ADVERTISING GOD: NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN VIDEO-FILMS AND THE POWER OF CONSUMER CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Pentecostalism in Nigeria is increasingly altering the way that those who are attracted in large numbers by its practices and resources perceive their relationship with local culture and material goods. One of the practices of Pentecostalism that has captured popular imagination is the production of Christian video-films. This paper discusses how these popular narratives negotiate both the local worldview and the cultural marketplace. It argues that the rhetoric of Pentecostalism as portrayed in locally produced video-films is implicated in changing consumer tastes and behaviour. Although this type of Pentecostalism speaks the language of traditional worldviews in terms of the emphasis on occultism, it is harnessed to a project of westernised system of commodity consumption.

Introduction

It is the totality of the therapeutic effects and the largely unrecognized socio-cultural efficacy of the indigenous home videos in contemporary Nigeria that have transformed it into an important social institution (Nigerian Tribune Editorial, Feb. 3, 2000)

Indigenously produced video-films in Nigeria constitute a cultural and social revolution. The popularity of what are now commonly called Nigerian video-films, as an emergent art form and a medium of both communication and entertainment, is unprecedented in the country’s history of cultural production, distribution and consumption. In the past three years, an average of a thousand feature films has been produced each year. Comment on different aspects of the video-film phenomenon is a regular feature of the Nigerian print media; it is the subject of editorials (Nigerian Tribune, 3 February 2000), feature articles, gossip and controversies as well as litigation. These video-films have also become
a programming staple of some Nigerian independent television stations, for example Minaj Broadcasting International (MBI), Africa International Television (AIT) and DBN.

These films depict almost all aspects of Nigerian social, political, economic and religious life. Of the different concerns that producers tackle in the videos, religion has come to occupy a disproportionately high place. Nigerians are certainly religious, judged by the social indices of religiosity, but there are also a number of factors that converge in privileging religion in social and national discourses in Nigeria. Significant here is the recent past history of the country, which was marked by unprecedented brutalisation at the hands of military juntas and the corresponding economic ‘balkanisation’ of the nation. The activities of military dictators and their cheerleaders reduced the country to a ‘crippled giant’ in the eyes of other nations (Osaghae 1999).

The depiction of religion in locally produced films in Nigeria is a significant indicator of the different ways people perceive themselves and their religious practices. Above all, it is a way of documenting the processes of social change sweeping across the country. These feature films describe in a variety of forms the changing faces of Pentecostalism, but also of other religious traditions in the country. The emphasis placed on the practices and rhetoric of pentecostal Christianity is an indication of the central role of Pentecostalism as well as of its significance to the video-film industry. As anyone conversant with the Nigerian religious field would agree, a study of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is not complete without a reference to its impact on the production and consumption of modern goods and services, especially material popular culture.

The material culture of Nigerian Pentecostalism presents a dominant, vibrant and complex domain of production and consumption. An interesting case is that of music and musical taste. Some musicians who achieved fame with secular songs have followed the success of Pentecostalism. In the 1980s and 1990s, these popular musicians, now referred to as ‘cross-over artistes’ (Ukah 1997), suddenly switched from secular music to singing gospel songs in order to cut a pentecostal market niche for themselves. One such artist, who now sings for Jesus, had previously recorded albums for the Prophet Mohammed.2 Worship stores have been established in many places to sell gospel songs on audio cassettes, CDs, videotapes, musical instruments (especially the tambourine), books of choruses, magazines devoted to testimonies, key holders inscribed with icons and emblems of churches. This situation indicates a distinctive Christian artists’ market and an expanding worship industry catering to an equally expanding pentecostal public.
The cultural importance of the video-films and the unprecedented patronage it has engendered therefore require very careful study, particularly given the traffic between the films’ forms of representation and the narration of cultural values. What then, one may ask, is the function of the video-film in the formation of social relations and social identity? From what reference points do the video-films draw in the construction of their disparate audience from the youth, from religious communities and other constituencies? Why and how is it that Nigerian Pentecostalism has found a soul mate in commodified and fictionalised narrative video-films?

The Nigerian video-film has become the site not just for isolated religious messages and meanings, but for a forest of religious symbols and values. This is understandable in the context of the contemporary Nigerian spiritual supermarket, where individuals and groups are free to display goods and services, ideas and ideologies, personages and personalities. The sustained interest of different religious groups, Christian and Muslim alike, as well as of independent video-film producers, in religious narratives has established a clearly discernible genre of home videos, referred to here as ‘Nigerian religious video-films’. Some variants, such as the Muslim and Christian home videos, exist within this broad category. Within the sub-genre of Christian home videos, there are (neo-)pentecostalist and non-pentecostalist strands. There is also a third strand of Christian home videos produced by independent video-filmmakers who infuse their works with Christian motifs and themes but belong to no recognisable religious group. Locally produced Christian music videos constitute an additional category.3

*The Religious Economy Model*

The ‘market model’ for religious practice and participation was first used by Peter Berger (1963) in an attempt to describe the relation of religions in a secular or secularising society. In a society where state power cannot be used to enforce religious adherence, new religions tend to emerge, each making itself as attractive as possible in order to win adherents, thereby creating a free market situation where these religions are compelled to compete among themselves for adherents and public patronage. Paradoxically, however, the explicit statement of a theory of religious economy emerged from those who disagreed with Berger’s initial theory of secularisation. While Berger argued that secularisation precipitated a market situation for religious practice, these other scholars argued that American society is not secularising because of the market situation of religious behaviour (Stark 1998).
The theory of religious market or religious economy has been a major research interest since the 1980s, especially in the United States of America. Pioneered by American sociologists, notably Rodney Stark and his collaborators, this theory, which the economist Laurence R. Iannaccone (1991) traces to Adam Smith, seeks to explain the persistence of religion and the ongoing religious mobilisations in America. As an alternative to the secularisation theory, the religious economy theory sees religious practice as an exercise in a marketplace, and conceives religious organisations as more or less successful firms operating more or less like other firms in an economic space regulated by discernible laws and logic. Central to this theory is the conceptualisation of ‘religion as a commodity, an object of choice’ (Iannaccone 1991: 159). Recently, Stark and Finke (2000: 193) defined a religious economy as consisting of ‘all religious activities going on in any society: a “market” of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization’. In an earlier elaboration on the concept of a religious market, Finke and Stark (1988: 42) maintain that ‘Religious economies are like commercial economies. They consist of a market and a set of firms seeking to serve that market. Like all market economies, a major consideration is their degree of regulation. Some religions are virtually unregulated, while others are restricted to state-imposed monopolies.’

Religious adherents are construed as consumers who shop for religious commodities for which they are ready and willing to bargain and pay a price. In a similar way, religious leaders are seen as producers and entrepreneurs whose actions represent ‘rational responses to the constraints and opportunities found in the religious marketplace’ (Iannaccone 1995a: 77). The relative freedom of choice exercised by religious consumers allows the creation of different cultural goods and commodities by cultural producers like pastors and filmmakers. These producers endeavour to produce or supply attractive commodities to their clients, advertise and market their wares, struggle with other competitors to maintain a niche and keep a steady demand for their supplies (Iannaccone 1992: 123).

