

Nollywood's Local Address
Matthew H. Brown

Indirect Subjects

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS Durham 2021

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Printed in the United States of America on
acid-free paper ∞

Project editor: Annie Lubinsky

Designed by Matt Avery

Typeset in MeropBasic Regular by
Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-
Publication Data

Names: Brown, Matthew H., [date] author.

Title: Indirect subjects : Nollywood's local
address / Matthew H. Brown.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press,
2021. | Includes bibliographical references and
index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020056100 (print) |

LCCN 2020056101 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478013280 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478014195 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478021506 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—Nigeria—

History. | Motion picture industry—

Nigeria—History. | Mass media and culture—

Nigeria—History. | Mass media—Political

aspects—Nigeria—History. | Mass media

policy—Nigeria. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE /

Media Studies | PERFORMING ARTS / Film /

History & Criticism

Classification: LCC PN1993.5.N55 B76 2021

(print) | LCC PN1993.5.N55 (ebook) |

DDC 791.4309669—dc23

LC record available at [https://lcn.loc](https://lcn.loc.gov/2020056100)

[.gov/2020056100](https://lcn.loc.gov/2020056100)

LC ebook record available at [https://lcn.loc](https://lcn.loc.gov/2020056101)

[.gov/2020056101](https://lcn.loc.gov/2020056101)

Cover art: Stills from *Checkmate* (1991–1994,
Nigeria). Crystal Gold/Moving Movies.

*Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges
the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Office of
the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate
Education, which provided funds toward the
publication of this book.*

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Acknowledgments

As is the case for many people in my profession, this book is both the product of and the ticket to my dream job. Therefore, the first thing to acknowledge is the immense privilege that this book represents. To have the opportunity to study a subject for more than a decade, to write many drafts about it, to have many different people read and offer feedback on those drafts (and not just for pleasure but often for the sake of their own jobs) makes me unfathomably fortunate. Do I deserve that fortune? In many ways, no, because part of what allowed me to live on a graduate student's stipend for many years, take long trips to Nigeria (often with my spouse), get taken seriously every time I spoke up, gain access to certain spaces across Africa, and much more derives largely from my Whiteness and my masculinity. It would be a severe oversight to fail to *acknowledge* those privileges here. The reader will have to judge for themselves whether I have put those privileges to work in any useful way. And if I have, well, that is the least I could do. Moreover, I must acknowledge that doing so gains me even greater privilege, which I must admit is one of the reasons I have done the work in the first place.

Although Whiteness and masculinity aid success, they do not, by themselves, constitute the skills and passions that make writing a book possible. Indeed, I had to learn those skills, and even some passions, by apprenticing myself to many people far more accomplished than I—none more so than the late Tejumola Olaniyan, my chief scholarly mentor. Teju was well aware of all the privileges that propelled me in this profession, but he worked very hard to ensure that they were not wasted. I am more deeply indebted to him than I can articulate here, but it suffices to say that I would not have found myself in the position to write this book without his guidance. It is to him that this book is dedicated. And as I acknowledge the role that he played in shaping this book, I must also acknowledge the

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role that members of his family played in making it possible for him to work so hard and maintain his presence, not just in my life but in the lives of so many other colleagues. Moji, Bola, and Bimpe, *Mo dupe*.

Others to whom I have apprenticed myself, in one way or another—whether they realize it or not—include Moradewun Adejumo, Karin Barber, Jonathan Haynes, Adeleke Adeeko, Carmela Garritano, Akin Adesokan, Brian Larkin, Keyan Tomaselli, Hyginus Ekwuazi, Akintunde Akinyemi, the late Frank Nwachukwu Ukadike, Ato Quayson, Henry Drewal, Cilas Kemedjio, Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, and Ann Elizabeth Willey. They all have my sincerest appreciation.

This book contains little in the way of ethnography or interviews, but it would not have been possible without my spending time in Nigeria. During many trips, long and short, I made friends and connected with minds that have inspired much of what appears on the following pages. To Abigail and Vincent Ihaenacho, I will never forget our nights of watching Nollywood movies and Mexican *telenovelas*, eating lemon cake, and laughing hysterically. To Joseph Ayodokun and his family, you have kept my research *and* my love of Nigeria constantly moving forward. Tejiri Aweto, “Chairman,” you too much, o! Thanks also to Festus Olaoje and his family for many good meals and many hours of yelling at the Africa Magic channel. To the Elebuibon family in Oshogbo, especially Lola: *E ku oro omo. E pele. Ba mi ki gbogbo ebi yin*. And to the Oyebisi family, my first taste of Nigerian tv was in your welcoming home, where I learned that the screen was not something simply to look at but to engage with, something that comes alive when our own voices bounce off it. *E se ganan ni o*.

I also learned about the other side of the screen from many Nigerian professionals who were patient enough to talk to me or, indeed, let me watch them work. Emem Isong, the late Amaka Igwe, Charles Igwe, the late Adedayo Faleti, Tunde Kelani, Clarion Chukwurah, Desmond Elliot, Uche Jombo, Monalisa Chinda, Joseph Benjamin, Nse Ikpe Etim, Bhaira Mcwizu, Uduak Isong Oguamanam, Austin Nwaolie, Temisan Etsede, Emeka Duru, Bode Sowande, Emeka Mba, “Christian Dior,” and Adegboyega Arulogun, thank you for your brilliance, time, energy, and indulgence.

This book is also profoundly shaped by my years as a graduate student, during which I was extremely lucky to take classes, work, write, and hang out with people who still inspire me. Many continued thanks to Akinsola Ogundej, John Stafford Anderson, Carmen McCain, Joseph Chikowero, Florence Ebila, Frances Lukhele, Mary Youssef, Mukoma wa Ngugi, Ben Cross, and Olusegun Soetan. Other scholars I met in those days who still inspire me include Laura T. Murphy, Esther de Bruijn, Kirk

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Sides, Matthew Omelsky, Lindsey Green-Simms, and Cajetan Iheka. I also received important financial support for my research during those years in the form of a Fulbright-Hays DDRA fellowship and a grant from the Ebrahim Hussein Foundation. Since grad school, support for this research has been provided by the University of Wisconsin–Madison Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education with funding from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation.

Indeed, writing this book has depended on the supportive professional environment at UW–Madison, especially in the Department of African Cultural Studies. I am grateful to former and current faculty, including the late Harold Scheub, Aliko Songolo, Jo Ellen Fair, Michael Schatzberg, Ron Radano, Luís Madureira, Dustin Cowell, Katrina Thompson, Nevine El Nossery, Vlad Dima, Sam England, Marissa Moorman, Mustafa Mustafa, John Nimis, Damon Sajani, Reginold Royston, Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué, and Ainehi Egoro, for making the quotidian chores of running a department feel meaningful and at times even enjoyable.

Many of the conversations that I have tried to weasel my way into with this book are being advanced in books published by Duke University Press. It has been both an honor and a pleasure to work with the staff at Duke, especially my gracious and indefatigable editor, Elizabeth Ault.

Above all, the work that went into this book was possible only because of great support at home. To my parents—Edward, Kathie, Laurie, and Becky—and my sisters, Lesley and Katie, thank you for shaping me. To my father, Edward, thanks especially for fostering critical thinking in our home. And to my mother, Kathie, thanks for instilling in me your love of language, of telling stories, and of conjuring good things in the kitchen. I thought about this book while cooking as much as anywhere else. My partner, Sarah—who has traveled with me throughout Africa and Europe, and who has inhaled as much archival dust as I have—is my primary co-conspirator in this endeavor. She has my deepest love and gratitude. And although they did not conspire, as such, my children, Louis and Hazel, certainly found ways to impress themselves upon this project. It is for them that I keep pressing ahead.

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Introduction

INDIRECT SUBJECTIVITIES AND PERILIBERALISM

The title of this book is a prism. By focusing the light of Nigerian screen media on it, three observable wavelengths disperse, illuminating Nollywood—Nigeria's commercial film industry—in different but complementary ways. At one end of the spectrum, *indirect subjects* are ancillary thematic concerns, the subjects of narrative exposition and contemplation that operate at a slight remove from the primary subjects of screen media texts. At the other end of the spectrum, *indirect subjects* are imagined spectators, members of a theoretical public addressed and positioned by certain examples of screen media in certain ways. They are invited by Nollywood and some of its antecedents to participate in the process of subject formation—of being conscious, perceiving agents who are nevertheless subject to a wide range of material and ideological limits on perception—but they are invited to participate indirectly, both as central to and held at arm's length from the political and economic processes that shape the modern world. In the middle of the spectrum is a wavelength more clearly visible to the naked eye. It initiates the method by which this book gains access to the extreme ends of the spectrum and sees Nollywood as part of a larger cultural and historical formation. In film theory terms it is known as *free indirect subjectivity*.

