

## Orality and Informality in Video-Film Distribution in Kenya: The Case of Eldoret

Joseph Basil Okong'o<sup>1</sup>, Solomon Waliaula<sup>2</sup> and Maina T. Sammy<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Literature, Linguistics, Foreign Languages and Film Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Moi University*

*E-mail: ojoseph4@gmail.com*

*ORCID: 0000-0002-7340-5194*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Languages, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies, School of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences and Creative Industries, Maasai Mara University*

*E-mail: swaliaul@uni-mainze.de or waliaula@mmarau.ac.ke*

*ORCID: 0000-0001-5982-3077*

<sup>3</sup>*Department of Literature, Linguistics, Foreign Languages and Film Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Moi University*

*E-mail: mainasanchez@gmail.com*

*ORCID: 0009-0002-9117-4374*

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### Abstract

*The history of Cinema in Africa is clearly one of marginalization at all levels, including film making, distribution and access. As various film scholars have noted these processes of exclusion were closely tied to the colonial and imperialist interests of domination and exploitation and later the ideological concerns of the African postcolonial state which not only inherited colonial structures and policies but employed these instruments to privilege the political class and serve the interests of the powerful and wealthy citizenship. This paper examines the strategies employed by the traders marginalized from access to formal structures of distribution of films who have established informal modes of transaction with their equally economically disenfranchised clients in Eldoret town. We employ Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework to analyze data obtained through ethnographic field study involving interaction with traders and their clients in the streets of the town through observation, interviews and personal testimonies. Our findings are that (i) Informal trade in video is a consequence of marginalization in access to films (ii) There is a close link between informal trade in video films and the broader Jua Kali informal systems which can be traced back to strategies of coping in urban economies established by marginalized African populations during the colonial era (iii) Despite*

*the digital transformation in the way cinema is produced and watched, the informalization of film distribution continues in Kenya and traders find innovative ways of linking with their clients (iv) Orality which has been part of the African cultural heritage of communication and social interaction remains an important mode of transaction in informal video trade in Kenya.*

**Key Words:** Informality, Marginalisation, Orality, Overlapping Realities, Video Film

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### **Introduction**

In attempting to define informality in the context of trade in urban spaces, Egan (2014: 23) describes it as:

...the practice of urban residences engaging in activities that, to varying extents, operate outside the regulatory framework sanctioned by the State, drawing instead on social relations and community to make city life viable.

We adopt the above concept of informality for our purposes in this study and further note that in the colonial and postcolonial political, social and economic development of urban cities in Africa, informal practices in trade were a consequence of marginalization of certain sections of the population by the State in favor of the wealthy business class and to serve the political interests of the ruling regime. During the colonial period it was the African population that was placed at the margins by the State whose interests were to facilitate 'White' economic and political dominance. As Egan (2014:12) explains:

Urban exclusion has had particular implications in Africa, where many new cities were created expressly by and for the colonial regime. Built for the very purpose of administering colonized populations, many African urban centres involved considerable town planning to create acceptable environments for foreign settlers, while also securing the use of land for extractive purposes...the homes of the colonized population were kept far from white settlers and were only available on a temporary and tenured basis.

In Kenya as in any other African States this marginalization included limited opportunities for gainful employment and trade in the urban establishment where Africans found it difficult to obtain business licenses and were restricted from setting up trade in the central Business District as well as favorable areas down town. And even when African traders did manage to formally establish their business the colonial regime would carry out raids and arrests on the business premises by invoking certain ordinances in the

law that conveniently allowed it to destabilize or 'remove' unwanted populations from urban areas on the grounds that they were a 'health risk' or a 'security threat' (Egan 2014:55).

In order to survive in such a hostile environment therefore, African populations had to devise strategies that enabled them to operate outside the formal business establishment and 'hidden' from the security system of the State. This informal engagement in trade by marginalized populations in the urban settlements can be traced to Colonial urban policies. The postcolonial state has essentially continued to perpetuate the same policies in order to serve the interests of the dominant economic class and the ruling regime. As Egan (2014: 58) observes in the case of the City Council of Nairobi after independence:

The urban policies of the CCN were essentially deracialized versions of colonial policies, which did very little to rectify the uneven geographical development.

