PENTECOSTALISM AND EDO LANGUAGE VIDEO FILMS IN NIGERIA

BY

EDORODION AGBON OSA

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Department of African Studies and Anthropology
School of History and Cultures
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian video film industry, commonly known as Nollywood, has come a long way since its rise in the late twentieth century. Since then, the industry has grown to become one of the major sources of engagement with the Nigerian and the Nigerian diasporic ways of life. At the core of this engagement with the life world of its audience members is their religious life. While many religious organisations in Nigeria have seized the wide acceptance of Nollywood to project themselves and to assemble specific audiences, the dominant religious theme of the video film industry is the spiritual battle between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. This is especially obvious in the English language Nigerian religious video films. In academic studies of the portrayal of these two religions, many scholars highlight that post-colonial English language Nigerian religious video filmmakers grant preference to Pentecostal Christianity.

This thesis examines the representation of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in Edo language video films, which are part of the Nigerian video film industry. It focuses on a specific genre of Edo language video films that portray the tension between Pentecostalism and indigenous religion. In this dissertation, African traditional religion is used interchangeably with and to reflect Edo traditional religion, which is part of the local discourses that draw on a diverse range of practices that are dynamic and subject to innovations over time. Also, English language video filmmakers references post-colonial film producers. In addition to secondary sources, the study spans two years of familiarisation with the fieldwork site between 2015 and 2017 and a seven-month extensive engagement with the research participants from June 2018 to January 2019. The thesis adopts a qualitative and ethnographic approach based on participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and textual analysis. It also uses the quantitative method of questionnaires to retrieve data from a segment of the participants.

The thesis argues that unlike English language Nigerian video film producers, Edo language video filmmakers do not privilege Pentecostal Christianity or African traditional religion in their films. Rather than typecast one religion as good and the other as evil, Edo language video filmmakers use the values of the two religions, which they see as similar, to promote the moral and ethical wellbeing of Edo citizens and Benin society. Beyond this, the filmmakers use their films to project a pan-Edo ethnic identity that recreates the historical Benin Kingdom in the twenty-first century. They do this by drawing on the values of Pentecostalism, traditional religion, the institution of the Oba of Benin, the language, royalty more generally, and the historical and traditional figures and sites in and around Benin. As many filmmakers believe that Edo people are excluded from participating in the centre stage of Nigeria's economic, political and social life because of their population size, they deploy their films to create a visible socio-political and cultural space for Edo people in a multi-ethnic Nigerian nation, and to promote a strong pan-Edo sense of unity amongst the people who trace their origin to the ancient Benin Kingdom in the diaspora.

By arguing that Edo language video filmmakers adopt a 'neutral' attitude to the portrayal of religion, the study challenges the notion that African film producers prioritise Pentecostal Christianity over traditional religion. It suggests that a new approach should be embraced, which takes into account the highly specific locales in which indigenous African language video filmmakers operate. It also calls for the expansion of on-going debates about ethnicity and cultural nationalism that gives due attention to video and film more generally. The thesis suggests that future research should focus on the portrayal of religion in other parts of Nigeria and Africa to see if they resonate with the findings of this study. This is especially so given that Edo language video film audience members believe that even in the 'neutral' portrayal of religion in Edo language films, African traditional religion enjoys a more positive representation.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my parents, Chief David Agbonranruekhu Osa and Mrs Grace Isere Osa.

You planted the seed but never saw it to fruition.

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ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

AG – Action Group

AMRP – African Music Research Party

ATR – African Traditional Religion

BCO – British Colonial Office

BECE – Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment

BTC – Benin Traditional Council

BTV – Bendel Television

CDA – Community Development Association

CDF – Colonial Development Fund

CECF – Commission on Educational and Cultural Films

CFC – Colonial Films Committee

CFU – Colonial Film Unit

DGN – Directors Guild of Nigeria

DVD – Digital Video Disc

EBSTV – Edo Broadcasting Service Television

EFPDA – Edo Film Producers and Distributors Association

FFU – Federal Film Unit

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

IFRA – French Institute of Research in Africa

IMF – International Monetary Fund

NBC – National Broadcasting Commission

NCNC – National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons

NDLEA – National Drug Law Enforcement Agency

NFVCB – Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board

NITDA - National Information Technology Development Agency

NPC – National Population Commission

NPE – National Policy on Education

NPF – Nigerian Police Force

NTA – Nigerian Television Authority

NYSC – National Youth Service Corp

RCCG – Redeemed Christian Church of God

SAP – Structural Adjustment Programme

UK – United Kingdom

UNESCO – United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation

USA – United States of America

VCD – Video Compact Disc

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Background to the Study

This dissertation explores Edo filmmakers' portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity and Edo traditional religion in the Edo language video films produced as part of the Nigerian video film industry, often described as Nollywood. It particularly concentrates on those Edo language video films that depict the conflict between the two religions. It needs to be noted that Pentecostalism is diverse, as is Edo traditional religion. However, the phrases Pentecostal Christianity and Edo traditional religion are used as local expressions within Edo communities in Edo State and beyond in its diasporas and therefore the local terms will be used throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, Edo traditional religion (sometimes described as African traditional religion or African science) has dynamic and oftentimes innovative trajectories to the present day. Since the advent of colonialism, it has had dialectical relations with the various forms of Christianity (Gore 2007, 2008).

Unlike many English language Nigerian video films, which highlight the conflict between traditional religion and Christianity, Edo language video films often portray the religions as compatible in the sense that both can be associated with positive moral values. Considering the religious messages and content of Edo language films in the wider context of Benin social and political life, the dissertation explores the relationship between the films and the contemporary Benin religious ecology, including the institution of the Oba of Benin. It argues that the films play an important role in Edo cultural self-assertion in the Nigerian and global contexts. However, the religious views of the filmmakers, and the views of the different audiences of Edo language video films, suggest that the

celebration of Edo values takes place in a contested debate. While most viewers of these films appreciate the representation of both religions as valuable, this is criticised by both the committed traditionalists and the Pentecostal pastors. The thesis also illustrates that notwithstanding English language Nollywood religious video films' simple approach, right from the late colonial period, varying differences have always marked the spectatorship of film in Nigeria.

The rise of video film as a form of cultural and artistic expression of the Nigerian way of life often in very local terms from the late twentieth century onward, and its appropriation by Pentecostal communities as a potent means of proselytisation, has attracted the interests of anthropologists, religious, media, and film scholars (Marshall-Fratani 1998, Hackett 1998, Pype 2012, Manieson 2014, Mitchell 2018). Many of these scholars situate the discourse of African religious video films in a narrative on African traditional religion and culture that emphasises the colonial experience. Douglas Thomas (2005: 43-82) argues that on arrival in Africa, Christian missionaries embarked on a mission of denigrating African traditional religion and culture to valorise the European way of life and to subjugate Africans so that they would appreciate the 'civilising mission' of colonialism. Even though missionaries often appropriated the local names of the African traditional religious Supreme Being as the name of the Christian God wherever they went, altogether, they treated African traditional religion and culture as 'non-reality'; i.e. as a belief system that has no cultural value (Babalola, cited in Thomas 2005: 43). Thomas further argues that unfortunately, many educated African Christians have also adopted this colonial approach to African traditional religion and culture.

Pentecostal Christianity built on the foundations laid by both colonial and generations of African missionaries when it took root on the continent in the late twentieth century (Meyer 1998, 2004, 2005, Magbadelo 2004, Pype 2012, Mitchell 2018). Pentecostal Christian leaders took traditional religious practices more seriously than many mission and older independent churches. However, they represented them as evil, and they began to emphasise that Pentecostalism could offer African traditional religious worshippers a better life based on a

break with the past. This narrative also dominates African religious video films in English (Ukah 2003, Meyer 1998, 2004, 2005). Focusing on Francophone film in Kinshasa, Katrien Pype (2012: 27-61) argues that Pentecostal leaders in Kinshasa appropriated the production of African religious video films to proselytise and to stigmatise African tradition, culture and religion as demonic and savage. She describes Kinshasa Pentecostal leaders' mediated understanding of African society as '(Re-)Presenting Apocalypse' (Pype 2012: 57). Although Pype's work addresses a French language teleserial, it however resonates with the discourse of English language video films because of the teleserial's diabolisation of African indigenous religion.

As Carmen McCain (2013) argues, the study of video film production in Africa needs to be expanded beyond the realm of films in English and other colonial languages. This thesis illustrates that unlike video films produced in foreign or colonial inherited languages, which some scholars have noted are often oriented towards commercial consumption across cultural boundaries (Ukah 2003: 222-8, 2012: 210, Meyer 2005: 163), video films produced in African languages are tied to the sociocultural, religious, and sometimes the economic and political trajectories of very particular communities. Therefore, to fully grasp the representation of religion in African video films, it is necessary that academic discourses should distinguish between African video films produced in English or any other colonial inherited language and those produced in African indigenous languages. Scholarship needs to engage closely with films in multiple African languages in order to understand their diversity and range.

By studying Edo language video films, this thesis argues that rather than the current understanding, which often discusses African religious films as an area of homogeneous cultural production; African religious video films should be seen as a diverse cultural industry. By highlighting the difference between African language religious video film and its English or any other colonial inherited language counterpart, the dissertation shows that Edo language video films are not just part of a generalised African or Nigerian debate on Pentecostal Christianity, but that they are also embedded in the highly specific social,

cultural, and political concerns of Benin society. The study also engages with and expands the discourse of Pentecostalism and traditional religion in African video films. Edo language video film producers confirm that video film's engagement with religious values is not one-dimensional; there is more than one way in which African language video filmmakers depict the values of different religions. For Edo language video filmmakers, religious values transcend the Pentecostal assessment of Christianity as good and traditional religion as evil because both religions can be catalysts for the ethical development of Benin society. Given Edo language filmmakers' disposition towards the doctrines of Pentecostalism and traditional religion, this thesis calls for an evaluation of the paradigm of the discourse of African religious video films. The expanded paradigm should take into account the roles religions play in the lives of the people from which the films originate.

Also addressed in the thesis is the debate about cultural nationalist self-assertion by African ethnic groups. The mobilisation of religion by Edo language video filmmakers in the current project of Edo self-assertion echoes the wider studies of popularly consumed media in the construction of ethnic and cultural nationalism (Waterman 1990, Peterson 2012, Apter 2013). Considerable attention has been given to the centrality of mass mediated technology in the process of ethnic nationalism and cultural self-assertion. Benedict Anderson (2016) underscores the importance of the advent of printing technology and the mass production of books, newspapers, and other forms of printed materials to the formation of 'imagined communities' in early modern Europe and beyond. Waterman (1990: 370), in his analysis of the role of popular music in pan-Yoruba ethnic celebration, also alludes to the earlier relevance of the printing press to that cause.[1] This dissertation contributes to such debates by highlighting the role played by the mass mediated technology of film and video. By focusing on Edo language video films, it demonstrates that video or film can also be mobilised in the same way as printing technology and religion in the formation

[1] It is noteworthy that in fact Waterman was referring to *Iwe Irohin*, the first newspaper established in what is now geopolitically known as Nigeria. The establishment of this newspaper is acknowledged in Nigeria as marking the attempt to create a unified geographical and political entity.

of ethnic identity. As Edo leaders, spearheaded by the Oba, seek to assert a pan-Edo identity, they draw both on Christian and traditional values. This is reflected, and amplified, by many Edo language video films.

Several scholars have argued that Christianity is a foundational component for the emergence of ethnic and cultural nationalistic movements. For example, J. D. Y. Peel (2000) emphasises that Christianity was critical to the formation of a pan-Yoruba ethnic and cultural nationalism in the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. However, based on research in Eastern Africa, Derek Peterson (2012) has illustrated that there are also potential tensions between Christianity and ethnic nationalism. Edo language video films illustrate these tensions. While most filmmakers are Christians, and many films celebrate Christian values, the fact that these films do not denounce traditional religion means that the relationship between Edo language video films and Christianity is complex, not least because Edo language films also attract criticism from Pentecostal Christian leaders. The forms of Edo self-assertion discussed in this thesis therefore add to debates about the complex relationship between Christianity, media technology, and cultural assertion in Africa in particular, and across the world more generally. The thesis highlights both the suitability of Christian discourse for ethnic nationalism, the tension between Christianity's universal message and ethno-cultural agendas, and the place of mass mediated technology in the creation and pursuit of cultural and ethnic nationalism.

The discussion of ethnic and cultural nationalism by Edo language video filmmakers is closely associated with the current inclusion of Benin City and its associated areas linked as the core part of the pre-colonial Benin Kingdom in a multi-ethnic Nigerian nation. Many of the filmmakers believe that the people of Benin are marginalised from the socio-political and economic mainstream of Nigeria because of their population size. In conversation and debate, people often see Benin in the twenty-first century as the direct heir of the ancient Benin Kingdom, which to them occupies a pride of place in history. This dissertation highlights that Edo language video filmmakers mobilise the values of Christianity

and traditional religion to celebrate the history of their people, and to affirm their ethnic and cultural identity.

The thesis also explores how the state of a people's language becomes central to ethnic identity construction and cultural nationalism. Edo language video filmmakers perceive Edo language as being under threat from both the external factors of globalisation and migration and the internal pressure from the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Many filmmakers think that the pressure exerted on Edo language by these factors is a threat to the continued existence of Benin as an entity. At the same time, they envisage Edo speakers not just as citizens in Benin and Nigeria but also as members of a global diasporic community. The diasporic community is often seen as composed of youths who depend on film and other media for a deeper understanding of Benin history and values. In this regard, the thesis illustrates how film is used as a developmental and educational medium to guide and empower the younger generation by providing access to Benin language and culture. While the impact of the filmmakers' objective is yet unexplored among the diasporic audience, particularly the youths, the thesis shows that in Benin, the youths, and the audience more widely, encounter the language part of Edo video films in a differentiated manner. Most of them appreciate the portrayal of Edo language in its comprehensive historical Benin Kingdom's moral and cerebral splendour, but some audience members disapprove of the language being depicted in its contemporary form, which they think of as morally debasing.

1.2 Statement of Problem

As explained above, this study investigates the interface of film and religion in Edo language video films in Nigeria. The focus is on Edo language video filmmakers' representation of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. Here, on the one hand, the traditional religion of Edo people is correspondingly used with and to represent African traditional religion, it is also an aspect of local conversations that utilises a range of dynamic practices that

are liable to restructuring over time. On the other hand, Pentecostal Christianity is adopted as a term to refer to the various forms of the movement that emphasises adherents' total severance of ties with the past, and 'Christianity' more generally embraces Pentecostalism and all the other denominations present in Benin, such as Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, and even Jehovah's Witnesses. The study particularly scrutinises how the film producers reflect the conflict that arises when the doctrines of Pentecostalism and traditional religion clash in the films. Therefore, the research addresses two main questions:

- How do Edo language video filmmakers portray Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in their films?

- How does their portrayal reflect contemporary practices and debates in Benin?

As set out in greater detail in Chapter two, the desire to investigate these issues was precipitated by the developments that have taken place in the social, cultural and religious spheres of Benin from the 1980s onwards. In order to adequately address these two main questions, the following sub-questions were developed:

- What role does the position of the Oba of Benin play in the filmmakers' portrayal of religion?

- Which are the religious beliefs of the filmmakers and how do they affect the filmmakers' representation of religion?

- What are the ideas and influences behind the filmmakers' portrayal of religion in their films?

- How do Edo language film audiences perceive the portrayal of religion in Edo language video films?

- What larger issues and concerns are addressed by, and reflected in, Edo language films about religion?

1.3 Objective of the Research

As already noted, this dissertation examines Edo language video filmmakers' representation of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in their films. Emphasis is placed on how they portray the two religions when their doctrines come in conflict with each other. To achieve this purpose, in addition to studying the relevant literature and the films themselves, the thesis is based on extended empirical research with the filmmakers and their audiences from June 2018 to January 2019. This was preceded by a two-year acquaintance with the site of the study from 2015 to 2017. The religious affiliations of the filmmakers are considered as part of the investigation, as are the views of Pentecostal and traditional leaders. The study also engages with the contemporary religious landscape of Benin and important figures such as the institution of the Oba of Benin.

The thesis contends that filmmaking in Benin is also an aspect of ethnic identity construction and cultural nationalism in an ethnically plural nation. The findings challenge the existing discourse of the portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity and traditional religion in African religious video films and stimulate future research on African language video films. Such research must include the factors prevalent in different and highly particular African socio-political, economic, cultural and religious landscape. The dissertation highlights the role of mass mediated technology such as video film in the formation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism.

1.4 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies in the fact that it contributes to the research, discourse, and study of African religious video films in the following ways:

- It addresses the gap in the existing literature, which largely focuses on the study of the Nigerian video film industry as an area of homogeneous cultural production rather than as a diverse cultural industry.

- It illustrates that not all African video filmmakers demonise traditional religion at the expense of Pentecostal Christianity in their films.

- It explores the objectives and purposes of indigenous language video filmmaking in a single and culturally coherent community.

- It identifies key differences between African religious video films made in colonial inherited languages such as English and those made in indigenous African languages.

- It reflects on the role of mass mediated technology in ethnic assertion and cultural celebration.

1.5 Edo Language Video Films in Benin and Beyond

By focusing on video films made in Edo language, the dissertation engages with three distinct but interrelated areas of debate. In addition to the general literature on religion and social life in Benin and among Edo speakers, the thesis engages with debates about the relationship between Pentecostal Christianity and traditional religion in African video films, and with debates about the role of popular media and ethnic identity in Africa.

In this thesis, 'Nollywood' is used as a singular term to reference the various strands of video films produced in Nigeria. Also, the term 'Edo' or 'Edo language' refers to the people that dwell in or trace their ancestry to what is geopolitically referred to in Nigeria as Edo South Senatorial District (Omoera 2014b: 72). In some literature, the language is also referred to as 'Bini' or 'Benin' language. Edo people, who are also sometimes addressed as Benin people, speak the language of the video films in focus. They predominantly live in an area that is contiguous with the seven local administrative areas of Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Orhionmwon, Uhunmwode, Ovia South-West, and Ovia North-East Local Government Areas of Edo State in southern Nigeria.

The current population of Edo speakers in this area is estimated at about 2.6 million, which is about 57.5 per cent of the population of Edo State (National Population Commission 2016, Edo State Government 2019). Altogether, the seven local administrative areas constitute about 10, 372 square kilometres and they fall under the sphere of influence of the Oba of Benin, whose palace is situated in Benin City, the capital of Edo State and the seat of the ancient Benin Kingdom (Gore 2007: 26). The Oba is the spiritual, religious, cultural and traditional head and leader of Edo people and he symbolises their ethnicity (Kaplan 2003: 194-8). He is at the centre of an intricate traditional system of government, where he and the people of Benin Kingdom have been in a close relationship since at least the fifteenth century (Gore 2007: 26).

The traditional system of governance is organised in such a way that power flows from the palace of the Oba through the various societies within it, to the honorary and hereditary chiefs (Enigie) in the various wards and quarters in Benin, and the towns and villages in the local governments listed above, to the people of the kingdom and then back to the palace (Kaplan 2003: 194-5, Gore 2007: 28).[2] Although other religions such as Islam and 'mainline' Protestant and Catholic Christianity are practiced in Benin, African traditional religion and

[2] An *Enogie (pl. Enigie)* is a hereditary chief. *Enigie* are usually related to the throne because they are descendants of a former prince who left the court in Benin.

Pentecostal Christianity are the two prominent religions in the twenty-first century, with the latter being the most visible. A significant percentage of the people living in the northern half of Edo State, which is coterminous with the old Benin Kingdom, adhere to the Islamic faith (Oseni 1999, Egbefo 2007-2008). But the religion, although quite prominent among the 'multi-ethnic mix in Benin City', is not a prevalent religion among Edo citizens (Kaplan 2003: 192), who speak the language of the video films. Kaplan is of the view that the inability of Islam to make inroad into the core Edo speaking group that is indigenous to Benin City lies in its rejection of traditional religious practices alongside the religion (Kaplan 2003: 192-3). Also, there are other indigenously produced traditional religions that are practiced in Benin that do not necessarily fit into the Edo traditional religion captured in this thesis. Some of these religions include Reformed Ogboni Fraternity, Owegbe Society, and Aiyelala. Other foreign religions that have also found their ways to Benin in the twentieth century and beyond include the Rosicrucian Order, Hare Krishna and so on. However, the use of the term 'dominant religions' in this dissertation approximates to the ones largely followed by Edo citizens of the seven local administrative areas that directly owe their loyalty to the Oba of Benin, which are also almost exclusively featured by Edo language video filmmakers. While the Edo people of the seven local administrative areas are still officially obligated to the Oba of Benin in the twenty-first century, many traditional rulers of what is now known as Edo State trace their ancestry to the ancient Benin Kingdom, and the population speaks languages and dialects that are closely linked to and mutually intelligible with Edo language. Nonetheless, most communities across Edo State still have close connections to the court in Benin.

Despite the fact that many Edo language video films are increasingly being produced in other parts of Nigeria and in the diaspora, Benin City remains the main centre of the production of Edo language video films. The city plays host to a number of video film production outlets. While the Oba Akenzua Cultural Centre is the main point of daily convergence for most of the filmmakers, their production outlets are strategically located in the market areas of New Benin, Oba Market, Oliha Market, and Third East Circular and Upper Sokponba Road

Junction Market (Omoera 2014c: 391). The strategy to situate their production outfits in the market districts is to maximise their economic potentials and to enhance their visibility. Notable among the filmmakers' outlets in the New Benin Market district are Soul2Soul Films, Soundview Films, Supreme Movies, Steve Film Centre, Universal Film Centre, and Osagie Mega Plaza (Omoera 2014c: 391). Moonlight Video Centre, Nelson Films, Prolens Movies, and Picture Communications dominate the Oba Market district. Prominent among the Oliha Market district production houses are Triple 'O' Films, Ninety-Nine Entertainment Centre, and Ozin Oziengbe Films, while Scotland Movie Centre, Akpola Films, Rainbow Theatre, Midland Entertainment Centre, and Silver Entertainment are clearly noticeable in the Third East Circular and Upper Sokponba Road Junction Market district (Omoera 2014c: 391). Many of the Edo language film producers, particularly those who came from the stage theatre background, operate from established offices and production houses. But some of them, especially those that are focused on showcasing their works on the *You Tube* video-sharing platform, carry out post-production activities in their private residences.

The stated primary objective of Edo language video filmmakers is to project and celebrate Edo moral values, using both Pentecostalism and traditional religion. However, many filmmakers are also mindful of the economic importance of filmmaking. To get past the restriction placed on them by the relative size of Edo language film audience, and to optimise profit, many of the filmmakers engage in simultaneous productions of Edo and English language video films. Some of them also engage in other businesses or vocations alongside filmmaking. As Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, a leading Nigerian video filmmaker of Edo extraction states, the desire to keep producing Edo language video films is motivated by passion, determination to exhibit Edo ethnicity in Nigeria's socio-political arena, preserve Edo language, 'blood tie', and to give back to the community, rather than economics (Omoera 2018: 10-16). With over two hundred video film credits to his name, spanning English, Edo, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, and Urhobo languages, among others, Imasuen argues that whilst the primary responsibility of every Edo language filmmaker is to celebrate Edo ethnicity, pragmatism is a

key part of film production in Benin that keeps the filmmakers in business. Hence, they not only produce films in Edo and English languages but also engage the talent of popular English language Nollywood actors in the Eastern and Western parts of Southern Nigeria in films based on Benin narratives and moral values for purposes of visibility, access to a wider audience, and to fund the production of Edo language video films (Omoera 2018). This is especially so given that most often, the filmmakers personally fund their productions. For instance, a typical Edo language video film costs an average of N500, 000.00; that is about £1,200.00, to produce. While this budget is insufficient to execute an average English language video film (Omoera 2014c: 392), it is an enormous amount for Edo language film producers who have to recoup the money from the limited audience size. To stem the piracy of their films and to plug the possible loophole of financial leakage, the filmmakers resist renting out their films for a fee. Rather, they long charged a fairly uniform amount of N300.00 (0.75p) a copy (Omoera 2014c: 394). This price had however dropped to N200.00 (0.50p) at the time of the field study for this thesis.

Even though Benin City is the hub of Edo language video films production, the distribution of the films extends beyond the city. The films can be found in video shops in other major towns of Edo State, such as Ekiadolor, Okada, Abudu, Iguobazuwa, Ekpoma, Auchi and Igarra.[3] Edo language video films are also accessible from video shops in Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan, Kano, Port Harcourt, Akure, and other principal towns and cities in Nigeria. The bulk of the Edo language video film audience in these places are Edo emigrants who see the films as links that connect them to their ancestral home (Omoera 2014c: 392). The global diasporic Edo community is also one potent source of income for Edo language filmmakers. Some Edo language films that have been subtitled in European languages have been exhibited in cinemas across European and American cities such as London, New York, Turin, and Madrid (Omoera 2014c: 392). One such video film is *Ikoka* (Corn growers), which was produced by one of the

[3] Although the last three towns are in Edo State and trace their ancestry to the historical Benin Kingdom, indigenes of these towns do not speak the Edo language that is the focus of this thesis. However, many of the dialects they speak are intelligible to the Edo language of the video films under the focus of this study.

filmmakers that participated in this study. The film was produced in Edo and English languages and subtitled in Italian, Dutch and Spanish. Furthermore, it is also common to hear or watch trailers of newly released Edo language video films being advertised on local radio and television channels in Edo State. And finally, many filmmakers deploy transit advertisement methods, such as billboards, loudspeakers mounted on slow-moving vehicles, and loudspeakers powered by car batteries blasting from makeshift karts, to shore up the sales of their films and to promote their visibility in Benin and across Edo State.

1.6 Pentecostal Christianity and Traditional Religion in Edo Language Video Films

Many analyses of African religious video films reflect the thrust of the debate in the wider literature on Pentecostal Christianity, which emphasises the importance of distance between Christianity and African traditional religion. Birgit Meyer (1998, 2004) makes the argument that Pentecostal Christian leaders in Ghana stress the distance between the religion and the traditional religion of the people and encourage their congregants to 'make a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998: 316). She notes that this Pentecostal mantra of rupture dominates the themes of many Ghanaian and Nigerian religious video films (Meyer 2004: 100-5). Many other African religious video film scholars also share her position (Tasie 2013, Ukah 2003, 2012, Pype 2012, Mitchell 2018).

Meyer and others have mainly focused on the English language video films, which have a larger commercial appeal. Even though Meyer notes that the films convey moral lessons to the audience (Meyer 2015: 3), not all English language films focus on the wellbeing of society: for many, their emphasis is on entertainment and making profit. For example, William Akuffo, a prominent Ghanaian religious video film producer, admits to getting fed-up with 'all this Pentecostal crap', in an interview with Meyer (2005: 163, 2015: 172). Despite his disenchantment with the religion, Akuffo continues to make video films that are dominated by Pentecostal doctrines because of the guaranteed financial

reward. In fact, some of the filmmakers that have produced successful English language video films based on Pentecostal doctrines are themselves not Pentecostal Christians. One such producer is Hammond Mensah, a Ghanaian Ahmadiyya Muslim, who captures the logic that determines the themes of English language religious video films. He argues that 'if you show anything that goes against Christianity, you are doomed, people say nasty things about your film' (Meyer 2015: 172). So at least some of the English language religious video filmmakers do not convey a message that reflects their views on morality and social cohesion, but instead produce films with religious themes because they provide audience entertainment and ensure a profit.

For African language religious video filmmakers in Benin, it is an entirely different situation. The Edo language video film case suggests that African religious video films made in indigenous languages are much less influenced by the concern about entertainment values and commercial profit. One reason for this is that indigenous language Nollywood films are cultural repertoires of African values, language, and philosophy. They also convey the particularity about the cultural locales of the films. Olusegun Soetan (2018: 5) describes Nigerian video films made in indigenous languages as vehicles of political and socioeconomic expressions of their places of origin, particularly in an ethnically diverse nation as Nigeria. He emphasises that by depicting the sociocultural accoutrements of their places of domicile, indigenous language video films and their producers firmly place themselves at the heart of the social fabric of the communities they represent (Soetan 2018: 9-10).

For video film producers in Benin, making films in Edo language goes beyond entertainment and commercialism. It is more about cultural and even ethno-national celebration, and they conceive of themselves and their films as part of the contemporary sociocultural, religious, political and economic landscape. Manuel Castells (2000: 2) refers to the globalised era of the late twentieth century onward as the 'network society'. That is a period dominated and defined by a 'new communication system, increasingly speaking a universal, digital language', which is 'both integrating globally the production and distribution of

words, sounds and images of our culture, and customizing them to the tastes of the identities and moods of individuals'. He further suggests that the era is characterised by new modes of communication that are linked together by a network of computers, which are interactive in nature. These new forms of interactive computers are involved in a symbiotic relationship with the social world of the twenty-first century. According to Castells, they are 'shaping life and being shaped by life at the same time' (Castells 2000: 2).

Since the onset of the 1980s that Castells refers to as the 'network society', Pentecostal Christianity has grown alongside African traditional religion to dominate Benin religious and cultural field. Expectedly, the doctrines of the two religions feature prominently in Edo language films. The filmmakers draw on the values of Pentecostalism and traditional religion to evoke what they see as the values and morality of the ancient Benin Kingdom in the twenty-first century. Although the audience perceive traditional religion as enjoying more prominence in this regard, Edo language filmmakers do not intentionally favour or demonise any of the religious doctrines. Their impartial attitude towards the two religions is underlined by Peter Ovbiogbe, a prominent Edo language video film producer and one of the research participants, in an interview with the author. As stated in the dissertation, Ovbiogbe argues that when conceptualising religious film ideas, many Edo language filmmakers are always conscious of the shared importance and sensitivity of the two religions in Benin. As a result, and in order not to offend their audience members, they strive to reflect this in their films.

The video films illustrate most filmmakers' commitment to reflecting both Pentecostalism and traditional religion. Some Edo language video films appear to reflect the Pentecostal emphasis of the dichotomy between it and traditional religion, and the typecasting of the latter as demonic and belonging to the past. However, others seem to validate the cause of traditional religion as supreme in Benin cosmology. Between these two are the films that strongly highlight the convergence and compatibility of the two religions. Moreover, a closer reading even of apparently pro-Pentecostal films often suggests a more complex

relationship, in which both religions convey important moral and spiritual lessons. In some films, religious difference is not the main cause of conflict but the immoral or anti-social uses of spiritual power. Hence, instead of reading and drawing inferences based on the message of each single video film, an all-embracing understanding of a larger body of Edo language video films provides a better and more precise perspective on the overall mission of the filmmakers.

The representation of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion as compatible or not mutually exclusive in Edo language video films is often intentional. Since many Edo citizens identify with both religions in one way or another, Edo language video filmmakers use their films as an important vehicle for conveying the values of the two religions, which they think of as making important contributions to Benin society, and to Edo language and culture. Benin has been transformed by regional and international migration since the onset of the late twentieth century. Many Edo citizens now live outside of Benin and Nigeria. The filmmakers' emphasis on forms of morality, which they see as represented in the values of both Pentecostalism and traditional religion, is therefore part of a conscious commitment to global Edo self-assertion. As Peel argues, sometimes people appropriate the values of religions to define and identify themselves in opposition to other groups (2003: 281). Oftentimes, the connection between religion and people is sparked by marginalisation, as was the case of the Christian mission educated elite in the southwest region of Nigeria at the hands of the British colonisers (Peel 2003: 279). The Christian mission educated elite had to draw on the values of Christianity and the African tradition of the Egba, Ijebu, Ijesha and Oyo to assert a pan-Yoruba ethnicity in opposition to the colonisers. In a similar manner, Edo language video filmmakers intentionally use the values of Pentecostalism and traditional religion for Edo self-assertion in the face of contested and multi-ethnic political struggles within Nigeria.

The audience members of Edo language films generally appreciate the messages of the video films. However, a closer scrutiny of specialised audiences shows that Pentecostal pastors are often critical or reluctant to watch these films

because they disagree with the representation of the religion. In a less pronounced manner, traditional religious priests and leaders often criticise the commodification of traditional religion in Edo language video films. On their part, the general audience members appreciate the representation of both religions in the films. They are also well disposed to the portrayal of the shared values of the two religions, which the filmmakers emphasise in their films. This means that unlike the impression created by English language video films, audience members experience Edo language religious video films in differentiated ways.

The position of Edo language video filmmakers in this study suggests that mass mediated technology is as crucial as religion to the formation of cultural nationalist agendas, especially for marginalised ethnic groups. It also shows that African religious video films made in indigenous languages are an important component of the social and cultural fabric of the community. Edo language filmmakers' interest is in the appropriation of the values of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion for the overall moral wellbeing of society and not in the emplacement of good or evil in the doctrines of Pentecostalism or traditional religion.

1.7 Edo Language Video Films and Edo Self-Assertion

The relationship between Edo language video film and Edo ethnic identity offers an interesting case study in the context of contemporary debates about the relationship between religion, media, and the formation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism more generally. J.D.Y. Peel (2003) highlights the importance of religion, particularly Christianity, in the construction of a pan-Yoruba ethnic identity from the previously independent ethnic groups in the southwest region of Nigeria. It is true that Christianity essentially became the base from which the pan-Yoruba identity sprang. But equally important is the role played by mass mediated technology. Through the printing press and education, the Bible and other texts in Yoruba were widely distributed. This helped to codify the Yoruba

language and to galvanise the Egba, Ijebu, Oyo and Ijesha and other groups into a cohesive ethnic bloc. Thus while Peel's emphasis on Christianity in the formation of ethnicity and nationalism is understandable because of his professional and academic focus, mass mediated technology has equally been integral to the construction of ethnic and cultural nationalism.

Benedict Anderson (2016: 37-46) brings the role of the printing press in the formation of ethnic and cultural nationalism to the fore in his work '*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*'. Anderson argues that the printing press was central to the demise of Latin as the language of the ruling class in medieval Europe and the subsequent emergence of 'imagined communities' with awareness of nationhood. He stresses that for example, before the advent of print capitalism, there was little emphasis on the commonalities between the various European speakers of French, Spanish and English. However, the coming of the printing press changed everything. It was able to galvanise the different audiences convened by these languages into 'imagined communities' with a sense of purpose and provided a base for them to share common understanding of issues (Anderson 2016: 44).

Anderson goes on to suggest that the invention of the printing press brought permanence and fixed-ness to languages that were previously fluid and transient, and from which disparate groups were able to draw a sense of nationhood. According to him, print capitalism also resulted in the creation of 'languages-of-power'; that is dominant languages that swallowed up languages that are similar but smaller and non-codified (2016: 44-5). However, Anderson contends that the last contribution has been controversial in the history of mankind. He argues that politicians, nation-states and dominant ethnic groups have appropriated print for socio-political, cultural and economic purposes (2016: 45). This created an intimate connection between mass mediated technology and ethnic and national consciousness.

With the aid of video film, another form of mass mediated technology; Edo language filmmakers are placing themselves at the core of the formation of a

pan-Edo ethnic identity and nationalism in an era of globalisation. An early attempt was made to forge a pan-Edo ethnic identity by the ethnic minority political elite of the ancient Benin Kingdom in the Western Region of colonial Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s. While the effort resulted in the creation of the Midwest Region, which was dominated by Benin, it did not manifest into a solid ethnic entity for a number of reasons, which likely include the absence of mass mediated technology serving the cause consistently. In the twenty-first century however, Edo language video film producers are mobilising video technology to fill that void. Manuel Castells (2000: 3) also makes the point that the new dispensation of unfettered global communication flow can be disorientating for groups in the process of social and cultural transformation. Such groups tend to coalesce around ethnic, cultural and religious identities in order to find their bearings and ascribe meanings to their existence. This argument holds true for Edo speakers. Hence, the filmmakers are coalescing the various groups that are connected to the ancient Benin Kingdom around iconic figures such as the Oba, the historical sites and traditional symbols to resist the perceived marginalisation. They also invoke these figures to create a visible sociocultural and geopolitical space, and to assert a distinct cultural nationalistic agenda in the globalised era. Although access to state resources is largely based on the size of ethnic groups in Nigeria, sometimes, other factors such as visibility can often facilitate this access.[4]

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

As outlined, this dissertation examines Edo language video film producers' representation of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in Edo language video films and how they portray the two religions when their doctrines come in contact with each other. The thesis is divided into seven chapters including the introduction and conclusion.

[4] This is illustrated by the election of Goodluck Jonathan, an ethnic minority Ijaw, as President of Nigeria in 2011.

After the current introduction or Chapter one, Chapter two explains the methodology adopted in the gathering, collation, analysis and interpretation of the data for the study. It also discusses some of the challenges encountered in the course of the research. Doing this enables the reader to gain an insight into the processes involved in the collection of data and to appreciate and understand the fieldwork terrain. The chapter also explains the position of the researcher in relation to the research, how this may have affected the outcome of the research and the measures taken to at least minimise the impact. It also highlights the importance of trust between researcher and research participants.

Chapter three examines the history of film in Nigeria and the social and religious contexts of Benin, which provide the backdrop for the production of Edo language religious video films. It offers a detailed discussion of the religious landscape, with particular attention to the role of traditional religion and Christianity and how they have shaped Benin's religious identity over the years. The chapter also explores the example of the Oba and his court, which emphasises the compatibility of both religions in different ways.

Chapter four analyses some Edo language video films based on the filmmakers' claim that they do not privilege any religious doctrine. The films were selected from a broad range of films that evidently tailored the Pentecostal and traditional religious viewpoints to the local religious field and for their enlightenment of Edo citizens. The video films also engage with the moral virtues that are understood as important to the historical Benin Kingdom and contemporary Benin society. The chapter argues that instead of using film to advance the cause of one religion, Edo language video filmmakers draw on the two dominant religions to convey the moral virtues of the kingdom and to foster the social cohesion of Benin society.

In Chapter five, the rationale for Edo language film producers' use of their films to spread the moral virtues of Benin is investigated in more detail. It argues that Edo language filmmakers use their films as mediums of ethno-linguistic and

cultural identity in an ethnically heterogeneous Nigerian nation, where the Edo language is often marginalised. Moreover, the chapter engages with the fact that many Edo speakers now grow up outside of Edo society, or, in an increasingly globalised world, even outside of Nigeria or West Africa. Edo language films therefore address a perceived lack of knowledge and understanding of Edo values, in particular among the younger generation, by conveying the history and moral virtues of Benin Kingdom.

Chapter six focuses on the audience's perception of the depiction of Pentecostalism and traditional religion, and the construction of Edo identity, in Edo language video films. In addition to the views of the general Edo language video film audience, it discusses the views of the specialist religious audiences of traditional priests and leaders, and Pentecostal pastors. Most of the audience members of Edo language video films are adherents of either Pentecostal Christianity or African traditional religion, and primarily native, fluent or aspiring Edo language speakers. Their perception of the portrayal of the values of the two religions is crucial in determining whether Edo language video filmmakers are achieving their desired objectives. Most general audience members share the filmmakers' concern for the moral health of Benin, and appreciate the films' contribution to Edo self-assertion. However, Pentecostal pastors and indeed traditional priests are often more critical.

Chapter seven is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It summarises the findings of the study and advances some recommendations for future research into African religious video film study and discourses, as well as calling for the evaluation of the study of ethnic and cultural nationalism.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter outlines the procedure involved in the collection, processing and analysis of data and information for this thesis. It further explains the rationale for conducting the research and the methods used in addressing the research topic. It goes on to provide an open and frank discussion of the researcher's positionality in relation to the research topic and the ethical challenges faced in the process of carrying out the research. There is also a discussion of the factors that limited the conduct of the research.