This book is premised on the idea that deeply historicizing and critically theorizing Nollywood and its relationship to key concepts in global political economy require close attention to matters of audiovisual form and style. The introduction to this book is therefore designed to illustrate not only how the formal convention of free indirect subjectivity works in Nigerian screen media but also how it can help us see the whole spectrum of Nollywood's indirect subjects. After drawing attention to the ancillary thematic concerns of two important examples and how those concerns are addressed to imaginary publics, this introduction then develops a

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vocabulary to render the indirect subjects of Nollywood historically legible. My goal is to establish that Nollywood's way of addressing its public often participates—both critically and uncritically—in a discourse about modernity, and Africa's place in it, that stretches back more than a century and that I call *periliberalism*. To see how the prism works, and why periliberalism helps describe it, let us consider two scenes from Nigerian screen media.

SCENE ONE: *CHECKMATE*

Ada Okereke (Mildred Iweka), a principal character from the early-1990s soap opera *Checkmate*—which ran on Nigeria's state television network for five years—lies in a hospital bed (see figure I.1). Her husband, Nduka (Bimbo Manuel), sits in a chair next to her. He is doubled over with shame and pity, his head resting on Ada's mattress, while she lightly strokes the back of his neck. Nduka's family put her here. They do not approve of his marriage, and while he was at work the previous day, they confronted Ada, who is several months' pregnant. She tried to escape but fell onto her belly. Now, as the camera zooms out to disclose the full tableau—Nduka's penitence, Ada's gesture of solace—a voice-over invites spectators into Ada's subjectivity. "I've got to leave you," she laments.

Ada's lips do not move. Instead, spectators are being offered an opportunity to hear her thoughts, as though her consciousness were telling a story in addition to the one the camera is telling. The image then cuts to a medium shot of Nduka, a flashback, in which he professes his love. Here the camera is positioned just to the left of Ada, capturing some of her hair in the frame. Therefore, the visual perspective of the flashback is not hers but that of a third-person narrator, as if it were inviting spectators to recall this scene. In other words, this memory belongs to the "narrator," not Ada. After Nduka's "I love you," the image cuts back to the hospital, once again showing the couple from a similarly distant, third-person point of view. On the sound track, however, spectators continue to hear Ada's voice, as if inside her head: "I know, but I have to think about myself and the baby too. I don't want to hurt you, but your people are monsters. They are wicked!"

Two more flashbacks then quickly roll by. The first shows members of Nduka's family lashing out at Ada. "What haven't they done to me?" the voice-over continues. The second shows a Christian *Aladura* prophet who is blessing water that Ada will later drink in hopes of becoming pregnant. "What haven't I done to make them happy?" she asks. These two



FIGURE 1.1. *Checkmate*. Ada consoles Nduka while spectators hear her thoughts.

vignettes, coupled with Ada's words, suggest that her pregnancy, which did not come easily, was pursued as much for the sake of her in-laws as it was for her and her husband. "I have even sought help," she adds, referring to the prophet. "What more can I do?" The image then returns to the hospital—this time offering a close-up of Nduka, still prostrate—as Ada concludes, "I will always love you, my dear. Mom and Anne, they don't understand that I love you too. But I've got to let you go. I've got to let you go. I've got to let you go."

Before the scene ends, spectators are treated to one final flashback. Ada's mother and Ada's best friend, Anne (Ego Boyo, née Nnamani)—the central character of *Checkmate*—are visiting the hospital. Ada has just apprised them of her intention to leave Nduka, but they plead with her to reconsider. "Don't hurt the darling boy," Ada's mother implores. "I mean it. Don't hurt him."

SCENE TWO: *LIVING IN BONDAGE*

Andy Okeke (Kenneth Okonkwo), protagonist of the 1992 film *Living in Bondage* (dir. Chris Obi-Rapu¹), sits on a large chair in his parlor. The camera zooms in to a close-up of his forehead, and the image dissolves, then

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cuts to a scene of several bare-chested men, surrounding a red altar, over which looms a tall man cloaked in black. Immediately, one of the bare-chested men—it is Andy—falls to his knees, arms stretched toward the ominous figure, who issues a stern ultimatum in Igbo. Translation: “Andy, if you don’t bring your wife at the next meeting, you will die!” This is another flashback. Like Ada’s in *Checkmate*, the action here is filmed from a third-person point of view, as though the narrator of the story were inviting spectators to recall this incident.

A knock then interrupts Andy’s meditation. The image returns to his parlor, where he rises and walks to the door. His wife, Merit (Nnenna Nwabueze), has just returned from a visit to her family’s village. Andy takes Merit’s luggage and follows her to their sofa. She is wearing an electric blue head tie, a white blouse, and a green *aso oke* wrapper. Gold jewelry graces her neck and ears. As she takes her seat, she unshoulders a fashionable handbag. Andy then settles in next to her. He wears a fine red-and-gold floral-print tunic. By outward appearances, they occupy the margins of Lagos’s post-oil-boom middle class—no thanks to Andy. As established in the famous first scene of the film, he has worked for several companies and has failed at several investment schemes while Merit sustains their household with a steady secretarial job, where she is sexually harassed by her boss. Several times, Andy laments that he cannot perform what he considers his duty as a provider and protector. His latest investment scheme was a total loss, prompting him to confide in a wealthy friend, Paul (Okey Ogunjiofor). In several memorable scenes of revelatory spectacle, Andy comes to learn that Paul’s wealth derives from a satanic cult that specializes in human sacrifice. Andy is shocked but is willing to enlist, until the cult members demand his beloved wife. At first, he tries to pass off a prostitute as a surrogate, but as the flashback recalls, his subterfuge is easily uncovered, resulting in the high priest’s ultimatum.

But Merit has good news! Her brother and parents have given her ₦50,000 (nearly \$3,000 in 1992). She pulls a massive stack of cash from her handbag and passes it to Andy, who examines it and places it on the coffee table. As if enchanted, the camera lingers and then zooms in on the stack. The money temporarily buoys Andy’s spirits, and he begins to speculate about starting life afresh, but his eyes fix into a distant stare, and the words of the high priest resound on the sound track once more: “Andy, if you don’t bring your wife at the next meeting, you will die!” (See figure I.2.) Like Nduka, Merit cannot hear these words; they ring in Andy’s head. He then slouches into the sofa, and Merit worries over the look on his face. Slowly, however, Andy straightens and begins laying the



FIGURE 1.2. *Living in Bondage*. Andy hears the voice of the priest in his head.

foundations of a flimsy lie. He tells Merit that a friend has given birth to twins and that he has promised to pay them a visit. Merit claims exhaustion from her travels, but Andy convinces her to change and come with him. After a brief time cut, she emerges in a floral-print outfit matching Andy's tunic (what many Lagosians, using Yoruba terms, would call *aso ebi*, literally "family cloth"). The lie, it seems, was premeditated. Andy wore his *aso ebi* in anticipation of inviting Merit on this fabricated social call. As they turn to leave, a prescient feeling of uneasiness washes over Merit, and she begs to reschedule the visit, but Andy is adamant. They pass through the door, and unearthly sounds begin to echo on the sound track. The screen fades to black.

* * *

Common to both these scenes are brief moments in which two narrative perspectives overlap. The image assumes a detached perspective, as if the story were being told by a third-person narrator. However, the sound

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track provides fleeting access to a first-person point of view, or “point of audition” — Ada’s in *Checkmate* and Andy’s in *Living in Bondage*.² Essentially, spectators are invited to see with third-person eyes and hear with first-person ears. It is this invitation that constitutes *free indirect subjectivity*, the film-theory equivalent of what literary critics call *free indirect discourse*. In both media, the term designates a situation where otherwise consistent third-person narration momentarily slips into a different narrative voice, often belonging to one of the story’s characters. It is not that the character simply speaks, as if quoted; rather, the character’s consciousness, voiced or not, seems to take over the telling of the story, often briefly and sometimes inconspicuously. Of course, some trace of the third-person narrator always remains, rendering the character’s narration of themselves inevitably *indirect*.

Free indirect subjectivity has been theorized across several periods and schools of thought in film studies and is not, therefore, beholden to any. Pier Paolo Pasolini, inspired by Russian formalists, first proposed free indirect subjectivity in the 1960s, in a series of essays concerned with cinema’s growing poetic possibilities. His initial claims for the radical possibilities of indirect narration—to give voice to many subjectivities at once, and not merely through reportage—eventually gave way to what he describes as an anthropological mode of storytelling, in which “the bourgeois class itself, in sum, even in cinema, identifies itself, again, with all humanity, in an irrational interclassism.”³ Two decades later, Gilles Deleuze attempted to rescue free indirect subjectivity by way of postcolonial documentaries in which otherwise marginalized subjects take control of a film’s narrative and fully collaborate with a European auteur in the telling of their own story. As Louis Georges Schwartz notes, however, only the choices of the European auteur make it onto the pages of Deleuze’s book, seemingly affirming Pasolini’s darkest suspicions.⁴ As such, I am less interested in the possibility that free indirect subjectivity democratizes screen media narration (indeed, that would affirm a normative, bourgeois, liberal conception of the relation between screen media and society that this book disavows); rather, I treat free indirect subjectivity as an invitation to spectators to participate in the experiences of on-screen characters and therefore know themselves—however vaguely—as subjects, as agents of their own life stories who, like on-screen characters, are simultaneously subjected to many forms of political and economic circumscription. In a summary of Deleuze’s thinking, Schwartz writes that this form of indirect identification is what makes cinema “a machine for producing subjectivities.”⁵ Therefore, moments like the ones from

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Checkmate and *Living in Bondage* are indications not of screen media's potential voice so much as their *modes of address*, or the ways in which they imagine, speak to, and—as Karin Barber argues—call forth a theoretical public.⁶ The question, we might say, is less about who gets to talk than who is invited to listen, and how.

