

**Osakue Stevenson Omoera**  
*Department of Theatre and Arts,*  
*Ambrose Alli University,*  
*Ekpoma.*  
Email: omoera@yahoo.com

## **A Taxonomic Analysis of Benin Video Film**

### **Abstract**

This paper attempts a taxonomic analysis of Benin video film, an emerging stratum of Nollywood. It employs the evaluative methodology to highlight and X-ray the classificatory modes of Benin video drama as could be randomly distilled from the over 200 Benin movies the researcher has encountered. In the course of the investigation, it was found that the discernible categories within the creative cusp of Benin visual literature are more or less crafted after some existing genres in the larger Nigerian film ecology, revealing some of its strengths and weaknesses. It is against this backdrop that this paper offers some suggestions aimed at redressing some of the flaws, attracting capital investment, building support infrastructure as well as stimulating further scholarly interest in the promising Benin video drama sub-sector of Nollywood.

### **Introduction**

Against all odds Nollywood has risen to become the second largest film industry in the world (Uchenunu, 2008:26; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010:par 2). Although it is on record that by 1972, feature movies were being shot with video camera and equipment (Nwadigwe, 2009:99), the phenomenon did not become a vogue in the Nigerian film culture until the 1980s and early 1990s. Some scholars have attributed this development to certain complexities which border on socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural issues and circumstances (Owens-Ibie, 1998: par 29; Ojo-Rasaki, 2001:32; Uchenunu, 2008:27). However, Mgbejume (1985:18) remarks that since the birth of portable video recording facilities,

video is daily becoming a subject of great interest and fascination to many people, including Nigerians.

The shooting of feature films in the video format and its phenomenal popularity in Nigeria and Ghana led to a video boom in the West African sub region (Nwadike, 2009:100), and a redefinition of some sort in the rubrics of film video assessment in continental Africa. In fact, Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) now has cable pay television channels wholly dedicated to Yoruba and Hausa video films and plans to set up new channels to accommodate more indigenous Nigerian language movies on its broadcast menu for the teeming viewers across Africa and elsewhere. This is beside the almost a decade old African Magic channel on DSTV which owes its lifeblood to Nollywood and the various film festivals which draw their sustenance from it, too. Haynes (2007: 106) observes that:

The export of Nigerian films has been remarkable, even if most of the profit do not end up in the right hands. They are on television in Namibia and on sale on the streets in Kenya. In Congo, they are broadcast with the soundtrack turned down while an interpreter tells the story in Lingala or other languages. In New York, their biggest consumers are now immigrants from the Caribbean and African Americans, and Chinese people are buying too. In Holland, Nollywood stars are recognised on the streets by people from Surinam, and in London they are hailed by the Jamaicans.

Thus, Nollywood has become a primary catalyst in an emergent continent-wide popular discourse about what it means to be African (McCall, 2007:94). Perhaps, it is this inventiveness, resourcefulness and versatility of Nollywood that informed Uka's (2009:10-11) position that the prosperity path is already well-set as Nollywood for all its pitfalls has paved the way, whether by a conscious programme, a deliberate encouragement or by a kind of serendipitous happenstance, challenging young Nigerians who has the histrionic sensibility to develop their potentials to become stars, earn money and become poverty busters.

As Nollywood continues to narrativize Nigerian (African) experiences, it has become germane to probe this narrative energy which mainly stems from the multilingual character of Nigeria as a

nation of many ethnic-nations, which are now jostling for space in the creative firmament of Nollywood. With ethnic-nations such as the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa in the forefront and Benin, Efik, Urhobo, Nupe, Ibibio, Itsekiri, among others, following in a chase-like manner, Nollywood has arguably become the most diversified film culture on earth. It is in this sense of diversification, albeit, a positive one, that Haynes, an influential voice on Nigerian video film matters, asserted that Nigeria may not have a proper film industry, but it certainly does have something that is alive and kicking, and that is in the paradoxical image of the country, expressing its ethnic divisions... (Haynes cited in Ekwuazi, 2008: 142).

