

# VIDEO HALL MORALITY

*A minor field study of the production of space in video halls in  
Kampala, Uganda*

# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the social and political functions of the video halls in Kampala, Uganda, based on a field study conducted during two months in the end of 2011. 13 video halls in nine different areas of Kampala form the basis of this study, and the methods being used are observations and structured and semi-structured interviews with video hall owners, attendees, street vendors and "people on the street". The video halls are then problematized and discussed through theories on (social) space: Michel Foucault's (1967/1984) concept of "other spaces" and heterotopia; David Harvey's (1996) dialectical approach to the production of space, and; Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy's (2004) volume on the concept of MediaSpace.

The study finds that the social space of the video hall is closely linked with questions of morale and "otherness": the video hall is by many regarded an immoral place, where thieves gather and people do drugs. This frames the video hall outside of the "normal" social imaginary, even by many of the people attending the hall. The study also finds that the potential for political resistance or an alternative public sphere – one of the main features of Foucault's heterotopia – as seen in the video parlors in Nigeria (Okome 2007) do not seem to have any bearing in the Ugandan context. Factors such as the lack of educational films, and the moral contestation of the social space, is argued to be the cause of this, however the study also makes the argument that the video hall itself, as well as the academic field of film in general, has to be taken more seriously by the academia in Uganda in order to make sense of the functions and implications of this "othering" of the social space that is the video hall.

Keywords: *production of space, heterotopia, ethnography, video hall, Uganda*

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Peder Bergenwall

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Leafing through *Oxford History of World Cinema* (1996), a book claiming to sum up much of the world's filmic output and directors, it is easy to feel a bit let down. Here a chorus of academic writers, with the prestigious "Oxford", and the all-encompassing "World Cinema" in the title, is proclaiming an effort to demarcate the film canon of the world, and out of some 800 pages the continent of Africa and its filmic production and history gets five of those pages.

As much as this apparent lack in the writing of cinema history is a bit sad, it is also hardly surprising: with the colonial past of the African countries, many of them have not had a cinematic production "of their own" for more than 50 years, and even then many have had trouble getting funds for the huge economic endeavors a national film industry (often) entail. Struggles with strict regulations and censorship, economic hardships, segregation and apartheid, lack of technical equipment and expertise – many are the reasons African countries have seen their filmic ventures struggle to even get started, much less realize something that can be called a "film industry". Does this mean there have been no films shown in Africa, no audiences partaking in those same screenings, and no film-centric cultures growing up around these practices and leisure activities? Of course not: as we have seen in the last couple of decades with the Nigerian video boom, the film viewing practices and the imported films (American, European, Indian, Chinese) in Africa can have huge implications for the viewers' film habits, and a big impact on the country's and continent's own production: as of 2009, Nollywood is now the second biggest (after India's Bollywood) film producer in the world, and one of the biggest exporters of film in Africa. (UNESCO)

## *1.1 The place/space of cinema in Africa, a short introduction*

The cinema - or to be more accurate, the film going and viewing - in African countries such as Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana and Uganda has in some respects quite little to do with its correspondent in Europe and America. As some writers have shown (elaborated further down), the cinematic experience in Africa can range from racing to and from a (from the Hausa authority's point of view) "morally questionable" cinema theaters with no roofs (Larkin 2008),

through having the audience change the meaning of the films by commenting and indeed renegotiating the film's story during a screening (Bouchard 2010), to having no "real" cinema theater to go to, instead making use of makeshift shacks or street corner to screen DVD films for cheap (Okome 2010). Studying, and questioning, these specific appropriations of the cinematic experience and indeed the reformulations of what it might mean to "go to the movies" (if that phrase is even applicable) is of great importance if we are to understand how people make do in specific locals in an ever more globalized and localized world, and in what ways people make use of these sites of media consumption. These sites, as with all other places of gathering and socialization, can also be defined as spaces: as Michel de Certeau puts it, "space is practiced place" (de Certeau 1984: 117). By looking at places like these not only as sites of consumption of media but also linking them to other sites and powers surrounding them, the social practices of everyday life of the people using them - by, in short, exploring the space as practiced place - an understanding of what "cinema" might mean in countries like those mentioned above can be discerned. As media scholars and sociologists have known for some time, looking at, for example, questions of media consumption, the making of social space, and the formulations of moral codes in a society has to be done first with microscope before you can make claims of generalities (see for example Bourdieu 1979; Foucault 1975/1995; Munn 1986). Sites of media consumption and sociality in Africa, with the scarce academic output it has engendered, seems ripe for this kind of treatment.

## *1.2 Purpose and research questions*

In Uganda there are two cinema theaters of the Euro-American type, the Cineplex and the National Theatre, both of which are located in the capital city Kampala. As they are quite expensive to attend for most Uganda citizens - with 35% of the population below the poverty line (CIA estimates 2001, The World Factbook) this is hardly surprising - speaking of "the cinema" in Uganda seems problematic. There are however other sites of media consumption and coming together in Uganda, namely video halls, or what in Luganda (the major language in Uganda) are called "bibanda". As Michiel van Oosterhout and Katerina Marshfield (2005-2006) mentions in their survey of the video halls show, there seems to be a certain consensus among many people that these halls are places of immorality and drug abuse. At the same time, as DStv, locally

dubbed movies and football are major entertainment forms for many people, these video halls seem to cater to those not being able to enjoy them at home. The video hall in Uganda is, in other words, very much a contested space of sociality, media consumption and everyday life.

My interest in the video halls is with the very materiality of the place, and the social space they form in the neighborhoods they occupy, being informed mainly by Brian Larkin's (2008) ethnographic study on media and urban culture in Northern Nigeria, Michel Foucault's (1984) conception on "other spaces", the theories and case studies within the conceptual realm of MediaSpace (Couldry & McCarthy 2004), and David Harvey's (1996) work on social space. How have the video halls been shaped by, and how have they in turn helped shape, the neighborhood, the city and its peoples in terms of politics, media, everyday activities and economy? In short:

1. What place do the video halls have in Kampala, and what spaces do they occupy and create?
2. Which (social, economic and political) functions and connotations do the video halls have in Kampala, and how do they relate to other businesses, people's homes and sites of social interaction and media consumption?

### *1.3 Disposition*

As this is an ethnographic thesis based on a minor field study, I will first present the specifics of the methods and material being employed and analyzed. Following this is a presentation of prior research, specifically that of film and cinema in Nigeria, audience research, and film in Uganda. The theories on (the production of) space being used are then discussed and problematized: Foucault's concept of heterotopia, Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy's MediaSpace, and David Harvey's dialectical approach to space. Here I also define how I intend to use the concepts of space. The research results are then presented, first through a short description of a visit to a video hall, and then by examining specific aspects of the video halls in Kampala. This follows by a chapter with conclusions and discussion on the implications of the findings, and the study rounds up with a short summary.

## 2. METHOD, MATERIAL AND DELIMITATIONS

As this study will focus mainly on the video halls as place and space, and not go too deep into the media presented at these halls, the two main modes of inquiry will be observation and interviews: observation of the video halls, neighborhoods and the people coming and going there, and interviews with the people involved with them, whether customer, owner, vendor or passerby. The use of almost exclusively ethnographic methods under the banner of "cinema studies" – a field where film scholars like David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson long have been championing the use of textual analysis as the main (if not sole) basis for analysis of "how we make sense of" the film, or where the text is seen through the eyes of cultural studies, with researchers looking for structures and ideologies inherent in the text (see for example Bordwell 2008; Thompson 1999, and; Thompson 2003) – may seem a bit out of place, or, at worst, completely missing the point of what a film study "should be". There are, however, several reasons for choosing interviews and observations when doing film studies in general, if not solely so at least as a complement. Cecilia Mörner argues that "although textual methods, such as semiotics and discourse analysis, have certainly accounted for different positions for making meaning, it is true that these methods substitute "real" people—people of flesh and blood and with unique experiences—with textually constructed, "ideal" people." (Mörner 2011: 26) By giving the people involved a voice, so to speak, the researcher opens up to more direct information (from the audiences, the producers, the marketers, etc.) of the lived world of the culture under scrutiny. As Malinowski puts it, ethnographic field work is "to grasp the native's point of view, *his* relation to life, to realize *his* vision of his world" (emphasis in original, quote in Aspers 2007: 251).

To use only textual analysis, even when possible, in a study on film or media in a foreign context would be potentially detrimental to the end result: how do you make sure that the analysis is not based more in the culture of the author than within the context of the material itself? Patrik Aspers (2007) identifies two separate orders of construction. The first order of construction is the level of meaning of the actors in a specific field: their own life worlds as it is seen through the eyes and ears of the researcher. The second order of construction is the theories used by the researcher to answer her or his questions, to analyze, through the chosen theories, the

material produced within the first order of construction (Aspers 2007: 46-47). Working within this understanding of ethnographic work allows the researcher to not only "come close to" the field, but also (if done well) to faithfully represent the field from within, and to, through theory, make sense of it from without.

Qualitative ethnographic methods do, of course, come with their own set of problems. The first order of construction is reliant on, for example, the memory of the people being interviewed, that the interviewees do not withhold relevant information, or that they provide answers they think the researcher wants to hear. When using observations, the researcher has to be sure that she or he has understood what is being observed correctly, in the context of the field itself. This is closely related to the problems inherent to the second order of construction, as Mörner summarizes: "[r]esearchers are always influenced by their chosen theoretical framework and by ideologies", though, Mörner argues, "regardless of the theoretical and epistemological framework and influences, it is necessary to be able *to make sense* of whatever is supposed to be analyzed" (emphasis in original, Mörner 2011: 27).

As mentioned before, there are very few studies made on African film cultures in general, and, at the writing of this thesis, only two made on film (as it relates to this study) in Uganda. This makes it hard, if not impossible, to base the study of the video halls in Kampala on anything other than interviews with people related to the halls, and observations of them (with some articles as the few exceptions). Specifically it means that I have to rely on people's statements for many facts, as there usually are no written records to fall back on. Cross referencing will be done when possible (as some facts may be confirmed by several oral accounts), of course, but in some cases this is not an option. With these constraints in mind, I do contend that a study of this type – on the social functions of the video hall in Kampala – is best conducted using the ethnographic methods of interviews and observation as described above. A case in point is the inspiring work by Brian Larkin (2008) on cinema-going in contemporary Kano, northern Nigeria, where he, through observations and interviews in dialogue with extensive historical knowledge, looks at "how material structures produce immaterial forms of urbanism – the sense of excitement, danger or stimulation that suffuse different spaces in the city and create the experience of what urbanism is" (Larkin 2006: 13).

Aspers talks about four different types of interviews, based on form and what answers the questions may yield: the structured interview; the semi-structured interview; the thematically open interview, and; the completely open interview (Aspers 2007: 137). This study uses both the semi-structured type and an amalgamation of the thematically open and the completely open type of interview. These interviews and observations are used to interrogate and define the video halls in their urban context, using the studies mentioned above. By placing the qualitative findings of the field study in dialogue with the theories on space and social everyday life, I hope to contribute to the understanding of media consumption and getting-together in an Ugandan (and African) context, lift the importance of researching spatiality in media studies, and at the same time scrutinize the very theories informing this study: do they hold up in the urban setting of Kampala?

I have chosen to focus this study on the city of Kampala, with 13 video halls in the city forming the base of my research, using field work conducted during the two months of November through December 2011. The reason for this is two-fold. First, time constraints makes it difficult to do the study of video halls justice if the area of research is too wide or the number of video halls are too many. As I want to get to know the functions of the video halls, and the people going there, I see it as more important to spend more time in fewer video halls than to have a large sample but little time to "take in" the places. Secondly, my interest lies, as with Larkin (2006), with the video halls in an urban context. The city of Kampala is rapidly expanding, and at the same time the economy (and peoples incomes and livelihoods) plummeting in the recent year. This makes these sites of leisure inside the busy and struggling city an interesting area to focus on. Twelve of the thirteen video halls I visited were chosen with the help of my guide Gilbert Ereuka, security guard and projectionist at Amakula Kampala Cultural Foundation – the first video hall I went to was with Ivan Lukanda, lecturer at Makerere University. As Mr. Ereuka and his employer have been working with video halls in the city for some years, for their annual film festival, Mr. Ereuka had access to a list of twenty video halls, with names, addresses, and contacts to many of the owners, but due to time constraints and difficulties getting a hold of some of the owners, we decided to use the thirteen detailed here. These video halls are not always easy to locate, as I will elaborate on, and with the time constraint already mentioned, this list, picked by Mr. Ereuka and me, quickly provided me with a diverse

sample of halls located in many different parts of town. The video halls chosen was, in alphabetical order of the area in which they are found: Bwaise (Basesa Video Hall, Casablanca, Mukungu Sports Center); Katwe (Hollywood, Washington); Kibuye (San-Siro), Kisenyi (New Paradise Entertainment); Kitintale (Titanic); Kyebando (Down Town Sound), Luzira (Touch of Class); Nakulabye (MG Titanic), and; Ndeeba (Namyalo, Titanic). Fig. 1 in the appendix points out the different areas on a map of Kampala.

At the sites, the conditions of the observations outside and inside the video halls varied somewhat: in some areas, my presence drew more attention than in others, sometimes making it difficult to make a good observation without people changing their behavior (some, for example, put their drinks away, or stopped watching the film as they were watching me instead). Staying a while, however, usually made people go back to their business. If not, I instead started talking to people in as relaxed a manner as the situation allowed, turning the observation into an interview. Of the interviews, some were conducted "on-the-fly" as occasion arisen: a boda-boda driver asked me what I was doing in Uganda, and when I told him he started talking about his experiences while driving me home, and; a policeman and I got talking about video halls by chance as we met outside the guest house I was staying in. The formally made interviews (some taped, some not) took place either inside (when possible) or outside the video halls, often with either an owner or an attendant of the video hall, and some people coming there. The interviews of the customers were usually made in a casual manner, without a dictaphone or formal interview setting – as other researchers I met suggested, people here can be suspicious of answering questions on tape, thinking the information will be used by their government. Most interviews were done in English, but when not possible my guide translated the interview from English to Luganda, and back to English.