The methodological approach adopted in a research is largely determined by the nature and the objective(s) of the research (Asare 2013: 33-68). This research on the interface of film and religion in the Edo language version of the Nigerian video film industry was conducted in Benin City, the capital of Edo State Nigeria, and the seat of the Benin Kingdom. Its objective was to investigate how Edo language video filmmakers portray Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion and the conflict that arises between the two religions, and to understand the philosophy underpinning this portrayal. The desire to interrogate this interface was influenced by three factors:

- The deregulation of the audio-visual sector in Nigeria in the 1990s, which allowed private participation that has generated a new video film industry.

- The limited scholarship of Edo audio-visual history and culture, especially in its dialogue with globalisation.

- The growth of Pentecostal Christianity in Benin Kingdom since the 1970s and its impact on Edo traditional religious culture

Apart from serving as the site of the research, Benin City is where I was born and raised in the Edo traditional religion and culture, and where I had my primary and secondary education, during which I converted to Pentecostal Christianity. Thereafter, I worked there as a television cameraman for the Bendel State Ministry of Information and Culture, which corresponded with Bendel Television (BTV), now Edo Broadcasting Service Television (EBSTV), until my late teenage years. Hence I was familiar with the people, the city, and the film production community in the 1980s. It would naturally be expected that given this background, carrying out a field study in such terrain would be considered a given in terms of familiarity with the landscape, engagement with the people, and negotiating the orthodoxy. But I was largely absent from Benin for almost three decades until about two years prior to this study, when I accepted an academic position at the University of Benin. In the intervening period, Benin City had undergone some sociocultural, political, and religious transformations. It was in this period that the audio-visual industry was deregulated, paving the way for Edo language filmmakers to express themselves in new ways (Haynes 2007: 1, Esan 2009, Ariye 2010: 417-8, Ukah 2012: 210-11). At the same time, Pentecostal Christianity had expanded exponentially in the city (Kalu 2008: 87-102). During the early 1990s, Charles Gore notes that Pentecostal churches became more prominent in public spaces in Benin and traditional religious shrines were absent from some homes. But shrines were prevalent in Edo communities outside of the city. He suggests however that the importance of traditional religion is still noticeable in contemporary Benin, particularly during burial ceremonies and other significant institutions, such as those related to the palace (Gore 2007: 46). This period also ushered in a new Oba (King) in the kingdom and with it, a new dispensation (Nwanne 2016).

Considering these dynamics, to deeply understand the overarching socio-political, cultural and religious milieux informing the filmmakers' philosophical

standpoint, I designed a field approach that would take in the viewpoints of the following segments of Benin Kingdom's life: Edo language filmmakers, Edo traditional leaders and religious priests, and Pentecostal pastors and leaders. I also interacted with and collected data from Edo language film audience to get an understanding of the impact of the filmmakers' philosophical messages. To complement these interactions, I collected additional materials and texts on site that would add some richness to the data collected during the fieldwork.

2.2 Research Methods: Making a Decision

The adoption of the right methodology in the analysis and deconstruction of information and data collected during field study is integral to the successful completion of a research. Opoku et al (2016: 32-3) assert that one of the most important decisions for social science researchers is their research method. The adoption of an inappropriate method in the description and analysis of data and information collected could impact negatively on the outcome of the research. To avoid this, they argue that it is worthwhile for the social science researcher to think carefully about the type of methodology to adopt, both for data collection and analysis. They note that there are three dominant research methodologies for the social science researcher, namely the quantitative research methodology, the mixed methodology, and the qualitative research methodology, contending that none of these research methodologies can be considered to be more important than the others.

The focal point of quantitative research method is the use of statistics and numbers to represent a larger whole, with the aim of aggregating the findings to draw a conclusion that is as representative and specific as possible (Miller and Brewer 2003: 192). The philosophical anchors of the mixed methods of research are that it embraces the tools offered by both quantitative and qualitative research methods and places them at the disposal of the researcher. It affords the researcher the chance to explore (qualitative) and analyse (quantitative) in one study and broadens the scope of data that can be collected by the researcher

(McKim 2017: 213). And any attempt to reduce qualitative research to one definition has to be firmly rebuffed by practitioners, mainly because of the historical burden that has dogged the research method for decades. Its association with Euro-American colonial expansionism means that it is perpetually mired in definitional controversy, but what is agreed amongst the social science community is its incontrovertible contributions to the fields of description, narration and interpretation from the point of view of the research subjects (Denzin and Lincoln 2018: 9-11).

This thesis is about exploring how Edo language video filmmakers portray Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in their films. It is about discussing and analysing this exploration from the filmmakers' perspectives. Hence, the study is largely based on the qualitative research methodology, which provided an opportunity to immerse myself in their world and see things from their position. But since it also involves gauging how the audience members of the films perceive the portrayal of the two religions, I also had to adopt the survey tool of questionnaires, which is embedded in the quantitative school. This means that on the whole, the methodology adopted in the study should be considered as reflecting the mixed methods.

2.3 Methods of Data Collection

The data for this study were gathered using a variety of techniques, which were mainly qualitative, but which also embraced the quantitative technique tool of survey or questionnaire. Qualitative techniques used included participant observation, interviews, and the analysis of secondary materials such as maps, books, journal articles, photographs, and video films. An elaboration of how and why these adopted techniques were deployed are discussed in the following sections.

2.4 Participant and Non-Participant Observation

Regarded as one of the practices that sets anthropology apart from other disciplines, participant observation allows the researcher to immerse themselves in the culture and life of the subjects of their research by living with them in their natural setting and participating in their everyday life (Jackson 1997: 348). This is probably the most commonly adopted technique by anthropological researchers, but there is another strand of observational technique called non-participant observation. Here, the researcher, even though they may or may not be present in the field, does not physically interfere in the activities of the research participants. Perhaps this research technique may raise some ethical issues in terms of modes of observation, but it is the preferred option in certain fieldwork situations, especially where full immersion may be perilous to the researcher (Williams 2008: 561-2). A third way stands between these two methods. Known as quasi participant observation, this tool offers the researcher the chance to study their research subjects and participate in their everyday life, but rather than live entirely with them in their natural settings, the ethnographer engages with them in their activities and at the end of the day retreats into the confines of his or her abode. Although this research method does not entail what some ethnographers refer to as full immersion, nonetheless, it has been proven to be as effective as any other forms of ethnographic research in many contexts (Asare 2013: 36). I adopted this technique to study the filmmakers that participated in this research, since it provided the opportunity to reflect on the day's activities and allowed me to record observations on locations and in my interactions with participants.

2.5 Interviews

In order to get a deeper understanding of the issues observed on locations, to elicit information from other research participants, and contextualise the data

and information, I conducted interviews with the research participants. I designed separate sets of questions for semi-structured interviews with the filmmakers, the Edo traditional religious priests and leaders, and the Pentecostal pastors. I also held conversations with Edo language video film consumers. Mainly made up of people living and working in and around the neighbourhood where I was born and raised, such as friends and family members. The discussions were designed to gauge their understanding, interpretation, and reception of Edo video films.

2.6 Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires was not part of the initial fieldwork outline but once on site, I realised that a survey would make a valuable contribution to the study. Questionnaires enabled me to particularly evaluate the impact of the philosophical messages the filmmakers wanted to impart through their films on the audience at a larger scale. Two sets of questionnaires were designed for this purpose. The first, which did not include demographic variables, targeted the Edo language film audience's perceptions of the portrayal of the conflict arising between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. The second was designed to assess the demographic variables of Edo language film audience, including age and gender. In all, one hundred questionnaires were administered and eighty-six were retrieved. Out of the eighty-six retrieved, seventy watch Edo language video films while sixteen of them do not watch the films. A further breakdown of the seventy respondents who watch Edo language video films showed that of the fifty questionnaires that targeted the gender of audience members, thirty-three were retrieved. Twenty of them were female and thirteen were male. In the female category, seven belonged to the 35-44 year age bracket while two were in the 18-24 year group. Five respondents each made up the 25-34 and 45-54 year age groups. There were no respondents in the 55-64 and 65 and over age range. For the male category, one respondent each was in the 18-24 and 55-64 year age brackets, four each in the 25-34 and 45-54 year age groups, and three were in the 35-44 year class. There was none in the over-65

year category. The respondents were selected based on purposive sampling. I used my own judgment to determine how the respondents were selected given the security situation and the general environment of Benin at the time of the fieldwork, and my personal situation as a researcher. Despite this, respondent were selected on their residency in Benin and their awareness of Edo language video films. Other criteria used included being a native or fluent Edo language speaker, interested in Edo language films, desirous of learning Edo language, history, and culture through the films, and ancestral connection to the historical Benin Kingdom. The sites of the distribution of these questionnaires are explained in the 'Edo Language Film Audience' section. Two of the retrieved questionnaires were invalidated in the strict sense because the respondents' answers to some of the questions were not clearly indicative of any choice or because they provided more than one answer to a question. One did not provide answers at all. However, the invalidated questionnaires were not significant enough to affect the outcome of the survey, which was taken to be indicative in any case.

2.7 Fieldwork Execution

While participant observation constituted the main technique for gathering data and information relating to the Edo language filmmakers, a range of research tools was deployed during the fieldwork to obtain information from other participants. As noted, these tools included interview, questionnaire, and discussion. The type of technique used was determined by pragmatism, as well as the socio-cultural and religious tenets prevalent within the group I interacted with. For example, there are certain traditional expectations from someone transacting business with traditional leaders and priests. How this affected my research methods will be further explained below.

2.8 Edo Language Filmmakers

The focus of the research was on Edo language filmmakers, and so they were the first group I contacted. Among the filmmakers actively in production at the time, six agreed to participate in the research. Those who participated were Peter Ovbiogbe, David Owan, Iyeke Orhionmwon, Ben Usen, Uvbi Enibokun, and Gbubemi Toghanro. However, establishing initial contacts with them was challenging considering that I had not been in contact with the Benin film industry for three decades. However, with the help of some academic colleagues already working with some filmmakers, I was able to establish contact with one of them, who seemed to be well respected in the industry.

Having worked in Benin as an academic for some time prior to the field study, fieldwork provided an opportunity to reconnect with my heritage and the prevailing traditional and social ethos. I knew that when it comes to interacting with people, the boundaries between formal and informal engagement are blurred and that the people are sometimes concerned about interacting with officialdom, particularly at the initial stage of contact. Hence during the first meeting with all the respondents, I did not normally discuss the research. Instead, we often found a common ground in our childhood experiences and we talked about that. It was during the second meeting that I raised the research, the implications of participation, and the rights and obligations of participants, before handing over the participant information sheet and the consent form. I also left my contact details behind. This approach worked well, as it broke down the barriers associated with such initial contacts and it served as my guiding principle throughout my interactions with the filmmakers. And the fact that the filmmakers who participated in the research were of the same generation with me also helped to cushion the flow of interactions, as we had so much to reminisce about our childhood. With the help of the initial filmmaker, I was able to recruit the other participants.

As stated earlier, the dominant research technique used in gathering data and information from the filmmakers was quasi-participant observation. I went on location with five of the six filmmakers in this study to shoot their films. The first filmmaker I accompanied, Peter Ovbiogbe, also [redacted], where students are trained in film production. The shooting was spread over ten days in a rural community near Benin City. The second filmmaker, Ben Usen, recorded his production intermittently over two months at various locations spread across Benin City. The stop-start approach to the recording was necessitated by financial constraint, as he funded the project from his personal savings. The third filmmaker, Iyeke Orhionmwon, recorded his productions over three days on locations in and around Benin City. Some where also recorded in two rural communities to the north and south east of the city. The fourth and fifth filmmakers, David Owan and Gbubemi Toghanro, were studied while working on projects in conjunction with Peter Ovbiogbe. The sixth filmmaker, Uvbi Enibokun, the only female filmmaker who consented to participating in the research and who was the only female filmmaker active at the time, had just finished working on a production before the commencement of my fieldwork. There was another production lined up but it was not going to start until after I had finished my fieldwork, thus I opted to study her by going to her office on a number of occasions to interact with her as she carried out pre-production preparation for her next project.

On locations, I did not take field notes because I thought they would be intrusive and distractive. More importantly, I recognise that personally, writing while interacting with people impacts on my observation, so I often relied on a digital audio recording device and my phone camera to document the productions. Notes of the important activities that happened on locations were recorded in a notepad usually in the early morning of the following day, as we finished so late on most of the scheduled shooting days that it was not possible to take down notes of the observations. I collected copies of DVDs of the filmmakers' past productions for some textual analysis, based on which I was able to deepen my understanding of their philosophical underpinnings. The past productions also served as a platform for further interrogation of their ideological standpoints.

2.9 Edo Traditional Religious Priests and Leaders

Four Edo traditional religious priests and leaders, Ebo Okah, Sam Ikhuen, Noel Oke, and Texty Ogie participated in the study. Interviews formed the main tool of information and data gathering. For the most part, the traditional priests and leaders preferred to be interviewed in their places of worship but this presented its own challenges in terms of adherence to orthodoxy. In Benin Kingdom, interacting with religious priests in their shrines demands the performance of some rites and rituals.

When I met with the first religious priest, Chief Priest Ebo Okah, I had to take-off my shoes and walk into the shrine barefoot, with a bottle of traditional gin to present to him for prayers to the gods. In the shrine, permission had to be sought to take a seat and once that was granted, the priest presented a bowl of kolanuts and traditional chalk and with it, together with the gin, prayers were offered to the gods, with some of the kolanuts split into several parts and shared between us. As he offered the prayers, we chopped the pieces of kolanuts into tinier bits with our thumbs and then sprinkled the tiny pieces in front of the shrine, and a tiny glass of the traditional gin was poured onto the floor as libation to the gods. The leftover of the gin was passed between us. Having done this, we then settled down to discuss the research. This was to be the practice throughout my transactions with the traditional priests and chiefs during the field study.

Also in the kingdom, traditional priests and leaders conduct their affairs using the Edo traditional calendar, which is made up of a four-day week, namely: *Eken*, *Orie*, *Aho*, and *Okuo*. These days, in Edo mythology, represent the four geographical points of the earth, which are the east, the west, the north, and the south (Egharevba 1949: 81-2). *Eken*, the first day of the calendar week, is the day of rest. It is generally considered dangerous, and sometimes fatal, to conduct official business on that day. So, given the tight nature of the traditional

calendar, Edo religious priests and chiefs are always engaged with traditional activities and in most cases, these activities are private or accessible only to the initiates. Hence once I was granted access, I adopted the most expedient research technique – interview – to extract information from them.

Interviews were largely conducted using a mix of English and Edo languages but on one of the occasions, I had to conduct the interview entirely using the Edo language, as it settled the traditional priest's nerves and allowed him to give me more detailed information. On these occasions too, I relied entirely on audio and mobile phone's video recordings. Even though I had a set of questions, I did not stick to them during the interviews, as I had to follow the flow by allowing the interviewees take the lead. This way, I ensured that they told their stories, only intervening to clarify points.

2.10 Pentecostal Pastors and Leaders

Similar to the Edo traditional religious priests and leaders, four Pentecostal pastors and leaders took part in the research. They were Ken Egor, Frank Agboniken, Convenience Osieto, and Omorede Ologbo. The rationale for limiting the number to four was predicated on balance of opinions between traditional religious views and Pentecostal perspectives, since it was four traditional religious priests and leaders that opted to participate in the research. Like with the Edo traditional priests and chiefs, I used interviews and all the pastors preferred their places of worship as venues for our encounters. Apart from serving as locations for the conduct of the interviews, meeting these interlocutors in their churches helped the study because it provided the opportunity to observe them as they proselytised to their congregations. In fact, it was during the fieldwork that some of the Pentecostal leaders held their annual harvest thanksgiving services, and a church of one of the research participants hosted their major annual international gathering of worshippers.

Gaining access to the Pentecostal leaders was pretty straightforward, except with one who asked me to write a letter seeking for an audience. I was able to secure interviews with the others just by appearing in their offices with a friend or family member that was their congregant. Akin to the Edo traditional religious leaders, a set of interview questions was also designed for them but it only served as a take-off point. Interviews were recorded on digital audio device and videoed on phone camera while notes and observations were jotted down later that day or the following day.

2.11 Edo Language Film Audience

The initial plan was to study Edo language film audience through the observation of families as they watched films together in their homes. I had thought that studying two or three families would suffice in terms of drawing some inferences about the impact of the filmmakers' philosophies and intentions, but once on fieldwork site, I realised that doing this was problematic in two ways. First, the lack of regular power supply in Benin at the time of the fieldwork rendered this plan challenging and the option of using electric generators as alternative power supply became unattainable as a result of the fuel shortages that afflicted the city at the time. Second, and more importantly, I thought the inferences drawn from observing only a small number of families would be insufficient to broadly represent the effect of the filmmakers' philosophical messages on the audience.

So, to plug this gap, two sets of questionnaires were designed. The first, reproduced into fifty copies, was drawn to elicit the audience's perceptions of Edo language films, particularly in how they reflect the conflict arising between Pentecostalism and African traditional religion. The second also constituted of fifty copies, included additional questions relating to the demographic variables of the audience. The questionnaires were split into ten copies each and then administered to Edo film consumers through strategic outlets that included video shops, hospitals, petrol stations, and business centres. Since it was not possible to study audience members in their homes as they watched the video

films, I also opted to have conversations with individual respondents in order to gauge their perceptions of the filmmakers' visualisation of the two religions. The aim was to complement the results of the questionnaires.

2.12 Ethical Challenges and Positionality

Several challenges were encountered in terms of my positionality, ethics and the limitations to the smooth completion of the research. Efforts were made to however minimise their impact on the outcome of the research, by adapting to the exigencies of the fieldwork site and ensuring that the prescribed standards and regulations were adhered to in the process of conducting the research. These efforts form the basis of the following discussion.

2.13 Ethics

The conduct of this research was solidly grounded on the rigorous ethical standards set out by the College of Arts and Law Ethical Review Committee of the University of Birmingham, which granted me the permission to proceed, having been satisfied that I had met the requirements to do so. Together with this, and recognising the particularity of every research location, I also embraced the recommendation of Kvale, who advocates that researchers should be trusted with the capacity to negotiate the various ethical conundrums that they are confronted with on fieldwork sites. Every fieldwork, according to him, is uniquely peculiar and as such, social science researchers should be granted the flexibility to adapt to the situation found in the field, rather than being confined by 'abstract principles' (cited in Ryen 2011: 421). Thus in the conduct of this research, I implemented the standards specified by the Ethical Review Committee of the College of Arts and Law of the University of Birmingham, and those associated with the disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, in a way that reflected the sociocultural and religious values of the various groups of people that I worked with on fieldwork site, without jeopardising them.

Before the commencement of the fieldwork, usually at the first physical contacts with research participants, except with the filmmakers, I discussed the details of the research with them, their rights, obligations, confidentiality, and how the data and information gathered would be treated. I also discussed any concern they might have in terms of participation and at the end of the sessions, I left the participant information sheets and consent forms with them, together with my contact details, thus giving them time to digest the information contained in the forms and make consultations before agreeing to participate.

Overall, this process was straightforward, but every participant group demanded some certain flexibility in terms of approach. For the Edo language filmmakers, I did not broach the research details during our first meetings because of the prevailing social mores within the group and the commonalities we share as members of the same generation. Introducing this issue at a first meeting would have been disrespectful and would likely have hampered the entire process. It was during our subsequent meetings that the details and the implications of their participation were discussed, and the consent forms and the participant information sheets were handed over to them. For some of the Edo traditional religious leaders and priests, I had to translate the contents of the form into Edo language. Edo language also formed the basis of communication about the contents of the forms with members of the Edo language film audience I interacted with in their homes.

In all of these interactions, I explained to them that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time, if they so wished, without suffering any jeopardy. I also made them aware that the data and information collected would be treated anonymously and confidentially, as prescribed by the UK Data Protection Act (1998) and the Nigerian National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) guidelines. I also confirmed that all the data would be stored confidentially and safely in the Arts Building of the University of Birmingham for ten years, after which they would be permanently destroyed.

2.14 Anonymisation

To protect their identities and to meet the ethical standards outlined by the Ethical Review Committee of the College of Arts and Law, University of Birmingham, the identity of various participants in this research has been anonymised so that they cannot be identified. But for the purpose of the research, pseudonyms were allocated to them so as to give clarity and coherence to their views and to move the research forward.

2.15 Reflections of Edo Filmmakers on the State of Benin

This section focuses on the thoughts of Edo language filmmakers on the state of Benin as part of the research methodology. As stated above, interactions with Edo language video filmmakers during the field study were made easy because I share a generational bond and cultural understanding with many of them. Often, discussions about our shared commonalities started by reminiscing about the socio-political, economic and religious situation that prevailed during our childhood in Benin. This strategy began with Peter Ovbiogbe, the highly respected filmmaker and [redacted] of Edo language video film producers that I first encountered during the field study. On the first day of meeting him, we started by discussing the relative peace and harmony, and the social order that characterised that era and how we were raised not solely by our parents but by the entire community. We also talked about the bustling nightlife in Benin in the 1970s and early 1980s. I particularly recounted how my older cousin would wake up in the middle of the night during the weekend, dress smartly, and head out. He would not only go to a night club but he would go round the four or five night clubs that were operational in Benin at the time without any fear of harm. Peter Ovbiogbe recalled how he used to regularly sneak out of the house at night during the weekend to attend social wake-keepings, popularly known as

obituary or *obito,* and would return in the morning and head straight to bed, giving his parents the impression that he had been in bed throughout the night. He also reminisced about how his father would gather his household under the tree by moonlight and tell them stories of the exploits of the past Obas and Benin Kingdom as a whole, which also resonated with me. He further stressed that although there were not many churches then and traditional religion was visible everywhere, crime was a rare occurrence.

Naturally, the discussion then progressed to the political situation at the time. Comparing my childhood impressions to what I experienced at the present, I argued that Benin enjoyed relative prosperity in terms of infrastructural development and that Edo people had some access to power. Ovbiogbe was less impressed. He contended Benin enjoyed greater relative prosperity in the 1960s to early 1980s than in the twenty-first century. Moreover, from the stories his parents told him, and based on his studies in the secondary school, he thought that the prosperity Benin enjoyed at that time was nothing compared to the exploits of the ancient Benin Kingdom. 'You can't compare an independent kingdom to what Benin now is in Nigeria', he remarked. Ovbiogbe reminded me frequently that in the historical Benin Kingdom, Edo people had control over their resources, and that they enjoyed this independence until the British invasion in 1897. Commenting on the colonial period following the invasion, he noted that being 'merged' with the Yoruba in the Western Region marginalised Edo speakers. Ovbiogbe's view was that in today's Nigeria, Edo people are a minority ethnic group with 'very little relevance in governance circuit'.

According to Ovbiogbe, the current marginalisation of Edo people is not limited to the political sphere, but extends to filmmaking. Crucially, he noted, Edo language video films are not given the same status as those of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. Unlike films in the languages of the three big ethnicities, Edo language video films, and other minority ethnic video films, are not featured on DSTV, the digital satellite platform in Nigeria. When I asked him how he felt about the situation of Edo people and Edo language video films, he however contended that rather than dampen his enthusiasm; the situation has motivated him to

focus even more on the production of Edo language video films. He explicitly stressed the need to celebrate Edo ethnicity because 'Edo people and their experiences over 1000 years are enriching!' Ovbiogbe frequently asserted that irrespective of population size, Edo people have a superior culture and history, and he suggested that their traditional form of government, which has ensured the continued existence of the second dynasty, is revered globally. According to him, the qualities of Benin culture and history are what form the bedrock of his films.

My initial encounter with David Owan was also revealing in this regard. He is a highly rated Edo language video film producer and the current coordinator of the Benin zone of the Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN). As I stepped into his office in a building in the Oba Market district, not far from the palace of the Oba of Benin, I stretched out my hand and we shook hands. I followed it with a greeting in Edo language, to which he responded. I then initiated a conversation about our childhood. He managed a few sentences in Edo and then smiled. He then told me he is not proficient in the language. I was aware from his surname that his heritage is rooted in the *Owan* or *Ora* speaking part of Edo State, which is a dialect of but not the core Edo language used in the films or spoken in the area covered by the research. As discussed in Chapter five, his position suggests that Edo identity expands beyond the defined sphere of the study. Nevertheless, as someone from an area that traces their origin to the ancient Benin Kingdom, I expected he would be able to hold a conversation in Edo language, especially since he said he was born and raised in Benin. Having been made aware of this and since I could manage conversations in his native dialect, I switched code. Again, he struggled to hold the discussion in his native dialect. He confessed that he is not proficient in any of the dialects of Edo language and contended that his peculiar personal situation typifies the state of Edo language in the twenty-first century.

David Owan compared the current state of Edo language in Nigeria to that of a toddler caught in the middle of a stampede. He argued that the dominance of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo is such that there is utmost disregard for the existence of

the minority ethnic groups in the country, adding that to them, minority ethnic groups and their languages 'are the dregs of the earth'. Like Peter Ovbiogbe, the peripheral state of Edo people and their language is a spur for David Owan to immerse himself in the production of Edo language video films to stem the 'numbers of people like me in our society so that our languages don't go into extinction'. While his ancestry is embedded in the historical Benin Kingdom, Owan's parents encouraged him to speak only the English language when he was growing up, and his formal education was also limited to English. Although he understands Edo language, he is incapable of expressing himself eloquently. Owan makes Edo language films by telling the actors what he wants them to say. They then use their own words to realise the scenes he has planned. Because he understands them, he can ask them to amend the scenes and dialogue if they do not properly express his desired objectives.

Owan noted that the personal feedback he gets from the diasporic Edo community keeps him committed to the cause of using his films to propagate Edo language and culture. Although Owan said he is committed to Edo language video films, he chided wealthy Edo citizens for not having the same commitment. When I probed further on this, he said he had tried to source funding from wealthy Edo citizens to finance his films but only very few of them have been interested. Instead of allowing the nonchalant attitude of wealthy citizens of Benin to frustrate him, Owan contended that it has served as an impetus because he fears that if he gives up on Edo language video film production, the language will go into extinction. Hence, to plug the financial gap, he has to also produce films in English language to reach a wider audience.

What was apparent from my first contact with Ben Usen, another Edo language filmmaker and actor of note, was his devotion to Christianity. After the initial pleasantries, almost every statement he made was interspersed with scriptural verses. He told me his acting skills were first spotted as a child in the church and that only his devotion to Christianity has kept him alive since the death of his parents. Each time I tried to raise the issue of our childhood, he deflected it and always refocused my attention on his religious state. When I asked him his

thoughts on traditional religion, he was quiet for a while. Then he resorted to the Bible and quoted some verses. Usen then argued that since God made him in His image, he does not subscribe to worshipping graven images; that is images that are made by man. To him, that is what traditional religion is. In the typical Pentecostal Christian manner, he stated that traditional religion is all about idolatry and that those who worship them are like the idols.

When I asked Usen whether he reflects these thoughts in his films, a long pause ensued. He then explained that there was a difference between his personal thoughts and what should be put out there for the audience. According to him, Edo language video films are about the history and culture of Edo people, and traditional religion is embedded in the culture of not just Edo people but also that of all Africans. Moreover, Usen said, Edo language video films should celebrate Edo ethnicity. Hence, he drew a line between his personal beliefs and his work as a filmmaker. Usen pointed to the threat of extinction of the language and the marginalisation of Edo people as the reasons for his continued production of video films in Edo language.

The other filmmakers that I interacted with during the field study also echoed the thoughts of these filmmakers. Regardless of their religious beliefs, their discussion of religion was always contextualised within the broader discourse of the state of Benin and Edo ethnicity in Nigeria and the world. For example, another filmmaker, Iyeke Orhionmwon, told me that he had the opportunity to be fully involved in the wider Nollywood industry but that he chose to commit to Edo language video film version because of his desire to project Edo ethnicity and language. When I questioned him on his position in relation to traditional religion and Pentecostalism, he said the two religions are relevant to Edo people in the twenty-first century. According to him, traditional religion is part of Edo cultural identity and Pentecostalism is now part of the religious landscape in the twenty-first century. For that reason, he expressed in Edo language that: *aigb'oka n'iyan, aigb'iyan n'oka* ([in the farm], you don't destroy the corn for the yam, you don't destroy the yam for the corn), which means that the two religions are now so important in contemporary Benin that they have to co-exist.

These informal conversations added a layer of inquiry to this doctoral study. Before embarking on the fieldwork, I simply planned to focus on Edo filmmakers' portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. But once I had made face-to-face contact with the filmmakers that participated in the study, I had no choice but to revisit the research plan. In the beginning of our conversations, I tried to ensure that I did not deviate from the plan set out in Birmingham. But the more I tried to do this, the more the filmmakers kept talking about Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion as part of the wider discourse of the state of Benin in contemporary Nigeria. Often at the background of this discussion was the status of the ancient Benin Kingdom, the feats of the past Obas and some of the Benin hero-deities, and how the kingdom was famous worldwide. Also, they always reminded me of the reverence of the Oba of Benin in Nigeria, in spite of the current marginal state of the kingdom. After subsequent interactions with the filmmakers, it then became clear to me that they were not particularly interested in any of the religious agendas, especially in relation to which of them is the repository of good or evil. Having observed this, I then resolved to let them tell their own stories rather than stick to the initial research plan.

2.16 Researching Christianity and Edo Traditional Religion

As mentioned above, my parents were adherents of African traditional religion and naturally, it was the religion I grew up to follow. In those early years and up to my secondary education, I was deeply embedded in the values, doctrines, and practices of Edo traditional religion and my parents ensured that I performed the rites of passage into courts and shrines of the various deities that were appropriate for my age group. As the eldest son, the socialisation into Edo traditional religious practices took on a more significant note given that I was expected to inherit my father's status after his death. But in the wake of the Pentecostal whirlwind that swept through Nigeria's educational institutions in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Marshall-Fratani 1998: 281, Gaiya 2002, Kalu

2008: 87-102), I transitioned to Pentecostal Christianity. My parents disapproved of my decision, but I carried on regardless and a stand-off ensued. My relationship to them was under a cloud until I got a job working as a television cameraman. Soon afterwards, I left the shores of Nigeria.

In Europe, first in Ireland and then in the United Kingdom, I enmeshed myself in Pentecostalism with the same enthusiasm that I had dedicated to Edo traditional religion. But when I started an undergraduate programme in media studies and anthropology, this stirred up the consciousness of my heritage and fired my determination to critically examine it through the audio-visual medium. Moreover, my 'Otherness' in Europe as a visible immigrant became a marker of who I am over time. In almost all transactions, either officially or socially, I was (and still am) 'encouraged' to declare my ethnicity and/or my country of birth. These subtle ways of making me aware of my origin further reinforced the passion to pursue this project, and as Frantz Fanon argues, 'when it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire – the first milestone on the road that leads to dignity' (1986: vii).

Added to this, my growing familiarity with Pentecostal Christian scriptures increasingly suggested to me that there were similarities in Christian and traditional religions' imaginaries, from their moral emphasis on not stealing or avoiding adultery to a shared belief in heaven and hell, etc. Although differences exist in the conception of heaven and hell in Pentecostal Christianity and Edo traditional religion, there is emphasis on morality and moral conduct in both. For Christians, there is no other opportunity for anyone to repent after death (Hebrews 9: 27), but in Edo mythology, through reincarnation, the dead are granted fourteen chances to amend their ways (Osagiede 2019: 14-6). The shared similarities between the two religions are explored in detail in the next Chapter. Even though Osagiede (2019) uses the Christian concepts of heaven and hell to describe the Benin worldview, it should be pointed out that heaven is imagined as *erinmwin-ofunmwegbe* and hell is conceptualised as *erinmwin-erhen* in contemporary Benin discourses, thus indicating the intermingling of religions over the years. Edo religious cosmology does not provide for heaven and hell

but as outlined in Chapter three, it implies *erinmwin*, where the Enikaro (Ancestors), Osanobua (The Supreme Being), and other gods live, as heaven (*erinmwin-ofunmwegbe*), while hell (*erinmwin-erhen*) is the 'lost place' where those who died in ignominy are left to rot (Osagiede 2019). Hence in Benin, those who lived pious lifestyles are incorporated into the body of Enikaro after death and traditionally, Edo people would wish those who lived and died in disgrace to *'le erinmwin wihua'* (Get lost in the land of the ancestors [Hell]).

These shared beliefs about moral values and the seeming contradictions of the public rhetoric of the Pentecostal pastors about the duality of Pentecostalism, as representing good, and African traditional religion as representing evil, became a personal conundrum. At a time I began to wonder whether Pentecostalism was an apparatus of the Western post-colonial project, which simply denounced African traditional religion as demonic. I also struggled to understand why although Pentecostalism is so widespread in Benin City; so many crimes seem to be perpetrated. Looking at traditional religion in this manner, I could not understand why such practices seemed to be receding from the public domain in Benin City. The more I tried to find answers to these questions, the more I was driven to carry out my own research, which eventually led to this PhD.

During the fieldwork, as it progressed, I began to have a deeper and more realistic understanding not only of the ongoing dialogue between my heritage and the global religion of Pentecostalism, but also of broader discourses about cultural imperialism and the processes of resistance or adaptation it engenders at local levels (see Robertson 1995, McChesney 2015). At some point, this understanding began to flow into my interactions with the research participants and my disposition towards African traditional religious culture in this enduring cultural battle for the hearts and souls of Edo people began to soften.

While this was going on within me, I recognised that one of the tenets of the ethical training I underwent in Birmingham before embarking on the fieldwork stresses the need for the researcher to be mindful of their own emotional involvement in research issues, and prevents it from influencing the conduct of

their research in openly biased ways. So I tried in the best possible way I could to make this tenet my guiding principle, and to reflect on, and limit a negative influence of any overly emotional attachment to my heritage on the dissertation. Yet I am highly aware of the ongoing debates in the academia whether detachment, or even objectivity, are actually possible given that the 'distortion of "data is the price we must pay to gain understanding of complex social settings"' (Bogdan and Taylor, cited in Cowles 1988: 177). Crucially too, even though I had more sympathy for Edo religious culture than in the past, I renewed my commitment to the home branch of the church that converted me to Pentecostalism when I was in Benin. I regularly attended services in the church, coming back in contact with the familiar faces after almost three decades. Studying the scriptures together in an accustomed environment reinvigorated my quest in probing for answers to my research questions. This helped me to examine my strong sympathy for Edo traditional religion from a different point of view. My practical experience of working in the media in Nigeria, and the training I received in the media and anthropology programme at both the undergraduate and master's degree levels, also played significant roles in ensuring a greater degree of reflection in this research.

The objective of this research was not to seek the truth about the dialogue between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostalism, but to seek to understand the filmmakers' portrayal of this dialogue. That included the attempt to see this dialogue from the filmmakers' perspective. To ensure that this understanding actually reflects their thoughts, I therefore also sent copies of the draft of this thesis to the research participants, and invited their comments as a way of obviating personal biases and prejudices that may have permeated the dissecting and analysis of the data collected. Their responses were encouraging. Peter Ovbiogbe spotted some errors in terms of the description of his family's position in the traditional religious sphere of Benin and David Owan amended aspects relating to his religious background. But on the whole, they were impressed with the findings of the thesis, as they were consistent with their aims and objectives. Although the filmmakers were keen on using their names in the dissertation, I had to anonymise them because of the ethical requirement to do

so. Cowles (1988: 175-7) argues that regardless of the use of modern technology in the collection and analysis of data and the intense engagement in ethical training by the social science researcher, the question of bias and prejudice and how they affect the outcome of the research will always be raised. Thus in this research, whether the measures taken were enough to entirely strip it of my personal biases and preconceived ideas is what I cannot determine. But throughout the course of the research, I strove to adhere to the ethical orthodoxy governing research practices in the humanities and the social sciences.

2.17 Challenges and Limitations

In the main, conducting this research was challenging and the initial plan had to be adapted to suit the situation in the field. However, the fact that the fieldwork site was my birthplace helped to translate the fieldwork plan into reality, as I was able to mobilise a network of friends and family to recruit the research participants and execute the other plans effectively. But there were nonetheless challenges and limitations that inhibited the smooth implementation of the research outline. Before embarking on the fieldwork, it was the plan that I would study the filmmakers as they carry out post-production activities, especially the editing of the films to find out how and why they construct religious encounters, sites and symbols in the way they do. This became impossible as the filmmakers did most of their post-production in their homes as a result of the infrequent power supply. At the time of the fieldwork in Benin City, it was the rainy or wet season, and bearing in mind that Edo language filmmakers shoot their films in the natural environment, unlike in the West where films are recorded in purpose-built studios or sets, this significantly impacted on the production capacities of the filmmakers. During the fieldwork, only few Edo language filmmakers were active, as the others had to suspend productions until the end of the rainy or wet season. Those who were in production at the time were subject to the vagaries of the weather. Sometimes, they had to abort productions halfway due to sudden outbreaks of rain. This seriously affected the scope of the fieldwork, as there was only a limited pool of filmmakers to recruit from.

There was also the critical problem of finance on the part of the filmmakers, which impacted on their production capacities. For the most part, film production in Nigeria is privately funded, usually from the purse of the filmmakers. As a result, it is common practice among them to shoot a production over an extended period of time, not for the purpose of quality control or attention to details, but for lack of finance. This meant that I had to constantly be on the phone to them or be in their offices or homes to find out whether we were actually going to shoot or not. This inability to predict productions cascaded down my fieldwork plan, as it became largely dictated by the unscheduled nature of the filmmakers' productions.

Benin City was troubled by frequent power outages during the fieldwork, with the power cut sometimes lasting for several weeks. This, together with the state of insecurity in Benin during the study particularly in relation to personal safety, made it impossible to prosecute even some basic tasks such as charging mobile phone batteries, watching DVDs of the filmmakers' past productions, using the laptop, and having to stay late into the night to watch the filmmakers carry out the editing and other technical aspects of film production in their homes or offices. It was as a result of the unreliable power supply that I had to rework the plan of observing the Edo language film audience members at their homes, as there was no electricity to watch them and the alternative of using generators to watch the films was impossible as a result of frequent fuel shortages.

The qualities of the videos of the past productions of the filmmakers also posed a major challenge. I attempted to content analyse them so that I could strengthen the base upon which to interrogate the filmmakers, but most of the DVDs were unplayable due to the obsolete software used in recording them. I tried updating them with the help of the engineering staff at the broadcasting studio of the university where I worked but that was futile. I could not watch them until I got to Birmingham. Thus, I had to device other means of interviewing the filmmakers based on the analysis of the films.

This was further compounded by the breakdown of the initial mobile phone that I used in recording some of the scenes shot on locations at the beginning of the fieldwork. For some reasons, the mobile phone stopped working and I tried to retrieve the video clips from the phone camera by taking it to one of the mobile phone shops in Benin but they could not salvage them. In the end, I could not use the materials to enhance the research.

My personal situation as a diasporic researcher working in his birthplace was an ethical challenge I had to constantly deal with during the fieldwork. Even though there was a balance between us in terms of power relationship, given that we were of the same generation, there were certain expectations they anticipated from me. For example, taking into account the impression that has been created about the West (and Westerners) in Nigeria, they expected financial gratifications from me at the end of every encounter, as a long-term diasporic Edo man. To overcome this difficulty, I had to explain to them that it was unethical for me to do that, by drawing their attention to the provision in the consent form. I also had to let them know that the research was solely for academic purpose and that there was no financial reward derivable from it.

Probably the most daunting challenge I had to face during the fieldwork was the battle to stay healthy. A month after commencing the fieldwork, I was struck down by an illness. I sought medical attention from the teaching hospital attached to the university where I worked and after a series of tests, I was diagnosed as having been afflicted by malaria fever. After being put through a course of treatment, I recovered and went back to the field, but after a while, I relapsed and I was back in the hospital. I never fully recovered from the illness until I got back to Birmingham, and I had to conduct the remainder of the fieldwork while grappling with recurrent bouts of malaria. This had a significant adverse effect on the fieldwork plan, as I had to cancel appointments with research participants on several occasions and consequently, some of them never participated in the research again.

