

NOLLYWOOD UNBOUND: BENIN LANGUAGE VIDEO-FILMS AS PARADIGM

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Abstract

Apart from the usual Nigerian video-films done in English language, Nollywood films are often addressed within animated spectra of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo language film studies, but new frontiers of the glocalised order such as Benin, Nupe, Afemai, Ibibio language films have yet to receive critical attention in popular culture discourse in Nigeria and elsewhere. Employing historical analysis, interviews and document observation techniques, this study reviews existing literature on indigenous language movies in Nigeria and signposts the Benin video-film as one of the vibrant new frontiers. The paper further examines the Benin video-film against the backdrop of the Benin worldview that sets the subsection apart from other Nigerian film cultures. It concludes by asserting that the film culture in terms of output is representationally consequential considering that close to 400 movies have been made in its visual existence and canvasses for support for the culture both from the academic and professional circles so that it may realise its fullest potentialities in a glocalising Nollywood.

Introduction

In the first ever academic foray into the Benin video-film culture, Omoera (*Benin Visual Literature...234*), provided a filmographical corpus of over 200 Benin language films, but today, close to 400 Benin movies have been made. This is a considerable output which ought to be given attention as a redoubtable corpus of indigenous film production, yet the Benin language film is very much neglected, with little or no attention being granted it in the academic as well as other learned arenas. Hence, the significance of a study of this nature which is aimed at asserting the Benin video-film as a vibrant and viable Nollywood film culture besides that of the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo/English. Aside from the known film schools or acknowledged Nigerian film cultures of Yoruba, Igbo/English and Hausa (Zajc 67; Ekwuazi *Perspectives on the Nigerian...4*; Ogunsuyi *African Theatre Aesthetics...25*; Idachaba 17), there are massive cultural productions in Nupe, Ebira, Afemai, Tiv, Efik, Idoma, Ibibio, Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Benin subsections of indigenous language films in Nigeria. These forms of media productions appear to have

raised the ante of the 'glocalising order' in Nollywood because of the increasingly diverse and powerful cultural and linguistic energies they throw up. Onuzulike (233) seems to have made this point when he affirms that, in many ways, video-film itself stands for an example of technology that can be used for cultural explorations and representations mostly for the individuals or groups who cannot afford celluloid.

In fact, for over two decades now, Nollywood has experienced a tremendous mutation and growth in both the professional and academic arenas. This is likely to continue for a number of reasons. First, there are now many indigenous language film production sites across the country, apart from the dominant ones. Second, a considerable number of academic journals, books, conferences, professorial chairs and academic centres have been/are being dedicated to Nollywood studies in and outside Nigeria. The efforts of the Centre for Nollywood Studies, Pan African University, Lagos-Nigeria; *Film International*, an esteemed journal on the stables of Intellect Books, London-United Kingdom; *Post Colonial Text*, a Canada-based humanistic journal of international clout; *Ijota: Ibadan Journal of Theatre Arts*, a highly rated University of Ibadan-based specialized journal of international standing deserve commendation in this respect. It is from the foregoing perspective that this study argues that Nollywood is unbound; that is, it has gone beyond the 1980s and 1990s geographical and linguistic categorizations and interpretations to include a lot more in a 'glocalising order', which, at present, appears not to be receiving attention from film critics, film scholars and film theorists.

Nollywood Films and the Glocalising Order

As a concept, glocalization relatively recently crept into film as a form of media production in Africa. Glocalization is a word that was invented in order to stress that the globalization of a product (for instance, film as a cultural and edutainment product) is more likely to succeed when the product or service is adapted specifically to each locality or culture it is marketed in. The term combines the word globalization with localization – an earlier term for globalization in terms of product preparedness for international marketing is internationalization. The expression first appeared in the late 1980s in articles by Japanese economists in the *Harvard Business Review*.

According to Roland Robertson, who is credited with popularizing the term, glocalization describes the tempering effects of local conditions on global pressures. He specifically argues that glocalization "means the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies" (12). For instance, the increasing presence of Nollywood films worldwide is an example of globalization, while the variegated outlook of Nollywood movies as expressed in Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo/English, Benin, among other ethno-linguistic lines with different language tropes, customs, artefacts, distributive channels, deployment of technologies, exhibition agencies, market mixes in an attempt to appeal to local audiences in parts of Nigeria, Congo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and elsewhere are an example of glocalization.

Glocalization serves as a means of combining the idea of globalization with that of local considerations. Thus, initially developing an understanding of globalization offers a great deal of assistance in beginning to understand the function and meaning of glocalization. Philip Hong and In Han Song (658) explain that:

Globalization corresponds to the integration of local markets in world capitalism. Manifested by global changes in structures of the economy, globalization entails a restructuring of the world economy and a spatial reorganization of production and consumption processes across political states.

Relying on Beck's interpretation of glocalization as "internalised globalization," Roudometof further develops the foregoing definition primarily by solidifying its roles within and relationship to transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. Roudometof argues the essential nature of clearly defining these terms to more fully understand glocalization, with which they are interrelated (113). In a larger context, Roudometof explains that the emerging reality of social life under the conditions of glocalization provides the preconditions necessary for transnational social spaces, and that this process of glocalization may lead ultimately to a cosmopolitan society (118). Agreeing with Roudometof but with a specific reference to the Nigerian film, Okome (*Nollywood: Spectatorship...3*) asserts that:

While the wholesale adoption of video technology by practitioners in Nollywood has been an unqualified local success, it is the spirit to defy the economic malaise of the cinema industry in Nigeria that led to the adoption of this 'new' technology. What this success signifies is the will to overcome the problems occasioned by economic and political hiccups in the 1980s with the slump in the local currency. Perhaps even more important is the desire expressed by video filmmakers to keep local stories in the narrative programme of this local visual culture. By appropriating the terms of video technology the way that Nollywood has done... this local cinema has demonstrated to its audience and to the cinema world at large (transnationalism) that it has not despaired of making some kind of sense out of its own hieroglyphics. In the same vein, it has invested in its playful narratives of the social and cultural life (cosmopolitanism) of the Nigerian post-colony a nuanced essence of parody... (parenthesis mine).