Let us return to Ada's evaluation of her marriage. She is a confident, *modern* woman who generates a modest income and enjoys a great deal of personal freedom, yet her sense of personhood is refracted through her husband and his inability to shelter their marriage from external forces. Her problems would be solved, *Checkmate* suggests, if Nduka could provide for his family better: if, instead of a humble schoolteacher, unable to fend off his parents, he was a *real man*. Moreover, Ada is willing to inflict further suffering upon herself (while her mother begs her not to hurt “the darling boy”) precisely because Nduka's predicament is not of his own making, because his status, the show painstakingly establishes, is the result of structural rather than personal failures. Indeed, Nduka is an ideal companion—loving, hardworking, and devoted—but at the end of the day he does not really stand on his own two feet, socially or financially. Several scenes before the one described here establish that Nduka earns far less than he is capable of earning. Their household thus relies a great deal on Ada's income, while her wealthy parents sometimes offer assistance that Nduka plainly characterizes as emasculating.

Ada's assessment of Nduka's masculinity may be normative, but it is nonetheless unlikely to align with many spectators' socially constructed conceptions of gender and family. In southern Nigeria, extended-family members are not only necessary but often welcome factors in many marriages, whereas women's productivity and financial independence, although they may be dominated by patriarchal discourse, are central features of micro- and macroeconomic life. Most households must pool resources and often do so amicably. Ada's perspective on masculinity is therefore distinct, seemingly derived from a specific, liberal, nineteenth-century ideal of companionate marriage, organized around a male breadwinner. As I will establish in chapter 3, *Checkmate*—which is otherwise primarily concerned with Ada's friend Anne, whose family and business dealings constitute the direct subject of the series—repeatedly returns to questions of Nduka's earning potential, his ability to protect Ada, and his domestic authority. The show rarely resorts to free indirect subjectivity with Anne yet often uses it with Ada, making her perspective a privileged site of spectator identification and the indirect subject of the series. I will also establish in chapter 3 that *Checkmate* is but one example of a

larger pattern that persists in later media and contributes to a recognizable mode of address—that I call the *feminine melodramatic mode*—which comments on the state of the Nigerian economy by inviting spectators to identify with women who desire male breadwinners but who live in a social dispensation that cannot produce them on any measurable scale. From the subject position imagined by the feminine melodramatic mode, therefore, women cannot expect to change the Nigerian economy, but they can at least stand by men upon whom those expectations are then foisted. Thus, women are indirectly subjected to a liberal ideal that is focused on men. And if that form of subject positioning is not interchangeable with the lived realities of many southern Nigerian women, then we must ask why it crops up over and over across the history of Nigerian screen media. Why are spectators so often invited to identify with women characters who have some combination of money, a job, freedom, and access to sex yet fret about landing and keeping a particular kind of socially and economically independent man? As I explore several examples, I consider the kinds of political and economic fantasies that are wrapped up in Nollywood's feminine melodramatic mode.

Living in Bondage, as I will show in chapter 4, responds to *Checkmate*, initiating what I call a *masculine melodramatic mode*. The direct subject of many of the mode's screen media stories tends to be money and its moral ambiguity, but the examples I trace take up the indirect subject of breadwinning, which, if it is impossible to achieve—if the Nigerian economy cannot reward the kind of hard work and conjugal devotion exemplified by Nduka, Andy, or several similar characters—then there may be something evil lurking at the heart of breadwinner ideology. Nollywood is clearly on to something here. However, that does not mean that Andy should be rewarded, according to *Living in Bondage*, for circumventing hard work and conjugal devotion by turning to the occult. Instead, like the men at the center of so many subsequent Nollywood films, Andy must reach rock bottom, must destroy those for whom he would win bread, in order to win bread and then find salvation for his crimes through an institution such as the church or the state. Moral rectitude, in this formulation, comes not from bypassing the unjust waiting line for the good life but from taking one's number, and perhaps one's seat in a pew. It may be true that life in Nigeria exposes a lie at the heart of modern conceptions of gender. Masculinity may have always been an unsatisfactory construct for men, and an unjust construct generally, but liberal masculinity, from the point of view of Nigerian screen media, seems to be so clearly ideological, so obviously materialist, while being cast as immaterial, that it

must be exploded. Yet exploding it to reveal the ideological rapacity at its core is never the end of the story. In Nollywood men who stumble upon the diabolical nature of modern masculinity retreat into, or are saved by, churches and state institutions: the very ones responsible for spreading breadwinner ideology in the first place. And they do not come as reformers. Instead, they often come as supplicants, apologists for an ideal that instead of being cast aside is qualified and tempered. It is as if, through prayer and time, the liberal construct of the male breadwinner might be purified. As one popular *danfo*, or minibus, inscription proclaims, which any commuter in Lagos might see any day of the week, “God’s Time Is the Best.”⁷

To wait for a condition by which one’s life is already conditioned, in which one not only participates but to which one contributes, yet from which one seems to be excluded is what it means to be—at the other end of our spectrum—an indirect subject. *Checkmate* invites spectators to identify with a woman who chooses to suffer spectacularly in the shadow of her hopes for a modern, companionate, male-breadwinner model of marriage, all the while knowing that Nigeria’s economy produces very few people—let alone men—who win enough bread to fit the model. *Living in Bondage* invites spectators to identify with a man who, when he realizes that his wife is the breadwinner in his home, is forced to follow through with a plan to destroy her, yet he never relinquishes faith in the male breadwinner ideal. Why, once again, is that ideal so persistent, given the fact that it is relatively new to and uncommon in Nigeria? And not only the breadwinner ideal. Why do other concepts with specific meanings under liberalism, such as sovereignty and the rule of law, hold sway over other modes of address, such as the Gothic and comic modes I discuss in chapters 5 and 6? Ultimately, Nollywood is too big an industry, too complex and constantly changing, to be described in full or with any kind of finality, but this book nevertheless advances the argument that a significant number of Nollywood video films respond to liberalism—through concepts such as gender, family, and other social hierarchies—by imagining and addressing an audience that is distinctly local and has a distinct experience of the modern world that could be described as simultaneously within and without.

Elaborating on Nollywood’s distinct construction of locality, within and without modernity, is a key objective of this book—to which I will return shortly—but equally important is grappling with the relationship between Nigerian state television programs, such as *Checkmate*, and Nollywood video films, such as *Living in Bondage*. By “video films,” schol-

ars of African screen media mean feature-length films that, beginning in the late 1980s, were produced by midlevel entrepreneurs operating in the informal economic sector and using video technology to release their stories into the market as hard copies, initially on VHS and later on VCD.⁸ Video filmmaking in Nigeria would not be known as “Nollywood” until 2002,⁹ but it very quickly constituted a major revolution in audiovisual storytelling that over the last three decades has dramatically changed the media landscape in Africa and made Nigeria one of the world’s most prolific filmmaking nations.¹⁰ Why would these two media forms—state television and commercial video film—one operating squarely within Nigeria’s formal economic sector, the other produced by informal means (without state sponsorship, loans, a regulated paper trail, or other forms of institutional support), imagine and address similar publics in similar ways? By examining many examples of Nigerian state television and their relationship to Nollywood, this book argues that despite the divergent means of production and dissonant political mandates of each form, they participate in a system of governmentality that has long sustained liberalism.¹¹

To make my case, I will establish that liberal governmentality extends beyond Nigerian screen media yet is exemplified by them. Indeed, Nigeria’s relationship with liberal governmentality long precedes screen media, stretching all the way back to the pivotal role that Nigeria played in constituting the global system of trade from which mercantile capitalism emerged. To quickly retell a well-known story, many parts of Nigeria—especially in the south of the country, with which this book is primarily concerned—supplied the material and conceptual resources on which the modern world is built.¹² Several locations became slave-trading ports that abetted massive amounts of capital accumulation in the global North. Many also produced key commodities—such as palm oil, cocoa, cotton, and crude oil—that were central to both industrialization and the rise of global mass consumer culture. And of particular concern for this book, many locations in southern Nigeria have served as laboratories for juridical innovations that have sustained capitalist enterprise as well as liberal political philosophy for four centuries. In fact, southern Nigeria played a decisive role in the resolution of several crises that threatened liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as I will soon explain. A short time later, between the two world wars, southern Nigeria also provided the raw material for emerging forms of global cinema culture, which I describe in chapter 1. Today, having been united with the Colony and Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, and then becoming a sovereign

nation-state in 1960, the South is part of the most populous country in Africa with the biggest economy on the continent. It is a place without which global modernity would not be what it is and without which global conceptions of Africa would be quite different. Yet when screen media arrived in Nigeria, they did not represent Nigeria's central position in the liberal world order. Nor did they represent Nigeria's marginality. Instead, from colonial cinema through video film, screen media have positioned themselves between the liberal world order and an imagined public, one that supposedly understands and desires all the benefits of liberal modernity, that feels entitled to its share, but whose job in sustaining that version of modernity is to endure without it until, it bears repeating, conditions somehow change. If, in the context of 1950s Cuba, television can be said to have been "broadcasting modernity," as Yeidy M. Rivero writes, Nigerian television screens seem to have been *mediating modernity*—that is, situating themselves between modernity and ordinary people as part of a larger social process.¹³