These diverse ethno-cultural energies have also been observed in other film cultures like that of the British. Influenced by certain strains of post-colonial thinking, Higson (2000:64) advocates a post-national approach to the reading of British film that recognises the extent to which national cultures are characterised by plurality, heterogeneity and diversity. He contends that "all nations are in some sense diasporic... forged in the tension between unity and disunity, between home and homelessness" (2000:65). Within a specifically British context, Higson cited in Hjort and Petrie (2007:10) acknowledges the implications of multi-ethnic transformation of British culture in recent decades, especially in connection with the emergence of a post-national British cinema marked by cultural difference and diversity. In relation to the Nigerian film, Bamidele (2008:127) posits that all art (and no less film) is a game played with ethnic rules. This presupposes that films are made with ethno-nation character in mind. It is in this sense of cross-cultural and cross-lingual vibrancy that has ricocheted in the British cinema, Nigerian film ecology and elsewhere that this paper engages in a taxonomic analysis of Benin video film, a relatively new ethno-lingual and ethno-cultural frontier of Nollywood.

Every film/video, including Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Benin, Chinese, Hindi, to mention a few, has stories to tell with theme(s). To achieve this, it must be subjected to the regimens of pre-production, production and post-production processes which bring together artistic and technological ingenuities to bear in its making. There is a dynamic nexus between a film/video, its story, its theme(s) and the industry/society that spawns it. Okome (2008:72) though in a

slightly different context, hinted this when he pontificated that:

Film studies enthusiasts and scholars must necessarily understand the industry which produces the film, the text (theme), which is at the centre of its analysis and the interrelatedness of all three aspects of film as an academic discipline.

The theme is the intellectual content, focal point and thought of an art work (film inclusive) which makes it possible for it to provoke thought and discussion (Amunike, 2009:169). A film must be able to firmly capture the theme either reflected in the title or perceived from the events in it. The essence of a good presentation of the theme is that it helps the audience to have a good grasp of what the film is about, so that they can study, analyze, critique, comment and act on it. If a filmmaker/videographer does not know what he wants to say with his film, he can hardly produce a communicative work of art.

There are many themes and an endless variety of ways to communicate them in a film. Bobker (1969:29) agrees that a theme may be a social comment; an examination of a particular reality; an exploration into mystery; a study of ills of a particular time and place and so on. In a sense, the theme has to do with the subject of a discourse, the category of piece of writing or artistic work (film inclusive) based on form, style or subject matter. It is probably in this sense that Haynes (2006:511) identified three categories in his political critique of Nigerian video films, which include the hardy genre of films about traditional rulership; the crime thriller, with several variants; and family melodrama, which tends to infiltrate all other genres. Emasealu (2008:149), with concrete examples, also identified some genres in Nollywood to include epic movies, ritual films, romance genre, political movies, religious films and socially responsible, behaviour and attitude modification films. In fact, there is no end to the list of themes that can exist, but what is paramount is that the story must state its theme(s) within its chosen genre and all events in it, must organically relate to the script, which stems from society. However, as earlier stated, we are more concerned with the classification of indigenous video films along the lines of themes/subject matter they treat. Specifically, the paper strives to classify Benin video dramas, with a view to noting some areas of weaknesses and strengths as well making suggestions for

further improvement in the growing stratum of Nollywood.

### **A Survey of the Taxonomy of Benin Video Film**

One distinctive character of the popular Nigerian video film culture as Haynes notes is the “mass of narrative energy” (2000). This is a direct pointer to the fact that Nigerian video dramas boast of enormous thematic concerns which are all often suffused in one film usually in parts 1, 2 and 3 and so on. In classifying the Benin film genre, we shall draw on Ekwuazi’s (2003:44) classification of Nigerian video films, with slight modifications to reflect the Benin social cultural milieu. Exploring their content and subject matter, Ekwuazi identifies four dominant categories in the Nigerian video film industry. These are: Epic, Comic, Rags to Riches and Pentecostalism. Based on the foregoing, Benin video film may be classified according to the following themes/leitmotifs which they reflect as a teeming stratum of the Nigerian video film: Epic/Historical/Folkloric films; Comic/Hilarious films; Rags to Riches/Materialistic/ Social commentary films; Pentecostalism/Christian films and Musical video dramas. This section would continue in its discussion by examining these different categories of the Benin video films. Besides, emphasis will be placed on the events and activities that the films deal with since the classification will be determined by the content or subject matter which the Benin films deal with.