Another obstacle to the smooth accomplishment of the fieldwork was the inability of other research participants to stick to appointments. It was common to find research participants not turning up for appointments during the fieldwork, even after reaching firm agreements with them. For example, I had an appointment to meet one of the Edo traditional religious leaders in a hotel, and at the appointed time, I was there. After waiting for about two hours, I received a telephone call from him saying that he was unable to meet the appointment because he had an engagement at the palace of the Oba of Benin. We rescheduled the appointment for the same venue but again, he did not turn up, advising me that he needed to accompany the Oba of Benin on a visit to another kingdom. After several subsequent attempts to engage him, equally without success, I gave up. For any researcher conducting fieldwork in Nigeria, perseverance is required especially when seeking to interact with those in positions of authority.

I had thought that I would be able to access secondary materials relating to the research interest on fieldwork site, particularly those that were produced locally, focusing on the growth of Pentecostalism in Benin. But when I visited public and university libraries in Benin City, I could not find any current literature on the topic. I also visited religious departments in the universities located in the city but they were also unable to help. This impacted on my ability to enrich the background literature of this research using locally cited texts.

2.18 Conclusion: The Researcher as the Research Instrument

The main thrust of this chapter has been to explain in details the many ways and methods data and information for the thesis were collected and analysed. In doing this, it has also attempted to present the various challenges that were encountered and how these challenges were resolved. The study focuses on how Edo language video filmmakers depict Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion and how they represent the conflict arising therefrom in their films. As it progressed in its investigation of this topic, it also became clearly

obvious that it was also speaking to my socio-cultural background as a researcher. As Maeda (2011: 355) argues, once the researcher becomes part of the research, s/he is no longer a mere researcher but has also become the research instrument. As will be seen in the thesis, all the aspects of the research are associated with me in one way or another.

One significant experience that has emerged from undertaking this study is the fact that sometimes fieldwork plans do not pan out as expected. As mentioned earlier, my initial plan was to pay particular attention to how Edo language video filmmakers use editing and special effects to construct religious encounters and symbols in their films. The aim would have been to understand and interpret the philosophy behind the mobilisation of technology in the construction of such scenes. But once in Benin, it became impossible to observe and participate in the post-production activities of the filmmakers because of the way they work and the quasi-participant observation method that I adopted. As stated in the chapter, many Edo language video filmmakers essentially carry out their post-production activities in the confines of their homes. Their approach to film editing is understandable given the unpredictability of power supply in Benin at the time of the field study. Undoubtedly, my inability to observe and participate in the editing process involved in Edo language religious filmmaking has impoverished the findings of the dissertation in the sense that it would have enriched the discourse of African religious video films and the philosophy behind the construction of religious accoutrements.

Another important lesson I have taken away from conducting the research is that instead of sticking to the original plan, a researcher should always listen to and observe what the research subjects are saying and doing. As stated in the chapter, my plan was to simply focus on Edo filmmakers' depiction of traditional religion and Pentecostalism. In the beginning, I tried to stick to this plan and I made every effort to keep the filmmakers on track. But while they discussed religion in their interactions with me, it was only as a caveat to the wider discussion of the state of Benin. As Kvale (cited in Ryen 2011:421) posits, researchers should be flexible enough to adapt their research to the situation

found in the field. In the end, I had to allow them to lead while I followed. I believe that while the lack of technical details in the construction of religious encounters and symbols is regrettable, the dissertation's richness in exploring the filmmakers' discourses on religion and ethnicity in Benin offers a productive avenue for further research on Edo language film and cultural production.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge in accomplishing this thesis was the struggle to remain detached in the investigation of the research topic. Throughout the period of the research, I struggled to separate myself as a researcher from myself as an Edo citizen. At some points, my own prejudices and ethnic sentiments threatened to overwhelm my judgment but as set out above, I invested time and efforts in ensuring that they did not impact on the outcome of the thesis. Hopefully, by focusing on the ethical guidelines, reflecting on my own positionality, and asking for comments and corrections from the filmmakers who participated in the research, these steps have helped to ensure the integrity of the dissertation both as a sustained piece of original academic research and as a source of Edo language filmmaking recognisable to those who contributed to it.

CHAPTER THREE

EDO LANGUAGE FILM AND THE PORTRAYAL OF EDO RELIGIOUS CULTURE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the rise of Edo language film in Nigeria, and it explores the social and religious context for Edo language film production today. The first part of the chapter discusses Nigeria's film history with a particular focus first on the emergence of a Nigerian-dominated industry, and the different themes mobilised in English and Nigerian indigenous language films. The second part of the chapter explores the relationship between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in Benin. Local attitudes to both religions are contradictory: while Pentecostal leaders emphasise the opposition between Pentecostal Christianity and traditional religion, many Edo speakers see both religions as important aspects of contemporary Edo identity. As Edo language video filmmakers tend to share this widely held views, the understanding of both religions as complementary rather than opposites also influences how they represent both religions in their films.

Religion has played an important role in the long and distinguished history of Edo people. However, little, if anything, has been written about the depiction of this history through film. This chapter argues that Edo filmmakers' portrayal of religion reflects important aspects of the religious landscape of Benin Kingdom. Although especially Pentecostal leaders emphasise the difference between Christianity and traditional religion, the Oba, who is the spiritual head of Edo traditional religion and culture, and also widely regarded as the father of all religions in today's Benin, stresses the compatibility of both religions. Edo filmmakers recognise the authority of the Oba as well as the discourses of

Pentecostal leaders as important. This means that the storylines of Edo religious films do not necessarily convey a simple message. Aimed at an Edo language audience familiar with the local religious ecology, they are not intended to advocate for either Pentecostalism or traditional religion. Rather, the films explore the relationship between the two religions and their individual and collective contributions to the wellbeing of Benin society.

3.2 Film in Nigeria

Despite its limitations particularly in the quality of its productions, the Nigerian video film industry, informally known as Nollywood, currently enjoys an unprecedented popularity on the African continent and amongst the African diasporic communities in Europe, America, and the Caribbean. The popularity of the industry arises from its ability to tell the African stories that resonate with, and shape the, everyday life of the African people and those who trace their ancestry to the continent (Haynes 2007: 2, Krings and Okome 2013: 1-22).

While Nollywood is popular in the twenty-first century, more broadly however, many scholars argue that the history of film in Nigeria is burdened with colonial heritage, and this made the medium unattractive in the beginning (Diawara 1987, Shaka 1994, Okome 1996). Film came to Nigeria in 1903 under the British colonial administration of William MacGregor, and as a new medium, it was euphorically received. According to Onookome Okome (1996: 44), one of the first moving images that were displayed at the Glover Memorial Hall, venue of the first screening, was a fleeting sight of the visit to England of the *Alake* of *Egbaland*, a traditional ruler in the Southwest Region of Nigeria. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm that greeted this first screening soon petered out because of the disconnectedness of subsequent films (Okome 1996: 45). For the most part, the narrative of film in its early to middle years is dominated by the discourse of paternalistic colonial filmmaking (Ebewo 2007, Akpabio 2007, Olayiwola 2011, Obiaya 2011). Many film experts suggest that at this stage, film was deployed as part of the efforts to reinforce the 'civilising mission' and to spread the benefits

of colonialism (Ebewo 2007:46-7, Akpabio 2007: 90-2). Films of this era were often re-edited or censored to suit the thinking of 'backward peoples' and scenes, actions, characters, and props of films designed for the colonies, were kept as simple as possible so that Africans could understand them. The use of sophisticated camera techniques was also avoided in order not to distract them (Obiaya 2011: 137). Many scholars believe that these early films were also used to promote the superiority of Euro-American culture at the expense of the culture of the colonised (Diawara 1987: 61-3, Adeyemi 2010: 60-1, Olayiwola 2011: 184-5).

The approach to filmmaking between 1920s and early 1950s in colonial Nigeria was largely informed by the attitude of William Sellers, a sanitary superintendent, who was regarded as the leading figure of colonial instructional films. Stephanie Newell (2017: 348, 2018: 8) argues that Sellers championed the idea of simple amateur filmmaking that drove home the message of cleanliness and promoted the embrace of capitalist economic ideas amongst 'backward audiences' in an uncomplicated manner. His idea of films for the colonised was based on 'simple shots and singular lessons' (Newell 2017: 348). Armed with this philosophy, Sellers went on to produce such films as '*The Plague*' (1926), '*Lagos Health and Baby Week*' (1933), *'Anti-Plague Operations in Lagos*' (1937), '*The Construction of Bored-Hole Latrines'*, '*Modern Slaughter House Practice'*, and '*Anti-Malaria Fieldwork'*.[5] Newell states that Sellers and his team were so convinced about the impact of their approach to filmmaking that they regarded it as the 'document of the future for British imperial subjects, not only teaching them how to be free from dirt, but also how to be modern participants in the global economy' (2017: 348). Apart from the patronising nature of the films, Ikechukwu Obiaya (2011) contends that Sellers' approach also excluded Africans from participating in the process of filmmaking. He argues that Europeans exclusively produced the instructional films made by Sellers (Obiaya 2011: 137).

[5] Release dates are not available for most of Sellers' amateur films in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

While Sellers and his team immersed themselves in the production of simple amateur instructional films, rather than inspire them, the messages and images contained in the films generated raucous and hysterical laughter from the targeted 'backward audiences' (Newell 2017, 2018). Newell argues that the laughter of the audience stemmed from the films' embedded images and messages not echoing their sociocultural realities, thus the audience saw the films as a comic relief rather than as instructional materials (2017: 350-2, 2018: 9-10). As the film shows were going on, she emphasises that the audience chatted, sometimes in loud voices and amidst screams, about particular scenes in the films that evoked incongruity with their own culture. Newell points out that because of their paternalistic attitude, Sellers and his team failed to recognise the sophisticated viewing habit being displayed by the audience (Newell 2017: 351-2). They dismissed the reactions of the audience as a 'sign of parochialism and the presence of "closed systems of thought'" (Newell 2017: 352). By the early 1950s, the British Colonial Office (BCO) had started to take seriously the disengaged attitude of the audience. The BCO mobilised Peter Morton-Williams, a British anthropologist, to investigate the apathy of the audience (Newell 2018: 6). By this time, however, a new film culture had already begun to take hold (Larkin 2008: 123-5, Newell 2018: 7).

Nevertheless, before the mobilisation of Morton-Williams, the British Colonial Office had started to explore the role of film beyond its use as a medium for the promotion of hygiene and the European way of life. Uppermost in their thinking was using the medium as a propaganda tool, and to a lesser degree, as an instrument for education (Diawara 1987: 62). This resulted in the establishment of the Colonial Films Committee (CFC) in 1929. In the same year, the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films (CECF) was also instituted in Britain to examine the role of film in education in the colonies. But the concrete step to institutionalise film production in the colonies came in 1935, when the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (BECE) was established. This body was headed by Major L A Notcutt, who also produced all the films. BECE made about thirty-five short films between 1935 and 1937 and its works were mainly in East Africa (Shaka 1994: 114). At this stage, when engaged at all, Africans worked at

the rudimentary levels of film production (Diawara 1987: 61-5, Mitchell 2018: 151).[6]

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 paused the use of film for instructional purpose, and resulted in the creation of the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) to propagate the British war efforts in the colonies (Obiaya 2011: 133, Mitchell 2018: 151). During this period, the CFU concerned itself with the screening of imported re-edited Euro-American films to its African audiences. These films validated Britain's interests in the war and attempted to justify Africans' participation in it (Shaka 1994: 118-9). This attempt further distanced the Nigerian audience from colonial films. Fela Sowande, a Nigerian musician, teamed up with the unit in 1944 to bring African inflections to their productions (Obiaya 2011: 134). By this time, Nigerians had begun to openly express their disaffection with the propaganda and condescending films of the CFU. Thus in 1945, the African Music Research Party (AMRP) advertised in the Daily Service newspaper to raise a £10,000 scholarship that would fund eligible youths among its members to train in film and theatre productions in the United States. The hope was that such youths would return to Nigeria afterwards to engage in film productions that would reflect the African experience (Obiaya 2011: 137).

After the end of World War II in 1945, the Colonial Film Unit reverted to the previous practice of producing mainly instructional films. In this period, the unit produced films such as '*Towards True Democracy*' (1947), *'Good Business'* (1947), and '*Village Development*' (1948). Even though these films were produced in the colonies, Africans who participated in the productions were again confined to the periphery of filmmaking (Obiaya 2011: 134-5). Also, it is not clear whether these films were popular or widely shown. However, Rosaleen Smyth (1992: 168-9) argues that in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), some local staff members of the CFU, notably G.B. Odunton, openly criticised the paternalistic nature of the instructional films, and that Aidan Crawley, a British Member of Parliament and chairman of the conference on The Film in Colonial Development, expressed

[6] Africans were given basic training in film production and were kept away from the mainstream of film production

dissatisfaction with the condescending messages and techniques of the films. Given the similarity of the history of colonialism in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, it could be stated that at best, the films were received with mixed feelings.

The Colonial Film Unit closed in 1950, arguing that it had achieved the objective of institutionalising the much needed film culture in the colonies. But before shutting down, in 1949, the body set-up a film school in Accra, Gold Coast, to train Africans in the art of filmmaking. The school began with seven students drawn from Nigeria and the Gold Coast. However, six months later, the school was moved, first to Jamaica, and then to London (Diawara 1987: 61-5).[7] In that same year, the Federal Film Unit (FFU) was created to carry out the functions of the CFU. Although it trained local people in filmmaking, this new body continued with CFU's ideology of marginalising Africans in film production. It was not until fifteen years later that its organisation and management would be transferred to Nigerians. Regardless of this transition, a change in management did not translate into an ideological transformation, as the FFU adopted its predecessor's instructional and moralistic approach to filmmaking (Obiaya 2011: 135). It continued to produce instructional films until independence in 1960.

Notwithstanding the preponderance of paternalism and audience alienation in the discourse of early to mid-colonial film production and spectatorship, a closer engagement with film texts, especially in the waning years of British rule, shows that the relationship between film and audience viewership was not so straightforward in colonial Nigeria, as it was in British Africa. As already stated, by the time the Colonial Office commissioned Peter Morton-Williams to examine the nonchalant attitude of the audience to the instructional films, a new film culture was already emerging. Although the colonial state sponsored mobile cinema van was in existence and visible, the new film culture was created and driven independently of the colonial government by a combination of local and foreign entrepreneurs, and film at this particular time was moulding and being moulded by colonised societies in a differentiated manner (Okome 1996, Ambler 2001, Larkin 2008, Newell 2018).

[7] It is not clear as to what happened to the Film School after it was moved to London

Brian Larkin (2008) argues that in the late colonial Northern Nigeria, film played a significant role in the ordering of the conservative Kano society. He stresses that while film served as a potent means in the architectural arrangement of Kano, the society itself also stratified film into a morally acceptable or repugnant medium (Larkin 2008: 123-4). He notes that in colonial Northern Nigeria, Kano was built on the basis of old and new cities. The old city, *Birni*, was conceptualised as the seat of Kano Islamic conservatism, where the *Emir* or traditional ruler reigned supreme. *Waje*, the new city, was set-aside for non-Hausa Nigerians and foreigners, and it was the site for modern commercial activities, where non-Muslims settled (Larkin 2008: 126-8). Larkin highlights that film was integral to this physical arrangement. While the buildings for film screenings were located in *Waje*, they were sited close to the borders of *Birni*, indicating the physical but also moral boundaries between the two cities. At the same time, he argues that two forms of film culture existed: one was the *majigi*, which was the state sponsored mobile cinema van, and the other was the commercial cinema, which was privately driven and business oriented (Larkin 2008: 123-5). In the social and moral order of things, the *majigi* was considered by the Kano society as showing films that were in tune with conservative Islam and so was accepted in *Birni*, while the commercial cinema was rejected, and regarded as agent of moral degeneracy and social chaos. Thus it was considered only suitable for *Waje*, the 'enclave of disrepute' (Larkin 2008: 128-130). In colonial Kano, film was used to spatially arrange the city, but the society also used the medium to morally order Kano, creating a society of 'us' and 'them'.

Using the Copperbelt Region of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) as a case study to examine film culture in the declining years of British rule in Africa, Charles Ambler (2001) suggests that the Hollywood Western films of the 1940s and 1950s inspired what he describes as 'Copperbelt Cowboys' urban film culture amongst young Africans working in the copper mines. Arguing that this was replicated across British Africa, he stresses that it was common to find young men dressed in the Cowboy fashion seen in the films, and that the young men frequently paraded in the names of the characters associated with the

Hollywood Westerns (Ambler 2001: 81-2). Although the young men perceived themselves as symbols of modernity in a largely traditional African society (2001: 87), the older generation of men and women ordered them as morally debased and their attitude as socially reprehensible (2001: 100). Furthermore, Ambler emphasises that despite the 'Copperbelt Cowboys' regarding themselves as city dwellers, they still maintained strong connections to the outlying rural areas, where they originally came from (Ambler 2001: 81-2). In this situation, film became a symbol of social class and generational boundary, but it also blurred the social frontier between the urban and the outlying rural areas.

Although Onookome Okome (1996) strongly criticises colonial films in Nigeria for culturally alienating the audience and for debasing the indigenous culture, he alludes to the fact that the twilight years of British colonialism in Lagos experienced an urban film culture that was spearheaded by the 'mercantilists' (Okome 1996: 44-55). He argues that the cultural innovation introduced by the private entrepreneurs contrasted sharply with the one promoted by the mobile cinema van of the Colonial Film Unit, and that the difference was often reflected in the attitudes of the Lagos youths of that era. Okome highlights that while the CFU mobile cinema van peddled films 'about white people, European films in general, and American slapsticks, especially of the Charlie Chaplin kind' (1996: 52), which alienated the youths, the 'mercantilists' indulged in Hollywood Westerns that rang of such names as 'John Wayne, Texas Django, Nevajojo, and many more', to promote their wares (Okome 1996: 53). Such names resonated with the young men and women of Lagos and it helped to prosper the business of the 'mercantilists'. However, while the business tactic of the 'mercantilists' created a vibrant urban film culture amongst the Lagos youths, it was resented by the colonial establishment and the African elite, who considered these youths as 'outside "real" local culture' (Okome 1996: 55). Here, film in the declining years of colonialism in Lagos became a signifier of bureaucracy, represented by the alienating films of CFU, and the vibrancy of the private sector, represented by the captivating Westerns of the 'mercantilists'. And similar to the 'Coppebelt Cowboys' of Northern Rhodesia, who were branded social outcasts by the older generation, the medium also became a moral and social marker of the youths and

the Lagos elite. Many of the young men who identified with the 'mercantilists' films or Hollywood Westerns were typecast as 'area boys' by the elite, a common term used to define collective associations of youth linked to a particular area or locality perceived as social delinquents in Nigeria (cf. Ismail 2009: 464).

It is clear that early to mid-colonial films were paternalistic and marginalised audiences in colonial Nigeria, as they did in British ruled Africa. However, it is also obvious that the latter years of colonialism experienced a thriving film culture, which transcended the post-colony. Largely driven by the enterprise of private individuals, the film culture developed outside of the influence of the colonial authorities. As has been shown, audiences in Nigeria and across Africa reacted differently to the medium, and film also impacted on societies in varying ways.

In the aftermath of colonialism, the emergence of indigenous independent filmmakers ensured that Nigerians continued to embrace the film culture that was engendered by the latter years of colonialism. In spite of the legacy of infrastructural shortfall for filmmaking, the lack of funding, and the dearth of personnel, these independent filmmakers were able to produce films that had semblance of the lived experiences of the local audience, and they also recorded modest success in terms of viewership (Diawara 1987: 61-5, Adeyemi 2010: 61, Obiaya 2011: 140-2). It was in this period that Francis Oladele produced the first Nigerian independent feature film, '*Kongi's Harvest*' (1970), for Calpeny (Adeyemi 2010: 61). Before then however, Segun Olusola directed '*Son of Africa*' (1970) for Fedfilms, a Lebanese-Nigerian production company. Because of the insignificant contributions of local film professionals, this film is generally not regarded as the first independent feature film in Nigeria (Obiaya 2011: 141). Other notable filmmakers of this era were Ola Balogun, who produced *Alpha* (1972) and *Vivre* (1974), and Eddie Ugbomah, who had so many film credits to his name, the most prominent of which was '*The Rise and Fall of Dr Oyenusi* (1974) (Obiaya 2011: 141). Through the effective use of the mobile cinema van of the late colonial period, the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes furthered this new interest in film in the 1970s and 80s, particularly in the Southwestern

region of the country. They recorded on celluloid and showcased films in venues around the region, thus attracting new audiences from the remotest parts of the region to the medium (Jeyifo 1984, Ashaolu 2017: 65-6).

Unfortunately, the socioeconomic collapse of the late 1980s and early 1990s arrested this cinematic enthusiasm. The oil boom in Nigeria had gone bust and the Nigerian economy was ailing. The related Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed a lot of restrictions on the economy and impacted on the availability of sophisticated film equipment (Onuzulike 2007: 19). The Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes could no longer afford the imported celluloid. This development, in addition to the advent of video-cassettes consumables in domestic spaces (Gore 1998, Idachaba 2018) and the insecurity that characterised the late 1980s to early 1990s (Haynes 2007), especially in the case of Benin where the notorious criminal, Lawrence Anini, reigned supreme (Marenin 1987), impacted negatively on nightlife. The nascent cinema-going culture was truncated and the decline in the socioeconomic circumstances of Nigerians meant that cinema leisure became a luxury (Haynes 2007: 1, Olayiwola 2011: 189).

The use of video to document events such as weddings, funeral ceremonies, and personas, which were broadcast on television, preceded and developed alongside video filmmaking (Omoera 2014a: 48). However, in 1992, Kenneth Nnebue, an Igbo businessman who had been working with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes, experimented with shooting a film on video cassette. It was a huge success. Even though some scholars have contested it (Obiaya 2011: 142, Olayiwola 2011: 189), the production of '*Living in Bondage*' – the title of Nnebue's experiment – is generally regarded as marking the beginning of the Nigerian video film industry, commonly known as Nollywood (Onuzulike 2007: 19-20). This happened at a time when the Nigerian government was deregulating the broadcasting landscape to allow for private and foreign participation (Ariye 2010: 417-8). The Nigerian government established the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to regulate broadcasting (Mohammed

1994: 94).[8] And the global terrain of media and communication technology was undergoing democratisation such that audiovisual facilities like video cameras and cassettes became cheaply available (Barnett 2004: 9-12). These initiatives combined to provide opportunities for individuals who had the flair and creativity for filmmaking to express themselves and to tell their own stories.

Experts have identified two main factors as greatly influential in the strength and popularity of Nollywood: the heterogeneity of the industry in terms of its languages of production (Adeyemi 2010: 66-7, McCain 2013: 36-8), and its ability to address themes that reflect the lived experiences of its audience (Ebewo 2007: 47, Haynes 2007: 1). The ability of the Nigerian video film industry to address themes that reverberate with its audience is highlighted by Akpabio (2007: 91). He states that Nollywood producers exploit themes such as domestic abuse or violence, criminalities in the society, immorality, social vices, poverty, occult, religion, politics, migration, and other issues that speak to the existential realities of Africans in the twenty-first century.

3.3 Indigenous Language Nollywood Films

Carmen McCain (2013) argues that contrary to the widely held opinion in academic and popular circles, the dominant form of Nollywood productions is not the academically hegemonic English language genre but the less heralded indigenous Nigerian languages type. According to her, films produced in Nigerian languages consistently outnumber those produced in English language. [9]Out of the number of indigenous language films put forward to the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) during the period she reviewed, Edo language video films made up a significant number; they consistently ranked third behind Yoruba and Hausa language categories.

[8] Decree No. 38 of 1992 (amended in 1999) established the National Broadcasting Commission

[9] Carmen McCain draws on records available at the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) between 1994, when filmmakers started to submit their production for approval, and 2011. English language films outnumbered indigenous language films only in 2004.

The production of Nigerian video films in indigenous languages is a potent means for the preservation of cultural heritage. It is also a medium that serves as an instrument of self-assertion especially in an ethno-linguistically plural nation like Nigeria (Onuzulike 2015: 239, Ashaolu 2017: 65). In this regard, Nigerian language film production is not just a source of entertainment but also a medium for the expression of ethnic and linguistic identity (Adeyemi 2010: 66-7, Ashaolu 2017: 67-8). Indigenous language film production in Nigeria evolved in tandem with post-colonial filmmaking. Most of the filmmakers also simultaneously produced in English (Obiaya 2011: 140-2). For instance, Ola Balogun is credited with making the first indigenous language film '*Amadi*', an Igbo language film in 1975. He also made such films as '*Thundergod'* (1971), *'Fire in the Afternoon*' (1971), and *'In the Beginning'* (1972) in English (Obiaya 2011). He would later go on to collaborate with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes to make several other films.

Adamu Halilu, a filmmaker of Hausa extraction, produced '*Shehu Umar'*, the first Hausa language film in Nigeria in 1976. Another prominent player in post-colonial indigenous independent filmmaking whose work overlapped both the English and indigenous language film productions was Eddie Ugbomah. Although he was of Delta Igbo heritage, he predominantly produced his indigenous language films in Yoruba and he worked extensively with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes (Adeyemi 2010: 62, Obiaya 2011: 141), who were in the forefront of indigenous film production in Nigeria. Some of the titles he produced include '*Esan*' (1985), '*Apalara*' (1986), *'Omiran'* (1986), and *'Toriade'* (1989). His English language productions during this period include '*The Rise and Fall of Dr Oyenusi'* (1977), '*The Mask*' (1979), '*Oil Doom*' (1981), *'Bulos 80*' (1982), '*The Boy is Good*' (1982), '*The Death of a Black President*' (1983), and '*Vengeance of the Cult'* (1984) (Obiaya 2011: 141).

As stated above, it was the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes that spearheaded indigenous language film production. They also entrenched indigenous language films as a popular form of entertainment and cultural nationalistic expression, especially in the southwest region of the country (Onuzulike 2015: 240-1). Karin

Barber highlights the contributions of the Travelling Theatre troupes. She contends that their plays [and films] played to 'the people as a whole, rather than to exclusive, partial groupings or strata of the population…' (2000: 3). Barber goes on to suggest that the groups became so successful that their leaders became household names in the Southwest Region, but also across the country more generally. Many of the practitioners had initially collaborated with the post-colonial independent filmmakers to produce some of the earlier films mentioned but they also progressed on to make films in their own rights. Chief Hubert Ogunde, who started out from the traditional Yoruba Alarinjo theatre (Haynes 1995: 100), is widely regarded as the doyen of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes. He produced '*Jaiyesinmi*' in 1980 and '*Aropin N'tenia* in 1981. Another Yoruba Theatre performer, Moses Olaiya, produced '*Are Agbaye*' in 1983. Also, Adeyemi Folayan shot '*Kadara*' in 1982, '*Ija Orogun*' and '*Taxi Driver* in 1983 (Adeyemi 2010:61-2, Obiaya 2011: 141-2). The Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes have been credited with laying the building blocks for the Nigerian video film phenomenon. They provided the personnel, the technical capacity, and the audience base on which Nollywood was able to build on and flourish (Olayiwola 2011: 189-190).

The new momentum inspired by the Travelling Theatre troupes attracted Nigerians with creative flair to optically explore general issues affecting the people, but it also drew in those with highly specific intentions to articulate their views. Prominent amongst these groups is the Pentecostal movement. The religious group has not only benefited from the success of Nollywood to reach out to a larger audience than would have otherwise been possible (Marhsall-Fratani 1998: 282), but has also been able to use the industry to shape itself as an oppositional religion to the traditional religion of Africans (Meyer 2005: 157). The leadership of the organisation has appropriated Nollywood to cast African traditional religion as evil and to present Pentecostalism as the only viable alternative for the restoration of order to the society. Many English language Nollywood producers have also keyed into this narrative for profit making and entertainment purposes (Ukah 2003, 2012: 210-11, Meyer 2005: 163, 2015: 172). But as this and other Chapters in the thesis show, the commitment of Edo

language video filmmakers to the overall wellbeing of Benin means that they differ in their approach to the portrayal of religion. Their approach may also have significant implications for the discourse of African language religious video films.

3.4 Edo Language Video Films and Religion in Benin

The beginning of the production of Edo language video films is one that is contested by scholars and practitioners alike (Omoera 2014a: 51). The earliest Edo language films, according to Onions Edionwe, a renowned producer of Edo language films, were produced in the late 1980s when some Edo performing artists collaborated with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). It was during this period that such films as *Ikioya* (1988), *Ewemade* (1989), and *Ehizomwangie* (1990) were produced. Peddie Okao, another Edo language filmmaker, however proffers another production as the beginning of Edo language films. He contends that *Evbakoe*, a film produced in 1998 by Soul2Soul, a private video production company, marked the beginning of Edo language film production (Omoera 2014a: 121). The two accounts could be taken as correct in that while the former represents the first set of films ever produced in Edo language; the latter was the first independently produced Edo language video film. What is beyond dispute however is that these early video films were of the television drama genre, which articulated the historical and cultural heritage of Benin Kingdom, but they also adopted the dramatic format of earlier local television programmes such as '*Hotel de Jordan*', '*Things Fall Apart*', and '*Pot of Life*'. Later productions, which could be regarded as falling under the Nollywood era, use the feature film canons to address more contemporary cultural issues in Benin. And their religious experiences account for a significant number of the themes of these video films.

In his study of audience reception of Benin [Edo language] video films, Osakue Omoera (2014a: 93) classified Edo language video films into seven genres: action or sci-fi films, musical films, documentary films, rags-to-riches, materialistic or social commentary films, comic or hilarious films, Pentecostal or Christian films,

and epic, historical or folkloric films. Even though he orders Edo language video films into seven different categories, the focus of this thesis is a granular study of a particular genre of Edo films that articulates a dialectic between Pentecostalism and Edo indigenous religion. For the most part, this genre transcends Omoera's Pentecostal or Christian films and epic, historical, or folkloric films categories. Omoera explains that Edo language sci-fi video films are those that have adopted the technology of computerisation and digitalisation to explore local themes that resonate with Edo people, arguing that these films are usually packed with actions. Themes such as deceit, theft, crime, violence and youthful exuberance constitute the bulk of this genre. Musical films, according to him, are those that have embraced the 'operatic characteristics of music traditions of old' to narrate and visualise age-old Benin dances, with a modern slant (Omoera 2014a: 100). Documentary films are those that attempt to re-present Edo history and culture as they happened in the past, and the rags-to-riches, materialistic or social commentary category deals with the socio-political, cultural and economic issues that Edo people grapple with in a kingdom located in a post-colonial nation that is beset with social and economic crises. The comic or hilarious films are the Edo language films that tell the contemporary issues Edo people face in an amusing way with the aim of eliciting laughter and fun from the audience.

Omoera also describes Pentecostal or Christian films as those that strive to portray Christian doctrines by predicating their narration and visualisation on Edo worldview, with the hope of proselytising to them, and the epic, historical or folkloric films as those dwelling on the history and religious culture of Edo people. Generally, the last two categories dominate the products of Edo language filmmakers. Historical, folkloric or epic films often explore the complex web of the social and religious structures of Benin Kingdom and use these themes to tell the unique stories of Edo people in a diverse nation-state. Iyeke Orhionmwon, a prolific Edo language filmmaker, confirms this sentiment when he said:

> If you check Nigeria as a nation, you discover that there are three major tribes [ethnic groups]. It would be somehow wrong as a Benin [Edo] man to join

> others to promote their culture, leaving mine behind. That's why I decided to stay back and project my culture from here to the outside world (Iyeke Orhionmwon, personal interview October 8th 2018).

Like other African language films, Edo language video films are appreciated by their audience because of the films' capacity to reflect their life experiences (Omoera 2014a: 122). A significant number of these films depict the relationships that exist between Edo people, their traditional religion, which although has been part of Benin cosmology from the beginning, but has undergone some transformations over the decades and from community to community (Gore 2007), and Christianity, which came into Benin Kingdom over five hundred years ago (Egharevba 1949: 28, Bradbury 1957: 52-60).

Edo language video films draw on the religious landscape of Benin Kingdom, which has experienced considerable alterations over the years. During the field study, it was evident that three principal religions are currently practiced in the twenty-first century Benin. These are the Edo traditional religion, Christianity, and Islam. As stated in the previous Chapter, the three religions are clearly visible in Edo State. Nevertheless, whilst the three religions are also prominent in Benin City, Edo citizens who speak the language of the video films in focus mostly adhere to Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal or Christianity more broadly. Whereas, Islam remains predominantly a religion confined to the immigrant population in the city. Hence, it has little or no presence at all in the leitmotifs of Edo language video films. However, the contemporary relationship between especially Pentecostal Christianity and traditional religion is a matter of ongoing contestation and debate. Pentecostals emphasise the distance between Christianity and traditional practice, but many Edo filmmakers see the two religions as compatible. The latter also reflects the views and practices of the Oba of Benin and the traditional chiefs.

Earlier attempts were made by the Portuguese to introduce Christianity to Benin after the voyage of Ruy de Sequeira in 1472 to the kingdom (Ryder 1969: 24), but the missionaries did not establish any long-term Christian presence. The

cross worn on some chiefs' attires predated the arrival of the missionaries and the Portuguese took this to indicate a Christian kingdom associated with the notion of Prester John. But after the British invasion, Benin was once again open to modern missionaries, and in the late twentieth century, Christianity became the most visible religion in the city. Some Edo researchers such as Aisien (2013) suggest that there was the successful introduction of Christianity into the kingdom by the Portuguese missionaries during the reign of Oba Esigie in the fifteenth century and that this profoundly affected how Edo people, particularly the monarchy, practiced this traditional religion. It is argued that it infused some aspects of the Portuguese Christian tradition into Edo traditional religious worship.

The coming of the Portuguese also informed the creation of the *Ewua Guild* (Praying Party) in the Ogbelaka district of Benin City, with the *Ohuoba* as the head. Aisien emphasises that the title of the *Ohuoba* was created to represent the Portuguese priest that prayed for Oba Esigie early in the morning on a daily basis. Another significant contribution of the Portuguese to Edo religion, according to Aisien, is the mandatory journey every newly ordained traditional chief in Benin Kingdom makes to the fourteen shrines in the inner city of Benin. He argues that this journey replicates the annual pilgrimage made by the *Corpus Christi* during the period of Oba Esigie. Other changes effected by the Portuguese's arrival include the creation of the *Ugie Iron* and the *Ugie Oro*, which are annual festivals held in the Palace of the Oba, the *emuen-muen*, a statue set-up to honour the contribution of the Portuguese to the triumph of Benin Kingdom over the people of Idah, the creation of the towns of *Igueben* and *Agenebode*, the *Emi'Ighan* ceremonial drum, the *Ekpeti Oton*, and the *Ekasa* dance (Aisien 2013: 10-20).

The presence of Pentecostal Christian churches in Benin Kingdom in the twenty-first century is clear for everyone to see, as their presence is noticeable in every major street in Benin City. As Charles Gore (2007: 45-6) suggests, even though traditional practices still persists in contemporary Benin City particularly in

relation to funerals, the spread of the religious movement coincided with the retreat of traditional religious shrines from public view.

These churches are usually packed to the brim during weekend services. Part of the draw of Pentecostalism in Africa is the adeptness of the leadership of the movement. According to Birgit Meyer (1998: 319-320, 2004: 96-8, 2005: 155-9) and John Magbadelo (2004: 22-3), the leadership of the movement has skilfully internalised, reinvented, and weaved together popular culture and the socioeconomic adversities which confronted Africans in the wake of the socioeconomic and democratic deficits, which riddled parts of the continent in the mid-1980s to early 1990s, to make itself relevant to the material needs of the people. Both scholars argue that because Pentecostal leaders are well educated, they are able to adopt the benefits offered by media technology and use their language expertise to propagate their messages beyond the confines of their congregations.

During services in these churches, it is common to observe Pentecostal leaders calling on their congregants to step forward to the altar if they want to 'make a complete break with the past'. The past in this case refers to the African traditional religion, which many of the adherents had been born into and which the Pentecostal leaders hold responsible for the troubles plaguing the congregants (Meyer 1998: 323-5). As already highlighted, in Benin Kingdom, as in other parts of Africa, Pentecostalism thrives on its opposition to African traditional religion, and its leaders emphasise that traditional religion perpetrates evil through its agents, which are the family gods, magic, rituals, witches, and wizards. In a country that has been dogged by socio-economic and political upheavals since the 1980s, John Magbadelo (2004: 15) argues that such rhetoric sounds like music to the ears of the 'pool of frustrated and marginalised people in the larger Nigerian society'.

As the Pentecostal leaders' oratory resonated with the 'marginalised people', video filmmakers also capitalised on the narrative (Ukah 2012). The Pentecostal rhetoric is particularly obvious in the English and other colonial inherited

language African religious video films, which, in the case of Nigeria, was pioneered by Igbo filmmakers from the Southeast Region (Meyer 1998, 2005, Ukah 2003, 2012, Pype 2012, Tasie 2013). The main ways in which post-colonial English language Nigerian video film producers diabolise traditional religion include the exaggerated displays of ritualism and magic, and the labelling of witchcraft as belonging exclusively to the realm of traditional religion (Elegbe 2012: 225-7, Dipio 2007: 78). These traditional religious accoutrements are a vital component of the African traditional religious worldview. Scholars argue that rituals and magic in particular are deployed as part of traditional religious rites and worships in Africa, where they are used to sanctify the land, for atonement, as oaths of loyalty to a cause, and as part of ceremonies such as dedications, coronations, marriages and funerals. In other words, rituals and magic in Africa are a critical means of restoring, sustaining, and reinforcing the moral order of a society. They constitute the foundation on which the African social and religious world revolves, and are an integral part of religious worship and traditional practices on the continent (Elegbe 2012, Dipio 2007).

However, for most English language religious video filmmakers, these traditional practices represent moral darkness (Tasie 2013:26). For example, in most films portraying African traditional religion, the revered traditional healer personifies evil. His modi operandi are rituals, magic and witchcraft. The video filmmakers' narrative of the traditional healer, which they refer to as 'juju priest' or 'native doctor', contradicts his role in the real world, where he is still very relevant in the control of the social and moral universe of the African society in the twenty-first century (Tasie 2013: 25, Dipio 2007: 78). The approach of many English language Nollywood producers to the depiction of the traditional religious healer or priest is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

In Benin, as in most African society's cosmology, there are good and evil magic. Good magic is located in the realm of African traditional healers, diviners and rainmakers, who are well respected and held in high esteem in the community (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014: 10). These medicine men and diviners deploy their knowledge for the good of the communities, thus ensuring the moral and

social equilibrium of the communities. Whereas, on its part, evil magic is deployed by people to harm others, it is the traditional medicine men who usually come to the rescue of those afflicted (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014: 11).

The attitude of many Nigerian English language video filmmakers suggests that the relationship between religion, film, and lived experience lacks depth. But as already seen with film in the colonial era, audience relationship with the audio-visual medium is not as clearly defined. This differentiated attitude is also reflected in the Edo language video film sector.

The current ideological standpoint of Pentecostal Christianity, as it relates to Edo traditional religion, sits contrary to the philosophy of the broader Christian faith at its inception in Benin Kingdom. Christianity at the time acknowledged traditional religion but viewed it as non-threatening to its missionary cause (Kalu 2008: ix). Before the arrival of Christianity however, Edo people had been strict adherents of the Edo traditional religion (Bradbury 1957: 52-60, Egharevba 1949: 83-5). In the main, the traditional cosmos of Benin Kingdom rotates around two worlds: '*agbon*' and '*erimwin*'. Chukwuma Azuonye (1996: 30-47) explains that *agbon* refers to the earth, which is the physical world that is wholly bounded by water and fed by all the rivers that nourish the humans and animals dwelling in it. Edo people believe that besides humans and animals, there also exists a pantheon of good and evil deities in *agbon*. Regardless of whether they are benevolent or malevolent, Edo people consider these gods as children of *Osanobua* (the Almighty God). While *Osanobua* is a distant presence from *agbon*, these gods descended from heaven to dwell amongst humans on earth. Azuonye further ascertains that *erimwin* is the unseen world, that is, the spirit world that Edo people consider to be heaven. In their philosophical worldview, *erimwin* is the world that can only be found under the sea or across the water, where *Osanobua* and some other spirits live.

