Nollywood, Globalization, and Regional Media Corporations in Africa

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This article makes three arguments with respect to the interface between contemporary African and global media. The first is that regional media corporations represent a greater threat to local media production than global media corporations. Second, the threat often consists in seeking to co-opt rather than to suppress local media production, since these regional corporations do not actually stand to benefit from suppressing local production. Third, the likelihood of being co-opted, accompanied by a gradual loss of autonomy, is greatest where local media have achieved a high level of success at attracting relatively large audiences, independently of both regional and global media networks. This discussion is based on analysis of the interaction between Nollywood and regional media corporations active in Africa.

This article makes three arguments with respect to the interface between contemporary African and global media. The first is that regional media corporations represent a greater threat to local media production than global media corporations. Second, the threat consists more so in seeking to co-opt rather than to suppress local media production, since these regional corporations do not actually stand to benefit from suppressing local production. Third, the likelihood of being co-opted, accompanied by a gradual loss of autonomy, is greatest where local media have achieved a high level of success at attracting relatively large audiences, independently of both regional and global media networks. In short, and notwithstanding the expanding reach of regional media corporations working in tandem with global corporations across the African continent and elsewhere in the developing world, many forms of local media production will continue to thrive. In part, they will thrive because vibrant local production serves the interests of regional media corporations. Local media operating on a scale that is too small to be profitable for either global or regional corporations can avoid subordination to the proclivities of regional media corporations.

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As a corollary, however, the fortunes of the most successful forms of local media may become increasingly intertwined with those of regional media corporations. Current developments in Nigerian film production and distribution will serve to illustrate these arguments.

The Nigerian film industry, the largest film industry in Africa, has been described as an expression of minor transnational practice to the extent that it remained largely disconnected from the official global economy.\(^1\) Adejunmobi (2007, p. 1) has further argued that despite the growing prominence of global media in the developing world, this type of commercially oriented industry offers a greater opportunity “for autonomous voices to emerge outside the dominant centers of cultural production” than do noncommercialized media productions. Increasingly, though, regional media corporations in Africa that are themselves embedded in, or deeply connected to, global media networks have become active disseminators of Nigerian film.\(^2\) Over the past few years, DStv, a South African satellite television station that is perhaps the dominant satellite television provider in many parts of the African continent, has been augmenting the number of broadcasts and channels dedicated to locally produced content and in particular Nigerian film, popularly known as Nollywood. This development raises intriguing questions about the future of the Nigerian film industry and local media more broadly. What I seek to determine in this article is whether such regional media corporations may in fact succeed where global media networks have thus far failed when it comes to reducing opportunities for local media production independent of global corporations.

This is not simply an academic question. In blogs and online chats, Nollywood fans have been expressing growing anxiety about the relationship between DStv, a South African media corporation, and Nigerian film producers. For their part, African media scholars speaking of DStv tend to level charges similar to those made against global media conglomerates, even though DStv is at least nominally an “African” corporation. In Francis Nyamnjoh’s view, for example, DStv is nothing more than an outpost for global capital. He writes that “like the rest of the world, Africans are generously invited by capital to partake of the standardized, routinized, streamlined and global consumer culture, of which McDonalds, Coca Cola, CNN, and satellite entertainment television such as DStv are harbingers” (2004, p. 73). Echoing Nyamnjoh, Winston Mano (2005, p. 54) concludes, “it is cynical that Africans’ response to the global is to set up continental content-providers that peddle foreign programs rather than promote local productions.” Abiodun Salawu (2006, p. 151) quotes a Nigerian film scholar, Ola Balogun, who describes the activity of the parent company of DStv as a “Boer conspiracy.” Salawu himself characterizes DStv programming, and in particular the *Big Brother Africa* show, which generated a lot of controversy on the continent, as “un-African” (Salawu, 2006, p. 153). Suffice it to say that much of the criticism has been focused on DStv’s role as a purveyor of foreign content, more so than on its relationship with the kind of local media production represented by Nollywood.\(^3\)

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\(^1\)See Adejunmobi (2007) for further discussion.

\(^2\)Outside Africa, in the United Kingdom, for example, there are also cable and satellite television providers that offer channels dedicated to Nigerian films, alongside channels such as AIT International and BEN TV with news and variety shows for a predominantly Nigerian audience.

