A religion of film. Experiencing Christianity and videos beyond semiotics in rural Benin

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Chapter 3:
The Word of God on Film

The three films *Jesus* (1979), *La Solution* (1994) and *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002) are very different in many respects. Yet, they have all been made with the goal of evangelism, and missionaries and churches have incorporated them into their activities in the Commune of Cobly in northwestern Benin. The films are thus part of the global Christian film scene, which has always existed in the shadow of mainstream cinema. Furthermore, its products are often informally circulated through structures that operate parallel to commercial film distribution. As a result, the history of Christian films and their development has been insufficiently documented, and scholars have neglected their study. For the USA, Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke recently observed that "very few [scholars], if any, have specifically identified the role that Protestant films have played in constructing culture" (2011: xii) and Asonzeh Ukah noted for West Africa that the "relationship between the Pentecostal upsurge in the last two decades of the twentieth century and video production, circulation and consumption remains an unexplored field" (2005: 286).

This makes it difficult to estimate the exact global importance of Christian films, their role in mission and evangelism, as well as the extent and impact they have on those who watch them. I show in this chapter that Christian films are increasingly important at both local and global levels. Indeed, they have become a crucial part of Christianity, especially in its Pentecostalised varieties, and may even have become more important than the Bible, which they sometimes visualise and on which they build.

In this chapter I describe, discuss and analyse the three films, as well as their circulation and use. I am specifically interested in the idea and practice of using films in evangelism and the resulting transnational flows that link the American Christian film industry with its Nigerian counterpart. While I seek to contribute to the study of film evangelism in West Africa, and more specifically in Benin, I recognise that many gaps remain. In spite of this, I consider it crucial to provide

background information on the three films in order to set the scene for studying how they work for specific audiences, something I pursue in Chapter 5.

All three films show Christianity in various ways. In fact, religion and film have been habitual bedfellows since the new medium's invention. Film provides an excellent medium to present religion and to visualise the transcendent, often through the use of lighting, montage tricks and special effects.

Jesus films were among the first commercially produced films. Within a decade of their appearance, they were shown in most parts of the world. Today, Jesus films continue to be made mainly in the USA and Europe and enjoy a global appeal. The *Jesus Film* discussed in this chapter is a prime example of this genre (see, e.g., Kinnard and Davis 1992; Malone 2012; Reinhartz 2007; Tatum 2004; Walsh 2003).

Since its production for global evangelism in 1979, *Jesus* has become the flagship of film evangelism and is now viewed as the most watched and most translated film in history. The apparent success of the *Jesus Film* largely depends on evangelical Christians, especially in America, who have been willing to finance it as a global venture. To achieve this, the Jesus Film Project of Campus Crusade for Christ as good as canonised the *Jesus Film*, thus rendering it into *The Jesus Film*, the Word of God on film that is now often accepted as equal to Scripture. Through this move, the film was made a prime tool for global evangelism, at least in the eyes of those who promote it. In spite of this, I will show that the *Jesus Film* is essentially an American cultural product that builds on Christian art that developed in the early and medieval church.

From the 1940s onwards the American Christian film industry started to produce dramatic films that showed the advantages of a Christian life and how the agentive Word of God impacts the life of people. Such films were also increasingly made for global mission with *La Solution* (1994) being a good example of this development. Baptist missionaries made this film in Côte d'Ivoire following a local story. Especially since the 1960s, mission films were often produced for evangelism in the country for which they have been destined. They are typical in that they build on the missionary heritage and legacy, but nonetheless try to account for local particularities. By directly linking Christianity with modernisation, how-

ever, makers of such mission films remained committed to what I call the aesthetics of colonial modernity.

Meanwhile, the idea of showing religion in film has been truly globalised well beyond Christianity (see, e.g., Plate 2003b). In 1910, for example, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke watched a Jesus film in Bombay and was inspired to start making films of Hindu mythology. Phalke is generally seen as the father of the Indian film industry, which still regularly incorporates religious themes, including Hindu mythology and the Christian Gospels, and further incorporates religious aspects in Bollywood's characteristic song and dance sequences. For some Hindus, watching explicitly religious films or television serials in a worshipful way has even come to replace the reading of holy books and participating in public worship (Bakker 2007, 2009; Friesen 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Dwyer 2006; Gillespie 1995a, 1995b; Mankekar 1999, 2002; Wenner 2002).

The third and most recent major global film industry developed in Nigeria since the late 1980s. Its video films are characterised by the visualisation of the usually unseen. Nollywood, as the Nigerian video film industry has come to be called (Haynes 2007b), is having a significant impact throughout Africa and has even achieved global appeal. It is a multifaceted industry that is distinguished through its dynamics of constantly adapting to ever changing circumstances (Barrot 2008, 2011; Haynes 2000, 2007a, 2011; J. Haynes 2012; Krings and Okome 2013; Larkin 2008: 168-216; Şaul and Austen 2010). Part of the Nollywood phenomenon is the production of explicitly Christian video films, of which the Beninese *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002) is an excellent example. The film has a genealogical link with *La Solution*, but is also distinct, as it is thoroughly Pentecostalised. As is typical of Nollywood, *Yatin* makes abundant use of special effects to show how occult powers operate, mainly through witches. In *Yatin*, they fight against a Pentecostal pastor, thereby staging a "spiritual warfare" that has become common in Pentecostalism. The film ends, as does *La Solution*, with a triumphant Christian victory.

Religion and film are not only linked through their content. In a wave of renewed interest in the relation between the two, various scholars are currently engaged in studying how film and religion share direct structural, ritual, narrative, experiential and even material similarities (see, e.g., Lindvall 2007: 203-223;

Lyden 2003; J. Merz 2014; Plate 2008; Stout 2012). In bringing the religious to film, as is the case for the three Christian films I discuss in this chapter, the medium further supports and reinforces their religious messages. In this sense Christian films participate in shaping the worlds of those who watch them not only thanks to their content, but also due to the nature of the medium and its material mediation – a topic that will preoccupy me in the rest of the book.

Pastors, evangelists and missionaries quickly recognised the religious potential of film and their apparent advantages for communicating the Gospel to people around the globe. This contributes to a shift in Christianity from the written Word of God to the visualised Word on film, a trend that global film evangelism particularly promotes. Since this form of evangelism is foundational to the circulation of all three films I want to address it before looking at the three films in more detail.

Global Film Evangelism

With *La Passion du Christ* (1897) and *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (1898), Jesus films were among the first commercially produced films and continue to be made today (Bakker 2004, 2009; Kinnard and Davis 1992; Malone 2012; Tatum 2004; Reinhartz 2007; Walsh 2003). Maybe, more importantly, biblical films made by Protestants not only advanced and shaped the new medium but also came to form the backbone of an early Christian film industry. This movement that Lindvall (2007) calls "sanctuary cinema" promoted the use of silent and non-commercial films in church education and evangelism both in the USA and abroad.

Lindvall traces the idea of using films for evangelism back to journalist, attorney and evangelist, Colonel H. Hadley, who, after seeing the first two filmed passion plays in 1898, already "prophetically foresaw film's enormous proselytizing possibilities" (2007: 58). Indeed, film promised a universal language that could be understood across the globe and that could serve as an ideal medium to transmit a message (Carey 1989). Furthermore, it would encourage the establishment of the Kingdom of God, mainly by reversing the effects of linguistic confusion as recounted in the biblical account of the Tower of Babel (Lindvall 2007: 93, 123, 194, 206; Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 8; Morgan 2007: 179; Noble 1999 [1997]: 155; Schultze 1990: 31). Similarly, Americans made utopian predictions

of human unity or world peace after the invention of the telegraph (Sconce 2000: 22), and when television became prevalent in American homes of the 1950s (Spigel 1992: 112).

This demonstrates the enormous and uncritical faith of many Americans, and especially evangelicals, in technology, which itself has been intertwined with religion (de Vries 2001; Noble 1999 [1997]; Sconce 2000; R. O. Moore 2000). More specifically, many evangelicals believe that film significantly speeds up global evangelism, that it is more effective than words in communicating the Gospel, that it attracts large crowds and that it reduces the need for sending missionaries abroad (Bakker 2004: 314; Behrend 2003: 133; Hendershot 2004; Lindvall 2007: 13; Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 8; Morgan 2007: 14, 181; Schultze 1990, 1996; Spigel 1992: 110-115). At the same time, however, film and television have also been controversial in Christian circles, especially since they were perceived as posing a threat to Christian morals (see, e.g., J. Mitchell 2005; Reynolds 2010: 461; Schultze 1996; Spigel 1992: 46-47).

The Salvation Army is the first known organisation to have used film to advance their work in Australia in 1899 (Lindvall 2007: 56-57; Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 15-16), while Wilson Carlile followed suit in his London church (Bottomore 2002). By 1920, many churches in the USA accepted films as part of their Sunday evening services, itinerant evangelists brought Christian films to rural areas and missionaries took them on their trips around the globe (Lindvall 2007: 92, 115, 160, 188).

In 1927 Cecil B. DeMille made *The King of Kings*, a Jesus film that had wide appeal. It was distributed globally and missionaries used it extensively, partly to counteract what they thought to be Hollywood's morally corrupting effects (Bakker 2004; Lindvall 2007: 193-194; Tatum 2004: 49), an idea that was also shared by colonial officials in British Africa (Ambler 2001: 83; Davis 1936; Skinner 2001). During the silent film era the new medium already became thoroughly transnational, both through commercial cinema and the efforts of missionaries.

By the end of the 1920s, the Christian film industry in the USA could no longer meet the churches' demands for new films. In addition, the advent of sound films meant that neither producers nor consumers could make the investment

needed for new technologies in the face of the Depression. The sanctuary cinema movement had come to an end.

It was only during the 1940s that the Christian film industry picked up again. Several US production companies came into existence varying from amateurish enterprises to the more professional and prolific World Wide Pictures of Billy Graham or Irwin S. Moon's Moody Institute of Science. The new sound films shifted their focus to drama, biographies and scientific films that showed the advantages and values of a Christian life (Hendershot 2004; Lindvall and Quicke 2011; Orgeron and Elsheimer 2007).

In a further trend, different denominations started their own film production and distribution. Among them was the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest evangelical denomination in the USA that sends over 5,000 full-time missionaries abroad (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 24, 105-107; Wuthnow and Offutt 2008: 217). While SBC has been known for its conservative, critical and moralistic view of Hollywood and secular culture (Schultze 1996; Trammell 2012), they justified their move into film production by claiming that films "'must be converted by the church' rather than abandoned to pagans" (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 105). In setting up their own media production, they followed the trend of American evangelical media production. Eventually, such media also made their way into mainstream secular American culture, following Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority (Harding 2000; Hendershot 2004).

In the 1950s the Foreign (and later International) Mission Board of the SBC entered film production for world mission and became interested in providing films in the national languages of the countries they worked in. Being one of the largest mission organisations, they later partnered with Campus Crusade for Christ for the global distribution of the *Jesus Film* and significantly contributed to its success thanks to their large international distribution network (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 107-108, 192-193).

By 1960, there was an extensive transnational network of mission organisations that often used mobile film units to show films to a wide range of people across the globe, even though it was still a costly enterprise (Ogawa and Rossmann 1961). USA-based Christian film production companies, such as Ken Anderson's International Films or Tom Hotchkiss' Films Afield started their work in the

1960s and 1970s respectively and they sought to cooperate with existing mission organisations and individuals for the circulation of their products. Like the SBC, these newer organisations focused on the production of dramatic evangelistic films that they made in the countries for which they were destined. Especially International Films specialised in using local crews and actors, while finances and film directors continued to come from the USA (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 189-192).

Such newer postcolonial initiatives must have been influenced by the mission initiated and pioneering Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKA). The well-known and influential project ran in East Africa from 1935 to 1937 and had as its goal "to determine how Africans with no prior exposure to the cinemas would respond to the medium" (Burns 2000: 203; see also Ambler 2001: 91; Burke 2002: 43; Davis 1936: 33; Obiaya 2011: 133; Skinner 2001; Ukadike 1994). Being based on racist colonial theories of Africans' supposedly limited intellectual and interpretive ability, the BEKA tried to adjust and simplify their educational films accordingly, resulting in boring, unimaginative and unpopular products (Fair 2010: 111-113). By the 1950s, as West Africa prepared for independence, racist theories proved increasingly invalid (Burns 2000) and missionary filmmaking accounted for this by shifting their attention to dramatic films, drawing more and more on modernisation narratives that were current at the time.

