Media Aid Beyond the Factual: Culture, Development, and Audiovisual Assistance

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Abstract: This paper discusses audiovisual assistance, a form of development aid that focuses on the production and distribution of cultural and entertainment media such as fictional films and TV shows. While the first audiovisual assistance program dates back to UNESCO's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture in the 1970s, the past two decades have seen a proliferation of audiovisual assistance that, I argue, is related to a growing concern for culture in post-2015 global development agendas. In this paper, I examine the aims and motivations behind the EU's audiovisual assistance programs to countries in the Global South, using data from policy documents and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Program Managers and administrative staff in Brussels. These programs prioritize forms of audiovisual content that are locally specific, yet globally tradable. Furthermore, I argue that they have an ambivalent relationship with traditional notions of international development, one that conceptualizes media not only as a means to achieve economic development and human rights aims, but as a form of development itself.

Keywords: media assistance, audiovisual assistance, cultural assistance, culture, development, UNESCO, European Union, Richard Hoggart, ACP-Films, ACP Cultures+

Not Just Information: Aid to Entertainment and Cultural Media

Within the fields of international assistance and development, the media have been primarily conceived of as a tool used to achieve concrete goals related to human rights and democratic governance. One aid project might be directed at strengthening a country's independent press, for instance, in order to increase government accountability. Another might be designed to increase unfettered access to social media platforms, with the aim of increasing freedom of expression and political participation. While these kinds of assistance are varied, they all envision media first and foremost as informational, as a means to transmit useful, accurate facts about the current world to audiences who lack access to such resources.

This kind of "useful" media assistance has been and continues to be a critical component of human rights and development agendas, particularly in developing

countries in the Global South. However, its focus on promoting utilitarian kinds of media in the developing world also ignores the entertainment, pleasure, and fun that characterize people's everyday interactions with media both in those countries and in the rest of the world. In doing so, mainstream notions of media assistance are susceptible to the kinds of criticisms of the development field that have been posed by authors like Arturo Escobar (1995): media assistance frames subjects as comparatively "backward," in need of improvement through interventions from the more advanced Global North.

This paper deals with another strain of international media assistance, which for the past several decades has taken a different view of the role of media – one in which entertainment, fun, and pleasure are central. Usually grouped under the wider category of cultural (not media) assistance, these programs (which I will refer to as "audiovisual assistance") focus on the production and distribution of films, TV programs, and other audiovisual productions that contain little obviously-useful or factually accurate information. Instead, they focus on bolstering entertainment media in countries that lack strong national media industries, most often through providing funding and technical support for film and television production and distribution, as well as training for audiovisual professionals. Film, TV, radio, and cultural productions have long been an important form of cultural diplomacy. During the Cold War, for instance, cultural diplomacy played a key role in U.S. efforts to contain the spread of communism through a series of strategic cultural exchanges – such as sending jazz musicians to Europe or providing funding for foreigners to study at US universities – that portrayed the culture of the United States positively in critical regions of the globe. A contested term sometimes used interchangeably with "cultural propaganda," "public diplomacy," and even "soft power," cultural diplomacy has been historically coupled with the nation, and can, despite its variations, be broadly defined as national policies that are designed to export national culture to further foreign policy objectives. Anthony Haigh, in the Council of Europe's 1972 publication *Cultural Diplomacy in Europe,* defines it simply as, "the activity of governments in the sphere – traditionally left to private enterprise – of international cultural relations" (Haigh 1974: 21).

In this paper, I focus on case studies of audiovisual assistance run by the European Union in the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean, and Pacific island countries. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address what, if any, strategic foreign policy aims these audiovisual assistance programs might serve, it is important to note European nations' legacies of colonialism and lingering economic interests in these regions, and the role that media has played in these histories. At the same time, however, as Gregory Paschalidis outlines in his article, *Exporting National Culture: the history of cultural institutes abroad* (2009), European countries also have a long history of cultural exchange with their European neighbors. Although European countries sometimes used cultural diplomacy as a way to compete against the influence of rival European powers (as we shall see in the case of