Again, while stressing that cosmopolitanism and transnationalism are, without a doubt, unique concepts, Roudometof presents the insight that the two conditions often have a very close correlation to one another, a source of confusion repeatedly uncovered during many attempts to describe interconnected global processes. However, based on his extensive research, Roudometof (130) offers an understanding of transnationalism as

the connectivity and motion of everything from immigrants to the practices of capitalism, religion, or activism across state borders.

Indeed, one could consider globalization an economic form of transnationalism, as the social movement described by transnationalism entails a reduction in the significance of boundaries to all forms of activity globally, from political to cultural or economic processes. While the relationship is not linear or automatic, many forms of transnationalism may nevertheless serve as indicators of developing cosmopolitanism within a state (Roudometof 131). Yet again, cosmopolitanism, which to Roudometof (130), signals a pre-existing blending of global and local considerations in real life through glocalization, can be conceptualized as a moral and ethical standpoint or quality of openness manifested in people's attitudes and orientations toward others. As Roudometof notes, cosmopolitans (for instance, *Lagosians* in Nigeria) living in a transnational world are known to adopt a more open, encompassing attitude toward peoples and regions distinct from their own (131).

Thus, as boundaries fade in importance due to transnational motion, the integration of global and local forces defined by glocalization make transnational social spaces, in which those people and processes that have crossed borders interact, a reality. Ultimately, this process of glocalization may provide societal encouragement for the more culturally open mindset of cosmopolitanism. The foregoing interesting and intersecting scenarios seem to be unfolding with the emergence of Nollywood in the transnational film ecologies of Nigeria, continental Africa, African Diaspora and indeed the Western world. For instance, the multiple awards winning Benin language/Nollywood filmmaker, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's *Adesuwa*, which premiered in the Odeon Cinema in the United Kingdom in 2012; the world tour of *The Figurine*, which was made by Kunle Afolayan; the exhibition of Tunde Kelani's *Thunderbolt* in different festivals and cinemas in African and indeed across the world, among many other Nollywood movies indicate the transnational hegemonic potentialities of Nollywood films in an increasing glocalising world. And, it is important that Nigerian film scholars and researchers begin to interrogate aspects of these extended readings of the Nigerian film with a view to deepening global as well as local understanding of the highly diversified nature of Nollywood for the socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political imports and even impacts it has made and is still making.

Theoretically and practically, therefore, the aesthetic and economic possibilities of an emergent glocalising order in Nollywood are yet to be fully explored and exploited by development agents in both the academic and professional circles of the cultural and entertainment industries in Nigeria. According to Eregare and Afolabi (145) the cultural and entertainment industries are the vehicles for social and cultural relations. These industries are responsible for the 'manufacturing' of meanings whether they are news,

drama, music, and films. Glocalising the meanings and symbols produced from these industries through effective and pragmatic platforms such as the one Nollywood provides can benefit those interested in discussing or exploring the phenomena of translocal cultures, global linkages and transnational networks that impact and shape identities, cultural heritages and relationships among and between Nigerians and other Africans, Africans and the people of African descents and other peoples worldwide. However, this discourse is more interested in how the Benin video-film, by virtue of the Benin *weltanschauung*, can be distinguished and become accepted as a viable aspect of Nollywood and the need for film scholars, film critics and theorists, among other stakeholders in the academic and professional circles to give the required support for the film culture to realise its fullest potentialities in a glocalising Nollywood. Before delving into this, it may be profiting for this discourse to briefly reflect on the dominant Nollywood cultures in relation to some of the new ones, which the Benin film emblematises.

Dominant Nollywood Film Cultures and the New Ones

Nollywood is arguably the most diversified film ecology on the continent of Africa with distinct production points of releases and the exploration of diverse subject matters. Haynes and Okome (106) observe that:

Nowhere else in Africa has a domestic market been captured so successfully. The video films are produced on a number of distinct bases, and have a variety of forms, styles, and themes, as well as a language of expression. Taken together, they give us something like an image of the Nigerian nation – not necessarily in the sense of delivering a full, accurate and analytical description of social reality, but in the sense of reflecting the productive forces of the nation, economic and cultural.

In an attempt to examine these ‘productive forces’, Ogunsuyi (*The Aesthetics of Traditional...32; African Theatre Aesthetics...21*) contends that three popular approaches to the epistemology of films earlier agreed upon by Yearwood (65) and Ekwuazi (*Film in Nigeria* 133), could be applied to a purposeful reading of the traditional African theatre films in Nigeria. According to Ekwuazi in Ogunsuyi (*African Theatre Aesthetics...21*):

The first of these approaches is the iconic criterion. This is said to assert the identity and meaning of the film image... The second is the indexical criterion. It asserts the socio cultural background of the film maker and applies this as an index to conceptualising the film. The third and the last is the intentional criterion. This is where the very basis of evaluating the film is based on the intention per se of the filmmaker.

These approaches are referential because they serve aesthetic inquiries. It is germane to note too that these approaches direct our attention to contemporary studies associated with conceptual instruments of linguistic and semiotic science traceable to post-modernist culture. Exploring the foregoing along with the economic practice within society that clearly discerns the place of film, Ogunsuyi posits that there are three schools of film in Nigeria. These are: The Yoruba School of Film, The Hausa School of Film and The Igbo School of Film (Ogunsuyi *The Aesthetics of Traditional...*36-53; *African Theatre Aesthetics...*25-35). Idachaba (17) and Zajc (67) agree with this classification of the existing schools of film in Nigeria.