In the remaining pages of this introduction I sketch the conceptual means by which this book envisions and historicizes that "larger social process," where Nigeria is both central to and held at arm's length from the liberal world order. To capture those spatial dimensions while also trying to avoid unnecessarily cumbersome phrasing, I resort to a neologism, *periliberalism*, that describes the ideological nature of indirect subjection and its function as a form of global governmentality. Following an elaboration of periliberalism, I then explore this book's relationship to the field of Nollywood studies before describing the role that each chapter plays in supporting my key arguments.

PERILIBERALISM

*The problem, of course, is to uncover the rules, regularities, and reproductive logics that underpin our current condition—a condition that is of necessity global, although always global in a variety of local ways, shapes, and forms.*¹⁴

—ACHILLE MBEMBE

The story of *Indirect Subjects* begins in the formal colonial period, around the turn of the twentieth century (see chapter 1). Until then, it was not necessarily clear, or a foregone conclusion, that societies in Africa would be held at arm's length from the increasingly global political and economic order that Europeans had been constructing—relying on African and other non-European resources—since the fifteenth century. Liberal accomplices of empire, such as John Locke and Edmund Burke in Britain,

as well as Alexis de Tocqueville in France, conceptualized colonialism as a process of economic integration and convergence.¹⁵ They did not deny the fact that colonial conquest was an illiberal enterprise, but they imagined that it was the means to more noble ends. Let us be clear: that was nonsense. Instead of simply trading freely with parties in various locations across the planet, European joint stock companies and, later, imperial states imposed political and military subjection on non-European people in order to extract as much surplus value from them as possible. Thus, the core principles of liberalism—including property rights, individual liberty, open markets, and the need for a juridical infrastructure, such as contract law, capable of ensuring the free deployment of property in open markets—were mendaciously subverted in the sanctimonious process of spreading liberal values. That critique, of course, is not new. It is one of the foundational, if implicit, arguments of postcolonial theory. Even in political theory, as Uday Singh Mehta has written, “when viewed as a historical phenomenon, the period of liberal history is unmistakably marked by the systematic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and ‘types’ of people.”¹⁶ However, those exclusions were repressed enough during the first few centuries of the “period of liberal history” that they would return with a vengeance by the turn of the twentieth.

The effects of that return are taken up in several recent interventions in the study of what scholars now call *liberal imperialism* (or *imperial liberalism*).¹⁷ For the purposes of this book the overlapping perspectives of Karuna Mantena and Mahmood Mamdani on the subject of “nativism,” as well as the revisionist materialism of Onur Ulas Ince and his use of the term *colonial capitalism*, best illustrate how it came to pass that by the beginning of the twentieth century, instead of converging with Europe, vast regions of the world were decisively and, from the point of view of European investors, productively being held at arm’s length from the political and economic body of liberalism. Indeed, the features of what I am calling periliberalism lie where these recent revisionist histories intersect.

In *Alibis of Empire*, Mantena argues that by the time colonial holdings in Africa were formalized at the 1884 Berlin conference, the project of liberal imperialism had come under threat in Britain. In some circles the 1857 Indian rebellion, followed closely by the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica, brought the purpose and efficacy of liberal colonial policy into question. Many wondered why colonial subjects would rebel if they were being integrated into a system of converging global prosperity. And when colonized subjects did rebel, many liberals wondered what methods were

appropriate for responding. Should rebellions be put down militarily or politically embraced? John Stuart Mill, a foremost defender of what many imagined were the most egalitarian principles of imperialism—its so-called civilizing mission—pursued vigorous prosecution against the governor of Jamaica, Edward John Eyre, for brutally suppressing the Morant Bay rebellion, although Mill's efforts came to naught. The prevailing sentiment in Parliament as well as the wider society favored the use of illiberal force to protect imperial interests. Meanwhile, several members of Parliament sought a state of exception to use illiberal force in their own backyards, hoping to suppress what was then an increasingly vocal campaign for manhood suffrage. As Mantena writes, they “likened the Hyde Park riots to the events of Morant Bay as evidence of a growing anarchy fanned by liberal sentimentalism.” However, those reactionary impulses only fanned the flames of liberal imperialism. Mantena's core argument is that the liberal project was saved by a conservative idea, *indirect rule*, revealing an uncanny symbiosis between liberal and conservative thought.¹⁸ To get there, she focuses on Henry Maine, the historian who in 1862 was appointed as legal member of council to the viceroy's cabinet in India and who, in the course of his work, would generate the principles upon which the British version of indirect rule was built.

Maine's ideas are the subject of Mantena's history of liberal politics, but they are also the subject of Mamdani's work on the long-term political implications of colonial administration in Africa. The key concept in both cases is “nativism,” the ideological distinction between and even promotion of incommensurable differences between regional cultures, even races. As Maine theorized it, European culture, from Roman times on, was built on a foundation of laws that rationalized people's understanding of community and morality. Meanwhile, “oriental” societies, according to Maine's diagnosis, clung to ancient regimes of “custom” that mystified social relations and principles of moral conduct. Maine's conclusion—that non-European societies may be complex and even fascinating but also ill-equipped for liberal jurisprudence—warranted, to his thinking, the isolation, close study, and protection of “native” cultures. They may have been slated for eventual liberalization, but the process was to be carried out slowly and deliberately to avoid fracturing ancient social bonds and thereby contributing to political upheaval. Moving too fast would only lead to results like those in Jamaica. In order to manage the growing conceptual space between the metropole and “natives,” Maine called for collaboration with local political elites in the colonies. He assumed that those who understood local society best—such as the African

chiefs and emirs who would become the so-called native authorities under indirect rule—could mediate between the dynamism of law and the static tendencies of custom. Maine's ideas influenced several colonial policy innovations across the British Empire but achieved their fullest expression in Africa. Mantena describes Maine's theoretical moves as "alibis of Empire," which she argues "made possible the deferral and disavowal of moral and political responsibility for imperial domination."¹⁹

Maine's alibis were taken up by Fredrick Lugard, who experimented with their application in Nigeria—first in the North, then in the South. However, Mamdani has long argued that the version of indirect rule with which Lugard is widely associated was already at work to some degree in other parts of British Africa. Indeed, what Lugard implemented was a more formal variation of the practice that was already well on its way to becoming apartheid in South Africa. Rather than forcibly alter native forms of social organization, the architects of apartheid and indirect rule concluded that colonial governments should define a geography within which native society could flourish and *allow* it to abide by its own legal and political authority, which, of course, merely quarantined native society from the commercial and political processes that otherwise shaped colonial life, especially in urban centers and ports. This conceptual and material segregation resulted in the bifurcation of what Mamdani refers to "citizens" of empire and its "subjects."²⁰ Moreover, Mamdani argues that the economic, legal, and geographic inequalities inherent to indirect rule continue to be "reproduced through the dialectic of state reform and popular resistance" in contemporary Africa.²¹ Much of that popular resistance now occupies urban centers, so the division is no longer neatly urban versus rural. The former subjects of empire have become citizens of postcolonial nation-states; nevertheless, they remain—to a large extent—subjects, though indirectly, of the liberal world order that was constructed on and eventually supplanted empire.

More recently, Mamdani has also taken up Maine's body of work by way of returning to the theoretical roots of indirect rule, noting that in addition to setting limits on the degree to which colonial subjects could access the liberal world system, "The prerogative to define the boundary, the substance and the authority of the 'customary,' gave vast scope to the powers of the occupying authority."²² Besides creating spaces outside of the liberal world order, therefore, indirect rule enlarged and enhanced the hegemonic power of liberalism. And it was this increased power, along with the disavowal of moral questions raised by intellectuals such as Mill, that not only resolved—or at the very least papered over—the crisis of

liberal imperialism but also made the liberal project stronger than ever. Indeed, it became fashionable among British liberals to celebrate, as a form of reverence for authenticity, the removal of Africans from the very modernity built on their backs (which I further illustrate in chapter 1 by exploring the creation, exhibition, reception, and distribution of film in and from Nigeria during the early twentieth century). However, the attempted removal of Africans from modernity saved liberalism in more than political and conceptual terms; indirect rule also reinvested in the material processes by which liberal capitalism had emerged and long sustained itself.