This understanding of the historical genesis of marginalization and informalization in trade in the postcolonial state is important to our analysis in this paper because we are concerned with the strategies employed by traders in video films who find themselves excluded from formal business structures in Eldoret and have thus worked out informal strategies to make a living. This trade involves serving a clientele from a population which has been economically disenfranchised and cannot afford to access film in contemporary digital modes such as on mobile platforms and apps such as Netflix, Smart TV or on Cinemaplex. In Eldoret such populations live in low class suburbs of Langas, Huruma, Kidiwa, Ngomongo etc.

According to Ramon Lobato (2012:2) informal distributors have been central in the circulation of films since the early days of cinema. He seems to imply that there has always existed an informal economy of cinema that complements the institutionalized structures and processes of cinema. As he points out, this informal economy operates entirely outside the legal frameworks of film reproduction and distribution. This paper situates itself in this discourse by focusing on a specific case of film distribution that has operated outside the mainstream and legalized structures in Kenya. Secondly, the said informal film distribution is part of a larger informal economy referred to as *Jua Kali* in Kenya that straddles the formal and informal entrepreneurship. As is apparent in this chapter, the *Jua Kali* economy is social, interpersonal and oral. By orality, we imply the wide spectrum of interpersonal relations that includes the playful and dramatic exchange expressed in vocal and body language of participants in the

business interaction. Our study focuses on the informal video shop as well as hawkers that engage in the distribution of films in peri-urban spaces in towns and in particular, the provincial town of Eldoret. In addition, we have found it necessary in this study to foreground the postcolonial heritage of film distribution as well as the postcolonial urban cultures as they have influenced the nature of film distribution in the country. The type of films that we refer to in this study are those which have been illegally reproduced from the legal copies in a process of piracy. In the beginning, copies were made in local under cover studios but currently films are downloaded from the internet and distributed from cybers and as well as online distribution using data transfer applications. For our purposes, our focus is on the former distribution methods before the internet became widely accessible in the country at the turn of the New Millennium. These older forms of sourcing and distributing films still continue to co-exist with the contemporary digital methods because access to reliable internet is still a big challenge to the ordinary film consumer in Kenya. Studies have also been done on the socio-cultural implications of the informal video shop in Kenya (Kithyoko 2006, Waliaula 2014). One of the findings of the studies has been that the video-shop produces a characteristically heuristic mode of film consumption in which orality blends in with the reception experience, making it an informal and playful engagement between a cinema and its audiences. In this chapter, we have argued that orality and informality is also applied in the marketing and distribution of cinema, and that this was particularly dominant in the 1980s to the 1990s, but is also present to date. We locate this in the wider postcolonial experience.

The research methods used in this study are largely ethnographic in the formal sense of participant and non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews as well as taking advantage of being part of the local community and to that extent, native ethnographers. The former positionality was an important approach to data collection in view of the nature of subject under study. The film distribution practice we were studying is illegal and yet hidden within the legal spaces and practices of the urban economy. For example, these video shops are situated at the bus park and the operators position themselves as legal and licensed entrepreneurs yet what they trade in are products of piracy. Therefore, a formal engagement with such informants is not possible. One needs to cultivate trust and loyalty in order to access information from them.

**Film Distribution in Kenya: A Historical Perspective**

The Kenyan Post-independence government (as almost all independent African countries) inherited colonial structures, but these were not necessarily applicable to the local conditions. For instance, the colonial experience was about the control of the urban geography and therefore the African population did not just move in from anywhere (Otiso 2005:73). For example, movement from the countryside to the urban space had to be authorized and a special pass was needed. Urban space was demarcated. There was space for business and individuals were allowed to do business here formally if they had to have the money to pay for the rates or had connection to the elite to circumvent formal procedure. In the post-independent state, these colonial laws were never repealed. But at the same time there were many people who moved from the countryside to look for jobs in towns. Because there were not enough jobs for everybody, most of these people had to look for innovative ways to survive. They ended up in business, yet they were entering a space that had regulations. As a result, there was a periodic *msako*, which is Kiswahili for 'routine check' by the authorities to clean the city of 'loiterers and idlers' (Al-Bulushi 2021:822). This was a dreaded activity because it was ruthless and punitive. As a result, we had a community of business people that needed to stay in business but did not have access to the basic requirements and resources, such as capital, licensing, and formal marketing channels. They had to look for informal methods to cope. This was the beginning of the category of urban dwellers that self-identify as 'hustlers' and do anything to survive in business and make profit.