The central insight of the religious market theory, as Chaves and Cann (1992) observe, is that ‘religious markets ought to function like other markets in that more competition should produce a religious product that is more to the liking of consumers’. Religious consumption is ordinarily higher, therefore, where the market is unregulated and free. The basic elements of this theory can be distinguished as plurality, rationality, competition and freedom of choice or participation. An unregulated
religious economy, like that of Nigeria where freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed (Ilesanmi 2001), shows a high level of religious plurality and a diversification of religious firms, portfolios and affiliation or participation (Iannaccone 1995b). This theory not only examines religious consumers, but focuses a great deal of attention on the character and conduct of religious firms who supply religious commodities and also try to create and maintain demand for their goods (Stark and Iannaccone 1994: 230-233). It highlights the creativity of religious entrepreneurs in the generation of visibility for themselves and their portfolios, the management of diversity, vitality and religious expansion.

This theory does not pretend to explain everything about religion or religious behaviour. There has been a long history of disagreement from notable sociologists such as Steve Bruce and Roy Willis among others (Willis and Bruce 1984; Bruce 1993). Roland Robertson (1994: 51) observes that Stark’s theory of religious market ‘fails to address directly the structure, history and difference between religious markets’. The shortcomings of the religious market theory have necessitated constant revisions and updates by its principal exponents, especially Stark, Finke and Iannaccone, who insist that their model deals only with ‘the human side of religion’ (see Stark and Finke 2000). Its analytical utility for the present discussion lies in its insight into the nature of religious vitality and the expansion of pentecostal culture into apparently non-religious spheres such as politics, business (banking and insurance), advertising, mass communication, and the production of material popular culture (see Ukah 2002). The production of material popular culture, for example videos, is informed by market vitality as well as by market competition. The use of such concepts as ‘religious marketplace’ and the ‘religious economy’ in this paper is to be understood against the background of this theory which emphasises the plurality of religious practice and options in an unregulated environment which forces religious organisations to operate according to the logic of a market underscored by competition, rivalry, profit and self-interest.

The Emergence of Nigerian Video-Films

The present explosion of video-films in Nigeria was made possible by a convergence of factors, the first of which is the diffusion of a cheap and easily accessible technology. By the early 1970s, compact versions of the videocassette recorder (VCR) had become a fairly familiar sight in many homes in Europe and the United States of America. However, VCRs did not become common in Nigerian homes until about the late
1980s. They started trickling into Nigeria in the mid-1970s, principally through Nigerian sailors who brought them back from their journeys abroad, especially Europe, and through Nigerian traders from Kowloon, Hong Kong and other parts of south Asia. By the mid-1970s, the ‘Udoji awards’, which revised wage scales and boosted earnings, also contributed by putting more money in the hands of civil servants who then could spare some for household electronic items. Thus, the wealth of the oil-boom era of the 1970s facilitated the taste among Nigerians for high-tech goods as well as the capacity to import them.

Though the cinema, especially in urban centres, was a popular social institution in the 1960s and 1970s, filmgoers patronised mostly foreign films. Indian films were prevalent in the North, and Sabo areas of urban Western Nigeria, while Chinese/Hong Kong (Kung Fu) and Western films were well liked in the slum areas of urban Western and Eastern Nigeria (Ukadike 2000). However, at the end of the oil-boom era and onset of economic crisis, social order, especially in large urban centres, became particularly turbulent. Violence and other forms of social unrest were so pervasive that many urban dwellers were very reluctant to venture out after sundown. The impact of this situation on cinema attendance was dire; the halls were almost empty most of the time, and showing films became unprofitable. Hence, the VCR filled the gap created by the sudden exit of film audiences from cinema halls and led to a domestication of sorts, of the wide screen within the safety, security and comfort of the home.

From a different angle, the Yoruba travelling theatres provided stage plays in urban Western Nigeria, and were very popular. Karin Barber (2000: 1-2) records that there were more than one hundred of these theatre groups, which ‘plied the roads of western Nigeria in the decade spanning the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s’. Many of these plays by the travelling theatre companies were also shown on television, therefore to bigger audiences (Ogundele 2000). Following the success of a doyen of the travelling theatres, Hubert Ogunde, with the film Aiye, which delved into the supernatural, other theatre practitioners made forays into film production which they saw as more prestigious and potentially more profitable. By and by, film overtook live theatre as the medium of choice for the theatre troops but reliance on proven narrative formulas (usually involving the supernatural), the vagaries of Nigerian film-making, and evaporation of the much anticipated financial boon soon forced their attention to video as the cheaper alternative to filmmaking. Afolabi Adesanya (2000: 39), in tracing the transition from filmmaking to video, has argued that ‘the economics of celluloid film
production and marketing had been the bane of Nigerian film-makers'. Thus, the demise of feature film production made the emergence of video-films inevitable. The venture into video-films was initially a low-budget enterprise requiring only a video-camera, a VCR and a television set; however some producers now claim to spend up to six million naira on producing just one video-film.4

The increased availability of VCRs corresponded with a surge in the number of television sets available to many people. The simple nature of the VCR as a compact unit, which can be connected to an existing television set, meant it could easily be placed in a prominent corner of the living room as a status symbol. Thus, the emergence of the Nigerian video-films derived from the socio-political and economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the upsurge of neo-Pentecostalism and the appropriation of American-style neo-pentecostalist messages on videotapes and the ‘cassettisation’ of socio-cultural experience in Nigeria.

**Neo-Pentecostalist Resurgence and the Video Culture**

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, Nigeria witnessed the emergence of more religious movements and groups than in the previous half century. They have increasingly come to occupy significant social and religious spaces in a society that is undergoing marked changes in several spheres. Arguably, there are more Christian groups than Muslim, although data in this respect is lacking.5 A majority of the proliferating Christian organisations is made up of what may be characterised as the pentecostal and charismatic movements and ministries. Significantly, Pentecostalism is a broad, fluid and protean category under which many seemingly incompatible denominations may exist. The core of this group, however, is generally (but not exclusively) characterised by the doctrinal emphasis on the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit made manifest in such activities as speaking in tongues, divine healing, prophecy, post-conversion experience and revelation knowledge, frequent prayer vigils and fasting, evangelical zeal and the use of modern mass media in ritual and religious activities. Other important features of this movement are a type of charismatic leadership structure and laity-driven administration, as well as what is variously called prosperity teaching or theology of abundance.

The emergence of this group of churches, however, is not altogether sudden. There have been some incipient forms of Pentecostalism on the religious landscape of Nigeria since the beginning of the twentieth century as Harold W. Turner (1979: 21-28) points out. J.D.Y. Peel
(1968; 2000) gives a more recent date. According to him ‘Pentecostalism first made its appearance in Nigeria in 1930-1931, when the leaders of the Aladura revival . . . made contact with the Apostolic Church, a British Pentecostal body’ (Peel 2000: 314). Pertinent also is Matthews Ojo’s (1988a; b) study of how campus Christian movements of the 1970s tried to influence the religious texture of south-western Nigeria, before the neo-pentecostal boom of the 1980s and 1990s. The important thing to many scholars of this phenomenon may be not only the origin but also the rate of growth and mutations within the group, as well as how they have come to capture the social imagination, saturate the media with their presence and claim a place for themselves in the social, religious, political and economic dynamics of urban Nigeria.

What could have triggered this profusion of pentecostal and pentecostal-like churches in Nigeria? Scholars are quick to indicate a number of factors: social, political, economic and religious. Kukah (1992) contends that the Nigerian Civil War experience of the 1960s created some sense of disillusionment with the secular order and a craving for spirituality. The oil boom period after the war encouraged the expansion of higher education and increased both international travel and rural-urban migration. The new city dwellers constituted the primary catchment area for the emerging religious groups. It is important to note that the religious groups that emerged about this time, such as the Deeper Life Bible Church founded by Williams F. Kumuyi in 1973, did not preach prosperity but piety. This is also the case with the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) before 1981.