The idea that colonial rule was driven primarily by the logic of capital accumulation is, like the idea that liberalism is inherently exclusionary, not at all new. Indeed, for Marxist political economists the so-called imperial turn in studies of liberal political philosophy must seem more than a little belated. Lenin defined imperialism as the “highest stage of capitalism,” in which the foundations of the liberal world system were financed by the political and material domination of colonies.²³ Frantz Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the polished emblems and executors of liberal jurisprudence—colonial flags and police—are just the grimy signifiers of violent expropriation.²⁴ And Walter Rodney argued that through colonialism, Europe not only profited from but also painstakingly “underdeveloped” Africa.²⁵ Indeed, centuries of liberal claims to have spread democracy and human rights may be easily interpreted as nothing more than good old-fashioned bourgeois false consciousness. More recently, however, where some theorists of liberalism are willing to admit only that its rise was unfortunately accompanied by colonial violence, Ince makes a compelling case for colonial violence as the economic and philosophical bedrock of liberalism, a form of “primitive accumulation,” which in Marx’s original formulation is less the highest stage of capitalism than its larval stage. As Ince phrases it, primitive accumulation is “a frontier phenomenon that arises at the interface of accumulative and nonaccumulative logics of social reproduction and consists in the assimilation or subordinate articulation of the latter to the former through the deployment of extraeconomic and extralegal force.”²⁶ Key here is the idea that capital makes use of “extraeconomic” political and social logic—in addition to brute force—to define and enclose zones free from capital accumulation, all for the purposes of either imminent or eventual expropriation. Ince’s formulation aptly describes the Scottish land enclosures on which Marx based his theory of primitive accumulation, but it also describes many later processes, including what Ince straightforwardly describes

as “colonial capitalism.”²⁷ Colonies, according to this perspective, functioned for European liberals as spaces where crucial political, legal, and economic experimentation could be undertaken. However, they were not uniformly horizontal spaces; indeed, they were economically topographical, with mining and port cities occupying the highest elevations, as it were, while the native authority jurisdictions of indirect rule came to define low points on the economic map: the areas below global liberal sea level. Therefore, zones subject to indirect rule were not beyond capitalism, nor were they straightforwardly exploited for their wealth in rubber, cotton, gold, copper, labor, and so on (although of course they were). They were included in liberalism by being excluded from many forms of direct capital investment and sometimes from direct exploitation while being subjected to all manner of bureaucratic vivisection. For Ince, then, capitalism is like the so-called immortal jellyfish, regularly returning to its larval stage throughout its life, living off places where its logic and modes of production are necessarily absent. Timothy Brennan has likewise argued that primitive accumulation is not only ongoing under contemporary capitalism but also serves an “image-function” in the liberal world, making modern life seem coherent by contrasting it to postcolonial chaos as well as whetting the appetites of investors by offering them a “smorgasbord of locally varied legal options” where liberal values need not apply.²⁸ Throughout the story of the modern world, therefore, spaces of violent illiberalism have, rather than call it into question or suggest its limitations, arisen within and fortified the liberal world order.

The term *periliberalism* may therefore seem unnecessary, even redundant, for states of exclusion from the core functions and benefits of liberalism have always been central features of the liberal philosophical framework. In fact, liberalism seems to desperately need and therefore actively reproduce its outside, conceptually and materially, in order to endure. But recognizing that fact does not tell us anything more about what the outside looks or feels like. Screen media can help, although—and this is *very* important—not because they depict or represent that outside; rather, they participate in the constitution of inside and out. Technically, they are not beyond the liberal world order, but they can make it seem as if inside and outside are distinct, that certain forms of wealth or governance are *out there* while certain reactions to it belong *in here*. For example, in the colonial and early independence periods—which I explore further in chapters 1 and 2—state-sponsored screen media participated in what historian Fredrick Cooper has called the “gatekeeper state,” the colonial, then independent government that was positioned at the

threshold between global political economic networks and African citizens. However, what ultimately defines a gatekeeper state, Cooper insists, is not “effective control of the gate” as much as “the intensity of struggle over it, which has had varying outcomes.” In Nigeria oil has made the state what Cooper describes as a “caricature of itself.”²⁹ The federal government has invested oil revenues in cultural projects such as its television network, which has become the most comprehensive in Africa, while marshaling those investments to position itself as the bearer of development or the gatekeeper between some form of modernity, which is not yet widely available to many of its citizens and their local aspirations.³⁰ However, there is no obvious reason why commercial video filmmakers, who came on the scene in the 1990s, would assume a similar position relative to their audience unless they too were struggling, in one way or another, over control of the gate. In that sense the “state” in state television should be considered in Gramscian terms, not exactly as a dominant power in postcolonial Africa and not a “thing to be seized” but an “arena of social contestations,” to borrow Stuart Hall’s phrasing.³¹ It is an essential site of struggle for the meaning of modern sovereignty. The remaining chapters of this book explore why and how Nollywood, which emerged during a period of structural adjustment in Nigeria and thus without direct state oversight, would imagine and address its spectators in ways similar to the state’s modes of address: as indirect subjects queuing at the gates of modernity. But first, just a few notes on etymology and semantics.

Periliberalism is not simply about being peripheral to the liberal world order; it is about being fundamentally and indispensably constitutive of the liberal world order precisely by being held at arm’s length from it. My use of the term draws on a long history of liberal exclusions and self-consciously invokes a “world systems” approach to the study of global inequality, recalling such concepts as capitalist “core” and underdeveloped “periphery.”³² However, my intention is to augment the work of economic historians and political philosophers by closely attending to the formal dimensions of relatively recent cultural developments. Meanwhile, the term *periliberalism* also self-consciously invokes the concept of neoliberalism, although I hope to maintain some ambivalence about whether economic policies that supposedly reinvigorate liberal logic in the global North, with increasingly global pretensions, create substantially new experiences of liberalism in the global South. In terms of southern Nigerian screen media, we might ask whether the current liberal moment looks and feels very different from previous ones. Indeed, what periliberalism does share with certain uses of the term

neoliberalism, especially those inspired by Michel Foucault, is an emphasis on subjectivity.³³ My aim is not so much to describe a world system as to describe a particular subjective construction of it: Nollywood's local address.

The subjectivity that I am proposing as "periliberal" is also very different from the subject position with which neoliberalism is often associated. In much of the scholarly literature, subjects of neoliberalism are described as selves invited to appraise their economic status, to accept that they have quantifiable value and therefore should calculate the return on any investment they might make with or in their own personhood, whether in time, effort, affect, or assets.³⁴ Their fate is tied to the rise and fall of the value of those investments, which is determined in the market. However, periliberalism describes a context in which subjects are invited to regard themselves not as sites of fungible value as much as placeholders for value. They are not—and this is key—imagined to be worthless; they may be filled with value at any time, thereby bringing value to the society, the nation, or even the empire, depending on when, where, and how one is looking. The value of the periliberal subject is therefore tied to the value of the local context, as if the subject's ability to achieve full personhood depends on whether the nation or local community can meet certain political and economic benchmarks, and vice versa. Regardless, both the local community and its members are imagined, in screen media if not other systems of address, to be sites of indeterminate, potential value precisely because they are not themselves recognized as investors or investments in the larger global market where primary value is determined. Put simply, periliberal subjects constitute zones of primitive accumulation that amplify the value of subjects who already do live and labor under liberalism proper. It is the possibility of becoming a site of liberal value, of becoming what Wendy Brown calls a "speck of capital," that may elevate current specks to positions of asymptotic desire.³⁵ And it is within this context that Nollywood's spectator-subjects are invited by free indirect subjectivity to tentatively identify with characters who desire certain dividends of modernity while simultaneously acknowledging that those dividends cannot yet be realized because of both the current state of the nation and, supposedly, the current state of themselves. Brown's assessment suggests that those of us who do live under conditions of fully established neoliberalism ought to find our status revolting. Yet the very notion that such a tainted status might constitute someone else's desire can short-circuit revolt—in every sense of the word. Neoliberalism thus thrives on periliberalism, although it remains worthwhile to distinguish one from the other.

My description of these political and economic logics, of the screen media aesthetics that intersect with them, and the power they all have to imagine, position, and address subjects may seem to deny the agency of those subjects. But that would be too simplistic a way of understanding both subjection and agency. To begin with, my title, *Indirect Subjects*, may suggest but is not interchangeable with the grammatical concept of an *indirect object*. Whereas indirect objects receive the action of a subject at a slight remove, indirect subjects are the actors of their own utterances. They make their world, but it would be disingenuous to deny that they do so—as James Ferguson argues—in the *shadow* of processes that otherwise organize social life on Earth.³⁶ If one of the central arguments of this book is that the liberal world *needs* indirect subjects, then those subjects do indeed make the world as we know it; they are just rarely imagined to be doing so directly. More importantly, my analysis of Nigerian television and video films frames screen media as the constitutive, porous barriers between subjects and objects, as the verbs—the action words—that render different noun phrases, different *things*, grammatical or meaningful. Nollywood tends to imagine its spectators as indirect subjects partly because of history and partly as a way of making history, of finding a place for and participating in the reproduction of certain logics and relationships that keep the global economic and social system running. I therefore maintain awareness not only of spectator agency but also of the agency practiced by people in the Nigerian film industry, the people who make the sounds and images I attend to in this book and who thus make the world I observe. Regardless, there is also a sense in which agency does not really matter at all.