The recent popularisation of the video format in West Africa, especially in digital form (Adesanya 2000; Ambler 2002: 119; Garritano 2008; Larkin 2000), has further boosted evangelicals' and Pentecostals' interest in the audiovisual media. Churches could now show videos quite easily and many began to show American Christian films (see, e.g., Garritano 2008: 25; Marshall-Fratani 1998: 293). Thanks to rapidly developing digital projection technology, missionaries and evangelists find it increasingly easy to take equipment even to the remotest areas.

While the consumption of Christian audiovisual media has thus been popularised transnationally, it also became a lot easier and cheaper to make, reproduce and distribute video films of reasonable quality. This allowed the establishment of Christian video film production outside the USA. Christian films have become so important in Nigeria that Zylstra recently declared it the "Christian movie capital of the world" (2009) with an estimated 20% of Nollywood's considerable output

being explicitly Christian. Such films are locally financed, written, acted, directed, edited and produced. They are often made in English in order to have a wider appeal and are sometimes subtitled or dubbed into French and distributed throughout Africa and beyond via their ever-growing networks.[22]

Today, global Christian film production and its use in evangelism and mission enjoy unprecedented possibilities and evangelicals and Pentecostals unabatedly perpetuate their faith in the salvific potential of audiovisual technology. The media flagship of evangelistic superlatives, the *Jesus Film*, is now increasingly recognised as a major contributor to religious transnational flows (Noll 2009; Wuthnow and Offutt 2008: 223), which I now discuss in further detail.

Jesus: *From Film to Global Evangelistic Tool*

The film *Jesus* (1979, produced by John Heyman)[23] follows the genre of other Jesus films among which it does not stand out as special in any particular cinematographic way. What distinguishes the *Jesus Film* is that it has been turned into an evangelistic tool and praised "as one of the greatest evangelistic success stories of all time" (Boyd 1999: 14). It is now claimed to be "the most-watched, and the most-translated film in world history" (Eshleman 2002: 69; see also Dart 2001: 27; Tatum 2004: 174; Wood 2007). According to the Jesus Film Project, the film has been dubbed into 1214 languages, making it accessible to 91% of the world's population in their mother tongue. Billions have seen the film (including multiple viewing), of whom over 200 million are claimed to have "indicated decisions for Christ following a film showing".[24] In this section I plot the history of the *Jesus Film*, discuss it as a cultural product and analyse how it has achieved its claimed success by raising it to the status of Scripture.

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[22] Nollywood is increasingly popular both in Africa and at a more global level (see, e.g., Adeniyi 2008; P. Jenkins 2008; Krings and Okome 2013; Ogunleye 2003a, 2003b; Oha 2000, 2002; Ojo 2005; Okome 2007; Okuyade 2011; Ugochukwu 2009; Ugor 2007: 17-18; Ukah 2003, 2005, 2012).

[23] The *Jesus Film* is more readily associated with its producer, John Heyman, who seems to have had a bigger influence on the film than its two directors, Peter Sykes and John Krish.

[24] According to the Official Ministry Statistics for April 1, 2014 supplied by the Jesus Film Project as presented on their website http://www.jesusfilm.org/film-and-media/statistics/statistics, accessed on 14 August, 2014. The same site, accessed on 25 June 2013, claimed that over 6 billion people had seen the *Jesus Film*. I have noticed that, generally, their stastics have become less specific over the years.

History and Production of the *Jesus Film*

The story of the *Jesus Film* goes back to the American Bill Bright (1921-2003), who founded Campus Crusade for Christ in 1951 as an organisation to win the Los Angeles campus of the University of California for Christ. His new ministry quickly grew, expanded into other areas of evangelism, and has since become one of the word's largest parachurch organisations. Its name was abbreviated to "Cru" in 2011. Cru retains a strong evangelistic and global focus that can be situated in mainstream American evangelical Christianity. Together with the likes of Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts and Pat Robertson, Bill Bright is recognised as one of the principal evangelical leaders of late twentieth century America (Harding 2000: 18-19; J. G. Turner 2008: 2).

In Bright's official biography, Michael Richardson (2000: 167; cf. Eshleman 2002: 68) traces the idea of a film on the life of Jesus back to 1945, when the Christian film industry made its comeback in the USA. Other sources report that Bright had a vision in either 1947 or 1950 of a feature length, biblically accurate film on the life of Jesus that could be used to evangelise millions worldwide (Boyd 1999: 16; Eshleman 1985: 7). Such ideas are as old as film itself and seem to have been popularised in the sanctuary cinema movement of the 1920s (see above). Bright approached Cecil B. DeMille, director of the earlier highly successful *The King of Kings* (1927), to realise his project, but nothing came of it. It took another 30 years before the project started to unfold, when John Heyman, a British film producer of German Jewish background, presented himself to Bright. Heyman wanted to discuss his recent work for the Genesis Project, his new production company whose goal was to film the entire Bible accurately. Heyman presented parts of Genesis and two chapters of Luke that he had already filmed. Bill Bright and Paul Eshleman, who was to become the director of Cru's Jesus Film Project, were impressed and decided to work with Heyman on a film depicting the life of Jesus (Tatum 2004: 165; J. G. Turner 2008: 181-182).

Under the guidance of Eshleman and John Heyman, and with the help of over 450 scholars and leaders from a variety of secular and Christian organisations, work began on the challenging task to fulfil Bright's vision (Eshleman 1985: 45-54). Richardson assures his readers of Bright and Eshleman's "intense and scrupulous requirements that the movie adhere to Luke's gospel… [so] that all the Chris-

tian world would have a trusted, cross-cultural tool for mass exposure of the life of Christ to anyone" (2000: 168). Peter Sykes and John Krish directed the full-length feature film on location at over 200 sites in Israel using a cast of over 5000 actors of Yemenite-Jewish or Moroccan background (Dart 2001: 27; Eshleman 1985: 50, 2002: 68). The British Shakespearean actor Brian Deacon portrayed Jesus.

Warner Brothers took on the *Jesus Film* for commercial distribution while Cru retained the distribution rights for areas that were not commercially feasible under the label of "Inspirational Films". *Jesus* was released on 19 October 1979 in 250 cinemas across the USA. It received mixed reviews and only recovered half of the total production costs of six million dollars. The deficit was paid for through a single private guarantee that had been pledged beforehand (Dart 2001: 27, 29; Tatum 2004: 174; J. G. Turner 2008: 183). In 1981, Eshleman launched the Jesus Film Project for Campus Crusade for Christ with the ambitious "mission to show the 'Jesus' film to every person in the world in an understandable language and in a setting near where they live" (Eshleman 2002: 69).

Unwrapping the *Jesus Film*

Jesus films can be considered to constitute their own genre, as they have their specific characteristics and problems. As with any film, they are culturally specific products that also show the ideology of their makers (Walsh 2003; see also Bakker 2004: 330; Bakker 2009: 47-50; Peperkamp 2005; Tatum 2004). Together with other Bible-based films, Jesus films follow a biblically predetermined and often well-known story that cannot supply a complete script, but must be visualised and adapted to film in significant ways (Flesher and Torry 2004; Hope 1975; D. B. Howell 2007; Reinhartz 2007; Walsh 2003: 22-23). This is necessarily done within the established conventions of the relevant film industry, which, for most Jesus films, including *Jesus*, is Hollywood. David Shepherd (2008) and Peter Malone (2012) have noted that Jesus films are not limited to Hollywood, which is most notably evident in four different Jesus films produced in India (Bakker 2007, 2009: 216-229; Friesen 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 198-201). In spite of this, Hollywood has established "a culturally unmarked 'norm' for

filmmaking" (Gray 2010: 99) and continues to dominate the global film scene (see, e.g., Dyer 1997; J. Ellis 1992: 209-210; Wuthnow and Offutt 2008: 226).

As a result, photographic images of various Aryan-like Jesuses (P. Jenkins 2002: 6) have travelled the world and audiences now often find in Jesus films a Jesus whom they recognise, and who feels natural, real, and credible (Flesher and Torry 2004: 12; Morgan 2012: 206). It is thus necessary to unwrap the apparent neutrality of the *Jesus Film* by looking at it as a specifically American product (Kwon 2010; Peperkamp 2005: 356), and by focussing on visual aspects of the film and the rhetorics that surround it.

The *Jesus Film* includes in its opening credits the following statement: "A documentary taken entirely from the Gospel of Luke". The makers of *Jesus* asserted this on the basis of claiming to have paid careful attention to render their film as historically and archeologically accurate as possible (Bakker 2004: 324), something that Christians of different backgrounds have come to value (Peperkamp 2005; G. West 2004: 128). Contemporary New Testament scholars, on the other hand, argue that such historicity is a myth (G. West 2004) and that "claims for authenticity and historicity [of Jesus films] are naïve" (Reinhartz 2006: 2; see also Peperkamp 2005: 356). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that historical reconstructions always fall short of being able to portray how it "really" was (Hodge and Kress 1988: 163; Iedema 2001: 191). Rather than accepting the *Jesus Film* as historically accurate, I understand it is an interpretive reconstruction and dramatisation of how Jesus' life might have been according to the Gospel of Luke from the perspective of American evangelicalism of the 1970s.

This does not hinder Christians, regardless of their theological or cultural backgrounds, to consider the historicity of their faith as important in the sense that the biblical accounts reflect real events (Peperkamp 2005; G. West 2004: 128). For most Christians the narrative history, of which they see themselves part, is linear and God-given. It begins with Creation and the Fall, which necessitates the unfolding of a salvation narrative that culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. These pivotal events that define Christian identity are presented in the *Jesus Film*. The Jesus Film Project's affirmation of the historicity of *Jesus*, even though it is not tenable by current academic opinions, feeds on the historical

interest of many Christians, setting it apart from fiction and rendering it more authoritative (Flesher and Torry 2004: 9).

In the interest of historical accuracy, the makers of the *Jesus Film* mainly chose actors who were Yemenite or Moroccan Jews. The Englishman Brian Deacon, however, played Jesus. Eshleman explains: "Deacon had been selected to play the part of Christ because he so effortlessly portrayed Jesus on the screen. His mannerisms and delivery were excellent, his speech impeccable" (1985: 59). Accordingly, viewers of the *Jesus Film* see a white Jesus with long slightly wavy brown hair and a beard. By incarnating the image of Jesus as appropriated by early European Christians and which had been established in Western art as the "true" or even "real" likeness of Jesus, the character played by Deacon is instantly and indisputably recognisable as Jesus (Finaldi 2000: 74-103; Morgan 1998: 38-39, 2012: 59, 206; cf. P. Jenkins 2002: 6).

Roy Kinnard and Tim Davis (1992: 14) affirm that the visual inspiration for Jesus films came directly from Renaissance and baroque paintings (see also Bakker 2009: 57; Morgan 2007: 168, 175; Reinhartz 2007: 7). Going further back in time, Gabriele Finaldi (2000: 8-43) and Freek Bakker (2009: 62) show that during the first centuries Christian art was exclusively symbolic. There are no known pictures or descriptions of Jesus' appearance that had been made during his lifetime. The earliest pictures of Jesus were often modelled on Roman or Greek gods. In the sixth century, in Byzantine Christianity, an image appeared that showed an imprint of Christ's face. The "Mandylion of Edessa", as it came to be called, was supposed to have miraculously appeared on a cloth after it had contact with Jesus' face and was "not made by human hand" (Cameron 1983). It became a relic and object of veneration and more importantly for the present discussion, started to define Christ's "true likeness". Western Christianity followed suit with its version of the same phenomenon. The now lost original "Veronica" dates back to at least 1200 and was housed at St Peter's in Rome (Clark 2007; Kuryluk 1991). The Veronica was widely reproduced and closely resembles the Mandylion of Edessa. Both early images of Christ's "true likeness" tended to be understood as relics that transmaterially identified the image or icon with the presence and power of Christ (Morgan 2012: 55-67). Both images influenced Christian art through the Renaissance to this day and have informed more recent portraits of Christ. Warner Sall-

man's *Head of Christ* (1940), for example, quickly became popular among American Protestants who sometimes accepted it in a transmaterial way for standing for Christ himself and by supplying talismanic protection (Morgan 1998: 4, 50, 172, 196; see also Dyer 1997: 68; McDannell 1995: 189-193; Morgan 2003, 2007: 209; Reinhartz 2007: 48-49). This "interpretation of an ongoing tradition of imaging Jesus", as David Morgan (1998: 38) put it, also became part the genre of Jesus films.