European cultural institutes) – particularly against rivals' influence on non-European third countries – cultural exchange *between* European states became understood as a way to promote European unity and cross-border understanding. Beginning with the Council of Europe's 1954 European Cultural Convention and continuing today with EU regulations, European states' cultural *external* relations with each other have also become part of the EU's *internal* cultural policy. Thus, in the EU, external and internal cultural policies are highly interconnected.[1]

In any case, like UNESCO and other international organizations, the European Union frames its interventions in audiovisual industries abroad as development, rather than diplomacy – a fact that carries important implications. Since their emergence in the 1970s, international audiovisual assistance programs have been intricately connected to transnational and global institutions, particularly UNESCO and the European Union, as well as the particular human rights and development such institutions espouse. This relationship suggests that a closer examination of audiovisual aid programs can yield new insight into the role of media – and especially various actors' perceptions of it – in human rights, economic development, and the relationship between the Global North and South. This is particularly true today, when culture is a growing area of concern for international organizations and is poised to take a central role in global development agendas after the UN's Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015.

This paper argues for the importance of considering aid to entertainment and cultural media in analyses of media assistance. My goal is not to make a case for audiovisual assistance or to prove its effectiveness in promoting economic development or human rights. Instead, I attempt to show how the aims and mechanisms of these programs relate to key current issues in international development, human rights, and global media. I first briefly discuss the increasing importance of culture in international development agendas. I conclude with a case study of EU audiovisual assistance programs to media industries in the Global South, using analyses of policy documents, funding awards, and interviews with European Commission Program Managers and staff to examine the logic and motivations behind these non-traditional forms of development aid.

Linking Culture and Development: From UNESCO's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture to the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda

2015 marks the end of the time frame of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), created at the turn of the century to guide global development agendas. The Goals focus on eight specific aims related to poverty and quality of life, such as

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[1] Following Ulrich Beck's conceptualization of Europe as a "cosmopolitan empire," without the Westphalian nation-state's strict divisions between internal and external (Beck & Grande 2007).

the eradication of poverty and hunger, implementing universal primary education, achieving gender equality, and reducing child mortality. In discussions on the post-2015 global development agenda, however, a concept that was absent from the original MDGs has taken a central role: culture. In the early 2000s, UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the EU's Cotonou Agreement and Dakar Declaration all linked culture to development and rights. So, too, did the UN General Assembly Resolutions in 2010 and 2011, and the 2012 RIO+20 Conference on Sustainable Development. In 2013, the UN General Assembly held a high-level debate on Culture and Development, with the EU, the G77 Plus China (a coalition of developing countries), and the Community of Central and Latin American States all calling for the recognition of culture as an "enabler of sustainable development in the post-2015 agenda" (UNESCO 2013).

A diverse range of social, economic, and environmental aims have been positioned within this growing consensus on the need to recognize the link between culture and development. The UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), for instance, released a paper in 2013 outlining three ways to position the "creative sector" in the post-2015 agenda: "leverage[ing] culture for poverty reduction and inclusive economic development," "ensur[ing] cultural rights for all to promote inclusive social development," and "capitaliz[ing] on culture to foster innovative and sustainable models of cooperation (ECOSOC 2013). Meanwhile, UNESCO's 2013 Hangzhou Declaration prescribes culture as a panacea not only for sustainable economic development and "mutual understanding to foster peace and reconciliation", but also for such disparate aims as environmental sustainability and "strengthen[ing] resilience to disasters and combat climate change" (Hangzhao International Congress 2013).

It is important to emphasize that audiovisual assistance programs run by international organizations such as UNESCO and the EU began to proliferate amidst this flurry of discussions about the link between culture and development. UNESCO's 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, its 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression institutionalized concern for cultural production, distribution, and exchange, with an emphasis on culture in the developing world – concerns which many audiovisual assistance programs explicitly address.

However, as much as audiovisual assistance might be a product of these discussions, it also prefigures them. The first program by an international organization to fund audiovisual assistance in the developing world was UNESCO's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture (IFPC), which was established in 1974 and provides financial and technical assistance to both states and individuals for the creation of artistic works and the bolstering of cultural industries. In his 1973 speech introducing the Fund, Richard Hoggart – then UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Social Sciences, Humanities, and Culture – argued that the funding of artistic creation necessarily dealt with the economic divide between the

Global North and South that other post-War international institutions and programs attempted to address, yet also embodied a new way of thinking about economic development assistance that was concerned more with overall quality of life than economic indicators (Hoggart 1973).