My understanding of agency follows from the work of philosophers such as Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler; as such, it also diverges from some of the work done under the banner of African studies.³⁷ As Lynn M. Thomas has recently argued, African studies suffers from a widespread tendency she calls “agency as argument,” the idea that Africanist research may be validated by the degree to which its overarching goal is to assert the agency of the human subjects whom it studies. For Thomas, agency is not an argument, but a fundamental assumption—along with structure—to which questions of “*form, scale, and scope*” may be posed as part of a more extensive and probing research agenda.³⁸ After all, human life is full of choices, small and large, made every minute of every day that constantly produce and reproduce the world. The social structures that those choices create both constrain and enable further choosing. Therefore, agency is mundane, a way to describe everyday world making, not necessarily “human creativity and resilience,” as some

would have it.³⁹ In fact, if only those choices that register as creativity or resilience are considered acts of agency, then agency becomes too privileged a category, too exclusive a domain, to be methodologically useful. It ends up looking a lot like liberal, Enlightenment conceptions of individual choice and instrumentality, which therefore obscures from view the agency of billions of people across history who participate in social life but in ways that may be complicit, socially distributed, or otherwise not easily identified according to instrumental metrics. Moreover, if agency is happening all the time, everywhere—if it is ubiquitous—then structure constitutes an especially explanatory site of analysis. Structure is the result of agency, but it also gives agency its form and makes it legible. In order to understand “indirect subjects,” therefore, this book is principally concerned with articulating the structural conditions within which those subjects are imagined and to which they may contribute. Indeed, if the engine that drives the story of this book comprises the choices that Nigerian screen media professionals have made as they have produced content, it is within and against structural conditions—which they have not chosen—that video film and television experts have participated in making a world that critics and scholars can acknowledge, contemplate, scrutinize, and enjoy. The agency of Nigerian screen media professionals as well as spectators is therefore assumed: to do otherwise, to draw special attention to it or *return* it to them, as if that were possible, would be condescending. Instead, the “*form, scale, and scope*” of their agency, and the conditions that structure it, require further elaboration.

Finally, my repeated use of the phrase “arm’s length,” as I trace the contours of periliberalism, is meant to convey something *visceral* about the structural conditions underlying Nollywood’s local address. “Arm’s length” captures the closeness, mutual coconstitution, and embodiment of an otherwise abstract description of an equally abstract global order of things. I want to suggest that the shoulder of the periliberal world is held in the grip of the liberal world’s (invisible) hand, although it is not embraced.⁴⁰ The two seem to be locked in this configuration. One cannot abandon the other. And for both, there may be a perverse kind of comfort in the grip. Nevertheless, the relationship is one of bodily and intimate violence. It manifests in subjective and affective categories such as Blackness and Whiteness—which, although they are abstract, or not biological, not essential but indeed contingent and historical—do real work, both damaging and productive, on real bodies every day. In fact, racialized thinking is not simply inscribed upon bodies, although it is; the social construction of race is deeply embedded in them, manifesting

in intimate quotidian as well as sometimes spectacular experiences of the self, the other, and the material world. The arm in “arm’s length” is thus a separator and a link. The two bodies it spans may be nominally equal in their humanity, yet the separator link produces difference and inequality; indeed, it is a form of *inhumanity*. And because the arm belongs to the liberal world, it is there that inhumanity lies. The separator link, we might say, is quite simply *power* in its quintessentially modern form. Can the periliberal world escape its grip? Must it cut off the liberal world’s arm, in some way either discursive or material? Must it find some new way to finally, fully decolonize? Meanwhile, does the liberal world order understand what it is doing? Does it understand how it has found itself in this posture? And in considering the ways that it might bring this destructive relationship to an end, is it ready to acknowledge that it may have missed its chance for an embrace, that it must instead let go? Perhaps the embrace can come later. But if it turns out that it really is too late, even to let go, if the liberal world has been holding on for so long that some kind of *rigor habitus* has set in, indeed, if liberalism cannot imagine itself without its stifling grip on the periliberal world, then there may be no other choice—if justice is any kind of virtue—than cutting off its own arm. If that seems unlikely to happen anytime soon, then in the meantime, as the periliberal world searches for answers and perhaps a sharp knife, we can more closely consider the arm, the separator link, the gate between the two. Thus, while exploring the many brilliant and world-making choices that Nigerian screen media producers have made over several decades, this book nevertheless considers the ways in which Nollywood and its antecedents may have participated in the performance of the separator link. That claim, of course, is not the last word on Nollywood or the only way to think about the industry, but the study of Nollywood does need new ways to think about video films, the world they imagine, and the ideological processes that bind them to one another.

NOLLYWOOD STUDIES: FORMATIONS AND FORMS

This is not the first book to acknowledge that Nigerian video films imagine modernity from a local perspective, which in turn may be different from perspectives generated in the wider liberal world. Moradewun Adejunmobi draws a contrast between the video films that built Nollywood and several newer films that depart in various ways from the original model: “Many Old Nollywood films cater to the visual pleasure of desired access to modernity by exhibiting its supposed bounty—grand homes, stylish

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clothing, and expensive cars—as obtained frequently through vice and debauchery. They also link the acquisition of these ‘spoils’ of modernity to egregious violations within the moral economy that call for appropriate penalties and the ultimate forfeiture of the ‘spoils.’”⁴¹ This kind of profound insight has rarely been pursued further, whether by scholars interested in the formal dimensions of video films or scholars examining the films’ ideological ontology. In the case of Ghana, Carmela Garritano provides a generative conceptual model in which she elaborates on video films’ “global desires” or “expressions of global membership.” She writes that Ghanaian movies “issue strong moral condemnations of greed and the immoral attainment of wealth and yet position the spectator as a consumer, one who gazes on and desires the movie’s extravagant commodity displays.”⁴² Meanwhile, Adejunmobi contrasts the overt morality of early video films with the aesthetics of “New Nollywood” films—which are made possible by new forms of financing, production, and distribution—in which characteristically moral modes of address may be giving way to themes of ethical ambivalence corresponding to neoliberalism’s flat view of the world, in which inequality is supposedly incidental rather than inherent to the diffusion of liberal economic policy. But what accounts for the profoundly moralizing tone of early video films in the first place? And is it true that video films are “highly critical of materialism and capitalistic values,” as Garritano argues? Or does criticizing materialism—when material resources are not widely available—perhaps affirm the “capitalistic values” that have organized social relations in Ghana and Nigeria in the modern era?⁴³ It may in fact be necessary, from the point of view of African video films, to cast materialism as immoral precisely because its pursuit is not often possible.

Such questions call for renewed attention to the ideological functions of screen media in West Africa. Brian Larkin has established a strong foundation, aptly describing the philosophy of video films as an “aesthetics of outrage” in which the “architecture of insecurity” or “widespread feelings of vulnerability” are “dramatized” in “melodramatic terms,” but he also argues that “Nigerian films represent the waning of state-based visual media (from mobile film units to television dramas) and their ideologies of progress and uplift.”⁴⁴ Certainly, Nollywood has eclipsed “state-based visual media” in Nigeria, Ghana, and across the African continent, but the contrast between the two may not be all that stark. State-based media, we will see, can also be profoundly moralizing, indeed profoundly given to vulnerability, outrage, and melodrama. Likewise, video films may engage in their own projects of calculated, mediated uplift. Therefore, a key objective of this book is to revisit one long-standing

argument in Nollywood studies concerning the relation between the spheres of formal and informal screen media production.

In 1997 Jonathan Haynes inaugurated the academic study of Nigerian videos by publishing in Nigeria an edited collection of essays by several leading film and literary critics. Some of the authors in that volume seem to have felt compelled to draw a contrast between video films and celluloid African cinema. After all, what we might call *big-screen* African cinema has traditionally been so invested in anticolonial nationalism that many of its examples serve as proxies for the study of nation building and postcolonial statecraft. On the other hand, Nigerian video films have very different interests, more akin to certain forms of popular culture such as music and traveling theater. Videos therefore seem to have opened up space in African film and media studies to contemplate modes other than the macropolitical and power relations other than the governmental. As Haynes wrote at the time, “The radically different basis of Nigerian videos thus makes them . . . a singularly convenient subject for theoretical orientations that want to look past or around the African state.”⁴⁵ In Larkin’s contribution to the same volume, he argued that Nigerian video films created a new public sphere, a “cultural and political space . . . outside of the control of the state and corporations.”⁴⁶

In the meantime, however, Nigerian video filmmaking was widely recognized as the “child of television.”⁴⁷ Nollywood’s products, after all, were designed for viewing on television screens. More importantly, many pioneers of video filmmaking had deep professional relationships with the state television network, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Some were salaried employees, whereas others had worked on independent productions broadcast by the NTA. (I review the work of many such individuals in this book.) Therefore, to call Nollywood the child of television is to say that Nigeria’s formal screen media brought informal screen media into existence and raised them with varying degrees of attention. Though acknowledged by many observers, that relationship has attracted little sustained research, in part because of a lack of resources available to do so. State television productions, even those only a few decades old, are very difficult to obtain. This book is the result of a prolonged effort to scrape together enough examples to make proper comparisons, contributing to a unique though still admittedly meager archive. But there are many holes in my account, which call both for further research and plenty of speculation.