The whiteness of Jesus in Heyman's film is significant both in terms of colour and light. Richard Dyer (1997: 67) has observed that in medieval religious art Jesus, as well as Mary, is often painted in a pure white that contrasts with the people surrounding them. As I have already implied, the same is true in the *Jesus Film*. Jesus, thanks to his relatively fair complexion, often stands out from the crowd. In the first half of the film Jesus' clothes are off-white, accentuating this to some degree. Then, during the transfiguration almost half way through the film (Luke 9: 28-36), his cloths turn properly white and mainly stay that way until the end of the film, making him even more prominent. The general use of lighting in the *Jesus Film* is equally subtle but effective. It follows the Hollywood conventions of coming from above and sometimes from the back, which is itself based on Western art (Dyer 1997: 116-117, 125). When Jesus is shown inside a room, he is the focus of lighting, making him appear whiter than his surroundings. This is particularly marked during the scene of the Last Supper (Luke 22: 7-38). Jesus wears white clothes and takes the spatial and luminous centre of the composed picture. The disciples and areas around him remain in shadow. When Jesus stands up to distribute the bread and wine, his face moves into the shade while his head is lit up from the back rendering his hair halo-like, an effect also known from Sallman's *Head of Christ*. This use of lighting conforms to the Hollywood conventions for expressing spiritual and even ethereal qualities (Dyer 1997: 127). In terms of lighting, the film then takes a more subdued stance for Christ's arrest and death, culminating in a shot of Jesus on the cross that closely resembles Salvador Dalí's painting *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* (1951). When Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24: 36-49), the same lighting techniques from the scene of the Last Supper are employed again, bringing the film's narrative of triumph to its visual conclusion.

Light and whiteness, as well as filmic translucence, are thus crucial visual symbols of the film. Not only do they express holiness and divinity, especially of Jesus, but they also place Jesus in the visual centre of scenes as it is also known from Byzantine art (van Leeuwen 2005: 207). Furthermore, every time angels appear, namely during the annunciation (Luke 1: 26-38), to the shepherds (Luke 2: 8-20), when Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22: 39-46) and in the empty tomb (Luke 24: 1-12), intense light emerges from behind the silhouetted messengers of God, from where it falls like spotlights on the people to whom the angels appear. This effect was achieved by the "powerful floodlights and spotlights" (Eshleman 1985: 52) that were used during the filming. Light, of course, is itself a biblical metaphor to express the agency of the divine and holiness, and when it comes from above, that is from heaven as a place of light, the metaphor is stressed further (Dyer 1997: 108, 118). The filmic lighting accentuates Jesus' whiteness, which itself metaphorically stands for perfection, and which symbolises the Christian enlightenment that came to be identified with Europe and the West. Whether in European religious art or in the *Jesus Film*, Christ is often portrayed as "[t]he supreme embodiment of Western humanity" (Dyer 1997: 118).

In sum, the way Jesus is represented in Heyman's film has much more to do with Western art and European symbolism than with any form of its claimed historic accuracy (see also Kwon 2010). There have been recent attempts to break the whiteness of Jesus by letting black actors play Jesus in the South African *Son of Man* (2006) and the American *Color of the Cross* (2006, Bakker 2009; Gilmour 2009; Malone 2012; D. J. N. Middleton and Plate 2011). These films, however, as well as other attempts to Africanise Jesus, did not have a significant impact in Africa, nor do evangelical missionaries use them in their activities, mainly due to their theological unorthodoxy. In general, then, the imagery of a white Jesus continues to circulate transnationally and is also present in northwestern rural Benin through Jesus films as well as posters and calendars imported from Nigeria, Ghana and beyond (cf. Gocking 2009; Gullestad 2007: 261-262; B. Meyer 2010b: 113-116; Robbins 2004a: 174; Spyer 2008: 22).

Moving beyond Jesus' visual appearance to the way his behaviour is portrayed, it seems that the makers of *Jesus* tried to remain as neutral, and for that reason as inexpressive, as they could. Such an approach helps to avoid offending

potential viewers and is another typical trait of many Jesus films (Reinhartz 2006: 3). Heyman's *Jesus* thus presents us with a static and portrait-like rendering of Jesus who is a friendly and essentially human person, but whose feelings appear flat (Bakker 2004: 327-328; cf. Malone 2012: 91) and who does not come over "as a person of great spiritual awareness or well-defined purpose" (Charette 2005: 361). Accordingly, Bakker claims that the film "never becomes more than a Sunday School film" (2009: 34). In the film, Jesus moves from scene to scene in a pageant-like manner. Particularly during the time of his ministry, which starts with his baptism and ends with his arrest (Luke 3: 1 to 22: 46), he is depicted as exemplary and immaculate, merging the conventions of Hollywood with the evangelical pietistic tradition to the point of sentimentality (R. F. Marshall 1999). This creates an image of human distance and difference, but nonetheless of captivating attraction. The film, Ronald Marshall has argued, "encourages us to feel sorry for him and so believe in him too" (1999: 51). This is what the Jesus Film Project aims to achieve and it does so by reinforcing its Bible-based film with a pro- and epilogue in which it makes its evangelical and conservative Protestant theology more explicit. Accordingly, the prologue sets the scene by quoting from the Gospel of John (3:16-17), the passage that evangelicals often identify as the quintessence of the Gospels. At the end, the epilogue passes frame stills from the film with a voice-over by a narrator and the voice of Jesus himself. The epilogue is designed to move people to commit to Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour by eventually joining the narrator in a prayer of commitment (Kwon 2010: 163; Reinhartz 2006: 3, 2007: 28; Tatum 2004: 171). With its evangelistic purpose *Jesus* thus invites its audiences to a private, internalised faith, which is typical of American religious expression in its conversionistic and voluntaristic character (Bakker 2004: 324; Noll 2009: 70; Walsh 2003: 13).

The *Jesus Film* is designed to live up to the expectations of evangelical audiences by claiming historical accuracy, by visualising Jesus in his "true likeness" and by conforming to their theological expectations. All these traits give the film authority and help to make it more accessible, while also breaking with the strict logocentric character of Protestantism that generally lingered until the 1970s (Bakker 2004: 313), and remains present among some Christians today (J. Merz 2010: 123 n.4). But one more step was taken, namely elevating the *Jesus Film*

above other Jesus films by declaring it Scripture and thus according it the same status as the Bible itself (Flesher and Torry 2004: 4).

The *Jesus Film* as the Word of God

In spite of initial logocentric anxieties of portraying Jesus, Protestants and evangelicals quickly adapted to the rise of new media by embracing and exploiting them (see above). The reason for this is founded on "the assumption… that the word can be translated to other media without compromising its accuracy and authority" (Morgan 2003: 108). Brian Malley, however, qualifies this assumption: "The Bible is a text: Bibles must be made out of words. These words may be inscribed in any medium or any encoding scheme whatsoever, but it must be *words* that are so encoded" (2004: 61, italics in original).

If, therefore, media products can be shown to constitute biblically accurate texts, they may be accepted as Scripture. In the film's original English version, the words come from an adaptation of the Good News and King James translations of the Bible. There is no doubt that all words Jesus speaks in the film are represented in Luke's Gospel (Eshleman 1985: 46), but Eshleman (1995: 111) equally recognised that 30% of the film does not come from Luke (cf. Reinhartz 2007: 25, 262 n.216). Not only are there parts that have been omitted, but more importantly there are also scenes that have been changed and added to. The makers of *Jesus* have justified this through their perceived need to be more gender inclusive and less anti-Semitic (Bakker 2004: 325-327; Tatum 2004: 172-173; cf. Eshleman 1985: 47), while R. F. Marshall's (1999) biblical zeal accuses the *Jesus Film* to present a sanitised Gospel that is designed to be more appealing. All this does not hinder Eshleman's declaration that Heyman's *Jesus* is not merely a film but "the Word of God on film" (2002: 72).

In an evangelical understanding, the authoritative, inerrant and divinely inspired Word of God that is identified with the Bible has a stable existence and agency that goes beyond language, specific translations and media (cf. Morgan 2003: 108). This evangelical assumption influences the interplay of presencing principles and how they work out in everyday life. As with any other interplay of the two presencing principles, a specifically evangelical one is never a neat system, as Susan Harding (2000) and especially Vincent Crapanzano (2000) imply.

Malley (2004) has demonstrated that evangelicals' practice of using the Bible is generally much more complex than how they talk about it and views can differ significantly even within one congregation. Talal Asad (2003: 9) confirms Malley's (2004: 111) findings that evangelicals sometimes engage in the exegetical study of the Bible as a historical document, while at other times they read it for personal meditation and devotion by seeking to make it directly relevant to their lives (see also Luhrmann 2012). Each way can be described through the domination of a different presencing principle. While the study of the Bible as a historical text largely follows the semiotic presencing principle, personal meditation on biblical texts is more experiential, thereby drawing on the transmaterial presencing principle (see Chapter 2). This may be the reason why Malley claims that "'God's Word' is not a well-bound concept" (2009: 197), providing it with its characteristic flexibility and malleability.

The typically evangelical interplay of presencing principles tends to accept the Word of God as having an absolute and stable existence beyond human experience, whose transcendent nature has been made accessible in an immanent book. In this way, evangelical Christians mainly perceive the Word of God through the transmaterial presencing principle, providing the Bible with agency and the possibility that the Word can incarnate language and give authority to those who use it, most notably pastors, evangelists and missionaries. For many evangelicals, not only humans, but also science and history need to be submitted to the Word of God. The Word of evangelical presencing thus refuses to be divided into structured signs. It is powerful in itself and can have a direct and immediate impact on somebody who is open to receive it (Coleman 2000: 143-144; Crapanzano 2000; Harding 2000; Malley 2004). Put differently, "it is the Word, the gospel of Jesus Christ, written, spoken, heard, and read, that converts the unbeliever" (Harding 1987: 168).

Eshleman claims that the *Jesus Film* – the Word of God on film – "presents the gospel clearly, greatly reducing the chance of leaving people with misunderstandings" (1985: 122). Such a logocentric position implicitly confirms Clive Marsh's (2004: 100-101) important observation that, especially in Christian circles, the importance of the visual side of film is often insufficiently understood and its communicative potential underestimated (see also Kwon 2010: 13). Eshleman's

(1985, 1995, 2002) rhetorics fit this characterisation and his claims play down, and even actively deny, the communicative role of both the film's visualisations and of media technology:

> I think the number one reason [for the *Jesus Film*'s success] is that it is the Bible – the Scriptures brought to the motion picture screen. The power is not in the cinamatography [*sic*], the presentation or even in the actors, but the power is in the Word of God. Because it stays close to Scripture it can be used like the Bible (Wood 1997: 9).

Therefore, "the film evangelises, edifies, teaches and makes disciples" (Eshleman 1985: 180), which is essentially the same role Paul ascribes to Scripture (2 Timothy 3: 16). Eshleman further claims that the *Jesus Film* "is as timeless as Scripture itself, for that is what it is. It is Scripture brought to life" (1985: 179). Through this identification, Eshleman enlarges Scripture beyond the textual, while he also implies that Scripture as text is associated with an inanimate and material book. The medium of film becomes necessary for instilling Scripture with life and renders it more important and relevant.

I can analyse Eshleman's discourse as playing with the two main presencing principles that I call semiotic and transmaterial. While these two principles can conflict when employed together, they also create an ambiguity that can be rhetorically exploited. Eshleman uses this ambiguity to redraw the borders of the acceptable by affirming the evangelical semiotic and secular view of the Bible as merely being a book without any transmaterial qualities. With Scripture now logically detached from the book, he shifts its transmaterial focus to film. Identifying the *Jesus Film* with Scripture is supported by the logic of their apparent transmaterial likeness, since the medium has a long history of being religious and transmaterial in nature. Scripture can now become alive through moving pictures, which cease to be images in semiotic terms and come to be identified with a kind of transmaterial life through their animation and through the life that Scripture is thought to give (Morgan 2007: 172). In doing so, the *Jesus Film* can become part of the unmediated Word of God, which typifies the evangelical interplay of presencing principles. Since the *Jesus Film* not only contains Scripture, but is also equated with Scripture, it is accorded the divine agency that only the inspired Word of God can have (Engelke 2007: 46).