As earlier noted these identified schools have received and continue to receive scholarly attention from many disciplinary backgrounds, nationally and internationally. Larkin (232), Johnson (203), Ekwuazi (*The Hausa Video-film...* 66) and Adamu (77) agree that Hausa video-films have close engagements with the styles of love present in Indian films as well as certain preachments which emphasise the Islamic worldview. Ekwuazi (*The Igbo Video-film...*147), Ugor (76) and Enem (29-30) affirm that there is an undeniable thread which runs through the Igbo video-film: the inherent drive for individual success which has made the Igbo personality to be seen as a victim of egotism and crass materialism. The Yoruba video-film, on the other hand, is to a great extent influenced by the animated cosmos of the Yoruba people. Life to the Yoruba mind is cyclical, involving the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn. Therefore the Yoruba film is steep in mysticism, reincarnation and rites (Ogundele 100; Asobele-Timothy 4; Eghagha 73). This, perhaps, explains why Okome argues that the Nigerian video-film has an unchallengeable *presence*, which has called attention to itself from the world on its own terms (*Nollywood: Africa...*6).

Furthermore, some other critical inquirers into the Hausa video-film include Mohammed Bala (1992), Yusuf Adamu (2004), Mathias Krings (2004), Hyginus Ekwuazi (1997), and Abdalla Adamu (2007; 2009; 2010; 2011). For the Igbo video-film, some of those who have inquired into its nature also include Anyanwu Boniface (1995), Hyginus Ekwuazi (1997), Nwachukwu-Agada (1997), Chukwuma Okoye (2007), Nnamdi Malife (2008) and Stefan Sereda (2010). Again, Onokoome Okome (1991;1993), Hyginus Ekwuazi (1994), Durotoye Adeleke (1995; 2005; 2007; 2009), Wole Ogundele (1997), Afolabi Adesanya (1997), Obododimma Oha (2002), Daniel Seiffert (2004), Olufadekemi Adagbada (2005; 2008), Adewale Rafiu (2007) and Saheed Aderinto (2012) are some of the Nigerian film scholars and critics who have done incisive scholarly studies in the area of the Yoruba video-film.

Issuing from the foregoing, it is no surprise to observe that Nollywood, for a very long time, was structured along the lines, defined in colonial times, with three main regions: the Northern with Kano, South-eastern with Onitsha and South-western with Lagos. This is why it is part of the burden of this study to dispel this notion by arguing that a considerable amount of filmmaking activities is taking place among other micro-

national film cultures in Nollywood which remains generally underexplored and under-theorized and yet can be demonstrated to be representationally consequential in terms of production output, audience reception, opportunities for contending views and voices as well as the cultural display of difference.

This, perhaps, best explains why new frontiers, beyond the generally known Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Nigerian video movies have emerged in the cultural firmament of the country. In fact, some film scholars, film producers and film aficionados are now working on various film projects that explore their cultural and tribal affiliations. For instance, Mabel Evwierhioma is working on Urhobo video-films (Mabel Evwierhioma in an interview with this researcher in 2008). Prolens Movies Limited has produced *Ukpebuluku* (2009), an Urhobo film. Supreme Movies Limited has produced another Urhobo video-film, *Urhiewwe* (2010). Steve Amedu is already producing films in Esan language (Steve Amedu in an interview in 2008). Tony Boye produced *Inaghomi* (2008), an Itsekiri video-film; Alex Eyengho also made *Oma tsen-tsen* and *Suaro La* in Itsekiri language. Uncle City has produced *Igbabo-Eva* (2009), *Ifiogbodon Se Eraman* (2010), *Emo Isagbo* (2010), *Okpor-Ogie* (2010), among others, in Afemai language. Emem Isong premiered an Ibibio language movie, *Mfina Ibagha* in 2006; and many others have been produced in other Nigerian languages such as Fulfulde, Kanuri, Tiv, Efik, Ijaw and, of course, Benin, which is the fulcrum of discussion in this study.

Benin Videography: Early Beginnings, Production Sites and Audiences

Historically speaking, Ozin Oziengbe, aka, Erhietio Sole Sole, a man widely believed to be the doyen of Benin video drama (in an interview with this researcher in 2009) was of the contention that the Benins have produced video dramas long before the commonly acknowledged ones. To buttress his point, he cited video works such as *Ikioya* (1988), *Ewemade* (1989), *Ehizomwanogie* (1990) and others which he made in technical collaboration with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Benin Centre. His position appears to enjoy the support of Ogunsuyi (*African Theatre Aesthetics...66*) who also remarks that as at 1987, he had produced *Erhi Ifueko (Ifueko's Father)*, a folk drama for the screen at the NTA, Benin Centre. However, Baba Cliff Igbinovia, a prolific Benin moviemaker and actor (in an interview with this researcher in 2009), pointed out that the first commonly acknowledged Benin video drama appeared in 1992 with the Uyiedo Theatre Troupe's *Udefiagbon*.

Although *Udefiagbon* treats a contemporary social issue of child abandonment, Peddie Okao (in an interview with this researcher in 2009) noted that it is *Evbakoe*, subtitled in English as *Reap what you Sow* which was released by Soul 2 Soul Nigeria Limited in 1998 many people regard as the first video drama of Benin language expression. Regardless of when, where and how video-filmmaking in Benin commenced, Ibagere (in an interview with this researcher in 2011) observed that Benin video-films numerically rank fourth, after Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba film cultures and yet have not been granted academic attention like others.

Benin is the present day capital of Edo State in South-Southern Nigeria. The term Benin is vested with several meanings and connotations, the earliest of which date back to between 900 - 1200 AD, when it started enjoying the status of a kingdom ruled by the OgEgharevba 1). Benin is also interchangeably used with the term, Edo (Agheyisi 39; Omoregie 10-11; Lawal-Osula 2). Aside from being a geographical entity, Benin is also used to describe the people and the language spoken in this area. With the current geopolitical arrangement, the Benin speaking people are mainly found in the southern part of Edo State (Edo south), which comprises of seven (7) local government areas (LGAs), namely, Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Orhiomwon, Uhunmwonde, Ovia South-West and Ovia North-East.