\(^3\)Evuleocha (2008) is one of the few to discuss DStv’s partnership with the Nigerian film industry in some detail. She sees this partnership as a positive development.
Writing about Latin America, Joseph Straubhaar (1982) as well as Elizabeth Fox and Silvio Waisbord (2002), among other scholars, have challenged assumptions about a one-way flow of media from powerful countries such as the United States to the rest of the world. I do not intend to pursue that line of argument further. Rather, and for my purposes here, I am more interested in what these scholars have to say about the activity of regional media corporations, especially in terms of their interaction with global media corporations, on the one hand, and with national media, on the other. Straubhaar and Spencer (2006, p. 373) note, for example, that in Latin America, regional media networks have often developed partnerships with global firms. At the same time, Fox and Waisbord describe the current media situation in Latin America as “one in which media companies from larger national markets have made inroads in medium-size and small countries” (2002, p. 13). This should not be viewed as an arrangement whereby regional corporations in Latin America reflexively subordinate their own interests to those of their global partners. Indeed, and according to Fox and Waisbord, “each party brings to the table indispensable resources: Western media sources provide satellite connections, large international operations, and extensive film and television archives; regional partners offer domestic experience and popular local programming” (2002, p. 11).

Sounding somewhat more pessimistic about the possible outcome of such partnerships, Gage Averill, nonetheless, identified “the relationship of local to global circulation as a central problematic of late capitalism” (1996, p. 209). Fox and Waisbord (2002, pp. 8–9) likewise note the unusual articulations occurring between “local, regional, and international capital” in Latin America. If global firms do not systematically overwhelm local media production as some early writing on globalization seemed to predict, what we need then is a clearer understanding of how global-regional and regional-local collaborations play out in specific contexts, what they mean for local media, and what they mean for the ability of diverse social formations to be represented on and to express themselves using the available media. My goal in this article is to examine how this dynamic between the global, the regional, and the local is unfolding with respect to regional popular film in West Africa. I am also interested in exploring the circumstances under which local media might remain independent of regional media corporations.

**DSTV AND NOLLYWOOD**

DStv was launched by Multichoice Africa and is often described as the first corporation to offer Pay TV across the African continent (Mano, 2005, p. 52). Multichoice Africa’s parent company, M-net, was founded in 1986 in South Africa. DStv’s own publications show that it currently offers satellite television services in 47 countries and or territories spread across east, west, and southern Africa. It appears to be the dominant satellite television provider in African countries where English is the official language. The cheapest package that DStv offers on its website resembles a typical cable or satellite television package in the United States or in the

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4 See Adejunmobi (2007, pp. 8–12) for a description of regional popular films.

5 I am referring here to the DStv Guide, titled *dish Africa*, from June 2010. This is a monthly magazine advertising DStv programming for each month.
United Kingdom with well known channels such as the Cartoon Network, E!, MTV, CNN, ESPN, NatGeo, Discovery, and Sky News, among many others.

However, and in addition to these programs emanating from the global north, DStv has been steadily adding African-produced content. Starting in 2003, DStv created a channel for African films titled AfricaMagic. The line-up of films on AfricaMagic was (and remains) so heavily dominated by Nollywood films that some commentators have suggested that the channel should be called NigeriaMagic. Most of the films on AfricaMagic were Nigerian-produced English-language films. A few years later, DStv started a sister channel, AfricaMagic Plus, that drew heavily from East and Southern Africa in its selection of popular films and television shows. Both channels were available all over Africa. Later still, DStv added Magic world, showcasing the kind of African films that I have described elsewhere as belonging to the “global ethnic” category (Adejunmobi, 2007, p. 13). By 2007, DStv was already screening a few Yoruba-language films with English subtitles on the AfricaMagic channel during weekends. In March 2010, DStv took this one step further and launched AfricaMagic Yoruba and AfricaMagic Hausa. AfricaMagic Yoruba offers nonstop broadcasting of Yoruba-language films over 24 hours, while AfricaMagic Hausa typically offers Hausa-language films over a 12-hour cycle. Both AfricaMagic Yoruba and AfricaMagic Hausa are available mainly to viewers in Nigeria and countries bordering on Nigeria with substantial Yoruba or Hausa populations.