It is also important to note that in the 1990s, there were two significant shifts in the leisure interests in Africa. The World Bank enforced stringent measures for governments to access loans and many of these measures led to an economic downturn. In the film industry, the first victims were businesses where the government was a major stakeholder, such as Film Theatres. These were colonial set-ups that the postcolonial government had inherited (Nyutho 2015:84-86). Examples include the Kenyan National Cinema, and the 20th Century Fox, in Nairobi as well as film theatres in Eldoret, Nakuru, Mombasa, Kisumu, and Kitale (Nyutho 2015:104-108). These were situated in the central business districts of major towns. The cinemas were run by the Kenya Film Corporation which could then lease to middlemen, mostly Asians, to run to make profit and to pay rent and tax as well. There were international companies that distributed the films. They too paid a tax to the government. Therefore, it was difficult for any minority group to enter the film distribution and exhibition business.

Marketing is part of any business. In the formal business sector, film was marketed through posters, the print and electronic media. In the film theatres there was also advertisement of upcoming films. It was also part of the culture of film, and basically middle-class culture. The business of film was the government, its subsidiaries and formal business establishments. However, there was the invention and incursion of video technology into the country in the 1980s home video as well as the video show – which became more popular. This therefore facilitated the informalization of film cultures, including marketing. This informalization fed into existent oral traditions as well as the fluid rhythm of the urban life in the postcolonial urban spaces, ensuring survival for the marginalized.

### **The Fluid Urban Spaces**

In urban areas in Kenya and much of Africa, there is a unique culture of space, characterized by what one could term as the continuity of rural communal identities in the urban space. This has had a significant impact on the urban experience of life, particularly in the buying and selling of goods and services. One of the emergent patterns has been the development of ritualized space and movement associated with village life, but which when embedded in the typical urban experience creates a distinctive rhythm that is neither urban nor rural. It is rhythm that defies formal structures and cultures that define the so called planned urban areas. James Ogude (2012:150), in a different context, has observed that “the divide between the rural and urbanscapes is always accentuated, when far less attention is paid to the imbrications of the city and the rural, and how indeed both spaces are defined by a fluidity of relationships and the trafficking of economic goods and cultural currents between them.” See Figure 1 and 2 below.



*Figure 1: A Street in Eldoret. Notice the Public Service Vehicles in front of a busy corridor along which informal businesses are located. The public service vehicles and informal business are deliberately positioned to capture the attention of people passing by.*

*Figure 2: A busy corridor in Eldoret town which is meant to be a passage way for pedestrians walking from one main street to another. Notice informal stalls deliberately placed along the corridor to attract passersby who are potential clients.*



This informal (marginalized) culture is defined by the insertion of film marketing in the general ebb and flow of life, to the extent that the film marketing practice cannot be seen in isolation from the overall social experience of the people. It is part of how the people congregate not merely to engage in business but also to just hang around and hope that something happens that could enable them earn some money. It is also a metaphor of the patterns of socio-economic segmentation and apparent re-connections in the urban population that goes back to the colonial era.

There have always been formal structures and procedures to instil order and regulate the movement of people and the activities that they engage in. But this was always overlaid by what Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nutall (2008:359) have termed as “overlapping realities” of the urban experience in the developing world. The concept of overlapping is both metaphoric and literal in the case of Eldoret, as in many other cases in Sub Saharan Africa. There are agents and processes of overlapping, and they co-exist with formal agencies and processes. For example, we have the broker, an informal intermediary role in a grey area we shall explain as we go along. It is not a role you will find in established marketing regimes. Yet, it is an enduring and thriving urban practice in informal marginalized businesses throughout the country.

Another overlapping scenario is witnessed in spatial organization. As has already been mentioned, there are streets, roundabouts, bus parks, markets, leisure parks and so on. These are set aside from spaces for department stores, barbershops, salons, restaurants, grocery stores and so on. In this sense, there is an aspiration for order. Much as this is generally observed, it is also adapted to immediate circumstances. Yet there are times when the activities meant to be done at the markets are also done on the streets and bus parks. For instance, traders may stick to their designated stalls during the day but in the late afternoon and early evenings they become hawkers, moving around with their wares all over town, along the streets and even beyond, to the outskirts of town, into the residential neighbourhoods. Some of the traders merely relocate their stalls to other places that are deemed to be more strategic. Of course, this transcends official urban planning, and it is frequently disrupted, and the perpetrators arrested and fined by the authorities, in an attempt to subvert the minorities that had created their own spaces by subverting the official spaces.