A common observation, summarised by Peel (2000: 314), holds that the pentecostalist movement ‘expanded faster even as economic and political conditions worsened in the 1980s’. Prolonged military misrule resulted in economic mismanagement, and sanctions by the West precipitated an economic meltdown. The fall of international oil prices in the early 1980s marked the beginning of a prolonged period of social, political and economic instability. Frequently characterised as years locusts have eaten, this period was marked by massive unemployment, decay of social infrastructure (educational system, healthcare facility and social amenities), high rate of inflation and violent crimes. The question may, therefore, be asked: is there any direct correlation between the social environment and the upsurge of pentecostalist revival? This question does not yield an easy answer, especially given the country’s complexly layered socio-cultural formations. Yet, some scholars, for example Okorocha, (1987: 53), Kalu (2000: 54) and Peel (2000: 317-8), have argued that the upsurge in Pentecostalism and the broader issue
of religious change in Africa are basically facilitated by the ‘unsecular character of African worldviews’ (Peel 2000: 317). This assertion, however, does not address other issues unique to the expansion of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.

As an aspect of transnational culture (Poewe 1994), the nascent global Christian movement initially engaged the Nigerian literate public through books, tracts and pamphlets. But its appeal spread like wildfire only when words were matched with images, first in the form of videotapes of television broadcasts of such pre-eminent American televangelists as Jimmy Swaggart, Oral Roberts, Jerry Falwell and Robert Schuller, and later through travels and preaching tours of pentecostal personalities. These tapes were imported in large quantities and extensively used by young, university-educated leaders of the post-war campus Christianity in Nigeria who often mimicked much of what was on these tapes. It merits pointing out here, also, that the video culture was initially pioneered by the neo-pentecostalist movement as an instrument for the spread of spiritual ideas, religious messages, attitudes and beliefs.

The young pastors who emerged in the late 1980s as religious leaders of the proliferating Christian groups were, in the main, self-trained or video-trained by listening to and viewing the audio-visual recordings of American televangelists whom they regarded as role models. Often, these young pastors’ small circle of followers gathered at the house of the pastor or on the church premises to watch some religious videotapes usually brought in from the United States of America. Many pioneer members of these nascent churches and parachurches report that they had their first video viewing experience in the context of a church or parachurch meeting. Hence, the VCR and the television became instruments of proselytisation and propaganda apart from their functions as tools for religious education and entertainment.

Neo-pentecostalist pastors not only introduced a good number of people from the lower economic class to the culture of viewing religious films in the form of video cassettes, recorded sermons and songs, they were also instrumental in the subsequent popularisation of video tapes of their own preaching and other religious events. These tapes were duplicated and copies sold to members of their congregations who were often exhorted to watch them since they contained seeds of blessings and divine inspiration. Vaunted as ‘points of contact’ with the divine, as purveyors of miracles and fortunes, these tapes also functioned as an extension of church ministrations of preaching, worship and songs. More importantly, they formed a sort of surrogate authority on matters of religious, social and ethical values. In addition, their
use served as a form of public sacrament, a morale-booster and an embracing of the technological innovativeness of the West, advancement from one stage of social life to a more progressive one. By employing this technological medium, these churches portrayed themselves as up-to-date and modern in contrast to the older, mission churches often stereotyped as ‘fatigued’, ‘powerless’ and ‘backward’ (Kalu 2000: 108).

By encouraging their members to watch video-recorded church events and other imported videos of American television preachers, neo-pentecostalist leaders generated enough publicity for the new technology and stimulated interest in the purchase of VCRs. In other words, neo-Pentecostalism provided a religious impetus for a social and economic behaviour, echoing David Maxwell’s (1998: 350) observation that, ‘[t]he growing influence of what is known as the “prosperity gospel” has implications for both the formation of capitalist attitudes and activities, and for shaping political activism.’

It is of interest to point out here that the first nationally important Nigerian video-film, Living in Bondage (NEK Video Links 1992), was infused with a great deal of the neo-pentecostalist rhetoric of deliverance. Living in Bondage (I & II), although shot in the Igbo language, (and later subtitled in English), ‘opened up a larger space for the urban video film in Nigeria’ (Okome 2000: 149-150). According to the producer, Okey Ogunjiofor, the inspiration for making the film came after his pastor had ministered to him to return to his first love. Hence, what the producer did in the original and sequel of Living in Bondage was to advertise his neo-pentecostalist religious orientation.

In this video, Andy, played by Kenneth Okonkwo, is a young trader of limited means. He has just married a young bride, Merit, whom he loves dearly. Soon after the wedding he starts experiencing financial difficulties as business slows down and his family responsibilities take their toll on his purse. In this state of affairs, Andy approaches his closest friend, Paulo (Okey Ogunjiofor), for assistance. The latter, who exhibits all the outward signs of wealth and comfort, agrees to help but fails to indicate the nature of the assistance. Rather he asks Andy to meet him late one evening so that he can introduce him to other wealthy friends who can help him out of his financial predicament. Andy agrees. At the appointed hour and place, the friends meet and drive, under cover of darkness, to the secret cult house where Paulo introduces his friend to cult members and their leader. He also explains the nature of Andy’s ‘problem’ to the leader of the group who agrees to intervene. Andy is asked what he wants and he responds eagerly
‘wealth, instant wealth’. The cult demands Andy’s wife as a ritual sacrifice in exchange for which Andy will become wealthy. After some hesitations and a failed attempt to deceive the cult members by providing a commercial sex worker in place of his wife, Andy finally submits Merit for the ritual sacrifice to a wealth-giving deity. Her blood, extracted via a large syringe into a calabash gourd is passed round and drunk by all cult members. She dies and is buried in the village.

Andy becomes rich, relocates to a bigger apartment in the city and rides in assorted Mercedes Benz cars and jeeps. His style of dress is transformed and he becomes a ‘major importer and exporter’ of different goods, such as ‘Andy designer belts, Andy designer suits and Andy designer wine’. In addition to this display of wealth, Andy remarries less than three months after Merit’s death. This act earns him the ire of his former in-laws who now openly accuse him of using his late wife for money-making rituals. Merit’s mother goes to her daughter’s grave-side and weeps profusely. In Igbo culture, weeping at the graveside of a deceased incites the dead to respond harshly and swiftly to the cause or source of the sorrow. This becomes the turning point in the narrative as the sorrow of Merit’s mother activates her daughter’s ghost to commence a protracted process of tormenting Andy and his new wife. The latter abandons Andy in the midst of the crisis, taking with her a large amount of cash in suitcases. She takes this ‘blood money’ to her best friend who operates a hair salon. This friend poisons her in order to take possession of the money, but is then killed by hit-and-run car as she is loading the suitcases of cash into the boot of her car.

Meanwhile, Andy is experiencing difficulties in trying to get rid of the disturbing apparitions of Merit. He loses a contract worth millions of naira and also a chieftaincy title because her ghost appears at the crucial moment of signing the contract and at the moment when he is about to be crowned as a chief. He approaches the leader of the cult, who ritually slaughters a he-goat and bathes Andy in the blood as a cleansing act that is expected to purge him of all links with his late wife. However, the apparitions still persist. All further rituals by his secret cult leader to restrain the ‘nuisance’ of Merit fail. The leader tells him he must sort himself out, the spirit of Merit is much too strong for him to deal with. In effect Andy is living in bondage although he is wealthy and has all that money can buy. All his friends abandon him, including Paulo who is the architect of his present pain. In desperation, Andy kills Paulo because, he reasons, the latter failed to inform him of the consequences of asking for instant wealth from the money
deity. Tormented and no longer able to handle these embarrassing apparitions, he goes insane. He now lives in market places, scavenging in heaps of rubbish for food and wearing rags.