When DStv first launched AfricaMagic, both fans and professionals involved in Nollywood expressed fears that DStv might “destroy” Nollywood. DStv was accused in Nigerian tabloid publications of showing Nigerian films without paying royalties to actors and producers. It was accused of paying too little for individual films when it did pay and of lowering the value of films by showing them repeatedly. There were also complaints that the DStv offices in Nigeria had failed to hire Nigerians in management positions. Many of these complaints seem to have faded over time. With the introduction of AfricaMagic Yoruba and AfricaMagic Hausa, a different set of complaints emerged in print and online publications. Some critics alleged that DStv was discriminating against certain ethnic groups in failing to develop an AfricaMagic channel in Igbo. Producers of the Nollywood films shown on AfricaMagic, who are themselves frequently Igbo, stepped forward to defend DStv against charges of discriminating against Igbo-language speakers, as have the Nigerians now working in management for Multichoice in its Nigeria office. Nigerian defenders of DStv have argued that because production of Igbo-language films is relatively slim compared to Yoruba- and Hausa-language films, an AfricaMagic Igbo channel would not be commercially viable. They have also noted that the producers and directors of a substantial percentage of the Nollywood films shown on AfricaMagic are in fact Igbo.

REGIONAL MEDIA CORPORATIONS

For my purposes here, I would describe Multichoice-DStv as a regional media corporation, insofar as its primary area of operation is Africa (and parts of the Middle East), where it seeks to

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6As one example at the Nollywood Uprising Conference held in Los Angeles in 2005, and attended by well-known actors and film directors from the Nigerian film industry, including Lancelot Imasuen, Peace Fibresima, Omotola Jalade Ekeinde, and Zack Orji, among others, DStv’s involvement with Nigerian film industry became the subject of heated debate among panelists and the audience.
become the dominant satellite television provider. Multichoice-DStv is also a regional media corporation that directly interfaces with global corporations at several levels. This corporation is listed on stock exchanges in Johannesburg, Amsterdam, and New York (Mano, 2005, p. 52). In addition and as pointed out earlier, the bulk of DStv programming derives from American film and television. DStv thus draws upon global media and global capital when it comes to technology, content, and financing. In many respects, DStv’s profile and activities would appear to substantiate the criticisms expressed by Nyamnjoh, Mano, and Salawu, among others. Yet DStv has consistently moved toward increasing locally produced content. In addition to the variations on the AfricaMagic formula, DStv has recently also added channels offering locally produced content for black South African viewers, including Msanzi Magic and Vusu channels. For the large Nigerian market, it has debuted a new show, Naija Sings, advertised as offering the first Nigerian music singing competition. In view of these developments, it is understandable why some viewers might be confused about the identity of Multichoice-DStv as a company. A Nigerian respondent to a blog entry about DStv expressed surprise that DStv belonged to a South African corporation, asking, “Why then do they have AfricaMagic Yoruba and AfricaMagic Hausa?”

On the one hand, the decision to launch channels with shows in indigenous languages like Yoruba and Hausa would seem to be a step toward greater on-screen acknowledgement of Africa’s linguistic and ethnic diversity by satellite television corporations. On the other hand, DStv might be seen as simply cherry picking those forms of diversity that are in John Fiske’s words, “incorporable” (1997, p. 58). Fiske expatiates on this term by describing how forms of diversity associated with marketing strategies are acknowledged by corporations mainly “because they are incorporable and indeed are the products of the system that incorporates them” (1997, p. 58). In short, we should not be surprised to see DStv organizing its future programming to take further advantage of forms of local diversity whose commercial value is already established while generally disregarding those forms of local diversity considered to have minimal commercial potential.

Even before DStv began taking an interest in Nollywood, Yoruba and Hausa language films already accounted for the two most important indigenous language streams represented in Nigerian film production. As two of the languages with the highest number of native and second-language speakers within Nigeria, Yoruba and Hausa speakers were of particular interest to Nigerian film professionals seeking to create a successful commercial product. Within Nigeria itself, and in addition to film, there is also a significant amount of local television programming in Yoruba and Hausa, especially in the regions where these languages are widely spoken. Before DStv created its Yoruba- and Hausa-language film channels, Nigeria-based satellite television providers, HiTV and DaarSat, had already identified this demographic within the country as a source of revenue by offering their own Yoruba-language channels, namely Amuludun TV, and Faaji television. In introducing satellite television broadcasts in these rather than other African languages, therefore, DStv was simply capitalizing on the market potential of language constituencies that had already been targeted for commercial purposes by national media institutions in Nigeria. For their own strictly commercial purposes, regional media corporations like DStv are likely to become major players in shaping the range of local diversity accepted for media representation in the regions of the world where they are dominant actors.