The inhabitants of these LGAs are, for the most part, native speakers of the Benin language and the primary market target of all the Benin video-film producers/videographers who shoot Benin movies. Benin filmmakers operate from two distinctive points, Benin and Lagos, with several production sites. While Lancewealth Images Nigeria Limited is a clear Benin film producer from the Lagos end, Prolens Movies Nigeria Limited, Pictures Communications Nigerian Limited, Osagie mega Plaza Nigeria Limited, Triple 'O' Resources Nigeria Limited, 99 Entertainment Nigeria Limited, to mention a few, constitute and animate the creative and productive mitochondrion of film making at the Benin end.

The non-native residents of the Benin speaking areas as well as the general viewing public, including audiences in other parts of Nigeria, Africa, the Diaspora and the Western world, constitute the other markets for the Benin language film. Perhaps, this speaks to the potentialities of the Benin video-film in a glocalising Nollywood which are largely untapped at the moment. Some of the outstanding names in the Benin video culture are Johnbull Eghianruwa (Sir Love), Eunice Omoregie (Queen of Benin movies), Omo-Osagie Uteteneghiabe (the unmistakable voice of Benin movies), Loveth OKH Azugbene (Emama no kasedo/Ovbesa kpoo), Osagie Legemah, Osaretin Igbinomwanhia (Akpaka 99), Prince Ayomi-Young Emiko, Onions Edionwe, Osarodion Enogieru, Monday Osagie, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, Davidson Esekeigbe, Baba Cliff Igbinovia, Osasuyi West, Ogbeide (Ukeke), Andrew Osawaru, Wendy Imasuen, Omodele Uwagboe, who have featured as either as actors/actresses or producers/ directors in movies such as *Ikoka* (2003), *Ikuemitin* (2007), *Emotan* (2003), *Ekuase* (2004), *Agbawu* (2007), *Yasin* (2008), *Olidara* (2008), *Ebuwa* (2009), *Ovbimwen Osemwen* (2011), *Okpaniya* (2006), *Okagbe N'ogbeti* (2011), *Adesuwa* (2012), among many other great Benin films.

Omoera in a bid to draw attention to the Benin subsection of Nollywood, asserts that most of these films are often linked with the Benin Oba or royalty, but they generally explore mundane and contemporary issues as well as matters from previous epochs, using Benin language, proverbs, folklores, costumes, artefacts, songs, adages, among other icono-cultural paraphernalia as distinctive means of communication, which are

steadily carving a niche for Benin movies in the pantheon of indigenous films in Nigeria (*A Taxonomic Analysis...*52; *An Assessment of the Economics...*forthcoming). Having briefly looked at aspects of the history, production and audiences of the Benin film, this study elects to examine the Benin worldview in the Benin video-film as a way of concretising what really makes the Benin film 'tick' in a glocalising Nollywood.

The Benin Worldview: An Infrastructural Base for the Benin Video Culture

Generally, worldview denotes a comprehensive and usually personal conception or view of humanity, the world or life. In relation to African arts and worldview, Trowell (19) argues that:

In reality the essentials of art study are more fundamental and necessitate a thorough understanding of man's nature, physical and spiritual; of his modes of expression, visual and otherwise; of his reactions to surrounding; of his relationships with the world, in each and all of its various aspects; and of the progress of all these factors through time.

Trowell's profound assertion still holds true today about traditional African arts, their practitioners and the society where they live in. The traditional Benin society is steep in customary observances which allow for the devolution of authority from the Oba down to the ordinary citizen. Ezra (3) asserts that the Benin Oba is the central figure in the kingdom, combining vast spiritual powers that result from his divine ancestry with enormous political clout.

According to the Edo Arts and Cultural Heritage Institute (EACHI), Benin is one of the oldest traditional kingdoms in West Africa, which still exist today (EACHI par 6). Much of what is known about Benin today is its rich arts and crafts that adorn many European and other museums around the world. During the colonial era Europeans looted a lot of the sacred and popular arts of the Benin people (Osahon 48), and efforts to retrieve some of these art works continue till today (Igbinovia 13). As this is going on, another popular art form is emerging. This is the Benin video-film, a performance art that is purveyed to large audiences, both Benin speaking and non-Benin speaking through the use of videographic gadgets such as cameras, video compact disks, digital video disks, among other modern media technologies.

Omoregie (in an interview with this researcher in 2009) remarked that it appears that the rich history, artistic and cultural heritage of the Benin are now being transmitted through the agency of the video-film as a form of modern media production and, of course, this is what impels this study's investigation of the Benin speaking audience's reception of the Benin video-film. Ezra (3-4); Erhahon (123) opine that almost all the folklores, popular beliefs, customs, stories, music, dance, legends, festivals, oral history, proverbs, aphorisms, sculpture, weaving, sports and games, among others, of the Benin people are either derived from the Benin royalty or associated with it in one way or the

other. Hence, the Benins have popular songs such as the 'Eguae ruese' folksong which goes, thus:

Text in Benin	English Translation
Kponmweoba me	Thank the Oba for me
Kponmwēn ekhimwēn oba me	Thank his chiefs for me
Iwina ne eguae ye vbe Edo oyemwēn	The work of the palace in Benin pleases me
Chorus	
Eeee Eguae ruese	Thanks go to the palace for everything

The above and many more traditional components of the Benin worldview appear to have found their way into the Benin video art (Omoregie in an interview with this researcher in 2009). At any rate, the traditional observances within the Benin culture space may be categorized into cultural, socio-religious and economic bases.

Culturally, Igbe (*The Okaegbee...*59) points out that the male folk are generally regarded as the head because the traditional Benin home or community is built round patrilineal or patriarchal 'edifices' such as the 'Omodion' (eldest son) inheriting the estate of a deceased person. Traditionally, a man who has many wives is said to have many 'urho' or 'doors'. That is, if he has three wives, he has three 'urho' or 'doors' (Eweka1; Ehiemua 3). The traditional Benin sees the number of 'doors' in a man's house as an indicator of whether he is a man of substance or not in society. Thus, any Benin man who is unable to cater for his family is lowly regarded and belongs to the low-brows or dregs of society. The women are traditionally expected to bear children, see to the needs of their husbands and generally hold forth at the home front/home management. Hence, in their kinship and lineage organization there is a marked patrilineal bias and emphasis upon primogeniture (Eweka 1-2).