The IFPC (which continues to fund cultural and audiovisual projects today), then, anticipated critics of development like Escobar, and foreshadowed the contemporary "cultural turn" in development studies. Both the IFPC's development philosophy and funding mechanism – in which applications are submitted by individuals or organizations in target countries – have also served as a blueprint of sorts for the proliferation of cultural aid programs that have emerged since the late 1990s. Created in 2010 as part of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, for instance, the International Fund for Cultural Diversity is quite similar to the extant IFPC. It aims to "foster the emergence of a dynamic cultural sector at the national and/or local level in developing countries" by funding "government authorities, public institutions and NGOs" for projects ranging from "the development and implementation of cultural policies, to capacity-building of cultural entrepreneurs, mapping of cultural industries and the creation of new cultural industry business models" (UNESCO Website 2005). Similarly, the European Union's Investing in People program, which was created in 2012, funds projects in developing countries and BRICS that "support culture as a vector of democratization, diversity and socio-economic development" by either "encouraging cultural expressions which promote diversity, intercultural dialogue and human and cultural rights, in the context of reconciliation, conflict resolution and democratization" or "strengthening capacities of cultural actors for the development of a dynamic cultural sector contributing to economic growth and sustainable development" (European Commission Website 2012).

Cultural assistance programs since the IFPC have included assistance for audiovisual productions as part of a wider concern for cultural industries. However, today a wide variety of programs focus wholly on audiovisual assistance, or make special allowances for audiovisual projects. The non-profit organization FilmAid, for instance – founded in 1999 during the Balkan Crisis and has since partnered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – funds the creation and distribution of "useful" educational media, as well as organizing film festivals and teaching filmmaking in refugee camps. The EU also runs a handful of audiovisual assistance initiatives of various sizes and geographic foci, which I will discuss in greater detail in the following sections. Some national governments also have audiovisual assistance programs.

While these audiovisual assistance programs are diverse, they share two defining features. First, their interventions take the form of assisting with production, distribution, or training of audiovisual professionals. Second, they frame these interventions in development and human rights terms. However, as the case

studies from the EU discussed in the following sections suggest, the motivations behind such programs are complex and at times contradictory, particularly in relation to notions of development.

EU Audiovisual Assistance and the Global Media Market

In *Viva Riva* (2010), Congolese director Djo Tunda Wa Munga's second feature film, we meet titular character Viva (Patsha Bay) as he is on the cusp of becoming a very rich man: through some unspecified but shady means, Viva has acquired a truckload of gasoline which he has brought to fuel-scarce Kinshasa, hoping to wait until the city's crippling shortage boosts gas prices sky high before selling off his spoils. While celebrating his future cornering of the city's gas market with an advance he received from his partners in the deal, Viva sees Nora (Manie Malone) dancing at one of the city's nightclubs and is immediately smitten. Overconfident from his impending wealth, even the reputation of her boyfriend, a powerful Kinshasan named Azor (Diplome Amekindra), does not discourage Viva from pursuing her. Soon, however, Azor is the least of Viva's problems, as the cut-throat Angolan criminal boss Cesar (Hoji Fortuna) – and the unnamed lesbian army commander (Marlene Longange) he coerces into helping him – begins to track Viva, and his gasoline, down.

Viva Riva was the first film produced and shot in the D.R. Congo in 25 years, and as such, its portrayal of Kinshasa is worth examining. While slickly shot, the film does not shy away from the grittiness of D.R. Congo's largest (and Africa's second-largest) city. Aside from the film's outright violence – requisite for any crime drama – water and gas shortages allude to the city's wobbly infrastructure. Social inequalities are rampant: the film's female characters are forced to side with whichever male characters can best protect them in the moment; the Commander faces verbal and physical violence, seemingly related to homophobia; and both prostitution and Kinshasa's infamously numerous street children are ever-present.