Although made by men, the film's agency is further justified by its divine origin in Bill Bright's vision (see above; cf. Morgan 2007: 212). The *Jesus Film*, then, is not only inspired by God through the inclusion of Scriptural texts, but it has also been divinely sanctioned. In short: "It is a tool that God has given" (Eshleman 1985: 180). In this way Eshleman follows the tradition of evangelical rhetorics of Jerry Falwell, who constantly entangled his personal narratives with the stories of the Bible to gain authority (Crapanzano 2000: 162-166; Harding 1987, 2000), a practice that has Victorian precedence (Larsen 2011: 108). Eshleman, however, goes further in turning Heyman's *Jesus* into *The Jesus Film* – as the film came to be called in 2000 – (Bakker 2009: 32) by identifying it as the Word of God. Through the *Jesus Film*, Jesus is not only seen (Eshleman 1985); he can even touch us (Eshleman 1995), drawing on the widely recognised similarities of touch and sight (see, e.g., Marks 2000; Morgan 2012). Going even further, the Jesus Film Project claims: "When people watch JESUS in their heart language, they do not merely watch a film – they personally encounter the living God" (2011: 4).

The *Jesus Film* thus authorised, together with a transmission view of communication that contains a message (Carey 1989), allows its evangelical audiences to believe both in its evangelistic effectiveness and its universality. Since evangelicals like Bill Bright commonly teach that the Bible is infallible and true, "and that Christ wanted them to spread his good news too" (Harding 2000: 19), declaring the *Jesus Film* as Scripture simultaneously turns it into a formidable tool for evangelism.

The *Jesus Film* as an Evangelistic Tool

In order for the *Jesus Film* to become a viable tool for cross-cultural evangelism, its biblical dialogues need to be translated into different languages, before the film can be dubbed. This is one of the central efforts of the Jesus Film Project, making its film the most "translated" film in history. To dub the *Jesus Film* is now an imperative part of many Bible translation projects. Once Luke's Gospel is translated, it can be adapted to dub the *Jesus Film*. Since 2011, however, The Jesus Film Project (2012: 18) has started to use an oral translation method they call "VAST", which – bypassing the lengthy process of written Bible translation – makes more or less instant dubbing possible. Should VAST become the main

method of the Jesus Film Project, it might not be long before the *Jesus Film* will be available in more languages than the written Gospel of Luke.

Being able to offer the *Jesus Film* dubbed into a language understood by its audience is often seen as largely sufficient for communicating the Gospel. The Jesus Film Project – at least in its published publicity material – belittles the complexities of both translation and dubbing, two different processes it subsumes under "translation". In doing so, the Jesus Film Project implies that "translation" is unproblematic (cf. B. Meyer 1999b: 58) and largely a technical and financial hurdle that should be overcome quickly and with as little effort as possible. This is indeed a trend I observe more generally among American evangelicals who engage in Bible translation (see, e.g., Peterson and Gravelle 2012).

Being familiar with the process of Bible translation through my work with SIL (see Introduction), however, I maintain that translation is not only riddled with linguistic, cultural and political challenges, but is much more complex than the Jesus Film Project implies (see, e.g., Asad 1986; Hill 2006; Gutt 2000; B. Meyer 1999b: 54-82). Similarly, dubbing the *Jesus Film* is not usually a straightforward procedure, which becomes apparent, for example, when the English word "God" (one syllable) needs to be replaced by its Malagasy equivalent of "Andriamanitra" (six syllables). Any dubbed version of audiovisual products such as the *Jesus Film* are not simple "translations" of the originals, but new hybrid media products, which have considerable creative potentials (Boellstorff 2003; J. Merz 2010; Werner 2006: 175, 2012: 100).[25]

The Jesus Film Project goes to a tremendous effort to promote and distribute its dubbed films as widely as possible, in cinemas, on television, on videocassettes and DVDs, through the Internet, as well as by sending film teams to remote areas (Eshleman 1985, 1995, 2002; The Jesus Film Project 1997). The Project's approach to universal distribution is often perceived as an "aggressive" form of evangelism (Noll 2009: 89; Tatum 2004: 174).

Cru and the Jesus Film Project use a capitalist business model for universal distribution, as pioneered by tract societies during early nineteenth century

[25] Dubbing constitutes a little explored area of media studies. Tom Boellstorff recognises that the discrepancy between lip movements and speech leads to an "awkward fusion" (2003: 236, 238), but what this exactly means for audiences and media consumption remains largely unknown.

America (Morgan 2007: 27-28), and as applied by other Evangelical media ministries (Friesen 2012: 131, 138) and mission societies (Gullestad 2007: 19). Furthermore, Bill Bright ran his own business before becoming a spiritual or religious salesman by founding Campus Crusade (J. G. Turner 2008: 51, 232). In establishing the Jesus Film Project, Eshleman (1985: 173) was inspired by Coca-Cola's business plan with the result that both companies aim to offer everybody on the globe the possibility of consuming their products. This kind of capitalist and secular thought is strong among American evangelicals and fuels what Harding calls their "sacrificial economy" (2000: 109). Churches, mission societies and parachurch organisations do not make any financial profit through their operations. In the sacrificial economy, evangelicals donate money to God's work and expect His blessings in return, whether materially or otherwise (Harding 2000: 122). It is on this principle that the Jesus Film Project raises the necessary funds to finance its global operations. As in business, the Jesus Film Project needs to advertise both its products and itself, by showing that it operates in a Godly manner and that its efforts produce the claimed results.

While granting the *Jesus Film* the status of Scripture goes a long way in making it attractive to evangelical donors, the Jesus Film Project also needs to show the results of its evangelistic efforts to justify its use of donations. This is done through promotional stories and statistics. Anecdotal stories are regularly provided on the Jesus Film Projects' website (http://www.jesusfilm.org/stories), as well as in other promotional materials (see, e.g., Boyd 1999; Eshleman 1985, 1995; The Jesus Film Project 2011, 2012). The Project often focuses on the specific response of a single person. Designed to appeal to American evangelicals, I find that the anecdotes are riddled with ethnocentric stereotypes, often appear sentimental and paternalistic, and are typically unverifiable.

The impressive statistics provided by the Jesus Film Project, on the other hand, are designed to show the extent of the film's impact more quantitatively. Such statistics are characteristic of Cru (J. G. Turner 2008), as well as other organisations that engage in film evangelism (Friesen 2012: 132). Statistics have a polemic character, especially when they are not properly explained and thus need to be taken with a pinch of salt. After its national evangelistic campaign "Here's Life, America" of 1976/77, Cru recorded 535,000 decisions for Christ. Cru then

commissioned a study, which revealed that only 3% of those who made a decision actually joined a church (J. G. Turner 2008: 168-170). This suggests, according to John Turner, "that Crusade often overstated its effect because it only reported on 'decisions' instead of long-term commitments" (2008: 170). It is probable that the figures for people who "indicated decisions for Christ following a film showing"[26] of *Jesus* are equally vague. I can assume that the statistics are based on counting people who respond in some way or another when being invited to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour after the *Jesus Film* has been shown during an evangelistic event. It is not made clear, however, to what exactly people respond (Steffen 1993: 273). Some will indeed make a commitment to Christ and subsequently join a church. But it is equally likely that already devout Christians present in the audience simply reaffirm their decision, that people can respond emotionally without really meaning it (cf. Harding 2000), that they respond to the miracle and use of media technology (Kwon 2010; Myers 1993) or that they merely want to be polite by expressing their appreciation for having had an interesting evening[27]. That the statistics need to be doubted, is also confirmed in studies in Zambia (Mansfield 1984: 72) and the Philippines (Kwon 2010: 160-161), which make it clear that one viewing of the *Jesus Film* is hardly enough to make a permanent impact. Dwight Friesen (2012: 142), too, failed to see the emotional response during public screenings – for missionaries a sign of their success (Gullestad 2007: 70) – that is so often claimed in promotional literature.

Outside American evangelicalism, in more mainline denominations (Dart 2001: 28) and in Europe, where evangelicalism resonates with fewer Christians, people receive the film more critically (see, e.g. J. Merz 2010; Peperkamp 2005; Wiher 1997; and Steffen 1993 for an insider critique). Usually, the Jesus Film Project does not address such criticism in a significant way unless there is a public prompt to do so. Then, it may appear sympathetic to concerns but generally responds by reiterating its position (see e.g. Dart 2001: 28; Wood 1997: 11). I strongly suspect, however, that the Project nonetheless takes such criticism seriously and that it is aware of its evangelical rhetorics (cf. Harding 2000: 46-47).

[26] As worded by the Jesus Film Project on their website http://www.jesusfilm.org/film-and-media/statistics/statistics, accessed on 14 August, 2014.
[27] Sharon Merz (personal communication) observed this last phenomenon during an evangelistic event featuring drama in southern Ghana in 1998.

After all, Eshleman (2002: 70-72) readily acknowledges different challenges and difficulties.

While the Jesus Film Project maintains the advantageous rhetorical position of its flagship, the *Jesus Film*, it presents itself as a dynamic organisation that constantly adapts to the settings in which it operates. This is shown in the development of staged evangelistic events and its increasing range of products.

Evangelistic films had always been accompanied by preaching (Bakker 2004: 314). Accordingly, it has become increasingly important for the Jesus Film Project to prepare the film audiences by staging an elaborate evangelistic event that culminates in showing the *Jesus Film*, and to then engage its audience in further follow-up (Boyd 1999; Eshleman 2002: 70; Wiher 1997: 66, 72-73). All this usually happens in collaboration with local churches. The Jesus Film Project also seeks to partner with other organisations, which stage evangelistic events. For example, since 1997, Campus Crusade maintains a formal partnership with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, which includes the showing of the *Jesus Film* (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 193; The Jesus Film Project 2011: 15; J. G. Turner 2008: 185). Wood (2007: 26) refers to 1,500 active partnerships between Cru and organisations that use the *Jesus Film* globally.

Furthermore, recent years have seen new audiovisual products being launched. Among them is a version for Catholics of the *Jesus Film* (2000, http://www.millenniumfilms.org/) that provides a new pro- and epilogue. Apart from leaving out the scene of the ascension of Christ at the very end, it basically retains the original film (Peperkamp 2005: 364-370). In 2001 the Jesus Film Project added a new 14-minute introduction to the film especially for Muslim audiences.

More recently, the Jesus Film Project engaged in bigger projects: *Magdalena: Released From Shame* (2007) is a *Jesus Film* derivate that retells the story of Jesus from the perspective of Mary Magdalena, who provides the voiceover for the new film. *Magdalena* uses extensive footage of the original *Jesus Film* that is interspersed with new scenes. Additionally, the makers added several new women-focused scenes from gospels other than Luke (Malone 2012: 93; The Jesus Film Project 2011: 24-27; Wood 2007: 27). More relevant for Africa, *Walking with Jesus* (2011) is a series of five episodes made in Kenya that uses direct references to the

Jesus Film to develop typical evangelical themes, such as sin and salvation, the Holy Spirit, and growing in Christ. The series was "produced by Africans for Africans" (The Jesus Film Project 2012: 26), with Mike Bamiloye, a Nigerian pioneer of film evangelism (see below), as screenwriter. The technical production and financing, however, was American.

The Jesus Film Project retains the almost canonical *Jesus Film* as the centrepiece of its activities and relaunched it for its 35th anniversary during Easter 2014 in a digitally remastered version with a new music score. The recent audiovisual additions suggest that the Project recognises that the film as an evangelistic tool does not completely live up to what its promotional materials, stories and statistics make it out to do. I assume that a significant part of its claimed success lies in the staging of the evangelistic event, during which the *Jesus Film* is shown, in the different pro- and epilogues, and in follow-up, which increasingly uses further audiovisual materials. The *Jesus Film* thus remains a typically American phenomenon whose outstanding feature is not the film itself, but what evangelicals have made of it. Its success depends on the evangelical community, which perpetuates its typical interplay of semiotic and transmaterial presencing principles and accepts the rhetorical aura of the film. The evangelicals' interest in evangelism and mission means that they are ready to accept it as part of their sacrificial economy, which in turn, makes universal distribution feasible.

