



Representing 'otherness' in African popular media: Chinese characters in Ethiopian video-films

Alessandro Jedlowski & Michael W. Thomas

To cite this article: Alessandro Jedlowski & Michael W. Thomas (2017) Representing 'otherness' in African popular media: Chinese characters in Ethiopian video-films, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 29:1, 63-80, DOI: [10.1080/13696815.2016.1241704](https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2016.1241704)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2016.1241704>



Published online: 21 Oct 2016.




[Submit your article to this journal](#) 



Article views: 149



[View related articles](#) 



[View Crossmark data](#) 

Representing ‘otherness’ in African popular media: Chinese characters in Ethiopian video-films

Alessandro Jedlowski^a and Michael W. Thomas^b

^aLaboratoire d’anthropologie sociale et culturelle, University of Liege, Liège, Belgium; ^bCentre for Film Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS, University of London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the recent phenomenon of Ethiopian films that prominently feature Chinese characters. As the success of these films relies on representing a stereotypical Chinese ‘Other’, and in reference to China’s ever-growing presence in African countries, we pose broader questions relating to the place of ethnicity, race and national identity in popular cultural productions emerging from the continent. Through an analysis which caters for multiple and at times oppositional interpretations, we argue that the representation of the ‘Chinese Other’ constructed by these films at times criticizes and at times reasserts existing stereotypes and prejudices. The overriding view and intent of the filmmakers to use Chinese characters mainly as narrative devices is often functional in the development of specific, inward-looking social and political criticisms. But this attitude inevitably forces the films to overlook the key issue underlying discourses about otherness in Ethiopian popular media – namely the issue of how to deal with racial multiplicity in a society that defines belonging along rigid and exclusionary terms.

ጩቅ

ይህ ፅሁፍ በዋናነት የቻይናን ገጸ ባህሪ ያለው ህጋዊ ባልተለመደ ሁኔታ በወቅቱ በሚሰሩ የኢትዮጵያ ፊልሞች ላይ ያተኩራል። የነዚህ ፊልሞች ስኬት የቻይናን ባህልና ወግ በኢትዮጵያውያን አሳቤ እንዲሁም ከመቼውም ጊዜ በላይ የቻይና የልማት ተሳትፎ በአፍሪካ አገሮች ውስጥ በማግለጥ ሲሆን፤ በዚህ ፅሁፍ በባህል፣ በጎሳ በዘር እና ብሔራዊ ማንነትና ቦታ ጋር በተያያዘ ሰፊ ያለ ጥያቄ ለመዳሰስ እንሞክራለን። በጥናቱ ላይ ሁለት ተቃራኒ ሃሳቦችን ትርጓሜያቸውን በመቃኛት ትንተና አካሂደናል። በጥናቱ ላይ በፊልሙ የጊዜ ውክልና እና ወቅሳ አንዳንድ ጊዜ ግትርነት እና ጭፍን ጥላቻ ብቅ ብለው ይከራከራሉ። ከፊልሙ እይታ እና ሐሳብ በዋናነት በማህበራዊ እና በፖለቲካዊ ትችቶች ላይ ያተኩራል።

KEYWORDS

Ethiopian cinema; Chinese presence in Ethiopia; representation of otherness; popular culture in Ethiopia; autochthony and ethnicity; Ethiopia–China relations

ቁልፍ ቃላት

የኢትዮጵያ ሲኒማ; በኢትዮጵያ የቻይና መገኘት; ሌላነት ውክልና; ኢትዮጵያ; እና በጎሳ; ኢትዮጵያ-ቻይና ግንኙነት ላይ ባሕል

Debates on media representation of ‘otherness’ have occupied a central position in media studies, cultural studies and postcolonial studies debates over the past thirty years. The work of scholars such as Said (1978) and Hall (1997), coupled with those of, among others, Foucault (1980), Castoriadis (1987) and Taylor (2004), have been adopted and reinterpreted by media scholars to reveal the tight connections between power dynamics, social imaginaries, and mediated constructions of difference and otherness. Media today are powerful agents in the construction of collective ideas and perceptions of

reality; they work at different levels, shaping our imagination in subtle ways, ‘producing “truth effects” and legitimizing certain discursive regimes, while rendering others illegitimate, deviant and “false”’ (Orgad 2012, 28). Within this context, by playing a sort of ‘boundary work’ (Silverstone 2007, 19; quoted in Orgad 2012, 30), media representations of otherness are in many ways central to processes of collective identity formation. Studying them can thus reveal important aspects of how societies respond to the challenges posed by globalization processes to their existence as imagined ‘homogeneous’ collectivities.

Much of the existing research on these issues are based on a North-South perspective that privileges the analysis of Western representations of ‘its’ others (Africa, the ‘Orient’, and the ‘New World’ – see for instance Mudimbe 1988; Mignolo 2005; Said 1978; see also Hallam and Street 2013; Loshitzky 2010) or, more rarely, the gaze of the ‘Other’ toward the West (see for instance Kaur 2002; Okoye 2010). Works focusing on images and imageries that non-Western societies have of *other* non-Western societies are much rarer, and studies about the way African popular cultures represent ‘non-Western otherness’ are almost absent.¹ The few existing works mainly focus on the representation of what we could define as an internal, African ‘Other’, and investigate media discourses on racism, autochthony, religious and ethnic discrimination among different African groups (Danso and McDonald 2001; Mano 2015; Nyamnjoh 2010) while marginalizing the analysis of the way non-African people and cultures from other regions of the ‘Global South’ are represented and discussed in African public spheres.² Nevertheless, with the tremendous increase of popular media production that the introduction of digital technologies has fostered, new African representations of the non-Western ‘Other’ are emerging, and new imageries are being shaped thanks to the wide circulation that this type of media manages to achieve among local audiences. The southern Nigerian video film industry (Nollywood), with the hundreds of films it puts on the market every year, is probably the best known vector for the circulation of these new forms of imagery across Africa (Kings and Okome 2013; McCall 2007),³ and other popular film industries are emerging all over the continent, participating in the creation and circulation of popular media representations of ‘non-Western otherness’ in Africa.