Many of these interviewees, the customers, are not named in the study: some of the customers were, as suggested earlier, not comfortable with being "officially" interviewed as they had little way of confirming me not being affiliated with Makerere University or the government. When told that they didn't have to provide me with a name, they were more open to questions and chatting. The same goes for some of the people interviewed outside of the video hall context (people on the street, students, businessmen and so on). One reason for this suspicion, I'm told, is that Kampala to a large degree consists of the Baganda ethnic group from the Central region

(where Kampala is situated) whereas the current president, Yoweri Museveni, is part of the Banyankole group from the Western region. This in turn creates tensions between the peoples in Kampala, and especially between the Baganda and the now ruling president (see for example BBC; The Guardian). This situation of course creates some potential problems for this study. Referencing these people when presenting results becomes problematic: I can not quote a person that is not being credited with that particular opinion, but at the same time using only the ones I actually have got names on makes for a rather small sample. Knowing this, I argue that these unnamed interviewees do accurately represent a certain attitude (as will be explored), and as such can be used as sources of information. The presentational problem is solved by not talking about them as specific named persons, but in a more generalized manner. I want to make clear though that these people of course do not represent what everyone thinks and talks about, even though they are representative of what a large portion of the people seem to think. The generalization is used as a way of showing not *the* “public opinion”, but *one of* them. I will try to be as specific as possible throughout the presentation of my findings when the unnamed respondents are being referenced.

Seeing as the (video) film culture in Uganda has next to nothing written on it, there are of course many possible ventures one could take in researching this field. Focusing on the role and popularity of the local translators and VJ's, one could trace their origin in the oral history and culture of storytelling in the region, and in that way help define a very specific and, in the Euro-American context, forgotten art. The emerging national film industry seems to be a struggling one, with few resources and little to no technical expertise (except for some internationally involved organizations providing workshops and technical aid), also a possible site of inquiry. So why focus only on the spatiality and sociality of the video halls? As these halls seem to attract mainly people with low income, people with no or low paying jobs, and with few other means of seeing films, DStv and football, the video hall may be the perfect place for coming close to Kampala's many economically struggling people, their forms of leisure and how the places they frequent function in relation to questions of social space. Getting to know the video hall can, in short, be a way into bigger things, which I will elaborate further on later in this thesis.

### 3. PRIOR RESEARCH – AUDIENCES, AFRICA AND “THE CINEMA THEATER”

Defining audiences is not an entirely easy task. Toby Miller (2000) identifies three sites for defining the audience: the film industry, the state and criticism. At the site of the state, discussions of the audience has in many ways been panic-laden and, as Miller puts it, "signs of anxiety" (Miller 2000: 337). The Payne Fund Studies of the 1930's induced a sense that "large groups of people were engaged with popular culture beyond the control of the state and ruling class, such that they might be led astray" (ibid: 338).

A UNESCO report published in 2009 show that the film production in Nigeria in 2006 had past the production in the US (872 films produced, compared to 699, respectively), making them the second largest film producer in the world after India (which produced 1041 films that year). (UNESCO) Though not uncomplicated, as suggested by the discussion on Nollywood video film and the FESPACO focused art house cinema put forward in *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution* (Şaul & Austen 2010), it indicates that both film in Africa as such, and the study of its production, consumption, political and economic implications, and every other thinkable aspect of it, is of increasing importance. One could of course argue that film in Africa ought to have been important for a very long time, but this seems as good a time as any to rectify the lack of interest of the past. Drawing on this apparent boom of the Nigerian film industry, I will use some studies relating to this. The reason for this is that, as I will show, film (in its broad sense) in Nigeria have some crucial likenesses and implications in an Ugandan context. On Uganda specifically, a survey on the video halls conducted in 2005-2006 by Michiel van Oosterhout and Katerina Marshfield, and a master's thesis on the national film production (or "Kinna-Uganda"), will be used. Following this, I will present articles that relate to research on audiences and how it has been discussed and problematized in the past.

### *3.1 Video film and the cinema in Nigeria*

In looking at the Marhaba cinema theatre in Kano, Nigeria, Brian Larkin (2008) goes past typical apparatus and audience theory in that he places the cinematic event in interplay with, and indeed as interdependent on, the urban social, ethical, religious and cultural life surrounding the Marhaba cinema specifically and the Muslim city of Kano generally. As he reminds us, the buildings and streets built under colonial urbanism "creates platforms for the making of everyday experience, and those streets and buildings give rise to a profusion of activities which under-grow and overwhelm the space and logic of earlier structures, reusing and redefining them for a postcolonial age" (Larkin 2008: 148). Along with the materiality of the urban objects, the urban life and its manifestations is congested with the immaterial affects they provoke: "the tedium, fear, arousal, anger, awe, and excitement felt as one moves from one space to another" (ibid) is also, according to Larkin, what citizens are moving between in the urban city of Kano. Cinema-going in Kano is, as Larkin puts it, a "visceral event," where feelings of "danger, illicitness, eroticism, and excitement" (ibid: 149) are common. As the cinema theaters in Kano, especially the cheaper ones, often are frequented by what the Muslim Hausa call 'yan daba (hooligans), karuwai ("women who have left home") and 'yan gaye (Westernized youths), the Hausa see the activity as illicit and immoral. Though, as many attend the theaters "precisely because they feel they receive moral instructions," the cinema "stands both inside and outside the moral boundaries of Hausa society, a marginal space that transgresses orthodox norms yet strangely becomes a site those norms can be intensified" (ibid). The Hausa cinema theaters are, as Larkin shows, contradictory sites where both "moral" and "immoral" imaginations and activities form and take place. Cinema is, however, not immoral simply by the activities taking place there: as Larkin, drawing on de Certeau, pertains, cinema takes on its meaning "from its relations with other places of the city" where it only can be marked "by excess, by its immoral aura, in comparison with the moral space of home and mosque, bureaucratic spaces of work and government, and educational spaces of school and university" (ibid: 150-152). The cinema stands in relation to all other instances and institutions in Hausa society.

As with other film distribution venues in Africa, the distribution in Northern Nigeria is different from that in the United States and Europe. Theaters usually gets one print of each film,

and this print then gets sent to other theaters in turn before coming back to the original cinema for a second run. This means that each night a different film is running, with, in Larkin's words, particular days being charged with particular meanings: "Fridays was reserved for the newest and best films, followed by Saturday; Monday and Tuesday were for the cheapest and least popular. Tuesdays were for Hong Kong films, Thursdays for U.S. ones, and the other five nights for Indian movies" (ibid: 157). Prices for attendance shifts too, depending on previous showings popularity; popular films which ran at fifteen naira one showing may cost thirty, or seventy-five, naira the next (100 NGN is at the time of writing equalent of 4.20 SEK) . Larkin pertains that cinema in Kano is "marked by this play between the standardized logic of the technology itself and the social practices that congregate around, constituting cinema as a 'practiced place'" (de Certeau, in Larkin 2008: 162). Larkin rounds up the chapter with the conclusion that "[c]inema provides a visual experience difficult to reproduce on a video screen and a social space of interaction impossible to recreate in a domestic arena" (ibid).

Onookome Okome (2007) is focusing his work on the mainly Nigerian video film industry, Nollywood. He contends that research on the reception of and audience in Nollywood, and indeed African popular arts in general, is in need of a new approach: "Indeed, understanding the multiple dimensions of this audience is indispensable to the goal of problematizing ways in which knowledge is constructed, used, or circulated, dispensed and re-invented in Africa" (Okome 2007: 6). He points to Karin Barber, who sees "the 'public' as a new form of 'coming together'." Though, as she points out, this can only be understood properly "'if the specific forms of address, use of space, mode of staging, and expectations and interactions of performers and spectators are empirically established in their surprising and subtle details'" (Barber, in Okome 2007: 6). Okome's interest lies in what he sees as the two main sites for consumption of Nollywood videos, and what he calls "the street audience": the "street corner" and the "video parlor". This kind of spectatorship, for Okome, is one of absence: "the absence of capital that makes it impossible to engage in the consumption of these images in the more orthodox space of consumption such as the cinema halls" (ibid). The video parlor in particular is described in the same way as one would of the video halls in Uganda, as a "simple location where members of a community congregate for the sole purpose of consuming video narratives. The material technology of the video parlor is sparse. It can be anything from a small, stuffy room in the

neighborhood to a disused school hall. The essential quality that it must possess is that it has room enough to take in people who are willing to pay a small fee to see video films with other members of the community" (ibid: 7).

Sidney Little Kasfir, quoted in Okome, has described these video theatre spaces as partly having roots in the popular Yoruba theatre and partly due to the contention that "contemporary African art has built through a process of bricolage upon existing structures and scenarios on which the older, pre-colonial and colonial genres of African arts were made" (Kasfir, in Okome 2007: 8). As Okome contends, the improvisational structure of the Yoruba theatre of the 70's can also be seen in the practices of the video theaters, though the bricolage suggested by Kasfir for Okome has "broader implications for audiences of video parlors" (ibid). Drawing on the work of Jean-François Bayart (written as Francoise Bayart in the article), Okome refers to the African audience as the "popular public" or, in Bayarts words, the "ironic chorus". (ibid) This phrasing is used to describe the African public's vulnerable and weak position and its social and economic negotiation within this position. In negotiating these positions, finding new and creative ways "out of the complex and tedious life that members live", Okome contends, the "public" becomes the "popular audience" which "traverse definable boundaries" (ibid).

These popular audiences, in their abjectness and powerlessness, "negotiate and restate their desires, aspirations and dreams" in their respective neighborhoods, forming what Okome calls "neighborhood feelings" (ibid: 9). Following this, the effect is that "[a]s members re-think their places in the life they are forced to live, affiliation to specific neighborhood communities become one of the crucial ways they define social belonging" (ibid). In Michiel van Oosterhout and Katerina Marshfield's survey of the video hall audience, conducted between 2005-2006, one of the findings stated that action packed and martial arts films were particularly popular among the school children and street children. van Oosterhout and Marshfield argues this has its social and political reasons: "Given the poor and slum like circumstances in which many of the video hall goers are living, without having adequate protection from the authorities (the police and security LC's), these films serve not only as entertainment but also as lessons in simple survival" (van Oosterhout & Marshfield 2006: 13). Okome's notion of the public audience shaping their "forced" living conditions within the neighborhood seems to have pertinence in van Oosterhout and Marshfields study as well.

Okome maintains that these audiences "may give up specific class affiliations, education, age or gender differences for the purpose of a temporary 'coming together'" (Okome 2007: 9). In these instances of confluence a certain kind of social critique could be discerned, moving outside the film texts social and ethical questions: "Domitilla inspired the criticism of the state and its system of governance, and the primary text was then construed as a "real story" in the same way that television soap opera operates as social barometers of the things that matter to its consumers" (ibid: 15). This criticism, however much freedom it may grant its contenders at that time, in that space, Okome is not oblivious to its limitations: "There is little doubt that the phenomenon of the video parlor has opened up the spectrum of social debate to include some members of the abject section of the Nigerian society but the agency which the 'freedom' of this venue offers is achieved only in the temporal constitution of that space of spectatorship. Even in the energetic but high digressional discussions that ensued at the Warri venue, popular agency can only be but temporary" (ibid: 16) Discussing audience participations and potential for power must of course take this specific temporality into account, where social critique may in fact never leave the particular space of the video hall. As we shall see with Michel Foucault's idea of the heterotopia, linking people's power to interpret media with the power to step out of or divert the dominant social order is not unproblematic. This however cannot in itself be seen as an argument against the importance of audience negotiations and reformulations of filmic texts, as these insights may prove valuable and indeed crucial in understanding (popular) audiences' potential for making meaning for them. As Okome puts it, "[b]y bringing this group of socially and economically marginal viewership into this social discursive formation, these sites of screening help the enhancement of the democratization of video stories in contemporary Nigeria" (ibid: 18).

Crucial to my own study of the Ugandan video halls, Okome maintains that "[a]s social centers, "street corners" and video parlors provide alternatives to the orthodox space of cinematic spectatorship" (ibid). The African audiences have to, in Okome's view, be discussed in light of these diverse and specific spaces and practices of consumption these video halls create. "Besides the remapping of the aural and physical landscape of the city, audiences of popular video films repeat for us the ways that the economics of spectatorship is defined as a strategic means of coming to terms with an abject status" (ibid: 19). He concludes his article by urging researchers to see that it is the stories, not the medium on which they are being distributed, that is important

to and for the audiences. In his view, "In the end, it is not the medium or how it manipulates the stories that Nollywood tells that matter to the people who consume Nollywood. The focus is on the stories. The medium may be important but the stories are even more so. There is the need to study many more sites of viewing popular Africa" (ibid). As much as this may be a valid point as it pertains to the video halls in Lagos screening locally made video films, it does not take into account the various sites of consumption not presently showing home-grown video films. In Uganda, with a very scarce local production of films, a vast majority of the videos shown at video halls are imports. The stories in these films are probably as important for the viewers as where they made in Uganda, but the specific uses and negotiations of these texts may prove quite different than in the Nigerian context. Focusing on the stories alone makes it difficult to discern in what ways the audiences makes use of the video halls themselves as (social) spatial sites where ethical, religious and moral questions come into play. How, for instance, does the street children of Kampala make use of the video halls as a substitute for a living room, as van Oosterhout argues? How do the video halls place themselves in the urban landscape, in relation to other establishments and vendors - like those of Brian Larkin's study of cinema in Kano, Nigeria? These instances of spectatorship and social life – the texts, consumption, interaction, negotiation, spatial location, feelings of security in the urban landscape, and so on – must be viewed as interdependent of each other, and equally important to understand as the stories that are being consumed.

### *3.2 Popular audiences*

Okome's view on the video parlor audience echoes the poststructuralist notion of the active, engaged audience who "use" media in deliberate ways, as opposed to the audience as the "cultural dopes" of Harold Garfinkel (Stam 2000: 338). As Ravi S. Vasudevan's article "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema: The Bombay 'Social' Film of the 1940s and 1950s" (Vasudevan 2000: 381-399) makes a strong argument for, the popular arts (in this case, Indian commercial cinema) and its audiences are not unilateral. The Indian critics have bashed the popular cinema for its "derivativeness from the sensational aspects of the US cinema, the melodramatic externality and stereotyping of its characters, and especially for its failure to focus on the psychology of human interaction" (ibid: 383). The audience, by extension, is

according to Vasudevan seen by critics as "an immature, indeed infantile, figure, one bereft of the rationalist imperatives required for the Nehru era's project of national construction" (ibid).