There is a third pattern in the urban experience that could be termed as the formalization of the informal that, to Ogude (2012:151), is characterized by the ritualization of certain spaces and activities in the urban areas, “within which a projection of fantasies rooted in popular cultural memory could be



performed.” Ogude focuses on the performance of traditional music associated with the countryside in such spaces.

### **Orality and Performance as Subversion of the Formal**

In this kind of informal transaction, ‘talk’ becomes the main medium of connecting the client with the film video seller. And this further involves a person to person interaction as will be evident in the ethnographic description of our field experience in the next section of this chapter. From a dramaturgical perspective the encounter between the two parties is basically an oral performance because each of them must take up roles and engage in a verbal exchange, involving different rhetorical strategies, accompanied by body postures to reach a point of agreement, or vice versa.

To prepare for this, the video seller carefully stages the performance, like an actor sets up his space. As mentioned in the previous section this is essentially an improvised selling place as he is not legally meant to set up his establishment there in the first place; he must be on the move at any sign of the city authority’s appearance. Again, and paradoxically, he has established himself on a corridor; a busy passageway set up for pedestrians on transit between the bus stage/park and various other destinations and errands in the city. This positioning is deliberate and is both convenient and inconvenient: convenient from a business perspective as he is able to obtain buyers from amongst the train of human traffic moving to and fro in this busy corridor, but inconvenient for those who may feel as if his establishment in that space is partly blocking the smooth flow of transit. The structures are designed with light material and consist of an iron rod-frame which is then covered with plywood to make a tabular stand overlaid with a plywood board in which the video DVDs are arranged. The stand may be backed by a plywood board on which more DVDs are also arranged in a manner that makes it easy for the passing pedestrian, potential buyers, to see. The Video hawker will normally place alongside a TV monitor, speakers and DVD player which will be played loudly to attract clientele. Over the shelter may be a patio umbrella or polythene for protection from the sun or rain. In other words, like a good dramatist and oral performer he knows that spectacle draws people who will then be audiences from whom he can benefit. Note that such spectacle that is deliberately staged to attract small crowds of passers will also be good fodder for other hawkers selling other products, and even petty thieves and conmen. In other words, the marketing of cinema feeds into the informal and existential rhythm of urban life as the subaltern adapts into the mainstream.

Onto this stage arrives the potential client drawn by the spectacle and the video hawker is well prepared to engage him/her in a verbal dialogue whose aim is of course to make a sale. Neither is the client completely unprepared or ignorant of how the process goes; in other words, this informal oral exchange takes place regularly in other kinds of transactions in similar kinds of public setups all over the city including the market. Thus the process can be seen as a ritual whose script both parties are aware of and willingly take part in. An example for such a typical script is shown in the next section below and begins with a teasing – joking relationship especially if a client and the video hawker are familiar with one another or what we could call a ‘sizing up’ Both patterns of the initial contact behavior of the two parties are a way of laying the ground work for the ‘transactional moment’ when the seller will attempt to get the buyer to purchase the product while the buyer will either wiggle out of it or if committed will attempt to get the seller to lower the price. However, the teasing-joking relationship can be more appropriate amongst buddies. In cases where the seller and the buyer are unfamiliar with one another, the former will either wait for the latter to look around and begin to ask questions about a certain movie title or the seller will start by asking the buyer what kind of movies they are looking for. These questions enable each party to find an appropriate opening for the discourse, upon which it will now be possible to start the transaction.

The teasing-joking relationship that occurs at the beginning of a conversation is however also a common aspect of discourse in many Kenyan and other African societies. Referring to joking relationships among communities in Burkina Faso for instance, Herberg (2006) (see also Sweet: 2021 and Wako: 2013) has observed:

In villages as well as in urban areas, joking relationships are acted out to the amusement of the public. Hence, people turn to joking relationship in social situations to create this played out animosity, enabling true friendship to develop (197).