This paper intends to look at this emerging phenomenon by focusing on one of the most dynamic video film industries to have emerged over the past few years, the Ethiopian one (Jedlowski 2015; Thomas 2015). Within the large repertoire of audiovisual materials that this industry has produced since its birth, a small number of films featuring (non-professional) Chinese (or more generally East-Asian) actors in leading roles have appeared. Among them, we will focus our attention on two recent releases, *ሜዶ ኢን ቻይና/Made in China* (2012 – Figure 1) and *ዘራፍ/Zeraff* (2011 – Figure 2), in order to describe and interpret the representation of the Chinese ‘Other’ that these films depict, and the role that this representation acquires within a specific political and cultural context such as the Ethiopian one. Both films were shot at roughly the same time with *Zeraff* released in the private cinemas in Addis Ababa in late 2011 and *Made in China* following in early 2012. Both films proved extremely popular with the local, Addis Ababa movie-going public, with *Zeraff* enjoying a run of over four months whilst *Made in China* was one of the most popular films of the year with it still being screened up to eight months after its release (Mesfin Haile-Eyesus. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, June 19; Naod Gashaw. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, July 1). In



Figure 1. The jacket of *Made in China's* VCD.

some other recent films Chinese characters feature in cameo-roles (such as in the comical appearance in a scene of የወንዶች ጉዳይ 2 – *YäWändoch Gudday/Men's Affair 2* [2009], as a Chinese Ambassador character in the action-thriller ዲፕሎማት/*Diplomat* [2012] or even in the martial arts film ሴት - *Set/Woman* [2012]). What distinguishes the two films analysed in this paper is the fact that the Chinese characters are central to the narrative of the stories portrayed.⁴

In order to better frame our discussion, and before analysing *Made in China* and *Zeraff* and exploring what these films propose in their representations of Chinese people and their presence in Ethiopia, in the first part of this paper we will briefly provide some information about the context from which these films have emerged. This section will focus particularly on the recent history of a Chinese presence in Ethiopia, and on the Ethiopian mediascape and the transformation it has witnessed over the past decade thanks to the emergence of the local video film industry. In the second and third parts, we will discuss the two films, analysing their content with the help of a few direct interviews with members of both film crews. Finally, in the fourth part, we will discuss the ambivalent representation of Chinese people produced in these films and contextualize this within wider debates about the representation of otherness in popular media. In methodological terms, we will look at these films combining film content analysis, sociological and political insights based on our fieldwork experiences in Addis Ababa over the past few years, and the data collected through a number of open and semi-structured interviews with the films' directors and members of the crews.⁵



Figure 2. The jacket of Zeraff's VCD.

Drawing the contexts

As is the case for many sub-Saharan African countries, political and economic relationships between Ethiopia and China have exponentially increased over the past twenty years, reversing a previous trend of diplomatic distance (Adem 2012). Official ties between the two countries were inaugurated in 1970 (Geda 2009), but the relationship remained relatively cold during Mengistu Hailemariam's regime, which favoured stronger connections with the Soviet Union. Under the leadership of Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Ethiopia and China began to develop closer relations, and today China is one of Ethiopia's key economic partners (Geda 2009; Thakur 2009). Within this context, the Ethiopian government's fascination with the People's Republic of China is not only connected to the economic opportunities that this country offers to its partners, but also to the political model it proposes, a blend of authoritarianism and economic liberalism that matches the EPRDF's vision of Ethiopia as a centralized authoritarian developmental state.

With the exception of a few, relevant studies on the role of Chinese companies, and more generally of the Chinese model, in shaping the Ethiopian media and telecommunication sector (cf. Gagliardone 2014), most of the existing studies on China–Ethiopia relationships focus on the economic impact of the partnership between the two countries and are generally based on the analysis of macro-economic data. Hence, there has been little interest in the sociological and cultural consequences of the increased connections and exchanges between these two countries. This, in many ways reflects the general

situation of the existing scholarship on Africa–China relationships, within which studies on the cultural implications of the growing involvement of China in the African continent have been, until recently, limited in number, and have begun to emerge as an autonomous corpus of studies only over the past few years (cf. Banda 2009; Rønning 2014; Shen 2009).

As emphasized by Banda (2009, 356), China's involvement with African media has been particularly focused on supporting state-owned corporations, thus implicitly consolidating media centralization and making an attempt at positively influencing the representation of China in local media. Parallel to this, a number of Chinese media corporations have begun to invest in Africa in order to create opportunities for African audiences to access Chinese news and media products (Gagliardone 2013; Xin 2009). A fairly similar landscape can be observed in Ethiopia, where close relations with the Chinese government have contributed to an already rigidly centralized media environment, within which images about China and the Chinese presence in Ethiopia tend to be controlled by local government authorities. Within this context, it becomes relevant to investigate what kind of representations of the Chinese presence in Ethiopia circulate through unofficial, popular media, and how representations are perceived by local audiences and local authorities. In fact, as shown by a number of reports (cf. Geerts, Xinwa, and Rossouw 2014), and suggested by a few incidents around Africa over the past few years (including the much talked about Abole incident in Ethiopia during which nine Chinese nationals were killed and seven were kidnapped – French 2007), the perception of China's presence in Africa is complex and dynamic. It changes over time and is influenced by a large number of factors that reflects the active role of both Chinese and African people in shaping Africa–China relationships. In this sense, as Fackson Banda suggests, analysing the perception of China's presence in Africa

requires much more nuance than the 'hardware' approach assumed in crude political economy; we need to understand the 'software' of Chinese renewed penetration into Africa. Such a perspective considers both China and Africa as *agents*, actively engaged in constructing a new cultural milieu. In other words, the question should not only be about what the so-called Chinese dragon is doing to Africa, but what China and Africa are doing together. (2009, 355)

Taking up this suggestion, in this paper we make an attempt at addressing some of these questions through the analysis of a specific popular culture form, that is, Ethiopian popular commercial films in digital format.

As mentioned above, over the past decade a thriving digital film industry has emerged in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa. It produces commercially driven films, uses Amharic as its main language and targets local and diasporic audiences. These films are firstly released in the large cinema theatres that characterize Ethiopian urban landscapes, and later circulate via VCDs and internet, thus creating an arena of debate concerned with present-day Ethiopian reality, which provides an alternative to the one imposed by state-controlled media.