Yet in the first Congolese film in a quarter of a century, Kinshasa's local specificity is articulated with the world beyond D.R. Congo's borders. Much of the action that unfolds against the vivid urban Congolese mise-en-scene seems to draw on European and US filmic traditions, employing tropes from film noir, crime thrillers, and gangster films. Meanwhile, more regional flows of commerce and people subtly but perceptible steer the film's narrative action. The gasoline Viva acquires comes from an unspecified location outside of D.R. Congo's borders, and Cesar, the Angolan crime boss, has murky connections to military forces back home – plot points that run parallel to D.R. Congo's ongoing conflict with its wealthier neighbor Angola over maritime oil rights and Angola's treatment of its own Congolese population.

Viva Riva's production, distribution, and reception also seem to invite us to consider how global flows interact within and outside the D.R. Congo's borders. For example, despite the film's use of ostensibly Western forms, the production is, in part, aimed at challenging the dominance of US and European films in Africa and jumpstarting national and regional film industries. In an interview with *The Guardian*, the film's co-producer, South African Steven Markovitz, argues that African audiences are interested in seeing African films that better reflect their lived realities than US and European production:

> "African cinemas have been dominated by Hollywood and European cultural programmes catering to the intellectual elite, not tapping into a growing middle class who are interested in seeing films about themselves and their neighbours. [...] There is an audience, a real market for African films. They have disposable income and they want to be entertained. We hope that this will create a pipeline for further African titles on the continent" (Smith 2011).

Indeed, *Viva Riva* was in some ways a groundbreaking release that might demonstrate the potential for future Congolese film productions and co-productions with other African countries. Not only was it the first feature film to be produced in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 25 years; it also had a rare continent-wide release in Africa, opening not only in the D.R. Congo but also in Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Namibia, and Zimbabwe over the course of several months. It swept the African Academy Awards, won MTV's Best African Film award, and even won an award in Nigeria, a country whose idiosyncratic film market is dominated by *Nollywood*, which produces the second-most films per year of any film industry (Miller 2012) through a system of rapid, low-cost production and direct-to-video distribution.

Given the current global flows of the film trade, *Viva Riva's* distribution outside of and across Africa is especially notable. A 2011 study of the international film trade, for instance, found that exchanges of films between African countries were the most uncommon of any region in the world, and that African countries trade films more actively with European countries than they do among themselves (Chung 2011). Africa, thus, differed from other regions, in which local hubs of audiovisual production exported films to neighboring countries, competing – at least to an extent – with exports from global hubs in the US and Europe. Nigerian films are distributed widely in sub-Saharan Africa and throughout diasporic populations, but they are the exception. While Markowitz sees a would-be African audience for African films, with the income and interest to support film from around the continent, he acknowledges that foreign media dominance and a lack of distribution networks and infrastructure stymies this audience's ability to reach these films (in Smith 2011).

It is difficult to pinpoint why, exactly, *Viva Riva* succeeded in its regional and global distribution and reception, and its international sources of funding suggest a complex relationship with European flows of financing to African audiovisual

industries. France's *Canal Plus*, for instance, was a major commercial backer of the film, foreshadowing the company's more extensive involvement in the African media landscape: in 2012, *Canal Plus* began offering a satellite TV service in 20 Sub-Saharan Francophone countries (including D.R. Congo) and Ghana, providing film and TV shows from Europe alongside European-African co-productions (including *Viva Riva*) and African films ("Canal Plus Takes Africa" 2012).

This paper's major case study, however, is the film's other major source of European funding. *Viva Riva* received nearly half a million Euros of its production budget from a European Union economic development program that attempts to create viable audiovisual industries in the developing world. If the French company's transnational investments signal that the time has finally come to profit off audiences in the developing world, this audiovisual assistance program's funding of *Viva Riva* would paradoxically suggest that African films need help to be profitable on their own.

ACP-Films is the audiovisual branch of *ACPCultures+*, a larger support program for ACP cultural sectors (including dance, music, and drama) which is funded by the European Development Fund and thus forms part of the EU's official aid for economic development. *ACP-Films* is run jointly by the European Commission and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, an organization of Least Developed Countries created to guide development cooperation with the EU. *ACP Cultures+* emerged out of negotiations between the two bodies in which representatives from the ACP Group of States expressed their desire for support for their cultural sectors – negotiations that also contributed to the inclusion of an entire section (Article 27) devoted to cultural development in the Cotonou Agreement, the 2000 treaty that outlines relations between the EU and ACP countries.