A critical look at *Adaze* (2003), a video drama produced by Ama Films shows this patrilineal bias of the Benin society, where women tend to be deprecated and relegated to the background in the decision making process in family affairs. Ukata (*The Images(s) of Women ...1; Conflicting Framings...*65) has roundly condemned this seeming unfair representation of women in the Nigerian society as well as Nollywood films. She contends that Nollywood videos such as *I was Wrong* (2004), *More than a Woman 1 and 2* (2005), *Omata Women* (2003), *Glamour Girls* (1997), among others, typified women in very outrageous ways that tried to feed on the stereotypes of women in Nigeria and by extension African societies. To her, it seemed as though women have nothing good to contribute to the society other than destroying moral values.

On the socio-religious plinth, Izevbigie (78); Obanor (1); Ebohon (20); Lawal-Osula (7) assert that the traditional Benin person leads a sedentary lifestyle and believes in the existence of a supreme God/being (Osanobua) who he/she worships and communicates with through intermediaries such as the ancestors, Ehi (guardian angel)

and other smaller deities such as Olokun, Ogun, among others. Obanor (20) further posits that the average Benin man believes in reincarnation and that a man/woman reincarnates fourteen times to complete a full circle of his/her existence. Substantiating Obanor's view, Ebohon (*Cultural Heritage ...7; Ebohon and his Centre...20*) argues that, to the Benin mind, calamity or evil can be avoided or averted through appropriate propitiation rites/performance of certain rites in the ancestral shrines such as Aro-Era (Father's shrine), Aro-Iye (Mother's Shrine), Aro-Osun (Osun's shrine), Aro-Ogun (Ogun's shrine), among others. Perhaps, it is such a belief that informs the 'Ugieewere' ceremony which provides every Benin man or woman the opportunity of warding off evil from the land and supplicating for good fortune yearly (Omoruyi 12-13; Osemwengie-Ero 4).

On the economic front, the Benin people are very industrious people who specialize in industries such as bronze-making, farming, coral bead-making and general merchandising. Osawaru and Eghafona (82) contend that the present day bronze casters in Igun quarters of Benin City are reminders of the high sense of craftsmanship and industry of the Benin in the days of yore. Technologically, Osagie (64-65) states that the early Benin local technology developed in about ten base areas, including metal, wood, ivory, bone, shell, fibre, leather, clay, mud and stone. However, there seems to be a gradual but consistent shift from this pristine Benin worldview to the one which is constantly being assailed from many angles. This trend is perhaps due to the advent of time, modernity, urbanization, foreign religion, globalization, foreign languages and other contemporary challenges. This discourse will reflect on some more values that the Benin people hold dearly using the postulation of Ekwunife (70) as espoused in his 'Quinquagram of Igbo traditional religious values' before examining some of the contemporary challenges in the Benin man's or woman's view of life.

Although Ekwunife uses the Igbo traditional society as a reference point, the issues canvassed are illustrative of the values that are central to the worldview of traditional Africans, including the Benin people. Ekwunife (70) identifies five pillars on which many of the traditional African values are built by drawing on the Latin, *quinqua* meaning five. Putting *quinqua* in perspective, Ekwunife contends that "Life, Offspring, Wealth, Peace and Love" are the cardinal values around which other traditional African values cluster (72). Scruton (483) had earlier noted that the term value is often applied to all those objects thought to be, worthy of human pursuit, say on moral, aesthetic or religious ground. This position dovetails with Shorter's (111-112) observation that:

...value is the worth which we ascribe to choice – choice of an object, an opinion, a course of action, a relationship, a role, an experience. In a choice one alternative is preferred to the other (or another) and a worth is conferred upon it...Values are expressed as a repeated and consistent leitmotif. In any number of contexts, through any number of images or

symbols. They become a regularity or pattern in the thought of people or culture...

The point being made is that there can be no value if man has not got the potentialities of choosing from many alternatives. These alternatives may be objectively good or bad, moral or immoral, just or unjust, praiseworthy or blameworthy. When a person is faced with these alternatives, he/she evaluates them making choices which may later on be discovered to be either detrimental or beneficial to his/her general welfare and that of the society where he/she lives. It is in this context that this discourse further exfoliates itself by looking at the Benin worldview vis-à-vis the five cardinal traditional African values as put forward by Ekwunife.

Life as a supreme value: For the traditional Benin of south-southern Nigeria, life is the supreme gift of God to man. It is meant to be cherished and preserved at all costs. It is a supreme value (Igbe *Okaegbee* 54; Obazee 50). No other human value should be preferred to this supreme value. It is sacred and belongs to God. It is given to man on trust. Hence, no Benin toys with his/her life or with another person's life. Emovon (28) affirms that the Benins express this sentiment on the supreme value of human life in their prayers, sacrifice and offerings, songs and music, dances, video arts, names given to children, proverbs, pithy sayings, betrothals and marriage ceremonies, myths and folklores in their social and political interactions, in their economic ventures and organization.

Igbe (*Izomo*...53) further states that the value of human life as a supreme gift from God is commonly expressed among the Benins in the names given to their children such as Osayande (God owns the day), Orobosa (everything is in God's hands), Osayaentin (God owns the might of life), among others. Other names and maxims expressive of this sentiment are Agbondimwin (life is deep), Agbonze (life is of great value) and N'agbonrhienrhien ze iro dan (the person who is enjoying life does not harbour evil thoughts). If, therefore, as scholars like Awolalu and Dopamu (28-29), Ikenga-Metuh (250), Ekwunife (74), to mention a few, rightly point out that African names are not mere labels but pregnant with meanings, it is because these names not only express personalities but also rich African values. For the Benin, the greatest human value is life. Perhaps, this thought is better captured in the Benin folk saying/song which reads:

Text in Benin	English Translation
Ede agbon mwen	My life
Rhie obosa ne akpama	Is in the able hands of God
Afianma gie fiannmwen	Fear is far from me
Udu gie khuemwen	My heart will never fail me
Rhunwunda tegha muso vbe nerho	Because I must realise my dreams
Vbe agbon nerhie	In this life.