Despite having to go through state-run control panels in order to obtain exhibition licences, the contemporary film industry is vastly different to that of the state monopolized film sector which came before. Since cinema's introduction to Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century, at the bequest of Emperor Menelik II, celluloid film production and

exhibition has depended on state benefactors for support. The state's interest in film production, distribution and exhibition was at its most pronounced during the rule of the military junta, known as the Derg, from 1974 to 1991. The Derg, with explicit Soviet support, saw the potential cinema had as propaganda, and imposed strict controls on the exhibition and production of films in Ethiopia. The creation of a government funded film division within the Ministry of Culture and Sports (which developed into the Ethiopian Film Corporation in 1986) ushered in an age of increased investment in filmmaking, vastly increasing Ethiopia's filmic output (prior to the Derg, only two feature films were produced from within Ethiopia, by 1979 the state had already produced 24 documentaries and a docudrama. Towards the end of the Derg era two purely fictional feature films were produced for Ethiopian audiences, በአይዘት ዙሪያ - 'BäHiywät Zuriya/Around Life' [1989] and አስቴር/Aster [1992], both films are family dramas which focus on the struggles of their female protagonists, Almaz and Aster respectively). After coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF deemed film production an unnecessary and unprofitable state venture which resulted in the withdrawal of state support for film production, whilst maintaining control of film exhibition on ideological grounds. The void left in film production in Ethiopia was filled by entrepreneurial theatre groups, local video and music distributors and state-television professionals who saw the importance of producing video films in Amharic, Ethiopia's national official language. The commercial potential of locally produced films, however, was not fully realized until the government lifted a licensing requirement which stipulated that films should be exclusively projected by using the standardized 35 mm film gauge. This opened up avenues for committed individuals to attempt screenings of video films in cinemas. Breaking from the history of state-controlled cinema in Ethiopia, this contemporary, quasi-liberalized, film sector has produced a relatively independent sphere of media production emanating from entrepreneurial individuals with variable filmmaking knowledge prior to embarking on projects.

Parody and social criticism in *Made in China*

Made in China's narrative follows the escapades of two Ethiopian friends (Solomon and Johnny) and a Chinese man (known by his Ethiopian name, Abulé) as they try to swindle money from local Ethiopians in order to pay for a trip and visas to China, with the aim of setting up a business in Ethiopia selling cheap Chinese goods. Solomon and Johnny first meet Abulé when he is moving into their neighbourhood soon after his release from an Ethiopian prison, having completed a five-year sentence for being involved in a (Chinese construction) corruption scandal. Solomon and Johnny offer to move Abulé's belongings but are deterred by Abulé's threatening martial arts stance (seemingly regularly deployed by Abulé to defuse situations, exploiting the Chinese stereotype and concealing the fact that he lacks any real technical knowledge of martial arts). After a scuffle with a local tough guy, the two Ethiopians seek help from Abulé who, unable to actually fight, runs off seeking shelter in a local *t'illa bet* (drinking house serving a traditional home-made beer), with the two friends managing to escape with him. After drinking *t'illa* together, it is apparent that Abulé can speak fluent Amharic and even knows Addis street language (*yä'arada qwanqwa*) and parables (*tärät-inna misalé*), at this point the three become good friends and spend what little money they have during a night out on the town. In desperate need of money the three hatch plans for a series of

scams which involve playing on Ethiopian stereotypes and on Ethiopian pre-conceptions of Chinese people. Eventually the three friends are wanted by the police as their poorly executed scams humorously unravel one after the other. When faced with the prospect of jail and after realizing fleeing to China could yet be their most far-fetched plan, it is Abulé who persuades the friends to stay and to follow through on their last job instead of cutting loose after receiving upfront payment for a road-construction job. The motivation for this change of heart is credited to Abulé's new love whose family would have fallen victim to the friends' scam.

The comedy in the film is structured around parodying the Ethiopian–Chinese relationship and addressing misnomers and stereotypes popularly held by Ethiopians who believe foreign workers are better than Ethiopian ones (Mesfin Haile-Eyesus. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, June 19). The crucial character, then, is that of Abulé, who is actually played by the non-professional South-Korean born actor, Young-Guk Lee, a university student in Addis Ababa University at the time when the film was shot. The son of a Korean missionary, Young-Guk Lee moved to Addis Ababa with his family when he was 10 years old and thus picked up the Amharic language and Ethiopian customs at a young age (Young-Guk Lee. 2014, Interview, July 5). Lee's ability to speak Amharic as well as his natural comic skills are key to the central parody of the film, which shows the Chinese character imbued with Ethiopian mannerisms. Adding to the irony and the comic effect of the film is the fact that, when the three friends are on a scam, Abulé must pretend that he cannot understand Amharic and must instead pretend to be the stoic, presentable Chinese man – a role which he inevitably struggles to pull off. An example of this is when he corrects his friends' mistakes (in Amharic) when they present their business plans, or when he says 'yemaräsh' (bless you) when he hears sneezing. As one of the film's directors pointed out in the interview we had with him, the fact that Young-Guk Lee is South Korean had no effect on the audience's reaction to the film (Mesfin Haile-Eyesus. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, June 19). Rather, one could say that it somehow confirmed the existing stereotype circulating in Ethiopia which associates all East-Asian people with China. Even Lee's appearance on many Ethiopian talk shows and interviews with him stating his Korean origin did not modify the popular perception of him as being Chinese, something that, as he underlined in interviews, constitutes one of the most common irritating experiences for him in Ethiopia (Young-Guk Lee. 2014, Interview, July 5).⁶

Made in China's plot relies on the three scams staged throughout the narrative to maintain its parody of how Ethiopians popularly perceive and often naïvely trust foreigners on face-value. The three business idea scams that Abulé, Solomon and Johnny try to enact are deeply based, as Mesfin Haile-Eyesus (2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, June 19) shows, on broader popular conceptions of the type of businesses Chinese people successfully run in Ethiopia, and in this sense they interestingly reveal the way Chinese people are 'stereotyped' in Ethiopian public discourse (cf. Hall 1997). Mesfin Haile-Eyesus points out that a lot of these businesses are rooted in traditional Chinese culture, such as the acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine clinic that the friends open first, and the martial arts school they open later on. It is the first of these con operations, the Chinese medical clinic, which is pulled off with most comic effect in the film, as the friends have to hide their faces under surgical masks when the tough guy who chased them in the opening scene of the film enters for treatment. The treatment they recommend is acupuncture and after making sure that the patient is thoroughly tied to a table, they somewhat sadistically start to

stab the man with pins, inducing further pain and cries of agony (Figure 3). The tough guy then manages to break out of his bonds and proceeds to chase the three friends out of the clinic, reflecting the earlier sequence when Abulé was unable to do martial arts. This time however, their first scam is also exposed. The parody here is highlighted further as the tough guy is consequently injured after he goes around looking for Abulé in the first instance and unwittingly confronts a Chinese man in a similar track-suit to Abulé's. Unlike Abulé in the previous scene, however, this time the Chinese man instantly floors him with a martial arts move, thus harking back to the old stereotype that all Chinese people know martial arts.