ACP Cultures+ aims to "contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development through the promotion of an enabling environment for creativity, cooperation and exchanges, independence and viability of the cultural sector in the ACP States, as well as the safeguarding of cultural diversity and fundamental cultural values" (ACPCultures+ website). In order to do so, the 2012 round of *ACP Cultures+* awarded around 30 million Euros to dozens of projects in the cultural sector. In addition to trying to kick start national audiovisual industries through support for the production and distribution of film and television works, *ACP-Films* attempts to integrate audiovisual industries into regional and global networks by encouraging professional exchanges and stipulating that the projects it funds are co-productions (either between ACP countries, or between an ACP and an EU country). It also awards funds for the transnational distribution of audiovisual products to help films from ACP countries to reach regional and global audiences.

Like Viva's own scheme to get rich within the film, then, *ACP-Films* takes advantage of – or attempts to create – international networks and cooperation in order to spur economic development (as well as a variety of stated human rights aims). However, unlike the gasoline Viva deals in, the value (and use) of film as a commodity is more difficult to gauge. Indeed, funding the production of films and their distribution throughout arthouses and Video on Demand worldwide seems to be, on the surface, a curious means of economic development aid. After all, it seems doubtful that one successful feature film could single-handedly create a film industry in D.R. Congo, and, furthermore, stylistically *Viva Riva* seems more targeted toward achieving critical, rather than box office, success.

ACP-Films selects projects like *Viva Riva* from an open call for proposals, based on the decisions of an anonymous panel of audiovisual experts (along with the non-binding guidance and advice of the ACP Secretariat and European Commission Program Managers). Like *Viva Riva,* the films whose production *ACP-Films* funds tend to be characterized by both cooperation between ACP countries, and between ACP and European countries. Also like *Viva Riva,* those films often address social issues. *Jambula Tree*, which was awarded 495,000 Euros, was produced by South Africa's Big World Cinema and two French companies: Awali Entertainment and Mandra Films, and filmed by first-time Kenyan director Wanuri Kahiu. According to the *ACPCultures+* newsletter announcing the film, *Jambula Tree* "depicts the love story between two young women in modern-day Kenya." (ACPCultures+ Newsletter) Another film, *Ladji Nyé*, is a "political thriller offering a modern and up-to-date vision of Malian society" (ibid) created by partners in France, Senegal, and Mali, while the film *Thom* "questions the transmission of moral values in contemporary African societies" (ibid) and has backers in France, Burkina Faso, and Chad.

Production is not all that is funded by *ACP-Films*, of course. Recent awards have gone to film distribution projects such as *Afrique en Doc TV,* which aims to broadcast African documentaries in 17 countries in West, Central, and East Africa; the Festival Ile Courts film festival in Mauritius; and a project in the Caribbean with German partners that attempts to strengthen market access for 400 Caribbean-related films through the acquisition of distribution rights, the creation of a Video on Demand platform, and through TV broadcasts aimed at the Caribbean and its diaspora.

These distribution projects attempt to garner wider audiences for productions from ACP countries, both at home and abroad. Meanwhile, training programs try to help films and TV shows meet the technical and aesthetic standards required to attract the largest possible audiences. One such program, *L'Afrique en série,* is funded by *ACP-Films* and run by France's CFI (France's organization for media cooperation abroad), and teaches TV production skills (at least, European-style ones) to about a hundred audiovisual technicians in TV industries in countries such as Ghana, Cameroon, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Each of the 12 courses offered

by the program focuses on a different topic related to the production fiction TV series – such as sound mixing, sound recording, editing, framing, directing, and production coaching. All are taught by professionals in the European TV industry (primarily France).

Even though African TV is successfully competing with foreign imports for African audiences, according to CFI, these depictions of African lives do not measure up to the aesthetics of global TV tastes. *L'Afrique en série's* website bluntly states that many African TV programs are "technically weak", which "reduces their circulation potential in countries outside of Africa" (CFI 2013). Through these training courses, they hope to meet the objective of helping "the best African series to achieve the international standards demanded by the field of global broadcasting" (ibid).