And often the motif of the town ‘guy’ who is ‘trapped’ in the networks of the urban space and has therefore refused to visit his kin or renew the links he has with his rural/ancestral homeland becomes the brunt of these jokes: for many communities in Kenya still maintain strong links with their rural spaces and see the urban space as the ‘working place’ where the money is made to support their folks in their village. The latter is further seen as the place where eventually one is going to settle on retirement. But the motif is also a metaphor that describes multiple and complex experiences of town life in the post-colonial Kenyan society linked to individualism and materialism that pervades urban society. This is contrasted with what is thought to be the more

communal and humanistic nature of rural life, where they fit in as the decision makers and therefore the 'majority'.

A fundamental aspect of the dialogue or verbal drama that takes place in the video seller's space is the use of narratives or making stories. These stories are used in multiple ways: as a means of passing time as evident in the scenario described at the video seller's shop where movie fans meet, sit down and exchange stories about various films, film stars, and directors, as well as politics and the goings on in the town. Similarly, other hawkers, bus drivers, touts, etc. pass by the video seller's space to watch the movies being played on the screen while also exchanging stories with one another. In these two scenarios the main thing is to occupy themselves in the time between their next engagements. In this example therefore, the video seller's shop is not strictly a space where only commerce takes place; it is also a point for socialization for the urban marginalized.

A second function of these narrative exchanges is that while socializing in the video seller's shop these patrons also attract other passersby. They may then be drawn or influenced to buy a movie or two based on what they hear about a specific film from the anecdotes or watching one being played on the screen. For the video-seller, therefore, having hangers on and more people around, and engaging in stories without buying, still works to his advantage as they indirectly help him advertise his wares which he cannot do through the formal systems of posters and billboards.

In this verbal drama, physical presence, appearance and distance, body movement, posture, and gesture become significant. It is for instance interesting to see the way in which the video seller carefully notes the physical appearance of the client and strategically addresses him or her accordingly. As Lumumba explains when we ask about this:

*Ni lazima uchunguze vile mteja ameji vaa – Mzee mwenye koti na tai, huwezi mumzungusha huku na huko.* (You need to carefully examine your clients (and treat them appropriately) – A respectable man dressed in a suit and tie should not be harassed)

*Naye Mama ambaye amejivaa na kujirembesha lazma umuonageshe na heshima. Umusikize kwa maakini na usionyeshe kwamba umejuwa kumshinda.* (And a woman well dressed and groomed should be treated with respect. Don't be impudent with them)

*Halafu wamama hu enda na moods. Aki kuja kama amekunja uso, juwa hiyo siku si yake; kuwa mpole.* (Women have moods. When she looks irritable know that she is having a bad day. Be courteous)

## The Stall



*Figure 3: The typical video stall appropriately placed along an adjacent corridor. Notice how the structure is hinged on the outer wall of a neighbouring building and the orderly arrangement of videos to attract potential clients*

*Figure 4: A close up view of the interior of the video Stall with the TV screen and dvd deck placed strategically to display parts of movies for the purpose of attracting potential clients. Notice also the arranged video DVDs in their jackets (covers)*



As Juma leads the way, we count about five video stalls along the main bus stage and cross the road to one stall positioned where a line of public service vehicles to Huruma, where a large suburb about 3 kilometers to the west of town are parked waiting for passengers. This stall is owned by Juma's friend Lumumba. Juma engages Lumumba in small talk before introducing us and explaining what we have come to do. Lumumba welcomes us and we stand by to observe the goings on:

Juma (walks towards Lumumba while calling out): *Wewe ni fala sana!* (You fool!)

Lumumba: (As they shake hands in a greeting): *Ona huyu.* (turns to us) *Nani fala katikati ya mimi na yeye?* (Look at this one. Who is the fool between the two of us?)

Juma: *Huyu ni wale wamepotea town. Hawaendi nyumbani. Ati ana fanya biashara na bibi ameacha na watoto mashambani.* (He is one of those people who are lost in this town. They never go back home. They claim to be busy doing business here while they have abandoned their wives and children back in the village)

Lumumba: *Wewe umepotezwa na Malaya ya hapa town hata huendangi nyumbani. Ulienda kuona wazazi lini?* (You have been ensnared by the prostitutes of this town and never go back home. When was the last time you paid a visit to your parents in the village?)

