industry would be misogynistic or sexist is not inevitable, of course. It is true, however, that many Ghanaian movies do tend to recycle gender stereotypes with a long history in African popular culture and naturalize a similarly deep-rooted "ideology of patriarchy" (Okome 2007c, 166). Wisdom Agorde (2007), for example, has described an ethic of masculinity reiterated in Nollywood movies. Rooted in gender difference, this ethic defines manhood through violence, wealth, and ownership of women. Newell has identified the good-time girl and "the infinitely patient wife" as two common feminine character types in Ghanaian popular literature (2000, 37), and these characters appear frequently in videos, too. Agbese Aje-Ori (2010) has added the "mother-in-law" as another female stock character, and in this book, I describe the figure of the "monstrous woman." A reimagining of the good-time girl, this frighteningly powerful woman unleashes evil on the men who misuse or abuse her. Highly symbolic, she dwells at the limits of morality; her punishments reinstate social norms violated by selfish men with enormous appetites for women, food, and money.

Like Stephanie Newell (1997; 2000), I conceptualize African popular culture as a gender apparatus, a technology that produces and naturalizes particular gender ideologies. Gender is not incidental or

supplemental to the worlds and identities imagined in the videos, but necessary to the articulation of these identities (Garritano 2000). The work of gender theorist Judith Butler undergirds the feminist readings included here. In her writing, Butler theorizes "the performative" function of gender norms, demonstrating that through repetition across multiple sites of culture, gender ideologies sanction and naturalize ways of being and of desiring. As Butler notes, "A performative" works "to produce that which it declares" (1993, 107). Crucially, then, cultural forms do not simply reflect dominant ideologies but are productive of those ideologies. They have the capacity to reiterate norms and to question or parody them. Women videomakers such as Veronica Quarshie and Shirley Frimpong-Manso have challenged gender stereotypes common in Ghanaian movies. Like the female writers Newell describes (2000), these women moviemakers speak from within dominant narratives of gender and open possibilities for the emergence of alternative ways of being men and women.

Although mainly centered on Nollywood, the scholarship on African video does include some very promising book chapters and articles on Ghanaian video movies. Several of these studies, in their attempts to introduce readers to and generate interest in Ghanaian video, have tended to be either wide-ranging and overly general, or limited in scope, discussing common thematic or generic features of small selections of video texts. A notable exception to this preliminary scholarship on Ghanaian video is the groundbreaking work of anthropologist Birgit Meyer, whose series of articles have examined Ghanaian popular video as an articulation of Pentecostalism. For Meyer (2004), Ghanaian popular video, the emergence of which converged with a marked increase in the number of Pentecostal-charismatic churches, represents one of many "pentecostalite" expressive forms that have flourished as a result of the liberalization of the media. Video enacts a "pentecostalite style" that "recasts modernity as a Christian project" (Meyer 2004, 93), warning against the evils modernity introduces and promoting Christian discipline as the only method for warding off those evils. In Ghanaian video features Meyer finds that "pentecostal concerns merge almost naturally with melodrama as an aesthetic form" in that both assert "the need to go beyond the surface of the visible to reveal hidden reality underneath" (2004, 101). Video functions then as a technology of modern pentecostal subjectivity and vision. Meyer writes: "Moviegoers are positioned in such a way that they share the eye of God, technologically simulated by the camera. Indeed,

audiences are made mimetically to share the super vision that enables God to penetrate the dark; they are addressed as viewer-believers and even as voyeurs peeping into the otherwise forbidden" (2004, 104). The appeal of video, then, involves the attainment of vision that is panoptical and voyeuristic. It is all-encompassing, secretive, and illicit.

Following the path cleared by Meyer, critics have tended to center on this one genre, variously called the occult video (Okome 2007a), the horror film (Wendl 2001, 2007) or a pentecostal expressive form (Meyer 1998, 1999, 2003, 2004). Although much of this work is compelling, its limited scope has created the false impression that Pentecostalism and its representation of occult practice figures prominently in all Ghanaian movies. Attention to the Christianity-occult binary has overshadowed the other ideological investments the videos make, the meanings they enact, and the subjectivities they produce. Certainly, Pentecostalism animates many Ghanaian movies, and even when not championed or invoked explicitly, it remains a significant discursive strand in many more. But video movies are not monolithic, nor are they controlled by one dominant way of looking or mode of narration. Unrestrained and unruly heterogeneity is a pronounced feature of videos movies. They are, in the words of James Ferguson, noisy.[12] Borrowing from Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (1999), this book advocates for and strives to employ an analytics of noise. Noise, Ferguson writes:

> has its social logic—a logic that makes itself visible only if one is able at some point to set aside the search for signal, and to maintain a decent respect for the social significance of the unintelligible, for the fact that signs may produce puzzlement, unease, and uncertainty (and not only for the ethnographer) just as easily as they may produce stable and unequivocal meanings. (Ferguson 1999, 210)

Ferguson's analytic seems well suited to video movies because, like the ethnographic sites and situations he interprets, videos are messy, crisscrossed by multiple flows of meaning. They grow out of and speak to an urban, African context not entirely dissimilar to that studied by Ferguson, and as urban cultural texts they are held together by "conflicting strands of meaning and style" (1999, 229). They resist ideological domestication (Ferguson 1999, 229) and instead invite multiplicity, complexity, and contradiction. Ferguson insists that to plot the noise of a particular scene is to listen for "multiple implied

and imagined communities of meaning that only partially exist, only partially overlap and are geographically and socially dispersed" (Ferguson 1999, 227). By conceptualizing popular video as an expression of one master and overarching discourse, contained by a consistently deployed logic of surface and depth, or even assimilated to one dominant ideology, we risk silencing the flow of noise and closing off the multiplicity of potential meanings, looks, styles, and sensations produced by video features across time. Plotting the dynamic range and variable tempo of the noise, narratives, and silences of video movies also allows us to capture their incredible diversity and ideological implications, which have, so far, gone unheard.

In the emergent scholarship on African video movies, little attention has yet been given to historical change. *African Video Movies and Global Desires* aims to enrich our understanding of African video movies by bringing historical specificity to bear on the study of locally produced video features. Popular video is described here as a shifting and historically contingent discursive field marked by myriad ideologies, anxieties, discourses, and desires, and each chapter examines a loosely defined historical period as demarcated by significant structural changes in the industry. The chronological organization of the book outlines the changes in narrative forms and cinematic features that mark the thousands of videos produced by Ghanaian videomakers for over twenty years, and it engages the often ambivalent and contested meanings and identities produced by Ghanaian cinema at different historical moments and for different publics. It examines historical and technological change within the local, national, and transnational contexts in which video texts circulate and as it is revealed in the style and content of the video-texts.

The readings of the films and videos contained in each chapter purposefully complicate the neat and linear chronology implied by the chapter organization. Each text, much like a palimpsest, carries artifacts from that which came before, and in this way, the textual analyses present Ghana's cinematic history more like a layering than an unfolding. Traces of the pedagogical imperative that informed the colonial film productions of the Gold Coast Film Unit inflect the most recent video features, for example, while iterations of the figure of the monstrous woman, who consumes selfishly and excessively, appear in movies made during all periods of Ghana's film and video history. The close readings of visual texts are not intended to suggest a chronology of development from amateur to professional productions,

from the visual pleasures of spectacle and astonishment to narrative containment, or from analog to digital technologies. Rather, in each period, we can see variations in aesthetics, narrative form, and modes of spectator engagement and in the anxieties, desires, subjectivities and styles reiterated across multiple video texts. These changing textual properties are analyzed as effects of the economic, technological, and political shifts indicated in each chapter division.

The first chapter of the book, "Mapping the Modern: The Gold Coast Film Unit and the Ghana Film Industry Corporation," describes the early years of Ghana's film history. Beginning with the earliest film screenings in the 1920s, this chapter offers an account of colonial film production in the Gold Coast and the formation of a national film company after independence. Rather than seeing the birth of a national Ghanaian cinema as a complete turning away from colonial influence, I identify the discontinuities and continuities between the feature films of the Ghana Film Industry Corporation and those of the Gold Coast Film Unit. Close readings of *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952) and *A Debut for Dede* (1992) permit us to focus on the cinematic production of modernity as articulated in the late colonial and the national film. Emerging out of institutions connected through the history of colonialism, these films share a gendered language of modernity, tradition, and nation. Both films represent modernity as a relationship between space and time; the journey from village to city functions as an allegory for the evolution from African tradition to European modernity, and both films illustrate that each narrative of modernity relies, for its production, on gender difference.