#### **Epic/Historical/Folkloric Films**

This category of Benin films deal essentially with the history of the Benin from different prisms. While a majority attempt to recapture, in filmic form, the heroic feats and activities of past Obas in Benin Kingdom, others dwell on the activities of great medicine men and women whose legendary feats have remained extant in the rich Benin adages, proverbs and folktales. For instance, *Ikoka* (2003), a three part epic tragedy, explores the crisis that engulfed Benin kingdom some three hundred years ago. Set in the 18th century Benin kingdom, the film relates the story of Oba Ewuakpe whose reign was synonymous with terror as he rules with high handedness. The people reject him and the kingdom falls into deep crisis. But peace returns when the Oba’s wife, Queen Iden gives herself as sacrifice to save her husband and her people from perdition and ruination. This singular act earned her the title “*Iden no mio vban fan*” meaning,

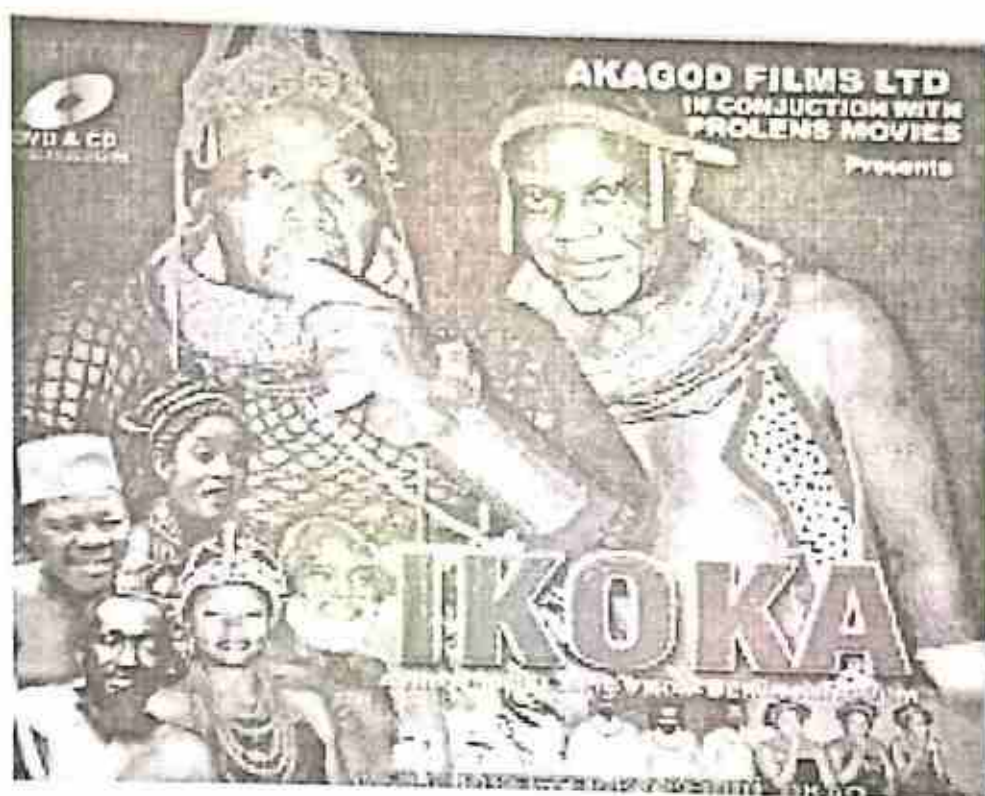
Iden the saviour (Omoregie, 2009).

In *Eyowo* (2003), another epic/historical film, Eyowo, the favourite wife of Nekhighide, the warrior betrays her husband to maintain the invincibility of Oba Ozolua. Similarly, the movie, *Ebomisi 1 & 2* (2003) recapitulates the titanic clashes among some great medicine men in Benin history. Of particular interest is the haughty and boastful Ebomisi who is egregiously known for challenging his fellow medicine men to duels, which he always wins. But Obonayen, another medicine man of tremendous renown, as a way of helping the Oba check the excesses of overbearing citizens, puts a stop to Ebomisi's act of terrorism by neutralizing his charms. Today, the tale is one of the adages in Benin folklore and family circles.