The prostitute whom Andy had wanted to sacrifice in place of his wife had, in the meantime, become a ‘Born Again’ pentecostal. One Sunday afternoon after church service she finds the insane Andy picking up food at a rubbish heap, and recognises him. She is moved with pity as she realises that his problem must be connected with ritual murder for money. She calls in her church members who bind Andy and take him to their church where her pastor organises a prayer session for his deliverance. Andy confesses to his crime and is restored to health and normalcy through the ministration of the pentecostalist church. The closing scene shows Andy calm, clapping and singing praises to God in the church. He is now a ‘born again’ pentecostal Christian.

This narrative, with its compelling images, in some measure influenced the general acceptance of the movie and the current trend of pentecostalisation of the video-film culture in Nigeria. The narrative accepted as true the local belief that rituals with human beings could produce wealth. For young men and women who could tolerate the risk, this was one possible way of access to the ‘big boys’ club. Further, the movie rhetorically asked what wealth is for if it is not displayed in conspicuous consumption: big cars, big houses, designer wears and wine. Finally, the movie was an advertising image for Pentecostalism as having the solutions to problems encountered through the acquisition of wealth. The popular notion that wealth needs to be sanctified and covered by the Blood of Jesus in order to make its consumption safe for the ‘born again’ is partly rooted in this first important Nigerian video film.

Anatomy of Christian Videos

The film Living in Bondage was made by an independent producer and filmmaker and not by a pentecostal church. A large number of films produced by pentecostal groups follow similar patterns and carry similar images and messages. The major themes and motifs of Christian video-films are divine intervention in miraculous deliverance, divine providence in earthly circumstances, and recently, a subtle concern with eschatological anxiety, with the end of time or the Parousia. Of all Christian groups in Nigeria, Pentecostals have been keenest in exploiting the medium of video-films. Lately, almost all major pentecostal churches have been involved in the commercial production of videos. Mega-churches like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG),
the Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM), and Winners’ Chapel are all involved in the burgeoning production, circulation and consumption of video-films. Some other pentecostal groups in the same venture include Kay Technical and Maranatha Powerplay House. Often, pentecostal pastors are key in both the acting and production. Religious sites are major distribution centres for these video-films.

Not to be outdone, the secular video filmmakers have shown remarkable interest in cornering a piece of the pentecostal market through the production of videos with strong Christian themes. The titles include Narrow Gate (RCCG [Glory Gate Parish] & Ulzee 1999); The Pope Must Hear This (pts i-iv) (NDSS & Co 2002); Vanity (2000); The Holy Man (Obi Osotule Film 2001); Blood of Jesus (House of Macro 2001); Date with Destiny (Maranatha Power Playhouse/TREM 2001). These videos and many others like them exploit the popularity of pentecostal themes, the strong visibility of its practices and material culture. These productions may not be designed to further a religious agenda or instigate conversion but are anchored on the commercial interests and market vitality of pentecostal material culture. Interestingly, at the forefront of this is the pentecostal pastor himself who is driven by his desire to call down God’s heavenly blessings on earth.

In this section, we describe two other movies from two pentecostal organisations deeply involved with the commercial production of Christian video-films. The first film, Captives of the Mighty (2001), was produced by Mount Zion Faith Ministries International (MZFMI). Michael Abayomi Bamiloye, a graduate in English and Yoruba from the University of Ife, Ile-Ife, founded the MZFMI in 1986 in Ile-Ife but has since moved to Ibadan in Oyo State. This group produced the first Christian drama, Unprofitable Servant, marketed commercially on video format in April 1990. Before this time, the group had been preoccupied with the staging of Christian drama in churches. In addition, it produced a good number of television serials, broadcast mainly during Christian festivities. The Unprofitable Servant was first broadcast on television in Oyo state as an Easter film before it was released into the market. The group’s first attempt at making a film, however, was in 1987, but this failed and the group went into ‘stage ministration’. Although this group is based in Ibadan, the members carry out their Christian live performances in all the regions of Nigeria. Recently, they have been to Ghana, Cameroon and Kenya with their stage performances. The first set of films from the stable of MZFMI are much like television serials, cut into episodes and packaged on videotapes. Their most popular film, Agbara Nla ([Great
Power] 1993), in five parts, pushed Christian drama onto television screens in southwest Nigeria, where the Yoruba travelling theatre had already prepared an eager audience willing to pay to be entertained, edified and exhorted through Christian films. Their films are made in two main languages, Yoruba and English. The Yoruba-language films are usually subtitled in English for a wider audience. MZFMI today has made twenty-eight titles and runs the Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama, where talents are harnessed and young people are taught to produce Christian films and videos. The people they train here are also prepared to become missionaries and pastors, in other words evangelisers working through drama, film acting and ministrations.

*Captives of the Mighty*, written, produced and directed by Mike Bamiloye, engages critically with traditional cultural belief in the potency of evil spirits. From its inception, MZFMI has always construed its mission as providing an alternative to Yoruba dramas and film which are considered ‘pagan’ entertainment. The group set out to provide ‘healthy drama’ and ‘safe films’ for a Christian public. As a result, the occultic worldview of the Yoruba became its primary target. *Captives* actively sought to undo the harm that may come through a passive acquiescence with local Yoruba belief in the existence of spirit husbands who seek out young Christian women as their brides. Spirit husbands are believed to be responsible for women not finding husbands, or married women remaining barren and many other problems associated with family life. In southern Nigeria, especially in urban cities where marriageable women experience great stress searching for prospective husbands, a focus on a possible metaphysical or occultic cause provides an explanation. Such a focus on the underworld accepts the occultic as truly real, reinforces fear and anxiety among the youth who may begin to imagine themselves as afflicted by such problems. Hope, however, lies in the pentecostal pastor who mediates divine intervention and redemption. Such filmic intention is clearly mingled with contemporary urban lifestyle, sanctifying and redeeming the latter for the use of ‘Born Again’ Christians.

In *Captives*, Mabel (played by Funmi Okeowo), a born-again pentecostal Christian, church worker and choir director, marries Akin (Elvon Jarrett), bible study leader in the same church, in what is generally taken to be a Christian wedding, though in Western style. Unknown to Akin, however, Mabel has been married to a spirit husband, Iguanna (Doyin Hassan), a relationship that has produced four ‘spirit-children’. This is the scene for a metaphysical conflict between light and darkness, between God and Satan, between friendly and malign forces. At
the end of the wedding reception, the couple is driven in a Mercedes Benz car to a five-star hotel for their honeymoon. Iguanna, who is physically present at the church wedding and reception becomes the third party in the honeymoon where his constant apparitions to Mabel, because she has broken the vows of their spirit wedding, become so disturbing that the hotel honeymoon becomes a hotel nightmare for her. By marrying Akin, Mabel breaks a spiritual covenant with Iguanna, who, in a bid to get back his estranged wife, torments her in her sleep. He beats her up in her dreams and her shouts are heard by Akin, sleeping next to her.