More satirical is the narrative of the second business con, that of opening a construction office, in *Made in China*. The construction sector in Ethiopia has become associated with the Chinese labourers who are sent into the country in order to construct major infrastructure projects such as highways, railways and more recently commercial and residential buildings. In Mesfin Haile-Eyesus's words, '*Made in China* observes and reflects the reality', this reality being that the Chinese labourers are competing directly with Ethiopians and therefore hindering employment in the country (Mesfin Haile-Eyesus. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, June 19). The construction office scam also neatly brings together the other narrative strand of the film, which follows a socially conscious Ethiopian man asking his neighbours whether they will help contribute in order to build a new road for their area. Through different sequences this narrative builds up the complex issues of distrust and individualism amongst neighbours in urban Ethiopian communities. Not only is the socially conscious man rudely turned away by everyone he asks for donations, but in a sequence where he is cleaning out the road's gutters single-handedly, he stares in disbelief as a fellow neighbour relieves himself in the ditch he has just cleaned. When Abulé and his friends come to this man's community and advertise a road-construction meeting held by the Chinese 'Engineer Young' (Abulé), the whole neighbourhood turns out and supports with exuberant donations. This blind trust of foreigners is a commonly voiced critique within Ethiopia which is touched upon constantly throughout *Made in China*. One



Figure 3. The acupuncture scam.

moment which epitomizes this critique (and which also instigates rapturous laughter in the cinema) is when Abulé is waved through a security check un-hassled by guards whilst his two Ethiopian friends pass through behind him and disgruntledly object to getting frisked. It is Ethiopian behaviours and the juxtaposition of Ethiopian reactions to fellow countrymen and to a Chinese foreigner which combine both comedy and social criticism exemplified when the first patient to receive treatment from Abulé's clinic, although accidentally being pushed off the examining-bed, believes he is fully cured by the foreigner's unorthodox methods. It is in these many scenes and the joining together of the two narrative strands, apparent when the socially conscious Ethiopian attends the meeting of 'Engineer Young', in which the comical as well as critical elements of social satire start to become obvious, and the analysis of the broader relationships between Chinese and Ethiopians in Ethiopian society is made more explicitly visible.

When asked precisely about this relationship, Mesfin Haile-Eyesus spoke about the sense of anxiety that the rapid expansion of Chinese activities in the country has provoked among many Ethiopians: 'We have to respect the people who are coming in to help transform the system, but we don't have to let them control everything' (Mesfin Haile-Eyesus. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, June 19). And it is the idea of the need for mutual respect between the Ethiopian community and the Chinese workers that seems to be the message that *Made in China* ends on. A possibly calamitous confrontation between the Ethiopian neighbours and Abulé and his friends is averted as Abulé is shown walking up the road in his hard-hat, leading a group of Ethiopian workers. The angry neighbourhood soon realise Abulé's genuine intentions and use the tools they had picked up, not to harm Abulé (as they had intended), but instead to co-operate in the construction of their road.

Political critique and the symbolic use of Chinese otherness in *Zeraff*

The title of the second film we discuss, *Zeraff*, comes with deep Ethiopian patriotic ideals as opposed to the world renowned label of Chinese manufacturing, 'made in China', of which *Made in China* clearly takes its name. The word *zeraff* does not have a literal translation in English but it is used almost uniquely within a certain genre of Amharic oral poetry called *fukkära inna qärarto* (recitals of heroic deeds and war songs). The word can thus be interpreted as meaning 'he who slays with a sword', or 'he who is a defender/killer' which sets out the oppositional binary codes and melodramatic caricatures which dominate the style of the film.

Zeraff's plot centres on the father–daughter relationship of İndäshäw, a man who suffers heart palpitations and panic attacks when he comes into contact with anything from China, and Adän, a young woman depicted as naïve and self-centred. The opening sequences establish that İndäshäw's trauma was instigated after his father was killed by a faulty Chinese-made electricity generator during a power-cut, a premise that, while pointing at one of the most pervasive stereotypes about Chinese goods in Africa (their poor quality and faultiness), contributes to making the following scenes farcical. We quickly see Adän meeting a Chinese man called Po (humorously nicknamed Po-Po, meaning 'potty' in Amharic, by İndäshäw) and despite them being unable to communicate with each other and the fact that Adän is in a long term relationship with an Ethiopian, Po proposes to her and she accepts with child-like clapping of the hands in delight. She proceeds to tell her father the good news but hides the fact that her new fiancé is a Chinese

man. After Īndāshāw arranges for the elders to deal with the marriage proposal, Po also turns up at the house. Only after seeing Adān rushing to hug Po does Īndāshāw realise that his daughter has accepted a marriage proposal from a Chinese national, a thought which triggers his blood pressure to raise too high leading to him passing-out.

The farce continues when it occurs that Īndāshāw has been in a coma for three months with intermittent bouts of delusional *fukkāra* recitals. When he is omitted from hospital, however, the ever naïve Adān takes him home to proudly reveal a photo of her and Po in a wedding style pose which instantly instigates another bout of Īndāshāw's illness. Despite his attempts to sabotage the marriage, Īndāshāw finally accepts Po due to Adān becoming pregnant, but in order for Po to prove himself he compels the Chinese character to carry out some challenges, which include drinking thirty two bottles of *tejj* (a traditional honey mead which killed one of Īndāshāw's friends who attempted twenty seven bottles), chopping up fire-wood and making the traditional bread-like staple, *injāra*, the foundation of Ethiopian cuisine. The performance and particular significance of these acts create scenarios of comical interaction between Po and Īndāshāw. For instance, when Po fails to make *injāra* correctly, not realizing that it is regarded as a woman's job, he asks Īndāshāw to show him how to do it which offends him to such a point that Īndāshāw draws his pistol on the bemused Po (see [Figure 4](#)). Po's translator then persuades Īndāshāw to give Po tasks that can prove his manliness and Po finally proves his worth when, at Īndāshāw's bequest, he defeats his belligerent nephew in one *kung fu* style punch. These scenes all play on reciprocal stereotypes and misunderstandings which, while somehow perpetuating essentialist perceptions of Chinese otherness, equally mock them, pointing out the naivety of many Ethiopians in how they imagine Chinese people and culture.