Chapter 2, "Work, Women, and Worldly Wealth: Global Video Culture and the Early Years of Local Video Production," investigates the period between roughly 1980 and 1992, when the erosion of state support for and control of filmmaking coupled with the ready availability of video technology allowed individuals situated outside of the networks of official cultural production to produce features entirely unregulated as commodities and artistic objects. The first video movies articulate the deep ambivalences generated by Ghana's encounter with global capitalism and the concomitant shift from economies of production to consumption as illustrated in three representative examples: *Zinabu* (1987), *Big Time* (1988), and *Menace* (1992). In these early video movies, it is gender that structures and distinguishes these two articulations of capitalistic value.

Chapter 3, "Professional Movies and Their Global Aspirations: The Second Wave of Video Production in Ghana," traces the shift toward more professionalized production and a more organized and regulated industry during the second phase of commercial video production in Ghana, from 1992 until around 2000. In this period, the privatization of the national film company and the emergence of several independent media outlets in Ghana parallel the privatization of cinematic space, as viewing shifts from the public cinema hall or video parlor to the privacy of watching a video or video compact disc (VCD) at home. In addition, as opportunities for employment with state institutions diminish, professionally trained film- and videomakers enter into the commercial video industry in large numbers, bringing new ideas about professionalism, art, and modernity. These dramatic changes in the economic and structural organization of film and media institutions, in no small part driven by the state's liberalization policies, correspond to the iteration of a professional style, a "performative competence" (Ferguson 1999, 99) that signaled aspiration toward an imagined global standard. This chapter focuses on the emergence of the "professional" movie, describing the historical changes linked to its appearance and then analyzing the themes taken up by and stylistics deployed in several groundbreaking professional videos.

Chapter 4, "Tourism and Trafficking: Views from Abroad in the Transnational Travel Movie," maps the transnational networks and flows that link West Africa to global cities such as Amsterdam and New York, concentrating mainly on Ghanaian video movies about travel. The analysis focuses on several examples of transnational Ghanaian popular movies, including *Wild World* (Ghana and Italy 2002), *Amsterdam Diary* (Ghana and Amsterdam 2005), *London Got Problem* (Ghana and UK 2006), and *Love in America* (Ghana and USA 2008), examining this genre of movie as a site crossed by overlapping and intersecting discourses of gender, globalization, and consumerism. It argues that Ghanaian travel movies capture the aspirations of Ghanaians to be modern and mobile global subjects and imaginatively link Ghana to the global city.

Chapter 5, "Transcultural Encounters and Local Imaginaries: Nollywood and the Ghanaian Movie Industry in the Twenty-first Century," investigates how the inundation of the commercial video movie market by Nollywood and the shift from analog to digital technologies have fragmented and realigned the Ghanaian video movie industry in the last decade. I read representative examples of two types of video

movies: the transnational "glamour" movies of Shirley Frimpong-Manso and a series of local "sakawa" movies. I suggest a correspondence between these two types of movies, which at first glance seem completely dissimilar. I argue that "sakawa" and similar types of occult movies made for local audiences bring into visibility the uncanny excised from Frimpong-Manso's aesthetics of consumption.

African Video Movies and Global Desires adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Ghana's commercial video movie industry, coupling contextual criticism with close readings and formalist analysis of individual video texts so as to contribute to the burgeoning scholarly conversation on African video movies. It investigates how video movies participate in the normalization and refashioning of dominant discourses of globalization, gender and sexuality, neoliberalism, and consumerism and highlights the ambivalence generated in the reproduction and repetition of those discourses across time and in the thousands of video movies that have been made since the 1980s. This ambivalence, the contradictions, and the cracks revealed through reiteration, matter a great deal because it is ambivalence that creates spaces for new imaginings of self, subject, family, and community.

A final note about terminology: In the title and throughout the book, I use of the term "video movie" instead of the more common "video film" in a minor attempt to acknowledge the singular importance of video technology to the history of African popular video, which to my mind is diminished by "video film." The technology, or medium, of the text is not incidental to its symbolic life. "Video movie" retains an emphasis on video as a medium that generates particular material conditions at the level of the artifact, and it more broadly highlights video as a form of technological mediation and commodification that is different from film. Larkin (2000; 2008) has written on both of these aspects of video, and I draw on his work at various points in this book to describe the role of video technology in the history of Ghanaian screen media. Finally, "movie" calls up very different connotations than "film." Movies are associated with the commoditized forms of screen media produced by dominant commercial industries, like Hollywood. The word "movie" best captures the aspirations and ambitions of video producers in Ghana, which might be why "movie" is widely used in the Ghanaian industry, by journalists, movie producers, and actors alike. The national industry's annual awards ceremony, The Ghana Movie Awards, most obviously speaks to the term's prevalence.

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