The logic behind such a program is easy to criticize – after all, who is France to tell Africa what African TV should look like? At the same time, with TV increasingly watched across national and regional borders, global audience's expectations – aesthetic, generic, structural, etc. – help determine what is profitable in a global marketplace and, in turn, what gets produced. TV production that meets globally-accepted aesthetic norms requires technical expertise – much like more traditional areas of foreign technical assistance – that may be out of reach for workers in some local audiovisual industries. The *L'Afrique en série* case does suggest a tension between European audiovisual expectations and African audiovisual production – a tension that I also saw during interviews with EU audiovisual assistance Program Managers and discuss in the following section. The case also suggests that in audiovisual productions, technical expertise and knowledge are inextricable from cultural expression, forcing us to reconsider whether audiovisual assistance can truly escape the critique that development assistance frames its subjects as backward, in need of improvement through interventions from the more technologically advanced Global North.

Behind the Screen of Audiovisual Assistance: Some Observations from the Case of EU Aid Programs

To better understand the aims and motivations behind EU audiovisual assistance programs, during the summer of 2013 I traveled to Brussels to observe and interview the staff of European Commission programs that provide economic support for audiovisual industries abroad. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the Program Managers of *ACP-Films* and *ACP-Cultures+,* as well as *Euromed Audiovisual*, which funds audiovisual industries in the South Mediterranean.[2] I also informally interviewed the half-dozen staff at the ACP

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[2] I also met with the Program Manager of a third program, Media Mundus, which funds cooperation between European audiovisual professionals and their counterparts from anywhere in the world, although it is not development assistance and plays a minimal role in the findings

Secretariat in Brussels who are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of *ACP Cultures+* and *ACP-Films* such as publicity and communications. Some of the interviews were conducted under the condition of anonymity, and more than one interviewee expressed concern for the continued ability of their program to secure funding for audiovisual support in third countries given Europe's economic climate. As there are only one or two managers responsible for each program, in the data presented here their names and positions are omitted, in order to protect my interviewee's identities.

This methodology unfortunately blurs important distinctions between *ACP-Films* and *Euromed Audiovisual* at times, yet it still provides insight into the motivations and aims behind EU audiovisual assistance. I found that these programs' relationship with international development involved a complex set of motivations, and multiple tensions at the intersections of media, culture, and economic development. While coding the interview data, I found that despite both this complexity and the differences between the programs themselves, they seemed to have many motivations and aims in common. I present them here, with the hope they help to clarify just what audiovisual aid programs attempt to accomplish through their funding of entertainment media.

Media for Economic Development

As would be expected, the interviewees echoed the linkage between culture and development that Richard Hoggart expressed in his 1973 introduction of UNESCO's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture. By framing audiovisual projects that have no measurable economic impact as international development aid, these programs, like the IFPC, challenge the economic measurements that have driven traditionally development theory. Nevertheless, economic growth was not dismissed as a motivation – indeed, interviewees repeatedly emphasized the potential of cultural industries to be economic drivers. The projects funded by these programs seem to make economic sense. *Euromed Audiovisual*, for instance, creates more distribution networks between South Mediterranean countries, whose films have historically needed to first find box office success in Europe before finding a distributor in their home countries. *ACP Films*, on the other hand, funds distribution projects to increase the viewership of African films *abroad* in order to increase box office returns. As one interviewee told me, "I think these films need outside distribution [...] there are few cinema theaters in Africa nowadays, so it's not so easy to have this distributed there." It is easy to see how both of these interventions in distribution could bolster the audiovisual industries in these countries.

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presented here.

Media as Development: "Their Own Images"

Yet a parallel set of motivations emerged that de-emphasized economic growth, even while utilizing the language and logic of development. In the absence of economic indicators to demonstrate their programs' impact, interviewees turned to anecdotal, non-economic indicators to demonstrate effectiveness. In the process, the original economic motivations were often de-emphasized, and a different set of motivations emerged in its shadow.

The broadest and most general of these motivations was simply that locally-produced audiovisual products are a good in themselves. One interviewee, when asked about the importance of funding the production of films, said, "If we don't support production, there will not be film in [these] countries, because they really need our help, that's for sure." This was a common sentiment: without intervention, films will not be made or seen in these places. Expanding filmmaking and distribution worldwide was seen as an important task in itself, even if the language and institutions of economic development were still presented as a vehicle from which to advance that goal. Whereas most media assistance programs tend to see media as a tool *for* development, then, audiovisual assistance envisions media *as* development itself.