While the *Jesus Film* has become the flagship of global film evangelism it only constitutes the tip of the iceberg of a much wider and more informal transnational production and distribution of evangelistic films. Most of these productions are Christian dramas following the lead of the Christian film industry in the USA (Lindvall and Quicke 2011). While the *Jesus Film* is a film *of* the Word, the Baptist *La Solution* (1994) and the Beninese *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002) are films *about* the Word. By indirectly building on the *Jesus Film*, they apply the Word of God to everyday life by showing the values and benefits of a Christian life (Ukah 2005: 311). Such dramatic films complement the *Jesus Film* because they seek to demonstrate concretely how the Word of God of the *Jesus Film* can impact people and change their lives.

La Solution: *Aesthetics of Colonial Modernity*

La Solution (*The Solution*, 1994, David Powers) is the third film made by the *Centre de Media Baptistes* in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Following the Southern Baptist Convention's venture into film evangelism in the 1950s (see above), American missionaries of their International Mission Board arrived in the country in 1966 (Vanderaa 1991: 28) and later set up a media centre to distribute and promote evangelistic films throughout Francophone West Africa. In the 1980s they also started to produce their own 16 mm celluloid films.

One of the main initiators of the three films, Barbara Whittington (personal communication, 21 Nov. 2012), recalls that making them took over ten years and was quite costly. It succeeded largely thanks to the determined effort of the staff of the Baptist Media Center. The International Mission Board provided the resources and a three-man crew for the production, while all actors were unpaid Christian volunteers. The goal was to produce non-commercial and evangelistic dramatic films that people across West Africa could directly relate to. The evangelistic intention was to share God's message that has the power to change peoples' lives, as for example Craig Bird (1991) showed for *Le Combat* and Marty Croll (1994) for the premiere of *La Solution*.

The Baptists were not the first missionaries to engage in such an endeavour. Lindvall and Quicke (2011: 189) discuss the dramatic evangelistic film *Suzanne* (1972) that was made by Films Afield in Côte d'Ivoire using an all-African cast. Subsequently, it enjoyed a good response with over 200 copies being circulated among missionaries throughout West Africa. The Baptists' Ivorian film production is thus a direct continuation of the American Christian film industry and its various missionary extensions.

The two first films of the Baptist Media Center, *Le Combat* (1985) and *L'Indifférent* (1985) were produced simultaneously but received very different reactions. *L'Indifférent* – written by an American missionary – was not very successful and was never widely circulated. The 40-minute film *Le Combat*, on the other hand, quickly became very popular, was shown on Ivorian television in 1986, dubbed into English and several African languages and continues to be distributed on Video CD. It is still widely used in film evangelism throughout West Africa.

Bird (1991) thinks the success of *Le Combat* is due to the film's story, written by Marcus Minomekpo, a Togolese Christian, who also played Dansou, the protagonist. Minomekpo used his own experience as a Christian to write the story and a team of missionaries adapted it into the script for the film. As its name implies, *Le Combat* shows the conflict between Christians and "traditionalists". After the newly converted Dansou withstands death threats, he burns his "fetishes" and, together with his wife and main adversary, is baptised in a lagoon.

The success of *Le Combat* led to the feature-length *La Solution* (1994) that follows, develops and refines the same formula. It was equally successful as its predecessor and continues to be distributed on Video CD and used in evangelism. *La Solution* tells the story of Ata, a career-orientated modern African, who lives with his wife Akoua and two children in a posh residential area of an unnamed West African city. The film begins with Ata and Akoua arriving in their car in their village of origin. There, Nato, the all-powerful *charlatan* of great renown, performs a sacrifice for them.

The scenes of the sacrifice – which last for over thirteen minutes – are introduced by showing glimpses of evocative ritual objects, such as a bird's head or clay mounds with faces. Then the camera jumps to a portrait of the authoritative and scary Nato whose face is painted in red, black and white and who wears a headdress with cowry shells. His behaviour is imposing and sinister, somewhat erratic and, for me, almost comic: he shouts at times, makes funny noises and pulls faces. The background music that intermittently accompanies these scenes implies – at least to viewers familiar with Hollywood conventions – tension and eeriness. Interspersed with the sacrifice itself a group performs accomplished dances reminiscent of West African *vodun* or *orisa*. The scenes of the sacrifice thus combine the visually most appealing and repulsive scenes of the film by skilfully othering and temporalising Nato and his fetishes, as well as village life more generally.

Although the film is very critical of "fetishes" and the people associated with them, it does not overtly demonise them. Rather, *La Solution* tries to demonstrate their futility and portrays priests and *marabouts* as con men whose main aim is to trick people into paying them, leaving it ambiguous as to what their real power may be. The scenes not only show fetishes, but also other strange objects whose

purpose remains mysteriously vague, thereby provoking either contempt for superstition or unease about the objects potential nature and purpose. *La Solution* thus employs the aesthetics of colonial modernity that temporalises and stigmatises "traditional religion", as is typical of Nigerian and Ghanaian video productions, but without their strong demonising tendencies (cf. Behrend 2005: 209-210; Haynes 2011: 76; B. Meyer 1999a, 2004b, 2005; J. Mitchell 2009: 154-155; Pype 2012; Wendl 2007).

At the same time, however, the othered "traditions" are performed with considerable expertise, mainly in the form of drumming, songs and dance. According to Karin Barber (2000: 323-324) this was already common in church-based Nigerian Yoruba theatre of the 1940s and 1950s. The purpose was to present "tradition" as appealing, thereby increasing the value of Christianity, which was always portrayed as being superior.

The ambivalence of the scenes of the sacrifice both being visually tempting and repulsive, are also reiterated by Ata who implies that he did not really enjoy what he did, but nonetheless recognises the need for a sacrifice. After all, protection from enemies and success in life, such as becoming the director of a company, do not come cheaply. During the sacrifice, Nato gives Ata and Akoua a pot, which now holds their lives for their protection. The day the pot would break, Nato threatens, Ata and Akoua would die in a tragic accident. The pot also comes with several alimentary interdictions and requires a yearly sacrifice. Indeed, *La Solution* presents a widespread theme of the illicit accumulation of money and success that has been ubiquitous in Ghanaian video films (Garritano 2008: 30; B. Meyer 1995, 1998b; Ogunleye 2003c: 5; Wendl 2001: 287) and has become a "hallmark of Nollywood" (Haynes 2011: 82; see also Green-Simms 2010: 211; McCall 2002; B. Meyer 2001; Okwori 2003; Wendl 2007).

Back in the city, Ata and Akoua receive a visit from their Christian neighbours but Ata does not want to hear about Jesus. The next day at work, he receives a letter that talks about the financial difficulties of his company. Expressing his troubled feelings, a colleague recommends a visit to a *marabout* to add protection and to find the solution to his problems. During the consultation the *marabout* identifies Akoua as the root of all of Ata's problems, implicitly accusing her of witchcraft. Even though Ata follows the instructions of the *marabout* he is finally

made redundant. He sends his wife away whom he now accepts to be a witch. He turns to drink, beats his children and then turns them away too.

While the children roam the streets they meet a Christian friend from school. She tells them about Jesus and Ata's children accept him as their friend. With the hope that Jesus could also change their father's life, they return home and announce that Jesus loves him. Soon their friend's parents arrive. The man carries a Bible, which identifies him as a Christian, maybe even a pastor or missionary. This image of Bible-carrying Christians has already been well established in American Protestant art (Morgan 2007: 97) and indicates that the person has spiritual authority and credibility (see also Chapter 2).

The eleven-minute long scene that follows constitutes *La Solution*'s apex. It is logocentric due to its lengthy dialogues that confirm Christianity as a religion of the Word. The visitors learn of Ata's problems and begin to witness to him by sharing their testimony, as is common among evangelical Christians (Harding 2000; Hendershot 2004). They share how they experienced the ineffectiveness of the fetishes, which could not save their son from death. Their suffering ended only the day they gave their lives to Jesus. The Bible-carrying visitor then has Ata read Jesus' words from the Gospel of Matthew: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (11: 28). Following the typical interplay of evangelical presencing principles that accord agency to the Word of God (see above) Ata has reached a turning point and sentimental music starts to play. The visitor asserts that Jesus is the solution to all problems. The Word has now acted on Ata to the extent that he decides to try Jesus and renounces the fetishes.

After a dream during which it becomes clear to Ata that he has to deal with the pot that contains their lives, he returns to his village, Bible in hand. He seeks reconciliation with his wife and, together with their children, shares the good news of Jesus by reading Matthew (11: 28). During a village meeting Ata faces the elders and Nato. While the objective had been to discuss further sacrifices needed to restore Ata and his family, Ata turns the meeting around by declaring that sacrifices were done in ignorance and they were not needed. While he claims that Jesus was the real protector, he smashes his pot, which provokes gasps and wails. Nato angrily declares that Ata has overstepped the limits and that he would die before the cockerel crows in the morning.

While all the villagers spent an uneasy night, Ata emerges unharmed in the morning. Nato, on the other hand, is found dead. Ata uses the grief of the people to preach to them, declaring that he has found a saviour and a true protector in Jesus and encourages the villagers to accept and follow him too. Jesus, he asserts, is the solution.

The film ends with an act of iconoclasm during which several of the elders smash their own pots, thereby symbolically pledging allegiance to Jesus and breaking with their past (B. Meyer 1998a). Then, in a display of evangelical values that has become typical especially of Ghanaian video films (Ogunleye 2003c: 8; B. Meyer 2002: 76, 2003a: 212), the camera switches to Ata and his family who come together in joyful exuberance, hinting at a bright future of Christian happiness and success.

La Solution follows in the footstep of earlier dramatic Christian films that were shot in Africa. One of the early examples, *The Story of Bamba* (1939) was made to promote mission work in the USA and is thus part of a sub-genre called "mission films" (Gullestad 2007: 217-246). Even though it tried to portray Central Africa more realistically than before, *The Story of Bamba* is still a missionary product of its time that reinforces colonial stereotypes by insisting on a dichotomisation of a timeless "tradition" against the superiority of both Western medicine and Christianity. *The Story of Bamba* was written by Americans and filmed using African actors recruited among Christians. It relates the story of a boy, nephew of a "witchdoctor", whom missionaries rescue from an epidemic. He then becomes a medical missionary himself and successfully heals his sick uncle. As a result, the witchdoctor, too, converts to Christianity (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 23; Reynolds 2010; Weber 2001).

Films made by missionaries like *The Story of Bamba* or *La Solution* are strongly teleological, demonstrating a move from a traditional and backward past to a progressive and modern future, clearly drawing on secular narratives of modernisation (Ferguson 1999). They use the aesthetics of colonial modernity that thrives on contrasting various dichotomies, such as village and city, backwardness and success, ignorance and education, traditional and Western medicine, fetish and Bible, lies and sincerity. The happy ending stands for the triumph of the good and Christian ways over the bad and past, which are rejected and broken. At the same

time, *La Solution* is kept denominationally neutral with no pastors or churches featuring in it, thereby displaying general evangelical values of family, sincerity, innocence, success, growth and happiness.

Films like *Le Combat* and *La Solution* have been criticised for being initiated, financed and promoted by foreign missionaries (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 189), even though the underlying stories come from an African. The recent boom of the video film industry in Nigeria and Ghana has removed these particular concerns. In Benin, this trend of localising Christian film production started with the video film *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002).

Yatin, *Nollywood and the Pentecostalisation of Christian Films*

The Christian video film *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (*Yatin: Place of Suffering*, 2002, Christine Madeleine Botokou) was first made in Fon, the main language of southern Benin, and a year later in French. It is widely recognised as the first Beninese video film and the first French Christian film made in West Africa. Its success and use in evangelism beyond the borders of Benin has made it into a classic of Beninese video filmmaking (Mayrargue 2005: 248-250; J. Merz 2014). Before I discuss *Yatin* in more depth, I place the film in a wider setting by tracing its history. *Yatin* has direct and clear links to Nollywood, and more precisely the Nigerian Christian film industry.

Video films from Nollywood need to be understood as being different from earlier celluloid productions, both in Nigeria and Francophone Africa. They have become a "new cultural art" (Ukadike 2000), "a distinct form of cultural literacy" (Adejunmobi 2007: 9-10) and make a "most significant and original contribution… to our contemporary world film culture" (Wendl 2007: 17). For this reason it is important to look at the roots of Nollywood, its impact on filmmaking in neighbouring Benin and how the more explicitly Christian and evangelistic branch of the film industry – to which *Yatin* belongs – developed with it. Having thus presented the background of *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance*, I then describe and analyse the film in detail.