In a survey on the reception of the Western in an Indian reservation camp, JoEllen Shively's showed the John Wayne movie *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) to twenty American Indians and twenty Anglos (non-Indian white Americans, not including those with Mexican or Spanish descent) (Shively 2000). Drawing on both Wright and Swindler, Shively is concerned with how the Indians make meaning of and enjoy a Western or, in her words, "how do Indians link their own ethnic identity to the Western, or limit this identity so they can enter the narrative frame of the Western?" (ibid: 346). Her findings show that there is indeed a disparity between the Indians' and the Anglos' perception of the film, but not necessarily in ways one might think. They all enjoyed Westerns in general, and *The Searchers* specifically, but when asked who in the movie they identified with, 60 percent of the Indians answered that they identified with John Wayne, while 50 percent of the Anglos answered the same. None of the Indians identified with the Indians in the film, but instead "[t]he Indians, like the Anglos, identified with the characters that the narrative structure tells them to identify with - the good guys" (ibid: 348).

The Indian respondents also had differing answers than the Anglos, on the questions of why they liked the film, what they like about it. The Anglos identified their ancestry and believed the film was an authentic portrayal of the Old West as they saw it, with 50 percent ranking this the top reason for liking the film while none of the Indians did. The Indians here seemed to be unwilling to reject the film as unauthentic, but nevertheless did not resonate with the portrayal of the Indians. Instead the cowboy's way of life and the setting of the film (the landscape) was ranked the highest. The Indian respondents liked how the "'Westerns relate to the way I wish I could live'" and commented on John Wayne's character in terms of "'He's his own man'" and "'He is not tied down to an eight-to-five job'" (ibid: 351). The way of life of the cowboy resonated more with the Indians than with the Anglos.

Shively, drawing on Swindler's argument that, in Shively's words, "cultural works are tools used by people to contend with immediate problems" (ibid: 346), and Cawelti's contention that Western novels "provide readers with a vehicle for escape and moral fantasy" (ibid: 345), show that the American Indians in her study indeed identified with the cowboy and his lifestyle, with

the fantasy of being free and independent like the cowboy being meaningful to the Indians. As she concludes, studies such as Cawelti's and Will Wright's fail in that they do not "ask the viewers or readers why they like Westerns" (ibid: 357). Even though asking respondents seem a quite simplistic way of approaching audience's reception and use of popular texts, it nevertheless shows that preconceptions on how an audience will respond to a specific genre, text or work may well fail short if these questions are not part of the survey. As Shively shows, the Indians could make meaning of a seemingly "unfaithful" portrayal of their ancestry in that they instead identified with "the good guy". In an African context this is interesting, not least with the amount of imported films being shown in many countries (despite Nigeria being a big exporter, particularly India and China are big on the African markets). Though my study is not mainly concerned with audience reactions as such, it involves screenings of transnational popular media (e.g. Chinese films, American music videos and British football) to a largely uneducated audience - historically an obvious example of the "cultural dope" of Garfinkel, having "our" values being pushed on the (innocent) native people. The question of the powerful media versus the active audience is of course a more complex one than can be elaborated here - and I will not try to answer it in this study - but researching the (social) space of a video hall must also involve the people going there: how they make use of not only the place as a gathering point, but also how this space is being constructed in relation to the media being screened.

When researching audience, or more specifically sites of media consumption in a film context, the assumption is that we are talking about the bourgeois cinema hall and its audiences. Evident in most literature on the subject, this has also historically been the case (see for example Bazin 1967; Janovich & Faire 2003; Gray 2010; Biltereyst, Maltby & Meers 2012). Even in the African context, a continent where cinema halls are not always available or popular venues, research is often done on "the cinema", something I problematized in my BA thesis, as it related to South Africa (Bergenwall 2010). Okome's work discussed earlier is one of quite few examples that take a different approach to what film viewing might be, as do many of the authors collected in Şaul and Austen (2010).

One of those authors is Vincent Bouchard (2010), who shows that films in specific contexts can be the catalyst for social interaction and creative forming of personas amongst the people at the venue. Interested in audience practices at film screenings, Bouchard distinguishes between

two models of spectatorship: the bourgeois and the popular (mentioned above). In the bourgeois model (a model seen in most European and North American settings) the attending audience is silent, letting the film being screened do the talking while they try to interpret the works "original meaning." The popular model, on the other hand, Bouchard sees "correspond to carnival or traveling-fair entertainment" (Bouchard 2010: 95). Here the audience is livelier, using gesturing and loud observations as they comment on the film being screened. Drawing on research done on missionary and governmental film screenings in colonial era Zaire (hereafter called the Congo), Bouchard sees the popular oral commentary practices in the postcolonial Democratic Republic of the Congo being very much a part of this history.

In previous research done by Bouchard on the Montreal theater director and commentator Alexandre Sylvio Jobin, he sees a practice where Jobin as a commentator "acts as presenter, crowd warmer, translator, interpreter, and humorist", where he "proposes an interpretation, an explanation that orients the viewers' understanding" (ibid). These practices have, according to Bouchard, taken specific forms in Africa due to both the local cultural practices of specific populations, and to their colonial and sociopolitical past and context.

In both stationary movie theaters and in mobile screening units, the Belgian information service leaders acknowledged the need for a simultaneous commentary for the films in the local dialects, if their audiences where to understand the message being told. Translating the subtitles weren't enough; the films needed an "elaborate commentary in order to avoid any misunderstanding of the educative message" (ibid: 96). This educative focus of the early governmental and missionary films in the Congo may have some resonance in the Ugandan context as well, seeing as the British founded the mobile film showings model with their "cinema vans" used for rural propaganda purposes in their colonies before World War II (ibid: 97) As the van Oosterhout and Marshfield report (Marshfield & van Oosterhout 2006) show, educative needs seem (by the time of their report) to have been the biggest reason for the audiences to prefer Nigerian productions, presumably with their shared cultural and colonial history, as well as present day problems and every day strife.

Bouchard points at three reasons why the filmmaking priests in the Belgian Congo where successful and had so well attended screenings: the came to know their audiences' tastes; they

worked with Congolese actors and technicians, and; they adapted the screenings to the various audiences. This stood in contrast to the unimaginative and inadaptable Services de l'Information du Congo Belge, who had the commentator staying in the projection booth at the back of the van, unable to notice and adapt to the audiences' reactions (Bouchard 2010: 97-98). The priests' commentators were not just translators; they were used as means of teaching the spectators "appreciate the very modes of cinematographic expression" (ibid: 98).

As Bouchard notes, "[t]he commentary thus aims to control the film's discourse in order to align it with the educative goal" (ibid: 99). This was done by instructing the commentator with explanations and passages to emphasize and, by doing a prescreening to see where audiences' attention was wavering, take notes and complement with remarks to the commentator. Bouchard sees an alternative process of mediation being an option, "in which the audience recognizes one of its own members as a commentator" (ibid: 99). Here a negotiation between the audience and the commentator occur, where the meaning and understanding of the material being screened is under constant flux: "these practices tend to favor a multiplicity of meanings because they are always based on improvisation" (ibid).

In popular screening in present day Congo, "the spectators openly share their understanding of the film" (ibid: 100). Here the audiences are active in their interpretations of the films, and they renegotiate its meanings amongst each other. According to Bouchard, these practices vary from one place to another, but he never elaborates on in what ways these practices vary, only that the size of the halls and the quality of the films "are as important as the films shown" (ibid). Seeing as this may have socio-economic implications (one could perhaps imagine the cheaper screening rooms being the ones that would draw the more talkative audience), leaving such a gap in his article seems somewhat strange. How the screening room and quality of the film is impacting the publics' remediation (as used by Bolter and Grusin, Bouchard 2010: 107) could potentially be of huge importance in understanding these practices.

Bouchard has in his fieldwork found three distinct patterns of viewer stances: immersed spectators that "can interact out loud with the film's characters"; the comments can also be more random, responding to other remarks, and; in some cases "one or a few spectators can speak up in order to improvise a commentary based on their knowledge of the story or of the characters"

(ibid). Though spectators often identify with, and root for, the hero of the film, this is not always the case. Saïdi M'Pungu Mulendas work on popular film venues in postcolonial Congo (referenced in Okome 2010) shows that this participation can be seen as a dialogue where "[t]he participation is active; it becomes an impassioned collective game in which the screen stars have to answer to the audience" (ibid: 101). Identification with the films characters on the other hand can take on quite interesting proportions. The "neighborhood heroes" presents themselves as one of the films characters, a star actor or a typical role within the genre being screened. This creation of a character must pass through the acceptance of the rest of the audience. Certain people of the audience can take up the commentary of the film, a practice Bouchard maintains is not unique. This person is often very familiar with the films at hand, has a good sense of humor, is observant and has "a good knowledge in French and the local language" (ibid: 104).

Bouchard notes that "[i]t is not the film as an original and novel artwork that attracts audiences in this cinema but rather a communal activity during the screening" (ibid). With Okome's study of video parlors in Nigeria in mind, this may in fact be a common trait of these types of sites. In Bouchard's words, "in the case of a film that was not made for the given cultural space [...] these practices offer an occasion for hybridization" (ibid: 104-105), meaning that the film's "original meaning" in these contexts is not as important for the audience as their common interpretation (through commentary) is. The author contends that these practices lets the spectators "restructure the film", not paying any mind to the film author's intentions. These practices in turn are, for Bouchard, the results of the non-modern oral practices being mixed with the "appropriation of cinematographic apparatus born out of a foreign culture" (ibid: 106). As we shall see, these commentary practices are not particular only to the Congolese context.

### *3.3 The case of Uganda*

The headline of this section might seem a little out of place, seeing as, in the academic field of film studies, there is not much of a "case of Uganda" at all: film production in the country has just recently started to make itself heard, and very few words have been written on film in Uganda in general. As Nassanga Goretti Linda, professor of Media and Communication at Makerere University, expressed it in an email, "[a]s you may have realised, video and film are

areas we have not focused on much in Uganda" (personal correspondence, January 11, 2012). Kristin Alexandra Rasmussen has written a master's thesis on cinema in Uganda, where she analyses the situation from within the concept of national cinema (Rasmussen 2010). In her research she argues that the framework of national cinema, not used in the strictest sense of the term, is useful in analyzing the production of film in Uganda. As this theoretical framework is not the main focus of my own study I will not go into too much detail of Rasmussen's research, but a few points are useful to make. With my own bachelor's thesis on South African film in mind (Bergenwall 2010) I certainly see the usefulness of working within the concept of national cinema when looking at film in Uganda, however, this framing of a film culture without fully exploring the venues of actual reception/consumption makes the study weaker. While television and video halls are mentioned briefly, these channels are not elaborated in any detail. Rasmussen talks about Kinna-Uganda as a national film industry/culture, but without taking into account the audience and places of screening. Maisha Film Lab director Musarait Kashmiri is quoted, questioning how film makers can make money distributing their films to the video halls, and Rasmussen then leaves those places out of the further discussion on the future of the national film industry. As seen in the Nigerian context, discussed by Okome earlier, makeshift screening halls can in fact be a big and important part of a national film culture. By neglecting the two arguably biggest venues of local consumption (television and the video halls), Rasmussen's argument for a national cinema in Uganda seems a bit lacking.

## 4. THEORY – SPACE, PLACE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Space is, to put it awkwardly, a contested space, that is to say, both in terms of specific spaces as they are produced and function in the real world and in our minds, and also in the academic theorization of the concept of space. As Henri Lefebvre puts it, "[w]e are forever hearing of the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth" (Lefebvre 1974/1991: 3). His criticism is that, for the most part, authors rarely define the space they are referring to and, specifically relating to academics like Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, they "leap over an entire area, ignoring the need for any logical links" between the different spaces, springing "without hesitation from mental to social space" (ibid: 5-6). Hopefully not falling into

that same trap, I will under the headlines that follow chart out the different conceptualizations of space as they relate, and seem relevant to, my chosen field of inquiry – in short, a review of the theories I will use.

#### 4.1 "*Other spaces*" and Foucault's heterotopia

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, i believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

(Foucault 1984: 22)

When theorizing space in any capacity, it seems impossible not to evoke and address Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia and his lectures on space collected in the 1984 article titled "Des Espaces Autres", or "Of Other Spaces" as it has been translated in the journal *Diacritics* published in 1984. The lecture on which the article is based was held in 1967, some seven years before Henri Lefebvre first published *The Production of Space* in French. Foucault's concept of heterotopia is one of otherness (as the title of the article suggests): external sites (as opposed to internal, mental places) which are "places [that] are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about" (Foucault 1967/1984: 24). These sites stand in contrast to utopias, sites that "present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down" (ibid). In Foucault's view, the heterotopias are real places that function as "effectively enacted utopias" or counter-sites in which other real sites are "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." Using the cemetery as an example, he argues that the cemetery has seen a shift in place since the nineteenth century, from being placed in the city center to being moved to the outskirts of town, as people's views on mortality and the dead body changed: with the death being seen as an illness and the dead body as bringing sickness, the cemetery was moved, and "[t]he cemeteries

then came to constitute, no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but "the other city," where each family possesses its dark resting place" (ibid: 25).