*Okpaniya* (2006) is yet another video drama which explores the rich folkloric tradition of the Benin people. It tells of a woman, Imahe who has become a laughing stock of her community because of her inability to bear her husband, Edeigbe, a child. But nature smiles on her one day on her way to the farm when she stumbles on a broken calabash. The broken calabash anthropomorphically acquires human qualities and promises to turn to a child for her to bear on the condition that no one calls him a broken calabash. On getting home, she relates the strange but interesting encounter to her husband, not knowing that their evilly rude houseboy/adopted son, Oteghyekpen eavesdropped on them. After some time she gets pregnant to the amazement of her mockers and in due cause puts to bed a bouncing baby boy who they named Emieukpomoyako. About seven years later, Oteghyekpen out of envy spoils the fun and joy of the family when he calls his younger brother, "Broken calabash". This makes Emieukpomoyako to vanish into the thin air to the regret and pain of the parents.

Other films in this category are *Emotan 1&2* (2003), *Ekuase* (2004), *Imaguero* (2004), *Adesuwa* (2005), *Uru N'eronmwon* (2005), *Agbono Ma Uwangue* (2006), *Akuobisi* (2006), *Avanukhun* (2007) and many others. These films tell of great betrayals, heroic feats and the enduring spirit exhibited by the past Obas and other men and women of prominence as well as the lowly persons in the Benin of yore. These films rely heavily on Benin orature for their subject matter. These traditional stories could be actual events, myths,

legends or folktales but what is unmistakable is that they are always rooted in some distant idyllic Benin world which interestingly still commands respect and acceptance in the land today. Besides, the films draw from the existing Benin theatre culture which is steeped and deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of the Benin race.



*The Sleeve of Benin Epic Video Film, Ikoka, Photo Credit: Prolens Movies Limited*

### **Comic/Hilarious Films**

This category of Benin video dramas deliberately explores buffoonery, light-hearted issues and sometimes, a series of mistaken identities which ultimately elicit rib-wracking laughter from the audience. *Atete* (2001) emblematises a classical example of Benin films that belong here. In the gripping movie, a mischievous son of a native doctor, Ebose/ Brother Osagie gets commissioned by a parent church to go to their rural branch and assist another pastor in the work of evangelism. He gets there and begins to perform fake miracles, with the intent of collecting the villagers' money and sleeping with their beautiful daughters. When he eventually impregnates a number of the girls he begins to speak in "tongues" that they should rejoice as it is a sign of the Holy Ghost's visitation.

Though he tries to escape justice, he inadvertently runs into the hands of security operatives who are invited by the village elders.

Another side-splitting example in this category is *Olakpa* (2003). The video drama tells of the antics of two charlatans, Ecaptain and Eteacher who hoodwink and frisk certain villagers of their hard-earned money in the name of bringing enlightenment to their village and providing security for their lives and properties. Not knowing that one of their sons, Imafidon, a notorious con man who has just been banished from the village is behind the scheme, the villagers buy into the idea. Luck runs out on the impostors when police officers from the city storm the village as part of their routine security check of rural settings.

A similar scenario plays out in *Ozeba 2* (2006) which comically satirizes the trite and clichéd preachment of some religious leaders (Christian leaders) that “unless one gives whatever one has God will not bless one”. Ehigiator, a coffin maker, not wanting to miss out on this “blessing” and having nothing to offer “God”, brings the best of his products to Reverend, Professor, Pastor, Toni Morrison in an “Holy Ghost” convention and insists he must carry it. This sparks off a disruption which leads to unbelievable revelations that tears apart the gathering of some religious faithful. This segues in with the story of the greedy couple, Mr & Mrs Oregie who now run from pillar to post to get delivered from the taunting of some elves. The source of their problem lies with the wife who steals a bag of goods in the market only to get home to realise that it contains two elves that have now made life unbearable for the Oregies. The above stories continuously weave in and out of other comically laced plots in the film narrative. (The researcher participated in the making of this movie). Other films in the comic/hilarious mode are *G.S.M Oghisoegbe* (1999) *Esogia Nobavbaro* (1999), *Ozeba 1* (2001), *Esergent Efosa* (2002), *Iku-vbogie* (2003), *Iyelekute* (2005), “*E*” *Papa Guy* (2006), *Oletuketuke* (2006), *Ebvare-E-Mwuikpo* (2008), *Ekusu-Ekpo* (2008), *Okpia Nebuebu* (2009), to mention a few.