Within two years, Mabel experiences five miscarriages and incessant nightmares and torture at the hands of Iguanna. She covers up this situation and only complains of constant nightmares against which her earthly husband constantly invokes the blood of Jesus. When she cannot bear this domestic situation any longer, she seeks counselling from a female pastor (Doyin Stephens, played by Gloria Bamiloye). Pastor Stephens instructs Mabel to tell her story to her husband and ask him to forgive her for deceiving him into marriage when she was already married to Iguanna.

Meanwhile, Akin’s mother is agitated about her son’s childlessness after many years of marriage. After her son informs her that six doctors have issued a clean bill of health for him and his wife, the mother suggests that two other reports are yet to be seen: a ‘moral report’ and a ‘spiritual report’. The moral report concerns how Mabel conducted her sexual life before her marriage to Akin. The spiritual report relates to Mabel’s status as a child of God or her affiliation with the wider spiritual realm. Further, she specifies that Mabel is a witch: for her this is the only logical explanation for the numerous miscarriages and continued barrenness.

After being called a witch by her mother-in-law, Mabel goes to confront her spirit husband, Iguanna, begging him to release her womb and stop destroying the joy of her earthly marriage. The ensuing battle is reminiscent of the Great Battle of the forces of Order and the forces of Chaos. This dualism is a trademark of MZFMI narratives as Oha (2000) has observed. Finally, becoming exasperated, Iguanna threatens to make Mabel barren for life. In an ensuing struggle between Iguanna and Mabel for the latter’s womb (called ‘flowerpot’) kept in the underworld, the former, in an act of violence, breaks the ‘flower pot’ (the womb) so that ‘no flowers will grow there again’. The shock of the smashing of the flowerpot against a wall by Iguanna wakes up Mabel in tears, wailing and screaming.
Mabel takes this opportunity to accept the counsel of Pastor Stephens and opens up to her husband. Initially, the confession of a spirit husband, four spirit children and the broken flowerpot devastates Akin. He walks out of the house in the middle of the night. As in *Living in Bondage*, this is the turning point in the narrative: a problem has been identified, a product has been packaged, and a disease has been marketed, now is the time to sell the medicine. The pastor must direct the process of reconstruction and healing, a procedure that involves the consumption of the pastor’s brew. Pastor Stephens prescribes a three-phase rehabilitation for Mabel: total forgiveness from Akin; a combined spiritual attack from Mabel and Akin against Iguanna, and lastly a deliverance session (presided over by Pastor Stephens, Mabel’s church pastor, Akin and another male pastor).

Four months after the deliverance session, a medical report shows that Mabel is pregnant again. The pastor’s brew has worked and she gives birth to a baby girl. The existence of an active occultic world is reinforced and confirmed as much as the important role of the pastor in identifying, deconstructing and reinventing indigenous beliefs as well as providing a remedy. The film strongly demonstrates a dialectic that appropriates local cultural beliefs and foreign elements such as the hotel, the car and Western wedding and pentecostal rituals of deliverance in weaving a new consciousness for pentecostal Christians.

Our second case study in this section is the film *Wasted Years* (2000), produced and directed by Teco Benson. It was written by Helen Ukpabio, an evangelist and founder of Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries (LFGM) with headquarters in Calabar. Helen Ukpabio is also the executive director of Liberty Films and Music Plaza, the label under which *Wasted Years* is produced and marketed. She is a former member of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS), an indigenous African Christian movement established about 1942 by Olumba Olumba Obu in Calabar (Mbon 1992). Claiming that BCS is a secret cult, Ukpabio quit the group in 1982 (Ukpabio 1999a). She became ‘born again’ and started her own church, Liberty Gospel Church, in 1992. Barely ten years after, this church has 63 branches in four countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and South Africa). All the branches are also distribution channels and marketing outlets for her movies.

She was trained as a nurse and midwife but her love for acting drew her into filmmaking. Her first movie, *Magic Money* (1998), was a failure. She commenced her ‘expository series’ to bring to public attention the sources of evil powers of her former associates at the BCS. Her involvement in BCS has been an enduring influence in the man-
ner in which she exploits the dark underside of African worldviews in her films. She says she has a two-fold divine mandate through films and also through her church: to unveil the secrets of witchcraft and to deliver those who are under the oppressive burden of demon possession (Ukpabio 1999b). Her renown was established with the release of the award-winning movie, The Price (1999), which holds the record as the best-selling movie in Nigeria with over half a million copies sold. The most controversial movie in the history of Nigerian video-films, Rapture (2002; in two parts), which is the subject of multiple litigations with Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), comes from the stable of Liberty Films. She has produced thirteen video-films in all; together with MZFMI, she dominates the Christian video-film market in the country.

The gist of Wasted Years is that wealth that is not used for the work of God is ruinous; and life that is not lived for God and his mission is wasted years. Wealth must be sanctified if it is to be enjoyed and such sanctification means bringing it into the church, becoming born again and spending one’s money in the holy enterprise of evangelism. Wealth that is not brought into the house of God will precipitate the owner’s ruination. In Wasted Years, a rich businessman, Chief Arthur (played by Justus Esiri), uses his wealth and influence to get all the good things of life: a variety of expensive cars, mainly jeeps, massive houses, women and chieftaincy titles. Arthur is so self-important that he goes about with two tough-looking bodyguards. His long-standing friend, Raymond (Sola Fosudo), tries in vain to persuade Arthur to become ‘born again’ and bring his wealth into the church for the service of God. Changing cars at each scene, Arthur exhibits a sense of self-worth as a successful and hardworking businessman. One morning he gets to his palatial office and finds that someone has left a bible for him. In a fit of rage, he shreds it. Thereafter he kills his elder sister’s 12-year-old daughter in a hit-and-run car accident. He knocks down this girl and abandons her in the pool of her own blood and speeds away. This is the first of many misfortunes to envelop Arthur.

Raymond invites Arthur to a thanksgiving service to celebrate the former’s survival from an airplane crash. During the open-air event, Pastor Sharon (Helen Ukpabio), the presiding pastor, says, ‘there is this crazy pursuit for wealth, fame, power, and other worldly pleasures. [. . .]. Wealth that should have been profitably used for serving God are [sic] wasted in pursuit of vanity’. The moral of the film is stated poignantly by the pastor: ‘If you have everything that life has to offer but you have not Jesus Christ in your life, the bible says “you are of
all men the most miserable’.” In a display of displeasure, Arthur walks out of the thanksgiving service, which has been turned into an excuse for proselytisation. He warns Raymond not to bring him to events where he will be insulted, especially by a woman preaching the gospel.

Arthur intends to get a chieftaincy title but worries that his elder brother, Callistus, who has just become lame as a result of illness, would be a source of disgrace and shame to him and his friends. He has him kidnapped and buried alive in the middle of a strange forest at night. This is Arthur’s second murder. In order to prevent exposure, he starts visiting one diviner (called sorcerer in the movie), spiritualist and occultist, seeking protection and concealment of his brother’s murder as well as a safe coronation ceremony. He pays three million naira for ‘Rama’s protection’ and for ‘Brama’s protection for life’. For this sum, he receives a miniature coffin with a needle in it, a beaded necklace and a ring. He is to wear both necklace and ring at all times except when having a bath; as for the needle, he is to lick it every morning before leaving his house. These acts will supposedly fortify him for life.