Īndāshāw is presented throughout the film as an Ethiopian patriot, always wearing traditional white garb and even a patriot's uniform (see [Figures 2](#) and [4](#)), offering constant praise to the past great Emperors of Ethiopia at a shrine to Emperor Tewodros II located near the door of his house. In Ethiopia, Tewodros II is regarded as the most heroic Emperor because he took his own life rather than suffer humiliation at the prospect of being taken prisoner at the hands of the British expeditionary force in 1868. Īndāshāw's veneration of Tewodros II is not uncommon within nationalistic Ethiopian households.



Figure 4. Īndāshāw displaying his pistol to Po after Po's attempt to make *injāra*.

These traditional Ethiopian characteristics are epitomized when Īndāshāw directly references Tewodros' heroic deeds when he addresses the Emperor's portrait and states that he feels guilty that Tewodros gave his life for the new Ethiopian generation that are out of touch with their own tradition and history. Īndāshāw is also very traditional in how he converses with other characters and how he seems to be stubbornly set in his ways, adamant that his father's death is a result of a faulty Chinese-made generator, incapable of entertaining the thought that perhaps the frequent power-cuts in Addis are also partly to blame. In contrast to Īndāshāw is his daughter, Adān, who always wears colourful clothes, jeans and earrings. Her mannerisms and speech, in particular, are a whirlwind of drabble and inconsistent thought, she seems perpetually confused and can be identified as inhabiting a hiatus in modern Ethiopian society between the local Ethiopian–Amharic worldview and a more global, liberal outlook. The Chinese character, Po, is then introduced in order to explore the relationship between Īndāshāw and his daughter.

The comedy instigated by the ensuing 'culture clash', enables the film to covertly critique the generational dislocation within the burgeoning middle-classes of Ethiopia. This is a clash within which the presence of the Chinese character, Po, seems somehow to symbolize an external model of non-Western globalization and modernization naively and unconditionally adopted by Adān/the youth (and, as a matter of fact, by the government, which has developed intense political and economic ties with China), while being thoroughly and at times violently resisted by Īndāshāw/the elders (representatives, in the film's narrative, of the nationalist ideal of unity and cultural integrity that the EPRDF's government is often accused by its opponents to have abandoned in favour of ethnic federalist policies – see Turton 2006). Unlike with *Made in China*, then, the exploration of the Ethiopian–Chinese relationship in *Zeraff* seems to serve an entirely different narrative objective, that of criticizing some aspects of the current political situation in Ethiopia. As a result, little interest is devoted to the exploration of the Chinese character, whose function is more symbolic than narrative. Po is played by a non-professional Chinese actor (Lan Zhi) who had no prior acting experience and little ability to communicate in English, let alone Amharic. The character is represented more as an object and symptom of the influx of foreign influences on Ethiopia which the film uses to explore Ethiopia's inability to develop, adapt and grow on its own terms. This more introverted critique of Ethiopian society is what the film director refers to when mentioning that 'nothing in *Zeraff* is about Chinese at all. It just seems that way because that is the only way we can express...' (Naod Gashaw. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, July 1).

It is also apparent that in *Zeraff*, the genuine feelings or intentions of the Chinese character are never explored. Throughout most of the film Po seems to be presented as an innocent bystander who is caught between two oppositional representations (Īndāshāw and Adān) of Ethiopian society's generational schism. Towards the dénouement of *Zeraff*, it even becomes apparent, through Po's success at passing all the 'traditional Ethiopian' challenges, that he and Īndāshāw are able to communicate better with each other than can Adān and her brother with Īndāshāw (their father). This generational dislocation is further apparent in the closing scene which depicts Po finally being accepted by the elders when Īndāshāw's son, without prior warning, announces his engagement to a Chinese woman – at which point Īndāshāw passes out again.

Censorship, social criticism and the representation of the 'other'

As the analysis of the two films highlights, both *Made in China* and *Zeraff* represent and use Chinese characters in order to develop social critiques. In this sense, in both films, the representation of 'otherness' is functional to the discussion of specific, inward-looking political and social issues, and it thus has, in many ways, less to do with the reality of the 'Chinese Other' than with the processes of construction and negotiation of an imagined 'Ethiopian Self'. The two films focus predominantly on local complexities that resonate with producers and main target audiences, tending to produce rather stereotypical representations of the non-Ethiopian 'Other'. As little time is invested in exploring the social, cultural and psychological nuances of characters emerging from different cultural and racial backgrounds (in this case Chinese) these films, at first glance, appear to repeat an 'Orientalist' attitude well established in major film industries around the world (cf. Higgins 2012; Naficy and Gabriel 1993). Even if simplistic representations of the 'Other' are perpetuated due to the limited resources available and to the specific constraints affecting production processes, one can consider the casting decisions made in the two films analysed here as good examples of this attitude. For the roles of the Chinese characters, the casting agents opted respectively for a Korean non-professional actor (*Made in China*) and a non-professional Chinese actor unable to speak Amharic or English (*Zeraff*) in a film in which there are no lines in Mandarin. Both cases end up reinforcing the overall feeling that the filmmakers and producers had no particular interest in proposing an accurate representation of Chinese people in their films.

So far, then, at least in its guiding strategies, the representation of 'otherness' in Ethiopian popular films seem to reproduce some of the aspects of the 'Orientalist' attitude that cultural studies and postcolonial studies have underlined when analysing Western discursive constructions about 'otherness'. This is what one would have expected from these films in the first place, and this is what we seem to get from them. But a closer analysis reveals more complex and layered discursive dimensions at play. Indeed, a specific aspect of Ethiopian, and particularly Amharic, artistic tradition should be considered in order to gain a better understanding of the narrative strategies deployed in the films discussed in this article. Multi-layered narrative structures that address a particular subject in order to point at something else are common in Ethiopian, and particularly Amharic, literature and culture. While similar strategies exist in many other cultural traditions worldwide, in Amhara culture they are often referred to through the use of a term that comes from the ancient tradition of oral Amharic poetry: *säm-inna wäraq* (wax and gold). In the words of the Ethiopian film scholar Teshome Gabriel,