The decision to create channels dedicated to programming in specific indigenous languages places DStv and other regional media corporations in Africa in a position for developing what I
would term here a “local ethnic” profile for programming, contrasting with what I have described elsewhere as a “global ethnic” configuration of film production and consumption (Adejunmobi, 2007, p. 13). Global ethnic texts are perceived to be ethnically distinctive but are read mainly by outsiders to the group represented, and generally “exemplify responses to the major genres of dominant [global] culture” (Adejunmobi, 2007, p. 13). Local ethnic texts are likewise perceived to be ethnically distinctive but are of interest mainly to self-identified members of the group represented. They also tend to echo rather than to challenge perspectives associated with dominant culture. Local ethnic films represent one form among many others of regional popular material, which often “draw upon the minor genres and minor technologies of global culture” (Adejunmobi, 2007, p. 9).

VARIABLE DISTRIBUTION MODELS

Given the kind of capital investment and technology at DStv’s disposal, it comes as no surprise that DStv management has steadily sought to increase the size of its viewership and to extend viewership over larger and larger areas of the continent. In this regard, the Nigerian market would be especially attractive by virtue of its potential size in Africa’s most populous country. The popularity of Nigerian film across huge swathes of the African continent and the potential size of viewership in Nigeria compared to other parts of the continent would be sufficient reason for DStv to dedicate a significant amount of viewing time to Nigerian films. Nonetheless, and under current conditions, it is unlikely that all film production in Nigeria will end up within the sphere of influence of regional media giants such as DStv.

One of the distinctive elements accounting for many of the unusual features in the development of the Nigerian film enterprise is that both production and distribution of this “media merchandise” have for the most part fallen outside the control of global, regional, or even national institutions. Syndication and foreign sales are where many media corporations hope to recoup costs and make a profit. One might in fact describe Nigerian film producers’ contracts with DStv as a form of syndication, albeit a form of syndication where the producers do not reap the highest profits possible for a variety of reasons.

As Larkin (2008) has pointed out, beyond the initial sales of a new release Nigerian film producers do not typically exercise much control over distribution of their product. Indeed, and as noted by Adejunmobi (2007, p. 3), they do not generally invest in film production with an eye to recouping their investment through foreign sales. On the contrary, and overwhelmingly, Nigerian film producers seek to make their profits from initial sales to established Nigerian “marketers.” These marketers in turn operate on a scale which provides a profit margin but also encourages them to sell individual films as widely as possible, including beyond Nigeria’s borders.

Wherever the impetus for transnational sales emanates from small-time independent operators rather than from producers within larger corporations, we are, in all likelihood, dealing with a distribution network that remains viable and profitable even when detached from global distribution

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7David Kendall (1996, p. 55), a writer for shows on various American networks, stated for example, “Even if you produce pilots and series that lose money, and don’t make it to syndication, they probably don’t lose money because of foreign sales.” He also remarked, “Syndication is where all the big money is.”
networks, and that I would describe as a minor transnational distribution network. Thus, Barnard and Tuomi miss the point about film industries in the developing world, and specifically Nigeria, when they state that “the emerging broad-based industry will have substantial economic power in the local developing country, but will over the short term not present a serious threat to more sophisticated incumbents from the developed world” (2008, p. 661). This is largely true. The fact, however, is that the majority of small-scale distributors of Nollywood around Africa are not interested in challenging “sophisticated incumbents from the developed world.” Making a profit within the space of opportunity afforded them for trade and travel is more than sufficient for their purposes.

Widespread piracy clearly cuts into the profits of Nigerian film producers who are vocal in their complaints about the government’s failure to seriously combat piracy. Indeed, Nigerian film producers may be willing to accept rather paltry dividends from DStv because this arrangement ensures that they reap a more significant benefit than informal trading networks offer for export sales. Widespread piracy also means that these producers will continue to favor smaller rather than larger investments in the productions that they fund. These lower levels of funding in turn reinforce their ability to operate profitably on a scale of production that is unsustainable for highly capitalized regional and global media corporations. Because this film industry did not experience its explosive growth in the absence of piracy but rather against a backdrop of widespread illegal reproduction, it is unlikely that piracy by itself will ultimately make this industry unviable as Mattelart (2009) seems to suggest. Nor is it likely that what Averill (1996, p. 208) calls the “asymmetries of access and accumulation” enjoyed by global corporations will condemn such minor transnational media practices as Nollywood to eventual extinction. To the contrary, the scale of piracy in Nigeria means that both global and regional media corporations have minimal incentive for becoming involved in local film production and distribution in that site, beyond what is offered on Pay TV. Notwithstanding growing collaboration between regional media corporations and Nollywood producers, most sales of individual copies of Nigerian films occur outside the distribution networks controlled by either regional or global corporations.