### **Rags to Riches/Materialistic/Social Commentary Films**

This typology designates those films that explore contemporary, burning issues of the day as they affect Benin land in particular

and Nigeria in general. The films attempt to capture, in the form of film narratives, the economic, social as well as human challenges the Benins have contended with or are still contending with. Such problems as the shameful exodus of their youths to foreign lands in search of greener pastures, the frequent sale of family houses and the utter desecration of family values by both the male and female folks, the celebration of ill-gotten wealth, regardless whether from kidnapping, prostitution, cybercrime, armed robbery or other dishonourable means. The list is endless and invariably collectively points to a larger spectrum of problems besetting the Nigerian state. Ugor (2004:75) while examining the same matter, albeit in a slightly different context, observes that Nigeria as a nation has not recovered completely from the backlash of the economic depression which peaked in the 1980s and the woes that came with the institutionalization of military rule for over two decades and half. In spite of the enthronement of democracy, which brought with it greater freedom for citizenry and benign atmosphere for foreign investments, the nation is still under the yoke of weighty economic problems – unemployment, irregular wages, high poverty and general low standard of living. Thus, it is not far to seek when one argues that the Benin land scenario is a compelling micro assessment of the larger Nigerian situation, where there has been a meteoric rise in social crimes which are traceable to the people's desperation for survival and upward mobility in the social ladder.

Consequently, Benin video dramas have assumed the place of a metaphoric medium through which a myriad of social pulses of the Benins (Nigerians) are gauged. This is probably the point Okome (1998:41) made when he asserted that the city discusses itself through the video films. It is through the video dramas that the moral sense left in the "city" attempts to negotiate the vortexes of everyday Benin (Nigerian) life. Ugor (2004:75) further underscores the point being made when he contends that it is through the popular video art that the most bizarre and unimaginable activities of "city" dwellers in their quest for wealth are captured. A riveting home movie in this category is *Namugba* (2001). The video drama explores the craze to travel abroad which tugs at the heart of virtually every Benin youth. The bug catches Osaro, a bullyboy who is notorious for maiming a secondary school mate over his girlfriend, Osamede

whom he puts in the family way. This reprehensible act earns both of them expulsion from the school. Along the line, Osaro convinces Osamede to trade off her inheritance to ferry himself abroad. They both seal this plan by taking a love oath. After Osaro's departure, Osamede goes through a series of humiliating ordeals in hands of her aunty and supposed "in laws", but she hopes that all the pains would fade away when her lover comes to town with the "Golden fleece". Though Osaro makes it back to Benin City, his ugly past like a ghost bent on revenge, now haunts him everywhere he goes and Osamede is sorrier for it.

The issue of marital irresponsibility and inchoate social club activities among some Benin women take the front burner in *Ikuemitin 1&2* (2007). The film lets us into the precarious world of some society women – "Agbawu Sisters", who will do next to nothing to win the acclaim of their ostentatious peers. On one level, the ring leaders like Mama Yuppy and Iyima encourage and sometimes coerce floor members like Uwaila, Eniye, Itohan, Ivie and other "sisters" to involve in dubious acts such as flouting the orders of their husbands/fiancés, sleeping with Chief and attacking other women who refuse to belong to the Agbawu sisters' fold. On another level, some of them organize and sponsor robbery gangs who unleash terror on the city from time to time. Matters come to a head when Mama Yuppy and Iyima begin to scheme and flex muscles on who to become the Chairlady of the International Agbawu sisters' club, to be installed at the next reunion party where other sisters from Europe and America will be in attendance. After arresting some armed robbers, the police get them talking. This eventually leads to the arrest of Mama Yuppy at the reunion grounds. Other members of Agbawu sisters club and their invited guests scamper for safety and the guilty and culpable face the music of their indiscretions.

*Egiemwen 1&2* (2008) relates to us the story of a young man, Utomwen, who returns from London to inherit the Enogie's seat being the heir apparent to the throne. After his enthronement, he flouts time tested ordinances in his dukedom to the chagrin of the Queen Mother, Ivie and palace chiefs. He colludes with his fiancée, Cynthia to sell palace artefacts and plunges himself into the use of hard drugs. He insults the sensibilities of his subjects by calling them primitive and uncivilized people. The Queen mother, his mother is

worried sick when he refuses to make necessary sacrifices for the peace of the land as directed by the palace priest. Ivie's fears manifest in the physical as thunder strikes to slay Utomwen's fiancée, Cynthia and paralyzes her son. But harmony returns to the land with the effort of the palace chiefs in concert with the Queen Mother and the priest who restore Utomwen back to normalcy with a vow never to defy the customs and traditions of his people again. In the same breath, we see in *Oto-ere* (2005) the wielding of awesome power by JC Jungle and his ilk in *Udazi* (2005) and *Omwengho* (2008) as they forcefully annex other men's land, wives and other valuables with fierce brutality. The trend in these movies hark back to some recent events associated with some rascally fellows (some now dead) in Benin City who let loose fright and panic on the citizenry to oil their devilish ego. In the end, JC Jungle and his ilk meet their Waterloo as appropriate retributions are meted out on them. Other video dramas cast in the rags to riches/materialistic/ social commentary mode are *Uyinmwun 1, 2 & 3* (2006), *Agbawu* (2007), *Yasin 1, 2&3* (2008), *Olidara* (2008), *Ebuwa 1&2* (2009) among many others.