Benin and the Nollywood Connection

The Nigerian Herbert Macaulay introduced film to Nigeria in 1903, when he hosted the first screening in the Glover Memorial Hall of Lagos, the prime venue for entertainment at the time (Akpabio 2007: 90; Obiaya 2011: 132; Olayiwola 2011: 184; Owens-Ibie 1998; Ugor 2007: 2). Four years later, in 1907, Catholic missionaries showed a Jesus film at one of their Lagos schools (Okome 1996: 46). Missionaries were thus among the earliest promoters of film in Nigeria, even though their efforts to show evangelistic films to a wider public mainly developed during the inter-war period (Ogunleye 2003a: 108; Olayiwola 2011: 184; Reynolds 2010: 462; Ukadike 1994: 30-31).

It is not known when the new medium first came to Benin. All I was able to find out was that the colonial cinema market was dominated by two French corporations from its beginning during the inter-war period (N'Gosso and Ruelle 1983: 11; Obiaya 2011: 137; Ukadike 1994: 62). Concerning film production in Benin, the Laval Decree of 1934 limited the creative involvement of Africans throughout French West Africa (Haynes 2011: 68; Ugor 2007: 3). The only evidence of celluloid filmmaking in the country dates from around the time of independence, when Dahomey produced several 16 mm documentary short films, some of which won prizes at minor film festivals (Service de l'information de la République du Dahomey 1963: 67). In spite of France promoting cinema throughout Francophone West Africa (Ukadike 1994: 70), filmmaking never caught on in Benin, as it did in other countries, such as Senegal, Mali or Burkina Faso.

The first West African video film was made in Ghana in 1987, as a direct consequence of the region's economic difficulties, which resulted in the end of celluloid film production. Nigeria followed with its first video production two years later (Garritano 2008; B. Meyer 1999a: 98, 2010a: 45; Ogunleye 2003c: 4; Ukadike 2000: 249). Since the modest beginnings of the late 1980s, Nollywood has become one of the leading global producers of films, peaking with a release of 2,700 films in 2007 (Haynes 2011: 72), while 1,770 films were submitted to the Nigerian National Film and Video Censors Board in 2008 (Barrot 2011: 109).

In 1996, I was not able to find any film or video on VHS made in Benin on Cotonou's markets. At that time, however, Ghana and Nigeria had already seriously entered video film production (Adesanya 2000: 43; Barrot 2008: 32) and

Yoruba videos began to make their way to neighbouring Benin. This was assured by Yoruba traders, who dominate the extensive informal trade that exists between the two countries (Igue and Soule 1992: 99-100). Especially among Benin's Yoruba speakers, these films have become very popular (Adejunmobi 2007: 4-5; Barrot 2008: 43-44; Okome 2010: 30; Ugochukwu 2009: 4). More recently, Nollywood films have been popularised throughout Benin, since some producers and distributors, who often merit being called pirates as well, now sometimes dub videos into French (Barrot 2011: 112; Ugochukwu 2009: 6).

It is not only film distribution that has spilled over to Nigeria's neighbours. Cameroon now produces its own Nollywood-style films with an estimated 80 Anglophone productions per year since 2008 (Coulon 2011; Haynes 2011: 84). In Benin, film production started in the early 2000s with *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002). *Yatin* was made by Christine Madeleine Botokou, a Beninese citizen who had lived in Nigeria since her childhood and later studied at the University of Ibadan. In 1995 she felt God's call to become engaged in evangelism and media ministry. As a result, Botokou started her own video production company and acted in several Christian videos, including Yoruba language films. Botokou was thus part of the Nigerian Christian film industry when it was rapidly developing. Returning to Benin in 1998, she started a Beninese production and distribution company, the inter-denominational Stedafilm International, following the Nigerian model (Mayrargue 2005: 248-250; personal communication Botokou, 22 Jun. 2013).

Botokou wrote, directed and produced *Yatin*, and even acted in it. Her film closely follows the conventions of Nigerian Christian films and Nollywood. It was an instant success, being shown in homes, churches, and at evangelistic events. *Yatin* has also become popular in neighbouring Togo, Burkina Faso and even Côte d'Ivoire, countries she visited on a promotional tour (personal communication, 22 Jun. 2013).

The success of *Yatin* did not go unnoticed and Pascal Legnoui of the more commercial Porto-Novo-based Akoyane Films used a very similar story with a pastor fighting against *Mami Wata*, in his debut film *Le berger* (2004). Like *Yatin*, *Le berger* proved generally successful and made its way as far as Cobly, where copies on Video CD circulated. Akoyane Films then followed with a serial of five

films, as is typical of Nollywood (Haynes 2011: 72; Ogunleye 2003b: 18-19; Ukah 2012: 221). *Le triangle des élus 1-5* (2006) used the same Christian formula of *Le berger*. Its story, however, was repetitive and drawn out resulting only in a modest success.

Another important development of commercial film production in Benin was when the multimedia company LAhA Productions co-produced *Abeni 1* and *2* (2006) together with Nigeria's Mainframe Productions. Tunde Kelani, Nigeria's most celebrated Yoruba filmmaker, directed the two successful films (Adeoti 2011; Adejunmobi 2007: 5; Barrot 2011: 118 n.127). While LAhA Productions since followed with another dozen videos made in Benin, the idea of cross-border productions remains appealing since it guarantees access to a larger market. Such cross-border productions stress the direct connection that Beninese films have with Nollywood and Yoruba films more specifically.

There is a clear potential for the continued development of a Francophone video film industry (Barrot 2011: 118). In Togo, where the market is significantly smaller, M'Bolo Music, Togo's main media producer, started video film production in 2008, mainly producing and distributing for Ewe language theatre groups. Togo has also started to produce explicitly Christian films, such as the Nigerian sponsored *L'intermédiaire* (2010, Hope of Glory Film Productions).

Filmmaking in Francophone countries remains challenging, but is slowly growing nonetheless. Even successful filmmakers, such as Christine Botokou, find it difficult to make film production a profitable enterprise and struggle to recuperate the costs incurred (Fassinou 2010). Insufficient distribution channels, especially in the informal sector, and widespread piracy only add to the problem of the commercial feasibility of Beninese films. Piracy also slows down the development of a film industry in Cameroon (Coulon 2011: 104) and continues to be an issue in Nigeria (Haynes and Okome 2000: 69; Okome 2007: 14-15; Ukah 2005: 299-303), even though Nollywood could not do without it at the same time, since it provides the all-important channels for distribution (Barrot 2008: 18; Larkin 2008: 217-218).

As in Nigeria, Benin also has a growing segment of specifically Christian film productions. Christine Botokou, for example, remains committed to Francophone Christian films, even though she faces constant financial challenges. In 2007 she

released *Le retour de la pierre*, which received mixed reviews. In 2013, she worked on the following video projects: *Le Saint-Esprit est là*, *La mirail renversée* and *Tu as besoin de lui*.

Many of the Beninese, who started their careers in film under Christine Botokou, continue to be involved in the production of Christian films. Stanislas Abiala, for example, who plays Pastor Philippe in *Yatin*, continues to act and now runs his own film production company. Contemporary videos are of varying quality, as the producers are limited by their meagre budgets (personal communication Botokou, 22 Jun. 2013).

Among the more recent Christian film producers in Benin are *Le Groupe d'Evangélisation et d'Edification "Arbre de Vie"*, which released its Fon language film *Koyi! Yissénon fon lo* in 2007. Geordy Films Production made *Le déstin* in 2009, MediaGospel the serial *La promesse* in 2010, while *Foyer Electronique* presented *Ça rattrape….!* in 2011. *Les Productions Vin Nouveau* released *La beauté de la croix 1* in 2011 followed by the second part in 2012. Eden Production launched their debut *Noudo (malédiction)* probably in 2012 and followed with *Les prisonniers de l'enfer 1* and *2* in 2013. Other recent Beninese Christian films include *Jamais!!* (ca. 2012, Fon, Grace Divine Films) and *Le pouvoir de la langue* (ca. 2012, MaxMath Production).

Film production does not only happen in evangelical and Pentecostal circles, but also includes the influential African Independent Church *Christianisme Céleste* (Henry 2008; Noret 2011; St-Germain 1996), which is represented in the recent series *La puissance de Dieu* in Fon and Gun (no date, Solo Production) and the Catholic church that features in *Gbêtô: Tout se paie ici bas* (2007, SAS Productions), a Fon language film, that offers a Pentecostal solution to the spiritual attack provoked by a *vodun* priest.

Christianity in its Pentecostalised form, then, has become an important part of Beninese film production, as it already is in the Ghanaian film industry and Nollywood, where explicitly Christian filmmakers produce most of the Christian films. It is thus worthwhile to look at the links that Nollywood – and especially Yoruba video films – have with Christianity, evangelism and missionaries.

Nollywood's Christian Roots and the Emergence of the Nigerian Christian Film Industry

West African video films have often been traced back to different traditions of theatre, and sometimes popular literature, such as of the Igbo (Ukadike 2000: 254) or Hausa (Larkin 1997, 2000: 230, 2008: 205). For Ghana, John Collins (2004: 417, 419) and Tobias Wendl (2001: 285) see a clear link between concert parties, as theatre is usually known there, and Ghanaian video films. In Benin too, some drama groups started to offer their stage productions on video as early as the late 1980s, but only became interested in film production after the release of *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002).

The most important and best documented connection between theatre and video films undoubtedly comes from south-western Nigeria, where the Yoruba travelling theatre directly developed into today's industry of Yoruba video films (Adesanya 2000: 38-39; Barber 2000; Faniran 2007; Haynes and Okome 2000; McCall 2002: 86; Müller 2005; Ogundele 2000; Olayiwola 2011; Oyewo 2003). The Yoruba travelling theatre, in turn, has its roots in school and church drama, which developed from the activities of missionaries as far back as the mid-nineteenth century (Adedeji 1971; Adeniyi 2008: 241; Barber 2000: 2, 26; Ogundele 2000: 92; Ogunleye 2003a: 108). From the 1940s to the 1960s, the Yoruba travelling theatre continued to be linked to churches and mainly presented topics from the Bible. As it started to become more commercial, however, its link to churches diminished and the Yoruba travelling theatre shifted its focus to non-Biblical themes. During the oil boom of the 1970s, the Yoruba travelling theatre had reached its peak and started to use film clips in their plays, especially to present supernatural aspects that would have been difficult to act convincingly on stage (Ogundele 2000: 95). Soon whole plays were recorded and shown on television. Its success was followed by filmed productions on celluloid during the late 1970s and 1980s, which theatre companies preferred since they could retain control of their films (Barber 2000: 259). The economic crisis of the late 1980s finally pushed filmmakers towards the economically more viable video format.

The Yoruba travelling theatre and its direct successor, the Yoruba video film, are typical of popular art in that they borrow ideas from the most varied sources (Barber 1987). Having their roots in church and school, their theatre and video

continued to develop by adding elements of folktales and performances of Yoruba masquerade. Wole Ogundele (2000: 92, 99-100) sees these elements as directly responsible for the keen interest in portraying the world of spirits and the occult more generally. Witchcraft and other spiritual phenomena continue to be important in Yoruba theatre (Müller 2005) and have become crucial to Yoruba video films (Adesanya 2000: 39; Faniran 2007: 69; Ogundele 2000: 108; Oyewo 2003; Ukadike 2000: 255), to the extent that videos are "saturated with the supernatural" (Haynes 2007a: 146). Additionally, the makers of such films were also inspired by other filmic traditions, such as *telenovelas* and other soap operas (Green-Simms 2010: 211) or Indian films, from which they borrowed love stories and songs (Ogundele 2000: 99; Ukadike 2000: 245, 255).

The development of the Nigerian Christian video film industry followed similar lines and can be traced back to the 1980s. By then, the Yoruba travelling theatre was no longer strongly associated with churches and had lost much of its earlier Christian character. At the same time, mission organisations and individuals circulated evangelistic films that came from the transnational expansion of the American Christian film industry since the 1950s. Missionaries, especially from the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, also produced films in Yoruba (Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 108), and other American evangelistic films, such as the ones from Ken Anderson's International Films, became available (Klem 1975: 58; Lindvall and Quicke 2011: 192-193). These films must have become well known in Christian circles and directly contributed to the idea of restarting explicitly Christian theatre groups.