Other key gods in the kingdom that attract huge following include *Olokun* and *Ogun*. *Olokun* is the eldest and the preferred son of *Osanobua*, and he dwells in *Okun* (Ethiope) River, at Urhonigbe. He is the most revered deity in Benin

mythology and his most favoured wife is *Ora*. He is said to be the god of fertility and wealth who blesses couples with children and the people with prosperity. For someone to gain favour from *Olokun*, they have to reach him through his wife, *Ora*, by singing her praises and screaming out her name four times at the bank of any river. All rivers in the kingdom are conceptualised as deriving their sources from River *Okun*. If satisfied with their praises and sacrifices, she then conveys their requests to *Olokun*, who must grant them their wishes, because they were conveyed to him by his most favoured wife (Egharevba 1949: 84, Bradbury 1957: 53). *Ogun*, according to Azuonye, is the god dedicated to iron thus craftsmen associated with metalwork form the bulk of its followers. Altars are erected, filled with all sorts of metal, where sacrifices are made to seek for success in their endeavour. Other worshippers include hunters and warriors who always seek his favour before embarking on any mission.

3.5 Holy Aruosa Church

One of the most noteworthy contributions of the Portuguese missionaries to Edo religious culture is probably the Holy Aruosa Church and missionary records of that visit to Benin note the designation of a plot of land assigned to them by the Oba of Benin. It remains an important church in Benin today. It illustrates the Oba's attitude towards the kingdom's religious plurality and the Edo people's complex religious culture. More importantly, it expresses the ideological standpoint of Edo language video filmmakers.

At the present day, it is claimed that Holy Aruosa was introduced into the kingdom as a Catholic church (Otedo News 2013), but it fell victim to the British invasion of the kingdom in 1897, as it was razed down alongside the entire city. Before the arrival of the Portuguese however, Edo people acknowledged the existence of a Supreme Deity and they worshipped Him accordingly. Their pre-Portuguese missionaries' mode of worship of the Supreme Being followed the order laid down by their ancestors, which required the *Ohen-Osa* (High priest of

God) to pray and break the kolanuts. He would then kill some animals such as fowls or goats and sprinkle their blood on the altar (Ogedegbe 1970: 151).

Thereafter, he would order a feast to be prepared using the remains of the animals that were sacrificed. Such feasts usually consisted of pounded yam, which the Edo people call *Eman*, boiled meat, soup, and *Obobo* (mashed yam mixed with palm oil). Little bits of the meat, soup, pounded yam and *Obobo* were then placed on the altar for the spirits to consume, and the congregation ate the rest (Oba Akenzua II 1945: 1, Ogedegbe 1970: 151). The altar of the Supreme Deity in this period was adorned with ornaments such as *Ukhurhe*, *Uwenrhiontan*, *Ebaokhue*, *Ovbiakheame*, *Orhue*, *Ikpigho*, *Ada*, *Eben*, and *Egogo*.[10] In addition, it also contained some pieces of white and red cloth, which were placed at where the priest prayed. It is claimed that the forefathers of Edo people who worshipped the Supreme Being underwent some purification exercise before appearing at the altar and when passing by it, they raised their hands up and prayed: *'Osanobua*, *Igbinaan*' (God, I cling on to you) (Welton 1969b: 23, Ogedegbe 1970: 151).

The Holy Aruosa Church was re-instated by Oba Akenzua II in 1945. Although it is claimed that the new Holy Aruosa was built on the site of the original Portuguese church (Ediagbonya 2015: 214), no evidence of it exists today. With the new Holy Aruosa Church, the traditional mode of worship of the Supreme Being gave way to a new method that was heavily influenced by the framework of the Portuguese Catholic Church, but filled with the content of Edo oral history, tradition, and cultural and religious values (Welton 1969b). In the place of the old ornaments that adorned the old altar, their drawings and paintings, as well as that of the Oba, were instead inscribed on the new cathedral building. Designated as the Edo National Church of God, its main objectives at the time of its re-establishment were:

[10] *Ukhure* is a rattlestaff. It usually serves as an intermediary between a family or clan and their ancestors. *Uwenrhiontan* is a peeled wand smeared with white chalk. *Ebaokhue* is the parrot's feather. *Ovbiakheame* is a small earthenware pot filled with water. *Orhue* is white chalk. *Ikpigho* is cowry shells. *Ada* and *Eben* are Benin royal swords. *Egogo* is an indigenous gong.

- To worship God in the simple practical and undogmatic way.

- To make known to the world the meaning and significance of Benin National Festivals.

- To preserve the Benin Custom, Tradition and Tribal identity (Oba Akenzua II 1945: 10)

Michael Welton points out that with the Holy Aruosa Church, Edo people rejected the Western Christian notion of the exclusiveness of revelation and the mantra of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God, pointing out that from the Edo people's worldview, God has had direct communications with them and their ancestors even before the birth of Jesus Christ (1969b: 26-7). He goes further to assert that Edo people's rejection of Western Christian ideology was predicated on the need to assert their identity in the struggle against Western domination and colonialism. In doing this, he argues, they had to develop new scriptures, creed, catechism, hymns, and a unique choir for the conduct of services at the Holy Aruosa Church. They expunged the Biblical saints from the texts and replaced them with their hero-deities, and repudiated Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Instead, *Olokun* was put in His place. They also adopted languages that are associated with Christianity to describe the Edo people's spiritual world. The creed of the Holy Aruosa Church bears similarities in its framing to the Apostle's creed:

> I believe in God who made Heaven and Earth and all things therein. I believe in the Sanctity of His Holy Co-Existents. I believe in the purity of His Holy Messengers who are the guides of human beings. I believe God made Mortals and Immortals to serve Him, worship Him, love Him, praise Him and adore Him in Heaven and on Earth. I believe I was born holy and pure and that the pious priest now has made me holy and pure in the holy Name of God. I believe I cannot stand before the Holy Throne of God, or become a member of the Holy Assembly of God in the last day, if I do not love my fellow creatures as myself, or do unto them as I would they unto me. I believe that all diverse ways of serving God are acceptable to Him. I believe that Prophets existed and will always exist

> in this world through whom God has revealed and will always reveal His Majesty. I believe sins are punishable in this life or hereafter (The Creed of Aruosa).

The creed is modelled on Benin Kingdom's worldview, which highlights the Supremacy of God and the preeminent rulership of the Oba of Benin over the earth. It also states that God mediates the physical realm of humans through the hero-deities of Benin Kingdom. This could be likened to how the Oba of Benin governs the kingdom through his chiefs and Enigie. The creed further acknowledges the existence of other gods in the kingdom, which it refers to as Co-Existents (Welton 1969b: 24, Ogedegbe 1970: 153-4). Another significant adaptation from the Holy Bible is the Holy Aruosa Commandments. Rather than the ten commandments contained in the Christian Bible, the Holy Aruosa Commandments is made up of fourteen commandments, which every follower must learn to recite at all times (Ogedegbe 1970).

The conduct of services at the Holy Aruosa Church always begins with the choir singing hymns from the *Book of Holy Aruosa* and the *Ohen-Osa* walking down the aisle and sanctifying the worshippers by slowly waving his hand. Afterward, the congregation recite the creed. It is then followed by a short sermon, which is shaped in the Catholic way of worship. The scriptures also reflect the Biblical scriptures (Welton 1969b: 23). For example, Welton writes that in a sermon conducted on 12th December 1965, Mr Aisien, the then *Ohen-Osa*, took his sermon from St. Matthew: Chapter 25, verse 3 'Go ye, and do good' of the *Book of Holy Aruosa* (Welton 1969b: 25)

It should be noted here that the scriptures of the Holy Aruosa are based on the oral history and tradition of Benin Kingdom and were written by the Oba, with the assistance of some of his chiefs. They are essentially aimed at acquainting Edo people with the exploits of their ancestors. Paradoxically, when writing the scriptures, the Oba urged all Edo people to also study the Christian Bible alongside the *Book of the Holy Aruosa* so as to understand the teachings of the Western religion (Welton 1969b: 24). During sermons at the Holy Aruosa, hero-

deities of Benin Kingdom are usually juxtaposed with Jesus Christ, his disciples, and the Biblical saints. The outfits of the *Ohen-Osa*, his assistants, and the choir are shaped in the image of those of the Catholic priests but with a heavy flavour of Edo traditional religious culture clearly discernible in them (Welton 1969b: 24). Baptism at Holy Aruosa takes the form of the *Ohen-Osa* smearing the foreheads, chests, and backs of the worshippers with water, mixed with *Orhue* (White chalk), scooped from a pot placed at the altar. This is clearly an appropriation of the Catholic mode of baptism used by the Portuguese missionaries in the kingdom. At the end of the service, the congregation again recite the creed (Welton 1969b: 24, Ogedegbe 1970: 153-4).

Holy Aruosa Church is organised in a hierarchical manner, with the Oba of Benin as the custodian and perpetual head, followed by the eldest son, who is the heir to the Benin throne. The *Ohen-Osa* ranks third in terms of position in the church (Welton 1969b: 21-2). Its membership is largely drawn from the elderly and the traditional sphere of the society in Benin Kingdom, that is; those holding traditional positions in the society or those who have close links with the palace of the Oba. One factor that is noticeable to the keen observer of proceedings in Holy Aruosa is the obvious absence of the youths from its services. The youths of Benin Kingdom hardly attend the church, not because they reject the philosophy of the church or their traditional beliefs, but because of their desire to embrace modernity and progress, which they believe lies outside of Holy Aruosa (Welton 1969b: 21-2). It should be highlighted that the same Edo citizens who shun Holy Aruosa in their youth would later seek to associate with traditional institutions that have the Aruosa Church at the core after achieving the desired socioeconomic, political and educational height (cf. Kaplan 2003: 192-4).

3.6 Influence of the Oba of Benin

The position of the Oba of Benin is one that is central to the lives of Edo people. Benin Kingdom is organised around him, with power flowing from him through a complex web of chiefs and societies to the people, and back to him. Hence his

influence permeates every facet of life in the kingdom, including those of the filmmakers.

The Oba is the spiritual, cultural, and religious, leader of Edo people and as stated earlier, he is also considered as the father of all religions in modern Benin. He was also the political leader of the people until the British invasion of the kingdom in 1897 (Gore and Pratten 2003: 216-7). The high esteem with which he is held was obvious in my transactions with the research participants during the field study, including the filmmakers. Flora Edouwaye Kaplan clearly encapsulates this reverence in her description of the Oba:

> The Oba is still viewed in awe, fear, respect, and love. It is widely believed that his pronouncements have the power of prophecy and that they will come to pass…he is "the child" (meaning the beginning of all life), "the father" of all his people (the giver and taker of life), and the "old man" (the most senior and venerated among them) (2003: 193).

She goes on to suggest that the position of the Oba is central to the religious and cultural lives of Edo people. Peter Ovbiogbe, one of the filmmakers that participated in this research affirms this assertion when I asked him about a plaque that was placed on his office wall. He argues that he has won so many awards as a filmmaker, including one from the President of Nigeria, but that there is none he cherishes as much as the one placed on his office wall. It was presented to him by the Oba of Benin based on [redacted], one of the numerous video films he has produced depicting the historical, religious, and cultural lives of Edo people. For any Edo man, according to him, an award or honour bestowed by the Oba is the highest recognition that can ever be awarded and thus must be highly regarded by the recipient. Kaplan's argument provides solidity to this claim. She states that 'You cannot buy a title in Benin' is a familiar mantra held by other ethnicities in Nigeria about Edo people and their tradition. Any honour or award given to an individual by the Oba must be earned and are only given by the Oba. Titles confer on recipients grant direct access to the Oba

and certain traditional sites in the kingdom. They are recognitions of individuals' feats in their areas of endeavours (Kaplan 2003: 195). According to her, awards or honours are hardly given by the Oba, but if they are given, such awards or honours are held for life by the recipients regardless of their moral standing thereafter (Kaplan 2003: 190).

In my interactions with the filmmakers, the Pentecostal Christian leaders, and the traditional religious priests, the awe and respect with which they talked about the position of the Oba was palpable. In particular, the significance of the Oba's position in relation to how the filmmakers portray the history and religious trajectories of Edo people is summarised by Gbubemi Toghanro, another filmmaker who participated in the research:

> We highly reverence the institution of the Oba…if the Oba says a thing, no Edo man, no matter where you are, can go against it. The Oba is the custodian of our traditional culture…if the Oba chooses to go the other way, it is natural that people follow suit. He is the king (Gbubemi Toghanro, personal interview October 8th 2018).

3.7 Influence of the Religious Landscape on Edo Language Filmmakers

In the twenty first century, the majority of Edo people profess Christianity as their faith and a significant number of these Christians adhere to the Pentecostal strand. At any given service in these Pentecostal churches, it is widespread to hear leaders of these churches emphasising the duality between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion and calling on their congregants to eschew traditional religious practices if they are to attain eternal after-life (Meyer 1998: 317, Kaplan 2003: 192). To them, Pentecostal Christianity is in diametric opposition to African traditional religion, in the same way that light is the opposite of darkness. They equate African traditional religion to the ways of the devil and Pentecostalism to the ways of God, and employ the theory of modernisation to try and convince audiences even far beyond their congregants

to 'make a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998: 317). In doing this, they associate Pentecostalism with progress, modernity, wealth creation, civilisation and globalisation, and tag African traditional religion as belonging to the past, traditional, poverty, disease and isolation.

Pentecostal leaders in Benin Kingdom decry the relationship early Christianity had with the traditional religion of Edo people, which manifested in the Holy Aruosa Church. They brand it as sacrilegious and a 'pervasion of Christianity riddled with heathen practices' (Ogedegbe 1970: 152). The current established churches, such as the Catholic and Protestant churches, are not spared either. Pentecostalism is not in any way a homogeneous movement in Benin and across Nigeria. Matthews Ojo (2018: 84-6) argues that the movement is so diverse that six types are easily discernible: faith seekers, faith builders, faith transformers, the reformists, the deliverance churches, and the modernists. He describes the faith seekers as those Pentecostal churches that adopt vigorous evangelism to convert individuals. The main focus of this group of churches is to strive to disentangle the individual of any ego so that they can recognise the mightiness of God and His desire to redeem the world. Ojo contends that most of the leaders of the faith seeking churches belong to the lowest level of the socioeconomic hierarchy. According to him, the faith builders stress the innate capacities of humans to overcome adversities and reach for greater height. This class of Pentecostal churches emphasise material wealth and prosperity and they tend to flourish in urban centres that attract the young and ambitious.

Ojo suggests that even though the method and outlook of the faith transformers appear similar to those of the faith seekers, they differ in that whilst the faith seekers are focused on individuals, the faith transformers are concentrated on changing 'large and isolated ethnic groups' (Ojo 2018: 85). The reformists group of Pentecostals are members of mainline Protestant churches seeking to change their churches from within. They perceive the Protestant churches as their possessions that must be converted to the revivalist way. He goes on to define the deliverance churches as the 'forensic experts' that perceive African traditional religious practices as the evil of the society (Ojo 2018: 86). These

churches see African culture as inimical to the progress of individuals and they use rituals and performances to break links with members' ancestry. The modernists are members of the local African Independent Churches who are convinced that the only way forward in a modern society is to rebrand their faith in a more appealing way to a globalised audience. These various Pentecostal forms are spread across Nigeria and many of them are clearly visible and dominant in Benin, including the homegrown ones such as Benson Idahosa's Church of God Mission, Felix Omobude's New Covenant Gospel Church, Chris Oyakhilome's Christ Embassy, and Eunice Osagiede's Spirit and Life Bible Church.

Notwithstanding the diversity of these Pentecostal churches, what sets the movement apart as a religious group that deserves a critical attention is the ferocity with which it demonises African traditional religion. Many leaders of these churches organise special 'deliverance services' to cast out demons and the devil from the lives of their followers, where they also ask them to severe all relationships with the past, meaning the traditional religion that the majority of their congregants were born into. According to Birgit Meyer (1998: 321-9), Pentecostal leaders adopt two main approaches to the termination of connections to past lives. The first is what she terms 'deliverance from the immediate past', meaning the individual life prior to conversion. Here, new converts are urged to disclaim all links that are immoral and detrimental to achieving a Christ-like life. Emphasis is placed on such activities as pornography, incest, bestiality, masturbation, inferiority complex, anxiety, corruption etc. She describes the second as 'deliverance from the ancestral past'. This translates to the lives lived beyond the individual and his immediate past, to include the ones lived by the convert's ancestors up to three previous generations. The movement stresses that individuals are not exempt from curses that run in their families stretching back to at least three generations. Meyer further posits that Pentecostals perceive such African traditional practices as chieftaincy rites and rites of passage to adulthood, burial ceremonies, traditional festivals, and marriages as Satanic that must be broken and repudiated (Meyer 1998: 324). Ironically, while Pentecostal leaders cast out these demons, the devil, and

traditional practices, they emphasise that the delivered must continue to fervently engage with the doctrines of the movement if they are to completely extricate themselves because 'Satan does not give up on a person just because he has become born again' (Kwami, cited in Meyer 1998: 322).

However, a closer examination of the philosophies of Pentecostalism and the traditional religion of Edo people reveals that the polarity drawn between the two religions by the Pentecostal leaders seems arbitrary to many Benin citizens. Many Edo speakers see a convergence of the two religions' doctrines and worldviews that the Pentecostal leaders would not want to admit. For example, the Christian Bible emphasises the notion of Heaven (the unseen world) as the seat of God in the same manner as the Edo traditional religion conceptualises *Osanobua* (God or Supreme Being) as dwelling in *erinmwin* (the unseen world) (Luke 23:43, Revelations 20: 14, Azuonye 1996: 30-47). As outlined in Chapter two, regardless of the variations in the imagination of heaven and hell, both religious doctrines highlight morality and ethical behaviour. The Christian Bible stresses that the righteous shall live eternally with God in Heaven while the evil ones will have a date with the devil in Hell (Romans 2: 6-8). In Benin cosmology, *erimwin* [Ofunmwegbe], where *Osanobua* lives, is also the reward for those that lived pious lives on earth. Those who lived unrighteous lives are also destined for the 'lost place' in *erimwin* (Hell), where *Esu* (Devil) lives. It is crucial to state here that this depiction of *Esu* is contested in the Edo and Yoruba mythologies. Idowu (cited in Welton 1969a: 181) argues that *Esu* in Yoruba mythology is the 'right-hand divinity to Orunmila', his duty is to 'run errands for Orunmila', and that he is a trickster. However, in Edo universe, *Esu* is seen as the bitter enemy of Osanobua. But since Edo and Yoruba share some cultural commonalities, many scholars believe that the two versions are interwoven in modern narratives (Welton 1969a: 181). Pentecostals argue that the devil was cast out of the circle of God for his intransigence (Revelations 20: 10). Edo legend also holds that *Esu* was thrown out of the orbit of *Osanobua* for his disobedience (Welton 1969a: 180-8). Christianity is organised in a hierarchical order that places God at the helm, and Michael Welton (1969b: 24-5) argues that Edo traditional religion is also structured in such a way that it recognises *Osanobua*

as the head. Generally, Pentecostal Christianity imagines the universe as being made up of good and evil spirits and that evil spirits, which usually manifest in the form of witches, must be exorcised for peace and order to be restored (Isaiah 48: 22, John 15: 13). Similarly, in Edo traditional religion, witchcraft is also not tolerated. *Obo N'oyada* (traditional healer who goes to road junctions) performs the role of supernaturally combating witches and restoring the moral order in Benin cosmology (Bradbury 1957: 59-60).

The doctrine of Pentecostalism is premised on the notion that God intervenes in the affairs of humans through intermediaries, and Edo traditional religion is also based on the idea that intermediaries exist between God and humans (Welton 1969b: 24). The taking of Holy Communion in Christianity signifies purification of the mind, body, and soul, especially when appearing before the altar of God. As stated earlier, purification is also important when appearing before the altar of the Supreme Deity in Edo traditional religion. It is demonstrated by the raising of the hand when passing by the altar, and saying '*Osanobua Igbinaan*' (Ogedegbe 1970: 151). During the church services that were attended in the course of the field study, it was also clearly evident that Pentecostal churches have incorporated some Edo traditional and religious dance, songs, and praises into the conduct of their services. More importantly, Christianity has appropriated *Osanobua*, the name of the Supreme Deity of Edo traditional religion, as the indigenous name of the Christian God in Benin Kingdom (Ogedegbe 1970: 152-3).

Discourses in Benin during the field study indicated that prominent traditional chiefs in the Palace of the Oba also claim adherence to Pentecostal Christianity. Some of these traditional chiefs play prominent roles whenever some of the Pentecostal churches organise events such as Harvest Thanksgiving or annual conferences. In addition, while Pentecostal leaders openly demonise and distance themselves from African traditional religion, most traditional religious priests in the kingdom claim that some Pentecostal leaders clandestinely consult them for mystical powers to boost membership of their churches. Thus in Benin Kingdom, there are similarities and links between the two religions that seem

obvious to many people, regardless of the public rhetoric of the Pentecostal leaders.

Edo people have always been open to and accepting of new ideas, including the global religions. Hence it is no surprise that a significant number of them, particularly in Benin City, in the twenty first century, regularly attend church services. As shown in Chapter six, while a number of them claim to be Christians, most still have strong attachment to many traditional religious beliefs and practices. The attraction to Christianity in particular is fostered by the close similarities between the doctrines of the religion and those of African traditional religion in the kingdom, and the ease with which they were able to blend them. As Kaplan (2003) and Welton (1969b) note, for many Edo people, there is no contradiction in embracing Christianity and at the same time holding on to their traditional religion, as the two are seen as two sides of the same coin. Often, Pentecostalism is taken to signify progress and modernity while African traditional religion represents ethnic identity, traditional values, and their ties to the soil. They both encapsulate the twenty-first century Edo person.

Most Edo language filmmakers share these attitudes. Like other Edo citizens, they see no contradiction in exploring the overlap of the two religions in the lives of Edo people. It should be stressed that of the six filmmakers that participated in the research for this PhD, five professed Christianity but four have no problem identifying as traditional religious adherents. The fifth does not identify openly with traditional religion, but he has no problem projecting Edo religious practices in his films. The sixth professed traditional religion but also has no difficulty with occasional attendance of church services, especially during social ceremonies. The socio-religious milieu of the Benin Kingdom also informs the themes of Edo language filmmakers. Osakue Omoera (2014a: 93-8) argues that one of the key attractions of Edo language films is the capacity of the filmmakers to appropriate Christian doctrines to tell stories that are typical to the audience in their own language. He further notes that Edo language filmmakers use the medium of film to invoke the exploits of their heroes past and the values embedded in the complex social structure of Benin Kingdom to educate, inform,

and entertain the modern generation of Edo people in a globalised world marked by media messages.

One such film depicting the religious lives of Edo people is '*Aiyoboru*', (meaning, 'I don't want to achieve with my hands', or lazy person) which was [redacted] by [redacted] in the course of this research. The central character of the film is a beautiful young lady named Rose. She is a devout Pentecostal Christian and every young man in the village desires her as a wife but they all resent her attitude, which they perceive as bordering on arrogance. Two of the young men who are traditional religious followers, Agbondo (A life of strange events) and Aghayedo (Child born in sorrow), are particularly desperate to have her as a wife and they place a bet on who would succeed in achieving that goal. Rose is seen walking down the village path to church with a friend and Agbondo, who is a farmer, approaches her and asks for her permission to talk to her. She agrees and Agbondo begins to express his love for her. She turns him down and insults him, saying that he should rather aim for those ladies in the same social class as him, meaning the uneducated ladies. Aghayedo is a wealthy man by virtue of his position as the chairman of the village's Community Development Association (CDA). He adopts a more sophisticated approach to winning her love by taking her to a restaurant in the village and lavishing her with wines and drinks. She agrees to marry him on the condition that he renounces African traditional religion and becomes a Pentecostal Christian, to which he agrees.

Later, Rose and Aghayedo are seen in her church with her pastor. She introduces Aghayedo as her suitor and asks the pastor to pray for them. The pastor asks Aghayedo to leave the room so he could talk to Rose. The pastor then expresses his doubt about the sincerity of Aghayedo's intention, as he believes that he is up to no good. But Rose convinces him otherwise and he reluctantly gives his approval. Once Rose and Aghayedo are married, we see him (Aghayedo) and his friends sit at the corner of his house, where they are about to worship his ancestral god. He calls on Rose to bring them some palm wine and spirits. On bringing the drinks, she is shocked to find out that Aghayedo is still dedicated to his African traditional religious worship. Aghayedo retorts that he only declared

his allegiance to Pentecostalism because he desperately wanted her as a wife for two reasons: to win the bet he had with Agbondo, and to conquer her pride and subjugate her to the traditional religion that was handed down to Edo people by their forebears. Rose begins to weep and accuses Aghayedo of deceit.

Moments later, we see Aghayedo in pensive mood pacing up and down the living room. Rose finds him in this situation and confronts him. He tells her that he his lawyer has just informed him that his court date in relation to the several property disputes he has is coming up in a couple of days. Rose comforts him and assures him that the court verdict will be in his favour on one condition: that he genuinely declares for Pentecostalism and cuts all ties with ancestral worship. He agrees and assures her that there will be no going back this time. He goes to court and he is eventually acquitted of all the charges against him. In the end, he comes home in jubilation and Rose joins him in the celebration. He tells her that he has been found innocent on all the charges and declares that the God Rose serves is truly a living God. He then reiterates to Rose that he will never go back to worshipping the ancestral gods.

Here in this film, the attempt of Edo people to embrace modernity and progress, which Pentecostalism represents, and at the same time to self-identify as an ethnic group through traditional religion, is laid bare. Aghayedo is a proud traditional Edo man, who believes in the values espoused by his traditional religion. He is keen to prove his modernity and the only way to do so is by winning the heart of a devout and educated Pentecostal Christian lady using the modern language of love in Nigeria. His denouncement of African traditional religion would seem to reflect the narrative of Pentecostal Christianity triumphing over African traditional religion, which is dominant in English language Nigerian video films. But when I questioned [redacted] on this in a later interview, he argued that he settled the conflict through the dominant paradigm because it had to be resolved one way or another, and that it does not actually reflect his religious worldview:

> What I have done over the years, if you have watched some of my movies, is to try and balance it [the religious worldviews]. But in all, no matter what anybody says, Jesus Christ supersedes. But the fact that Jesus Christ supersedes don't mean that our own way of living, that we should forget it. I have seen so many Enigie who so much believe in Christianity, that doesn't mean when it comes to how to govern their people that they will neglect it [their traditional religion] (personal interview,).

For Edo language filmmakers, as captured by , the sociocultural and religious routes of Edo people define the thematic expressions of their films. Thus Edo language films could be regarded as serving as a mirror on Benin Kingdom, reflecting the ongoing dialogue between Christianity and traditional religion. As will also be seen later, the films are also helping to construct the ethnic identity and social relations of Edo people in the twenty-first century. states that he does not privilege one religion over the other in his films, but that the resolution of the conflict between good and evil in favour of one religion's worldview should not be seen as a validation of that religion. Instead, it should be viewed as an expression of the moral values that contribute to the wellbeing of the society. As will be revealed subsequently in the thesis, his argument is echoed by most of the filmmakers that participated in the study.

3.8 Conclusion: Mapping the Religious Field of Edo Language Filmmakers

The focus of this chapter was the historical and social context in which Edo language video filmmakers operate, and in particular the attitudes to religion on which they draw for their portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion.

Like English language Nigerian video films, Edo language films are popular because of their ability to portray the experiences of Edo people, who form the

main audience of the films. This includes their engagement with religion, which reflects the contemporary Benin religious landscape. Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion currently dominate modern Benin, but the former is the most widely claimed and the most visible. Yet, Christianity has a local history that long predates the rise of Pentecostalism. Spearheaded by Portuguese missionaries, it has been in existence in Benin for over five centuries, and co-existed with the traditional religion of Edo people. As the court embraced Christianity, the Oba of Benin, who is the spiritual and traditional head of Edo traditional religion, also maintained access to the religion. As in the past, the present Oba emphasises the compatibility of the two religions. This is reflected in the Holy Aruosa Church, which is regarded as the national church of Edo people, and in the various festivals and ceremonies both in the Oba's palace and in the religious life of Edo citizens more generally.

Even so, the rise of Pentecostalism from the late twentieth century onwards brought a change to the relationship between Christianity and African traditional religion. With its slogan of making 'a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998), this form of Christianity challenges the relationship between earlier expressions of Christianity and Edo traditional religion. The leaders of the religious movement castigate traditional religion as evil and blame it for the ills of the society. Although Pentecostal leaders highlight the difference between the two religions, many Edo speakers see Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion as similar. Many of them profess Pentecostalism, but most Edo citizens still hold dearly to many of the beliefs and practices of traditional religion.

It is the tension created by the Pentecostal emphasis on rupture, the understanding by Benin people of the similarity, or compatibility, between the two religions, and how traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity shape the contemporary religious field of Benin, that drive the messages of Edo language video films. More generally, this complex religious landscape also influences the filmmakers' attitude to religion. This historical and socio-religious context now

provides the basis to analyse selected Edo language video films in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF PENTECOSTALISM AND EDO TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN EDO LANGUAGE VIDEO FILMS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses some Edo language video films that express Edo filmmakers' contradictory attitude to religion and their assertion of not using film to promote any religious agenda. Chosen from a wide range of films that clearly adapted the Pentecostal and traditional religious worldviews to the local religious ecology and for their edification of Benin society, the chapter argues that the overall concern of Edo language filmmakers is the moral health of Benin. They mobilise the values of Pentecostal and traditional religions to achieve this purpose. This means that the filmmakers operate in a distinctive local context that is different from post-colonial English language Nigerian video film producers.

Many video film scholars are of the view that African video film producers use their films to promote the Pentecostal agenda while at the same time disparaging African traditional religion (Meyer 1998, 2005, Onuzulike 2008, Tasie 2013, Manieson 2014, Enna et al 2015). Birgit Meyer writes:

> The obsession with staging spectacular struggles against demonic forces for the mass audience is a central point of convergence between video-films and Pentecostal Charismatic churches. Pentecostalism has successfully absorbed popular forms of grassroots Christianity that place a strong emphasis on Satan and the demons that serve him. These demons…are held to be behind the gods worshipped in the context of local religious traditions and the power of witchcraft, but also encompass new spirits, such as Mami Water, the erotic

> goddess at the bottom of the ocean who seduces people with sex and commodities (Meyer 2005: 165).

This study of Edo language video filmmakers challenges this notion and calls for a new approach to the production and study of religious video films on the continent.

4.2 Religious Conflict in Nigerian Video Films

Religious conflicts feature in many African-produced films (Pype 2012: 27-61, Meyer 2005, 2015: 1-37). While Nigerian video film producers devote a significant amount of time and space to the visualisation of religious conflicts in their films (Ukah 2003: 204), it is precisely in the area of religion that most English language Nollywood video filmmakers portray the lived experiences of their audience members in an unrealistic manner. Among other roles, the medium of film is widely perceived as a window onto the society it represents, and a shaper of the ethical and moral behaviour of such society (Nwokedi 2018: 4, Onyenankeya et al 2017: 297, Enna et al 2015: 177, Uwah 2011: 81). However, many English language Nigerian video filmmakers depict the religious landscape of Nigeria differently. As previously outlined, even though most Edo speakers do not adhere to Islam, the religion, as well as Christianity and African traditional religion, dominate the religious field of Benin. This dominance is also reflected across Nigeria (Kitause and Achunike 2013: 45). At the outset of their incursions into Nigeria, early Christian missionaries and Islamic jihadists denigrated the traditional religion of the indigenous people (Kitause and Achunike 2013: 48). Despite this, and since the independence of Nigeria, there is much less any recorded widespread violence between traditional religious adherents and Christians or Muslims in southern Nigeria compared with the north. There have been pockets of physical skirmishes between traditional religionists and Christians or Muslims, but these clashes have been driven not by doctrinal differences from traditional religion but by land disputes, ethno-nationalist sentiments, perceived political and economic marginalisation (Nolte

2004), and aggression from the adherents of the two messianic religions (Okeke et al 2017: 9). Moreover, the clashes between traditionalists and Christians or Muslims tend to be local and are usually resolved locally (Nolte 2004: 74-8), but there have been several violent hostilities between the followers of Christianity and Islam (Kitause and Achunike 2013: 49).

Even though these often-violent confrontations between Christians and Muslims have led to thousands of deaths, with many more maimed (Omotosho 2014: 134-5, Kitause and Achunike 2013: 49), they have hardly found their way into the themes of English language religious video films. Research carried out by the author in this regard yielded little result. Francoise Ugochukwu (2009: 130) and Durotoye Adeleke (1995: 148-9) argue that Nollywood [English language] filmmakers avoid portraying the religious crises between Christians and Muslims for fear of igniting the volatile relationship that exists between the two groups. In fact, rather than reflect the violence, some English language video film producers have used the few films they have produced in this respect to promote a peaceful and harmonious relationship between Christians and Muslims (Khalil 2016: 4, Ugochukwu 2009).

At the same time, most English language Nollywood religious video films are dominated by the conflict between African traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity (Meyer 1998, 2002, 2004, 2005, Ukah 2003, Pype 2012, Mitchell 2018). In this conflict, the film producers adopt a contrasting attitude in their depiction of the iconic figures of the two religions. While many filmmakers ridicule, subjugate and diabolise the traditional religious priest, the Pentecostal pastor is portrayed as dynamic, spiritually and physically invincible, and triumphant. To them, the African traditional religious priest symbolises evil that must be eradicated from society, but the Pentecostal pastor is the perennial saviour who always rescues the society from the claws of the traditional religious priest.

In many films, the traditional religious priest is a man dressed in ridiculous and dirty attire (Tasie 2013: 25, Ezegwu et al 2016: 6). He is frequently seen with a

stick and often made up grotesquely. His shrine is located deep in the forest and he speaks in strange language. In addition, the traditional priest is often portrayed as uneducated relic of the past and a powerless figure (Meyer 2015: 153). Typically, in a duel with the Pentecostal Christian pastor, the traditional priest is made to cry helplessly to his god, who often disappoints him. In the end, he is defeated in the battle, often by the superior force of the Pentecostal pastor (Mitchell 2018: 154). In contrast, the Pentecostal pastor tends to be valorised. He is always decked in a suit, speaks fluent English, and wields a Bible encased in a shining leather jacket. The Pentecostal pastor also parades the latest gadgets and he is often depicted as dwelling in modern buildings. His office is adorned with the latest furniture and electronic appliances. He is frequently the one who engages the traditional religious priest in battles, which he never loses. The God of the Pentecostal pastor always triumphs over that of the traditional religious priest. He is the 'good' that eventually eliminates the 'evil' traditional religious priest (Mitchell 2018: 154).

African video filmmakers inherited this portrayal of the conflict between these two religions from early Christian missionaries (Merz 2008: 207-9, Mitchell 2018: 155). As stated, right from the beginning of their journeys in Africa, many missionaries and the colonial officers portrayed Africans as savages and their beliefs as inferior in order to convert them. Even though early missionaries implicitly accepted the equality of the Supreme Being of the African traditional religion with that of the Christian God, by giving the Christian God the Supreme Deity's name, they rejected the lesser gods, such as *Olokun*. They perceived these lesser deities as idols that should be demonised or wiped out from the society for peace and order to reign. They also stereotyped African traditional beliefs and practices as fetish and even demonic (Merz 2008: 207). Since then, some African communities have come to adopt and entrench this dualism between the two religions in more ways than the early Christian missionaries would have thought possible (Osagiede 2019: 47, Merz 2008: 207).

In Benin, the Pentecostal leadership took this duality to a new level. For a start, using Pentecost as its own marker (Magbadelo 2004: 15), the leaders separated

the movement from the broader Christian family, in the same manner that Christianity distanced itself from Judaism after the latter had become dominated by the gentiles (Robbins 2007: 10-1). Then, they reinvented the devil, equating it with *Esu* [Devil in Edo legend, but some scholars argue it is a Yoruba Orisa (god) imported into the Edo speaking area post 1897], and the other spiritual agents that have been tagged along with traditional religion. Pentecostal leadership rebranded them as ever-present forces that have to be constantly kept at bay through special deliverance services, so as to prevent them from making a comeback in the lives of Pentecostal adherents (Meyer 1998: 321-9, Merz 2008: 209-10). Pentecostalism pitches itself as a problem-solving practice, using its five principal religious ethos: speaking in tongues, baptism in the Holy Spirit, personal prayers, divine healing, and casting out of the devil and demons (Meyer 1998: 321). By emphasising the last point, Pentecostalism positions itself in direct opposition to the indigenous religious practices that many of their members acknowledge as part of their family legacy. The leaders of the movement implicate African traditional religion in the socioeconomic and political ills bedevilling the society (Pype 2012: 27-61). They demonise traditional religion as evil and call on their members to completely divorce themselves from their past traditional lives (Marshall-Fratani 1998: 261). This public oratory and the huge membership of Pentecostalism created ready-made themes, and presented an economic opportunity, for Nigerian video filmmakers (Ukah 2003: 214-222). Because they want to benefit from the large Pentecostal following, some scholars argue that English language video film producers had to adapt their messages to suit the Pentecostal rhetoric (Ukah 2003: 214-222). They demean traditional religion and parody the traditional religious priest in such a way that they generate ridicule and amusement from audiences (Marshall-Fratani: 261, Mitchell 2018: 154-5).

Edo language video filmmakers however challenge this narrative of using the medium of film to advocate the cause of Pentecostalism at the expense of traditional religion. As this chapter shows, they recognise the relevance of Pentecostalism, but they do not systematically privilege it over African traditional religion. While some Edo language video films seem to reflect the

established pattern of pitching Pentecostal Christianity against African traditional religion, a significant number of the films do not offer a clear judgment. Many films place the two religions on the same pedestal and call for their evaluations based not on the resolution of the battle between good and evil in favour of one religious worldview but in terms of the moral values that they convey.

Three Edo language video films are examined in this regard in the following sections to demonstrate the range of Edo language filmmakers' discourses on religion. While some films clearly emphasise the superiority of Pentecostalism, many others do not consider the sides in the battle between good and evil as clearly associated with one religion and instead emphasise the importance of personal character and Edo cultural values.

4.3 Pentecostal Christianity in *'Imariabe'*

This section discusses an Edo language video film portraying Pentecostalism. The film was selected because of the Pentecostal triumph over traditional religion and the clear articulation of the Pentecostal worldview, which was adapted to the local religious ecology. As outlined in Chapter three, the objective here is to draw attention to Edo language filmmakers' discourse of why the resolution of the conflict in favour of one religious worldview should not be taken at face value. Thus the resolution of the conflict in this film should be considered in the context of the discourse of the subsequent films in the other sections of the chapter.

Imariabe (I am not guilty) was produced by Steve Film Centre in 2011. The film is about two young ladies, Imariabe and Itohan (Mercy), who are sent on a mission to destroy the world by Mammy Water, the goddess of the sea. Mammy Water gives them both as children to two previously childless couples. One of the ladies, Imariabe's mother's childlessness, was caused by a curse laid on her by her ex-boyfriend for stealing his money. The couples are driven by

desperation to seek help from Mammy Water. Imariabe and Itohan meet in the primary school and set about their mission from early on, where they perpetrate evil. The other pupils in the school, including the teachers become afraid of them.