### **Pentecostalism/Christian Films**

The films that belong here derive their meaning, significance and taxonomy from the thoughts and ideas embedded in them. These films linguistically indigenize the bible and Christian doctrines to entertain and evangelize the people of Benin. One could recall that the Benins have had international relations/productive contacts with the Europeans and the Christian gospel as early as the fifteenth century. Lawal-Osula (2005:2) asserts that early accounts by Europeans and Arab travellers report that Portugal's first contact with Benin revealed that the people were highly cultured and dignified and that their city was well planned with wide roads and elaborately designed home; their system of monarchical rule signified an ancient civilization spanning 2000 years. By the early fifteenth century, the King of Portugal and the Emperor of Benin were exchanging diplomatic envoys. Benin Princes and envoys enjoyed the hospitality of the royal courts in Lisbon and Portuguese envoys, agents and priests were royally welcome in the city of Benin.

Lawal-Osula (2005:2) further notes that at the peak of this diplomatic relations, Portugal established a church in Benin City,

the first of its kind in Africa south of the Sahara and till today, some vestiges of it are etched in the Holy Aruosa Church in Akpakpava street in Benin City. With the advent of modernity and what Omoregie (2003:3) calls the activities of house-of-God monarchs such as Revd James Johnson, Revd Benson Idahosa, Evangelist Samuel Ogbomwan, among others, in Benin, the Christian gospel spread through the land. These men of God deployed mobile cinemas, loudspeakers, television and other forms of media production including video dramas to propagate the good news. By late 1990s videographers/filmmakers, including those with Christian background and hard-nosed businessmen, started to explore Christian themes in their creative works and today a good number of video films of Benin language expression explore bible themes for evangelization, entertainment, education and sundry purposes. Some popular movies in this mode are *Erhun Avan* (2002), *Etinosa* (2004), *Osaibueku* (2005), *Udazi* (2005), *Pastor Igbinosun* (2008) and many others.

### **Musical Video Films**

This is probably the trendiest of the categories of Benin video film which this paper identifies. Movies in this class combine operatic characteristics of music traditions of old with popular Benin dances like "Asagbaide", "Ukho", among others, and give them dramatic twists against contemporary discourses in Benin land. For example, *Wagie Emwenma Gha Yeman's* (2008) preachment, in the main, calls for a rallying of the Benin people for the advancement of the race in an increasingly competitive world. It is an extraordinary commentary on the need for the Benins to close ranks regardless of class, economic power, political and religious orientations or intellectual endowments in advancing the cause of Edo (Benin) nation thereby taking the Benin culture to what Aimiuwu (2007:) calls the next level of civilization where the people will realise their dreams and aspirations. Similarly, *Ozedu* (2009) captures the feud that normally erupts between wives in the traditional Benin man's house using musical drama while *Efe Baba* (2009) musically satirises the disgusting attitude of most Benin sons who wait for the death of their parents so that they will inherit landed properties. Accordingly, most first sons in Benin are now euphemistically called

landlord-in- waiting. *Obugie Oba Erediauwa* (2009) *Are Wiri* (2010) and *Ukhu- Edo* (2010), among others, belong here. There could be more in the taxonomic study of Benin movies but it suffices that the foregoing are the ones that have been identified so far in the evolutionary process which the Benin video film is still undergoing.