Foucault distinguishes several types of heterotopias, all of which serve different but related purposes. The heterotopia of crisis, he argues, is a place that in many ways has disappeared in the modern societies (though he leaves this open, saying that, for example, military service has had this function), but in the "so-called primitive" (as he puts it) societies, these places are "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc" (ibid: 24). The heterotopia of deviation is a related to, but, in our times, a much more common place than the heterotopia of crisis. Here deviations of our societies are gathered: the elderly in retirement homes, the mentally ill in psychiatric hospitals and the inmates in the prisons, all being people who act or behave outside the norm of the society in question, people who deviate. Foucault sees the cemetery as a combination of both these types of heterotopias, but also as being linked to the heterotopia of time, in that as the cemetery "begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance" (ibid: 26) Other heterotopias of time are museums and libraries with its indefinitely accumulating time, a sort of stand-still and frozen time. Opposite this is the most fleeting of heterotopias of time, with the fairground exemplifying this temporary place in the mode of the festival. Here time does not stop like in the museum, but is constantly moving and never permanent. Heterotopias are also, for Foucault, linked to rites of purification and isolation, usually only penetrable through certain rituals or with permission (as in the purification process of Scandinavian saunas), or it is compulsory as seen in barracks and prisons. The last two heterotopias recognized by Foucault are two complete opposites: the heterotopia of illusion and the heterotopia of compensation. The first is exemplified with the by now almost gone (in the Western world) brothel, who's "role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory". The heterotopia of compensation, by contrast, is a created space "that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (ibid: 27). Some colonies, like the Puritan societies of America, and the Jesuit colonies of South America, are for Foucault the best examples of these types of heterotopias.

Foucault's idea of the heterotopia is not without its problems, though, as David Harvey (2000) poignantly argues. Though Foucault's heterotopia "enables us to look upon the multiple forms of transgressive behaviors (usually normalized as "deviant") in urban spaces as important and productive", Harvey points out, "Foucault assumes that such spaces are somehow outside of the dominant social order or that their positioning within that order can be severed, attenuated or, as in the prison, inverted" (Harvey 2000: 537-538). Like Lefebvre's criticism of authors like Derrida, Harvey criticizes Foucault's way of making difference into something useless and edulcorate: "What appears at first sight as so open by virtue of its multiplicity suddenly appears as banal: an eclectic mess of heterogeneous and different spaces within which anything 'different' – however defined – might go on" (ibid: 538). Harvey asks himself in what way the heterotopia (exemplified by the cruise ship) becomes "critical, liberatory, and emancipatory" (ibid), and in the case of the ship I can't but agree. The "other spaces" as spaces of difference and liberation may, with Harvey's criticism in mind, seem more like wishful thinking than actual possibilities for people to escape the dominant social order. Does that eliminate all possibilities for resistance and/or social spaces not outside of social dominance but running as an undercurrent through that dominant social order (I am thinking here of, for example, the underground hardcore punk scene of the 80's Washington D.C with its D.I.Y. ethic, or the squatter and artist communes in Scandinavia, occupying buildings in the middle of the city)? Surely not, but if we are to analyze spaces of possible otherness, difference or deviation – and ultimately, resistance – we have to be more attentive to the apparent banality (as Harvey puts it) of Foucault's heterotopia in its over-inclusive and vague state, and more critical of these sites of difference and their possibility for resistance.

I shall have reason to come back to this concept of heterotopia in my analysis of the video halls in Kampala, but needless to say they still form an interesting and intriguing stepping stone for analyzing (other) spaces. Lefebvre's criticism of Foucault not specifying what space he is referring to in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (see Lefebvre 1974/1991: 3-4) has little clout on Foucault's article on the very subject of space. Seeing as Foucault himself distinguishes between the mental and the social (or internal and external, as he puts it) in this article, it evades the risk of falling into the same theoretical pothole as his earlier work. Though not intended for publishing, Foucault's ideas on other spaces have found some foothold; not least as basis for what

the geographer Edward W. Soja (1996) calls "Thirdspace", his conceptualization on the postmodern space/s of the modern city.

## *4.2 MediaSpace*

In looking at space and its social implications from the field of film and media, Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy's (2004) volume of essays prove to be most useful, particularly when seen not only as concretized concepts of spatial (media) theory, but also as a fruitful introduction to methodologies and possible research inquiries – ways of engaging the two intertwined yet separate theoretical fields of media and space. As the introductory chapter contends, "[a]s electronic media increasingly saturate our everyday spaces with images of other places and other (imagined or real) orders of space, it is ever more difficult to tell a story of social space without also telling a story of media, and vice versa" (Couldry & McCarthy 2004: 1). Couldry and McCarthy, together with the other authors of this volume, use the term MediaSpace to try to bridge the gap between space and media, as a sort of marriage between the two. This is an ambitious dialectical project, one "encompassing both the kinds of spaces created by the media, and the effects that existing spatial arrangements have on media forms as they materialize in everyday life" (ibid: 1-2). Both space and media, they argue, are in a sense dialectical in themselves, as they both have the possibility for a sense of belonging (they use Benedict Anderson's (1985) concept of the imagined community as an example) and alienation or distance (as in a short phone call with a friend). This perhaps contradictory (a word that has been in fashion in academic writing for some time now) relationship inherent in the concepts of both space and media may take interesting forms as it relates to the site of the video hall (and what spaces one might find there) and the media it incorporates, as my research will show.

Though MediaSpace "may be dominated by ideologies of control and individualized power", the authors argue, "like any complex system, it constantly under stress through forces of flux, transience and unmanageability" (ibid: 3). Like Foucault (but perhaps more carefully phrased), Couldry and McCarthy leaves the analysis of media and space open to possible rifts or undercurrents in the dominant social order, but without implying a counter-force (or

heterotopia) outside of this order, making it a more subtle and, perhaps, at the same time critical approach. In order to analyze MediaSpace, and to chart how it has been analyzed in the past, the authors map out five central levels of engagement with media and space: (1) Studying media representations. (2) The study of how media images, texts and data flow across space and, in doing so, reconfigures social space. (3) The study of the specific spaces at either end of the media process, the space of consumption and the space of production. (4) The study of scale-effects, or complex entanglements of scale, which results from the operation of media in space, and (5) Studying how media-caused entanglements of scale are variously experienced and understood in particular places.

Of specific interest for my study are levels 2 and 3. The study of flow across space, the former of the two, is "concerned with the overall spatial and social configuration that results from a particular medium" and is "site-specific in its attention to local determinations." (ibid: 6) The authors exemplify this with, amongst others, Lila Abu-Lughod, Faye D. Ginsburg and Brian Larkin's volume on media anthropology, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (2002). Brian Larkin, contributor to the volume, have also himself elaborated on his included chapter in his excellent study of media in Northern Nigeria with *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (2006), which has been discussed in further detail above. The latter of the two, the third level, focuses on "media as social processes as well as technologies and 'content'." This field of inquiry ranges from the space of production to the space of consumption, and anything in-between: "[these processes] encompass everything from the market research that precedes the image, to the production studio, to the editing suite to the broadcasting mast to the television set to the living room, bar or airport lounge where the image is received" (Couldry & McCarthy 2004: 6). Combining these two levels makes for an understanding of the "reconfigurations of space through media and the detailed spaces of media production and consumption" (ibid). These articles will more be used as founding basis informing my own study, than actively drawn upon in the text, with particular focus on the introductory chapter in the book.

### 4.3 David Harvey and the dialectical space

Well renowned Marxist geographer David Harvey have written extensively on space and time as it relates to capitalism, often with a focus on justice and urbanization. In his book *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* (1996), David Harvey seeks to “define a set of workable foundational concepts for understanding space-time, place, and environment (nature)” (Harvey 1996: 2). Using an interplay between a dialectical method and historical-geographical materialism, he hopes to form a basis for inquiry where one may step outside dualistic and totalizing approaches, without losing the sight of the material conditions people actually live in, or in his own words: “The ‘solid rock’ of historical-geographical materialism is here used to say that dialectical argumentation cannot be understood as outside of the concrete material conditions of the world in which we find ourselves” (ibid: 8). The Marxist dialectics in Harvey’s work is not explicitly written out due to the fact that, as he puts it, “the reduction of dialectics to a set of ‘principles’ might be self-defeating.” (Harvey 1996: 48) However, Harvey does summarize the main principles of dialectical thought in eleven propositions. I shortly summarize these propositions here, as they are relevant to my own approach.

“Dialectical thinking emphasizes the understanding of processes, flows, fluxes and relations over the analysis of elements, things, structures, and organized systems” (ibid: 49). Harvey exemplifies with the definition of “capital”, where dialectical thought sees capital as being “constituted as *both* the process of circulation of value (a flow) *and* the stock of assets (‘things’ like commodities, money, production apparatus) implicated in those flows” (ibid). Things and systems are, in this view, neither permanent (solid) nor are they irreducible to smaller things and systems (processes). Following these arguments, things are also “internally heterogeneous” (Levins and Lewontin, in Harvey 1996: 51), or contradictory, as they are constituted of a collection of other things. “Space and time”, Harvey argues, “are neither absolute nor external to processes but are contingent and contained with them” (ibid: 53). Drawing on Lefebvre, social processes are seen as producing space and time, as “[p]rocesses do not operate *in* but *actively construct* space and time and in so doing define distinctive scales for their development” (ibid). In the same sense, Harvey maintains that one cannot separate the parts and the wholes, as they are in effect mutually constitutive of each other, which causes the subject and the object to become interchangeable:

“[o]rganisms, for example, have to be looked at as both the subjects and the objects of evolution in exactly the same way that individuals have to be considered as both subjects and objects of processes of social change” (ibid: 54). In other words, we are both transformed by our surroundings and are ourselves transforming our surroundings in the process. As mentioned, stability is not the condition in which things are, rather “change and instability are the norm and [...] the appearance of stability of ‘things’ or systems is what has to be explained” (ibid). Change, in other words, is integral to the understanding of systems and processes, or as Ollman puts it, the “research problem [can] only be *how*, *when*, and *into what* [things or systems] change and why they sometimes appear not to change.” (Ollman, in Harvey 1996: 54-55) Equally essential to Marx’s dialectical thinking is the *use* of the inherent change, or the “exploration of ‘possible worlds’” and “potentialities for change, self-realization, for the construction of new collective identities and social orders [and] new totalities” (Harvey 1996: 56).

As will become evident, using a dialectic approach in theorizing the (production of) space, by placing that theory within the very real material context, and at the same time allowing that same context to inform the theorization, we make way for an understanding of video halls not as fixed things but as ongoing social processes – the space they both occupy and produce – while not forgetting their economic, political, social and moral place in society and in people’s consciousness.

#### 4.4 *Defining space*

As I have noted earlier, the use of the word “space” in social sciences is highly diverse, and the meanings alter depending on who’s writing, what is being examined and in what discipline. I will in my own thesis view “space” as a term not only relating to a specific place (hence the distinction) at a specific time, but as an ongoing process. Michel de Certeau talks about space as “practiced place”, differentiating place from space with the latter being “a determination through *operations* which, when they are attributed to a stone, tree, or a human being, specify ‘spaces’ by the actions of historical subjects” (de Certeau 1984: 117). Similarly, Henri Lefebvre focused his entire work *The Production of Space* (1979/91) on this non-static view of space, where space is constantly being produced and reproduced through social, political and economic processes. This

contention is perhaps best described in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*: “The past has left its marks, its inscriptions, but space is always a present space, a current totality, with its links and connections to action. In fact, the production and the product are inseparable sides of one process” (Lefebvre 2009: 186) Drawing on David Harvey’s contention that “time and space are social constructs” (Harvey 1996: 210), and Doreen Massey’s argument that space “is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global” (Massey 1994: 265), my use of the word “space” will be informed by these understandings of the concept. Though, Massey, unsatisfied with the contention that “space is a social construct”, argues that “while it is surely correct to argue that space is socially constructed, the one-sidedness of that formulation implied that geographical forms and distributions were simply outcomes, the endpoint of social explanation” (ibid: 254). Adding to, instead of detracting from, the above statement was that “the social is spatially constructed too,” and that “in its broadest formulation, society is necessarily constructed spatially, and that fact – the spatial organization of society – makes a difference to how it works” (ibid). This interdependent, doubly constitutive view of space and the social is, I would argue, significant to the understanding of the processes that make up the social space of video halls.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULTS

Placing the video halls of Kampala in any context whatsoever necessitates both some historic background of Uganda, Kampala and these places of media consumption, and a thorough description of the places in question. For pedagogical reasons I have chosen to present first a chapter detailing a visit to a specific video hall, followed by a more general account on video halls in a separate chapter. This works as an introduction for the reader to a video hall, how they look and feel, what is shown and how people in and round the hall interact and behave. It is written as a "first experience" of sorts, using notes from the first video hall I visited. Following this I will place the video halls in dialogue with above mentioned theories and studies on media, place and space, and discuss the video halls in both general and specific terms, drawing on the field work and interviews done. In the appendix I have provided photographs of some of the video halls relevant to this study (figures 2 through 10). I will not reference them specifically in

the text as their function is more to “get a sense” of how different video halls can look than it is pointing out specificities.

### *5.1 Visiting New Paradise Entertainment*

From the university campus me and Ivan Lukanda each jumps on a "boda-boda" (young men on motorcycles driving people around, much like a more reckless and dangerous taxi) who takes us down the hill that is Gadaffi Road, with Old Kampala and the Gadaffi Mosque in our front view. Once there, finding a video hall - or "bibanda" as they are called by the locals - proves more difficult than we had anticipated. Mr. Lukanda asks around at different restaurants, car repairmen and a video film vendor before we find the small courtyard housing, among other things, the video hall we had been told of.

The courtyard is found through a narrow opening between two shops, at the corner of a very busy intersection in the middle of Kisenyi district, a slum just south of Old Kampala. At the corner across the street from where we are standing, several cars, "taxis" (minibuses used for public transport), motorcycles and other vehicles are parked along the side of the road. Mr. Lukanda tells me this area is known for its many repair shops, pointing at a coach bus coming through the intersection, indicating it would not be there if not for making repairs. The loud noise engulfing Kisenyi is palpable, with people shouting at the top of their lungs in order to be heard over the sounds of the busy traffic, machines and the many manual labour workers going about their business by the side of the roads or in their shops. The smell is, much like most of the city, a mixture of fumes from the traffic, tar and dirt dusting up when cars or motorcycles drives by. In the courtyard itself a women is cooking food in a large bowl on the ground, supposedly (and this will prove to be true) to sell to video hall customers coming there. A sign hanging from a protruding roof reveals the name of the establishment: New Paradise Entertainment, a name that is an ordinary enough name for an establishment dealing with entertainment, and in part betrays it's Christian inspiration - seeing as Uganda houses around 23,800,000 Christians of different churches, this is not surprising (Uganda Bureau of Statistics). Mr. Lukanda asks around and finds Roland, the man attending the video hall this Tuesday, who invites us into the hall.