Juma: *Wacha kuharibu jina yangu mbele ya hawa waheshimiwa* (Don't spoil my name in front of these important guests! they laugh and embrace. Then Juma introduces us to Lumumba explaining our motive. We give further explanations and Lumumba welcomes us to observe the goings on)

We notice that this stall is strategically placed right next to a busy corridor between a row of shops that forms a passageway for people going to board vehicles, others who have alighted and are headed for various destinations within the central business district, shoppers, idlers, e.t.c. We also observe quite a number of them stop by to check out the videos on display, or to watch one of the movies that Lumumba is playing on the monitor screen to draw the attention of possible clients. What strikes us as interesting, is the way Juma easily steps in and helps Lumumba convince or regale customers to buy the movies on display, and even gets us to purchase one or two DVDs as well:

Juma: *Lumush! Ata hawa waheshimiwa wangee ku promote kidogo bwana.* (Hey Lumumba! Even these honorable ones should promote you at least)

Lumumba: *Hawa ni wageni usi wapeleke speedy* (They are my guests, don't rush them)

Juma: *Bwana Lumush! Hawa ni wa kubwa. Walimu wa chuo! Wacha ata hiyo ni ma Profesa!* (They are not just guests they are very 'big' guys - Professors at the University)

Lumumba: *Eish! Ni wakubwa sana... Nimewaogopa manze...* (What! Important indeed, I respect them . . .

Juma: *Wewe Daktari Joseph na Solomon wacha maringo. Nunua vitu...*(Picks two DVDs from the display) . *Kwanza hizi ni mzuri sana chukua muende ku woch.... Utani eleza* (These ones are good; buy them and go and watch. You shall give me the outcome.

(We take them, exchange glances with one another then ask Lumumba how much the cost is. He sells them to us at 100 kshs each all the time explaining to us why the movies we have purchased have great suspense...)

Like all the other structures that we have seen this one is makeshift. Lumumba explains this to us:

*“Unoana wenzangu, hii ni tao; huwezi weka kitu chenye ita bomolewa kesho. Halafu ma kanjo wata weza kuja kwa musako saa yeyote na itapidi uhepe haraka. Na ujue siko hapa kwa muda; kesho niki pata mahali ingine nita weza hama tena na bidhaa zangu. Hii frame huwa na beba na kuweka kwa duka la ile kila jioni an kuirudisha kila mchana”*

(“You see my friends; this is town; you can’t place a permanent/expensive structure which will be brought down tomorrow. Then you must also consider that the county *askari* can appear any time on a *Musako*, and you have to flee. Be aware as well that am not stationed here permanently; if I get a more appropriate place tomorrow of course I will move out. Incidentally I always dismantle this structure in the evening (when the day’s business is over) and keep the parts in that shop (points to a nearby shop) and then pick them and set up the stall again.)

We look more closely at the structure and observe that it is designed with light material, consisting of an iron rod-frame which is then overlaid with a movable plywood board to make a tabular stand on which video DVDs are arranged. The stand is backed by a plywood board on which more DVDs are also displayed in a manner that makes it easy for the passing pedestrian (who might be a potential buyer) to see. Over the stall is a patio umbrella for protection from the sun or rain.

Lumumba sees us examining the structure and remarks:

*“Lazima uzipange na plan, ndio customer aweze ku chagua chenye inamupendeza. Zile filamu zimetokezea juzi na ni moto moto unapanga hapa juu kwa board.”*

(You need to display them in such a manner that the client can easily identify a movie of his/her choice. The latest movies are placed up here on the board – where the client can easily see them)

Standing next to the upright board Lumumba has placed a TV monitor, speakers and DVD player, on which a movie is being played. The sound is loud and attracts passers by some of who stop to ask about the movie playing on the screen and to search for more movies in Lumumba's collection.

Others however are simply by standers. Most interesting is the conversation that takes place between the potential client and the seller. As the former stops and watches the movie on the screen, Lumumba engages her in conversation:

Lumumba: *Yes, sema miss.* (Yes, tell me madam)

Client: *Hii ni gani?* (which one is this?)

Lumumba: *Hiyo ni latest kutoka Tanzania. Imeshika sana.* (That one is the latest movie from Tanzania)

(He shows her the movie's jacket which she examines reading the title and other details while he continues talking about the director and the actors).