### **Further Discussion/Concluding Remarks**

A careful look at the foregoing taxonomic analysis of Benin video drama will show that many of the movies overlap in terms of thematic categorizations/concerns. For example, *Atete* (2001) and *Erhun Avan* (2002) are both hilarious and at the same time preaching Christian virtues in form and content. Another instance could be found in *Efe Baba* (2009), *Are Wiri* (2010) and *Ukhu- Edo* (2010) which are all musical video films with a considerable proclivity for the exploration of rags to riches/materialistic/social issues of the day in Edo land and the wider world. Another interesting trend is the increasing use of cross-over artistes in Benin movies. Prominent actors/actresses in English Nollywood like Sam Loco Efe, Justus Esiri, Hanks Anuku, Nosa Obaseki, Jim Iyk, Olu Jacob and many other stars have featured in Benin movies such as *Ikoka*, *Anini* and others. This tendency needs to be further explored to give visibility to Benin movies outside Benin precincts.

Another trajectory is found in some others like *Udazi* (2005), *Uru N'eronmwon* (2005) and *Okpaniya* (2006) that have anthropomorphic propensities which are ostensibly fetched from the rich folklore tradition of the Benins. By anthropomorphic propensities we mean certain tendencies which allow the ascription of human characteristics to what is not human. In this regard, Aluede (2005:158) observes that anthropomorphism is common in African societies because of their diversities in language spoken, music and dance performances. He further argues that the showing or treating of animals, gods and objects as if they are human in appearance, character and behaviours is endemic in African musical and dramatic aesthetics.

These above attributes, among other aesthetic peculiarities and qualities, are amply exhibited and portrayed in Benin movies and should be further explored to reinforce their relevance as visual cultural products which are capable of add up to what Ekwuazi

(2000:15) avidly refers to as “a visual cultural encyclopaedia”. Benin video films also provide vital links and insights into the cosmology and worldview of the Benin people. This is made stronger by Benin videographers’ increasing reliance on Benin repertory of music, history, imagery, dances, proverbs, anecdotes and maxims, especially as they pertain to the Oba who embodies the customs and traditions of the race. This is steadily carving a niche for Benin movies in the pantheon of indigenous films in Nigeria. It is probably this thinking that emboldened Omoera (2008:247) to assert that Beninwood following the tradition of “wood-ism”, is gradually assuming an emphatic position in the dramatic experience of Nigerians, Africans and the diasporic blacks.

A further review and analysis of the content of most of the Benin video films leave much to be desired in terms of filmic finesse, verisimilitude and messaging. This is glaringly seen in most of the works which are subtitled in English. Grammatical tenses, collocations, intensifiers, idioms, to mention a few, are sloppily used and, of course, could easily put off the non Benin speaking viewer as well as the English language savvy Benin who may want to rely on the English subtitle to move along with the details of the moving pictures. A random assessment of over 200 movies of Benin expression indicates that a majority of the films appear to be hurriedly put together. Besides, the mise en scene (costume and make up, setting, props and the whole lot that appear in the video frame) are sometimes misapplied, underutilized or too meretricious to be taken seriously within the visual context it ought to help the viewers grasp.

The sound/audio quality of most of the surveyed movies is another sore point. One suspects that the varying volumes of the audio quality of these movies could get the audience hysterical because most of the actor’s/actress’ actions tend to be stagy and due to poor technical know-how the film editors’ input leave a sour taste in one’s mouth. In *Atakparakpa* (2005), *Agbono ma Uwangu* (2006), *Uyinmwon 1, 2 & 3* (2006) and many others, instances where the sound is not in sync with the pictures are rife and this could have been taken care of if only the Benin videographers paid attention to details in the course of producing their movies.

In summation, we believe, Benin video film could move into the

next level of its success if the necessary capital investments and infrastructural support are granted it. Therefore, well meaning business men and women should invest in the sub-sector to scale up investment opportunities, utilization of digital technologies supported by the necessary infrastructure and enabling environment provided by the government of the day. Moreover, the paper being part of an ongoing doctoral thesis is also bound to have other implications such as the encouragement of researches along the lines of classificatory modes in the diverse indigenous movies in Nigeria, especially among the new frontiers such as the Efik, Nupe, Itsekiri, Ibibio, Urhobo movies as well as stimulate further scholarly interest in the promising Benin video drama sub-sector of Nollywood.