As a young woman, Itohan falls in love with Osas (God's), a man who is keen to marry her. He proposes marriage and because of the love she has for him, she is tempted to accept it. Doing that, however, will contravene the wishes of Mammy Water. Confused, she confides in Imariabe, who warns her of the consequences of violating the wishes of Mammy Water. Unbeknown to Itohan, Imariabe is also keen on striking a romantic relationship with Osas. She sneaks behind Itohan's back to retrieve Osas' number from her phone. However, Itohan is determined to marry Osas. Later, in the company of Osas, we see Imariabe emerging from his house. They stumble on Itohan at his doorstep. Itohan is shocked to see Imariabe with Osas. Angered by his betrayal, Itohan kills Osas. Incensed by her action, Imariabe uses her superior supernatural power to kill Itohan.

Afterwards, Imariabe encounters Kelvin, a young devout Pentecostal Christian. Kelvin is determined to convert her into the faith. In one of their scheduled meetings towards realising this goal, Imariabe tries to seduce him at the church's altar. They are caught in the act by the church's general overseer, who immediately identifies the evil spirit in her. The church then sets about delivering her from this evil spirit. At the same time in the underwater world of Mammy Water, the deity and her subordinate spirits gather to kill Imariabe and bring her back to account for her betrayal of her genetrix. A spiritual battle ensues as both pastor and Mammy Water are engaged in winning Imariabe's soul. Eventually, the pastor and the church prevail. The more powerful spiritual force of the pastor destroys the goddess and her subordinate spirits and Imariabe is saved. She then marries Kelvin and subsequently becomes the assistant pastor of the church.

The film, *Imariabe*, and others such as *Orobosa*, *E'Pastor-Igue*, and *Etin-Osa* (See Appendix 1) ostensibly reflect the Pentecostal discourse of the duality between

good and evil, the supremacy of the Christian God, and the distance between them and African traditional religion. As noted by scholars working elsewhere on the continent (Meyer 2005, Pype 2012), traditional deities like Olokun and Ogun, and the water goddess, Mammy Water, and her symbols are labelled as agents of evil. In contemporary discourses, many Africans associate Mammy Water with sexuality and gender, reflecting the dynamic imagery of the water goddess over the years. Henry John Drewal (2008: 60-3) states that the personality of Mammy Water is so formless that it can only be compared to the shape of water itself. Some African communities consider the water spirit as a transmitter of wealth, fertility, good fortune, and seductive pleasures, while others perceive her as a femme fatale (Drewal 2008: 61-2).

Despite this ubiquitous identity, for Pentecostal Christians, Mammy Water's imagery is fixed. She represents immorality, unrighteousness, sin, and sexual seduction. She is one of the most powerful proxies of Satan (Drewal 2008: 72). The film, *Imariabe*, confirms an understanding of these attributes of Mammy Water as ever present in the world. Thus for the 'born again' Pentecostal to remain free from the stranglehold of this agent of the devil, they have to be resolute in the ways of the Lord, as the devil could make a comeback into their lives if they relent. To the Pentecostal leaders, Mammy Water and traditional religion are in the past, as they represent the present (Meyer 1998: 318, Hackett 1998: 261). The film reflects these dualities by mobilising the past and the present, modernity and tradition, the good and the evil, the 'us' and 'them', and of course, God and devil, here represented by Mammy Water.

As noted earlier (Chapter three), in Benin mythology, *Ora* is the favoured wife of Olokun, the benevolent Edo deity that dwells in the sea or river. And as will be shown later, there is a dialectical relationship between *Ora* and Mammy Water in Benin. *Ora* is also reputed to be a goddess of fertility and wealth, hence the portrayal of Mammy Water in Edo language video films resonates with the discourse of *Ora*. In the film, *Imariabe*, Mammy Water unleashes mayhem and destruction on the community in congruence with the Pentecostal rhetoric, using Imariabe and Itohan for her own purposes. Mammy Water's world is entirely

different from that of the Pentecostal pastor. While the Pentecostal pastor and his followers worship and embark on a spiritual battle with her and her subordinates in the physical world that is clear for everyone to see, Mammy Water and her protégés are located in the dark underwater world, which is far removed from the ordinary eye.

Meyer (1998), Hackett (1998) and Marshall-Fratani (1998) argue that in an attempt to diabolise traditional religion and dichotomise the religious ecology, Pentecostalism had to adopt a new theory of 'time' and 'space' to delineate the movement. To this end, Pentecostals employ the language of the present, modernity, globalisation, and 'us' to identify themselves, while deploying the rhetoric of the past, traditional, local, and 'them' to typecast African traditional religion. In *Imariabe*, the dark underwater world of Mammy Water and her devotees exemplifies the past. The water spirits' costume and make-up are grotesque and outlandish, reflecting a world that is anything close to that in which the twenty-first century African traditional religious worshippers live (Tasie 2013: 25). In contrast, the world in which the Pentecostal leader and his followers live in is situated in the present. Their costume and make-up in this film are reflective of the twenty-first century globalised world. The pastor is decked in a suit and tie and he does indeed have a Bible bound in leather. His congregants also wear clothes that are firmly rooted in the late twentieth century and beyond (Mitchell 2018: 154).

This film thus clearly calls on the Pentecostal discourse of good and evil: the Pentecostal pastor and his congregants are on the side of good, struggling to rescue Imariabe from the evil Mammy Water. In the ensuing battle, Mammy Water is powerless in the face of the supremely powerful God of the Pentecostal pastor. In the end, she and her protégés are destroyed by the fearsome power of the Christian God and a clear moral order is restored. In other words, Imariabe is saved to propagate the Pentecostal Christian doctrine. Reflecting the Pentecostal rhetoric of modernity, which calls on its adherents to 'make a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998), in *Imariabe*, Mammy Water, the

benevolent Benin goddess, is cast as an agent of the devil, from which Imariabe has to break.

While the mainline churches regard conversion as a single act of ritual disconnecting Christians from their past lives, Pentecostal Christians reinvent this boundary as an on-going dynamic process by conceptualising Satan, and by implication traditional religion, as ever present and ever threatening, thereby requiring the continuous support of the community of the Pentecostal church (Meyer 1998: 321-2). Therefore, being a Pentecostal Christian requires constant work because the devil continues to have influence. Thus the spiritual insecurity means that one has to pay close attention not to 'backslide' and to remain 'born-again'. This Pentecostal account of rupture is clearly articulated in *Imariabe*. Imariabe and Itohan are the means through which the agent of Satan in the film, Mammy Water, wreaks havoc on the community. Itohan dies in the process but Imariabe is saved because of her relationship with the Pentecostal Kelvin. But for her to remain free from the grip of Mammy Water – even though the force of the Christian God had destroyed her – she is consecrated as the assistant pastor of the church. Based on *Imariabe* alone, it would appear that Pentecostalism has also appropriated Edo language video films for the purpose of proselytisation, but as the next sections illustrate, this is clearly not the case.

Pentecostal emphasis on rupture is problematic in many parts of Africa because of the integrated nature of traditional religion and African culture (Meyer 1998: 339-340, Merz 2008: 213-5, Onuzulike 2008: 164). Charles Gore (2007: 24) has identified this as particularly relevant for Benin. Earlier, John Mbiti (1969) had expounded on the enduring nature of African traditional religion in the lives of Africans:

> It is not enough to learn and embrace a faith which is active once a week, either on Sunday or Friday, while the rest of the week is virtually empty. It is not enough to embrace a faith which is confined to a church building or mosque, which is locked up six days and opened once or twice a week. Unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more

> than, traditional religions do, most converts to these faiths will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis (Mbiti 1969: 3).

Even today, traditional religion remains an integral part of many people's practices. Equally importantly, in trying to 'Other' it in recent decades, scholars contend that Pentecostalism implicates itself in traditional practices (Meyer 1998: 331, Merz 2008: 214, Onuzulike 2008: 165). They argue that by stigmatising African traditional religion, Pentecostal leaders also recognise it as important and real. Moreover, by engaging closely with it, Pentecostal leaders also implicate themselves, and some of them have indeed been found to be deeply involved in traditional practices (Merz 2008: 214). This argument is given an audio-visual illustration by the films featured in the following sections of the chapter.

4.4 Edo Traditional Religion in *'Iredia'*

In this section, an Edo language video film articulating the traditional religious worldview of Benin Kingdom is featured because of its clear adaptation to the modern life-world of Edo people and the resolution of the battle between good and evil within the Edo religious worldview. Like '*Imariabe*' discussed in the preceding section, it should be seen as part of a wider corpus of films that reflect the filmmakers' discourse on religion, which includes the importance of seeing beyond the resolution of the conflict between good and evil in a Pentecostal narrative.

Iredia (I have come to stay [One whose life is preserved]) is a 2018 film that was produced by Solution Ogiemwanye Film; an entertainment company owned by Solution Ogiemwanye, a Pentecostal pastor. It focuses on a cursed community known as Utomwen (Longevity). The community is held spellbound by Uvbi (Princess), an evil princess, who is determined to destroy the whole community for her selfish and occult interests. The only solution to neutralising her power

and overcoming her is through the interpretation of an ancestral book, which can only be deciphered by Iredia, an orphan from a faraway village.

In the beginning of the film, Iredia's mother is seen in the presence of the ruler or Enogie. She is accused of witchcraft, an offence punishable by death in the community. She denies the allegations but she is found guilty and sentenced accordingly, an abominable act in Benin cosmology given that she is pregnant. She pleads for the commutation of the death sentence to life imprisonment because of her pregnancy but the Enogie turns it down (cf. Egharevba 1960: 3).[11] As she is taken away for execution, she is able to summon up enough strength to subdue and kill the guards assigned to kill her. As a result of the enormous energy expended, she falls into premature labour in the river on her way back to the community. She gives birth to a son in the midst of the river and christens him Iredia before she dies due to complications from the labour.

Moments later, a man is seen paddling a canoe down the river. He stumbles on the baby crying by the riverside. He picks him up and takes him home to his wife. The couple had been trying for a child for decades without success. Now that they have found a baby floating in the river, they are both very excited about the gift. In Benin mythology, since he was born in the middle of the river, the dwelling place of Mammy Water and *Olokun*, her husband, Iredia may be understood as having come from the goddess of the sea. They dedicate the baby to the ancestors and the gods of the land, and in a coincidence of fate, they also christen him Iredia.

Meanwhile, the calamity heaped on the community by Uvbi continues unabated. She begins by killing her father, who is the Enogie. Here, the death of the Enogie at the hands of his own daughter could be interpreted as a punishment for his violation of the Benin moral code that prohibits the killing or at the least staying the execution of a pregnant woman until she gives birth. Uvbi also goes on to kill

[11] *Ogiso* Owodo, the last king of the first dynasty in Benin, was banished for committing *kirikuvua*, which is the directing of the execution of a woman in pregnancy. The Ogiso dynasty ruled Benin until about 1170 A.D (cf. Egharevba 1960).

her mother and threatens to kill her grandmother, who subsequently has to cower to her instructions. Everyone in the community lives in the fear of Uvbi. Determined to find a solution, the elders constitute a delegation, which includes Iredia's adoptive father, to go and consult the community's traditional religious priest. During the consultation, the priest reveals that for peace and order to be restored to the community and for them to defeat Uvbi, Iredia must be sacrificed to appease the gods and ancestors.

Shocked at the revelation, Iredia's father appeals to the priest for an alternative solution, but this is rejected. Back home, Iredia's parents convince him to flee the community. On his way, Iredia is confronted by Uvbi's guards, who are however unaware of his real identity. They arrest him and take him to Uvbi's palace, where he is incarcerated. He later falls in love with a palace maid, who finds out his real identity. The maid discloses this to Uvbi's grandmother. Because she knows that Iredia's interpretation of the ancestral book will lead to Uvbi's demise, Uvbi's grandmother is determined to use the opportunity to avenge the killing of her daughter, Uvbi's mother. The grandmother summons Iredia to appear before her. With her assistance, Iredia locates the ancestral book in one of the rooms in Uvbi's palace. Having found the book, Uvbi's grandmother engages Uvbi in a supernatural battle but Uvbi prevails and she dies.

In the ensuing commotion, the maid releases Iredia. He escapes with the ancestral book. However, by now Uvbi is aware of Iredia's real identity. She confronts him in a final duel. But with the aid of the words contained in the ancestral book, Iredia defeats Uvbi in the battle and she dies. In the end, peace and moral order are restored to the community.

According to its producer, the film, *Iredia*, was made to validate the cause, and reinforce the narrative, of Pentecostalism in Africa. In the opening scene, the producer is seen speaking to the camera, where he draws the audience's attention to the Pentecostal worldview of the dualism between good and evil, of which traditional religion, and in particular witchcraft, is the principal agent that

operates in the evil realm. Harking back to the early missionaries' approach to African traditional religion in the colonial era, he draws a parallel between witchcraft in Africa and its counterparts in other parts of the world. He also argues that while witchcraft has been an agent of positive transformations in the rest of the world, in Africa, it has been used to perpetrate evil and catastrophe. In the characteristic discourse of 'us' and 'them', he however urges born-again Pentecostals to be passionate in their ways by de-linking themselves from those who are still 'in the world', including their immediate families. [12]

It is also noteworthy to point out that in this scene, a cat emerges from behind the curtain and into view. This has symbolic importance. While cats are generally considered as one of man's best friends in the West, they are stigmatised and categorised as animals that can easily be manipulated by agents of the devil in Africa. This symbolic importance is confirmed when the audience see the cat manifests into Uvbi in the subsequent scene. There are many possible ways of interpreting this aspect of the film, but even at a very general level, it points to the power and presence of witchcraft, which can clearly even thrive in the company of a Pentecostal pastor.

Despite the verbal emphasis on the importance of Pentecostalism, it seems that all other aspects of the film's narrative, including the storyline and characterisation, suggest that witchcraft is widespread. Moreover, the film's narrative ends up describing African traditional religion as potentially good (in Iredia). While the ancestral book could be taken as an appropriation of the Christian Holy Bible or a reference to the Book of Holy Aruosa, Iredia liberates the community through the wisdom of the ancestors condensed in the book, which is a powerful feature of traditional religion. The producer's address in the beginning of the film could be interpreted as an attempt to deflect expected criticism from the Pentecostal community. This is particularly important, as he is a Pentecostal pastor. It may be a way of protecting his reputation.

[12] In Pentecostal discourse in Africa, being 'in the world' is used as a reference to those who have not been baptised into the Pentecostal faith through immersion and cannot speak in tongue.

The traditional religion of African people has been portrayed in a negative manner by the Nigerian video film industry right from its inception (Tasie 2013, Manieson 2014, Enna et al 2015). '*Living in Bondage'*, the video film that is widely regarded as sparking off the industry in 1992 set the tone from which the subsequent filmmakers built upon and made it a staple of their productions (Ukah 2003: 212, Tasie 2013: 24-8). *Iredia* would seem to be following this trend in the beginning, when Iredia's mother is seen pleading for her life to be spared at the village shrine with the Enogie and Uvbi. Although the Enogie's guards and the priestesses of the shrine are not grotesquely dressed and outlandishly made up as would be seen in many English language Nollywood films, the community shrine is nonetheless located in the middle of nowhere and decorated in stereotypical colours of red and black, some of the colours Nollywood has come to use to typecast traditional religion (Tasie 2013: 25).

The split from the more conventional religious narrative however begins to emerge when Iredia flees the village. While the evil Uvbi is determined to destroy the community, Iredia, associated with Mammy Water and also a holder of traditional wisdom, is the purveyor of peace and order. Both of them exist within the traditional Benin cosmology. Iredia is the only one that can save the community from the terror unleashed on it by Uvbi. Unlike the film '*Imariabe*' discussed above and in the Pentecostal narrative more generally, Mammy Water is represented here in the way that reflects her traditional role as the goddess that gifts Iredia to the adoptive parents, and thereby lays the foundation for the liberation of the community from the evil Uvbi.

Thus in *Iredia*, and similar films like *Emwinkure*, *Iyobo*, and *Iyodo-Niko* (See Appendix 1), the Pentecostal discourse of African traditional religion and the dominant portrayal of traditional religious accoutrements such as Mammy Water as the perennial antagonists of Pentecostal Christianity is transformed. Here in *Iredia*, African traditional religion, or at least Mammy Water and the ancestral book of wisdom, are represented as a source of good in society. As stated, in the Benin traditional worldview, the goddess, *Ora*, is a purveyor of good fortune, wealth, and fertility because of her relationship with Olokun. She

is sometimes interchangeably qualified as Mammy Water in local Benin discourses, especially to outsiders not familiar with the local religious ecology (Gore and Nevadomsky 1997: 60). As a caretaker of an Olokun shrine in Benin rightly puts it, 'Olokun, god of the sea and rivers and the water spirit known as Mammy Wata are "all one culture"' (Gore and Nevadomsky 1997: 61). Therefore, the interpretation of Iredia as a gift from Mammy Water is a reference to the benevolence of *Ora*, the Benin goddess of fertility. In the end, Iredia turns out to be the saviour of the community through the deconstruction of the ancestral book. Iredia's explanation of the ancestral book results in the neutralisation of Uvbi's seemingly insurmountable supernatural power. Eventually, she dies and the moral order is restored. The film, *Iredia*, suggests that the messages of Edo language video films are not as straightforward as they are presented in most English language Nigerian religious video films.

4.5 Ambivalent Attitude Towards the Relationship Between Pentecostalism and Traditional Religion among Edo Filmmakers in '*Amugbugbe*'

As already stated, many African video film producers tend to privilege Pentecostal Christianity over traditional religion. They portray it as the sole source of good morals in the society (Meyer 1998, 2005, Pype 2012, Tasie 2013). Apart from the colonial vestige of this portrayal (Tasie 2013: 26, Manieson 2014: 3, Mitchell 2018: 154), scholars argue that economic motive is also one of the reasons why they continuously dwell on this topic (Ukah 2003: 215, 2012: 209-12, Meyer 2005: 163-9). Regardless of their sentimental attachment to African traditional religion, many Africans openly declare adherence to Pentecostal Christianity because of its association with modernity. Hence, in order to profit from this open display of religiosity, many African video filmmakers tailor their themes to meet the expectations of the Pentecostals (Meyer 2005: 163-9).

Edo language video filmmakers however believe that the social cohesion of the kingdom is as important as the financial reward of being a filmmaker. They

argue that no religion has exclusive access to good or evil. Therefore, they explore good and evil in their films using the two dominant religious doctrines in the kingdom. The ultimate aim of this less unidirectional approach, according to the Edo language filmmaker Peter Ovbiogbe, is not to reflect a particular religious disposition but to promote the moral virtues of Benin Kingdom: [13]

> In my films, the triumph of good over evil depends on the theme I'm addressing, what conflict we are driving with the movie, and how we interpret conflict. It also has to do with the cultural background, connectivity and relativity of the people concerned in the movie…but to say that there is a direct influence from a particular [religious] belief, that does not come in…if the role is [suitably] upheld by Christianity, then of course the Christian power will triumph. If it is [suitably] upheld by African traditional religion itself, then African traditional religion will triumph… We have a responsibility to the society to build it and propagate good conscience and good behaviour. To that extent, we deliberately fine-tune these considerations to ennoble the society (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview October 5th 2018)

Uvbi Enibokun also shares this view of using film to spread the moral values that are enshrined in the worldview of Benin Kingdom. [14] A prominent Edo language film actress and producer, and an adherent of the African traditional religion, she also argues that good or evil does not rest in one religious worldview:

> … The film that we watch these days, because they want to make money, you will see somebody that is sick, a pastor must come and pray before that person is healed. I'm not part of that. You'll see rivalry scenes, like Juju person [traditional religious priest] and a Christian [Pentecostal pastor] in a battle and the Christian [Pentecostal pastor] will supersede. Is it really possible? It does not exist like that. When your mind is pure in an attack situation, whichever way you serve your God, your God is with you to fight for you. I don't portray

[13] Peter Ovbiogbe was acting as the coordinator of the , an association that was in its formative stage during the time of the field study for the thesis

[14] Uvbi Enibokun was the only female filmmaker that participated in the field study for the thesis. She was also very actively involved in the formation of the Edo Movie Producers and Distributors Association at the time

> Christianity like that…There is good and evil in Christianity and there is also good and evil in African traditional religion…That is why I'm very pleased with the Oba [of Benin] that is taking us back to our roots. In those days, when you leave your office open and travel, nothing happens. You won't be scared [that your office would be supernaturally tampered with]. You will come back and meet your office like that (Uvbi Enibokun, personal interview October 22nd 2018).

Besides using the medium of film to entrench the moral virtues of the kingdom, Edo language video filmmakers also key into the appeal of the Oba of Benin. They deploy their films to experiment with the complex religious terrain of Benin Kingdom and explore the relationship and compatibility of the two religions' doctrines. David Owan, a Pentecostal Christian and filmmaker of Edo language films, and Nollywood films more generally, buttresses this position by drawing an analogy between what the filmmakers are doing to translate the Oba's appeal into filmic reality and the dialogue between the traditional religious priest and the Christian priest in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*:

> That is why I love this book [*Arrow of God*]. When you have the [Christian] priest and the native doctor [traditional religious priest] discussing among themselves. The [Christian] priest said 'we have God Almighty' and the native doctor said 'we have *Chineke*'. When the [Christian] priest went ahead to say that Jesus came to fulfil God's mission, the native doctor replied that *Chineke* sent the deities to do His will. So that is the way it is (David Owan, personal interview November October 15th 2018).

The commitment to Benin's traditional values is not limited to filmmakers but also includes actors. Ben Usen is a well-known Edo language video film actor and producer. He is also a devout Pentecostal Christian. He had tried in the past to use his films to advance his religious dogma. He says some actors resisted his attempts, partly because they were adherents of African traditional religion, but also because of their desire to project their cultural and religious identity. While respecting the decision to reject his idea, Usen contends that he did not care

about what the actors thought of his initiative. He says it was their loss to have turned down the project, since he was going to pay them for their talent.

Usen also notes that many Edo language video filmmakers dissociated themselves from the idea of his film at the time. Yet notwithstanding his commitment to more stereotypical portrayals of traditional religion in Pentecostal films, Usen argues that Edo people and their culture, including the traditional religion, occupy a special place in the sight of the Christian God, and that Edo traditional religious worldview and Pentecostal Christian doctrine share similarities:

> I believe that God has something to do with the Benins [Edo people] that they are yet to discover…their parables, their philosophies, everything about them I see in the Bible. I see their way of life. I see a Benin culture in the Bible. I see everything in the Book of Proverbs. The only disputing factor is the idols. If you are a Bible student, you will see it there (Ben Usen, personal interview October 10th 2018).

Overall then, even though some Edo language filmmakers are strongly committed to Pentecostalism, they share a common understanding of the closeness of the two religions' dogmas and the resolve to use their films to propagate the moral virtues of good behaviour, respect for elders, the advancement of justice, fairness and equity, the appreciation of and respect for traditional and religious institutions, and the promotion of common good. These are values that they believe will help to maintain the social cohesion of Benin Kingdom.

Amugbugbe (The Cross), a 2011 Moonlight Video Centre Ltd production, is one of the films that illustrate the importance of these moral values. Others include *Osahenrunmwen*, *Ohen-Osa*, and *Alagiebo* (See Appendix 1). In *Amugbugbe*, Aigbekaen (We can't kill the clan) is a successful Pentecostal pastor. He thrives on the performance of healing and miracles and this serves as a big draw to his church. Ekpe (Divine one) is the clown of the village and he is always under the

influence of alcohol. He is suspicious of Aigbekaen's source of spiritual power. Keen to set-up a rival church but lacking the funds to do so, he approaches some elders in the community for help and they agree to support him. His wife refuses to support him but his son, Imade (The one who stands firm), who is intellectually challenged, keys into his idea. He then seeks the spiritual support of an African traditional religious priest, who strengthens him with the power to perform signs and wonders before establishing his own Christian church.

Within a short time, Ekpe's church becomes hugely successful. Aigbekaen's church members are attracted to it in droves. Outraged by Ekpe's depletion of his church, Aigbekaen is determined to eliminate him. He turns to his spiritual mentor, who is also a traditional religious priest. The priest tells him that because he did not abide by the instruction of the gods to avoid eating *ohee* (a traditional Edo sauce or soup for eating *ema* [pounded yam] and *ebae* [derived from garri]), there is nothing the gods can do to help him. Disenchanted with the inability of the traditional religious priest to help the situation, Aigbekaen resorts to the hiring of a criminal gang to get rid of Ekpe. He instructs them to kidnap and torture Ekpe to death. However, in the end, Ekpe is rescued before they could kill him. The criminal gang names Aigbekaen as their mastermind. Aigbekaen is subsequently arrested and taken away by the police.

In this film, the Pentecostal discourse of rupture in Benin is questioned and the religion is interrogated for its economic motive. It is also a satirical commentary on the competition between competing Pentecostal churches, which is largely driven by 'religious entrepreneurial subworld' (Ukah 2018) and 'the politics of belonging' (Adesoji 2017). Although the religious component of Pentecostalism is well known, the commercial aspect, which is the engine of the movement, is less recognisable to the public (Ukah 2018: 357-9). Using the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) as a case study, Asonzeh Ukah explains that many of the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria participate in the global economic enterprise through social networking regionally and internationally and the setting up of enterprises like educational institutions, media outlets, bookstores, water factories, banks, and mortgage companies to bolster their financial base

and to draw the cream of the society to their fold (Ukah 2018: 357-9). While the proselytising aspect of Pentecostalism is projected into the public sphere, this commercial enterprise side is a closely guarded secret (Ukah 2018).

Deploying the strategy over time, some Pentecostal churches become so successful that they create a socioeconomic gulf between themselves and the less successful ones. Abimbola Adesoji (2017) describes the struggle to bridge the gap between the successful and the less successful Pentecostal churches as the 'politics of belonging'. Here, the runaway success of some of the churches opens up a multi-layered relationship within the Pentecostal family, sparking the need for the less prosperous church leaders to jostle for recognition and belonging. At the apex is the 'established, refined, simple or more mature' class of Pentecostal leaders, who by virtue of their churches' financial success and established doctrines do not need to acquire titles to be recognised. They also do not clamour for influence but are rather sought after for the purpose of status conferment and financial wellbeing (Adesoji 2017: 1165).

Next is the 'aggressive or the ambitious' category of leaders. This group of Pentecostal pastors strive to gain the attention of the movement's College of Bishops because of ordination, higher positions, and access to the elite group (Adesoji 2017: 1166). Propping up the rear is the 'loner' group of leaders who find it challenging to gain access to the privileged class. They comfort themselves by restricting their socialising within the Pentecostal family to those they perceive as belonging to their own group. These leaders also confer titles on and between themselves. According to Adesoji, this 'loner' group is further split into two sub-categories. Although members of the first sub-category pretend to be on their own, they actually maintain relationships with members of the apex group for the reason of mentorship. In return they pay homage by allocating a certain percentage of their churches' income to the elite group members. The second sub-category is what Adesoji terms the 'real loners'. This group does not have any secret or open relationship with or seek recognition from the elite group, but instead, members relate with those who identify with a shared vision. Such members are usually those who founded their churches at

the same time and have similar goals (Adesoji 2017: 1167). Further, he contends that some members of this 'real loners' class even become disconnected from their contemporaries because of perceived rivalries. He argues that such members tend to seek for comfort elsewhere.

As *Amugbugbe* illustrates, part of the elsewhere some of the 'real loners' pastors look for comfort and help from is the traditional realm. It is the desperation to become a successful religious entrepreneur and the desire to politically belong that bring Aigbekaen, whom we first encounter as a pastor, into contact with the traditional religious priest thus projecting to the fore the problem of the Pentecostal mantra of rupture. He does not really believe in the cause of Pentecostalism. The main factor for setting up the church was to benefit financially from the appeal of Pentecostalism. Aigbekaen simply understands that if he is able to perform miracles and healing, the church will attract membership in large numbers, which translates into material wealth for him. This drives him into the arms of the traditional religious priest, who is so vilified and stigmatised by the Pentecostal leaders in Africa. Paradoxically, at least from the Pentecostal point of view, this confirms the power of the gods of African traditional religion because the traditional deities are behind the success of Aigbekaen's church. In the end, Aigbekaen's hypocrisy is exposed and the evil in him is also contained through his arrest.

Ekpe is the character that is used to demystify the narrative of the Pentecostal leaders. He is determined to prove that good does not reside exclusively in the Pentecostal realm and while he also builds a church, he resorts to the same traditional source of power used by his rival, Aigbekaen, without guile.

While the intention of the filmmaker is primarily to expose the insincerity of Pentecostals, the success recorded by Ekpe's church proves that despite the rhetoric of Pentecostal leaders, there is efficacy in the traditional realm. More importantly, the fact that Pentecostal churches can be places of healing on the basis of traditional powers shows the similarities or even interchangeability of Pentecostalism and African traditional religion, which again confirms the Oba's –

and popular – practice that constitutes both as similar and compatible. The fact that the audience do not know what happens to Ekpe's church afterwards could just be taken to mean that while the traditional gods can be benevolent and remain at the source of power, churches offer acceptable contemporary access to spiritual power. While this subverts Pentecostal Christian claims to rupture and a dual worldview, it resonates with the widespread association of modernisation and Christianity. It also means that unlike most English language Nollywood producers, Edo language video filmmakers do not have a fixed attitude to religion.

The ongoing importance of traditional practice illustrates the relevance of John Mbiti's (1969: 3) argument that the traditional religion of Africans follows them everywhere they go and that for citizens of Benin, it is fundamental to their everyday life. Mbiti explains that although this traditional religion will always engage in dialogue with other religions on the continent and as a result will undergo some transformations, it can never be replaced in the hearts and minds of the people. Mbiti's notion that for global religions, such as Christianity and Islam, to be fully relevant on the continent, they must come to terms with the nature of the African clearly resonates in Edo language films.

In Benin, the Pentecostal leaders' continuous dwelling on rupture and 'othering' of African traditional religion is often seen as challenging in the face of the perceived similarities of the two religions' doctrines. The result of this is the open declaration for Pentecostalism and the closet subscription to African traditional religious beliefs and practices by many Africans (Onuzulike 2008: 165-6). This was clearly evident in Benin during the field study. As previously stated, Pentecostal churches are obviously visible in the city, with almost every street hosting at least one or two. But it is also clearly evident for the keen observer that African traditional religion is also widely practiced in the city. Apart from the most prominent street junctions, almost every crossroads was marked by sacrifices used to propitiate the gods. Also, the shrines of the traditional religious leaders that participated in the research were adorned with all sorts of objects of individual workmanship. When questioned, the traditional

priests asserted that many of the paraphernalia they keep in their shrines belong to some Pentecostal Christians who do not want to be openly identified with traditional religious practices.

The close relationship between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion, and the complexity of the twenty-first century religious nature of the people of Benin are what form the wider discourse in which Edo language video filmmakers participate. As a rule, the filmmakers firmly acknowledge the importance of the two religions in the lives of Edo people. Many of them focus on the relationship between the two religions, not to explore their opposition, but to illuminate the importance of more general moral values, which are embedded in the religious culture of the kingdom.

4.6 The Moral Virtues of Benin Kingdom

B.J. Van der Walt makes the point that shared morality was the glue that held pre-colonial African society together. He states that such moral values as generosity, hospitality, charity, loyalty, honesty, solidarity, truthfulness, and respect for nature, elders and God [or the Supreme Being] were highly treasured, and that these virtues fostered integration, peace and harmony in traditional Africa (2003: 52). Edo language filmmakers speak of these values as specifically 'Edo values'. Nevertheless, they have the understanding that they are also universal to Africa, as they frequently reference 'us Africans', 'in African culture', and 'in African beliefs', in their discussions. As P.J. Nel (2008: 42) argues, African morality does not question 'the possibility of universal moral codes'. However, the experiences of the continent and the specificity of many African communities mean that some of these values could be regarded as unique to the continent. Thus the moral virtues of Benin are not significantly different from wider African traditional and moral philosophies.

Peter Genger describes the South African concept of *Ubuntu* as part of a wider African moral language, which means 'My humanity is inextricably bound up in

yours. We belong in a bundle of life' (Tutu, cited in Genger 2018: 24). It is illuminating to draw on Genger's description of *Ubuntu* in relation to Nigerian moral dilemmas, because it offers a useful starting point for the reflection on contemporary cornerstones on ethical and moral behaviours in Benin, which however have deep historical roots. Although Benin ethical debates are not engaged in a political struggle or process that is directly comparable to those of southern Africa, yet as in *Ubuntu* thinking, at the core of Benin moral values is the notion that every member of the community has the responsibility of ensuring that their actions and pronouncements are intended at protecting, guaranteeing, and enhancing the well-being of other members of the community (cf. Genger 2018: 24-6).

In Benin ethics, the maintenance of the social cohesion of the entire community begins with the good moral conduct of the individual. Therefore, every member of the community must ensure that their moral conduct does not compromise the social equilibrium of the society. Similarly, Genger explains that *Ubuntu* abhors injustice, oppression of the poor by the rich, violence, corruption, and the abandonment of the spirit of oneness in the community. He submits that those who breach these moral codes are brought to face justice, which is an idea shared by many in Benin. The breach of the moral codes could also lead to the loss of dignity and respect from members of the community. However, once justice has been dispensed through traditional moral authorities and punishment served, it is the collective responsibility of the community to ensure that the dignity and humanity of the offending party is restored (cf. Genger 2018: 24-6).

To many Benin citizens, life is a precious gift from God and the Supreme Being. It is the property of the Supreme Being and the connection between the living and the ancestors. Therefore, any attempt to inflict harm or death on human life is considered a taboo and even an act against the Supreme Being. It usually attracts the severest kind of moral punishment such as cursing, banishment from the community, or the propitiation of the ancestral spirits. The spirit of humanism in *Ubuntu* also demands that members of the community should be

their brothers' keeper, which also equally resonates with Benin moral and ethical expectations (Genger 2018: 25).

Genger goes on to enumerate other ideals of *Ubuntu*, which also reverberate with Benin moral and ethical canons, to include the virtues of personhood such as truthfulness, fairness, forgiveness, virtuousness, reliability, humility and selflessness, and the responsibility of the individual to ensure that the peace and harmony of the community is foremost in their personal and public transactions (Genger 2018: 25). In Benin Kingdom, it is expected of everyone to live the life of virtuousness, peace and harmony. Actions and utterances that are capable of being interpreted as cruel, untruthful, selfish, or vile would generally lead to the loss of personhood (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 130).

Traditional and moral philosophy in Benin starts from the family, where the *Odafen Noyanwa* (husband who owns the house) holds the moral authority. Everyone under his sphere of influence, including the wives, the children, and his unmarried younger siblings, must submit to his authority. In return, he protects them and provides for them. He is also held accountable for their behaviour (Egharevba 1949: 13). The Benin typical family consists of people related by blood (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 128). This family structure may include a husband and wife or several wives and children, but it may also consist of grandparents and married grandchildren too (Egharevba 1949: 11-12).[15] The *Odafen Noyanwa* ensures that strict adherence to the social and moral order is observed and any violation is punished by fining, flogging, and whipping, depending on the age of the offender and the nature of the offence (Egharevba 1949: 13-14). Notwithstanding that post-colonial African societies have been impacted by varying factors such as colonialism, the introduction of Western capitalist economic ideology, and globalisation (Ajayi 2017: 102), the core pre-colonial African moral values still persist in Benin in the twenty-first century albeit in modified forms (Kaplan 2003). These moral values are especially obvious in the rural communities of Benin Kingdom and during important

[15] The inclusion of grandparents and married grandchildren as family units is becoming less likely in the twenty first century Benin

traditional and social ceremonies such as burial, marriages, chieftaincy celebrations, and the coronation of the Oba of Benin.

Despite the close control of the social order, it is an offence to provoke anyone to anger in Benin Kingdom such that the person ends up committing suicide (Egharevba 1949: 47). Edo people believe that since the Supreme Being is the giver of life, it is only Him that can take it. Anyone accused of provocation leading to suicide in Benin is made to face justice. If found guilty, the person is branded an *Izigha* (murderer). He is declared an *Oghion' Oba* (enemy of the Oba) and ostracised, thus losing his personhood in the community (Egharevba 1949: 47). Benin moral codes also abhor evil acts such as witchcraft, adultery, murder, manslaughter, bribery, corruption, pervasion of justice, and oppression of the poor (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 130, Egharevba 1949:48-9). Violations of these moral codes usually attract severe penalties including death caused by the wrath of the gods, ostracism, fines, and lifetime banishment (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 130).

One key traditional way of regulating social and moral order in Benin Kingdom is through oath taking. It is widely believed that traditional oath taking is a very effective way of ensuring the maintenance of social equilibrium in the community (IFRA-Nigeria 2019: 9, Ekhator 2019: 15). The method was instituted by the Oba to guarantee probity, truthfulness, and justice in the kingdom. It was also designed to serve as a direct source to the ancestors and as a link between the living and the dead (IFRA-Nigeria 2019: 9). Traditional shrines are erected throughout the kingdom to serve this purpose. These shrines are hierarchical in order but the most powerful of them all is that of the Oba (IFRA-Nigeria 2019: 7). Here, those accused of serious offences such as adultery, murder, witchcraft, and manslaughter are brought to confess their misdeeds or face the wrath of the gods. Those exonerated of the offences walk free while those found guilty are expected to die or fall sick within a timeframe (IFRA-Nigeria 2019: 8).

The importance of oaths, and their association with the Oba, shows that notwithstanding the incursion and widespread acceptance of the global religion of Christianity, traditional forms of moral and social control remain immensely influential and relevant in the twenty first century Benin Kingdom (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 125, Ekhator 2019: 18). Many Edo people, regardless of their religious affiliations, still subscribe to many of the tenets and efficacy of traditional forms of control (IFRA-Nigeria 2019: 12). Every Edo person owes it as a moral duty and responsibility to respect the historical values and practices of the kingdom, including all religious practices. They are expected also to venerate the exploits of their heroes past and required to always be of good moral behaviour (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 130, Omoera 2014). The high esteem in which leaders are held is generally understood to contribute to morality and wellbeing

As the previous chapter also shows, Benin citizens hold the institution of the Oba dearly (Kaplan 2003). Above all, Edo people believe that *Osanobua* (God) decreed the moral laws of the kingdom. The Oba is the *Osanobua ogha gbon* (God of the earth), therefore, he is the custodian of the law. He is also the guarantor of moral order and social cohesion in the kingdom (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 128). The usurpation of these moral codes in Benin attracts the stigma of *Oghion' Oba*, *Oghien' Vbo* (enemy of the Oba, enemy of the people), which leads to the loss of humanity on the part of the culprit (Kaplan 2003: 190, Egharevba 1949: 48-9). As Charles Gore precisely points out, the relevance of the institution of the Oba of Benin [and traditional values placed on morality] 'is not a memorial to a bygone time' (Gore 2007: 25). The stigma associated with usurpers of the Benin moral codes and the tension generated were played out as recently as the declining years of the twentieth century, when a prominent traditional chief in Benin, Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion, took the Oba to court. The resultant court battle between the Oba and Chief Igbinedion, which was played out on television with the Oba being interrogated by lawyers, was considered a taboo and a violation of the moral codes of Benin by many Edo citizens. In the end, Chief Igbinedion lost the case and his humanity. Although some Edo people, including some palace chiefs stuck to him, most Benin citizens

subsequently isolated him (Gore 2007: 25), with many regarding him as *'Oghion' Oba, Oghien' Vbo*.

These moral virtues of the kingdom, the attempts to subvert them, the tensions they create when they come in contact with Christianity, and the restoration of justice through the institutions designed for that purpose, are what Edo language filmmakers explore and propagate using the two dominant religious doctrines in the kingdom.

4.7 Edo Language Films as Agents of Moral Virtues

Okaegbe, *Ason-Savan*, and *Ede-Okiekie* are examples of some of the films that have explored these moral values more explicitly. *Okaegbe* (The family head or head of funeral service) is a 2001 Billy Kings Movie production. It uses the traditional Benin burial rites as a focal point to highlight the moral virtues of the kingdom and the punishment thereof when violated. It also gives viewers insight into the tension created when a Pentecostal Christian of the classic mould is impacted by the malicious application of the Benin moral codes.