Offspring: Second in the hierarchy of quinquagramatic value for the Benin is offspring. Osayande and Abolagba (3) state that the Benin people place very high premium on biological fruitfulness. This, in the view of Igbe (*Izomo...*53), is reflected in such names as Omorowa (a child is the house), Omosede (a child is of greater worth than wealth), Omorose (a child is beautiful), Omorotiomwan (a child is one's family or lineage), Omoruikhuomwan (a child is one's inheritor), Omorunomwan (a child performs one's transitional rites) and so on. Indeed, having many offspring usually from polygamous marriages are greatly valued in Benin culture, not only to supply the needed manpower for economic purposes, but more, to continue the cherished ancestral lineage (Erhahon 151). Mere (93) substantiates the point being made when he observes that:

Traditionally children are highly valued. They have to continue the ancestral line in order to retain the family's ownership of whatever property that belongs to it. The reality of family extinction cannot be ducked where children are not forthcoming. Such a situation is socially abominable.

It is therefore no surprise that the average Benin parent believes that having children wards off the anxiety of growing old and the fear of loss of property to undeserving fellows. This is consistent with Obazee's (43) argument that the high premium the Benin people place on the human offspring impels them to go to great lengths in ensuring continuity of family lineages. One of such socio-cultural mechanisms, according to Omoregie, in an interview with this researcher in 2009, is the levirate system of remarrying within a particular family as a result of the death of person's spouse. This practice which is still prevalent today makes room for bereaved widows to get children on behalf of their dead husbands or require a man to marry his brother's widow for procreation purposes.

Wealth: The meaning of wealth in Benin custom is better described than defined in the strict sense of the word. Wealth in the traditional Benin thought system and practice does not necessarily mean abundance of material goods as modern Africans may conceive it; nor does it exclude some measures of affluence. Agheyisi (39) posits that wealth for the traditional Benin person is a comprehensive term. It includes in its purview: some landed properties, numerous children, relations and dependants, human skills and other endowments of nature through which a man or woman can make a living. Indeed, one may say that for the Benin person, there are two major ways of acquiring wealth, namely by ascription or inheritance and by achievement or through one's skills and labour. With respect to the former, the Benin would say *Efe-Erha* (wealth of the father) or *Efe-Iye* (wealth of the mother) while they call the latter *Efe-Obomwan* (wealth of one's hand or labour) which is further amplified in the inimitable Benin proverb, "A ma mie eson a i mie uwa" meaning "one does not experience prosperity or wealth without labour" (Erhahon 2).

Love: Fourth in the pecking order of Benin traditional values is love. Love and peace are interrelated. However, for explicatory reasons, we will treat them separately. 'Awe-emwen-omwan' which can be literally explained as "good neighbourliness among human beings" is perhaps, the best word in Benin to describe love. To the Benin mind however, Erhahon (68) opines that, it is a dynamic quality of man expressible in multiple human actions whose principal functions are to promote, cement and enhance human interactions under three vital aspects – ontological, socio-political and religious/spiritual.

Omoriegie (in an interview with this researcher in 2009) argued that if love (awe-emwen-omwan) exists between two people or communities they will strive to uphold or support one another. Everyone will endeavour to conform to family and social etiquette of not breaking known taboos of both the land divinity and other popular divinities of the community or of the ancestors such as suicide, incest, adultery, stealing, to mention a few. Husbands will support their wives and vice versa, children will respect their elders and vice versa and leaders at the family, clan or community will lead responsibly if love is shared among them.

The opposite could spell doom for the individual, clan or community. For instance, for a husband to kick his wife at the belly during pregnancy for any reason whatsoever is a serious offence against 'awe-emwen-omwan' (love). The reason is obvious. In doing so, the man is, as it were, manifesting his hatred for the sanctity of human life (the wife and the child in her womb) and by extension hatred for the society in need of continuity and perpetuity. He is equally offending the ancestors of the family, the clan and community and ultimately against God the author of human life and morality. In a sense, all moral offences in the traditional Benin society are offences against love (awe-emwen-omwan). This is probably why love in Benin thinking expresses itself in concrete actions which are meant to promote social ties, communal bonds and religio-cultural advancement (Omoriegie in an interview with this researcher in 2009).

Peace: Like 'awe-emwen-omwan' (love), the idea of peace (ofunmwengbe) is not apprehended in abstract terms in the traditional Benin society. Rather, it is viewed in terms of social relation, social justice and religious interactions. 'Ofunmwengbe' (peace) as the traditional Benin perceive it is to be gauged in terms of social relationship: Family relationship, clan relationship, village relationship or community relationship. Borrowing from Buddha's "Noble eight-fold path" (Parrinder 78), one may say that the Benin social relationship which engenders peace is characterized by three of these paths. These are: "Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood." 'Right speech' in Benin cultural context implies the choices and expressions of words that cement social relationship always. A common Benin maxim to this effect is 'Ota ne khuerhe o mua ekhoe rhie oto' meaning 'It is a pleasant speech that puts the mind at rest'. And, of course, it is the mind at rest that can contribute to the peace of the home and community.

With regard to 'right action' in social relationship, the Benin custom expects all strata of its citizens to be acquainted with the social norms and taboos of each sub-cultural area and observe them meticulously. Through the process of socialization children and youths are inducted into these various norms and taboos of society either in their various families or by acquaintance with age grades, peer groups or through instructions by accredited leaders of society. For example, at the action level, children and youths are expected to greet their elders and relinquish their seats for them in a gathering. Failure to observe this will earn sharp reprimands either from parents, guardians and responsible elders. Hence, the Benins place a high premium on the notion of 'Ima omo emwin', which means 'a child must be taught something to live by' (Erhahon 19).