If state television and video films share some genetic material, the key difference between formal and informal media in Nigeria, as John C. McCall points out, concerns bureaucratic documentation and

regulation. There is a paper trail at the NTA and associated government agencies, though often difficult to access, but no comparable forms of documentation exist with respect to the first two decades of video film production: "The video industry is a network of scattered informal economic activities and interactions held back from capitalization because the system depends on informal practices to produce and distribute its products."⁴⁸ Similarly, Alexander Bud describes the ways in which the Nigerian state has tried, and mostly failed, to establish formal means of documenting and regulating video film production and distribution.⁴⁹ And although practices are rapidly changing, with formal capitalization beginning to take hold in New Nollywood, the initial emergence of Nigerian video films had a great deal to do with commercial activity undertaken outside formal systems of authorization and accumulation.⁵⁰ As McCall puts it, "While the 'of and for the masses' quality of Nollywood's mode-of-production is extremely important, it is also the video industry's greatest obstacle."⁵¹ Many scholars and journalists thus celebrate the grassroots origins of Nollywood, but we must be willing to acknowledge that those roots grew in soil neglected by the global economy and yet may still have been fertilized by it. My approach to comparing state television productions and video films, especially those produced in the 1990s and early 2000s, proceeds in large part from the kinds of distinctions between formal and informal, state and commercial, made by Haynes, Larkin, McCall, and Bud, but it takes seriously the idea that, as with children and their parents, Nollywood may have been shaped by state media more than it realizes.

Indirect Subjects pursues that possibility, however, not by way of industry analysis as much as through attention to matters of form and style. If state and commercial screen media modes of production are organized differently yet several individuals have worked across both, we might ask whether they have produced similar work in each sector. My primary interests lie in the formal and stylistic features of that work, the way that both television and video film address their audiences and what that might say about the politics of culture in Nigeria. I am therefore not so much invested in filling gaps in the historical record concerning Nigerian television and Nollywood, although this book does do so in places. Rather, I am chiefly interested in *critique*, the idea that scholarship can invest in and even promote the significance of a form of cultural expression not so much by uncovering all the "facts" about it but by repeatedly returning to the representations it produces. Only by (re)reading primary texts as well as (re)reading criticism do we contribute to generating a language capable

of dealing with the importance and complexity of cultural expressions. So this book takes up several television programs and a few video films that have rarely, if ever, been written about before, but it also deals with several video films that have been written about extensively. My goal is to offer new terms and meanings to the critical lexicon associated with Nollywood. And to those ends, I have woven into my analysis, wherever possible, films that have received serious attention elsewhere, although I try to push the analysis of those films further and in new directions.

In my attempt, therefore, to contribute to Nollywood Studies, *Indirect Subjects* applies a formal mode of critique to audiovisual texts in order to explore several continuities, changes, and ruptures in the history of Nigerian screen media aesthetics. Undoubtedly, many important patterns and paradigms are overlooked. To wit, this book is largely silent on celluloid film production in Nigeria during the independence period. That too is about a lack of resources (I do not have access to any of those very rare films) but also because of active and acknowledged forms of neglect baked into my epistemological priorities. Nollywood video films have generally been full-length features, so they have generally invited comparisons with other feature films. This book shifts emphasis from the form of the cinematic feature to the medium and social positioning of television, with which Nollywood may have a more important historical relationship. Additionally, it is the social position of television that invites a comparison to colonial cinema, which is the subject of chapter 1. In the remaining pages of this introduction I further describe the structure and methods of the book, highlighting particular conjunctures and points of comparison while also indicating my other epistemological priorities and possible blind spots.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The research for this book essentially started with Nollywood and worked backward through time to state television and then to colonial cinema, yet the argument is laid out in chronological order. The first two chapters form part 1 of the book, together reconstructing the history of state-mediated motion pictures in Nigeria from colonial cinema up through television and into the early 1990s. The next four chapters form part 2, which oscillates between some of the most important and memorable of both the NTA's television serials and Nollywood's video films. The early 1990s form a kind of conjuncture—where television meets video film—around which the book is built.

Chapter 1 begins with one of the earliest documented instances of film production in Nigeria: an “expedition” undertaken by two brothers from London. The footage they *captured* would eventually play a key role in the history of global cinema, leading to the emergence of a documentary film movement in Britain and to the codification of guiding principles for film exhibition in Africa. However, the primary site of exhibition for that early footage was not in Africa but at the 1924 Empire Exhibition in Wembley. Several reviews of the exhibition as well as the films shown there—films that were created by editing and titling the raw footage from Nigeria—reveal key links among indirect rule, the medium of film, and the ascendance of a new political philosophy that celebrated, as a triumph of liberalism, the increasingly illiberal conditions prevailing in Africa.

Chapter 2 traces the related philosophical innovations that accompanied the growth of television broadcasting in postcolonial Nigeria. The key figure whose theoretical and artistic production I follow is Segun Olusola, a pioneer of radio and television who worked in various levels of government and who created Nigeria’s longest-running television serial, *The Village Headmaster*. His numerous speeches and essays paint a picture of state television’s conception of itself as a gatekeeper between global liberalism and the developing nation. By the 1980s, following the collapse of Nigeria’s oil boom and the hollowing out of the state by structural adjustment, it seems all that was left was the relation to liberalism. Close readings of *The Village Headmaster* suggest that free indirect subjectivity was at work early in Nigerian screen media history, addressing spectators as subjects of but also sympathizers with the unwavering developmental gatekeeper state.

Chapter 3, which kicks off part 2 of the book, plays a pivotal role in the story of *Indirect Subjects*. A revolution in Nigerian television programming began in the mid-1980s, when the NTA started purchasing content from independent producers (as well as bulk distributors of Latin American content). Local public-private collaboration initiated a shift in aesthetic practices, although the mediated orientation of the developmental state to its subjects remained distinctly hierarchical. Several Nigerian soap operas, *Checkmate* (1991–1995) in particular, were at the center of that shift. They were widely popular, as suggested by newspaper reviews, and treated their spectators as sophisticated cosmopolitans, although soap operas still imagined an audience in need of developmental assistance. *Checkmate*’s key innovation, which was replicated by several subsequent Nollywood films (including early Nollywood hits made by *Checkmate*’s creator, Amaka Igwe), was its indirect focus on the ideal of

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the male breadwinner, a man whom women are imagined to desire and who therefore serves as the standard by which masculinity itself is measured. I refer to this formal complex as a feminine melodramatic mode of address. However, an assemblage of historical sources fleshes out the argument already signaled in this introduction that the male breadwinner ideal, while cropping up repeatedly in screen media, has featured very little in the lives of Nigerian spectators. In addition to being the measure of a man, the breadwinner ideal seems to be a fantasy by which access to a liberal form of life can also be measured.

One of the key arguments of the book is that although plenty of Nollywood's signature films carried forward the modalities of state television, others reacted forcefully, often negatively. In chapter 4 I examine this dynamic by revisiting *Living in Bondage* and several films that extend its modal operations. As I have already indicated, *Living in Bondage*—which is the subject of many great examples of Nollywood studies scholarship—characterizes what I am calling a masculine melodramatic mode of address that makes use of occult images and themes in order to respond to the feminine modalities of soap operas and related video films. Films that reuse the central story structure from *Living in Bondage*, in motif-like fashion, suggest that if the breadwinner ideal is the measure of a man, then it simultaneously represents the regulation and standardization of masculinity in ways that individual men may find troubling, to say the least. My reading, which draws on many other scholars' readings but is novel in several ways, is accentuated by close attention to the actors and key characters from state television soap operas who became iconic occult figures in Nollywood films. My approach suggests that something sinister was lurking under the surface of state television narratives that Nollywood was able to exhume. If the feminine melodramatic mode tends to address a public waiting for liberal conditions to arrive, the masculine melodramatic mode suggests that any attempt to hasten their arrival may be diabolical.