Indeed, many of the Nigerian films shown on DStv are available in local markets at least in West Africa, at the same time as they are showing on DStv, so that interested viewers do not have to subscribe to DStv or any kind of pay TV in order to gain access to these films. Broadcast of Nigerian films by DStv may in fact be driving up sales by small time marketers rather than drowning out or competing with the informal networks used by these marketers. At the biggest shop selling Nigerian and Ghanaian films at Makola market in Accra, Ghana, for example, I have seen the number of racks and shelves dedicated to locally produced film increase exponentially rather than contract since AfricaMagic came on the air. Rows that were once lined with cassettes of locally recorded music have now been taken over completely by Nigerian and Ghanaian films. A final factor has also worked to the advantage of these small-time marketers: in a region of the world where well-equipped cinema theaters are rare, or expensive, or considered sites of vice, film viewing is more frequently associated with the small rather than the big screen. Likewise, fans of locally produced films in Africa who are unwilling to subscribe to satellite television on

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8See Adejunmobi (2007) for a fuller discussion of this.
9Larkin (2008, p. 225) states, “According to U.S. State Department figures, Nigeria is the largest market for pirate goods in Africa [ . . . ]”
10See Larkin (2008, pp. 135–138) for an example.
moral grounds may also prefer to buy individual films in the open market rather than to watch them on a satellite television channel.

REGIONAL MEDIA AND LOCAL DIVERSITY

Nigerian films have been criticized with ample justification for their misrepresentation of gender, class, ethnicity, culture, and their relentless trafficking in stereotypes. Yet, though Nigerian films may be wholly inauthentic in addition to being regressive in the values they appear to disseminate, they are a distinctive product in their mode of presentation and storytelling. It is not an exaggeration to state that Nigerian film directors have perfected a form of cinematic storytelling, whose trademark “lapses,” “excesses,” and “digressions” have been enthusiastically embraced by audiences that do not generally factor into any of the plans made by global media networks. When, for example, Strauss Zelnick, chief operating officer for Twentieth Century Fox, stated in the 1990s that “movies starring black people don’t work overseas” (1996, p. 22), he was surely not talking about the audiences who were already gathering to watch early Nollywood productions at the very time he was making that observation.

As it turns out, this distinctive mode of representation and storytelling actually serves the commercial purposes of a regional corporation such as DStv rather well. Despite the charges leveled against DStv by African media critics for a line-up heavily dependent on foreign shows, the continued dominance of this regional provider depends more so on the extent to which it is able to further integrate local content that has proven commercially successful on the African continent and among different African communities. In order to compete with rivals selling similar goods, a large corporation must prove that its products are distinctive in a way that is especially significant for potential consumers in each location where the products are sold. Within a potential group of consumers defined by any range of criteria coupled with a circumscribed location, and where the consumers have a choice between different products, a distinctive product with which these particular consumers identify, will do better than a distinctive product at a similar price that is perceived as being more closely identified with other consumers in other circumscribed locations.

Joseph Straubhaar (1991) famously postulated the theory of “cultural proximity” to explain just how this principle might account for the relative difference in popularity of varied media products. For media corporations seeking to gain an edge over competitors within circumscribed demographics or locations, paying attention to cultural proximity is good business (Davis, 1999, p. 55). Fox and Waisbord (2002, p. 15) echo Davis (1999) when they observe that “the prices for foreign shows are lower than the production costs of drama or comedy. Local productions, however, regularly garner higher ratings and consequently bring higher advertising revenues.” Indeed, the best way for competing regional media corporations to ensure dominance locally is to schedule local programming that has demonstrated its popularity and commercial viability where such programming is available. This is what DStv has done by dedicating specific channels to Nollywood and by further fragmenting the audience for Nigerian films along linguistic lines.