At least, certain kinds of media. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that the importance of funding audiovisual production and distribution in their target countries was that it enabled audiences there to view films and TV shows that were created in their own region or country. "Before," said one interviewee, "audiences [in the countries we work in] didn't watch movies from their own country, and now thanks to our program they watch movies because it's just like, the daily love of people."

Another interviewee touted a project that expanded film distribution in rural areas with little possibility for profit: "They project it to the village. Against, not against payment, against participation with work, or with food, even food for the technicians. So people do not even have to pay, necessarily. At least the children and young people and older people, they can see their own images. It's good." Even regardless of economic sustainability, then, it was seen as critical that audiences see "their own images," or movies or TV "from their own country."

Expanding Access to Culture

This increased local viewing of local audiovisual content was part of a broader goal of what interviewees called "expanding access to culture". At one point, in fact, an interviewee defined a program's success entirely by this concept: "We have good success for the majority of these contracts because they help the access to culture."

The term "access to culture" borrows from other areas of international development – such as expanding access to healthcare – and it operates under a

similar logic: culture is beneficial for everyone, but not readily available for many in the world. And as with healthcare, expanding access to culture entails technological modernization: audiovisual productions are technologically dependent, and all of the people I talked to were excited about new technological solutions for distribution, like VOD platforms and mobile phone streaming, as solutions for the poor cinema and broadcast infrastructures in target countries.

Because these programs seem to envision "culture" as something that one can expand access to, as opposed to something that exists everywhere as part of everyday life, I asked how their framing of expanding access to culture in purely audiovisual terms could be thought of in relation to pre-existing, locally-specific forms of cultural practices. They replied that directors were free to make films about whatever they wanted, whether "cultural heritage" or "science fiction". Local cultural heritage, then, was seen as one possible topic or subject, or genre. But the technology of film and TV, however, were seen as the best *mediums* to provide access to this and other cultural content:

> "99 percent of the population has a television – and even if people don't watch a movie everyday, they watch movies at some point. And if you talk about some leisure activity, it's one of the most important activities, for people to go out and so on, like, where do you go? You go to the movies, so…. I think it's really very important for culture to be disseminated [this way]."

Expanding access to culture, then, involves the dissemination of culture through technological modernization as a solution for the imbalance of culture worldwide. In some ways, this logic is strikingly similar to the strains of development theory criticized by Escobar. Much like media assistance in general, the subjects here are framed as "backward" – lacking in access not to useful information, but rather to cultural resources – and in need of improvement through interventions from more advanced countries. Significantly, however, access to audiovisual culture is also presented as a "leisure activity" in people's everyday lives; and audiovisual aid, then, can be conceived of as a way to provide access in developing countries to the kinds of pleasurable, non-useful media that are ubiquitous in richer countries.

This is in line with recent scholarship from the field of development studies, which critiques the global double standard in media consumption and usage as part of a larger, historical imbalance not of global capital, but rather of people's freedom to lead meaningful intellectual lives. As Lawrence Liang argues in "Access Beyond Developmentalism" (which approaches Cybermohalla, or media centers in working class areas of Delhi, through the lens of Jacques Ranciere's research on the intellectual lives of the working class in *Nights of Labor),*

> "We all lead intellectual lives, but the distribution of opportunities to lead an intellectual life is unequal. As such, we need to think through the history of materiality also as the conditions that divide people on the basis of those who think and those who work, or that divide time between those days of labor and nights of writing." (Liang 2010: 66)

Providing aid to audiovisual industries differs greatly from implementing specific ICTD projects like the one Liang's argument refers to, of course. Nevertheless, the administrators I interviewed saw expanding access to audiovisual productions as a way to counter a similar global imbalance in the leisurely intellectual activity of engaging with modern entertainment media.

Locally Specific and Globally Tradable

Expanding access to culture, however, did not include all kinds of audiovisual productions. What kind of culture should be disseminated was geographically bounded, limited to locally- or regionally-created audiovisual content that nevertheless conformed to global audiovisual norms. On the one hand, globally ubiquitous audiovisual exports from the United States were specifically excluded. But on the other hand, so was content that used idiosyncratically local forms, such as Nollywood films.