In the interim, Arthur’s wife, frustrated and driven out of the home with their two children, becomes ‘born again’ and is counselled by a friend to meet her pastor to help her repair her broken marriage. After his coronation, Arthur marries a second wife, Juliet (played by Susan Patrick) and then a third, (Augusta) and decides to hold a thanksgiving ceremony in another pentecostal church. After he offers the pastor the sum of one hundred thousand naira ‘for his wardrobe’, Pastor Joe (Rich Azu) prays in tongues for his new client and offers the chief the opportunity of reading the bible text of the service, saying: ‘to whom much is given, much is expected’.

With two deaths in rapid succession in his extended family, his elder sister, Justina, is asked to persuade Arthur to postpone the chieftaincy coronation. At the hint that one of the diviners whom he visits is pointing at him for the death of his elder brother, Arthur sends one of his bodyguards to kill the diviner. After he has silenced every opposition, he holds the coronation and the thanksgiving in the pentecostal church with diviners, masquerades and other spiritualists in attendance. The ‘dynamic pastor’ uses the occasion to inform those in attendance that anyone who gives ten or twenty naira as offering is calling his God a beggar. Therefore, all should give to God what He deserves since He is a rich God!

Increasingly, Arthur gets enmeshed in troubles, killing two more of his spiritualists and his first wife. As he does these things, his anxiety exacerbates, and his search for power and protection increases. During
one such adventure, the spirit of a powerful but dead medicine man strikes him and he is crippled. He begins to decay from the feet with maggots crawling all over this legs. In his condition, his bodyguards carry away all his money in big sacks.

Raymond and Pastor Sharon pay a last visit to Arthur in a bid to get him to convert, confess his sins and ask God for forgiveness, but the near-dead, half-decaying Arthur refuses, insisting it is too late for God to save him. He dies in his obstinacy and goes to hell; there, he meets Pastor Joe who conducted his coronation thanksgiving service and the diviner/soothsayer whom he killed. The pastor blames Arthur for his fate in hell, saying the latter compromised his faith and dedication in the service of God by enticing him with money. Arthur, in excruciating pain, replies, ‘I gave you money and you did not refuse’. On an elevated plain some distance away, Arthur beholds his deceased wife and the night watchman, both of whom he had killed. They are in dazzling white robes and caps to match, happy and singing while the flames of hell lap at him unrelentingly.

In *Wasted Years*, we see the depiction of Pentecostalism as the only way to serve God and merit heaven, a religious ideology that is a ‘hold all’ that ‘solves all’ human problems. This is a common theme running through the three videos described above. In *Living in Bondage*, a pentecostal sister and pastor sorts out Andy and his insanity, bringing him to normalcy; he is delivered from self-imposed bondage to the devil. In *Captives*, Pastor Stephens pilots Mabel to deliverance and her marriage is rescued from the grip of the dark underside of Yoruba culture; in *Wasted Years*, the refusal to join the pentecostal band and sanctify his wealth brings Arthur ruination and ultimately hell. Alternative religious traditions are deliberately stereotyped as evil, demonic, occultic or spiritualistic. As a propaganda tool, Pentecostalism posits an opposition to an ‘Other’: all non-pentecostal groups against which it fashions its rhetoric. The opposition it generates makes it possible for pastors to create a market for their services, since for them to remain viable and in business they must have and retain their clients/congregations who consume their services and goods in exchange for money. The ‘demonic underworld’ of African culture appears to be the disease pentecostal pastors must advertise through films in order to turn round and sell the medicine: deliverance, vigils, sanctification, etc. In this respect, the fight against an opposite gives Pentecostalism its relevance, its texture and defines its impact on society. By concentrating on the occultic materials and the dark sides of traditional worldviews, filmmakers (and pentecostal pastors) draw on the fears and curiosity of the masses as well as confirm
the myth that the use of occultic powers gives wealth. The emphasis, in many of these videos, is on fraudsters (popularly called 419ners, after the section of the Nigerian penal code which addresses such practice) and the *nouveaux riches* who exploit the greed and desires of the economically weak for access to wealth and material comfort. Of special interest to Christian videos is the belief that occultic powers give wealth. This belief is accepted not as a myth but as an explanation of wealth against the backdrop of pauperization of the society. In the Nigerian context, Pentecostalism provides a space where wealth and all the good things of life may be consumed without fear of incurring the wrath of God or the envy of humans and other malign forces. Consequently, it represents the good life and, as the rhetoric of the videos shows, the only good life.

**Pentecostal Publics and Video-Film Audiences**

The video-film market continues to expand. This expansion may be assessed by the number of titles released each year. In the period beginning from August 1993 to April 1996, 276 video-films were censored and released in Nigeria (Owens-Ibie 1998). In 1997 alone, 260 titles were censored (cf. Johnson 1997: 101). The following year, this figure increased to 387 video-films. In 1999, it rose to 505 titles. In 2000 and 2001, the Censors Board approved and released 750 and 1,035 titles respectively. For the first eight months of 2002, 510 films were censored and approved for public release. During this last period, eight films were banned by the Board as unfit for viewing. These statistics released by the Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) are an obvious indication of market vitality, driven in the main by competition and profit but also the active interest of consumers. Generally, video producers do not conduct any form of audience analysis as they go about their work of make-believe, but rely on intuition and creativity.

One area where a suitable market exists are pentecostal prayer camps. Not only video producers but also corporate organisations, especially banks and manufacturers of soft drinks and table water, have secured a foothold here. These camps are important economic centres for companies to vend their products. With serious economic difficulties facing the country, pentecostal groups have achieved a high degree of mass mobilisation which economic actors envy and try to benefit from.

The two broad target audiences of the video industry are the religious market and the youth market; sections of the population that in significant respects overlap, for the pentecostal population is made up
of predominantly young and middle-aged people. In both of these target audiences, women predominate (Ukah 1999b). Generally, more women than men belong to religious groups and frequent religious, especially pentecostal, activities. Some pentecostal leaders suggest that this is so because women experience greater spiritual thirst as well as trauma than men. One leader was explicit enough to say that women are more disposed to spiritual and demon attacks than men.\textsuperscript{17} Pentecostal advertisers and producers of popular culture recognise this female preponderance. Women, particularly married ones, constitute the bulk of video-film buyers in Nigeria. These women have the means to indulge their fancy but also the time to view these videos since their husbands are often out of the home on business. For those whose husbands rarely take them out for social events, these videos may serve as didactic entertainment purveying certain moral values as they adjust in an emergent culture that is increasingly being defined by its insertion into capitalist modernity. The wives of traders, particularly Igbo traders, are in the forefront of buying and viewing videos. The stories and images in these videos are, therefore, often carefully constructed to appeal to female spiritual, material and cultural sensibilities and fantasies.

For the Christian videos, their producers have different target audiences. MZFMI films primarily target a pentecostal audience. The storylines reinforce pentecostal values and beliefs. They warn, admonish and sometimes reprimand pentecostal Christians through theological imageries and biblical parallels, as when Pastor Stephens in Captives enumerates to Mabel the list of women in the bible who experienced difficulties before bearing children. Because of its strong evangelical motive, the cast of MZFMI is strictly made up of ‘born again’ pentecostal Christians. Liberty films, however, target a wider audience, and this is seen in the cast of characters in its films. Although also designed for evangelism, these characters are drawn mainly from secular film actors. It is hoped that these artists, who are already renowned in their trade, can appeal to a non-pentecostal public through their visibility in films.