The term refers to the 'lost wax' process in which a goldsmith creates a wax form, casts a clay mould around it, then drains out the wax and pours in molten gold to form the valued object. Applied to poetics, the concept acknowledges two levels of interpretation, distinct in theory and representation. Such poetic form aims to attain maximum ideas with minimum words. 'Wax' refers to the most obvious and superficial meaning. But the 'gold' embedded in the artwork offers the 'true' meaning, which may be inaccessible unless one understands the nuances of folk culture. [...] To restore the 'gold' in its purity [...] means, therefore, to perform an autopsy to remove the 'wax,' the comedy format, in order to gain access to the text's ideology. (1982, 31)

As demonstrated by a number of researchers who adopt this epistemological approach in order to analyse contemporary Ethiopian (and in some cases also more generally African) art and culture (cf. Gabriel 1982; Klemm and Niederstadt 2009), the ‘wax and gold’ formula is not only something that belongs to the ancient tradition of monastic schools of the Ge‘ez language where it used to be taught (Levine 1972). On the contrary, many argue that it

embodies [a] fundamental indirection in speech by means of a studied use of ambiguity [which] colours the entire fabric of traditional Amhara life [and which] provides the one outlet for criticism of authority figures in a society which strictly controls every kind of overt aggression toward authority. (Levine 1972, 8, 9)

As referred to by many Ethiopian filmmakers, the structure of films remains relatively linear and simple, reflecting the structure of traditional storytelling or *tārāt* which renders didactic dénouements easy for all to comprehend. Within these narratives, however, a more complex, layered form of wax and gold remains open to interpretation by engaged spectators. The Ethiopian scriptwriter and director Behailu Wassie, for instance, describes a wax and gold in Ethiopian films as embodying ‘the body and the soul, whereas the body is clear for all to see, it is the spirit [the moral and political messages of the film] which demands closer attention and deeper appreciation’ (Behailu Wassie. 2016, Interview, Addis Ababa, March 8).

Incidentally, in order to understand the reasons for the recurrent use of wax and gold-like narrative structure in Amharic popular films it is important to underline the role of censorship, and therefore also self-censorship, in conditioning the work of filmmakers. While censorship is formally prohibited by the Ethiopian constitution approved in 1994 (article 29), the state developed an articulated institutional system to monitor the content and circulation of films. As briefly mentioned previously, once production is completed, a film has to obtain an exhibition license from the Film License and Regulation Bureau of the Culture and Tourism Office of the Addis Ababa City Council, which has the official mandate for controlling the way in which issues related to ethnicity, religion and sexuality are represented in films, but which also implicitly exercises a form of political censorship on the films being screened in cinemas. This rigid licensing system is oriented toward protecting the delicate balance between politics, society and the different ethnic and religious groups that compose the fabric of the Ethiopian nation. But it has also permitted the Ethiopian authorities to make their presence strongly felt among film directors and producers, indirectly pushing for the adoption of wax and gold-like narrative structures within films. It is within this context that we can better appreciate the above-mentioned quote from *Zeraff*'s film director saying that ‘nothing in *Zeraff* is about Chinese at all. It just seems that way because that is the only way we can express ...’ (Naod Gashaw. 2014, Interview, Addis Ababa, July 1).

The adoption of a multi-layered structure of meaning, however, does not automatically protect film producers and directors from censorship and government control. In the case of *Zeraff*, for instance, it seems that the ‘wax’ layer has been read by some as the ‘gold’ of the film’s meaning, thus generating an undesired interpretations of the film (from the perspective of the filmmakers). *Zeraff* in fact provoked indignation among government officials in reaction to the bad attitude toward Chinese nationals it seems to convey. As one of the members of the film’s crew told us in an interview,

The first time we tried to do a commercial through Ethiopian radio, they said, 'no, we can't do this commercial because the movie doesn't support the Chinese people here', because [...] in the movie, Showaferew's character [Īndāshāw] asks the Chinese character to go back to his county, to go back to wherever he came from, to just leave us alone. And since the Ethiopian government wants the Chinese to come and live amongst Ethiopian people, they don't want this because it is opposite to what they are saying. (Personal communication, 2014)

As a result, *Zeraff* provoked critical reactions which eventually led to the film being withdrawn from cinemas. The government's reaction is characteristic of a rigid bureaucratic culture, in which a stereotypical interpretation of a film by public authorities falls back on pre-defined categories, thus overlooking subtle nuances and inward criticisms. The focus on 'Chinese Otherness' here is intended to expose and critique the processes through which an imagined 'Ethiopian Self' is constructed and reified in the public discourse, in order to reflect on its own contradictions in ways that a more loaded and historically burdened 'Western Other' may not permit. But, through their contrivances, the authorities (unwillingly or as a result of a bureaucratic rigidity) end up fighting this pluralism in an attempt to maintain the status-quo by reinforcing ideas of rigid identities and behaviours.

The government's reaction points also to the fact that, despite the implicit intention of expressing precise criticisms about Ethiopian society, both films analysed in this essay also produce representations of the 'Chinese Other' which can easily be interpreted as amplifications of popular negative perceptions of China's presence in Ethiopia. This brings us back to where we started this section, and thus to a critical appraisal of the strategies adopted when non-Ethiopian people (and in some cases, also simply non-Amhara Ethiopian people) are represented in Ethiopian popular films, and the place that the presence of these people is allowed to occupy in the imagined collective identity of the Ethiopian nation.

As pointed out by Mbembe (2010), most sub-Saharan African countries' contemporary discourses on national identity exclude racial multiplicity,⁷ implicitly negating the possibility of existence of, for instance, a Chinese-looking Ethiopian person.⁸ In this sense, around the continent, definitions of 'Africanity' and, more specifically, national identity tend to be closed rather than open. As Francis Nyamnjoh has underlined, a number of important questions seem to have been progressively erased from the ongoing debates on identity and belonging in Africa:

If belonging is a process, then the idea of the social construction and dynamic nature of Africa has to be taken seriously, both by the media and by those studying racism and ethnicity in Africa. What does it mean to be African? Who qualifies to claim Africa? Is being African or claiming Africa an attribute of race and skin colour (black, white, yellow), birth (umbilical cord, birth certificates, identity cards, passports), geography (physical spaces, home village), history (encounters), culture (prescriptive specificities), economics (availability and affordability, wealth and deprivation), sociology (social configurations and action, inclusion and exclusion), psychology (mindsets), philosophy (worldviews), politics (power relations), collective memory (shared experiences and aspirations) or a category through which a world that is not rigidly geographical, racial or cultural is constructed, to name just a few of the many possibilities? (Nyamnjoh 2010, 75)