Much like *Viva Riva's* producer, who saw the global dominance of films and TV shows from the United States as a barrier to the development of audiovisual industries in Africa, these programs see American (and to a lesser extent, European) exports as impediments to economic development. American dominance was also presented as an obstacle to the more intangible, non-economic benefits and aims of audiovisual assistance. "Well, I'm sorry because you're American," said one interviewee, "but I think it's really important that people have something else, not only the same American movies." In contrast, however, when I asked if programs received applications from audiovisual professionals in Nigeria's *Nollywood*, another interviewee explained that *Nollywood* films have not received funding because the industry is already successful, and because "the content is different".

This tension ties into an often-mentioned concern during the interviews for "cultural diversity". While it seemed like these programs ultimately aimed for local films to be shown alongside films from Europe and the United States in the countries they operated in, to a certain extent, their conceptualization of cultural diversity operated on a global, not a local, scale. American audiovisual dominance throughout the world squashes cultural diversity, even if the audiovisual imports are just one part of a country's unique cultural consumption and practice. Meanwhile, the success of low-production value *Nollywood* films in Nigeria does not contribute to cultural diversity, either, because they are not globally embraced, they are "different" from global norms of narrative content and audiovisual aesthetics.[3]

This view, however, was not limited to the Program Managers. According to one interviewee, the directors the program worked with aspired to be thought of as

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[3] Thus, as with the politics of diversity within Europe itself, diversity here is normative even as it celebrates difference (Lentin & Titley 2008).

global, or universal, filmmakers, not filmmakers whose work is defined by geographic, cultural, and – especially – economic context.

> "I've got the feeling, some directors, they, maybe they don't like so much to be known as [directors funded by this program or associated with this regional designation]. They think, well, I'm a director. And I do a film. It's by chance I come from the area, and I want to be known and I want my film to be known for its quality, not because [of its funding designation]. Because they think that's, they don't do [regional] cinema [funded by audiovisual assistance programs]. They just do cinema."

I wanted to understand this perspective on the relationship between cinema, seemingly with a capital C, and regional cinema that was funded through European interventions, so I asked, "Do you think there's a difference?" The interviewee replied, "I don't know".

This uncertainty seemed to reflect an ambivalence about the relationship between the global and the local that ran throughout these programs. By distributing audiovisual projects internationally from countries with small audiovisual industries and small domestic markets, audiovisual assistance helps films and TV shows in developing countries to be profitable that otherwise would not. At the same time that they help create more local content, however, by prioritizing audiovisual projects that can be distributed successfully internationally – not just in their countries of production – these programs inherently value globally-accepted audiovisual norms over local specificity.

In some ways, this ambivalence is unsurprising within the context of a development program, whether in Europe or elsewhere. Stuart Corbridge argues that development studies "is committed both to the principle of difference (the Third World is different, hence the need for a separate field […]) and to the principle of similarity (it is the job of development policy to make 'them' more like 'us')" (Corbridge 2007: 179-180). That principle of difference and similarity is a defining feature of these programs, with their simultaneous concern for cultural diversity, or difference, in South Mediterranean and ACP countries, and their support for packaging that diversity into the globally-accepted forms of film and TV. Thus, these interventions in distribution valorize content that appeals to markets and audiences outside a filmmaker's local context. To use Corbridge's construction, again, the "difference" is that these are "their own images," unique from American or European imports; the "similarity" is that, in order to be widely distributed, these images should appeal to more than those who would call them their own.

Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine if EU audiovisual assistance programs are fully representative of this type of assistance in general, but the conclusions from the interview data on *Euromed Audiovisual* and *ACP-Films* do

help to clarify and deepen our understanding of at least one particular set of aims and motivations behind audiovisual assistance. Like UNESCO's 1974 International Fund for the Promotion of Culture, EU audiovisual assistance links culture and development, eschewing the traditional economic focus of development. At the same time that the programs reinforce the conception of audiovisual industries as motors for economic growth, they also employ numerous non-economic aims – such as the importance of viewing films from one's own country – that tether the economic engine of the entertainment industry to more intangible ideas about culture as a public good. Future research on audiovisual assistance programs may reveal if other programs pursue similar aims, or, even more importantly, how the recipients and beneficiaries themselves conceive of such interventions in their audiovisual landscapes.

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