Whereas Nollywood's "occult" video films display patently gothic characteristics, I argue in chapter 5 that Nollywood's ubiquitous epic genre is characterized by a more distinctly gothic mode of address. The term *epic* is reserved in Nollywood for films set in versions of the precolonial past that are, very often, fantastically imagined. The ruins of that imagined past are designed to haunt contemporary popular culture. Of particular interest is the figure of the *igwe*, or Igbo king, who features in virtually all Nollywood epics but who is a minor player in the historical record. Drawing on the NTA's adaptation of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*—a

thirteen-episode miniseries that first aired in 1986—I demonstrate that Nollywood invests the image of a strong-willed, prominent man with fantasies of sovereign power. Those fantasies appear in Nollywood epics, such as *Igodo: Land of the Living Dead* (1999), which have received some attention from scholars but have rarely been the subject of close, extended critique. My readings suggest that if the nation cannot directly participate in the liberal world order, Nollywood epics have recourse to an invented past where sovereignty from outside influences may have been chaotic but was nevertheless enjoyed.

The first three chapters of part 2 draw on moments of free indirect subjectivity that are relatively straightforward: the image or the sound momentarily entering the dual perspectives of narrator and character. However, Nigerian comedies offer examples of something very different. In chapter 6 I examine *Basi and Company*, one of the most successful situation comedies in NTA history (1986–1990), which made use of a mirror, placed strategically in one of the principal sets, to provide a secondary perspective on the action of the show. One of the writers for *Basi and Company* (and sometimes an actor in the series), Nkem Owoh, went on to become Nollywood's premier comic icon. Conspiratorial mirrors also feature in some of his most beloved and successful films, including *Osuofia in London* (2003) and *The Master* (2004), which have both been studied extensively. All three primary texts tackle the issue of official corruption but in remarkably different ways. I argue that although *Basi and Company* invites its spectator-subjects to regulate their own collaborative roles in political corruption and remain skeptical of their own desires—perfectly in line with periliberal thinking—Nollywood comedies seem to revel in turning the tables, accusing the liberal world order of greedily preying upon and actively denying modernity to people who not only desire it but without whom it would never have been possible in the first place. Therefore, the comic mode of address is the most critical of periliberal subjectivity. Nollywood comedies may be addressed to indirect subjects, but indirect subjection does not necessarily rule out critical engagement with the spatial configurations of modernity.

Indeed, Nollywood's remarkable sincerity about the morality of modernity is itself a kind of criticism. Although it is overstating the case to characterize Nollywood as a clean break from statist postcolonial ambitions, it is equally overstating the case to say that Nollywood fully reproduces state governmentality. Rather, linking Nollywood's modes of address to those of the (gatekeeper) state suggests that Nollywood contributes to a form of social organization that makes it possible to

endure periliberalism. In the end, it is not necessarily incumbent upon Nollywood—as it might be incumbent upon the state—to resist the liberal world order or ease Nigeria into it; rather, the liberal world order itself needs fundamental reformation—if not outright overthrow—so that its most illiberal features, especially its tendency toward indirect subjection, no longer serve as its ongoing justification and *raison d'être*. Reading and rereading Nollywood reiterates just how unjust liberalism continues to be.

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1. The director of the film is sometimes listed as “Vic Mordi,” which is a pseudonym that Obi-Rapu assumed in order to circumvent state television policies against working in the informal sector.

2. This is Rick Altman’s term. See “Sound Space.”

3. See Pasolini, “The Cinema of Poetry,” 558.

4. See Schwartz, “Typewriter,” 131.

5. Schwartz, 124.

6. See Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics*, 137–74. For a discussion focused on African screen media, see also Carmela Garritano’s analysis of a “presentational mode of address” that features in some Ghanaian video films. Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 115, 127.

7. See Agbibo, “‘God’s Time Is the Best.’”

8. “Video film” may seem a contradiction in terms, apparently designating the combination of two media technologies. However, “film” in this formulation stands in for “feature-length film,” the hegemonic form in global cinema. Therefore, what built Nollywood were feature-length films made with video technology. Many Nigerians also refer to the same objects as “home videos” because they were designed for home viewing, not because they were made in the home.

9. The term *Nollywood* was coined in a *New York Times* article. See Norimitsu Onishi, “Step Aside, L.A. and Bombay, for Nollywood,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2002, accessed January 13, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2002/09/16/world/step-aside-la-and-bombay-for-nollywood.html. For more on the politics of the name “Nollywood,” see Haynes, “Nollywood: What’s in a Name.”

10. One study even claims that Nollywood is the second-most-productive film industry on Earth. See “Nollywood Rivals Bollywood in Film/Video Production.”

11. For more on “governmentality,” or the process by which individuals assume the mentality of government, unofficially managing and regulating themselves and others as officials might, see Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*.

12. This book’s focus on southern Nigeria derives in large part from the meanings associated with the term *Nollywood*. The northern Nigerian film industry, though similarly

based on video filmmaking and contributing to Nigeria's vast production numbers, is organized very differently, both professionally and aesthetically. Its practitioners often refer to their industry as "Kannywood," after the center of production, the massive city of Kano. Many northerners may consume southern Nigerian ("Nollywood") films, but many if not most of the North's filmmakers do not consider themselves part of Nollywood. Nollywood is therefore primarily a southern phenomenon, and a history of northern Nigerian screen media—which I am not capable of producing—would likely tell a slightly different story about Nigeria's relationship to the world.

13. See Rivero, *Broadcasting Modernity*.

14. Shipley, Comaroff, and Mbembe, "Africa in Theory," 658–59.

15. The British case receives more attention in this book, but the French case is equally important. See, for example, Kohn, "Empire's Law."

16. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 46.

17. Some useful examples of liberal imperialism/imperial liberalism scholarship include a collection of essays edited by Muthu, *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, as well as Bell, *Reordering the World*. See also Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*; and Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter History*.

18. Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 38, 2.

19. Mantena, 12.

20. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*. In some cases the zones were drawn so that members of one African society oversaw the subjects of other African societies, further complicating the process of indirection. See Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy*.

21. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 3.

22. Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 27.

23. Lenin, *Imperialism*.

24. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 57.

25. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

26. Ince, "Primitive Accumulation," 106.

27. Ince, *Colonial Capitalism*.

28. Brennan, "The Economic Image-Function of the Periphery," 113.

29. Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 182, 172.

30. Compare Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*.

31. See Hall's masterful evaluation of Gramsci's thought in "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," 19.

32. For more on the "world systems" approach to liberalism in world history, see Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV*.

33. For a useful overview of Foucault's thought on the subject, see Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-politics:'"

34. For a particularly generative description of neoliberal subjectivity in relation to television, as well as overarching processes of governmentality that inform even commercial television in the global North, see Weber, *Makeover TV*.

35. W. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 94.

36. Ferguson, *Global Shadows*.

37. For insightful reviews of the ideas that Foucault and Butler have contributed to the discussion of subjectivity and agency, see Dews, "Power and Subjectivity in

Foucault”; and Magnus, “The Unaccountable Subject.” Bourdieu’s ideas on this issue are perhaps best articulated in the chapter “Structures, *Habitus*, Practices” in *The Logic of Practice*, 52–65.

38. Thomas, “Historicizing Agency,” 325.
39. de Bruijn, van Dijk, and Gewald, *Strength beyond Structure*.
40. Here, I am self-consciously but derisively invoking Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, although it is not central to my argument.
41. Adejunmobi, “Neoliberal Rationalities in Old and New Nollywood,” 33–34.
42. Garritano, *African Video Movies and Global Desires*, 15, 11.
43. Garritano, 11.
44. Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 170–73.
45. I am using the American edition, published in 2000. Haynes, *Nigerian Video Films*, 8.
46. Larkin, “Hausa Dramas and the Rise of Video Culture in Nigeria,” 219.
47. See Obaseki, “Nigerian Video as the ‘Child of Television.’”
48. McCall, “The Capital Gap,” 11.
49. Bud, “The End of Nollywood’s Guilded Age?”
50. For more on the changing nature of Nollywood’s relationship to formal capitalism, see Haynes, “Neoliberalism, Nollywood, and Lagos.”
51. McCall, “The Capital Gap,” 11.

CHAPTER ONE: SUBJECTS OF INDIRECT RULE

1. Rice, “Exhibiting Africa,” 121.
2. National Archives, Ibadan, Nigeria, Colonial Secretary’s Office, 25/146, “Proposal for Producing Cinematograph Films,” March 25, 1922.
3. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 18.
4. Frankema, Williamson, and Woltjer, “An Economic Rationale for the African Scramble.”
5. Barnhart, “Status Competition and Territorial Aggression.”
6. See Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914–1940*; Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*; and Gächter, “Finance Capital and Peasants in Colonial West Africa.”
7. See Mamdani, *Define and Rule*.
8. See Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 21–55, for more on the “crisis of liberal imperialism.”
9. Maine, *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions*, 392–93, also cited in Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 131.
10. Lyall, “Life and Speeches of Sir Henry Maine,” 290, also cited in Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 166, and Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 21.
11. Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 150.
12. Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 2–3, originally argued in Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.
13. Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West*, 215, also cited in Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 11.
14. Nwabughuogu, “The Role of Propaganda,” 86.
15. Nwabughuogu, 91.