## Works Cited

- Aimiuwu, L.E. 2007. Benin culture: towards the next level. *A compendium of Speeches/lectures at the symposium on Igue festival: the religious and socio-cultural relevance in modern society*. Benin City: Benin Traditional Dance Foundation. 4-7.
- Aluede, C.O. 2006. The anthropomorphic attributes of African musical instruments: history and use in Esan, Nigeria. *Anthropologist* 8.3: 157-160.
- Anunike, O.W. 2009. Nollywood stories, synopsis and themes: implications for national re-branding. *AMA: Journal of Theatre and Cultural Studies* 4.1: 167-179.
- Bamidele, L. 2008. The necessity of film. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship (Special Edition – Motion Picture in Nigeria)* 3-5: 126-132.
- Bobker, L.R. 1969. *Elements of film*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc.
- Ekwuazi, H. 2000. Film industry and African cultural heritage. *Daily Times*. November 8, 2000:15.
2003. The Nigerian motion picture industry: the inmates are about to take over the asylum. *2<sup>nd</sup> National Film Festival programme of Events*. Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation. 43-49.
2008. Nollywood: history as economic determinism or as an accident in evolutionary trends/creative process. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship (Special Edition – Motion Picture in Nigeria)* 3-5: 135-142.

- Emasealu, E.C. 2008. The audience factor in Nollywood. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship (Special Edition – Motion Picture in Nigeria)* 3-5: 143-152.
- Haynes, J. 2000. Introduction. *Nigerian video films*. Revised and expanded edition. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies. 1-36.
2006. Political critique in Nigerian video films. *African Affairs* 105.421: 511-533.
2007. 'Nollywood': what's in a name? *Film International* 5.4: 106-108.
- Higson, A. 2000. The limiting imagination of national cinema. *Cinema and nation*. Eds. M.
- Hjort and S. Mackenzie. London: Routledge. 63-74.
- Hjort, M. and Petrie, D. 2007. Introduction. *The cinema of small nations*. Eds. M. Hjort and
- D. Petrie. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd. 1-19.
- James, A. 2001. Production value versus audience/social mores. *Making the transition from video to celluloid*. Eds. H. Ekwuazi, M. Sokomba and O. Mgbejume. Jos: National Film Institute. 237- 256.
- Lawal-Osula, O.S.B. 2005. *Edo-Benin grassroots voice*. Benin City: Arala Osula Press.
- McCall, J.C. 2007. The pan-africanism we have: Nollywood's invention of Africa. *Film International* 5.4: 92-97.
- Mgbejume, O. 1985. The techniques of video tape recording. Jos: University Press Limited
- Nwadiigwe, C. E. 2009. Superfluity in visual design: a technical evaluation of special effects in selected Nigerian video-films. *AMA: Journal of Theatre and Cultural Studies* 4.1: 97-114.
- Ojo-Rasaki, B. 2001. Character of the Nigerian film. *The Guardian*. September 27, 2001:32.
- Okome, O. 1998. The treatment of social change in *Living in Bondage II* and *II*. *Ndunode: Calabar Journal of the Humanities* 2.2: 38-46.
2008. Film theory and criticism: from world cinema to the Nigerian cinema. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship (Special Edition – Motion Picture in Nigeria)* 3-5: 64-79.
- Omoera, O.S. 2008. Benin visual literature and the frontiers of Nollywood. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship (Special Edition – Motion Picture in Nigeria)* 3-5: 234-248.
- Omoregie, O.S.B. 2003. Benson Idahosa as the climax of house-of-God monarchy in Benin history. *International Society for the Promotion of*

*Ubiniology Newsletter* 1.3:1-4.

2009. Personal communication on issues of Benin history and significance in the emerging video film industry at OSBO University centre, Benin City, December 12, 2009.

Owens-Ibie, N.1998. How video films developed in Nigeria. Retrieved Feb. 9, 2009, from <http://www.archive/mediadevelopment/setprint/contentviewfull/africa.html>

Uchenunu, A.O. The decline of cinema in Nigeria. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship (Special Edition – Motion Picture in Nigeria)* 3-5: 26-43.

Ugor, P.2004. Folklore, history, identity, and social critique: classifying popular indigenous Igbo video films. *Theatre Studies Review* 4.1: 64-78.

Uka, K. 2009. Pathways in Nigerian theatre: reflections on the international theatre day. *AMA: Journal of Theatre and Cultural Studies* 4.1: 1-11.

UNESCO Institute of Statistics. 2010. Analysis of the UIS international survey of feature film statistics: **Nollywood rivals Bollywood in film/video production**. Retrieved April 13, 2010, from [http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=7651\\_201&ID2=DO\\_TOPICIS](http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=7651_201&ID2=DO_TOPICIS) International Survey on Feature Film Statistics of the UIS International on Feat.