New Paradise Entertainment is, like most of its surrounding neighborhood, a small building of metal and stone: the back and front wall looks to be brick mortar, while the side walls and roof are made up of large metal plates. The side walls in particular make evident the very makeshift nature of this video hall: in various places the sun shines through the rifts and holes in the metal, inviting the light of the outside world to invade the otherwise relatively enclosed room. As we enter we are the only ones there: the showings, I am being told, starts at midday, so we are early. According to Mr. Lukanda this is part of a governmental measure to counteract the fact that many schoolchildren used to come to the morning shows - when the video halls opened earlier - instead of going to school. A law dictating the opening hours is the hope for remedying the defection.

Roland asks us what we want to watch, and I ask him what the most popular type of film is. "Action", he answers without hesitation, and puts on the 2009 Chinese action/martial arts film *Shi yue wei cheng*, or *Bodyguards And Assassins* (Teddy Chan, 2009). The story is in short a tale about Sun Wen's (played by Zhang Hanyu) plans to overthrow China's government with the help of his fellow Tongmenghui members in Hong Kong, and the Empress' (Liu Guangning) attempts, using assassins, to kill Sun. The film looks to be stored on a hard drive connected to a media player: the operator browses through a pretty substantial list of films on the screen, before picking this one. This version uses English subtitles, but has also been translated and dubbed to Luganda, with a dub track placed on top of the original audio track. The dub is technically, unlike the big production dubs of Germany and Japan, a crudely made production: when the translator/commenter speaks, he cuts out all other sound, making the viewing experience (for a European schooled film viewer) a jarring one, with the sometimes big variations in audio volume and style - a dramatic chase scene being presented with fast tempo strings that is being completely cut out for a comment from the translator, and then right back to the music. At one point the translator utters, amongst other things, "boda-boda driver". On screen we see Nicholas Tse as the rickshaw puller Deng Sidi pulling the decoy Sun Wen. A boda-boda driver being the closest thing the Kampala audiences has to a rickshaw puller, Mr. Lukanda tells me, the translator uses the analogy of the boda-boda driver in order to contextualize and explain the rickshaw puller's function in the Hong Kong society. This seems to be a common trait of the Ugandan translators (seen in many of the dubbed films also shown on the Luganda language Bukedde television

channel), with the dub track being filled with comments and outbursts in places where there is no dialogue (as seen in the Luganda translated version of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* (David Yates, 2010), where the translator laughs in an otherwise dramatic scene with a flaming dragon).

The film is being screened on one of four television sets present in the room. This particular TV is placed on top of a shelf right next to one of the other TVs which at the moment is showing a commercial for the drama series *Tinsel*, promoting the show's main features: "Passion...Power...Fame...Tempting isn't it?" On the lower shelf two DVD players and a stack of DVDs are placed, and on the floor underneath two presumably broken TVs have been left facing each other, gathering dust and left over building materials. Next to the shelf a homemade book shelf is holding the stereo on the top, two DStv receivers under that, and two VCRs on top of each other at the bottom of the stack. Like the building itself, the shelf looks like a temporary solution to an immediate problem, that has since - without further adjustments - become permanent. One television screen, placed further back just above the entrance, is showing a football match, while the fourth screen hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the long room is switched off at the time of our visit. 25 minutes in and we are now six people in the room: me and my guide, one man sitting four rows behind us eating from a plate, a woman sitting next to and talking to him, one young man sitting in front of us watching the movie, and one man lying on the front bench with his jacket as a pillow, drinking what will (from the smell and tiredness of the man) turn out to be beer. With only one stereo in the room, the devices have been set up to allow for switching between the different sources: what we are hearing is at the moment of our visit coming from the movie, but it may as well be switched to play the audio from the football match. The volume is loud, with the speakers almost breaking from the high pitched strings in the soundtrack; the video operator has tried to compensate for the loud noises of work and busyness intruding from the outside.

After sixty minutes in the hall, I am counting nine people including me and Mr. Lukanda. This number is continuously changing though, as people come and go during the entire course of the film. The film viewing in general seems sporadic in nature when we are here: the man in the front row picks up his phone, seemingly having woken up from a sleep, and answers the call, while another man further back is leafing through a newspaper, only occasionally lifting his head

towards the action on screen - it's difficult to tell if people have come here to watch a film or just to take a rest from their work.

## *5.2 The video halls of Kampala – an overview*

The exploration of one specific video hall does not, of course, by itself say anything of video halls in general: to be able to make any such claims of more comprehensive insights, we have to look at several places, and what makes these video halls what they are: how they are built and placed in the city and in relation to other places in the area, who owns them and who goes there, and what is being shown, amongst other things. I will draw on field work done on thirteen different video halls, in nine different neighborhoods: Bwaise, Katwe, Kibuye, Kisenyi, Kitintale, Kyebando, Luzira, Nakulabye, and Ndeeba. The video halls range from simple structures with cheap equipment and poor seating furniture, to more upscale places with projectors, comfortable seating and good ventilation.

According to Gilbert Ereuka there are more than 1200 video halls in Kampala. William Sensanga (I am using the Western way of writing names here to avoid confusion; in Uganda his name is actually Sensanga William, with the latter being his given name), owner of six video halls in Kampala (among them the San-Siro video hall in Kibuye and Hollywood in Katwe), believes that there is even more than that. Even so, as indicated with our search for New Paradise Entertainment in Kisenyi, finding one is not always easy, and even people in the neighborhood do not always know where specific video halls are: when we enter a neighborhood – be it Luzira, Bwaise or Ndeeba – the best bet on finding a video hall is to ask the boda-boda drivers or the young street kids local to the area.

The makeshift look of New Paradise Entertainment is not an aberration in the video hall context, as continuous visits to different neighborhoods and video halls show: while there are video halls which look to be built with a lasting intent, many are built out of wood or thin metal, with inner ceilings of cardboard and with entrances being covered by nothing more than a torn cloth. In Ndeeba, alongside the railroad track passing through one of the slum areas in the neighborhood, small metal or wood shacks are placed tightly together on both sides of the track houses vendors selling, amongst other things, mobile air time, sodas and fruit. In between two

such shacks the video hall Titanic is placed. The roof is made up of grass, and walking inside reveals the same type of cardboard as in New Paradise Entertainment covering the ceiling. As in most video halls, wooden benches, most in poor quality, are placed in rows, like the pews in churches, to accommodate the customers. A speaker is placed on the outside of the video hall – something most of these video halls have – in order to attract customers not familiar with the place (in some cases, the existence of a video hall in the area could easily be heard from far away). None of the video halls we've visited were placed alongside any main road, and in most cases we had to find our way on narrow paths between shops, small courtyards and through market places, making the outside speakers a helpful guide in finding them. In Bwaise, an eight minute matatu ride north of Makerere University Western Gate, in a repair yard just off the Bombo Road, two competing video halls – Mukungu Sports Center and Casablanca – have set up shop in each end of the yard. Both are wooden structures, resembling woodwork sheds, with the same cloth opening as New Paradise Entertainment. Along with the Washington video hall in Katwe, these video halls might be considered to be on the lower scale: they all follow the description of the cheaper made structures, with a more "temporary" look to them.

Michiel van Oosterhout, Dutch journalist and filmmaker living in Uganda since 2003, believes these "temporary" buildings have their basis in the period of now president Museveni's fight for power in the 1980s:

There were even within this town at a certain moment militias who were in charge of certain areas of town. So you could not easily move around town, so you could not go to the cinema. So partly because of that people built these temporary structures, and they didn't want to waste too much money on them because, in such uncertain times, if you build a structure which is more lasting it might just, you know, be broken down or shot down or whatever it is. And the thing is, out of that people just kept on building even though the times were getting better, and there was peace and there was security, people just stuck to that concept.

(interview with author, November 12, 2011)

The local word for the video halls, "bibanda", as both Mr. Lukanda and Mr. van Oosterhout tells me, means "temporary", the name itself summarizing the original idea of the place: a makeshift solution for a business idea. This cheap makeshift look is not, however, the only one present in Kampala. The different looks and feel of the thirteen video halls can be illustrated by the San-Siro video hall by the Kibuye market: unlike the other video halls, this one is in itself tiered when it comes to video equipment, comfortability and price, with three different screening rooms in one building. "Here we have three sections: we've got Executive, we normally charge 1000 [shillings] per football match; in VIP where there's HD and three plasmas we charge one-five, 1500; and this side where there's a projector and another big TV we charge 1000", William Sensanga, the owner of the place, says (1000 UGX is at the time of writing equalent of 2.83 SEK). These rooms are placed in a row on the first floor access balcony overlooking the market. In William's view, the Executive and VIP sections are more high-end, whereas the room we are standing in during the interview is considered by him to be of "medium" standards. The prices are set in accordance with the perceived class and economic situation of the people in the area, as William explains:

It's according to the client, the customers. Because, I put more money to where I know the class is. Because, there's different classes, you have to invest according to the people around. Some people really cannot afford the high class things, like putting an HD recorder, putting the plasma, the LCDs, and people really cannot afford a match of 1500. Or even 1000, because like in Ggaba, people can afford a match of 500, or maybe two matches of 700 highest. So I put different prices and the different machines according to the income and environment around.

(interview with author, December 4, 2011)

The two high-end rooms are reserved for football, whereas the third room show both football and video films, for which he charges 300 shillings – most video halls charge 200-300 shillings per film. William contends that film viewers do not care about the quality or standard of places themselves, "it's the quality of the movies, brand new movies with the VJs they want, that's what

they care about." The football fans on the other hand care about the equipment and comfort of the video hall itself, he argues.

van Oosterhout and Marshfield distinguish three different classes of video halls: those in the outskirts of town, made out of papyrus reeds; wooden or brick structures, in for example Bwaise and Mulago, and; the high-class ones that "resemble in structure Western style cinemas". (van Oosterhout & Marshfield 2005-2006: 6) Whether the classes of the video halls relates to the question of film and football viewership, as William Sensanga suggests, is unclear from the study, as the authors are mostly interested in the video halls from a film distribution perspective. Most video halls do show both football and films – or only football in some cases – with the MG Titanic in Nakulabye being the only one exclusively screening video films: the owner, Manji Grace (the MG in the name), says they run eight films a day, and they do not show any football – he owns another video hall just down the road, which do have DStv with football matches on game nights. While the papyrus made video halls in the outskirts of town would seem to suggest that one would reach nicer halls the closer to the city center one comes, this is not the case. One of the 13 video halls I visited, Touch of Class, that in van Oosterhout and Marshfield's words can be described as being Western in style and class, is located in Luzira almost ten kilometers south east of Old Taxi Park in central Kampala. San-Siro, the three room video hall housed in a big stone structure located in Kibuye, with its projector, large screen TVs and good ventilation, just a short walk from Katwe were the arguably less upscale video halls Hollywood and Washington (both wooden structures with smaller screens and less ventilation) can be found.

#### *5.4 The role of the translator*

The films being shown at the video halls are almost exclusively imports (from China, India, The US and, in some cases, Nigeria), dubbed to Luganda by a local VJ. One prominent translator, VJ Junior, distinguishes between the educative translation and the entertaining one. He himself focuses on the story of the film, translating only the dialogue and contextualizes what is happening in the story – "educating the audience" on the content, in a sense. The entertainment approach is more loose and free from the constraints of the plot of the film. van Oosterhout and Marshfield thinks this is "because the vee-jays themselves have received limited

education and can, as a matter of fact, not translate the foreign films accurately. They make up for their lack of foreign language skills by pleasing their audiences with typical Ugandan humor" (van Oosterhout & Marshfield 2005-2006: 13). The popularity of VJs like Junior among the university students seems, thus, to be a question of education, as they are usually better equipped to tell if a translation is faithful to the script or not. Most people attending the video halls in areas I have visited (e.g. Katwe, Kitintale and Ndeeba) are boda-boda drivers, taxi drivers, market vendors, manual workers or unemployed.

VJ Junior explains that, in order to do a faithful translation, he has to do some research on the film, read up on interviews with actors, and understand the genre and so on (interview with author, December 18, 2011). An educated audience is then able to tell that the translation is good, and prefers the work of the likes of VJ Junior to the more entertainment focused ones. Jean, a university student, tells me she do not like most Luganda translated videos as they "lie", do not stick to the script, and that the VJs themselves are mostly yelling. VJ Mike, translator and owner of the Washington video hall in Katwe, instead talks about "putting some spice" on the films, that VJs should "add some flavor." A local to the area Katwe (described by most people as one of the most crime-ridden and poor areas in town), he knows that most of his audience are not educated and do not understand English well, so he prefers to give them entertainment in their own language. He uses, in much the same way as the VJ of the film *Bodyguards and Assassins* detailed earlier, the technique of both narrating the story, translating the dialogue, and "spicing" the plot with his own jokes and proclamations. Categorizing VJ Mike strictly as an entertainer would be a mistake though: while action films are the most popular types in every area I have been to, Mike are trying to give his audience something more as he has focused his work on translating Nigerian films: "I'm a native in this area. People most of the time love action movies, so I just wanted to bring in another thing. So that they can be interested in African movies the way they are interested in other movies" (interview with author, November 25, 2011).

### *5.3 Video halls as local(ity)*

As indicated earlier, the video halls as sites for social gathering are in many ways very local in nature. People coming to the halls are mostly people working or living in the immediate area:

San-Siro by the Kibuye market attracts the people working in or around the market place (e.g. taxi drivers, market vendors, gas station attendants), while Mukungu Sports Center and Casablanca both positioned in a repair yard in Bwaise mostly draws people who are waiting for their vehicles to be repaired, and those on a break from work. Bwire Wilson of Titanic video hall in Kitintale says that some of his customers come from further away, if they for example have moved from the neighborhood but still want to go to that specific hall. This does however seem to mainly concern those customers who have the ability to move around easily, like the boda-boda drivers, as some of them tell me they go to the place nearest to their home or to where they are at days end. Picking a video hall further away requires a vehicle or travel money, luxuries many do not have.