The term of Okaegbe translates as the leader of the family body in Benin. As previously stated in the chapter, the Edo family structure extends beyond the Western idea of the nuclear family. Bradbury (1973: 214-5) explains that the Benin family configuration is a complex one in the sense that it may be constituted of one generation of lineage elders, but it could also stretch as far as three generations or even the entire clan that trace their roots to the same ancestors. Usually patrilineal in nature, this group of elders is known as the *Egbe* (Family). It is headed by the Okaegbe (Head of the family), who is typically the oldest male amongst them. The Okaegbe is the guarantor of peace in the family. He presides over disputes and serves as the chief priest of *Edion-egbe*, the ancestral shrine dedicated to the body of the dead in the family (Bradbury 1973: 215). The Okaegbe also ensures the maintenance and control of the tradition

and custom in the family, but his role takes on more significance and becomes fluid in the event of death.

In Benin traditional cosmology, offspring are expected to outlive their parents and the young should bury the old (Sibani and Ehisienmen 2020: 149). Therefore, in the event of the death of a younger member of the family, the Okaegbe delegates the responsibility of presiding over the funeral to a personal representative, oftentimes a younger elder or someone younger than the deceased. The Okaegbe becomes the *Okaegbe n' okhua* (The ultimate head of family), while the representative acquires the designation of *Okaegbe Iorinmwin* (Leader of the funeral service). However, regardless of the role of the *Okaegbe Iorinmwin* during the burial ceremony, the *Okaegbe n'okhua* takes responsibility for the final outcome (edoworld 2020).

Rex Osagiede (2019:45-7) argues that with the widespread embrace of in particular Pentecostal Christianity, these longstanding Edo traditional funeral rites have undergone some transformations and provoked tension between ardent traditionalists and Christians. But as Flora Edouwaye Kaplan (2003:192-4) suggests, Edo people are open to foreign religions introduced into Benin. Nevertheless, their commitment to traditional practices remain strong and the Edo traditional religion is still an integral part of Benin religious and cultural life in the twenty-first century. The importance of the role of the Okaegbe in Benin funeral ceremony, the attempt to undermine his moral authority, and the conflict it begets are conveyed through Ikpakperhan, the main character of the film, *Okaegbe*, and Noguese, the Pentecostal Christian son of the dead.

In the film, Ikpakperhan (The bark of tree) is a man who flaunts his evil doings. He bids to deprive especially the senior son of his inheritance but the funeral rites legitimate and uphold the Edo moral values. He hates his wealthy uncle, the Okaegbe of the family, for not financially assisting him to the extent that he casts an illness on him. The uncle dies shortly afterwards. Ikpakperhan sees this as an opportunity to share from his wealth, an opportunity he believes his uncle

denied him when he was alive. He plots how to preside over and exploit his funeral rites so he can seize the leadership of the family.

At a family meeting in preparation for his uncle's burial, Ikpakperhan confronts Enaruna (The one people serve), who is the rightful next head of the family. He challenges him to a spiritual battle and soon after, Enaruna falls sick and can no longer fulfil his role. Ikpakperhan takes over the leadership of the family and makes outrageous demands that his uncle's children must meet before the funeral rites can commence. He also asks them to lodge some money in his bank account and buy him a number of cows and goats. Shocked but cowed into submission, the children agree to the demands, except Noguese (The generous one), a pious Pentecostal Christian. Meanwhile, with the help of a traditional religious priest, one of the bereaved wives also plots to render the eldest son of the deceased, Onamagbe (The one gossip does not kill), insane.

Later the burial rites are successfully carried out and it is time to share the estate of the deceased. Ikpakperhan capitalises on this to further exploit the children. Yet on the day of the sharing, Ikpakperhan is shocked to find that all the evil he has perpetrated is coming to nothing, or even returns to haunt him. First, a lawyer appears on the scene with his uncle's will, which recognises the children in accordance with Benin tradition. Enaruna also recovers from his mysterious illness. He comes to the meeting and special effects indicate that the illness is cast back on Ikpakperhan, who becomes paralysed. Onamagbe regains his sanity and the evil wife confesses to afflicting him with the illness. In the end, she too experiences that the evil she has set in the world comes back to haunt her, as she loses her sanity and swaps places with Onamagbe.

Okaegbe emphasises the punishment that is visited on evildoers in Benin Kingdom, especially when perpetrated with the intention to cause death or serious harm. Ikpakperhan's atrocious behaviour is one that runs counter to the dictates of Benin moral virtues. In killing his uncle through the use of evil forces and attempting to exploit his funeral rites for his personal gains, Ikpakperhan upsets the social cohesion of the society, which has the family as the foundation.

The film illuminates that Benin's spiritual foundations reject selfish behaviour, injustice, and oppression of the poor and the innocent, and uphold and reward moral virtues. For violating Benin's moral codes, the gods subsequently set the innocent Enaruna free and punish every evildoer with the evil they inflicted first on others: they leave Ikpakperhan paralysed and punished the evil wife with the insanity she had wanted to inflict on Onamagbe.

The film also brings into focus the friction that arises when a passionate Pentecostal Christian engages with the traditional mores of Benin Kingdom. Noguese is a Pentecostal devotee who believes in the movement's rhetoric of rupture and opposition to traditional doctrines. This is apparent from the beginning, when he questions and objects to every move to subject him to traditional practices. His rejection of Ikpakperhan's demands is right but it also reflects his antagonism to traditional culture and religion. At the end of the film, the audience is left wondering about what happens to him after his rejection of Ikpakperhan's demands. This could be indicative of the limits of the Pentecostal narrative. Insofar as Pentecostalism diabolises traditional religious practices, it 'has no place' in the moral restoration of the traditional order. Although Ikpakperhan tries to bring the position of Okaegbe into disrepute with his unacceptable behaviour, the gods punish him for doing so. The moral standing of Okaegbe is reinstated with the healing of Enaruna, the rightful next Okaegbe. The deceased's estate is shared among the children in accordance with the Benin tradition, with the senior son getting the bulk of the property having performed the funeral rites. It is important to stress here that regardless of religious faith, every son, particularly the senior son, has to perform the Edo traditional burial rites to gain the right of inheritance. Thus the protestation of Noguese amounts to nothing. His absence from the end of the film could therefore be understood as a subtle concession to the enduring nature of traditional religious and cultural practices in modern Benin.

Ason Savan (Night is greater than day), a 2009 Nelson Production Ltd film, articulates the Benin moral values of good behaviour and respect for elders in a different manner. The film opens with teenagers playing football on a dusty

rural community playground. We also see an old man sitting in a reclining chair and watching the youths as they play. After a while, an argument breaks out over some peanuts snatched from the rightful owner because he refused to share with the others. The old man intervenes by asking them over to where he is sitting and advises them on the need to do good at all times. He also admonishes the rightful owner of the peanuts for not sharing, arguing that such behaviour runs counter to the Benin moral value of communalism.

He tells them of the story of twins – a boy (Ovbokhan) (Junior) and a girl (Odion) (Senior). The Supreme Being, Osanobua, sent them through a couple that had no children to deliver a close-knit rural community from the evils of untimely death, plague, and witchcraft. Odion was betrothed to an elderly disabled man at a very young age. On attaining adulthood, she goes against her parents' wish by declining to marry the man. This infuriates her parents who are determined to carry out their wish. Enraged by her parents' lack of understanding, Odion uses her supernatural force to kill them in their sleep.

Having killed her parents, Odion then turns against the entire community. She recruits a select few into her occult world where they perpetrate a reign of terror. Each member of the cult sacrifices a close family member on an annual basis to appease their evil desires. Ovbokhan in the meantime is resolute in fulfilling the mission ordered by Osanobua. He keeps warning Odion that at some point, she would face up to him. As the more gifted of the two, she ignores him. However in time, Osanobua strips Odion of her powers and fortifies Ovbokhan with more powers. Eventually, Odion falls sick during one of their clandestine spiritual meetings and exited the scene. Her exit here could be understood as death: the ultimate penalty evildoers pay for their atrocities.

Then we see the shot reverts back to the old man and the youths, where we see him explain to them the moral lessons of the story, which are the values of good behaviour and of sharing one's wealth with those who do not have in the community. He urges them to always strive for the promotion of the common good in their conduct. In the end, the youths express their gratitude for the

lessons and promise the old man that they will henceforth always be of good behaviour.

The film, *Ason Savan*, indicates that respect for elders in Benin is an acknowledgment of their age and wisdom. One crucial method elders use in transmitting wisdom and imparting good behaviour on the young ones is through story telling (Egharevba 1949: 70-1). The old man in *Ason Savan* symbolises elders as sages in Benin. Through the story told to the youths on the need to always be of good behaviour, the old man also acts as an agent of moral control. Every Edo person, irrespective of age, is expected to be of good behaviour. This does not only enhance the humanity of the individual but it also guarantees a morally upright society and helps to maintain the social equilibrium of the community. Every Edo person is also expected to hold elders in high regard. *Ason Savan* also exhibits this moral virtue. The youths halt whatever activities they were engaged in to listen to the old man's story. In the end, the moral message of rewarding good and punishing evil does not only benefit the youths, it also imbues and promotes the common good of the community.

The Benin moral virtues of good behaviour, truthfulness, honesty, and the abhorrence of corruption and evil practices are also the focus of *Ede-Okiekie* (End - Time), a film produced by One John 5 Four Media in 2012. It portrays these moral virtues using the Pentecostal duality of heaven and hell as the after-life reward for good and punishment for evil behaviours. In it, Ken is a Pentecostal pastor who preaches and lives by dictates of the Pentecostal doctrines. The elders of the church however do not subscribe to his ways. They are more interested in the church's finances and how to misappropriate them. They hold him accountable for the unwillingness of members to give generously to the church because of his hard-hitting and moralistic messages.

Soon, they conspire to strip him of his pastoral responsibilities. They send him to another branch in a remote part of the region and elevate a junior pastor to his position. Meanwhile, Ken is locked in a spiritual battle to rescue the daughter

of a congregant from the claws of an African traditional religious priest who is determined to kill her. Ken rescues her by praying fervently for seven days. The traditional priest dies in the process and is sent to hell at the judgment throne. Also, the leader of the church's elder's council is involved in a severe car crash. At the hospital, his spirit ascends to the judgment throne, where he is given a reprieve. He eventually recovers fully and then asks Ken for forgiveness. Afterwards, he immerses himself in the propagation of the gospel.

One of the consequences of evil, corruption, and pervasion of justice in Benin Kingdom is death caused by the wrath of the gods or the Supreme Being. Ken is a good man. He believes in justice and honesty, values that are cherished in the kingdom. However, the elders' determination to perpetrate corruption drives them to commit evil, which goes against the Benin moral codes. Many of the elders eventually die and end up in hell. However, the leader of the elders' council gets a second chance and becomes morally upright thereafter. In the Benin worldview, the death of the traditional religious priest in this film is not a consequence of his religious belief but the result of his evil act.

As *Okaegbe*, *Ason-Savan*, and *Ede-Okiekie* illustrate, the plots and dialogues of Edo language video films are the main conveyors of moral and ethical messages, but the soundtracks of the video films serve as entry points into the moral stories, and the characters' names are signifiers of their moral and ethical reputation. In Benin traditional worldview, the physical and spiritual universes are supernaturally connected (Azuonye 1996: 30-47). Whatever transpires in the physical realm has been predetermined in the realm of the spirit. Edo mythology also subscribes to the belief that in the physical realm, night is superior to day. Therefore, event cannot happen in the day without it being predestined at night. In *Ason Savan*, the story of the film is made clear in the beginning, when the opening soundtrack highlights this spiritual link between day and night. It emphasises that even though God created the day and night, the battles between good and evil are usually determined at night before they take place in the day. The soundtrack of *Ede-Okiekie* also lets the viewers into the storyline from the outset. Immediately, the opening soundtrack suggests to the

audience that the film is about the Pentecostal narrative of heaven and hell and the after-life reward or punishment for good or evil deed.

The characters of *Okaegbe* exemplify the importance of names to the full understanding of the moral messages of Edo language video films. For instance, rather than being a traditional name, in Benin, Ikpakperhan is an appellation that is associated with someone who often uses their knowledge of traditional medicine to harm others. In the film, the character, Ikpakperhan, lives up to this appellation right from the start, when viewers see him flaunting the evil attributes associated with the name. He goes on to perpetrate atrocities throughout the film. In the end, he reaps the punishment of evil deeds. In Edo language, the name, Onamagbe, may literally translate to 'the one gossip does not kill', but it goes beyond that. The meaning of the name is wide-ranging, in the sense that it encompasses someone that is generally resilient to harm. In *Okaegbe*, the character, Onamagbe, also reflects this characteristic. Even though his stepmother attempted to supernaturally destroy him, he recovers and changes places with her. Therefore, to fully grasp the meaning of the moral messages of Edo language video films, filmmakers in Benin contend that it is incumbent that the audience members understand every aspect of the films – the plot, dialogue, characterisation, and soundtrack – as they all combine to express their ultimate objectives.

Edo language video filmmakers also argue that the Benin moral virtues are not exclusive to one religion. As a result, they are not influenced by any religious persuasion when it comes to the portrayal of these moral values. Indeed, there is a strong sense among many of them, as it is with many Edo people, that the two religions share similarities in terms of doctrines, in the sense that they both encourage good moral behaviour (Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 125, Ekhator 2019: 18, IFRA-Nigeria 2019: 12-15). Thus what is of importance when determining the portrayal of good or bad moral behaviours in their films is the religious doctrine that would best convey the message to the audience.

Iyeke Orhionmwon, a prominent Edo language film producer and actor with a popular *You Tube* Edo films channel, confirms this notion during an interaction. He argues that his main concern when conceptualising a film idea is not the religious agenda of Pentecostal Christianity or African traditional religion but the propagation of the message of peace and the religious doctrine that can effectively express it. He emphasises further:

> In my own way, one thing I have done so far, whether it is from the traditional angle or from the Christian angle, I have been able to preach peace. One thing I so much believe is that if you are a Muslim for instance, or a Christian, or a traditionalist, if you have done something good for humanity, you love your neighbour as yourself, don't be surprised that on that last day, you will see that person in Heaven (Iyeke Orhionmwon, personal interview, January 4th 2019).

Uvbi Enibokun, an Edo language film producer, actor and dancer, who is generally regarded as the queen of the Benin sector of Nollywood, adds weight to this argument by questioning the logic of using film to confine good or evil to one religion. She stresses that the reward for good behaviour or the punishment for committing evil transcends religious boundaries:

> …When you do good, you reap [the reward], when you do bad, you reap [the reward]. [Whether] you are a Christian or not, you go to church or you don't go to church, you reap the reward…so that is how I play [portray] my own. Not because Christianity must triumph because the man [character] is a native doctor [traditional religious priest]. [It depends on] who is doing good… (Uvbi Enibokun, personal interview October 22nd 2018).

So for Edo language video filmmakers, Christianity and African traditional religion are not an end in themselves. The two religions serve as means to an end, that is as intermediaries for the propagation of moral values in Benin Kingdom. More importantly, the analysed films also prove that for the filmmakers, the moral health of Benin takes precedence over the championing of any religious cause.

4.8 Conclusion: Religions as Means of Societal Edification

This chapter demonstrated that despite the overwhelming preference granted to Pentecostal Christianity by English language Nigerian video film producers, Edo language filmmakers do not promote the cause of either Pentecostalism or traditional religion in their films. Rather, they use the doctrines of the two religions to explore the complex Benin religious landscape and to propagate the moral values that would edify the society. The analysis of the video films featured in this chapter clearly corroborates the filmmakers' assertion that their interest is in the wellbeing of Benin. The video films expressly articulate the Pentecostal and traditional religious worldviews, adapted them to the local religious ecology, and show why Edo language video filmmakers consider the two religions as vital to the wellbeing of Benin.

For example, the film, *Imariabe*, is obviously anchored on the narrative of the binary between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. The video film effectively relates the dualism to the religious field of Benin, by subverting the Benin narrative of Mammy Water as a benevolent goddess and by demonstrating that witchcraft can only be found in the realm of Edo traditional religion. It also efficiently utilises the discourse of 'us' and 'them', and 'past' and 'present' to 'other' traditional religion as belonging to the dark under water world, which is where the Edo traditional cosmology regard as the location of the palace of *Olokun* and Mammy Water. The video film illustrates that Pentecostalism is the sole proprietor of good, while traditional religion represents the evil that must be eliminated from society.

On its part, *Iredia*, clearly validates the cause of African traditional religion and confirms that Edo language video films should not always be taken at face value. Unlike *Imariabe*, the film upholds the Benin narrative of Mammy Water as a benevolent goddess and as an agent of peace, harmony, and order in the society. A Pentecostal pastor produced the video film, but despite the rhetoric of the producer to the contrary, the film ends up promoting the cause of African traditional religion. As has been stated, this means that the messages of Edo

language video films are complicated. By leaving open the interpretation of the ancestral book, the producer not only succinctly adapts the plotline to the local religious landscape, he also gives an audio-visual illustration to the argument that the reading of Edo language films is not simple. As set out in the previous chapter, the Oba of Benin authored the Book of the Holy Aruosa and replaced the Biblical symbols with Benin hero-deities. Thus the ancestral book in *Iredia* could be read as the Book of the Holy Aruosa or an appropriation of the Christian Holy Bible. And similarly, by subjecting the ancestral book to interpretation, the producer also alludes to the shared similarities in the worldviews of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion.

Apart from illustrating the incongruity of Edo filmmakers' attitude towards the doctrines of Pentecostalism and traditional religion, the film, *Amugbugbe*, visually problemitises the rhetoric of Pentecostal rupture in Benin. It also speaks to the arbitrariness of the Pentecostal leaders' oratory about the distance between the two religions by granting optical expression to the discourse about their interface with traditional religious priests for the purpose of spiritual augmentation. Additionally, the film also addresses the economic motive of Pentecostalism as a religion. Contrary to the Pentecostal leaders' narrative, *Amugbugbe* shows that there is potency in the traditional realm. But in doing this, it demonstrates that for the traditional power to be openly acceptable to many Edo citizens in the twenty-first century, it has to be seen through the modernist ideas of Pentecostalism.

What clearly emerges from all the films is the overall objective of Edo language video filmmakers. In the films, good is rewarded and evil is punished. And irrespective of the religious doctrine that conveys the value of being a good person, the fundamental aim of restoring the moral order in the society is achieved, and evil is eliminated. This confirms that Edo language video filmmakers are not persuaded by the agenda of Pentecostal Christianity or African traditional religion but are driven by the desire to promote good behaviour among Edo citizens. However, because they are aware of the professional and artistic expectation of filmmaking, they resolve conflicts

through the religious doctrines that can appropriately transmit the messages. The video films also illustrate that Edo language video film producers function in a uniquely local setting. They are not interested in locating good or evil in the Pentecostal or traditional religious universe but in using the two religions to guarantee the social cohesion of Benin society. The next chapter examines why the filmmakers feel the need to promote social cohesion and to edify Benin Kingdom.

CHAPTER FIVE

FILM AS TECHNOLOGY FOR THE PROMOTION OF MORAL VALUES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates in more detail Edo language filmmakers' understanding of religion and the rationale for using their films to spread the moral virtues of Benin, which were introduced in the previous chapter. It argues that Edo language filmmakers mobilise their films as mediums of ethno-linguistic and cultural identity in an ethnically heterogeneous Nigerian nation, where the Edo language is often marginalised. Moreover, it engages with the fact that many Edo speakers now grow up outside of Edo society, or, in an increasingly globalised world, even outside of Nigeria or West Africa. Edo language films therefore address a perceived lack of knowledge and understanding of Edo language and values, in particular among the younger generation, by conveying the history and moral virtues of Benin Kingdom.

The chapter focuses on Edo values because this is an important influence on Edo language filmmakers' engagement with Pentecostalism and traditional religion. For many of them, making films in Edo language is directly aimed at contributing to the moral and ethical wellbeing of Edo citizens at home and in the diaspora. At the same time, concerns about morality are intimately related to religion. As noted in the previous Chapter, in Benin cosmology, the natural and the supernatural worlds are closely linked. Irrespective of their own religious backgrounds, filmmakers are not necessarily concerned with elevating one religion over the other, but the degree to which they represent the moral values of Edo society. In other words, they assess religion – whether Christian or traditional – also in terms of the ethical behaviour it engenders. In order to

understand this particular engagement with religion, it is therefore necessary to explore in more detail the filmmakers' concern with Benin's moral economy.

The chapter also highlights that Edo language filmmaking is an integral part of a wider process in which an Edo ethnic identity is constructed. Historically, the ethnic identity of any given group of people has been understood as 'other oriented', meaning that how a group of people define, identify and assert themselves reflects how they believe they differ from others. The marginalisation that Muslim Yoruba faced based on the perception of their 'subordinate' Islamic practices from the Hausa shaped their identity in the second half of the nineteenth century (Peel 2016: 150-2, Apter 2013: 356). In Nigeria, Edo people are a minority ethnic group and thus see themselves as marginalised by the major ethnic groups. In this context, some draw on religion and technology for self-assertion. Both factors have been crucial to the formation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism in comparable circumstances. For example, Christianity, traditional religion and the printing press were vital in the construction of the pan-Yoruba identity, mainly from the second half of the nineteenth century (Peel 2016: 150-2, Apter 2013:356-8, Waterman 1990: 369-372). Through texts and debates initiated by educated Christians, the previously independent collective groups of people in Oyo, Ife, Ijebu and others became known and identified as Yoruba. In a similar manner, Edo language video filmmakers are engaged in the process of constructing a pan-Edo ethnic identity and nationalism through the portrayal of Pentecostal and traditional religious values that resonate with Edo ethics in their films. As in the Yoruba case, this includes Edo citizens who speak dialects that differ from standard Edo, but who nonetheless trace their ancestry to Benin Kingdom.

Usually, the expectation is that the discourse of film and video should be contextualised in the framework of other research works that have been carried out in the sphere of film studies. However, when film is discussed as an important aspect of 'cultural nationalism', then it becomes crucial to refer to comparative literature that focuses on other genres. This brings the discussion of film in this thesis into conversation with other forms of popular culture.

5.2 Video Films: Economic Empowerment Through Religious and Cultural Representations of Different Nigerian Groups

As explained in the previous Chapter, the socioeconomic difficulties of the mid-1980s to early 1990s and the global transition from geo-national economic protectionism to deregulation provided the opportunity for Pentecostalism and video filmmakers to thrive (Magbadelo 2004, Meyer 1998, 2004, 2005, Ukah 2003, Barnett 2004). Also, the tumultuous period resulted in massive unemployment in the country, but Nollywood came to the rescue for creative youth that were eager to harness their potentials. Since then, the Nigerian video film industry has not only provided the much needed employment for an army of youth in the country but has also generated or supported ancillary businesses and bridged the gap between the rich and the poor (Chowdhury et al 2008: 13).

The video film industry has afforded technical professionals such as cameramen, sound engineers, video or film editors, and electricians the opportunity to economically empower themselves (Chowdhury et al 2008: 19). Incidentally, with the advent of Nollywood, other sectors like tourism and electrical manufacturing outfits have started to experience a surge in growth. Now, over one million Nigerian youth are gainfully employed in Nollywood. Furthermore, the success of the video film industry has sparked the establishment of over twenty-five digital video disc (DVD) and compact disc (CD) production companies in Nigeria. These companies now produce up to 500,000 copies of videotapes, DVDs and CDs per day to meet the needs of the industry and have also provided employment for Nigerians (Chowdhury et al 2008: 23-4).

The video film industry's capacity to empower is not specific to individuals. The Nigerian economy at large has also benefited from the growth of Nollywood. In 2014, Nigeria became the biggest economy on the African continent after the contributions of the creative sector, including Nollywood, was taken into account (Liston 2014). The video film sector, along with other segments of the creative

industry such as music, telecommunications and e-commerce, accounted for a substantial percentage of the over £300billion that shot the country to the top position in Africa. Enjoli Liston goes on to explain that when data was last calculated in 2006, Nollywood turned out 872 films per year compared to Bollywood's 1, 091 and Hollywood's 485. But when low budget films such as the ones produced on video were added to the equation, Nigeria topped the production output with 2,500 films per year. The effort boosted Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 1.4 per cent during the period (Liston 2014). Additionally, Rebecca Moudio suggests that it was projected that between 2012 and 2016, the popularity of Nigerian video films would in part result in a three per cent growth in tourism (Moudio 2015: 36-7). She notes that the anticipated growth has already sparked an upsurge in the building of new hotels and other leisure outfits. Already, brand names such as Radisson Blu, Ibis, and Four Point Sheraton are commonplace on the hospitality landscape (Moudio 2015: 37).

As with its popularity with the audience, the foundation for the rise of Nollywood to the position of one of the key economic players is its articulation of the everyday life of Nigerians. The effective manner in which the industry has been able to optically package the cultures and traditions of Nigerians has been largely recognised as countering the perceived negative global image of the country (Moudio 2015: 35). Despite their impractical portrayal of the local religious ecology, James Tsaaior (2018) argues that English language Nigerian video films are major participants in the overall projection of the Nigerian way of life. They have come to be accepted as the single most representative visual texts of the various ethnicities that constitute the Nigerian nation. However, because English language video films do not have as much cultural affinity with the 'multifarious and variegated heritage' in Nigeria, many indigenous language video filmmakers lay claim to 'owning' the cultures and traditions that they depict (Tsaaior 2018: 147). Both the English and indigenous Nigerian language produced video films are together acknowledged as belonging to the Nigerian video film industry. Therefore, both are credited for the success of Nollywood. But as Adeyemi (2010), Onuzulike (2015), and Ashaolu (2017) stress, indigenous language video films are the most effective mediums of expressing the ethnic, cultural, religious,

and linguistic identities of groups of people. They also aptly document the trajectories of such ethnic groups for subsequent generations.

Obododinma Oha (2002) for example argues that the Yoruba language films feed on a specifically Yoruba morality that is replete with theology and spirituality built on the understanding of the inter-relationship between the natural and the supernatural worlds (Oha 2002: 130). He contends that many Yoruba people are conscious of the past and how it impacts on the present in their everyday lives. At the core of this intersection between the past and the present is the power of voodoo or juju, which the Yoruba people deploy either to do good or to perpetrate evil (Oha 2002: 130). The Yoruba, according to Oha, also believe in the potency of the 'word' (*Oro*) or incantation spoken through divination (*Ifa*). The *Oro* pronounced by the elder on a junior person or those delivered by one's relatives are believed to be more efficacious in terms of devastation, and if not revoked, they have the propensity to affect future generations of victims (Oha 2002: 131). It should be highlighted here that although Oha stresses the importance the Yoruba place on the potency of the 'word', there is a distinction between the 'word' pronounced through *Oro* and that spoken through *Ifa*. The 'word' pronounced through *Oro* always causes harm while that expressed through *Ifa* could either bring harm or good to the recipient.

Elegbe further points out that the Yoruba language video film producers utilise the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes' poetic style of expressing traditional culture and magic to tell their stories (2012: 207). The influence of travelling theatre styles of representation is apparent in the way Yoruba video films evocatively portray the deities and other supernatural beings and their association with humans. It also impacts on the way Yoruba filmmakers visualise how the supernatural manipulate the affairs of the living, and the relationship between the living and the unborn offspring (Elegbe 2012: 207). The encounter between this traditional Yoruba religious culture and Christianity is what many Yoruba language video films depict in their films (Oha 2002: 127).

The Igbo language version of Nollywood similarly expresses typically Igbo traditional and religious worldviews, and flourishes on the cultural and religious tapestries of myths, legends, folklores, acrobatics, songs, idioms, and story telling (Emejulu and Amadi 2014: 278). It also focuses on the Igbo traditional value of entrepreneurship, the quest to achieve financial and economic success, and the costs involved. Unlike the Yoruba and Hausa language films however, many of the Igbo video films exhibiting the religious culture of the Igbo people are shot in English language, perhaps with the hope of reaching a wider audience than the other two major ethnic groups (Uwah 2009: 67). Indeed, *Living in Bondage*, the video film widely acknowledged to have sparked off the industry, was based on this narrative of Igbo traditional cultural and religious values (Emejulu and Amadi 2014: 278).

Ritual practices appear in many Igbo language video films. According to Amaefula (2013), Igbo language video filmmakers regularly portray the key Igbo traditional and religious rituals of incantations, magic, charms, and blood used by the Igbo people to appease the gods and to respond to social and spiritual circumstances in their personal and communal lives (Amaefula 2013: 149-154). In a more intricate explanation of ritual practices in Igbo films, Uwah (2009) suggests that the Igbo traditional and religious belief in the existence of God as the ultimate force that presides over the affairs of humans and communities through lesser deities such as *Ala* or *Ani* (goddess of the earth), *Amadioha* (god of thunder and lightning) and *Ajoku* (god of yam) are often depicted by the Igbo language video films (Uwah 2009: 155). The Igbo god (*Chi* or *Ikenga*), which serves as the guardian angel of the individual in Igbo worldview is also a staple of Igbo language films (Uwah 2009: 155). The Igbo religious culture and society of the twenty-first century that is reflective of the impact of outside forces such as globalisation, economic, social, trade and missionary interactions also finds its way into the Igbo language film narratives (Uwah 2009: 67).

Other ethnic groups in the country such as Ibibio, Efik, Tiv, Urhobo, Ebira Itshekiri, and Ijaw also produce Nollywood video films in indigenous languages (McCain 2013: 33, Emejulu and Amadi 2014: 277). As has been previously

stated (Chapter three), together, indigenous language Nollywood video films exhibiting the cultures and religions of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria have always outnumbered the dominant English language version (McCain 2013).

In the case of Edo language video films, central to the portrayal of the religious culture of Edo people are the institution of the Oba of Benin, the history of Benin kingdom, the feats of past heroes and ancestors and the traditional form of government (Omoera 2015: 263). Edo language video filmmakers exploit the deep tradition of music, dance, language and history that are inserted in the cultural heritage of the kingdom and the symbolism of the Oba to tell their stories. Regardless of their religious affiliations and views, Edo language video filmmakers venerate royalty in their films, what it represents for the people in terms of cultural and religious identities, and the moral authority it still wields in the twenty-first century (Ekhator 2019: 20-1, Omoera 2015: 263, Idumwonyi and Ikhidero 2013: 127-130, Kaplan 2003: 190).

5.3 Religious Backgrounds and Thoughts of Edo Language Film Producers

Edo language video film producers come from varied religious backgrounds. Some of them have quite inflexible religious beliefs but most of them are liberal in terms of the religious doctrines they accept as meaningful. Their personal views contribute to a better understanding of the representation of both Christianity and traditional religion in Edo language films. In addition to illustrating why many Edo speakers accept both traditional practice and Christianity, they demonstrate that there are many different ways in which Edo speakers can understand the relevance of both religions.

For example, Peter Ovbiogbe, a well-respected Edo language film producer and actor was born into a mainline Christian family and he grew up in the faith. He has a Master's degree in Industrial Mathematics from a United Kingdom university. On his return to Nigeria, he qualified as a chartered accountant and

then worked in the banking sector for several years before turning to filmmaking, which had been his childhood ambition. Ovbiogbe's family also holds the office of [redacted], an important traditional office in Benin Kingdom, which is positioned within the constellation of specialised wards that historically served the Oba of Benin. The position is bestowed on all male descendants of the family. As one of the male offspring, it was incumbent on him to be deeply involved in the traditional rites and affairs relating to the position. He also had to be well grounded in traditional religious practices to be able to function in the role:

> I am a practising Christian since birth. The responsibility of my family as [redacted] represents the Ministry of Information, Lands and Survey in Benin Kingdom. [It] also requires us to be well informed about our traditional religion and settings, nuances, and experiences. Deliberately, we have to study the African traditional religion and have an understanding of both Christianity and traditional religion (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview, October 3rd 2018).

He suggests that this unique position is what has shaped his religious outlook and has made him appreciate the importance of the two religions in the kingdom. The two religions, he says, permeate the lives of Edo people and as a filmmaker, it is his responsibility to reflect this in his films without privileging one over the other.

Ben Usen, another prominent Edo language film producer and actor, differs in his religious stance. After his secondary education, Usen joined a music band, where they performed on stage across Lagos and the then Bendel State (now Edo and Delta States) for many years and recorded limited success. He then joined the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), where he rose to the rank of corporal. He says it was while he was in the police that he realised that filmmaking was his actual calling. After undertaking some short courses in filmmaking, mainly at the New York Film Academy, he eventually quit the police force and became an Edo language filmmaker. As a Pentecostal Christian, Usen believes that while there are similarities in the doctrines of Pentecostalism and African traditional religion

in terms of moral expectations from adherents, the two religions are far apart when it comes to liturgy. Even though he was born into a traditional religious family and only transitioned to Pentecostal Christianity as an adult, he dislikes many 'heathen' practices of traditional religion. Usen considers the 'constant' killing of animals and the sprinkling of their blood to appease the gods, sacrifices at road junctions, and the ridiculous demands of traditional religious priests as satanic and debasing:

> A lot of things we do as a people, we do out of ignorance. That is the gospel truth. There are a lot of good things about African traditional religion. You can't debunk that. I came from an ATR background, I became a Christian and I can see that. The major issue is sacrifice to idols…The Bible told [tells] me that I am made in the image and likeness of God. I see sacrificing to man-made objects as dehumanising or belittling ourselves…But the morality in ATR, as far as I am concerned, were [sic] drawn from the Bible because there is always a link (Ben Usen, personal interview October 10th 2018).

Pentecostalism, Usen points out, abhors fetish practices and no Pentecostal Christian should be associated with them. He claims that for the true Christian, the Bible should be the only watchword. Rather than making sacrifices to propitiate the deities, he says that the weapons for the Pentecostal Christian to defeat the Devil lie in prayers, fasting and deliverance.

Filmmaker David Owan is also a Pentecostal Christian. Unusually for this group, he was born into one of the very few Muslim families that migrated to Benin City from a locality that used to be part of the historical Benin Kingdom. He converted to Pentecostal Christianity in adulthood.[16] Unlike Ben Usen, he holds a different view of his faith. He believes that being a Pentecostal Christian does not preclude him from identifying with traditional religious practices because it defines his ethnic identity. Owan, who holds a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from a university in Benin and worked as a journalist with a newspaper in Benin

[16] David Owan's family came from a local administrative area outside of the research focus. They speak a dialect of the Edo language family but different from the Edo (Benin) language spoken in the areas covered by the study. The language group maintains a strong bond with the Edo (Benin) speaking people and has a strong affinity to the court in Benin

for many years, rising to the position of literary editor before he left and became an Edo language filmmaker, maintains that he participates in traditional religious activities as much as he does in the Christian ones. Because he now identifies as a member of the Edo ethnic group, he says he would be lost without traditional religion. When reminded of the Pentecostal leaders' rhetoric about African traditional religion and the need for Pentecostals to distance themselves, he dismissed this notion as colonial hangover on the part of the Pentecostal pastors. He asserts that it is their duty to preach but that it is his choice to either accept or reject their utterances. In fact, he claims that the Bible is an account of the colonisers' history and ways of life that was imposed on Africans:

> The Bible was not written by somebody from our village. You will see that some persons who were not Africans wrote it. So this simply means that their way of life was expressed in the Bible…But because we were a conquered people, we accepted the religion. That is the history I know about the link between Christian religion and our own traditional way of life (David Owan, personal interview October 15th 2018).

Although not as critical of Pentecostal leadership as David Owan, Iyeke Orhionmwon shares the same liberal views about religion. He was born into a traditional religious family but also became a Pentecostal Christian in adulthood. He went into filmmaking after secondary school education, having undergone some apprenticeships. Similar to, and yet unlike David Owan, he still actively participates in traditional rites and ceremonies. In addition, he is of the view that Pentecostal leaders are entitled to preach their divine messages and interpret the Bible to suit local needs. He also cites the colonial origin of Christianity and the need to affirm his ethnic identity as the reasons behind his continued participation in traditional religious practices:

> I so much believe in our Lord Jesus Christ but that does not stop me from being a traditional person. Before the white man came with his belief, with their tradition, with the Bible, we already had ours… They came in, they invaded us, impose[d] so many things on us and all that. It was very sad. It's not too okay

> for us to forget our past and embrace the recent. So I'm a Christian but I'm also a traditionalist (Iyeke Orhionmwon, personal interview January 4th 2019).

He reasons that his affiliation with the two religions has afforded him the opportunity to experience the shared similarities of their doctrines. He argues that the dichotomy created between Christianity and traditional practice is illogical since both of them preach peace and love.

For Uvbi Enibokun, the dishonest behaviours of some Pentecostal Christians discourage her from Christianity. She is a prolific Edo language film producer and a multi-talented actor, screenwriter and director who began her artistic career as a dancer immediately after her secondary education. She performed with various dance theatre troupes in the then Bendel State before being employed as a dancer and performer with the Bendel State Arts Council. It was from the Arts Council that she transited to filmmaking and acting, having worked there for several years. She concedes to going to church on social occasions such as weddings or birthday and anniversary celebrations, but stresses that she will never embrace Christianity because some Pentecostal Christians, including some of their leaders, do not practice what they preach:

> When you see what is going on in churches, it is very discouraging. I don't know how to pretend. Some will say do what I say, not what I do. [But] You should lead by example. To me, it does not augur well with them. The church, most of them do not practice what they preach. It is very annoying (Uvbi Enibokun, personal interview October 22nd 2018).

Born into an African traditional religious family, Uvbi Enibokun has adhered to the religion ever since. She argues that her dedication to the religion springs from its openness, sincerity and probity. She avows that once they have sworn an oath at an African traditional religious shrine, anyone with evil intent cannot survive without repercussions within a limited timeframe. In contrast, Christians take the Bible for granted and perpetrate evil without any fear of

retribution in this life. This Christian attitude, she contends, makes the religion unattractive to her.

Even though he acknowledges some of the claims made by Uvbi Enibokun about some Christians and their behaviours, Gbubemi Toghanro believes that the religion also offers a lot of positives. He goes on to suggest that the religion's emphasis on love, peace, and good behaviour chimes with the moral philosophies of most African societies. He says it is the people that is the problem, not the religion:

> To my objective mind, in Christianity you find evil. So it is with African traditional religion. You find that the religion is not the evil, it is just the case of people trying to do evil under the religious framework (Gbubemi Toghanro, personal interview January 7th 2019).

He admits to being a Christian but he is reluctant in disclosing the denomination he follows. He also says the religion he was born into does not also matter, as he no longer adheres to it. Like David Owan, Toghanro was born into a non-Edo speaking family, which is from a different state but from a culturally close community.[17] He is a well known Edo language film producer, scriptwriter and editor, who has also produced several films in his native language. He argues that he has always been passionate about the performing arts, as he participated in the production and performance of dramas while he was still in the primary school. After graduating in electrical engineering from a federal polytechnic in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria, he went straight into scriptwriting and film production. He says his attractions to the Edo language version are the history and culture of Edo people, and the ancestral ties between his ethnic group and Benin Kingdom. Toghanro also holds open-minded views about religion, arguing that although he is a Christian, he also shares traditional religious views and takes part in traditional practices. To him, associating with either religion does not constitute evil, as good and evil are not bound by religion.

[17] Gbubemi Toghanro hails from a city now located in a different state. His state of origin and the areas covered by this study used to be one geopolitical entity until August 27th 1991. His ethnic group also traces their ancestry to Benin Kingdom.

The desire of these filmmakers to project Edo morality through film has spawned a pan-Edo ethnic cause to re-assert the values of the historical Benin Kingdom. It is noteworthy to highlight here that some of the Edo language filmmakers do not necessarily come from the modern day Edo speaking areas. For example, David Owan and Gbubemi Toghanro originate from ethnic groups that do not speak Edo language but which trace their ancestry to the Benin Kingdom. Irrespective of this, they are as passionate as the native Edo speakers to revalidate the importance of the morality for which Benin Kingdom was renowned. This suggests that these traditional values remain central to contemporary Edo ethnic identity. In addition, the personal histories of these Edo language filmmakers suggest that Edo ethnic identity is successfully expanding and negotiated to include other groups.