In 1982, Kunle Ogunde founded his drama group The Word Production. Two years later, Ogunde made plans to venture into the audiovisual media and in 1986 he sought the help of Ken Anderson's International Films, although nothing came from it (Adeniyi 2008: 242-243; Ogunleye 2003a: 109). In the same year, Mike Bamiloye started his media ministry Mount Zion Faith Ministries International. The first video film of Mount Zion Film Productions (http://www.mtzionfilms.net/), an arm of Mount Zion Faith Ministries International, was *Secrets of The Devil* (1987), which was technically so bad that it never made it onto the market. It was three years later, after the first Nigerian video films had already been successfully released, that Mount Zion launched their debut *The Unprofitable*

Servant (1990) followed by *The Beginning of the End* (1990). While evangelism has always been a goal of Mount Zion Film Productions, they also want to offer Christian films with solid teaching and counter the Yoruba video films with their focus on the occult (P. Jenkins 2008; Ogunleye 2003a: 110; Oyewo 2003: 142; Oha 2000; Ukah 2005: 290-291).

It is thus clear that Nigerian drama groups were aware of American Christian films and sought to enter film production even before the video format became a feasible option. With the growing success of Mount Zion Film Productions, who pioneered Christian video films in Nigeria, other parachurch organisations such as Christian Multimedia International or Evangelical Outreach Ministries followed suit. Some of these media organisations, most notably Mount Zion Faith Ministries International, also run drama schools. Today, various independent filmmakers and all major Pentecostal churches produce their own video films with Helen Ukpabio's Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries (founded in 1998) being among the most prominent ones (R. Marshall 2009: 137-138; Okome 2007; Ukah 2003, 2005, 2012).

In 1995, in this climate of a rapidly developing Christian films scene, Christine Botokou (personal communication, 22 Jun. 2013) started her ministry in Nigeria and was among the founding members of the All Nigeria Conference of Evangelical Drama Ministers (ANCEDRAM, http://www.ancedram.org/). Mike Bamiloye, whom Botokou knows well, initiated ANCEDRAM, which promotes cooperation between different Christian filmmakers and production companies (Ogunleye 2003a: 124). Back in Benin, Botokou continued her video ministry through her production company Stedafilm International and has become associated with the *Fondation Olangi-Wosho* (http://www.olangiwosho.org/), which dubs Mount Zion films into French. This organisation is based in Kinshasa, where it is well known (Pype 2012: 35) and where Nigerian Christian videos have become very popular (Pype 2013). With her roots in the Nigerian Christian film industry, Christine Botokou has not only pioneered filmmaking in Benin, she also leads the way in promoting Christian films in French throughout Francophone Africa. Thanks to dedicated people like Mike Bamiloye and Christine Botokou, "the Christian film has become one of the most prominent filmic genres in Nigeria [and Benin] in the contemporary period" (Ogunleye 2003b: 18).

Beninese Christian video films, then, are directly linked to their Nigerian counterparts and have their roots not only in Yoruba films but maybe even more importantly, also in American Christian films. For Ogaga Okuyade it is "glaringly clear that the religious films of the present are invariably indebted historically to the colonial intentions of religious films of the past" (2011: 5). Although there are similarities between the missionary made films *Le Combat* and *La Solution* and the Beninese *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance*, which comes out of the Nigerian Christian film industry, there are also significant differences, which I outline below.

Spiritual Warfare in *Yatin*

When Botokou wrote the script for *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance*, her debut film, she was not yet familiar with *La Solution*. In spite of this, *Yatin*, like its missionary predecessor, presents a dramatic narrative whose overall purpose is to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over the old and evil ways. The hero of the film is Pastor Philippe, who plays a typical witchcraft-fighting pastor, similar to how Katrien Pype (2012: 36, 80-81) has described Pentecostal pastors for Kinshasa. He moves from the city of Cotonou – a Pentecostal image for heaven (B. Meyer 2002: 121) – to a remote village called Yatin, the flipside of the modern city (cf. Piot 1999, 2010), where "tradition" reigns through witchcraft and idolatry. Pastor Philippe sets out to redeem and deliver the villagers from demons and save their souls. Like *La Solution*, *Yatin* ends in the conversion of a whole village.

The film starts in Yatin, where a priest is performing a ceremony to initiate Sika, an older woman, to a *vodun* shrine, so that she will be protected from visible and invisible enemies. As in *La Solution*, the ceremony includes copious dancing and the sacrifice of a goat. The priest asks Sika to take a cola nut from a calabash with her mouth, an act that is accompanied with a sound effect, indicating that she has become a witch, as the viewer learns later. This is typical for southern Benin, where people are said to get initiated to witchcraft, often by ingesting something, either voluntarily or involuntarily (Henry 2008: 102; Kahn 2011: 10, 22). This direct link of *vodun* with witchcraft, however, seems to be the result of the Pentecostal demonisation of all that could be considered "traditional religion" (Gifford 2008b: 281; J. Merz 2008; Pype 2012) and is foundational for the war on witchcraft which the Pastor is going to wage in the village of Yatin.

The scene changes to showing a tree at night, which symbolises a witch coven's meeting place, as known from southern Benin and northern Ghana (Kahn 2011: 11; Parker 2006: 359) and typified by Yoruba films (Oha 2000: 198-199; Wendl 2007: 8). The witches appear flying in from all sides, while the leader joins them by coming out of the tree that splits in half. The witches are dressed in long black gowns and have their faces painted black and white. The leader also wears a blond curly wig. They have long fingernails and constantly move their hands, indicating their keenness to catch souls. The leader brings greetings from their Lord Lucifer who orders them to wreak havoc in the village. The witches greet this news with forced laughter, also typical of witches in such films. They now call for their four victims that are chained together. The leader tells each of the victims that he or she is bound by a spirit and then sends them back to Yatin on self-destructive missions.

The camera returns to the village where the new witch Sika attacks a young woman by sending red bolts with white halos from her eyes into the victim's lower back who then dies in agony. Later, the film shows further evil deeds that the people of Yatin perpetrate under the witches' influence.

Meanwhile, back in the city, Pastor Philippe has a vision of himself praying and singing at the beach with his Bible in hand. He hears people calling for help and asking him to come to Yatin. Philippe learns that Yatin means "place of suffering" and he feels that God is calling him to move there with his wife, Dorcas, to face and fight evil and to save the souls of the people.

On the way to Yatin, Pastor Philippe and his wife meet a woman who is about to hang herself out of misery and as instructed by the witches. Philippe prays and the camera briefly switches to the witch tree, where the suicidal woman's double is held captive, but is now released. He explains to her how the devil works and announces that Jesus Christ is the solution, directly echoing *La Solution*. With the promise that all her problems will end, the woman accepts Jesus and is saved. Later, they pick up a boy who fled the village in despair since he had no uniform to attend school.

At the house of the boy's parents the Pastor pays for the uniform and preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ, explaining that "the worship of idols is a terrible sin" and that Jesus would protect them instead. In this logocentric key scene of the

film that explains and discusses the Word of God, the parents accept Jesus and offer Philippe and Dorcas a house to live in. They settle in the village and continue to defy various manifestations of evil by praying against them. Philippe delivers a young man from the spirit of epilepsy, which visibly leaves the man thanks to special effects. This scene has a direct equivalent in the *Jesus Film*, indicating that *Yatin* tries to establish narrative parallels between Philippe and Jesus.

Three months later, Philippe is leading a small congregation that regularly meets for Bible study. He has now added a tie to the suit he often wears, another characteristic of Beninese Pentecostals (Mayrargue 2001: 286). The witches, however, are not happy about the perturbations that the Pastor causes. They meet under their tree and want to show Philippe who has the real authority. Their attempt backfires, however, leaving them paralysed. The witch Sika wakes up with burns all over her body and calls a healer to help her.

Meanwhile, the witches try to attack the Christians repeatedly but their attempts always backfire. These aggressions are portrayed with numerous special effects of the flow of spiritual powers and metamorphoses typical of Yoruba and other Nigerian films (B. Meyer 2001: 58; Ogundele 2000: 95). For example, Philippe and Dorcas pray before going to sleep and a man dressed in white appears and covers them with a cloth that renders them invisible. A barn owl then transforms into a witch inside the Pastor's house, but she cannot see her victims. The man in white then returns and casts white electrical sparks – a common metaphor to imagine the spiritual (Behrend 2005; Sconce 2000) – from his hand onto the witch who disappears. As a result Sika turns blind and confesses to being a witch. Pastor Philippe comes to deliver her. After Sika has confessed all her evil deeds she receives Jesus into her life.

The king of Yatin, too, is annoyed with the pastor, as he feels that his authority, and that of his gods, is being challenged. He gives Philippe three days to leave the village. Philippe refuses to leave so the king has him arrested. Since the time for annual *vodun* festival has arrived, the king decides to sacrifice Philippe, instead of the usual sheep, to the village gods. While the Pastor is tied to a tree near the shrine, Dorcas leads the Christians in prayers of spiritual warfare. Again,

narrative similarities become evident between the sacrificial sufferings of Jesus and Philippe's plight.

The ceremony begins with lavish dancing and divination. As the king approaches Philippe with a long knife, the prayers of the Christians finally take effect. The main shrine fractures and blue electric sparks burn the ropes that tie Philippe to the tree. Having noticed that God is at work, the Christians run to the shrine and join Philippe in shouting, "Hallelujah!"

The king, who has been thrown to the ground paralysed, now acknowledges that Jesus' power is superior. Pastor Philippe preaches the Word of God and collects ritual paraphernalia while the crowd of spectators becomes frantic, as they all want to become Christian. Philippe leads them in a prayer that renounces "fetishism" and ushers them to accept Jesus, while a Biblical reference to Acts (8:5-8) – a passage that reads like the script for the scene and that had provided the inspiration for the whole film (personal communication Botokou, 22 Jun. 2013) – appears on the screen. Philippe then prays for the king who regains his composure and joins Philippe in shouting, "Praise the Lord!" and "Hallelujah!"

Yatin, as a melodramatic spectacle, builds on the technically more accomplished *La Solution* by taking the spiritual realm seriously and visualising it through special effects. Whereas *La Solution* shows some doubts about the nature of occult powers, *Yatin* makes it very clear that they are real, that they pose a constant threat and that they need to be fought by prayer. The visualisation of the usually unseen and of occult powers, mainly through computer-generated special effects that are accompanied by sound effects has become a trademark, and maybe for some even an obsession, of Nollywood and its derivates.[28] In this sense *Yatin* is a prime example of the Pentecostalisation of Christian video films that happened in Ghana and Nigeria in the 1990s, and has been part of Beninese films since their beginning in the 2000s.

At the heart of the narrative of Pentecostalised video films, both from Ghana and Nigeria, lies a dualism between the forces of the devil and God, often repre-

[28] Various scholars have touched on the importance of Nollywood's special effects (see, e.g., Barrot 2008: 25, 2011: 108; Behrend 2005; Haynes 2007a: 145; J. Merz 2014; B. Meyer 2003a, 2003b, 2004b, 2010a; Ogunleye 2003c: 5; Okome 2010: 29, 32; Okuyade 2011: 13; Pype 2009: 143, 2012: 119-127; Ukah 2003; Wendl 2007).

sented through pastors who wage war on all evil.[29] This "spiritual warfare", as I have already indicated in Chapter 2, has become a crucial part of African Pentecostalism (Fancello 2008: 211-215; Gifford 2008b; Hackett 2003; Henry 2008; R. Marshall 2009: 1-15; B. Meyer 1999b: 171-174; Pype 2012, 2013). Such warfare involves a continuous struggle to maintain a clear break between the traditional past and the modern present (R. Marshall 2009: 14; B. Meyer 1998a; Robbins 2004b: 127-129). In this sense, Pentecostalised video films shift their narrative focus from a modern teleological and eschatological future to the "here and now" (Pype 2012: 220) in which Pentecostals seek to gain and maintain status and prosperity. Such prosperity is no longer an expression of temporal advancement as it is presented in *La Solution*, but becomes a spiritual sign of salvation, which often involves and even necessitates uncertainty and suffering, as *Yatin* implies.

That Botokou is interested in spiritual warfare is not only demonstrated in her films, but also in her more recent association with the *Ministère Chrétien du Combat Spiritual* that is part of the Kinshasa-based *Fondation Olangi-Wosho* (see above). This ministry focuses on prayer and deliverance, maintaining continuous prayer at its headquarters in central Cotonou. In fact, the local gods or *vodun*, witchcraft and other invisible forces of the usually unseen world in *Yatin* have been so thoroughly Pentecostalised that even the witches use distinct Pentecostal language. For example, they "bind the spirits" of their victims and later complain that Pastor Philippe has "delivered" several of them (see also B. Meyer 1998b, 2002, 2004b). To show the normally unseen in this way is designed to broaden the audiences' understanding of the supposed importance of the spiritual realm and how the forces of evil operate (Okuyade 2011: 6), and to address them from a clearly Pentecostal perspective (Ukah 2005: 304).