Asking around for a video hall in an area reveals that the localness in question may entail even more specific spatial organizations: with the reputation the video halls have, talking about them as local in general would suggest that people in the neighborhood should be able to point them out, or at least give us a general direction to where a video hall might be found. One could imagine that most people in a neighborhood in Sweden or the UK would know the local neighborhood pubs or beauty salons, for example. Regarding the video halls in Kampala, this is mostly not the case, as mentioned earlier. Asking neighborhood locals for a video hall mostly renders puzzled faces (many do not even know there is a video hall in the area), or at best a direction to who might know – in Old Kampala me and Mr. Lukanda got directed to four different people before a young man managed to give us a direction, and in Kyebando our boda-boda driver took us to two different video halls, asking locals along the way, before reaching the one we were looking for.

That people in general do not always know where to find the local video hall is not implying that those who go/has gone to video halls – the customers – do not know where they are. The reason asking young men for directions usually result in us finding a, or more commonly *the*, video hall we are looking for is simply because they are the ones who are most likely customers of the particular video halls themselves. As most video halls have football matches as their main source of income, many of their customers regularly use the video hall as a venue for meeting other football fans and watching games. At Touch of Class in Luzira, for example, I met several young men who were waiting outside an hour before the video hall opened (we were there

around four pm), discussing their bets for the days matches. All around town you can find these betting shops, and there is usually one such shop near the video halls. The people outside had all put down money on the matches – one man told me he had put 10,000 shillings on the three matches, even though he had no regular job to sustain such expenditure – and most of these people told me they come to the same betting shop and video hall on a more or less regular basis.

The video hall as a living room, as van Oosterhout and Marshfield has it, might arguably be a good description if looking at the interactions of the people outside of the video halls, and before films start (more on this later). Here young men sit around a Ludo table and play, others are sitting on benches along the wall of the video hall, talking and drinking. With these football screenings and betting however, a more fitting parable would be that of a local sports bar: a place where people (most often men) come together to consume, talk about and bet on sports.

### *5.5 The contested space of the video hall*

At that time we were too young, we could not go to the video hall. (...) We could not, because our parents thought that the video halls were places for bad behaving people, people who do not want to go to school. And of course, in video halls they show nasty things, so they believed we would get spoiled there. And actually, me I took long to go for those movies.

(Bosco, interview with author, December 13, 2011)

The video hall is, as mentioned before, a contested space. Much like the 1930's moral outcry in the US (Miller 2000: 337-338) and the contemporary debate on the Nollywood video film (see for example Şaul & Austen 2010), the question of the video hall in Kampala is, in a sense, a question of morality, indicated by Bosco's recollection of his childhood above. Bosco was 14 when he first visited a video hall on his own, in 1993. Brian Larkin describes going to the cinema in Nigeria in the mid-1990's as "a visceral event, often charged with feelings of danger, illicitness, eroticism and excitement" (Larkin 2008: 149). This does not come far from the

excitement and fear Bosco recalls as he tells of a time not too long ago when the police came to the video hall he was in. He was there at close to midnight, and the video halls were supposed to close at eleven, so the police had come: "as soon as the movie stopped, the police was out[side]." They were waiting for the people outside the door, demanding to see identification. Bosco, like many others, did not have an ID with him, so he ran out the back door, just barely getting away from the video hall as a police man, with cocked gun in hand, tried to stop him. Mr. Ereuka also tells of how he as a kid used to sneak to watch films without his parents knowing it. At the time his village did not have a video hall, but people from the city (Kampala) would bring films once or twice a year to show in the village. When caught, his parents would punish him by beating him with a cane. As he explains,

though they [only brought the films] once in a while to us in the village, it had a negative attitude that whereby most people usually think that people who go to video halls, that's the people who deal the drugs, people who are thieves, idlers. So our parents were really awry of that, they said "now, when any of these kids go to video halls, they'll get that behavior, they'll get adopted to that kind of behavior, and they'll become bad children." They feared it, that's why they were refusing us. And other parents were also doing that.

(interview with author, December 9, 2011)

The view of the video halls as places of immorality and drug abuse seems to have had a foothold on many people in Kampala in the early days of video film as the interviews show. van Oosterhout and Marshfield's study indicate that this holds sway today as well. Kenneth, a 22 year old police officer working around Makerere University at the time of the interview, calls the video halls "immoral", pointing to the "blue movies" (pornographic movies) some of them show, the kids who steal to be able to go there, the fighting that occur, and deceases that circulate when the video halls get crowded (interview with author, November 21, 2011). This contention corresponds with how some university students tend to describe them, as do many of the business people I have talked to throughout the city: they do not seem to discriminate between types or

classes of video halls: the "word on the street" is that the video halls in general are bad places. As for drugs being used, one video hall manager in Kyebando confirms some of peoples conceptions: as we are doing our interview, he himself is chewing on "mairungi" (known internationally as khat), and tells me that people at his video hall are allowed to use the drug inside the video hall as that makes them calm. As long as the customer is not making trouble, they're allowed to use mairungi and drink alcohol at this place. William Sensanga, owner of the Sans-Siro video hall, fills in:

You write about that, I won't deny it. There's some video halls where you find it, people are really taking drugs there at the video halls. They're taking marijuana, they're taking this green drug, leafs – they're called mairungis. So we are trying to transform them: I have a video hall at Katwe, I found it so much in a mess. People were taking drugs then, they were selling those mairungis outside. So we tried to transform them, theach them [that] this is not the right thing to do.

(interview with author, December 4, 2011)

As indicated by this statement, not all video halls share these characteristics, though the problem is well known by most of the video hall owners. Some of them spoke of this as something they are trying to get rid of, to create an atmosphere where people feel safe, while others did not seem to recognize it as a problem at all. Jeff, one of the owners of Touch of Class in Luzira, says he have invested (in video hall terms) a lot of money in order to make the place an inviting, secure and good place to be in (as implied by the name). They are surrounded by a wall and a fence, and the interior is made up of leathered benches, a built-in-the-wall big screen TV and good ventilation. MG Titanic in Nakulabye is another such place, where the owner Manji Grace have tried to "raise standards" of how his video halls look and feel.

There is, however, some truth to the claim that "blue movies" are being shown, though most owners would not say as much. One boda-boda driver tells me that he watches them at the video halls every now and then, and that "some do show it, but you have to ask for it and they'll

put it on" (interview with author, December 16, 2011). Roland at New Paradise Entertainment says that "blue movies" used to be screened after midnight, as also the previous video hall survey indicates (see van Oosterhout & Marshfield 2005-2006: 11). With the new rules on opening hours in place, video halls are not allowed to stay open after eleven pm, which probably prevents many from screening those types of films. This however does not stop people from naming these films as one main source of concern about the video halls.

André Jansson, in the introductory article to a special issue of *The Communication Review* focusing on spatial approaches to media, talks of Foucault's heterotopias as "those exceptional social spaces located outside or beyond the conventional moral orders of society—spaces that obey their own rules, but through their very otherness reproduce the dominant sense of 'normality'" (Jansson 2009: 305). I would argue that this description fits with the video halls in Kampala and Uganda. Geographically, one would be hard pressed to find a video hall in the city center, as indicated before, placing them not only outside conventional moral orders but also outside Kampala's central financial district and main tourists' streak (and often ways of main roads in areas where they are located), effectively relegating the halls both to the "other" moral spaces of media consumption, and to the "other" social and geographical places outside the city center. This, in accordance with the societal function of the heterotopia, also places them at a moral opposite from the established position of the video halls as immoral (as the interviews show), while at the same time reproducing and reinforcing this same position of "normality". In Jansson's words this "othering of space is a process of mediation that occurs over time, sustained by various representational machineries, resulting in sedimented normative structures for the everyday mapping of 'common sense,' 'good morals,' 'good taste,' and the like" (ibid: 306). The video halls in other words seem for many people to function as the "other" to their accepted moral and social codes, an opposite to weigh their own moral against.

This "othering" of these halls is also more a question of activities and time than of media consumption. The perceived immorality of the video hall has, in the eyes of the people denouncing them, little to do with the films being shown there (with the exception of blue movies), and more to do with the types of behavior they see these halls attract and engender. As many of the students and working people I talked to said, the films themselves are not hard to come by, and most use either laptops or their TV sets at home to watch them at home. Bosco,

for example, has a DVD player in his house, and lets his kids view some of the more kid-friendly films. He himself has little time for film between his job and his studies, but when he does it's almost exclusively action or adventure films – directly corresponding with the trend at the video halls. Ian, a student at Makerere University, says he have been to video halls a few times when he was younger, but stopped going once he got accepted to the university: now he, like Bosco, refrains from going due to lack of time, and because he perceives the video halls as immoral. One of the young kids hanging out outside the Titanic video hall in Ndeeba had the same outlook on work and time: if he would get a good, steady job preferably as a computer engineer, he told me, he was certain he would not have time for video halls anymore (interview with author, November 18, 2011). Janssons contends that “what were previously understood as “other spaces” are increasingly intertwined with spaces of the ‘ordinary’” (ibid). While this holds sway in many areas and sites, it has limited impact on the space of the video hall as it relates to “public” opinion. In relation to the media screening, the films in the video halls are of course sold to consumers for screening at home, connecting the space of home with the space of the video hall, but this does not seem to make the video hall as a social space any less “other” or more “ordinary” for many people as the media, apart from the blue films, are not part of that “othering”. It is rather the types of people who attend the video hall – unemployed, uneducated, drug users, thieves, idlers – and the behavior it is believed the video hall provoke that create this apparent opposition between those making use of the video halls and those who disaffiliate from them.

The media being consumed however – the films that are both sold to home consumers and sold or rented by video hall owners, and the football matches shown via satellite both in the video halls and at restaurants and people's homes – arguably form a link between “the other” of the video hall and “the ordinary” of the home. Jansson argue that the category of heterotopia in general is problematic: as Ulrich Beck (referred to in Jansson 2009) argues, the cosmopolitanization makes “the other” an everyday phenomenon for many people, as the “[f]lows of people, goods, and information transcend and challenge boundaries that were previously taken for granted”, while at the same time “dominant forces of society, and notably the media and consumer industries, still operate according to a logic that exploits and reproduces the normative status of heterotopia” (Jansson 2009: 306). Thus, in a cosmopolitan world, they argue, the heterotopia is more complex and contradictory than “commonplace understandings of “other

spaces” (ibid) would allow. I have argued that the video hall as a social space is morally contested by many people, but it is also a place many (other) people go to. The video hall, for the unemployed, boda-boda drivers, taxi drivers, market workers and other customers, is an everyday place. Though, as we have seen, some of them also regard going to the video hall as a leisure activity one partake in until something “more important” comes along (e.g. studies at the university, an upscale job etc.). There seems to be a certain flow of people moving from the video halls to the home, as it relates to media consumption and sociality. In other words, some people move (or can imagine moving) from “the other”, morally contested video halls to “the ordinary” of the home and the respectable job, as the opportunity arises. This move, this climb up the social and economic ladder is however hardly something everyone, or even most people, gets to do in Uganda and Kampala. As Mr. Ereuka maintains, it is hard making a living in the city of Kampala when you have no higher education, and even those who have are often working two jobs (e.g. lecturer at the university and consultant on the side). The dream of moving up from the lower steps on the social ladder seems to be a dream most will not live to see come to fruition. The young men spending much of their time inside or out of the video hall in Ndeeba have no illusions of where they will be in the next five years: “I can’t afford going to school, so I will hopefully have a job here somewhere”, the young man Ntanda-Umar told me. (interview with author, November 18, 2011)

So while the video hall for some is a thing they only went to when they were younger before they got their education or job, for many others the video hall in their home or work neighborhoods take a bigger part of their lives. While some video hall owners told me of a decline in attendance over the years due to people getting TV sets at home and Bukedde showing translated films, others held that their audience had not swayed or had even increased in number, in part probably thanks to the popularity of football, which needs an expensive satellite box and a monthly subscription fee most cannot afford on their own. The video hall, for these people, serve as both a meeting place after work or as a substitute for not doing anything at all, and as the only means of watching films and football they have.

The moral contestation of the video hall, the production of the video hall space as an immoral place, is contradictory in its very act of production: the arguments that the video halls attract behavior and people perceived as immoral (e.g. thieves, blue movies, drugs), true as they

sometimes may be, are often put forward by people who themselves used to go to these places. Many of those people I interviewed outside of the video hall context portrayed video hall attendees as idlers with no interest in an honest job, while they themselves (workers or students) oftentimes had a background as video hall customers. Many of the video hall customers interviewed had no steady income, but most talked about "helping out" here and working "for a few weeks" there. There are certainly idlers, as in any place, in the video halls, but many respondents (e.g. the young men at the Titanic video hall in Ndeeba) also talked about their dreams of going to the university and getting a "real job", but not having the funds or possibility to do so. The concern for young people seeing only violent films is also a contradiction of sorts: both the van Oosterhout and Marshfield study and my own show that action films are by far the most prevalent genre at the video halls, and the halls are attended mostly by young men. However, many of the same people maintaining the immorality of this are themselves fans of action films, and have been for a while (exemplified here by Bosco's account).

I will not go into a moral argument for or against popular action films, however it is clear that the prevalence of these types of films in the video halls have permeated into the homes of people with DVD players and television sets. This leaves the video halls as actual social places in the neighborhoods. It could be argued that a lot of poor and jobless people are concentrated to areas like Katwe, Kibuye and Bwaise, making the video halls here possible hang-outs for "idlers and thieves" (as one student put it). This however does not take into account the fact that there are both low- and high-scale video halls in these areas (San-Siro in Kibuye being one example). Furthermore, there are video halls in areas closer to the universities and businesses as well, with places like MG Titanic in Nakulabye, or the many video halls located in Wandegeya or Kisenyi, serving a lot of students not discouraged to visit these halls. David Harvey argues that the "internal spatio-temporal organization of the household, of workplaces, of cities, is the outcome of struggles to stabilize or disrupt social meanings by opposed social forces" and that "[t]he spatialized control of unwanted groups – the homeless, gypsies, 'New Age' travelers, the elderly – and spatial stigmatization is as widespread a phenomenon in contemporary society as it was in the medieval world" (Harvey 1996: 230). By making the video hall into an immoral place, the place for "the other" to the morally "normal" of the working/studying person (man), one is in fact making a clear distinction between those who have socially acceptable jobs and those who do not

(including boda-boda drivers, mechanics and those with no jobs at all), as many who attain these positions of social status (university student, consultant, shop owner) stop going to the video halls.