In Ethiopia these issues resonate within multiple layers, all reconnected to the specific complexity of the ethnic, religious and racial composition of Ethiopian society and the

historical and contemporary conflicts relating to it (cf. Aalen 2011; Baxter, Hultin, and Triulzi 1996; James et al. 2002). Nevertheless, this does not undermine the fact that the definition of 'Ethiopianness' (and, in a larger sense, of Africanity) that these films implicitly convey is closed and based on racial attributes. This is demonstrated for instance by the fact that much of *Made in China's* humour is constructed precisely on the racial definition of autochthony, with many of the film's jokes revolving on the surprised reaction of Ethiopian people to Abulé's markedly Ethiopian attitudes and linguistic skills. The irony plays precisely on the popular assumption that a Chinese-looking Ethiopian national cannot exist.

In fact both films humorously point at, and somehow reassert this principle, proposing a somehow ambiguous answer to our initial question about the representations of otherness in Ethiopian popular media: while the Chinese presence is seen as having both good and bad consequences on the Ethiopian economy and society, Chinese people represent a form of cultural and racial otherness which is far from being fully accepted as part of the imagined 'Ethiopian Self'. There is probably nothing particularly surprising about this as it is commonly noted that most nations in the world struggle to accept racial multiplicity as part of their collective, imagined identity. Nevertheless, this points our attention toward a number of dimensions of China–Africa relations, connected to terms such as race, identity and belonging, which have received little scholarly attention in the past, and which could become relevant in the years to come as a result of the growing number of Chinese migrants settling on African soil.

Conclusion

As Stuart Hall would put it,

symbolic boundaries are central to all culture. Marking 'difference' leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal. However, paradoxically, it also makes 'difference' powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order. (1997, 237)

There is then something inherently ambiguous and destabilizing about the role of otherness within the collective imagination. While its representation is generally based on 'a binary form [...] good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic', the 'Other' is implicitly 'required to be *both things at the same time!*' (Hall 1997, 229, original emphasis). Popular representations of otherness are, therefore, constructed from a mixture of repulsion and fascination, interest and dismissal, something that can be related, in the words of film critics Hamid Naficy and Teshome Gabriel, to

a continual process of yearning – for meaning, for those qualities which the dominant order has exiled or lost, and for the certainties that ideologies provide in a world that is increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Since the yearning is never fulfilled, the other remains forever alluring (and threatening) [...]. The other tends to thrive on the ambiguities and the limits of language. (1993, XI)

The two films analysed in this paper are imbued with this ambiguity. As our analysis evidenced, their representation of the 'Chinese Other' at times criticizes and at times reasserts existing stereotypes and prejudices. But, overall, they seem to use Chinese characters

mainly as narrative devices functional in the development of specific, inward-looking social and political criticisms. This attitude inevitably forces the films to overlook the key issue underlying discourses about otherness in Ethiopian popular media—namely the issue of how to deal with racial multiplicity in a society that defines belonging along rigid and exclusionary terms, where the essentially fluid nature of identity is dismissed in favour of hard, reified constructs which are propagated in the game of identity politics that defines our time.

Notes

1. When using the term ‘popular’ in this article, we refer to the existing literature on African popular arts and media developed by a number of scholars in African studies over the past few years (cf. Barber 1997; Wasserman 2011).
2. South Africa is an exception in this context, and some research on the media representation of other non-Western people and cultures have been conducted over the past few years. See for instance Baderoon (2002), Huynh (2008) and Simbao (2012).
3. Examples of Nollywood films focusing on the representation of non-African non-Western cultures and people are *J.U.D.E* (Osakwe 2012), partly shot in India, and *Kalybos in China* (Asamoah 2015), partly shot in China.
4. At the time of writing this article, the film ፍቅር በአማርኛ - ‘*Fiqir Bä’Amariñña/Love in Amharic*’ (2015) was finishing its post-production. This film features the non-professional Chinese actor, Kian Zian, also in a central Amharic-speaking role as the male love interest.
5. Alessandro Jedlowski conducted three months of research fieldwork in Ethiopia between November 2013 and February 2014 as part of his post-doctoral research project funded by the Marie Curie Cofund program, while Michael Thomas has spent time in-and-out of Ethiopia since 2010, with the research for this paper conducted during a six month stay between March and September 2014 for his MA thesis.
6. It should be noted that this phenomenon does not only occur with foreigners from South East Asia but, increasingly, also with Western foreigners. This calling of any foreigner ‘China, China’ somehow points to the growing impact of the Chinese presence in Ethiopia on popular perceptions of foreigners, which used to be addressed by the use of the term *ferenji* (European foreigner).
7. See, however, Lee (2014), Ray (2015) and Jean-Baptiste (2011) for historical examples that highlight the existence of more complex scenarios, particularly during colonial times.
8. This problem is further accentuated in Ethiopia by the fact of it being mandatory that each individual carries an ID card which, among other primary information, denotes a person’s ethnicity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

*In the Ethiopian naming tradition people always refer to each other by their first name. In order to avoid confusion in the text and list of references, however, we decided to adopt the Western system and list the Ethiopian authors by their second names.

Aalen, Lovise. 2011. *The Politics of Ethnicity in Ethiopia: Actors, Power and Mobilization Under Ethnic Federalism*. Leiden: Brill.

*Adem, Seifudein. 2012. “Imperial Ethiopia’s Relations with Maoist China.” *African East-Asian Affairs* 1: 31–53.