The attitudes of all filmmakers that participated in this research question the Pentecostal dualism of modernity and tradition, which associates the former with the movement and the latter with traditional religion. As revealed by the social backgrounds of some of the featured filmmakers, the two religions are not seen as mutually exclusive: educated professionals, including filmmakers, can be Christians and at the same time openly identify with and project traditional values. This is confirmed by the fact that the Oba's appeal for the compatibility of the two religions echoes with the middle class as much as it does with many 'ordinary' Edo citizens. In addition, it also means that the two religions are firmly rooted in the twenty-first century, thus casting doubt on a narrative that situates Pentecostalism in the present while confining traditional religion to the past.

5.4 Edo Language Films as Agents of Social Cohesion

As much as Edo language film producers adhere to different faiths, and with varying levels of attachments, they share a common understanding that the values of Pentecostalism and traditional religion should promote good

behaviours, particularly among the youths in Benin, in their films. They believe this will not only stimulate morality but that it will also help to sustain the social cohesion of the society. So why do they feel the need to use their films to propagate the moral virtues of Benin Kingdom and enhance the social cohesion of the society?

The socio-economic collapse experienced by Nigeria post-structural adjustment programme (SAP) of the mid 1980s onward resulted in the socio-economic decline in the personal circumstances of Nigerians (Emejulu and Amadi 2014: 277, Onifade et al 2013: 53). Since then, life expectancy in the country has dropped from fifty-four years to forty-eight years. The poverty level has risen from forty eight percent to seventy percent, and unemployment has grown exponentially from fifteen percent to over sixty percent. These figures continue to rise (Omoera 2013b: 41). This, coupled with the collapse of state structures, particularly in addressing the concerns of the people, and the lack of will by the security apparatuses in the country to share intelligence information, invariably led to an unprecedented level of criminality and a deterioration in the level of moral behaviour in the country. Nigerian youths are particularly affected by the negative turn in the fortunes of the country (Onifade et al 2013: 53-5).

Omoera posits that in Benin, there are a sizeable number of educational institutions, ranging from primary to university, but that the youths do not seize the opportunities provided by them or engage in meaningful entrepreneurship programmes. Rather, they prefer to engage in cybercrime activities popularly known as '*Yahoo Yahoo'*, prostitution, kidnapping, armed robbery and other serious crimes (Omoera 2013b: 40-5). This development, together with the external forces of globalisation and migration, are perceived by many Edo people as posing serious ramifications for the moral and social cohesion of Benin Kingdom.

Also, many Edo language video film producers believe that the socioeconomic and political state of the country is a threat to the established norms, values, and beliefs in Benin Kingdom. Since film is a powerful 'non-threatening' medium that

infiltrates the lives of the audience, they use their films to enlighten the people, shape the society, and promote social cohesion (Dias, cited in Maton 2018: 659). In response to the socioeconomic and political situation in the country, their ambition is to sustain the peace and harmony of modern Benin and to educate the young ones about the values of being a good person. They are also crucially aware that many of the youths subscribe to one of the two dominant religions in the kingdom; hence, they reflect this in their films by not undermining either of the religions.

The acclaimed Edo language filmmaker, Peter Ovbiogbe, buttresses this point. He argues that while their primary aim is to use their films to mould the society, they are vitally aware of the role traditional religion and Pentecostalism play in the lives of their audience members. Therefore, they always strive to uphold the values of the two religions in their films:

> We…have to deal with the expectations of the audience in their demands on us. If considering a societal issue that needs to be corrected, we look at it…our desire of what the society should be is taken into consideration…we ask ourselves, how does this improve lives and contribute to human progress? That becomes the next consideration in our minds. Then we begin to look at how it enhances the moulding of the society…We also look at its effect on the diverse religious faiths…and we try as much [as possible] not to offend both religions and the cultural values of the people…(Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview October 3rd 2018).

Edo language video filmmakers also recognise the point highlighted by Omoera in relation to the low level of literacy in the kingdom, which affects the youths especially. According to David Owan, a producer of several Edo language films that have been well received by the audience, it is precisely because of the low level of education of many of their audience members that he takes advantage of the edge film has over printed forms of mass media to spread the history of the kingdom and educate the young ones on the exploits of their ancestors:

> I started as a journalist years ago… The last point of call was as a correspondent. I left as a news editor. The reason [I left] is because I realised that a lot of people don't read… People hardly read. Sometimes you go to this '*Akara*' joint where they sell '*Akara*' [ground beans fried in palm or vegetable oil] and you see that same week's newspaper used to wrap the stuff. That tells you people don't read so that spurred me to look at audivisuals. People love to watch television so that got me into film business. Filmmaking is about expression; telling a story…the way it should be…as a filmmaker, I try to make sure I reflect our ways of life…the true story of who we are, where we are coming from…that is what prompted my love for making movies in our indigenous language, so that you don't go out of your station (David Owan, personal interview October 15th 2018).

Another Edo language film producer and scriptwriter, Gbubemi Toghanro, underscores this objective by stating that because much focus is not given to the teaching of Benin history and culture in educational institutions in the twenty-first century, they perceive Edo language video films as the primary means of disseminating the kingdom's historical, cultural, religious and moral values:

> Edo language movies have a strong role to play in our contemporary environment. We have a strong history. The Benin Empire is one of the empires you talk about in history. Not much attention has been given to it. Perhaps they are not seeing the importance. In Edo movies, we portray our culture strongly… our culture has strong family values. We don't want to lose grip…we don't want to lose the essence of our culture (Gbubemi Toghanro, personal interview January 7th 2019).

Another prominent objective of Edo language film producers is the desire to highlight the importance of royalty in the kingdom. Omoera has argued that the Benin (Edo language) video films are suffused with the Benin worldview and that a major part of the attraction of Edo language video films is the centrality given to the portrayal of the institution of the Oba in particular, and royalty as a whole (Omoera 2015: 263). The Oba, as noted in Chapter three, symbolises the cultural and religious history of Edo people. Their worldview also revolves around the institution and the exploits of the kingdom's heroes past. Edo

language video filmmakers consistently reflect this in their films. The purpose, according to Peter Ovbiogbe, is to instil in the people, particularly the young ones, the pre-eminence of the institution of the Oba and to teach them the norms, values and beliefs enshrined in the Benin worldview

> Of course we deliberately uphold the position of the Oba in a good state in our movies. When we talk about ennobling the society, the office of the Oba is first to be considered even before the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. That is the average Edo person for you (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview October 3rd 2018).

Actor and filmmaker Ben Usen further stresses the importance of the position of the Oba not just to the filmmakers but also to the entire Edo people:

> The Benin monarchy is very relevant in the scheme of things. Benin [Edo] as a people is one that I respect so much. I believe the Benin [Edo] people make the Oba. That is my belief. The reverence, the acceptance, the honour; that is what gives him relevance…they make the Oba. They make the Oba like God… the way they embrace the culture, not letting it go…preserving it for future generation. I think it is divine. Most cultures over the world have lost relevance…As far as I am concerned, he is a godly institution (Ben Usen, personal interview October 10th 2018).

He argues that he tries to reflect this position in his films to enlighten the audience about the need to uphold the institution of the Oba and the cultural, historical, religious and moral values of the kingdom.

In the wake of the oil bust of the late twentieth century, the consequent decline in the socioeconomic circumstances of Nigerians, and the resultant heightened criminality and social disorder, Edo language film producers contend that the consistent reinforcement of the moral virtues of Benin will improve the conduct of their audience members, particularly the young people. They also believe that this will help to maintain the social cohesion of the kingdom that has been put under strain by globalisation, migration and corruption.

In the face of the perceived marginalisation from the mainstream, the filmmakers understand themselves as being in the forefront of the drive to re-assert Edo cultural nationalism in Nigeria. Here, the filmmakers position themselves as the twenty-first century 'elders' telling the stories of Benin Kingdom. And as demonstrated in the film, *Ason Savan*, discussed in the preceding chapter, their films become the agents through which the stories embodying the morality and good behaviours of the historical Benin Kingdom are transmitted to the younger generations. Thus nowadays, Edo language films do not only constitute a powerful tool in the moral education of Edo film audience, the filmmakers themselves also become a powerful force in the setting of the moral agenda in Benin.

5.5 Edo Language Films as National Transmitters of Ethnic Identity

In an ethnically plural society, the ability to gain access to socio-political and economic resources is not only determined by the size of a group of people but also by their visibility in the public sphere. In Nigeria, the size of an ethnic group matters in this regard (Mustapha 2005: 8-12), but also of vital importance is the capacity to assert ethnic identity particularly through the use of film (Emejulu and Amadi 2014: 276). It may not only give such group of people access to political and economic power but it also marks the extent to which they have developed culturally, religiously and linguistically as a people (Emejulu and Amadi 2014: 276).

There are between two hundred and fifty and over four hundred ethnic and language groups in Nigeria, depending on figures that have been quoted by several scholars (Musatpha 2005: 4, Omoera 2013a: 2). For many of these ethnic and linguistic groups, the Nigerian video film industry has become a major site for the exhibition of their peculiar as well as common cultural, linguistic and ethnic identities. Prominent among these groups are the three major ethnicities of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, but other ethnic and language groups that have made

significant inroad into Nollywood include Ebira, Idoma, Ibibio, Fulfulde, Gbagyi, Igala, Itshekiri, Isoko, Nupe, Urhobo and Tiv (McCain 2013: 33). Thus as previously argued, the popularity of the industry derives from not only the themes it addresses but also its heterogeneity in terms of languages of production.

The Edo people are what Omoera describes as a 'major minority' ethnic and linguistic group in Nigeria (Omoera 2015: 263), which means that they are large in number but not large enough to be considered a major ethnic group in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria (Mustapha 2005: 4). Because of their relatively small population size in the Nigerian context, they do not necessarily enjoy the same privileges granted to the three major ethnicities of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in terms of access to socioeconomic and political resources at the federal level, often based on the 'federal character' principle (Mustapha 2005: 14).[18] However, what they do enjoy in the country is their place in history and culture. Edo people of Benin Kingdom, as stated earlier, have a long and distinguished history that is steeped in dance, songs, music, dress and worldview entwined around the institution of the Oba in particular, and royalty as a whole (Omoera 2015: 263, Shokpeka 2009: 185). This rich history, together with the uniqueness of the institution of the Oba, which is inherited by primogeniture, and the well-organised traditional form of government, which again has the Oba as its focal point, marks them out of the multiplicity of ethnicities in Nigeria (Omoera 2015: 263).

The special historical, religious and cultural position of Edo people in the annals of Nigerian history forms the basis on which Edo language video filmmakers draw to project their themes into the country's public sphere (Omoera 2015: 263). In so doing, they tap into every accoutrement of Benin religious history and culture to articulate their vision of Edo identity. Gbubemi Toghanro is of the view that it is crucial for him and his colleagues to use their films to highlight the

[18] The 'federal charcter' principle was enshrined in the 1979 Nigerian Constitution to ensure equitable ethnic and regional distribution of appointments and recruitments into the federal civil service. But in effect, some ethnicities perceive the provision as a mechanism of marginalisation from the socio-political and economic mainstream (see Mustapha 2005: 14-6).

peculiarities of Edo identity, history, culture and communalism because Benin culture is enduring and worth celebrating in the midst of the plurality of ethnicities in Nigeria. He adds that anyone intending to join Edo language film production should be prepared to understand and imbibe this ideal:

> … for those who want to come in…we have a way we do our things. So you can't come with a foreign idea and express it in Benin, it won't work. We have our stories. We want the world to hear our stories…Edo people are a loving people. If we don't show that aspect of us, then who will? Benin is a place where people are received and loved and accepted…we show Edo identity in their songs, voices and so on. We must ensure that we promote our culture and identity (Gbubemi Toghanro, personal interview January 7th 2019).

For David Owan, Edo language films represent an extension of the traditional oral story telling culture that the people of Benin were renowned for. He says that since the exigencies of the twenty-first century have made it difficult to continue with the tradition, he uses his films to transmit the history, culture, greetings, attires, idioms and the traditional form of government of Benin Kingdom, which revolves around the institution of the Oba, not only to the wider audience across the country but also to serve as a repository for future generations of Edo citizens:

> Before, such things [attributes] were passed on through oral tradition, from mouth to mouth. What we try to do is to put it [them] in movie form so that our children [and the audience] will know about our heritage…the Oba, the *Enigie*, the Chiefs, the *Odionwere*, we have our way of life…our names, our greetings are symbolic. The greetings express our identity. It is a reflection of who we are. The titled men, everyone you see [in the movie] is a reflection of who we are…(David Owan, personal interview November 4th 2018).

One prominent feature of Edo language video films is the depiction of the religious culture of Edo people. Edo language video filmmakers deploy the religious symbols of the kingdom, such as *Olokun*, *Ogun*, *Oronmila* etc. to display the religious culture of Edo people as an ethnic group. Of vital significance to the

portrayal of this religious culture as a marker of ethnic identity is the use of the Benin hero-deities by Edo language filmmakers. In the Benin religious universe, the hero-deities of the kingdom were once human beings who lived exemplary lives and instead of dying at the end of their life cycle on earth, they transformed into rivers, trees and other landmarks that are venerated in the kingdom (Bradbury 1957: 56-7, 1973). Hence, rivers in the kingdom such as *Okhuaihe*, *Ovia* and *Orhionmwon* are revered and worshipped in Benin and they are held in high esteem in Benin cosmology.

Edo language film producers call on these traditional religious symbols in the depiction of Edo people as an ethnic group with a deep religious tradition, especially in the portrayal of moral crises, when Edo people invoke these hero-deities as curses on perpetrators of evil in the kingdom. David Owan argues that the portrayal of these hero-deities signifies the importance Edo people place on their ancestors. As a filmmaker and an Edo person, he says it is his responsibility to project it to the outside world so that the audience could at least acknowledge the exploits of these hero-deities, but more importantly, that they would recognise Edo people as an ethnic group with a rich history and culture

> The only way I can tell stories about our exploits as Africans is through movies. Personally, I have made up my mind to make movies in [about] the exploits of our heroes past… if you look at the various deities… *Ogun*, *Oronmila*, *Olokun*… they are what bind us humans… our heroes that existed at a point in history… The only way you can let the world know is through the movies, so that children will ask their fathers; who is this man? (David Owan, personal interview October 15th 2018).

Edo language film producers also depict this traditional religion of Edo people in its dialogue with Pentecostal Christianity, which is the religious identification of many contemporary Edo speakers. Many of the filmmakers exercise sensitivity when it comes to the portrayal of the dialogue between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity in their films. According to Peter Ovbiogbe, this sensitivity stems from the understanding of the current religious state of the

twenty-first century Edo person and the value all Africans place on religious beliefs:

> … as Africans, we are very sensitive when it comes to that [religion]. Even if we are considering a negative issue towards these [religious] values, they must be portrayed with respect and care in making sure that familiar things look new to the audience (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview December 4th 2018).

He highlights this point by quipping *'aye church, sokpan aivbiorhe'* (We go to church but we don't sleep there), meaning that although many of them are Christians, they do not allow their religious doctrines to get in the way such that they debase other religious beliefs and views in their films.

Omoera suggests that Edo language video film sector of Nollywood is vibrant and popular in Benin because of its ability to not only depict the sociocultural and religious lives of the people, but also because of its proficient articulation of Edo people as an ethnic group, which emotionally attracts the audience to Edo language films (Omoera 2014: 76). But more crucially, Edo language video filmmakers' desire is to transcend the confines of Nigeria.

As noted above, the experience of marginalisation based on religious perception contributed to the formation of the Yoruba ethnic identity. Also, important factors for twentieth-century ethno-nationalism included the Yoruba experience at the hands of the British colonisers (Waterman 1990: 370), and the attempt by the political class in the South-Western region of Nigeria to create a political base in the immediate aftermath of post-colonialism (Peel 2016: 8).

Similar to the Yoruba circumstance, the marginalisation of Edo people, particularly in the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, contributed to the early attempt to form a pan-Edo ethnic nationalism (Eborieme and Egbefo 2014). Crucial to this early attempt was the experience they had at the hands of the colonial British administration, which lumped the component parts of the ancient Benin Kingdom as ethnic minority groups in the Western

Region of Nigeria. The subsequent marginalisation from the socio-political and economic space that they faced at the hands of the region's dominant Yoruba ethnicity sparked an immediate post-colonial pan-Edo ethnic nationalism from the Edo elite who had contacts with the Christian mission educated teachers, administrators and merchants in the region (Eborieme and Egbefo 2014: 14-5). But unlike the case of the Yoruba, while this initial attempt resulted in the creation of a separate region for the ethnic minorities (Natufe 1999), it did not materialise into a cohesive ethnic group[19]. The inability of this early attempt to manifest into a solid ethnic entity could be attributed to the absence of mass mediated technology, which could have galvanised them in the same way that the printing press coalesced the previously independent collective groups of people in Oyo, Ife, Ijebu and Egba into a pan-Yoruba ethnicity.

However, as Charles Gore and David Pratten (2003: 217) suggest, sub-structures underneath the nation-state constitute a major site in which identities that are not necessarily political in nature are constructed in contemporary Nigeria. According to them, such sites could be any organisation ranging from 'leagues', coalitions, to corporations that rally around a common philosophy. Gore and Pratten's study is centred on marginalised organisations that hold those in power to account by a range of subaltern strategies of interrogation thereby shaping subsequent discourses. But it also resonates with Edo language video filmmakers because they also rally Edo citizens through the technology of film for a common objective. Thus in the twenty-first century, Edo language filmmakers are utilising video films to spearhead the construction of a pan-Edo ethnic identity, in response to the marginalisation of Edo ethnicity from the mainstream of Nigeria, where they are seen as a minority ethnic group. In so doing, they are adopting the values of Pentecostalism and traditional religion that are compatible with Edo moral values to promote good behaviour in Benin Kingdom. Also, they deploy their films to assert Edo ethnic identity and cultural

[19] The Midwest Region was carved out of the Western Region on August 9, 1963 to cater for the interests of the ethnic minorities in the Southwest. It was and remains the only geopolitical entity to have been democratically created in Nigeria.

nationalism in an ethnically plural nation where access to resources is not only determined by size but also by visibility in the public sphere.

Additionally, Edo language film production has not only become a place for the projection of Edo ethnic identity and the revalidation of Benin moral values, it has also become a locale for the expression of a pan-Edo ethnic identity and cultural nationalism, where Edo citizens and those who may differ in terms of language dialect but trace their ancestry to Benin Kingdom participate.

5.6 Edo Language Films as Global Transmitters of Language and Culture

Two main reasons have already been attributed for the success of the Nigerian video film industry: the relevance of its thematic expressions to the lived experiences of its audience members; that is Africans and people of African descent across the world, and the multiplicity of its languages of production, which helps to guarantee its penetration of the various socioeconomic strata of its audiences. Undoubtedly, these factors are crucial to the growth and wide acceptance of the industry, but they would not have been possible without a crucial turning point at the time the industry took off. The deregulation of the global landscape spearheaded by the 'Reagan-Thatcher ideological axis' of the late twentieth century opened the way for the globalisation of world trade that is defined by the mass movements of good, services and people (Barnett 2004: 10). Significantly, it also resulted in the transmission of media messages that permeate geopolitical borders across the globe (Ekeanyanwu 2009: 72-5, Baniyassen 2017: 88). In tandem with this change, advances that were made in the sphere of information and communication technology (ICT) at the time engendered cheap technologies in media production (Ekeanyanwu 2009: 69-70). The culture industry, of which the Nigerian video film industry is a major player in Africa at least, benefited from these combined developments (Onuzulike 2009: 179).

As has been argued (Chapter three), having suffered under the weight of the exorbitant cost of celluloid film production in the 1980s, the new dispensation of digital technology afforded Nigerian filmmakers the opportunity to reinvent the industry and reach beyond the shores of Nigeria. Nowadays, many digital satellite television platforms across Africa, Europe and North America have dedicated channels exhibiting Nollywood films, with some of them focusing on Nigerian languages Nollywood strands (Voice UK 2019, Udomisor and Sonuga 2012: 29, Punch 2017). However, while some of these transnational digital satellite providers focus on some indigenous language Nollywood films, they are mainly restricted to the dominant languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Udomisor and Sonuga 2012: 29). Edo language video films do not enjoy this privilege. This could be as a result of the relatively small size of Edo speaking population, which the transnational satellite providers perhaps consider as economically unviable to invest in.

Edo language videos however command a visible presence on the video sharing website *YouTube*, where many of the Edo language video filmmakers have subscription channels and where there is a wide range of Edo language video films to choose from. Moreover, the filmmakers are aware of the reluctance of the transnational media conglomerates to invest in Edo language films. Hence, at the time of the fieldwork, plans were afoot to address this problem. Several meetings were held under the aegis of Edo Film Producers and Distributors Association (EFPDA), with a view to setting up a digital subscription platform to be known as *Edo Tube* that would be dedicated to the streaming of Edo language video films. They were also working on plans to part-fund a digital platform with one of the transnational satellite television providers.

Although Nigerians have been travelling abroad as British subjects since the colonial period (Samyn 2010: 29), the pace of migration was accelerated during the socioeconomic and political crisis of the 1980s (Odorige 2016: 20-1). This coincided with a political transformation that resulted in globalisation of goods, services and people (Orga 2005: 158). Edo citizens have always constituted a significant part of this Nigerian migration (Odorige 2016: 22). Today, many of

the Edo emigrants have set up homes in their host countries and are raising families abroad (Ugochukwu 2011: 5). These Edo expats form a key target of Edo language filmmakers. They deploy the technologies made possible by digitalisation and computerisation to reach out to them. The hope is to reinforce the Edo ethnic identity and culture among the first generation Edo emigrants and to create a feeling of pride in the rich cultural, religious and historical heritage of Benin Kingdom among the second and third generation Edo citizens, particularly those who have never visited the homeland:

> We hope to remind them of the values enshrined in Benin mythology and to make them cherish these values when they watch our movies…Edo as an ethnic group and identity is unique. We also hope that they will take pride in the feats of their ancestors because Benin is celebrated in history and culture, and it is something they should be proud of (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview August 26th 2019).

As part of their effort to attract and retain the diasporic Edo community, Peter Ovbiogbe, suggests that Edo language filmmakers, through the EFPDA, are migrating to DVDs and Blu-Rays. He says they are cognisant of the problems experienced by emigrants when they attempt to watch Edo language films bought on their visits to Nigeria. Because most of the films are recorded on video compact disc (VCD), they hardly play when taken to Europe and North America. It is worthy of note to mention here that many of the video films collected during the field study could not be accessed on return to Birmingham. The VCD system on which they were recorded is no longer compatible with the European or North American systems. Gbubemi Toghanro argues that part of the popularity of Edo language video films in Benin are the thematic expressions of Edo language films and their accessibility to the audience, but that they are vitally aware of the constraints audience members face when the films are taken abroad. He says they are aiming for improvements with every production especially to satisfy the diasporic community:

> This film is…business, it is a serious thing…we are improving with every production…I can imagine the diaspora Edo who have not been to this part of

> the world. I can imagine how they feel when they watch a well-done Edo language movie. They will be happy to promote it to their foreign friends (Gbubemi Toghanro, personal interview January 7th 2019).

Another vital component of this improvement is in the area of language expression. Edo language video filmmakers are of the opinion that they reckon with the exertion globalisation and migration have placed on the proficiency of the language particularly among the younger generation and the diasporic community. The socioeconomic meltdown of the 1980s and the globalisation project embarked upon by world leaders in the same period imposed a lot of strain on the traditional conservative Benin society (Odorige 2016: 20-4). Also, Edo citizens that migrated abroad found it challenging to impact it on their offspring.[20]

Thus in the new millennium that is defined by almost borderless media access, video films represent one of the most effective means of transmitting languages to a wider audience (Ugochukwu 2017: 125-7). Edo language filmmakers understand this and according to Peter Ovbiogbe, they are constantly engaging in research as a group to ensure that they achieve the best standards in terms of film production, especially in the area of the language, to meet the expectations of in particular the younger generations both at home and in the diaspora:

> That is where the research development…comes in. We are doing everything to ensure we are connecting with the next generation both by way of stories and how they want the stories to be told. We are reaching into and factoring our findings into the way we make films. We dilute what we have to make room for the younger generations. Don't forget…these new generations are coming with education, technology and others. We are putting all that [language, culture and history] into consideration and that is why we make our old stories and experiences look new to the younger generations (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview October 3rd 2018).

[20]Many Edo parents living abroad find it difficult to teach their children Edo language partly because of policies in the host countries but also due to social factors such as peer pressure on the part of the children.

He argues that he was particularly struck by the reaction of an audience member who watched one of his films that was shown during an exhibition in Italy some time ago. He says the reaction has further spurred him into making more Edo language video films that are grounded in the language, culture, history and landmarks, as opposed to the dominant English language ones that would have guaranteed him more financial reward:

> I chose to produce in Edo language…the English language probably would have reached more audience and probably would have earned me more money but I chose to do that to preserve our language which through our films, a lot of people in the diaspora use it to teach their children Edo language. Some of these children have never been to Nigeria…we are…developing and directing our citizens both locally and in the diaspora to watch our experiences and also what constitute their experiences. Somebody told me while watching one of our movies in Italy, she said 'that's my grandfather's house', which constitutes one of our sets. She was able to identify and relate with the grandfather's house. This has a way of bringing out the greatest sentiments in you (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview October 3rd 2018).

As has been argued in the preceding chapters, part of the success of the Nigerian video film industry is its apt narrative of the lived experiences of its audience members. The reaction of the Edo language film audience member in Italy reinforces this assertion. But more importantly, it reflects the nostalgic feeling Nollywood films evoke from its diasporic audience members.

In an era dominated by global media messages, Edo language film producers are adopting media technologies provided by advances in information and communication technology to transmit Edo language to an extensive audience that would have been beyond their reach in the past. And they hope that in the words of Uvbi Enibokun, 'our children would get to love these films…and they will project and promote the industry well into the future'.

Francoise Ugochukwu (2017: 118-120) argues that Nollywood indigenous language films foster a sense of bond and enhance language proficiency among diasporic communities. She further states that apart from the nostalgic feeling it creates among first generation Nigerian immigrants, for their offspring, Nollywood indigenous language films provide a voyage of discovery of their parents' language and culture, and create a bond with a land they hardly know.

In the case of Edo language films, the reaction of the audience member in Italy encapsulates Ugochukwu's argument. They provoke a feeling of oneness among Edo expats, and promote and domesticate the language in a foreign land. Edo language films are probably the most powerful means of disseminating Edo language to Benin citizens in the diaspora in the twenty-first century. They help to reinforce the language, serve as a conduit to the homeland, and evoke a feeling of nostalgia especially from the first generation immigrants. Above all, through the use of Edo language, Edo films constitute a platform for the proclamation and reification of Edo ethnic identity and culture in a faraway land.

5.7 Edo Language Films as Mediums for Language Preservation

The importance of film [and the media as a whole] as a form of promotion and preservation of language has been emphasised by scholars, film critics, film writers and cultural activists alike (Nze 2010, Eveleth 2014, Enaikele 2014, Usua 2018, Alberge 2019). For instance, Eveleth (2014) and Usua (2018) argue that the global community has come to regard film [and the media] as crucial components of the society insofar as they constitute the main platforms for the transmission of messages especially in the twenty first century globalised world. They note that because of this important role, film and the media generally occupy a prime place in the sphere of cultural promotion and language preservation. The proper deployment of film and the media does not only guarantee shared meaning within and between communities but also helps to construct and sustain culture.

The media are also invested with the ability to extend local cultures to the global audience, especially in Africa (Nze 2010). In doing this, the media do not only shape the cultural discourse of a society but also help to document for posterity. Film in particular has the capacity to reinforce the values, beliefs and language of the culture that is depicted because of the audio-visual characteristic (Usua 2018: 5-6). Its believability stems from its real life characteristic, which the audience can easily relate to. This audio-visual characteristic also brings prestige and the power of persuasion to film. The attraction to the medium means that any concept or message disseminated through it has the potential to be easily accepted by the audience (Usua 2018: 5-6). Film is particularly important as a resource for language promotion and preservation in the case of minority languages (Nze 2010). The medium could serve as a powerful force in the battle to rescue threatened indigenous languages from extinction (Eveleth 2014).

In Nigeria, the globalised nature of and the adoption of English as the formal language and the language of business have privileged it over indigenous languages (Awonusi 2007: 1). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in its report of the Atlas of World's endangered languages listed about twenty of Nigeria's indigenous languages as teetering on the brinks of extinction (Nze 2010). Certainly, it is the minority languages in the country, of which Edo is one, that bear the brunt of this supremacy. They are not only threatened by the dominance of English but they also face extinction from the onslaught of the majority indigenous languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, which Awonusi describes as '*decamillionaires*' (Awonusi 2007: 3).

The Nigerian Constitution grants recognition to the '*decamillionaires*' languages, alongside English, at the expense of the minority languages (Awonusi 2007: 3). As a consequence, the three majority ethnic groups enjoy privileges in terms of the distribution of resources that are not matched for groups like the Edo speakers (Ilorah 2009: 699-700). Omoera (2013a: 3-5) argues that there is no passion to speak Edo language especially among young people in Benin for many reasons. Many parents in Benin who lack formal education take pride in their

children speaking English much to the detriment of Edo language, because they perceive English as a status symbol.

Omoera also emphasises that even though the National Policy on Education in Nigeria (NPE) expressly guarantees the use of indigenous languages as means of instructions in especially the primary and junior secondary schools, educational implementers in Edo State have actively discouraged the use of it in their schools (Omoera 2013a: 4). In addition, even though the National Broadcasting Commission's (NBC) Code (2006) also stipulates that broadcast stations in the country should pursue a policy of 60:40 ratio in favour of indigenous languages in terms of programming, many broadcast organisations in Benin do not adhere to this regulation. For example, the state government owned Edo Broadcasting Service Radio (EBS-Radio) strives to meet this directive with limited success, but private broadcasters such as Vibes FM, Q-Radio, KU-FM, and ITV-Radio make no attempt to realise this objective. Together, these factors have helped to contribute to the non-usage, or at best limited usage, of the Edo language by young Benin citizens.

But as argued in the foregoing sections, in a country where access to socioeconomic and political resources are determined by not only the size of the ethno-linguistic group but also their visibility (Ilorah 2009: 699-700, Emejulu and Amadi 2014: 276), film becomes particularly crucial in the projection, promotion, and preservation of ethnic identity, of which language is an integral part (Enaikele 2014: 240, Onuzulike 2015: 239-240, Usua 2018: 5-6). Edo language filmmakers are cognisant of the plight facing the expression, preservation and promotion of Edo language, particularly in relation to the younger generations. Thus a critical component of their agenda is to entrench the use of Edo language in Benin. This objective, as Peter Ovbiogbe previously states, is in fact what has inspired many of them to stick to the production of films in the language, rather than migrate to the potentially more profitable English language Nollywood. He further states in this regard:

> We took a deliberate effort to make movies in Edo to celebrate the language and re-institutionalise the language because it was facing extinction even from the local environment. You have more people speaking English or Pidgin [Nigerian creolised English] and children are now disconnecting from the language in the face of globalisation. It is expected that cultural values of the stronger ones would dominate the weaker ones. You have the Yoruba, Hausa and co. Even our Constitution recognises only three languages out of over three hundred languages in the country. We felt it wasn't fair and we did everything to ensure ours is in the limelight (Peter Ovbiogbe, personal interview October 5th 2018).

They however face fierce competition for the attention of the youths of Benin, both from the dominant English language Nollywood producers and the global media conglomerates, in their effort to gain acceptance not only in the aspect of language use but also in terms of technical quality. Gbubemi Toghanro posits that technological improvement is critical to their agenda of entrenching Edo language video films. He states that since the contemporary Edo youths live in a globalised world, they are technologically savvy and that they recognise and appreciate technically well-produced films. Therefore, the filmmakers endeavour to meet this expectation:

> As a filmmaker, you have to do [produce] a good film [that can withstand] globalisation. Globalisation does not mean that our [local] language is not observed. The task for the filmmaker is to get [produce] film up to standard to stand a chance…So Edo language movies [just] need technical improvements (Gbubemi Toghanro, personal interview October 8th 2018).

Edo language filmmakers draw on the rich tapestry of Benin Kingdom's history, moral values, idioms and language to tell their stories (Omoera 2014a: 82-110). Most of their themes and the language they deploy revolve around the Oba who occupies a central place in the lives of Edo people and personifies the culture and tradition of the kingdom. Edo language video filmmakers consider themselves as being in the vanguard of the effort to effectively propagate, project, and preserve the Edo language in a multi-ethnic and linguistic Nigeria (Omoera 2014a: 82-110). Uvbi Enibokun affirms in this regard:

> Edo is the only language that I know. English that I speak is picked from here and there. Some people will say I love Edo so much. I guard it with some jealousy. I guard it with passion. This is my Edo language! (Uvbi Enibokun, personal interview October 22nd 2018).

Language is one of the most significant aspects of cultural heritage, which distinguishes one group of people from the others (Onuzulike 2015: 237). On its part, the moral codes of a group of people are embedded in the language of such group. For instance, some moral aspects of a society are expressed through idioms, proverbs, songs, wise sayings and folklores (Ukoma et al 2016: 325-8). Karin Barber argues that the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes and their plays 'shared a love affair with the Yoruba language … in its fullest sense – its idioms, archaisms, innovations, slang, dialectical peculiarities, and its sacred and secret registers' (Barber 2000: 2).

Notwithstanding Barber's argument being specific to the works of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes and live drama more generally, albeit in a less obvious manner, it also applies to film because live drama and film share a common purpose. The two mediums appeal to a mass audience and they both aim to edify their audiences and the society as a whole. Therefore, given this intimate relationship between live drama, film, and language, the meanings of some idioms, slang, proverbs etc. can be compromised or lost entirely when they are translated, since these moral codes are entrenched in the native language. Thus it is vital that they are expressed in their natural language. Edo language film producers recognise this and they deploy the 'sacred and secret registers' of Edo language 'in its fullest sense' not only to entertain their audience members but also to edify contemporary Benin citizens and teach especially the youth the importance of Edo language as a carrier of moral values of the ancient Benin Kingdom. Here, two Edo language video films provide a window onto how the filmmakers simultaneously preserve and use Edo language to enlighten the audience members. Reflecting traditional and Pentecostal religious narratives, they also express how the filmmakers adopt the language in its ancient and

contemporary forms for the purpose of entertaining and edifying the spectrum of Edo film audience.

The film, *Ukhure Enikaro* (Staff of the ancestors), is about the stealing of the ancestral staff of a rural community known as Iguokankan (Village of strange events). A 2020 Bright Obakpolor Television production, it begins with three siblings, Agbonisalo (The world is too short to dwell), Aigbogun (No one kills the god of iron), and their young sister (unnamed in the film), who live in peace after the death of their father. The eldest is Agbonisalo. He is a widower whose wife died during the birth of his daughter, Ekomwenrenren (I only know my mind). He also has an older child, a son, Owamagbe (The one that is protected by his home). After a while, Agbonisalo conveys a meeting of the siblings to share their late father's estate, and everyone is satisfied with his decision. On getting back home, Aigbogun discusses the sharing with his wife. She protests that it is unfair to Aigbogun. She questions the rationale for giving so much to their young sister at the expense of Aigbogun, but he disagrees, saying that he does not see anything wrong with the sharing formula. Later, Aigbogun gives a serious thought to the wife's position. Meanwhile, in the farm, Owamagbe narrates a nightmare he had the previous night to his father. The nightmare is about the stealing of the community's ancestral staff and the concomitant doom and disaster that befalls the community. Agbonisalo dismisses it as childish fantasy.

Then, Osazuwa (God is the source of wealth), Aigbogun's friend, comes from Benin to see him. He suggests to Aigbogun that a white man who works for his company is interested in buying ancestral staff from any community and that he believes Aigbogun can facilitate the stealing of their community's ancestral staff. Aigbogun chides him for making such a sacrilegious suggestion and walks him out of his premises. Moments later, with the aid of special effects, we see the ancestral staff departing from the community. We also see the Enogie sitting in front of his palace under a cloud of raging thunderstorm. Immediately, the Enogie knew that an abominable act has been perpetrated but he cannot figure it out. Suddenly, the Enogie is stricken with a stroke and he is paralysed on one side of his body. Then with her staff of office and muttering incantations, we see

the High Priestess of the community walks frantically to the palace of the Enogie. She tells the Enogie that a sacrilegious act has been carried out in the community and goes further to request the ancestral staff from him. Enogie sends one of the palace guards to get it but it is nowhere to be found. The priestess informs the Enogie that the gods are angry and that until sacrifices are made and the ancestral staff is recovered, calamity will befall the community, and we see the palace guard who went to look for the ancestral staff drops down and dies. Enogie enquires from the priestess the nature of the sacrifices but she says she cannot say until the gods have spoken to her.

Caption then reveals that after about seven days, the gods appear to the High Priestess. They tell her that the community will have to spill the blood of three foreigners and that of an indigene for peace and harmony to reign again. Shocked at their demand, the High Priestess tells them that three humans are too much of a sacrifice and that she will not pass the message on to the Enogie. Angered by her disobedience, the gods strike the High Priestess dead. This sends a shock wave around the community and the Enogie has to send emissaries to Ogigban (King of thorns [in the flesh of evil doers]), the traditional religious priest of the neighbouring community. Ogigban tells the emissaries that their High Priestess was killed because she refused to carry out the instructions of the gods. He then relays the instructions to them and promises to visit the Enogie on *Eken* day (Day of rest). In the meantime, Agbonisalo is erroneously found guilty of stealing the ancestral staff and along with his children, he is banished into the evil forest of the neighbouring community. The witch in the evil forest appears and threatens to have them for dinner, but the spirit of Agbonisalo's dead wife comes to their rescue. However, a while later, the witch transforms into a snake, bites Agbonisalo, and he dies.

As promised, on Eken day, Ogigban comes to the palace of the Enogie and relays the message of the gods to him in parables. Eventually, the sacrifices are made at the shrine of Ogigban, but he comes back to the Enogie and informs him that unless the community brings Agbonisalo and his family back to the community, there will be no peace. The Enogie instructs some palace guards and youths to

go in search of Agbonisalo and his children. In the evil forest, the witch continues to torment Agbonisalo's children. However, before she can kill them, Ogigban sights her from his spiritual earthenware pot. He vanishes and reappears before the witch, and a fierce battle ensues. He appears to overwhelm the witch, after which, he leads the children out. On the way, he stumbles on the search party and hands the children over to them. Suddenly, the witch makes a reappearance, and a protracted battle breaks out. In the commotion, Ogigban urges the search party to leave with the children while he battles the witch.

Special effects again depict the ancestral staff returning back to the community and tormenting those responsible for its disappearance. First in line is Aigbogun, who runs helter-skelter, and then his wife, who runs but cannot hide. By now, people are gathered at the Enogie's palace, anticipating the arrival of the search party. Moments later, the search party reaches the palace with Agbonisalo's children and everyone is excited about their return. Then we see Aigbogun scampering to the palace in a state of hallucination. Osazuwa also brings the ancestral staff to the palace, and minutes later, Aigbogun's wife also appears. Osazuwa confesses to stealing the ancestral staff with the help of Aigbogun and one of the palace guards. He says they could not do anything with it because the spirit behind the staff tormented him, and killed the white man who wanted to buy it. Afterwards, we see thunderstorm strikes and kills Aigbogun, Osazuwa, and the palace guard. Aigbogun's wife runs mad and into the forest. In the process, the Enogie is also healed. He then asks after Agbonisalo but the children inform him that he is dead. He apologises to them for the injustice meted out to the family, takes them in, and promises to look after them. The Enogie then orders the bodies of Aigbogun, Osazuwa, and the palace guard, to be dumped in the evil forest for the animals to feed on. Finally, with the demise of the evildoers, peace, order, and harmony, return to the community, and they live happily after.