### 5.5 *The video hall as resistance?*

Describing the video hall as a heterotopic “other space” would in its original sense be somewhat misleading: Foucault’s conception sees the heterotopia as a space outside of society’s moral or social sphere, as a space of transgression and resistance (the resistance Harvey is highly skeptical of). As we have seen, the video hall is in a very real sense outside of the mindset of Kampala’s middle class, both geographically and conceptually, and in this sense the video hall and its audiences are positioned as “the other” to the social consciousness of “the ordinary”. But whereas Onookome Okome see the Nigerian video parlors as sites for social and political critique, a potential underground public sphere outside of the “enlightened vehicles of public debates that are controlled by the state” (Okome 2007: 16) where the popular audience, at least temporarily, have a freedom of expression and a voice to criticize governance, the video halls in Kampala do not seem to foster this sort of social critique. In Okome’s study, it was the story of the film *Domitilla* (1997) that initiated the discussions on political, religious and social issues amongst the attendees, as Okome points to the familiarity with the audience's own life: "Like the members of the 'street corner' audiences in Lagos, responses to the world of this video film came with a sense of familiarity with the story. The audience of the Warri video parlour responded to it as a story it already knows" (ibid.: 14). This being a home grown film, a Nigerian product speaking to a Nigerian audience, the fact that the film's story was relatable to the audience and spurred a real life discussion is not unexpected. The Lagos video parlor as Okome imagines and portrays it can, if one is optimistic, be described as a form of heterotopia of resistance, a discursive "other space" to the political sphere that the audiences are excluded from even though it of course is not completely outside of the dominant social order.

Speaking of the video halls in Uganda in a similar way however, as it stands at the time of writing, would be overly optimistic and misrepresentative of the actual social interactions that take place here. While it certainly holds the potential for a grassroots movement of a social and

political nature, this would require that people actually discuss these matters at the video halls. With an outspoken general public in Kampala, who has no problem venting their disregard for the political situation (apparent with cab drivers, shop owners, gardeners and homeless alike) to an outsider, the video hall would seem a good place for such a oppositional discourse. This however is not the case, as I have argued.

One possible reason might be the media being shown at the video halls: a screening of a football match between two European teams, the most popular media in these halls, might not be the optimal kickoff for social critique of the East African nation state. Regarding the films being screened, van Oosterhout and Marshfield argues that the lack of educational or informative films in the video halls' repertoire is a problem, a problem the audiences themselves acknowledges: "The statistics presented in this report [...] give the reader a clear picture regarding many different aspects of the "bibanda phenomenon" and the structure of the VH audiences that are just waiting to be reached by educational as well as entertaining messages from organization seeking to advance the well-being of grassroots communities such as government ministries, NGOs and other development agencies" (van Oosterhout & Marshfield 2005-2006: 11). While the authors certainly has a point – as my research show, action and adventure films (predominantly from China and the US) are, according to most video hall owners, the most popular genres – this can, however, also be argued in many other countries. Countries with a much wider selection of films more readily available through different channels do not automatically see a big number of people going to "educational" or even locally produced films: according to the Swedish Film Institute's rapport for 2011 (SFI), films from the US made up 64.9% of the ticket sales at the cinema halls, while none of the top 30 films that year was a documentary (a genre the Amakula Kampala Film Festival has tried to promote by having them in their programme). van Oosterhout and Marshfield mentions that documentaries is a genre "that people were not acquainted with", but that they came (to the festival) "in big numbers and clearly stating afterwards that they liked these films because 'they were about real life'" (van Oosterhout & Marshfield 2005-2006: 12). As the festival is a free event, this is hardly surprising. Furthermore, as interviews with people owning their own television set and DVD player at home show, having the opportunity to choose what films to see (as opposed to what a video hall owner picks out), when it costs money, does not

automatically make for a more "educational" viewing: action and adventure films are still the most popular genres, and what people buy on DVD.

One informant, a university student named Jean, told me that the government had closed off the Constitutional Square (commonly called by its old name, City Square) in order to prevent disgruntled people from gathering in large numbers to protest, as had been done in the past. Two articles in *New Vision* show this, beginning in 2007: first in January as “[c]ity Council has banned all activities at the Constitution Square to revamp the place ahead of the Commonwealth summit scheduled for November” (*New Vision* 1: par 1), then in March where president Museveni said that “[t]he Constitution Square and Kampala Road are ‘farms’ for businessmen. We shall not allow anybody to hold rallies there.” (Museveni, quoted in *New Vision* 2: par 2). During my stay the square was solely occupied by the police, with big tree branches in front of the entrances to the square making the no-entrance line clear. Harvey, on the liberating potential of social spaces, argues that “social space, when it is contested within the orbit of a given social formation, can begin to take on new definitions and meanings [...] because the social constitution of spatio-temporally cannot be divorced from value creation or, for that matter, from discourses, power relations, memory, institutions, and the tangible forms of material practices through which human societies perpetuate themselves” (Harvey 1996: 231). The reverse, it would seem, is also true: with the governmental occupation of the Constitution/City Square the redefinition of social space is done by force. Within the context of the video halls in Kampala, the more abstract “value creation” (the moral “othering” of the video hall and its customers) may in fact rob these social spaces of their liberatory potential.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

[A]mong the many and conflicting definitions of space which are current in the literature there are some – and very powerful ones – which deprive it of politics and of the possibility of politics: they effectively de-politicize the realm of the spatial.

(Massey 1994: 250)

Doreen Massey's concern above, the de-politicization of space, is a valid one. As evident for example in the works of Foucault (1978), Lefebvre (1974/1991), and Harvey (1996), it seems difficult, if not outright detrimental, to examine space without taking into account political (and politically charged) aspects. As it relates to my own study, perhaps Henri Lefebvre put it most poignantly: "(Social) space is a (social) product [---] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action [...] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (Lefebvre 1974/1991: 26). While I do not intend to make unwarranted arguments about the video hall's hegemonic functions, I find it necessary to explore the political aspects as they relate to the social spaces the video halls form/produce: the social in this aspect cannot be separated from the political, much like how Massey argue that politics and space cannot (and should not) be seen as "antinomic terms" (as Laclau has it).

Okonome Okome's (2007) view on video parlors as a grassroots public sphere of sorts is, as I have shown, not strictly applicable to the video halls in Kampala as they stand today. This may however, as with the closing off of the City Square, have political implications in relation to the social-moral ones. One example of this might be the issuing of new guidelines for public gatherings in Kampala on September 19 2010: "We are sounding a warning. No gathering of more than five people, even if it is in your compound, should be held without clearance from the Inspector General of Police" (Police commander Andrew Sorowen, quoted in *New Vision* 3: par 4). Sorowen continued, maintaining that "[w]e are not saying you should get permission from the Inspector General of Police but notify him. He is the only one who can ensure that enough security is deployed to guarantee safety of the people during such events" (*ibid*: par 9). This, as the article mentions, apply to wedding receptions, football matches and video halls among other events. With the July 2010 attack on a FIFA World Cup match screening (where over 70 people died), the new directives are of course not surprising. However, this was not the only government intervention after the bombings. As of March 1 2012, all telecom operators will start registering SIM-cards they sell to people, as part of the "Bill on Interception of Communication" issued by the Ugandan Parliament on July 14 2010 (see *Daily Monitor*; Library of Congress). The government will then be able to intercept all calls and text messages by every user, and at the same time control how and where people may and may not gather (both in public and in private).

Both Ivan Lukanda, Jean, and Michiel van Oosterhout pointed out places in the city where most demonstrations and riots occur (the pair of student housing buildings on Makerere University campus called Lumbox, Down Town Kampala and City Square being good examples), and all said that these happen not infrequently.

The measures taken by the Ugandan government, while they on the surface are aimed at preventing terrorism, in many ways resemble “anti-terror” measures and tactics taken in other countries where the intent and practices have been questioned. The USA Patriot Act in particular can be seen as parallel to this, with its surveillance-focused “Title II – Enhanced Surveillance Procedures”, renewed by President Obama on May 26 2011 (Los Angeles Times). With more than ten years since the US experienced an outside attack, talks are now not on terrorist from afar, but of “homegrown Islamist terrorism” (Council on Foreign Relations). On New Year’s Eve 2011-2012, President Obama also signed the controversial National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), allowing him to indefinitely detain US citizens. “The White House is saying that changes to the law made it unnecessary to veto the legislation”, legal scholar Jonathan Hurley says, while “the White House conducted a misinformation campaign to secure this power while portraying Obama as some type of reluctant absolute ruler, or as Obama maintains a reluctant president with dictatorial powers” (Hurley 2011). Even Sweden has recently put forward a motion to allow riot control measures, specifically the use of tear gas by the police, even though the last big collision between the public and the police in Sweden was the protests during the EU summit in Gothenburg in 2001 (SVT; Sveriges Radio). The Occupy movement in the US is seeing setbacks with laws and regulations being written that, for example, forbid tents in public places in New York City and police clearing tents in Washington D.C.

These examples of politics controlling the public have to be seen in the light of growing protests and discontent. Noam Chomsky, on governments’ need for constant war, argues that “[t]hey realize that the system of domination is fragile, that it relies on disciplining the population by one or other means: in recent years, Communism, crime, drugs, terrorism, and others. [...] Crises make it possible to exploit fear and concern to demand that the adversary be submissive, obedient, silent, distracted, while the powerful use the window of opportunity to pursue their own favored programs with even greater intensity” (Chomsky 2008: 325-326). In the US context, these tactics are by many seen as a means of controlling the public and thwarting public

dissent. In the case of Uganda, it may well be the same, as seen with the regulations of public spaces and use of cellphones.

When talking of the video halls and the possibility for resistance (one of the main features of Foucault's heterotopia) as seen with the video parlors in Lagos, I argue that not only official government regulations make this difficult: the question of morality and social status hold a much larger sway on the public's perceptions and imaginations in this context. Most people attending these halls are of low-to-no-income class, with the workers being boda-boda and taxi drivers, mechanics, street vendors and so on, it is not hard to see how the social space of the video hall is being positioned as "immoral" and a "bad place" by those of higher social status. However, as I also have shown, even those people who come to the video halls on a regular basis dream of climbing the social ladder – and in that same instance moving away from the video hall. One might argue that even some of the video hall customers take to this perception of immorality and internalize this image. This social stratification, it would seem, flows as an undercurrent within this social space and is reinforced when it moves up the social ladder: people (of status) outside the video hall context posit it as immoral once they have left it; this view is being internalized by those attending the video halls, as they themselves strive to reach that higher social status; some of them reach this status, and continue the social stratification of those at the video halls. This might be viewed as a circle of "othering" as it were, a production of an "other space" by both parties. This making "other" of the video hall may actually serve as a way of controlling people, and making "hanging out" there something a "decent" person would not do – effectively removing potential places where social unrest and critique of the government may grow.

"Social constructions of space and time", David Harvey argues, "operate with the full force of objective facts to which all individuals and institutions necessarily respond" (Harvey 1996: 211). Though, as Aron Gurevich has it, this does not "mean that the society consciously imposes these norms upon its members by requiring them to perceive the world and react to it in this particular way; society is unaware both of the imposition and of the acceptance" (Gurevich, quoted in Harvey 1996: 212). This means that the production of the social space of the video hall, as it is seen morally and socially, is not necessarily a conscious act on behalf of the people involved (those going to, and those talking about, the video halls). This argument is of course relevant when asking the question: why would people going to the video hall see this space as

immoral? Or better yet: why do these same people go to the immoral video hall? As my research has shown, people seem to draw links between their social status and the social spaces they inhabit and produce. As Harvey shows, the “othering” of the video hall is not necessarily a conscious act on either the government’s or the people’s part. As interviews show, people have no problem recognizing their own difficult position, often with no job and no money to go to the university. When many of these people regularly gather at video halls, the video hall itself gets associated with this sort of life. As some actually manage to climb the social ladder, they distance themselves from that life. “Space”, Lefebvre argues, “is permeated with social relations: it is not only supported by social relations, but it also is producing and produced by social relations” (Lefebvre 2009: 186). My interview with Bosco is here a good case in point: he used to attend video halls regularly, consuming popular media in form of films and music videos, and socialize at these halls. As he got a job and, now, is studying at the university, he has stopped going to the video halls and portray them as immoral and bad. Brian Larkin’s (2008) account of cinema-going in Kano, Nigeria, is perhaps the closest one comes to the video halls of Kampala in an African context. His description of the aura of illicitness and lack of moral associated with this cinema and these neighborhoods are, as we have seen, certainly applicable to the video halls as well.

If one can talk of the video halls in Kampala as a heterotopia, it is not one of resistance but of moral “otherness”, one that is constantly being produced and reproduced by the people going there. And while many people in Kampala seem dissatisfied with their government (see *The Guardian*), the “immoral” video hall is not a place for social and political critique. This “othering”, this portraying of the video hall as immoral, may in fact be one reason for this lack of social critique: as attendees see themselves as part of something immoral and bad, reaching a higher status does not equate a will to help those people “left behind”, as they are, in this view, still “living immoral lives”. This is I argue, as indicated by the use of the term “the production of”, an ongoing process and not some static fact.

van Oosterhout and Marshfield (2005-2006) talks about the lack of socially relevant films, with almost no national products or African documentaries being screened at these video halls. They argue that making these types of films available would educate people. As Okome (2007) shows, this can in fact be achieved in a video hall-like context, something organizations like Amakula Film Foundation have tried to do. In Lagos, Okome sees a potential for a public sphere

as films spur discussions of the society. As football has in most cases taken the center stage of media consumption at the video halls, this contention seems to have some bearing: if social critique, as argued by both Okome and van Oosterhout and Marshfield, needs “quality films”, the prevalence of football in favor of films in general may of course be a problem. I argue, however, that getting “quality films” to the video halls in Kampala (and Uganda) is not enough in doing this. With this moral stratification of the video hall space being so ingrained in Ugandan people’s imaginary, distributing documentaries and educational films (for free) would perhaps draw a crowd and have an impact at that moment, but it will not be enough to erase the low status of the video hall in the Ugandan society. As Henri Lefebvre argued, “‘Change life!’ ‘Change society!’ These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space” (Lefebvre 1974/1991: 59).