- Asamoah, Koffi. 2015. *Kalybos in China*. Ghana: Kofas Media.
- Baderoon, Gabeba. 2002. "Shooting the East/veils and Masks: Uncovering Orientalism in South African Media." *African and Asian Studies* 1 (4): 367–384.
- Banda, Fackson. 2009. "China in the African Mediascape: A Critical Injection." *Journal of African Media Studies* 1 (3): 343–361. doi:10.1386/jams.1.3.343/1
- Barber, Karin, ed. 1997. *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Baxter, Paul T. W., Jan Hultin, and Alessandro Triulzi, eds. 1996. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*. Stockholm: Nordic African Institute.
- *Bekele, Solomon. 1991/1992. አስቲር /Aster. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Film Corporation.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. 1987. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Danso, Ransford, and David A. McDonald. 2001. "Writing Xenophobia: Immigration and the Print Media in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Africa Today* 48 (3): 115–137.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power-Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- French, Howard W. 2007. "Letter from Ethiopia: China's Risky Venture into Resource-Rich Africa." *The New York Times*, May 2.
- *Gabriel, Teshome. 1982. "Xala: A Cinema of Wax and Gold." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 27: 31–33.
- Gagliardone, Iginio. 2013. "China as a Persuader: CCTV Africa's First Steps in the African Mediasphere." *Equid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 34 (3): 25–40. doi:10.1080/02560054.2013.834835.
- Gagliardone, Iginio. 2014. "New Media and the Developmental State in Ethiopia." *African Affairs* 113 (451): 279–299. doi:10.1093/afraf/adu017.
- *Geda, Alemayehu. 2009. "Scoping Study on the Chinese Relation with Sub Saharan Africa: The Case of Ethiopia." *Scoping Studies on China-Africa Economic Relations*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/93155>.
- Geerts, Sofie, Namhla Xinwa, and Deon Rossouw. 2014. *Africans' Perceptions of Chinese Business in Africa*. Geneva: Globethics.net/Hatfield (Ethics Institute of South Africa).
- *Gashaw, Naod. 2011. ዘራፍ/Zeraff. Ethiopia: Mekdi Production.
- *Gashaw, Naod. 2012. ዲፕሎማት/Diplomat. Ethiopia: Binda Pictures.
- *Gulilat, Mulushewa. 2015. ፍቅር በአማርኛ/Love in Amharic. Ethiopia: Mebrak Film Production.
- Hall, Stuart. 1997. *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.
- Hallam, Elizabeth, and Brian Street, eds. 2013. *Cultural Encounters: Representing Otherness*. London: Routledge.
- *Haile-Eyesus, Mesfin, and Tewodros Seyoum. 2012. ሜዲያዎች/Made in China. Ethiopia: Misalé Film Production.
- *Haydrin, Awol. 2012. ሴት/Woman. Ethiopia: King Awol Films.
- Higgins, Mary Ellen, ed. 2012. *Hollywood's Africa after 1994*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Huynh, Tu T. 2008. "Loathing and Love: Postcard Representations of Indentured Chinese Laborers in South Africa's Reconstruction, 1904–10." *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 9 (4): 395–425.
- James, Wendy, Eisei Kurimoto, Donald Donham, and Alessandro Triulzi, eds. 2002. *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Jean-Baptiste, Rachel. 2011. "'Miss Eurafrica': Men, Women's Sexuality, and Métis Identity in Late Colonial French Africa, 1945–1960." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20 (3): 568–593. doi:10.5555/jhs.2011.20.3.568.
- Jedlowski, Alessandro. 2015. "Screening Ethiopia: A Preliminary Study of the History and Contemporary Developments of Film Production in Ethiopia." *Journal of African Cinemas* 7 (2): 169–185.
- Kaur, Ravinder. 2002. "Viewing the West through Bollywood: A Celluloid Occident in the Making." *Contemporary South Asia* 11 (2): 199–209.
- *Kebede, Admasu. 2009. የወንዶች ጉዳይ 2/Men's Affair 2. Ethiopia: Arki Sera Production.
- Klemm, Peri M., and Leah Niederstadt. 2009. "Beyond Wide-Eyed Angels: Contemporary Expressive Culture in Ethiopia." *African Arts* 42 (1): 6–13. doi:10.1162/afar.2009.42.1.6.

- Krings, Matthias, and Onookome Okome, eds. 2013. *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lee, Christopher J. 2014. *Unreasonable Histories: Nativism, Multiracial Lives and the Genealogical Imagination in British Africa*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Levine, Donald N. 1972. *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Loshitzky, Yosefa. 2010. *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mano, Winston, ed. 2015. *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media in Africa: Mediating Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*. London: IB Tauris.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2010. *Sortir de la grande nuit. Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée*. Paris: Éditions la Découverte.
- McCall, John C. 2007. "The Pan-Africanism We Have: Nollywood's Invention of Africa." *Film International* 5 (4): 92–97.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2005. *The Idea of Latin America*. London: Blackwell.
- Mudimbe, Valentin Y. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Naficy, Hamid, and Teshome Gabriel, eds. 1993. *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged*. Langhorn: Harwood Academic.
- Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2010. "Racism, Ethnicity and the Media in Africa: Reflections Inspired by Studies of Xenophobia in Cameroon and South Africa." *Africa Spectrum* 45 (1): 57–93.
- Okoye, Chukwuma. 2010. "Looking Back: Nigerian Video Film Anthropologises the West." *African Studies Bulletin* 72 (October 2010): 76–90.
- Orgad, Shani. 2012. *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Osakwe, Chukwuma. 2012. *J.U.D.E. Nigeria*: Cross Cultural Connect.
- Ray, Carina E. 2015. *Crossing the Color Line: Race, Sex and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Rønning, Helge. 2014. "How Much 'Soft Power' Does China Have in Africa?" Paper Presented at the International Conference China and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy, Beijing, September 10–11.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Shen, Simon. 2009. "A Constructed (Un)Reality on China's Re-entry into Africa: The Chinese Online Community Perception of Africa (2006–2008)." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47 (3): 425–448. doi:10.101017/S0022278X09003991.
- *Shibiru, Birhanu. 1989. *በህይወት ዙሪያ/BäHiywät Zuriya*. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Film Corporation.
- Silverstone, Roger. 2007. *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Simbao, Ruth. 2012. "China-Africa Relations: Research Approaches." *African Arts* 45 (2): 1–7.
- Taylor, Charles. 2004. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Thakur, Monika. 2009. "Building on Progress? Chinese Engagement in Ethiopia." *South African Institute of International Affairs Occasional Paper* 38: 4–23.
- Thomas, Michael W. 2015. "The Local Film Sensation in Ethiopia: Aesthetic Comparisons with African Cinema and Alternative Experiences." *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 7 (1): 17–41.
- Turton, David, ed. 2006. *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Wasserman, Herman, ed. 2011. *Popular Media, Democracy and Development in Africa*. New York: Routledge.
- Xin, Xin. 2009. "Xinhua News Agency in Africa." *Journal of African Media Studies* 1 (3): 363–377. doi:10.1386/jams.1.3.363/1.