*Huyo Director ni mnoma sana...* (That Director is very good)

(At this juncture he embarks on a description of several supposed achievements of the director of the movie as well as the major stars giving anecdotes here and there; Juma comes in now and then to make additions to these anecdotes)

Client: *Sio yeye ndio alitoa ile...?* (Isn't he the one who directed that...?)

Lumumba: *Naam. Ni huyo kweli. Nimkali sana. Amejua kutunga hadithi moto moto...yeye sasa ndio amependwa sana huko Tanzania. Wakisikia ame towa ingine mpya, watu wanaikimbilia. Ata huku Kenya. Hii kwanza imenunuliwa sana. Nilileta stock ya hamsini juzi. Sasa nimebakisha hii moja tuu...* (Oh yes. Very true. He is very good. He knows how to tell a good story ...he is now the most popular in Tanzania. When they learn that another one of his movies is out on the market, they rush to purchase and watch it. The same happens here in Kenya. By the way this particular movie is on demand. I brought in fifty copies and this is the only one remaining)

Client: *Nilipenda sana ile movie yake . . .* (I really liked that other movie of his /)

Lumumba: *Basi hii watu wanasema imeshinda ile si unaona ata quality?* (Now . . . people are claiming that this one is even better than that one you can see it's high quality for yourself)

Client: *Utaniuzia na ngapi?* (At what price will you sell it to me?)

Lumumba: *Leta 150* (Bring 150 kshs)

Client: (exclaims) *Haa! Kwani unauza ngombe?* (Haa! Are you selling a cow?)

Lumumba: *Si hivyo madam, hii ni mpya, the latest, si nime kuambia inatafutwa sana?* (Not really Madam. This one is the latest; don't you know it's on high demand?)

Client: *Ningeichukua lakini hiyo bei ziwezani nayo. Niko na sabini* (I would have taken it but it's beyond my reach. I have only 70 kshs)

Lumumba: (exclaims) *Ai madam. Afadhali bas ungechukua hizi za zamani* (points at others) (Ai! Madam. At that rate you might as well buy these older movies)

Client: *Hizo nisha ziona zote* (I have watched all those)

Lumumba: *Bas, chukua. Kwa sababu umelia sana nita kuachia na mia.* (Very well then, buy this one. Since you have really lamented, let me give it to you at 100 kshs)

Client:(Exclaims) *Woye! ni kama hutaki kuuza. Niuzie na 80 bei ya mwisho* (Oh My! It seems you are not interested in selling this movie. Okay give it to me at 80 kshs)

(Lumumba insists on 100 kshs. The customer makes as if to go. Lumumba calls after her: *Bas madam umenigonga lakini we ni customer mzuri chukua tuu.* (I'm selling at a loss but just take you're a good customer. [She returns, pays and walks off as Lumumba regales her to come again]).



## The Shop



*Lumumba arranging his video DVDs in the shop*

## Conclusion

This study is an extension of other studies of video shop cultures in Kenya. One of the findings of the studies has been that video shops are spaces where products are sold through the processes of informality and orality, thereby challenging mainstream majority projects. We have argued that this orality and informality also features in the marketing and distribution of films, creating a whole system within itself that undercuts the formal mainstream distributors. This informality connects to the typical urban cultures of postcolonial Africa that have been equally informal and oral, a result of marginalization occasioned by the mainstream exclusionist policies of the political elite as inherited from the colonial masters.

Premised on the ethnographic approach, the study has used a specific example of film marketing in Eldoret to demonstrate the play between orality and commerce in film marketing, and to represent the reality of other Kenyan and African urban centres, where alternative methods of subverting marginalization have been well developed. This has implications on the formal concept of film marketing on the one hand and also the nature and function of orality in the urban experience. Significantly, based on transformations in digital media, their informal streak in film marketing is gradually mutating from the typical hawking and oral transaction to other digital forms such as You Tube, Netflix, and other social media. It is worth

noting that the informal networks that involve orality have been reconfigured by hawkers to improve on their sourcing and distribution of films, thereby adapting to arising challenges as the centre attempts to sideline them using advanced technologies without success – for the minority can speak for themselves in their own spaces with a resounding presence.

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