I want to make clear though, that this critique of mine is mostly based on the view of the video hall as a social space of resistance (or the lack thereof). Film viewing in Uganda is, it seems, mostly associated with leisure and entertainment, and the video hall as a site for this is both popular and spread not only in all of Kampala but also in the country at large. As “sports bars” for football fans, a function they often have, they also serve as a way of coming together for people with little other means of watching these matches. I would argue that what is missing in order for these video halls to have the potential for an alternate public sphere (as envisioned by Okome 2007) is a more serious take on these video halls in both the academia and in the press. As could be seen, little work had been done on film and film culture in general in Uganda, and the general consensus was that “film is entertainment”, and that this type of entertainment is not worth the effort. As some scholars have shown (perhaps most effectively by Ien Ang (1982/1985), popular culture is not by default making people into “cultural dopes” as Harold Garfinkel (in Stam 2000) had it. When doing further research on these video halls, this has to be taken into account.

One point I have not touched upon is that of gender (the “socially constructed characteristics” (McDowell 1999: 13) as opposed to the biological “sex”), and the reason for that is out of respect to the many brilliant people who may have done a better job in studying these questions in greater detail than I would have, given the scale of this research. Gender was never my main focus, and doing something with it “half-assed” would only belittle a very serious topic.

I will however try to at least open up for further discussion and research on this particular topic, as I have in my work come across certain interesting things. The most obvious observation is that the video halls in Kampala are mostly being owned, run, attended and frequented by men. The video hall space is, in fact, a predominantly male space. Or, rather, the media consumption is mostly done by male: women, if present, are mostly the ones who cook and sell food and beverage outside of the video hall. In my visits I did notice some women in the audiences, but here too the distinction is quite clear: the place I found most women in the audience was at MG Titanic in Nakulabye – the one video hall I saw that was exclusively showing films (no football matches). van Oosterhout and Marshfield again point to the media being screened, as the “small percentage of girls visiting video halls, on average, like Nigerian movies and love stories” and when a documentary, as part of the Amakula Kampala International Film Festival, was shown “more than a third of the audience was women” (van Oosterhout & Marshfield 2005-2006: 17). Seeing as most video halls focus on football matches and football fans, this of course may be a big factor in the low attendance of women I noticed. I will not dive into the wider implications of this, as this topic, as I mentioned, deserve and indeed need a study of its own. A good departure point is the work on geography and gender by Linda McDowell (1999) and Doreen Massey (1994).

## 7. SUMMARY

My interest in African film culture was born in part by the apparent lack in the academic world on this. Using field work conducted in Kampala, Uganda during two months in the end of 2011, this study focused on the social, economic and political functions of the video halls in the city. I wanted to go beyond the typical bourgeois-focused research on the cinema, being inspired by the anthropological work done by Brian Larkin (2008), and by the work on Nigerian video culture by Onookome Okome (2007). The aim of the study was to look at the social and political functions and implications of the video halls in Kampala, using a combination of interviews and observation, spending time at these video halls and talking to owners, customers, businesses in the neighborhood, as well as students and workers in the city.

Drawing on, and problematizing, particularly the concept of heterotopia as used by Michel Foucault (1967/1984), the study found that the social space of the video hall was closely linked with questions of moral and “otherness”. The video hall was generally seen as an immoral place where thieves gathered, and people did drugs and watched “blue movies” (pornographic films). The field work could prove some of these contentions, but also found that this was a contested view: while some places had problems with drug use and thievery, others had measures to prevent these behaviors.

The video hall as a place of resistance, one central aspect of Foucault’s heterotopia, could not be proved. One reason, it could be argued, was due to the fact that most video halls did not show educational films or documentaries – the most popular genres was action and adventure – and relied mostly on football matches drawing the biggest crowds. Though, the moral “othering” of the video hall by both outsiders and people involved with them could arguably have been the biggest reason for the lack of social critique and discussion at the video halls. As the customers themselves in many cases saw these venues as immoral, the social space was never associated with politics or social critique. In the light of tighter governmental control on the public in recent years, the “othering” of this social space, I argued, could potentially be in favor of the government as it effectively removes one potential venue for political gathering. It was also argued that the video hall itself, as well as film in general, had to be taken more seriously by the academia in Uganda in order understand the functions of these matters.

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### *8.3 Filmography*

*Domitilla* (Zeb Ejiro, Nigeria, 1997)

*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* (David Yates, UK/USA, 2010)

*Shi yue wei cheng* (Teddy Chan, China/Hong Kong, 2009)

*The Searchers* (John Ford, USA, 1956)

## 9. APPENDIX

### *9.1 Informants*

The informants used for this study provided information to varying degrees, as many of them was interviewed in non-structured manners. Some didn't want to leave their full names, in which case I only use their first name.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Bosco</b>	Night manager at Makerere University Guest House.
<b>Bwire Wilson</b>	Manager at Titanic video hall in Kitintale in two periods: before and after he went to Iraq.
<b>Gilbert Ereuka</b>	Security guard and video operator at Amakula Film Foundation, served as a guide during this research.
<b>Henriq Muwonge</b>	VJ, met in Katwe together with VJ Mike.
<b>Ivan Lukanda</b>	Lecturer in Media and Communications at Makerere University.
<b>Jean</b>	Student at Makerere University.
<b>Jeff</b>	Co-owner of Touch of Class Video Club in Luzira, since about 20 years.
<b>Keneth</b>	Twenty-one year old police officer patrolling Makerere University Guest House
<b>Kyakuwa</b>	Eighteen year old attendant at Titanic video hall in Ndeeba.
<b>Michiel van Oosterhout</b>	Dutch journalist living in Uganda since nine years back. Been working with Amakula Kampala International Film Festival, and done research on video halls.

<b>Ntanda-Umar</b>	Young man at Titanic video hall in Ndeeba, frequent customer and friends with Kyakuwa.
<b>Roland</b>	Attendant of New Paradise Entertainment in Kisenyi.
<b>Sensanga William Washua</b>	Owner of San-siro video hall in Kibuye and Hollywood video hall in Katwe.
<b>Sekatawa</b>	Owner of Basesa video hall in Bwaise.
<b>VJ Junior</b>	VJ
<b>VJ Mike</b>	Kalibwe Michael, also known as VJ Mike, owner of Washington Video video hall and video library.

## *9.2 Interview templates*

As I wanted to keep the interviews semi-structured and fluent, the interviews differ from each other in varying degrees depending on what the person (owner or audience) had to say or wanted to talk about regarding the main themes of the interview. Using a thematic template instead of a strict script allowed for this more fluent and flexible type of interview. Here are the two templates used for video hall owners and the audiences respectively.

# Owner

## The owner

Name:

Place:

Time:

Owner since when?

Did you build it?

What does it involve?

Why did you start?

Is it making money?

Change over the years?

On what?

Work with other  
businesses?

Busy place?

## The place/audience

Often  
like this?

What do people  
watch?

Football:  
why?

Film: what?

Who are coming  
here (age, sex,  
occupation)?

What do people do  
around here except  
watching  
films/football?

From  
where?

Why do you  
thing they  
come

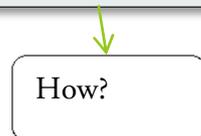
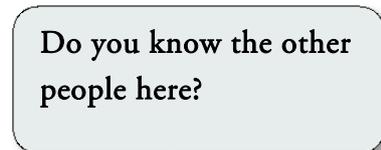
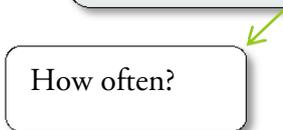
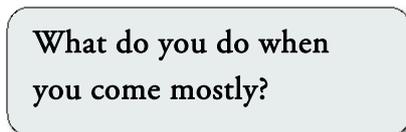
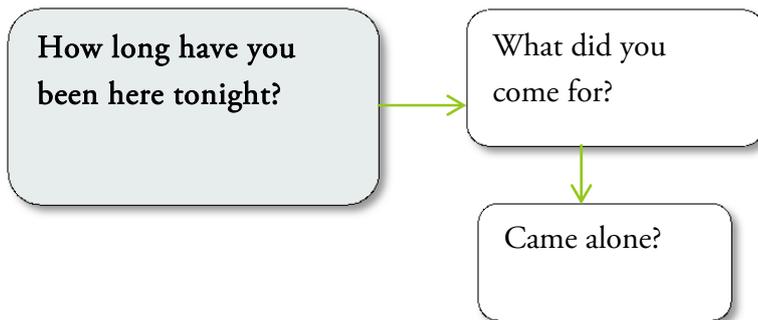
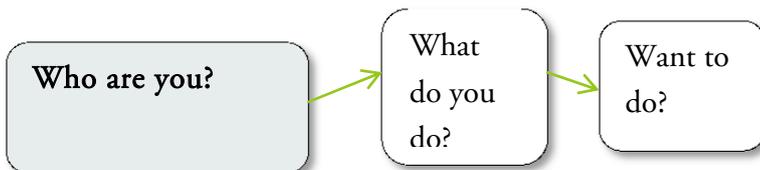
Drink, drugs?

Government/police  
involvement?

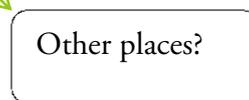
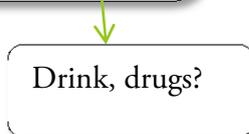
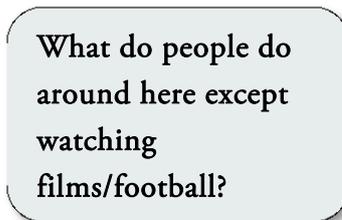
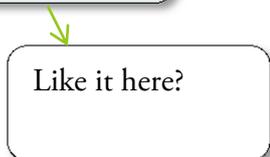
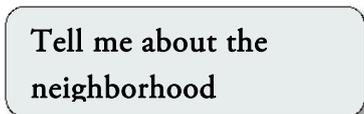
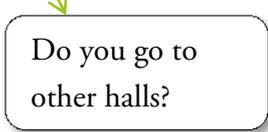
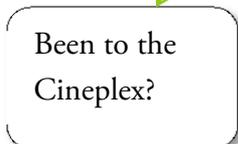
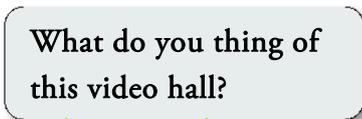
# Audience

Name:  
Age:  
Place:  
Time:

## The audience



## The place



### 9.3 Figures

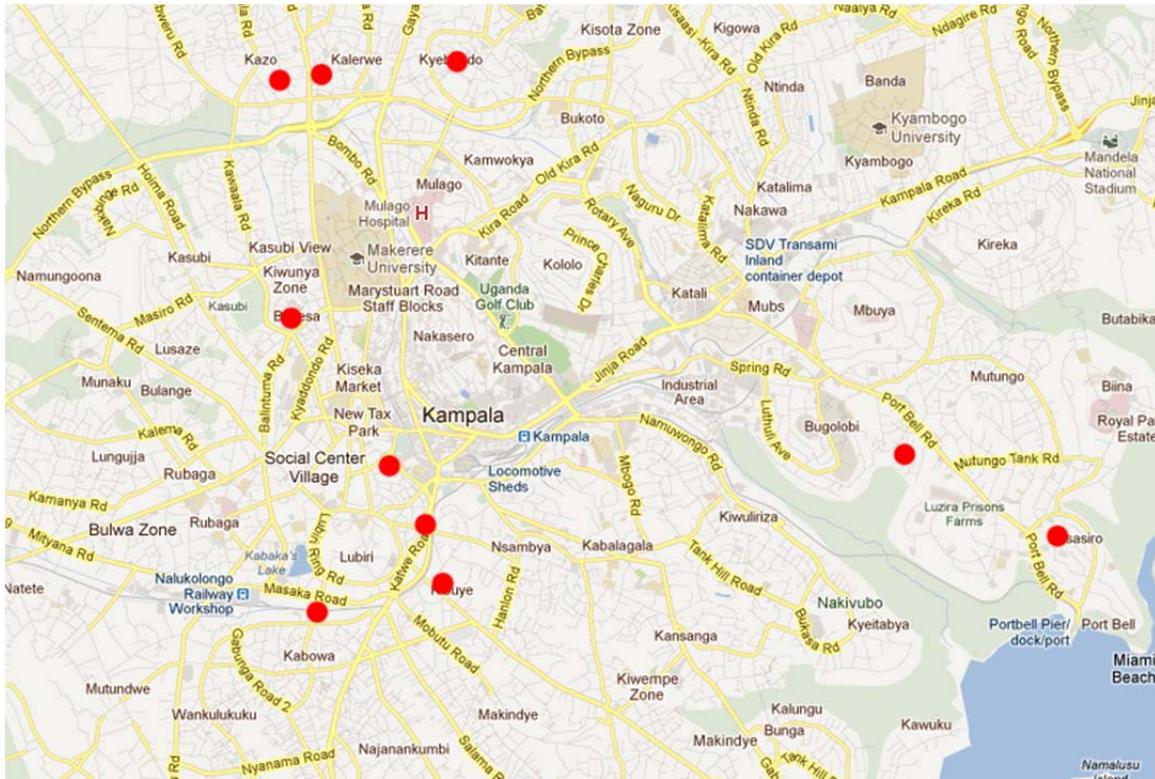


Figure 1 – Map of Kampala, areas of video halls marked with red dots



Figure 2 – Down Town Sound video hall in Kyebando



Figure 3 – MG Titanic video hall in Nakulabye



Figure 4 – San-Siro video hall in Kibuye, access balcone to its three screening rooms



Figure 5 – San-Siro, three television sets on at the same time



Figure 6 – Inside Titanic video hall in Kitintale



Figure 7 – Young men playing Ludo outside Titanic in Kitintale



Figure 8 – Touch of Class video hall in Luzira



Figure 9 – Washington video library in Katwe



Figure 10 – Stairs leading up to Washington video hall in Katwe