Christian video-films, like their secular counterpart, are designed to sell. The commercial production of this category of films is primarily, but not exclusively, market driven. The scripts and the images are deliberately anchored on the taste of African mass audiences. The focus on witchcraft, barrenness, and infidelity is a concern with family values. At the centre of family life is the woman who is most adversely affected when the family disintegrates. Kids are Angry (Liberty Films 2001) is a good example of a film that pays a great deal of attention to family values and the upbringing of children. Its target is families in different
stages of disintegration because of the impact of contemporary social life. As well as women, producers of Christian videos also target youth. Securing young people’s attention means securing an enduring market for products and services. In general, the consumption of locally made videos has become a defining feature of a vibrant youth culture in Nigeria. Since many large pentecostal churches have campus fellowships, this segment of the population represents an emerging segment of consumers of both Pentecostalism and Christian videos.

Students in tertiary institutions are avid consumers of video-films even though they cannot afford to buy them. Students are ever conscious of the mediated culture in which they are an essential segment. Often, they express themselves in relation to the tastes, fashion, and demands of the mass media (Deacy 2000). They not only consume, they are often part of the production processes of media items like videos, and are frequently recruited as members of the cast. Of the twenty-six video-club operators interviewed for the present study, virtually all reported that the majority of their clients are aged between seventeen and thirty-five. Of the seventeen video-club operators near the University of Ibadan, fifteen identified students, who borrow an average of three videos a week, at N30 per videotape, as the core of their clientele. A number of video-cafés exist within the campus of the University of Ibadan, much like all other universities in southern Nigeria, where some students organise video-film shows for fees ranging from N20 to N40. These video-cafés also function as video rental clubs and commercial video libraries. They generate leisure and entertainment as well as a little finance for self-sponsoring and business-minded students who wish to be economically productive even as they pursue their education.

Although the video-film format encourages private viewing, there are still situations of public consumption seen in the proliferation of video-clubs. In the first quarter of 2000, for example, the NVFCB registered 150 video outlets, comprising 100 video-clubs, thirty distributors, twelve cinema halls and eight video-viewing centres throughout the country. These video-viewing centres straddle the space between the familiarity of the home and the almost alien space of the cinema. They provide opportunities for students in particular to view the latest titles in the market since they may not be in a position to buy or rent all new releases. By far the most interesting aspect of campus video culture is the scheduling, by a few ‘business students’, of public exhibitions of video-films for a fee. Between February and the end of April 2000, a total of forty-two double sessions of video-film exhibitions were staged in the Large Lecture Theatre (LLT) of the Faculty of Arts, University
of Ibadan, which rents for N2,000 (US$19.2), with N1,000 refundable deposit and N200 cleaning charge. The LLT has a seating capacity of about 500, a balcony for about 200 people and standing room for about 250. The admission fees range from thirty to forty naira.\textsuperscript{18} Within this period, the University realised N92,400 from rent on the LLT for video-film sessions alone, while the organisers most likely made double that amount as profit.

For the students aged 20 to 30 who patronise such campus exhibitions, film offers different levels of meaning and function. Aside from being a form of escapism, it is often taken seriously as a description of reality, either spiritual or social. A female student who had watched \textit{Wasted Years} felt compelled to buy a copy and send it to her elder brother in Abuja because the story was a duplicate of the brother’s life, the only difference being that the brother was still alive. She hoped that if he viewed it he could reconsider his life, and make changes that would be beneficial to the family. For those in the same category as the above student, and they are in the majority, Christian video-films represent ‘a source of truth and value’. For some, they present a way of applying abstract doctrines to concrete situations. Such application of doctrine may be in the diagnosis of a spiritual or witchcraft attack, symptoms of which may be repeated failure in examinations or lack of progress in a specific area of life. A young male student said that Christian films go beyond mere entertainment; ‘they enlighten me to know when what I cannot see begins to hit me from behind’. This shows how viewers relate film narratives to known histories and familiar persons and events.

Part of the appeal of Christian films, therefore, is in how they relate the African worldview to contemporary lives of individuals, reinventing these cultural ideas through images and giving them concreteness and poignancy. Helen Ukpabio makes great capital from her own biography as one who has ‘worked with Satan and has served Lucifer before’ and now can diagnose and offer deliverance services through her films for those in bondage.\textsuperscript{19} Her films often locate their appeal and potency in the conflict between agents of Lucifer and children of God. Her comments and personal story create anxious expectations from an eager audience obsessed with the occult. Viewers who believe they have spiritual problems that need direct attention of the producer are often directed to a branch of Liberty Gospel Church where a pastor is trained in handling such matters.

The unparalleled appeal of a movie like \textit{The Price} (Liberty Films 1999) hinges on its ability to lay bare the human condition of being falsely
accused and suffering unjustifiable pain from significant others in the name of God. More importantly, that it has remained in the market four years after its release shows its enduring didactic strength in reinforcing a strand of Nigerian Pentecostalism that thrives on accusations and counter-accusations. Young pastors who are accused of any misdemeanour appeal to the authority and fate of Pastor Ken of The Price who suffered a similar fate. It is not a justification of evil but a form of ‘screen theodicy’, explaining why bad things sometimes happen to good people. It teaches pastors and would-be pastors what to expect in their ministry and possible ways of handling such practical situations. Since many pentecostal groups recruit their pastors from among students and graduates, this film remains ‘classic’ among the film-viewing student population.

As the popular appeal of these Christian films indicates, Nigerian society is basically a traditional society in the process of change. This change involves accessing the different facets of ‘modernity’ through various means, the two most prominent for many people being education and Christianity. University education, for example, introduces new opportunities and tastes while Pentecostalism brings with it new networks of friends and significant others as well as a new vision of looking at cultures and traditions.

**Conclusion**

The medium of video has become one of the preferred channels for the communication of religious truth, hope, ideas and propaganda in Nigeria. The simplicity of Christian narratives in video and its powerful appeal to Nigerian pentecostals have encouraged many pastors and pentecostal groups to engage the video medium as a way of matching ideas and abstract concepts with images. The strength of images and the vividness with which an external ‘Other’ is portrayed partly accounts for its appeal. By attributing poverty, illness, lack of progress and all other unwanted occurrences to the agency of evil spirits, Satan, malign forces of witchcraft and sorcery located in the primal local culture, a perspective is created that privileges pentecostal actors as ‘undoing’ this cultural world. The pastor excavates it, reworking its power configurations according to the mind and will of God. The believing public, aligning itself with God and the pastor, is assured of divine safety in the face of the resurgence of evil forces. In a remarkable respect, the social practice of Pentecostalism shares many feature with the insurance industry, a point Durkin and Greeley (1991) have already alluded to in a different context.
Furthermore, the current emphasis among many Nigerian Pentecostals on a theology of abundance which teaches that it is the will of God for all his children to be successful, healthy and wealthy is a strong impetus to proselytise by demonstrating that indeed ideas are matched by reality. As this teaching is given colour and vividness in many of the videos from pentecostal churches, the argument is strengthened that Pentecostalism not only preaches the good life, it also provides for it. By holding fast to the theology that it is a divine right to possess and consume every good thing conceivable, the ‘born-again’ is encouraged to see self and worth in relation to the quality and, perhaps, quantity of religious and non-religious items consumed. This is similar to Moore’s (1994) study of how conspicuous consumption and the practice of religion in the United States is conflated with a ‘commercial culture’. Through what is consumed, many pentecostal Christians invent new ways of being religious and modern, a practice that links them with a wider network of interactions (see Giggie and Winston 2002).