If the goal for regional media firms is to outbid rivals and raise profits, increased and distinctive content is the key. Smaller or mid-size corporations seeking to penetrate new circumscribed markets where larger corporations are already well established will tend to be especially interested in particular forms of “diversity” as a marketing strategy. Thus, DStv’s decision to begin
programming Nollywood fits in well with the current orientations “of a capitalism moving toward multiple, diverse, and short-lived products for multiple, diverse, and fluid markets” (Fiske, 1997, p. 58). The fact that DStv still broadcasts many foreign shows does not invalidate Fiske’s observations, since many (though not all) imported shows remain cheap relative to the production costs for local shows. While DStv will probably always offer channels that are heavily dependent on imported programming, DStv’s critics may be surprised to find this satellite television provider making more and more room for local content that is popular locally in a bid to strengthen its position as the dominant satellite television provider within Africa.

Other satellite television providers that have recently emerged on the African continent and that are attempting to undercut DStv’s position in the satellite television business have adopted a similar format, combining selected and highly desirable foreign programming (e.g., in sports), with popular locally produced content. Daarsat and HiTV, both Nigerian satellite television providers founded within the past two or three years, have included local programming in their typical package. HiTV offers not only Amulundun TV, with variety shows in Yoruba, but also offers HiNolly, its own channel dedicated to Nollywood films. To compete with DStv’s *Naija Sings* and other music channels, HiTV is offering Music One, focusing on local music. In fact, some observers claim that it was the introduction of Yoruba-language programming by Daarsat and HiTV that motivated DStv to either launch or step up its own investment in Yoruba-language programming.

In contrast, MyTv Africa, another South African satellite television provider available in West Africa, substitutes locally produced religious shows for Nollywood and was described to me by a Ghanaian subscriber as a somewhat more moral alternative to the outrageous storylines associated with Nollywood films. As competition for viewers begins to intensify among the different regional media corporations, DStv’s competitors around Africa will have to outperform the dominant player in the business when it comes to finding material that is distinctive and culturally proximate. There will be considerable incentive to use locally produced material in yet unexplored ways for reconfiguring television audiences—some satellite television providers might, for example, begin to offer channels broadcasting only locally produced religious films, or only films with narratives set in a distinct period in time.

As one of the larger satellite television providers within Africa, DStv is naturally interested in assembling the largest possible audiences for advertisers. Thus, it has pursued narrowcasting along regional and linguistic lines, with some caveats. The main beneficiaries of this regional corporation’s acknowledgement of “diversity” will thus be larger constituencies organized to generate more significant sums of advertising revenue. The fact that larger rather than smaller audiences have been privileged finds support in the decision to have AfricaMagic Plus specialize in East and Southern African film and television shows, while AfricaMagic specializes in Nigerian and mainly West African film and television shows. It is no accident also that the two indigenous languages granted recognition by DStv happen to be two of the languages with the highest number of speakers, not just in Nigeria, but anywhere in Africa. How likely is it, then, that we will see an AfricaMagic channel dedicated to shows for speakers of languages in East, West, or Southern Africa with relatively few speakers? I think it is highly unlikely. Shows in official languages, majority languages, and languages of wider communication will probably continue to be overrepresented in selections for local programming by the biggest regional media corporations.

By the same token, DStv’s impact on local film production is likely to be greatest in the case of films produced for viewers organized into these large constituencies. It is, in a sense, the very
success of Nigerian film production for a number of different audiences that makes it vulnerable to a takeover by regional media corporations. Anecdotal evidence suggests, for example, that AfricaMagic Yoruba has thus far been a huge success. This same is probably true for AfricaMagic Hausa. To the extent that the majority of Yoruba speakers and a significant percentage of Hausa speakers are Nigerian, DStv has, in effect, transformed itself into a regional provider of Nigerian television programming. Not only is DStv likely to affect the fortunes of television stations within Nigeria that specialize in broadcasting either Yoruba- or Hausa-language shows, but it is also likely to impact the production and distribution of films in these languages. Regular subscribers to DStv who happen to speak either Yoruba or Hausa will undoubtedly be less inclined to purchase individual films on the open market, if they can already watch as many films in those languages as they choose on satellite television.

If DStv also can successfully meet the challenge of lowering subscription costs to a point where regular viewers of indigenous-language films find it easier to watch these films on satellite television than to go out and buy individual films, while paying more for broadcast rights to individual films, DStv’s management might have successfully placed itself in a position to dictate trends for television programming in some Nigerian languages as well as determining the acceptable format for films in these languages and in English.11 As a well-funded Africa-based corporation, DStv could potentially drive particular themes and styles of Nigerian film production. That would constitute a significant takeover of important portions of the Nigerian film industry, not so much in terms of ownership as in an ability to chart directions for future commercial development.