Besides, every Benin clan/lineage has its lineage greeting and people/youths from each clan are expected to greet others/elders in the morning using their clan salutation/greeting. This gives everyone in the traditional Benin society an instant mark of identity in terms of the family he/she belongs to (Egharevba 79). Hence, the Oba lineage greets with 'Lamogun', Iyase of Benin family greets with 'Lavbieze', Ezomo clan salutes with 'Lagiesan', Oliha lineage greets with 'Laogele', Ero family salutes with 'Lamosun', among many other morning family greetings. Incidentally, Benin Kingdom is reputed to be the only place where such lineage salutation is practiced in Africa.

At the level of 'right livelihood', every member of the Benin society is expected to be trained in one skill or the other to be useful to his/her immediate family, extended family and society at large and have a meaning for living. It is such thinking that informed the Oba's setting up of different guilds where youths can learn various arts and crafts in addition to the usual farming skills. Dark (5) observes that a strong tradition in Benin is that bronze casting was learned during the time of Oba Oguola. By this arrangement, every youth in the traditional Benin society grew up knowing that the society will make allowance for his/her training and subsequent employment. This also helps in maintaining fairness and social justice in the land.

As an all embracing phenomenon, peace (ofunmwengbe) encompasses in its purview the ideas of social relation, social justice and religious interactions. It is the 'fruit' of 'awe-emwen-omwan' (love), the end term value in the hierarchy of quinquagramatic values of traditional African culture as postulated by Ekwunife. In any case, the Benin Oba has consistently been emblematised in all Benin art forms, whether old or new, including the Benin video-film. Ezra (4) affirms that art forms such as sculpture, bronze casting, carving, among others, as practiced in Beninland constitute royal art which has the Oba as its centre piece.

Some Implications and Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the media presents a vital sphere where glocalization is made evident. A powerful means of making connections on an international scale, the media is

nonetheless a tool also capable of having an impact on a more local stage. Hampton (1112) offers a meaningful example of this reality through his study of Internet use by local communities of urban underclass citizens. Developing a naturalistic experiment that examined use of the Internet for communication at the neighbourhood level, Hampton was able to identify the role of the media in encouraging local social cohesion and community engagement. Examining a topic of interest in which studies are presently quite limited, Hampton (1131) was able to determine that connection across distance may not be the only affordance of Internet-based communication. Rather, according to his studies, when a critical mass of individuals within a shared local environment adopts the Internet for communication, they cultivate an increased awareness that this tool affords communication locally as much as it does across distant space. In this light, use of the Internet for communication at the local level offers a strong example of the phenomenon of glocalization.

Drawing on the foregoing, this discourse holds that the Benin worldview as a firm infrastructural base for the Benin video-film is capable vitalising greater video works, beyond the heights that *Ikoka* and *Adesuwa* have reached, thereby boosting the presence of the Benin video-film in a glocalising Nollywood. To fully aggregate the gains of the Benin worldview which teems with great stories, folklores, artefacts and icons and images of universal appeal, this study proposes a small but dialectically relevant paradigm which it tags, 'homefrontism'. As a concept, it calls for a more painstaking aesthetic inward-looking attitude of Benin filmmakers into their social cultural milieu in making video-films. It posits that a conscious scouring up of iconic cultural resources such as proverbs, myths, folklore, heroic exploits, Benin Obaship rites, pithy adages, among other linguistic tropes, which are in abundance and currently largely untapped, can widen the entertainment and cultural germaneness of Benin films in Nollywood and beyond.

For instance, if culturally germane stories are given aesthetic twists and depths via videographic nuances, among other digital-enabled processes, the created contents are likely to stand the Benin film out as embodying unique communicative figurations amidst other mediatised cultures. Apart from the fact that the foregoing proposition enjoys a considerable support from a sampled audience of Benin speakers (*Omoera Audience Reception...131*), its intellectual resourcefulness is underscored by Okezie's (204) assertion that:

The languages and customs of Africa define and identify the people at their local settings. They guide their behaviour and determine the outcome of their efforts. It means that without their languages and customs, the continent has no identification and thus cannot be defined, cannot think, nor act constructively and independently, which are necessary elements for development.

Therefore, the Benin video-film practitioners, scholars, critics, enthusiasts, theorists, among other types of audience, should embrace and possibly adopt the rather deconstructive dialectics of 'homefrontism' to theoretically benchmark the output of the teeming Benin video culture in a glocalising Nollywood.

A diachronic review of the different forms of artistic/media production in Beninland would show that landmarks, myths and folklores linked with the Oba have been a major source/repertoire from which indigenous artistes – dramatists, novelists, poets, bards, musicians, dancers, among others, have continued to draw inspiration from. For instance, a careful examination of the creative works (stage plays, poems, carvings, sculptures, music, etc) of O.S.B. Omoregie, High Priest Osemwingie Ebohon, Ambassador Osayomore Joseph, Sir Victor Uwaifo, Akaba Man, Chief Arala Osula, Evbinma Ogie, among other Benin performing artistes attest to this fact.

The Benin video-film being a cultural and edutainment product of the latest technologies available and accessible to the Benin people appears to have become the trendiest audio-visual purveyor that aggregates the advantages and essences of other art forms/forms of media productions it met in order to assert itself, gain credibility and acceptance of the Benin populace and indeed other micro and macro national populations. The foregoing development has a theoretical mooring in media studies. McLuhan (65) asserts that when a new medium supplants older forms, it borrows the nuances, paraphernalia and other materials from the older forms to gain credibility and acceptance from the people (users). Indeed, this is what the video-film as a form of media production has done to other art forms in the Benin culture area, with a view to asserting itself in a glocalising Nollywood.