Furthermore, the involvement of pentecostal groups in the booming movie-making industry illustrates how encapsulation strategies are enmeshed with competition strategies for such resources as followers, wealth and the capture of a market niche. Different groups who use the video medium for evangelism also make it the avenue to create visibility for the ministries, for themselves and to create a market for their goods and services. Through the videos, needs and desires are created, through, as shown above, the excavation of the dark underside of African culture, the reinvention of fear and the exploitation of greed in some cases. The spirit of fear and greed that many of these videos depict guarantees a market of consumers who must now need the services of the pentecostal pastor. Such needs are not simply the cultivation of western desires and tastes or the consumption of western goods but also the consumption of deliverance services, prayer meetings, and other pentecostal paraphernalia.

While the video-films and advertising codes mobilised through Pentecostalism are forms of narratives of utopia expressing consumerist values and orientations, it is not necessarily the case that consumers and adherents are harnessed to a Westernised worldview and system of commodity production, exchange and consumption. As the campus video culture illustrates, young, educated audiences who show some resistance and critical discernment consume the advertisement of God-talk in video-films. Not everyone who watches these videos switches churches in search of miracles, wealth and health. The rhetoric of Pentecostalism and the narratives of utopia espoused in the films and
in pentecostal advertisement have their limitations, particularly given the hermeneutic filters viewers bring to their viewing, their active and creative interpretation, translation and involvement in the process of sense/making as well as their social needs.

This paper has attempted to describe the structural narratives embedded in Christian video-films in Nigeria. As has been shown, the video-films are produced, circulated and consumed in a complex set of circumstances. The audiences of these narratives are as complex and dynamic as the narratives themselves; they are defined by the cultural worldview that forms the backcloth against which pentecostal rhetoric is inscribed and asserted. In addition to this is the desire for change, for a better social life, which is often, but not always, conceived in western terms. Students who form a significant audience of videos also make a living out of the production and distribution of the videos. Even though some of the views expressed here are tentative and do not provide conclusive answers to the complex relationship between local video films and their audiences, they open up areas for future exploration.

NOTES

1. This paper was first presented at the Consultation on Religion and Media in Africa, held at Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Accra, Ghana, 20-27 May 2000. The author is grateful to Birgit Meyer, Ogbu Kalu, Jude Akudinobi, Patti Asonzeh-Ukah, Emelda Ngufor Samba and Frank Odiko for critical comments on previous drafts. The author also acknowledges with thanks the critical remarks and suggestions of anonymous JRA reviewers and editors.

2. Notable crossover artists include Sunny Okosun, Ebenezer Obey, and Onyeka Onwenu. Sunny Okosun became famous singing for the liberation of South Africa from apartheid with such titles as ‘Who owns the Land’ and ‘Fire in Soweto’. He is a pentecostal pastor, with the title of Evangelist. He has established his own church and continues to release Christian choruses on CDs, audio and videotapes. He also acts in home videos. In the early 1990s, he released an album singing the praises of Mohammed because he wanted to access the northern Muslim market. Ebenezer Obey, one of the founders of Yoruba juju highlife in the 1970s and 1980s, became born again in the 1990s and subsequently established his own pentecostal church. He owns the multi-million naira Decross Music Company dedicated to the marketing of Christian music. He has the official title of Evangelist. Onyeka Onwenu found fame in the music industry before joining Pentecostalism. Now she is a familiar face on the screens as a popular artist in the video-film industry. She also sings Christian music, which is marketed on CDs and audio- and videocassettes (Ukah 1997: 147-8; ‘Gospel Artistes: Between Jesus and Naira’, Saturday Champion, 7 September 1996, p. 10).

3. The typology offered here is tentative, as the actual nature of locally produced video-films is complex. A further typology can be made thus: secular and religious, with the latter broken down into Christian, Muslim, and traditional religious narratives. Christian films can be divided into three: pentecostal, non-pentecostal and Christian musicals. Pentecostal films would then comprise drama, sermons, praise songs and worship services, etc. Furthermore, Nigerian video-films can be grouped according to lan-
language of production thus: English, Pidgin English and vernacular (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Efik, etc). The above illustrates how complex the video-film scene is.

4. *The Guardian on Saturday* (Lagos), 4 March 2000. *Rapture*, a film in two parts made in 2001 by Evangelist (Mrs) Helen Ukpabio but released in December 2002 is claimed by the producer to have been made at the cost of twelve million naira (Interview with Helen Ukpabio, 16 October 2002, Lagos).

5. Such lack of statistics in the number of new religious groups may be attributed to the reluctance of many of these groups to comply with the government regulation that they register with the Corporate Affairs Commission of the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs and also to the lack of political and legal will of the government to ensure compliance with this requirement.


7. Chief Kenneth Nnebua, the chief executive of NEK Videos Links under whose auspices *Living in Bondage* was produced, is a Catholic.

8. Interview with Cyprian Orakpo, (26 June 2000, Lagos, Nigeria) a pastor of RCCG and Director of Transerve Nigeria Limited. This company was set up specifically to market video-recordings of the popular monthly Holy Ghost Service, at which the General Overseer of the church, Pastor E.A. Adeboye officiates. Today the scope of the company’s operations has enlarged to include the sales and distribution of pentecostal video-films and audio-tapes (musicals) from other pentecostal stables. The company also has business partnerships with other major video-film distributors at the popular Idumota market in Lagos.

9. K.N.I.E Associates produced this video in collaboration with Glory Gate Parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The RCCG is arguably the largest and fastest growing pentecostal church in Nigeria and a principal producer of pentecostal material culture in Nigeria.

10. This video has as subtext on the jacket ‘What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loose [sic] his soul (?) The choice is yours’.

11. Bishop Mike Okonkwo, founder and General Overseer of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM) and the president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), produced the video. He also played a role in the video.

12. MZFMI was registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission, Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs in Nigeria in July 1996 as a religious organization comprising five arms: (i) Mount Zion Drama Outreaches, (ii) Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama, (iii) Mount Zion Film Productions, (iv) Mount Zion Publications, and, finally, (v) Mount Zion Production studios.

13. See Mike Bamiloye: ‘Our Encounters with God: Interview with Mike Bamiloye’, *Redemption Light*, vol. 6, no. 9, October 2001, pp. 9, 17, 34).

14. Other titles from Liberty films include *Married to a Witch* (2001); *Power to Bind* (1998); *End of the Wicked* (2000); *Highway to the Grave* (2000); *Kids are Angry* (2001) and *Zions Gate* (2002).

15. In addition to the 505 movies officially released by NVFCB, there are many other X-rated video films, ‘acted in Nigeria by Nigerians with actors speaking Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Urhobo and Itsekiri etc.’ (*Tell Magazine*, August 30, 1999, p. 35). Two such movies, *Sex is a Nigerian and Valentine Sex Party* are products of Crystal Video and New Range Communications, Lagos. The output of video-films for the year 1999 came close to 600 titles.

16. *The Guardian* (Lagos), 10 October 2002, pp. 24-26. Banned films are usually released into the market by producers or, as is often the case, marketed abroad, especially in Ghana, Cameroon and eastern and southern Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Zambia and Uganda). I bought one of these films (*Issakaba* 4), listed as banned in 2002, at Onitsha in October where it was sold openly. In some cases, however, NFVCB rescinds its decision after some editing of the banned film, and thereafter it is approved for sale.

18. A dollar was officially worth approximately 117 naira in early 1999. The cost of admission tickets to these video shows at the time of fieldwork ranges from thirty to forty naira. These figures have gone up slightly in line with the further deterioration of the economy since the present regime of Olusegun Obasanjo which came into office in May 1999.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