In any case, growing collaboration between various satellite television providers and film producers appears likely, and will have a major impact on the content and style of regional popular film productions in Nigeria and elsewhere on the African continent. The relationship between electronic media and drama has clearly come full circle in Nigeria, where film production initially flourished due to the divergent interests of national television stations and drama groups.12 Effective control of piracy could make a difference in determining how much local producers invest in local film production and whether big budget filmmaking independent of regional media corporations takes hold in Nigeria and other African locations. Effective control of piracy might also encourage regional media corporations to become directly involved in the business of film production themselves. It will not, however, prevent the emergence and profitability of a film industry, dominated by small scale producers and distributors, that nonetheless remains competitive with and detached from global media—Nollywood has already demonstrated that.

Thus, a certain amount of regional popular material will continue to be produced that is completely detached from the circuits owned by regional media corporations in Africa. For one thing, these regional corporations are interested only in constituting audiences that are large enough to boost advertising revenue. Film selections that cannot, for whatever reason, be packaged in such a way as to attract such large audiences can still make money through other means of distributing and marketing their films. But perhaps the most important point is that, by eliminating piracy, regional media corporations can ensure the viability of the film industry itself, which of course may threaten the profitability of their own operations. This, in turn, may encourage regional media corporations to become directly involved in the business of film production themselves. For this to happen, however, the government must take much more effective action against piracy, which itself can be thought of as an act of kleptocracy. Effective control of piracy might also encourage regional media corporations to become directly involved in the business of film production themselves. It will not, however, prevent the emergence and profitability of a film industry, dominated by small scale producers and distributors, that nonetheless remains competitive with and detached from global media—Nollywood has already demonstrated that.

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11DStv management is already aware of its commanding position with respect to the Nigerian film industry. For example, in a May 2010 interview to the Nigerian newspaper The Vanguard, Segun Fayose, who works for Multichoice in Nigeria, claimed that Nigerian film producers made more money selling their films to DStv than by selling the films as CDs. See http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/05/09/africa-magic-provides-platform-for-the-african-story-segun-fayose/

12See Adejunmobi (2005, pp. 285–287) for a fuller discussion of the early tensions between Nigerian television stations and drama troupes that led some of those theater troupes to begin exploring film as an alternative means for bringing their performance to audiences.
a way as to interest relatively large audiences, whether such audiences are localized or dispersed, will continue to circulate through sales in local and regional markets. Perhaps most importantly, subscribers to Pay TV represent only a small but growing percentage of film viewers in Africa. There is the possibility that the subscription rates for Pay TV may never sink low enough to attract the majority of fans for regional popular African films. Such fans would then continue to purchase films on the open market. Nollywood producers and directors have already demonstrated that it is possible to make a profit operating at a lower scale of financing than do the regional media corporations. In that case, the impact of satellite television stations such as DStv might be greatest on individual subscribers who eventually give up the habit of buying individual films on the open market. But there may be enough potential viewers left for independent producers and distributors to continue operating at a profit on the margins of regional and global media distribution networks.

CONCLUSION

DStv and other satellite television producers could become a major force in Nigerian film production where the cost of monthly subscription is low enough to dissuade interested viewers from going out to buy individual films, and the price paid for broadcast rights is high enough to interest the majority of producers and directors. If Nigerian video film production increasingly falls under the tutelage of a regional corporation with close ties to global media corporations, should we then continue to describe it as a minor transnational practice? To the extent that DStv’s management pursues strategies designed to return the highest possible dividends to shareholders dispersed around the world, at least parts of Nollywood would no longer amount to a minor transnational practice. Rather those parts of Nollywood financed and distributed by regional media corporations would represent the latest permutations of regional capital working in tandem with both local and global capital.

Producers of local media catering to smaller audiences and working with narrower profit margins could continue to operate successfully alongside these regional corporations, which would in turn continue to look to local media as a source for marketable diversity. Instead of seeking to completely displace local media, regional media corporations are more likely to move toward commodifying and standardizing the most financially profitable forms of local diversity available within their region of operation. Where diversity can be successfully commodified, it will be co-opted rather than eliminated. In this respect, the autonomy of Nollywood producers and directors could be partly or substantially undermined in the coming years, precisely because Nollywood has proven so successful at generating local audience interest within a region that is large enough to interest regional media corporations. If this happens, it will be the work of regional media corporations rather than of global media corporations.

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