Furthermore, we have earlier noted that change which is occasioned by a number of factors such as urbanization, globalization, foreign religion, modernity, technology, foreign language, among others, seems to have swept through the Benin culture area in the last few decades leaving in its tracks weighty changes that are worth reflecting on in relation to the Benin worldview. This is probably the point Masagbor and Idemudia made in their allusion to Benin City when they observe that:

...there is ongoing writing and rewriting. The physical transformation particularly with the current beautification and modernization of the city, the realignment of roads and so on, there is reflexivity in the palimpsest. This has its heartaches and hurt as well as the benign... (17)

In a manner of speaking, a majority of the Benin people, especially the youths are now 'itinerant' persons. From the erstwhile sedentary way of living the Benin people now travel around the world seeking the Golden Fleece. There is nothing wrong with this as it were but, there is this negative colouration to the effect that hundreds of thousands of Benin girls engage in 'igbiragia' literally meaning prostitution and other indecent acts in

many European cities in Spain, Italy and Germany and even in the Americas (Ehiemua 1). This trend has given Benin land a negative image at home and abroad.

Besides, in a bid to travel abroad the boys now sell their fathers' houses. This act has brought hardship on both the male youths and their parents. A local artiste, Don Ziggy (2010) agonizingly laments over this negative development in his musical video, 'Libya Story'. Many of these boys die in the deserts of Libya while attempting to illegally cross to Spain or other European nations. A number of their parents also die of heart-attack when they suddenly realise their boys have sold their houses under their nose. Another video work entitled *Amaekpavbeowa* vividly explores the precariousness of Benin youths travelling abroad. Again, Mamudu (83) in *Blind Search* aptly captures the sorry Benin scenario: Landlords (parents) are under siege from adventurous sons and the only handy remedy is to inscribe on building walls: 'This house is not for sale'. Even this precautionary measure has been beaten time and again by the collusion of desperate sons, hard-nosed estate agents and money bags who believe they can buy anything or anybody with money. Perhaps, it is this kind of problem that made Odunsi (27) to lament, though in a slightly different context, that:

The varieties of pleasurable display that life offers are contrasted with ejections of its dynamic complexity so that a lifetime is punctuated here and there, now and then, with various problems. Like logical constants and music refrains problems have become a regular pattern of human life, constitutive, as it were, of our 'conditio humana' as far as we remain wayfarers. They are there in the private and family lives, in the social, economic, political and religious lives as well.

Worst, is the problem of cybercrime commonly referred to as 'Yahoo Yahoo', armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom. This is perhaps the latest challenge assailing the Benin people. Although scathing poverty, youth unemployment and general sense of despondency in the land have been attributed for this, it stands to reason that life is more than the pursuit of crass materialism. All manner of persons have been kidnapped: children, adults, the poor, the rich, medical doctors, teachers, politicians, among many others, have either died or humiliated to the extent of parting with huge sums of money to stay alive. In fact, it now appears that what binds the Benin people together is falling apart and not even the government through its agencies such as the police, the welfare department, youth and culture ministries have been able to do much to salvage the situation. It is this whole gamut of transitory tendencies and trends in the Benin worldview that seems to have been factored into the creative combustion of the Benin video-film as a contemporary performance art.

In spite of the regrettable negative developments noted above, the Benin video-film has emerged as a viable variant of Nollywood owing to a large Benin speaking audience

and a considerable output of video works. Indeed, the mediating role of the video-film as a form of media production has, to a large extent, helped in rejuvenating the people's interest in some of the traditional beliefs, pristine ethos, and cherished mores of the Benins in the face of raging globalization. This is more so that the Benin Oba, as a personage, as an institution, and as an essence, appears to be the epicentre of many of the Benin language movies. Borrowing the words from Oha (64), the Benin video films as:

Visual media are thus to be considered central in the project of cultural re-orientation and education in Africa, given the ways they assist in constructing and reshaping perceptions of the link between the present and the past.

As a popular art, the Benin video-film should be used to revive the interest of Benin speakers and other Nigerians/non-Nigerians, especially the youths in the seemingly dying Benin language. It should be used to propagate the socio-cultural practices of the Benin, which are capable of standing the people and their culture out in an increasingly glocalised Nigerian (African) society. Development agents such as community based organizations (CBOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and even governmental organizations (GOs) in the Benin area and in the Diaspora should make conscious efforts to see that the Benin language film is allotted a channel on the DSTV's African Magic bouquet, a mileage that the dominant Nollywood film cultures enjoy at the moment. Such a proactive step will further authenticate the unbound character of Nollywood and expand the visibility Benin videos currently have in a glocalised Nigerian film environment. In order to improve the audience-ship of the Benin video-film, the filmmakers should take advantage of the current development in film production by making cartoons. Making animated movies of Benin orientation will aid Benin videographers to buy into the children's niche market where cartoons are an irresistible attraction.

The multiplier effects of reframing the Benin language film along the above artistic and economic lines can well redound to the development of human and material resources in the Benin video subsection of Nollywood and indeed the larger Nigerian society. However, this is against the current grain of thought as many a Benin youth is jobless, lacks marketable skills, hapless, violence and crime-prone. This damning trend needs to be redressed urgently. In this regard, Omoera (*Bridging the Gap...forthcoming*) notes that:

There is so much talk about youth empowerment and development without commensurate action to actually provide templates for the youths to unlock their creative abilities. For this reason, the level of unemployment among the Benin youth remains considerable. A majority of youths in the area under study do not have the financial means to acquire formal education; they lack

marketable skills and are chronically poor. Furthermore, there are few socioeconomic structures to support or empower the youth to fend for themselves and this contributes to the underdevelopment of Benin and indeed Nigeria. In view of the situation on ground in the Benin locality, where a large number of the youths do not have any form of formal education or marketable skill and do not hope to have any in the near future due to their social-economic handicaps, it can be argued that hands-on education in the various crafts or enterprises in filmmaking will be a good starting point.

As Nollywood unbound, the need for frontiers such as the Benin, Epira, Fulfulde, Ijaw, Urhobo, among other indigenous language movies to be studied and considered as both a reflection of and an influence on cultural issues is becoming more crucial in order to better understand and navigate an increasingly glocalised Nigerian film ecology. It is hoped that this study will further vitalise academic interest in the Benin video-film by film scholars, critics and theorists within and outside Nollywood.

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