The Word of God remains central to Pentecostal video films – *Yatin* too has a logocentirc key scene during which Philippe explains the Gospel. Additionally, *Yatin* presents another source of agentive words in the form of prayers. Indeed, prayers become the main weapon in the fight against witches, demons and the devil and are particularly effective when accompanied by holding a Bible and

[29] This has been well documented (see, e.g., Haynes 2007a: 145; B. Meyer 2002: 73, 2010a: 47; Ogunleye 2003b, 2003c: 12; Oha 2000; Okuyade 2011: 5; Okwori 2003: 8; Ukah 2012: 228; Ukadike 2000: 251; Wendl 2001: 285).

adding the phrase, “In the name of Jesus!” with commanding gestures. In this way prayers become visually more expressive than the Word of God, especially if filmmakers provide special effects as further visual cues.

Special effects have been part of films for a long time. They are particularly interesting, since they can visualise things that are not normally observable with the naked eye and have thus become particularly important in religious films. The *Jesus Film*, however, only employs them sparingly and subtly, mainly through the use of light. In Indian mythological films and television serials, special effects have been employed to demonstrate the divinity of characters, and became largely computer generated since the late 1980s (Dwyer 2006: 29; Mankekar 1999: 190, 2002: 138).

It is this trend that West African video filmmakers picked up and turned into one of their trademarks. Due to their low budgets their special effects remain crude and often appear highly unrealistic and even funny, especially to an audience used to the iconic sophistication of Hollywood. In spite of this, their obviously computer generated special effects need to be understood as a powerful way to make the normally unseen visible and thus present. They cannot be made sense of within a semiotic framework, since they are not meant to represent or symbolise the normally unseen through iconic sophistication. Rather, as B. Meyer (2002: 74, 84 n.75) and Pype (2012: 119) put it, special effects visualise and reveal the unseen to their audiences, making the normally unseen present to those who watch the films. Such presencing relies on what I describe as the transmaterial presencing principle, making special effects appear veracious (Pype 2012: 101), appealing and powerful at the same time. As I have discussed elsewhere (J. Merz 2014), special effects provide films like *Yatin* with a characteristic visual form that is meaningful to African audiences and makes Pentecostal films much more visually veracious and credible than the more logocentric evangelistic films I have discussed in this chapter.

Le Combat and *La Solution* have in many ways been precursors to the Nollywood Christian films such as *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance*, that add a distinct Pentecostal twist to the narrative by visually portraying spiritual warfare through special effects. Both *Yatin* and *La Solution* have been made to demonstrate how the Word of God, as shown in the *Jesus Film*, works out in everyday life. This recognition

has indeed brought dramatic and Bible-based films together, the former supporting the latter. In this combination, films are now commonly used during evangelistic campaigns throughout Benin.

Film Evangelism in Benin and Cobly

The history of film evangelism in Benin and Cobly before the Democratic Renewal remains very hazy and largely unknown. This has to do with the informal aspect of this kind of activity that is hardly ever documented. Furthermore, film has neither a permanent nor continuous presence with the result that outside observers often are not aware that films are used during evangelistic events. I only learnt about specific events of film evangelism once I started to take an interest in it and ask very specific questions. Even then, research remained difficult, as people often do not remember many details.

The earliest documentation for a Christian film in Benin dates from 1982, when *Jésus de Nazareth* was one of the popular films in Cotonou's cinemas (Saxer and Grossenbacher 1987: 79). This must have been a dubbed version of Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977). American missionaries from the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention started work in Benin in 1970 (Vanderaa 1991: 3) and established the *Église Protestante Baptiste* (Alokpo 2003: 33; de Surgy 2001: 38). Michel Alokpo (2001: 69, 2003: 33) affirms that they have engaged in film evangelism, probably mainly focusing on southern Benin, where they have their congregations. I can assume that they showed the *Jesus Film* and also used their own productions, most notably *Le Combat* (1984) and *La Solution* (1994).

After the Democratic Renewal, Benin became more open to missionary activities and the government officially recognised *Campus pour Christ Bénin* in 1999. According to their director, Parfait Mitchaï (personal communication, 19 Jan. 2012), *Campus* has since established itself as Benin's main promoter of audiovisual media for evangelism, including the *Jesus Film*. They try to stimulate local film production by engaging with young Beninese filmmakers for whom they sometimes host training events. More importantly, *Campus* coordinates and maintains contact with around 45 film teams throughout Benin who come from different churches and mission organisations and who send teams to show the *Jesus Film*

programme. Since *Campus* have recognised that the *Jesus Film* on its own is not enough, their evangelistic campaigns now last for three evenings during which they show parts of the *Jesus Film* followed by locally made evangelical drama films, such as *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance*, *La Solution* or the French versions of Nigerian films, such as Mount Zion Film Productions' *The Gods are Dead* (2000), *Apoti Eri (The Ark of God)* (2001) or *The Broken Pitcher* (2009). In doing so they combine showing the Word of God of the *Jesus Film* while demonstrating its relevance to everyday life as shown in dramatic films.

While *Campus* has been instrumental in presenting their *Jesus Film* programme in most villages in southern Benin, they regret that they have not yet been able to cover the North as much as they would like. To date, there are no Christian video films from the north that could be used during evangelistic events. In spite of this, film teams have operated in the Atacora region and in the Commune of Cobly, often sponsored by the *Église Évangélique des Assemblées de Dieu*. In 1996/97, for example, a team circulated in many villages in the Commune showing the French version of the *Jesus Film* on a big screen, while a pastor interpreted it into Mbelime. The projections proved very popular and attracted large crowds. Another team came in 2003 and showed the *Jesus Film* on a large screen in Cobly during several nights, again attracting an important crowd. They also went to several village locations, which resulted in the beginning of at least one new church. Apart from these events the *Assemblées de Dieu* regularly offers film viewings, either on a television set or using video projectors. They use films during conferences, special church events, local evangelistic campaigns, and during funeral wake keepings.

The American initiated *Église Ministère de Jésus Bénin* started its work in the Commune of Cobly in 1995. In the early days, as part of their church-planting efforts, a team circulated in different villages to show the *Jesus Film* and other evangelistic films, such as *Le Combat*, *La Solution* and *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* on a large screen using a video projector. Later, from 2002 to 2004, a young man visited villages, where *Ministère de Jésus* churches had been established, by donkey cart. He offered a choice of Christian films from which the people chose two, and showed these on a television setup, stopping regularly to explain the films. In an interview (20 Aug. 2012) he said that his work resulted in new converts in many

of the churches. The most popular videos proved to be *Le Combat*, *La Solution*, the *Jesus Film* as well as the stories of Moses and Joseph. *Ministère de Jésus* continues to be interested in film evangelism and often shows videos during their yearly Easter conference.

A pastor from the *Église Pentecôte de la Foi* in Cobly invited a missionary from Natitingou who used a video projector to show an unidentified Jesus film in his church in 2010. The pastor was so impressed with this performance, that he asked me to buy him the necessary equipment when I was next in Europe. The new *Église Mission Évangélique de Dieu*, a recent splinter group of the *Église Pentecôte de la Foi*, rented a television and necessary equipment to show films during their 2012 Christmas conference. The Catholic church in Cobly too, likes to project films on big screens as part of Christmas or Easter activities. In 2012 and 2013 they borrowed a video projector from the parish in Tanguiéta.

Generally, as this incomplete survey shows, churches are extremely interested in showing films and I was not surprised to learn that about half of the Christians in the Kara area of neighbouring Togo have seen the *Jesus Film* in a church-related setting (Hill 2012: 72).

Showing Christian films, often for evangelistic purposes, is not limited to churches. TV stations sometimes offer Jesus films especially around Christian holidays, such as Christmas. Some of the video parlours show Christian films at times, as do some individuals who are keen on evangelism. During the late 2000s, for example, a teacher in Oroukparé regularly showed videos to those who came to his house. In Cobly, an enthusiastic Christian from the *Assemblée de Dieu* also regularly opens his house to show evangelistic films, mainly to the children of his neighbourhood. Generally, people watch at their neighbours' houses if they do not have a television themselves. Some also circulate Video CDs of popular films, including *Le berger* or *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance*, until they are so scratched that they do not play anymore. This means that there are extensive formal and informal networks that give most people the chance to watch Christian films and videos at some point in their lives.

Conclusion

The transnational trajectories of the three films *Jesus* (1979), *La Solution* (1994) and *Yatin: Lieu de souffrance* (2002) that I discuss in this chapter have often converged at local evangelistic events during which they are shown throughout Benin. The *Jesus Film*, being based on the Gospel of Luke, has been promoted as a historical and biblically accurate visualisation of the Word of God to the extent that it becomes identified with Scripture itself. Seen through the eyes of evangelicals, the Word of God of the Bible *and* the *Jesus Film* are powerful, agentive and have the ability to change lives. This is specifically demonstrated in dramatic Christian films, such as *La Solution* and *Yatin*, which visualise how people are affected by the Word and change their lives as a result of it. In this way dramatic films reinforce and complement Bible-based films. They make references to the Bible in their dialogues, quote from it and even borrow narrative elements from it.

Christian films conjure up the kind of mythic realism often associated with screen media by feeding off the pervasive cinematic myth that film can present reality, especially for early and "primitive" audiences who were constantly suspected of blurring the imaginary with the real (Ambler 2001: 88-89; Burke 2002; Burns 2000; J. Ellis 1992: 77; Lyden 2003: 50-53; B. Meyer 2003a: 206; R. O. Moore 2000; Reinhartz 2007: 6). Films can achieve this by bringing religion directly to film and by becoming transmaterial to their audiences by merging sign and referent. As a result audiences can experience the Word of God on film in a more powerful and intimate way than they could with any text.

Since the invention of film, evangelical and later Pentecostal Christians sensed the importance of the new medium. They became pioneers of film and continue to exploit its communicative potential as the example of the *Jesus Film* or Christian Nigerian videos show. Film has slowly become accepted as a medium suitable for Christians and appeared to evangelicals as an exciting and powerful tool that simply *had* to be used in global evangelism. In doing so, whether they intended it or not, the Protestant focus on the Bible as a text is not only being complemented by the Word of God on film, which is increasingly used in evangelism, but may eventually even be superseded by it. For Nigeria, Okuyade claims that "the site for evangelising has moved from the pulpit to the video film" (2011: 11).

Christian films arrived in West Africa with missionaries, who were among the first promoters of the new medium. While the circulation of films certainly had its ups and downs throughout the years, the medium continues to be pushed most notably through Campus Crusade for Christ's record breaking *Jesus Film*, now claimed to be the most watched and most dubbed film in history. The *Jesus Film* is now supported by locally made dramatic films, such as *La Solution* and *Yatin*, which help their audiences to see that the explicitly white Jesus of the film has direct relevance to their lives.

In Cobly, the new medium of film probably only arrived a few years after the first missionaries, but people clearly came to see both of them as manifestations of *upaanu* (the new times). Film and Christianity have thus become intricately linked, especially since local churches, missionaries and other individuals remain among the most important promoters of the medium.

Christianity, then, especially in its Pentecostalised forms, is becoming not only a religion of the book, but also of film. Ukah has observed especially for West Africa: "The medium of video has become one of the preferred channels for the communication of religious truth, hope, ideas and propaganda" (2003: 226), since it brings the life of the moving picture to the Word of God. On this basis I suggest that in Cobly, the medium of film has become an inseparable and important part of Christianity. Indeed, I have good reason to speculate with Reinhartz that "it may well be the case that more people worldwide know about Jesus and his life story from the movies than from any other medium" (2007: 1).

The Bible as a text is no longer the only medium that Christians commonly use. God's Word now also consists of moving images that people watch. Because film combines images, movement and sound it is more engaging and experiential than written text, making it more accessible and interesting to many people. This move from text to film and the importance that the new medium has gained in West Africa needs to be explored further.

In the next chapters I shift my discussion from the three films themselves to how people of the Commune of Cobly understand, receive and watch the films. I start by discussing the importance of vision in people's lives and how films, together with the television sets that show them, have become the most popular technology that enhances vision.