Aimed at evoking the era of the historical Benin Kingdom, the film, *Ukhure Enikaro*, depicts the ancient Edo language in its 'fullest sense'. This is clear from the beginning, when viewers see Agbonisalo advising his children on the values

of being a good person. Meanwhile, as the conversation is going on, his young daughter is curious to know her mother's whereabouts. She has not seen her since birth and she enquires from her father. Agbonisalo replies '*Ofiya,ne'*. In the ancient Benin Kingdom, and as it is morally acceptable in the twenty-first century, the dead who are survived by offspring are not considered as dead, but as those who left representatives behind. Thus Agbonisalo's response translates as 'she has left someone behind'. Confused by her father's reply, the daughter, Ekomwenrenren, probes for clarification. Then, the older brother, Owamagbe, intervenes and deconstructs the language in simple terms. The dialogue also speaks to the assertion that Edo language video filmmakers are the 'modern elders' propagating moral values in the twenty first-century. Agbonisalo reflects the role of elders as disseminators of morality in the ancient Benin Kingdom, and Ekomwenrenren is the character representing contemporary Edo youths. Owamagbe, who interprets '*Ofiya'ne*', portrays Edo language filmmakers as the 'modern elders'. Crucially, the actor, Bright Obakpolor, who plays the character, Owamagbe, is also the producer of the film.

Willie van Heerden (2002: 465) emphasises that in Africa, pronouncements expressed through proverbs are usually regarded as incontrovertible, and that proverbs grant authenticity to a language and strengthen the norms, values, and beliefs of societies. In the historical Benin Kingdom, as it is in modern Benin, many Edo norms, values, and beliefs, are transmitted through proverbs, idioms, incantations, and folktales. Several scenes in *Ukhure Enikaro* reflect this longstanding Edo tradition. A typical illustration of this is when Ogigban, the High Priest of the neighbouring community, is at the palace of the Enogie to explain the mysterious death of the community's High Priestess and the disappearance of the ancestral staff. In Benin tradition, when the Oba calls, the subject must answer, irrespective of circumstances or status. Ogigban articulates this custom. Instead of telling the Enogie that he has come to answer his call, he expresses it thus: *Ugben vba tie tiene, akhuenien gha khuenien*, which means 'Since the caller [Enogie] has called, the called [Subject] must answer'. His interpretation of the calamity that has befallen the community is also embodied in the following proverbs:

Emwin nozebagha noma gievbo dehenhen
Erhe na khin
Ikhunkhun, erherhe, ibeleku, evben-ohoghe, ekueku
Ohuomwan muomwan
Ena sio vbiri gbo vbara
Na dehenhen ma naghi lae otona
Enikaro muhunmwun yan izabo

As noted, proverbs, idioms, and wise sayings, resonate better in their natural language than when translated, but the following is an attempted interpretation of Ogigban's pronouncement in English:

What is wrong and why there is no harmony in the land
Are these:
Rumours, insincerity, deceit, lies, oppression
Jealousy
These are the causes of the disorder
And why there has been no harmony in the land
The ancestors have rested their heads on their shoulders [They are angry].

Apart from the glorious deployment of Edo language, the relevance of this film is also better understood in the context of the importance of Ukhure and Enikaro in the Benin traditional religious worldview. As outlined in Chapters two and three, the Christian idea of death is that it separates humans on earth from the spirit world of the dead until the day of judgment (Osagiede 2019: 25-7). However, in the Edo universe, *agbon* (earth) and *erimwin* (heaven or spirit world) overlap and the dead and humans continue to live in a cycle of interaction, where the dead intercede on behalf of humans. Osagiede suggests that not every dead can mediate for humans in Benin. Those who were virtuous during their lifetime are invested into the rank of Enikaro (Ancestors) on their deaths while those whose lives were characterised by immorality and indignity are uncelebrated (Osagiede 2019: 25-7).

In a more painstaking discussion, Bradbury (1957: 54-6) argues that Enikaro (or *Edion*) are venerated in several ways but that three types dominate: the individual, the community or collective, and the Oba's. For the most part, except for high-ranking individuals such as traditional chiefs who acknowledge their ancestry through both lineages, Enikaro are usually associated with the genealogy of the father. At the level of individual Enikaro, when a father dies and having performed the traditional burial rites, the senior son erects an altar of mud-built platform to his dead father. On the platform are typically an Ukhure (Staff) and bells made of brass. Here, the senior son acts as the priest and mediates on behalf of his siblings and other descendants (Bradbury 1957: 54). Thus in this regard, the dead father is conceptualised as occupying the same status among his forebears in *erimwin* as the Okaegbe does among the family in *agbon*. The worship of the Oba's Enikaro resonates with the entire Edo nation. It is more complicated and lasts longer than any other form of ancestral veneration. The prayers offered during the worship of the Oba's Enikaro are designed to usher in peace and harmony for the entire Benin Kingdom (Bradbury 1957: 54-6).

The film, *Ukhure Enikaro*, ostensibly portrays the stealing of the community or collective ancestral staff and the concomitant punishment accompanying such act. In Benin, the Ukhure dedicated to Enikaro is crucial to the maintenance of the social and moral order in the family and community. It is the focal point for the resolution of disputes, and it is where the spirits of the ancestors are invoked to punish or kill evildoers, adulterers, thieves, and incest offenders (Bradbury 1957: 54-5). Thus in Benin mythology, it is naturally expected that Aigbogun, his wife, and Osazuwa would be punished for stealing the community ancestral staff and for desecrating the land.

Ukhure Enikaro and many more films express Edo language in its Benin Kingdom's fullest ethical and intellectual glory, but other films also convey Edo language in its contemporary form and in its conversation with the global religions that have been introduced to Benin over the years. Some of the films portraying the language in its modern form are in the category of what Osakue

Omoera (2014a: 100) describes as comic or hilarious films. Such films portray contemporary issues and events confronting Edo citizens with the aim of eliciting fun and amusement. One of these films is *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* (The Pastor and the interpreter). The film is a 2018 production of Everlasting Films and its central character is Ekpen (literal translation leopard, gloss: The great one), who is the butt of jokes for his antics. He has a father called Okperhan (Mighty tree). Initially divorced from Ekpen's mother (Character unnamed), later in the film, Ekpen masterminds their reconciliation. Okperhan also converts to Pentecostal Christianity, but Ekpen and the mother stick to African traditional religion. The community members mock Ekpen for his behaviour. His antics get him into all sorts of altercations, which either end in a verbal humiliation or a fight.

Other members of the community include Jimoh (A Muslim name [apparently a descendant of Yoruba Muslim settlers in Benin]), who is in a relationship with Ebo n'ekhui (Black European), a beautiful but obviously wayward lady, and Ebo n'ekhui's friend (Unnamed in the film). Also, there are three young men who are fitness obsessed, with a dominant one, who is the boss, an *Agbo* (A traditional Yoruba medicine believed to cure all ailments) seller, and a Pentecostal pastor, who runs a church with the assistance of an interpreter. Iyore (I have gone and arrived), a young lady, also lives in the community and she leads the church's choir, and there is a young couple yet to have children, Osazuwa (God is the source of wealth) and his wife (Unnamed in the film). Finally, there is a community shop, owned by a fat lady with two adult daughters and a son, and a single-parent household, headed by a middle-aged lady who has a teenage daughter (Both unnamed in the film). Many of the community members are also members of the Pentecostal Church.

In the opening scene, Ekpen is seen seated outside with Okperhan, who advises him to desist from behaving childishly. Okperhan makes a reference to the earring dangling from one of his ears, and argues that in the twenty-first century Benin, only Edo expats of a certain status are allowed to wear earrings. Since Ekpen has never been Overseas, he should not been seen around with a ring

dangling from his ear. Ekpen tells his father that he is spotting the earring because the United States Embassy has just informed him that his visa application has been granted. As a result, he is practicing how to live as an Edo expat even before leaving for the United States. Realising the potential benefits of being a father of an expat son, Okperhan immediately begins to pray for Ekpen. He pleads with him to always keep his father in mind while in the States.

In subsequent scenes, viewers see Ekpen gets involved in one trouble or the other. He snatches Ebo n'ekhui from Jimoh, lures Iyore away from the church, attempts to strike a romantic relationship with the girlfriend of the boss of the fitness obsessed young men, and suggests to Osazuwa to allow him sleep with his wife. Ebo n'ekhui and Iyore later fight over Ekpen and the former loses out in the end. The plot of the film begins to align with the title when the interpreter of the community's Pentecostal Church announces to the congregation that he is embarking on a divine mission to proselytise to the Muslim Fulani of Northern Nigeria. His departure creates a vacuum, as the pastor of the church is a non-Edo speaker. The pastor is later seen at Ekpen's house, where he is able to convert Okperhan. Ekpen is angry with the pastor because he sees his father's transition as a denial of the food and meat he gets from the sacrifices made to *Ogun* (The god of iron). Aided by his mother, Ekpen plots to get his revenge on the pastor. He becomes the interpreter to the pastor and uses the opportunity to deplete the church. He deliberately misinterprets the pastor's Pentecostal messages to the congregation, by translating them into African traditional religious worldview. His new role swells his mother's traditional religious fold with members from the Pentecostal church. The church becomes depleted and the pastor is left wondering as to what has happened.

In the closing scenes, the original interpreter returns from his journey to meet a deserted church. He enquires from the pastor why the church is empty. The pastor cannot explain but tells the interpreter that Ekpen stood in for him while he was away. Because he knows Ekpen is a committed traditional religious worshipper, the interpreter immediately figures out the absence of the members. He embarks on a mission of bringing them back. In the end, viewers see the

pastor and the interpreter preaching in front of a once again packed church. Then, unaware that the original interpreter has returned, Ekpen is seen coming to church to carry out his interpreting function. Coincidentally, the church is in the middle of an intense prayer and as Ekpen is about to enter, with the aid of special effects, viewers see the supreme power of the Christian God prevents him from gaining entry. After about three unsuccessful attempts, Ekpen flees the church, and the film comes to an end.

As stated, *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* is a comic portrayal of religion. By parodying the intersection of Pentecostalism and traditional religion in Benin, the film shines more light on Edo language video filmmakers' ambivalent attitude to religion, and the broader argument of the shared similarities between Pentecostalism and Edo traditional religion. Crucially, it also speaks to the modernist rhetoric of Pentecostalism. As noted in Chapter three, Pentecostal Christianity draws on the presumption of a particular conception of modernity in order to separate itself from traditional religion and to consolidate its appeal to its adherents. Kudzai Biri (2020: 183-246) asserts that part of Pentecostalism's strategy is to recast African traditional beliefs, norms, values and rituals as scriptural verses, making them biblical to attract Africans. Rituals, beliefs, and performances that are deeply rooted in African traditional religious culture such as songs, dance, idioms, proverbs, and the spoken word are appropriated and remodelled as modern by Pentecostals and then projected as strictly Christian doctrines that promote earthly prosperity and lifestyles that lead to eternal afterlife. Biri contends that despite the distance Pentecostals stress between them and traditional religion, it is undeniable that the two religions' doctrines are similar or at least interchangeable and feed off each other (Biri 2020: 183-246).

E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu illustrates the interchangeability of Pentecostal and Edo traditional religious' doctrines. In the absence of the original interpreter, Ekpen effortlessly alters the messages of the pastor into Edo traditional religious worldview such that the congregation embraced them wholeheartedly. In particular, even though the dance and songs he introduced are entrenched in traditional religion, he adapts them in such a way that the pastor is unsuspicious.

Given the similarities, in no time, the church members also flock to the traditional religious shrine of Ekpen's mother. Furthermore, the video film also confirms the assertion in Chapter four that for the doctrines and potency of Edo traditional religion to be overtly acceptable to many in the twenty-first century, they have to be seen through the prism of Pentecostalism. The efforts of Ekpen benefit his mother's traditional religious shrine. Members of the Pentecostal church head there in droves but it is only fleeting. Although the messages are similar, once they realised that they were duped, they move back to the church to hear the same messages.

However, it is the use of Edo language in its contemporary form that makes the film even more relevant to this discourse. While *Ukhure Enikaro* portrays Edo language in its full glory of the ancient Benin Kingdom, in contrast, *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* articulates the language in the contemporary form that Edo language video filmmakers and some audience members perceive as morally inappropriate and threatening to the long term existence of Edo language. The moral dilemma of the language in the twenty-first century, which is examined in more detail in the next chapter, is projected right from the beginning. Unlike Agbonisalo in *Ukhure Enikaro*, who effortlessly uses idioms and wise sayings to express himself and advise his children in the language, Okperhan's articulation of Edo language is imperfect, as he sprinkles it with English phrases. For example, while admonishing Ekpen, he says:

We kue ghi'hua?	Do you see your mates?
Can't you see your mates?	
Can't you see your mates?	
We ibeghe ihua nuwa gbawanre?	Don't you see your mates you grew up together?
Inu irhan we beghe gho rhiemieho yeho?	How many of them do you see wearing earrings?

Okperhan's expressions in Edo and English languages may appear similar, but they illustrate the predicament of modern Benin adults, many of whom are

incapable of fully expressing themselves in Edo language. Furthermore, his sudden change of language when Ekpen tells him of his impending journey to the United States also exemplifies the attitude of contemporary Benin elders when it comes to shaping moral and ethical behaviour. In contrast to the historical Benin Kingdom, the following Okperhan's statements demonstrate how elders of today subvert morality for material benefits:

> *Airen omo nogha rhu nomwan hiehie!*
> *Lahor ovbivben*
> *Ugha yo, yemwen rhe zevbe erha*
> *Elele, eke nughanama erhi na gha talor kuo urhue*
> *Ovbivben, erhe tiwa hate rhue se vberio*
> *Ugha toor!*

The expressions above literally translate as follows:

> You don't predict a child that will prosper you at all!
> Please my son
> When you get there [U.S.A], remember me as a father
> Don't mind [The insults], it is because I want you to do well, that's why I was talking to you like that
> My son, it is not that I hate you so much
> You will live long!

Through the moral laxity of Ekpen spotting an earring and the language profanity exhibited by him and Ebo n'ekhui, when he smears Jimoh's character to gain the latter's love, *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* also addresses the filmmakers' perceived debasement of ancient Benin Kingdom's moral standard by the modern youths of Benin. First, the wearing of earrings by men in Benin is one of the obvious impacts of globalisation on Edo culture that is concerning to the video filmmakers. Until now, only women wore them as part of gendered distinctions. Then, the vulgarity of the following dialogue between Ekpen and Ebo n'ekhui:

Ekpen: *Wa gha zewa rhue nenemwin*	As you [And Jimoh] are in the process of doing that thing [Having sex]
Uwe nirhen rhiere hin	You will tell him to withdraw the thing [Penis]
Uwa fioboh yuwere	You will suddenly insert your hand [finger] inside [Vagina]
Uwa rhie lalor	You will [Withdraw it and] lick it
Ebo n'ekhui: *Irhue egbemwin vberio o!*	I don't do such thing o!
Vbo sie egboni	What causes such a thing
Ima vben vben?	Am I insane?

As noted, *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* belongs to the comic genre of Edo language video films, which is targeted at addressing sometimes-serious issues affecting Edo citizens in the twenty-first century with a humorous gradient (Omoera 2014a: 100). The humour of the video film is even reflected in the name of the lead character. Ekpen connotes bravery in Edo language, but it also captures the qualities of astuteness and integrity. In this film, the main character is nothing but a contradiction of these attributes. The language of the film may be profane and morally debasing, but the aim is to elicit laughter and fun from the audience while addressing some sociocultural issues that might be perceived as serious in some quarters. And the humour films such as *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* generate also has wider consequences for Benin society. Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren (2010: 1141) are of the view that some innocuous moral transgressions can be revolting and at the same time be humorous. When shared communally, such seemingly harmless violations that are humorous, yet serious, have beneficial effects not just for the individuals involved but also for the entire community. They argue that generally, humour plays a significant role in how individuals choose to entertain themselves and how they decide on whom to socialise with.

To a large extent, humour also impacts on the entire community because it promotes psychological, physical, and social wellbeing. McGraw and Warren further contend that humour that is communally shared and understood within a

specific community has the potential to distinguish such community from others and can help to reduce conflict between people with differing social and religious philosophies (McGraw and Warren 2010: 1141). As explained above, one of the objectives of Edo language video filmmakers is to use their films to promote the social cohesion of Benin society. Video films such as *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* are aimed at achieving this objective. They do not only create fun and laughter amongst audience members, while drawing attention to some moral and social issues, but unlike the English language religious video films, *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu* and similar films help to bridge the gap between Pentecostal Christians and African traditional religious worshippers, thus helping to contribute to guaranteeing the social cohesion of Benin society. An informant, who is a Pentecostal deaconess, affirms this in a conversation with the author of this thesis:

> I admire the way they [filmmakers] portray Edo language, culture, and tradition. It gives me a feeling of nostalgia about how we as a people lived our lives in the past. It [Edo language films] helps with my language ability and the actors are funny… I like the way they [also] portray traditional religion even when it is in conflict with Christianity, which is my religion, because there is good and evil in both religions (Personal communication, December 12th, 2018).

The film, *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu*, also clearly demonstrates Edo language video filmmakers' concerns for Benin moral values and the long-term future of Edo language. As the chapter shows, their concerns explain why they also deploy films like *Ukhure Enikaro* to edify their audiences, teach especially contemporary Benin youths the importance of the values of the historical Benin Kingdom, and to preserve Edo language for posterity. More importantly the filmmakers also understand the marginality of Edo language in the twenty-first century Nigeria and how significant its continued existence is to their practice. The films justify why they see themselves as being in the frontline of ensuring the survival and preservation of the Edo language, as it is a key signifier of Edo ethnicity.

5.8 Conclusion: Improving the Wellbeing of Society Through Films That Celebrate Benin Culture and Edo Language

Since it was argued in the preceding chapter that Edo language film producers use their films to spread the moral virtues of Benin, thus in the process maintaining the social cohesion of the kingdom, the purpose of this chapter was to find out why they think it is necessary to do so. As stated in the beginning, it is normally expected that the discussion of film should be treated within the discipline of film studies. But when this discussion spans 'cultural nationalism', it then becomes necessary to study film in the wider context of other genres in popular culture. The chapter identified a couple of factors that motivated the filmmakers to undertake this responsibility.

Edo language filmmakers' engagement with religion is born out of the desire to address the moral concerns of Benin. They utilise the values of religions in this regard. As previously argued, the filmmakers are vitally aware of the importance of religion in the lives of Edo people. To them, the values of Pentecostalism and African traditional religion in Benin are often important to the extent that they are in accord with the Benin moral codes, which engender the good behaviours of Edo citizens and promote the wellbeing of Benin society. Although the filmmakers come from varied religious and social backgrounds, their resolve to be in the vanguard of the re-establishment of the moral order in Benin means that religious and social affiliations are subordinated to this cause.

Religion and morality are embedded in the language of Edo people. However, the current marginal nature of Edo language in Nigeria places Benin morality in serious danger of further decline. Edo filmmakers crucially recognise that the survival and flourishing of Edo language is key to their practice. Hence through their films, they are determined to spearhead the revival and preservation of the Edo language, which contains a significant part of Benin morality.

Edo people are also considered a minority ethnic group in an ethnically heterogeneous nation, where there is fierce competition for resources among its component parts. Filmmaking in Edo language has grown into a site for the propagation of Benin moral and ethical behaviours that projects and celebrates Edo people among the multiple ethnicities in Nigeria. It has also developed into an industry for Edo citizens and non-Edo speakers to construct a common Edo ethnic identity and assert a cultural nationalism that embraces all who share in the ancestry of the historical Benin Kingdom. The intention is that this pan-Edo ethnic identity and cultural nationalism will engender a strong bond among Edo language film audience members in Benin and globally.

Overall, then, Edo language filmmakers use their films as mediums for the expression of Edo ethno-linguistic and cultural identity in an ethnically heterogeneous nation to imbue Edo film audience with the moral virtues of Benin in a globalised world. By invoking the values of Pentecostalism and traditional religion that reverberate with the long-standing Benin ethics in their films, the filmmakers also celebrate the defining characteristics of Edo ethnicity. The hope is that these values will help to insert the Edo ethnic identity for which the historical Benin Kingdom was renowned into the mainstream of the complex sociocultural, religious and moral milieu of the twenty-first century Nigerian nation.

The following chapter, which is the last before the conclusion, examines the audience's perception of the portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in Edo language video films. It includes the views of Pentecostal pastors, traditional religious priests, and the broader Edo language film audience.

CHAPTER SIX

AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF THE PORTRAYAL OF RELIGION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN EDO LANGUAGE VIDEO FILMS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the audience's perception of the depiction of Pentecostalism and traditional religion, and the construction of Edo identity in Edo language video films. In addition to the views of the general Edo language video film audience, it sought the views of the specialist religious audiences of traditional priests and leaders, and Pentecostal pastors. As highlighted in the preceding chapter, Edo language video film producers' engagement with religion reflects their concern for and the need to address the moral health of Benin, and in many cases, it reflects a form of cultural nationalism. As most of the audience members of Edo language video films are adherents of either Pentecostal Christianity or African traditional religion, and primarily native, fluent or aspiring Edo language speakers, their perception of the portrayal of the values of the two religions is crucial in determining whether Edo language video filmmakers are achieving their desired objectives.

The chapter illustrates that although many English language Nigerian video films emphasise Pentecostal Christianity, Edo language film audience members engage with video films' religious messages in highly differentiated ways. It argues that even though Pentecostal and traditional religious leaders in Benin do not see the films as adequately reflecting their religious doctrines, most audience members are well disposed to Edo language films, because they consider the filmmakers' engagement with the values of the two religions as unbiased, and as beneficial to the moral wellbeing of Edo citizens and Benin society. Many Edo speaking Pentecostal pastors and traditional religious leaders also consider themselves

marginal to the pan-Edo ethnic cause of the filmmakers. Notwithstanding the contest of debate in which the language strand of the films is received, the wider audience members, including the non-standard Edo speakers, embrace Edo language video films for being one of the primary sources of moral and historical education that are relevant to members of the ancient Benin Kingdom and the Edo people.

The chapter highlights that in tandem with an earlier finding by Osakue Omoera (2014a), Edo language video films are popular in Benin. It also shows that the representation of religion and morality in Edo language films appeals widely to Edo speakers. This confirms film as an important medium of Edo self-assertion. However, the 'cultural nationalist' debates facilitated by, and surrounding film, range across a wide spectrum. Within this spectrum, traditional experts are uneasy with what they perceive as the commodification of Edo culture. Their position suggests that there is a distinction between Edo culture as a purely spiritual practice and as a product that is mobilised for social and political purposes. On their part, Pentecostal leaders' critique of Edo language films focuses on the difference between Christian self-realisation and Edo ethnic celebration. This indicates that the relationship between Christianity and African ethnogenesis is not a given.

Although Peel (2003: 278-309) has emphasised the intimate connection between Christianity and the formation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism in the case of the Yoruba, the Edo language video film situation indicates that the relationship between Christianity, ethnic identity formation and cultural nationalism is more nuanced. While Peel suggests that Christianity helped to construct Yoruba nationhood out of the previously independent collective groups of people in Ife, Oyo, Ijebu and Egba, the same cannot be said of the ancient Benin Kingdom. Although Christianity influenced aspects of Edo culture after its introduction, unlike the Yoruba case where it was foundational, Benin already had a strong sense of nationhood before the arrival of the religion. And it is not necessarily the case that Christianity always fosters nationhood everywhere it is introduced. In fact, sometimes, it could be the basis for the

contestation of nationhood, as was the case in parts of East Africa in the early to mid-twentieth century. As Peterson (2012: 127-151) points out, rather than serve as a cohesive force for ethnic identity formation, Christianity became the battleground for the assertion and repudiation of Luo ethnic nationalism in the twilight of British colonialism in East Africa. Even though not as polarised as it was in East Africa, contradictions of religious opinions still play out in social practices in Benin. These contradictions find expressions in the divergent opinions of the portrayal of and the adoption of Pentecostal and traditional religious values for Edo self-assertion by Edo language video filmmakers.

Given the importance of the Oba in the public and filmic imagination of Edo identity, the chapter also examines the relevance and influence of the Oba in the religious lives of the audience members and Edo citizens more generally. It confirms that the Oba remains relevant and influential in how the audience members and Edo people identify with religion in the twenty-first century. This explains why Edo language filmmakers are also preoccupied with the portrayal of royalty in their films.

6.2 Audience Perception of Traditional Religion and Pentecostalism in Nigerian Video Films

Nigerian video films have been acknowledged as popular among the audience (Haynes 2007, Krings and Okome 2013). In determining the popularity of the industry, anthropologists, film, and media scholars adopted various methods to study the impact of Nollywood films' messages on the audience members. Many of the scholars used the survey research tools of questionnaires and structured interviews to collect data and information from audience members (Omenugha 2019: 41, Elegbe and Ayinla 2017: 39, Ogwo et al 2015: 33, Okon 2015: 5-6, Adeleke 1995: 85-105). Others adopted the qualitative approach of unstructured interviews and observations (Onuzulike 2016: 93-4), textual analysis and focus groups (Alawode and Fatonji 2013: 66), and mixed methods, which embraces two or more of the foregoing research methods (Asare 2013:

33-68). Undoubtedly, the diverse approach has helped to illuminate and widen the understanding of the spectatorship of video films in particular and films more generally, but it has also illustrated the difficulties of constructing a singular approach to the study of film audiences.

The lack of a uniform approach to audience reception study is in part inherent in the nature of society itself. According to Patti Valkenburg and Jochen Peter (2013), society is in a constant state of change and as a result audience experiences of media messages are dependent on the prevailing variables of the particular society at the time. They argue that mood, pre-existing beliefs, temperament, developmental, and social-contextual factors, amongst others, are crucial determinants of how audience members of a specific society react to, and act on, media and film messages. Valkenburg and Peter (2013: 207-8) contend that because of the fluidity of human behaviour and attitude, there should be no commonality to the study of audience reception of film and media messages. Instead, in order to bridge the divide between the various theoretical expectations and the actual results of a research, scholars should focus their attention on rigorously explaining the systematic methodological process involved in any research method adopted in the study of film or media audiences.

Furthermore, Anulika Agina stresses that the complicated nature of the medium of film itself also makes the case for a uniform approach to audience study problematic (Agina 2016: 12). She states that since film embodies the facets of technology, sociocultural setting, narrative, and people, thus generating a diverse response from audiences at different sites, only a multi-dimensional approach can fully capture how audiences make sense of the messages of films. Apart from the specificities of society and film, Agina (2016: 10) argues that infrastructural and archival deficits in developing nations such as Nigeria also compound the case for a sole approach to audience reception of film. Hence, she advocates that audience researchers, especially in developing countries, should include another layer of investigation into their studies, which recognises the importance of journalists and film writers in the process of film documentation.

Agina makes the point that a consequence of the difficulties imposed on researchers by the particularities of society and film is the apparent reluctance of many scholars to engage with audience reception studies of Nigerian video films (Agina 2016: 9). As a result, the vast literature on Nollywood films themselves is not matched by research into the spectatorship of these films. Regardless of this development, some scholars have studied audience reception on a broader scale, which takes in drama and live performances, as well as video films more specifically. Together, their works have enriched our knowledge and understanding of 'audience reactions to the different aspects of Nollywood movies' (Onuzulike 2016), including those of Edo language video films (Omoera 2014a).

Karin Barber (2000) addresses the rationale of audience adoption of plays [and films] as social delineators. Using the case of Adejobi Company, a Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupe, as an entry point, she suggests that the social class of audience members attending a play [or film] can be determined by the venue of the play [or film]. As previously noted (Chapter five), her discussion of live performance is important to film because both mediums share the objectives of entertaining and educating the audience. Barber contends that the audience members that attended the plays of Adejobi Theatre Company depended on whether they were staged in the community or were 'sponsored shows' (Barber 2000: 204-7). Although a few professionals featured in the audience in the community plays, she describes the predominant audience members as 'town audiences', that is those that were considered as belonging to the base of the social ladder, such as street vendors, touts at the motor parks, and other artisans and craftsmen. The 'town audience' members' social status was easily discernible from their scruffy outfits and impressions (Barber 2000: 204-5). But 'big men' and 'big well-to-do middle-aged women with towering head-ties and shiny handbags' whose demeanour exuded elitism and affluence attended the 'sponsored shows'. Barber explains that while the 'town audiences' were rancorous in their reactions to the plays, the 'big men' and 'big women' reacted

by 'listening attentively and applauded at the end of each scene' (Barber 2000: 205).

Notwithstanding the social differences between the 'town audiences' and the 'big men' and 'big women', both sets of audience took away moral lessons from the plays. Instead of perceiving the moral lessons from religious standpoints, she suggests that the lessons learned were based on gender and age (Barber 2000: 216-25). The male audience members saw themselves in the roles played by men while the female members of the audience identified with the female characters. The younger audience members related with the experiences of the youth in the drama and the elderly audience members internalised the messages propagated by the elders in the play. Furthermore, the married female audience members even identified with the characters that played their roles within their households. Those in polygamous marriages identified with the trajectories of the characters that articulated their positions in their families (Barber 2000: 218). Generally, the Adejobi Theatre Company's audiences appreciated the messages of the plays, but many of them were also critical of some aspects. Some audience members questioned the delivery of some of the moral messages, which they thought of as inconsistent with the traditional Yoruba universe or the worldviews of the global religions of Islam and Christianity (Barber 2000: 222-5). Others specifically identified the lack of forgiveness in the Adejobi Theatre troupe's plays, suggesting that it is incompatible with their moral values.

Durotoye Adeleke emphasises how film is concurrently being adapted by audience members of Yoruba language films to recreate the historical Yoruba religious culture in modern times (Adeleke 1995: 143), and to reject aspects of Yoruba religious culture that they think are exaggerated and inconsistent with their personal values and beliefs (Adeleke 1995: 191-3). His study mainly focuses on audience reception of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre troupes' live drama in Ibadan. However, by arguing that the audience members prefer watching the film version to the live performance (Adeleke 1995: 115), Adeleke's study becomes relevant to the discourse of film. The audience's preference for film as opposed to live drama is largely influenced by the option of watching

video films in one's own time and on one's own terms. It provides the added choice of having refreshments while watching the films, and the experience of watching films with friends and relatives rather than a larger audience (Adeleke 1995: 142-3). In addition to these, it is likely that the more permanent nature of the messages of film and the enhanced experience provided by the technologies of special effects, sound, and editing are also factors tilting the audience in favour of film.

Adeleke (1995: 153) contends that because of the uncomplicatedness of Yoruba films' plots and the vivid depiction of Yoruba life, including religion, it is easy for audience members to internalise the messages of the films, which they eventually strive to externalise in their daily lives. He stresses that it is the values conveyed in the films that affect the audience members (1995: 148-9). Adeleke states that many audience members see themselves in the characters of Yoruba films and that they apply the lessons learned from the films in their everyday lives, especially when it comes to family and domestic affairs such as marriage, how to run the home, and other relational activities. According to him, many Yoruba film audience members adopt the historical Yoruba values of old depicted in the films in their daily lives. Such moral values as patience, endurance, diligence, promoting the common good, honesty, humility, self-determination, the belief in the existence of God or Supreme Being, and tolerance, are highly valued by the audience, and they attempt to articulate them in their everyday conduct (Adeleke 1995: 154).

However, Yoruba film audience members in Ibadan also abhor the excessive visualisation of violence, sex, death, and karate, which they perceive as incongruent with the Yoruba way of life (Adeleke 1995: 157). Many of them see the constant reinforcement of anti-social behaviour on screen, and the excessive display of magic, rituals, witchcraft, incantations, and greed as detrimental to the moral fabric of Yoruba society. Audience members also consider the flagrant display of these social and cultural attributes as inconsistent with their personal beliefs (Adeleke 1995: 157-61).

Adeleke's finding resonates with a study carried out among Nigerian video film audience members in South Africa. Uchenna Onuzulike (2016: 96-7) notes that the prevalence of the occult is also one of the most resented features of English language Nollywood films by the audience members. He reports that their aversion to the representation of these African traditional religious rites, rituals, and practices is based on concerns about how the films will influence international views about Nigerians and Nigeria. Ogwo et al (2015: 38), Okon (2015: 8), and Alawode and Fatonji (2013) also highlight audiences' antipathy to the exaggeration of the occult, witchcraft, ritual, and the embellishment of traditional religious paraphernalia in many English language Nollywood video films. Apart from the tendency to encourage especially the younger members of the audience to perpetrate violence and immorality along similar line, they argue that audience members reject the constant re-enactment of the occult, witchcraft and magic, and the incessant demonisation of traditional religion in most English language Nigerian video films because of the potential to compromise Nigeria's moral image and the capacity to stigmatise certain ethnicities within the country as morally bankrupt particularly when it comes to the pursuit of wealth.

For Yoruba audiences studied by Adeleke, film also serves as a potent instrument for ordering the behaviour and moral conduct of members of the society, in particular in relation to gender and marital status. For instance, he argues that while audience members regard married women who frequent cinema houses in Ibadan as 'wayward' and lacking the moral expectations associated with the institution of marriage, young men and students who regularly watch films are considered enlightened and sophisticated (Adeleke 1995: 166-71). Adeleke further posits that film is used as a marker of marital status, noting that because married people have more demands competing for the limited resources at their disposal, they are less likely to have enough money to spare for film going. By contrast, single people have more money to indulge in film viewing (Adeleke 1995: 166-71).

On the whole, in spite of the emphasis to the contrary by most English language Nollywood producers, the foregoing analysis shows that audience relationship

with film is, and always will be, debatable and dependent on the existing circumstances. In proffering an answer to why film audience members in Ibadan do not engage in detail with the representation of religion in Yoruba language films, Adeleke (1995: 148-9) suggests that the attitude of the filmmakers could be responsible. He explains that filmmakers avoid producing films that could tip over the fragile relationship existing between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Added to this assertion, and as explained in Chapters three and four, the compatibility and the African universality of the religions' values mean that audience members do not distinguish between the values of the various religions. Karin Barber (2000: 222-5) also echoes this, when she avers that the audience members of Adejobi Theatre plays were strongly critical of the lack of forgiveness displayed by some of the characters. Generally, audience members of plays and films cut across religious divides. As argued in Chapter four, forgiveness is one of the virtues espoused by the African moral philosophy of *Ubuntu*.

The complex experience expressed here by the audiences is also exhibited by Edo language video film audience members, including the notion that Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion share commonalities. The manifestations of the audience in Ibadan, the arguments of the audience of Adejobi Theatre troupe, and as will be seen later in the Chapter, the discourses of Edo language video film audience members, all point to certain sectors of the Nigerian video film industry functioning in a highly distinctive local setting.

6.3 Perception of Religion and Ethnicity in Edo Language Video Films

The following sections of the chapter concentrate on Edo film audience's perception of the portrayal of Pentecostalism and African traditional religion, and the construction of ethnic identity, in Edo language video films. The first section focuses on Pentecostal Christian leaders' perception of the portrayal of the two religions and the construction of ethnic identity in Edo language films. The second part looks at how traditional religious leaders and priests see the

representations of traditional religion, Pentecostal Christianity and Edo ethnic identity in Edo films, while the third section is centred on the wider Edo language film audience members' perception of the portrayal of traditional and Pentecostal religions and ethnic construction in Edo language video films. As explained in Chapter two, data and information from the Pentecostal and traditional religious leaders and priests were retrieved through semi-structured questions and ethnographic study, but the questions were delivered verbally. Questionnaires and unstructured interviews constituted the main instrument for the retrieval of information and data from the broader Edo language film audience members.

6.4 Pentecostal Christian Leaders' Perception of Religion and Ethnicity in Edo Language Films

The views of Pentecostal leaders in Benin on the representation of Pentecostalism and traditional religion as well as the construction of Edo ethnic identity in Edo language video films are relevant for many reasons. Firstly, as argued in Chapter three, Pentecostal Christianity is the most visible religious movement in Benin in the twenty-first century. Secondly, it enjoys widespread following and the leaders are a powerful moral force in the society, as their influence transcends the religious and spiritual boundaries. Thirdly, many of the Edo language film producers are Pentecostal Christians, which suggests that they engage with the messages of Pentecostal leaders. Fourthly, a significant proportion of the broader audience members of Edo language video films subscribe to Pentecostalism. Like the Pentecostal filmmakers, these audience members also come under a certain level of moral influence of the Pentecostal leaders. Fifthly, their perception of the depiction of the two religions and the projection of Edo ethnic identity is important because it contributes to the overall understanding of Edo language film producers' resolve to use their films as mediums for the propagation of good ethical and moral behaviours and the celebration of Edo ethnicity.

Most Pentecostal leaders in Benin are of the view that Edo language video filmmakers prioritise and glamorise traditional religious practices in their films. They argue that idolatry and fetish practices are overemphasised in Edo language video films. As many of them were born into Edo traditional religious adhering families and only embraced Pentecostalism in their adulthood, they contend that they cannot completely dissociate themselves and the religion from traditional practices. Nonetheless, they assert that their personal contact with traditional religion and culture is limited and does not involve idolatry, sacrifices to the gods, and other fetish practices.

Pastor Frank Agboniken is one of the Pentecostal pastors who believe that the video filmmakers glamorise traditional religion in their films. Agboniken is a pastor of a well-known religious ministry, with several branches spread across Benin City. He was born into a family of nine siblings and grew up practising traditional religion. But in his adulthood, he converted to Christianity, first as a Catholic; then later as a member of the Anglican Church. He argues that while in these churches, he did not really grasp the full meaning and impact of the power of Jesus Christ. His desire to know more about Jesus Christ and his exploits led him to embrace Pentecostalism. To deepen himself in the faith, he studied pastoral work for four years at a Bible college in Benin, which earned him a Bachelor's degree in theology. He then went on to acquire a Master's degree in theology from a university in one of the southern states in the United States. He says that his conversion to Pentecostal Christianity has really made him to understand and appreciate Jesus Christ as the Lord and personal saviour of mankind.

Agboniken states that he is so deep in the faith that he stays clear of anything that would distract him or pollute his mind. This is precisely why he argues that he does not watch Edo language video films, because they are full of iniquitous messages that go against his Pentecostal beliefs. He is of the view that the filmmakers do not fully understand the critical role of Jesus Christ in the physical and spiritual lives of Edo people. According to him, that is exactly why they trivialise Him and the Pentecostal movement in their films:

> The first thing why my interest is not there [Edo language films] is because I see it [sic] as escapism; that is fantasy. The number two point is sometimes because of my level of Christianity. The level I have attained, I want to fill my spirit with the things that will connect me to God. Their [actors] kind of dressing … of which [they] try to look as if they are so lascivious and their attitude… that is exposing the very important part of their body so they can sell the films, that alone is discouraging…when you are handling [depicting] the things of God, one will [sic] be very, very careful. The Bible says 'my people are perished for lack of knowledge'… Things that concern the Holy Ghost you don't joke with it [sic]. Sometimes in their films, they try to mimic the pastor who is filled with the Holy Spirit. They try to mock them [pastors], try to downplay the Holy Ghost. That is an offense. You cannot just do that because it [Bible] says 'do not offend the Holy Spirit'… This is exactly what is bringing conflict at times between Pentecostalism and African traditional religion, which they portray well in their films (Frank Agboniken, personal interview October 31st 2018).

Even though he does not watch Edo language video films because of their incompatible contents with his Pentecostal faith, Agboniken emphasises that he does not prevent his family, including his children, from watching them. He says they are enthralled by the video film contents but that he tries to guide them in how they interpret the contents of the films so that they do not get polluted.

Pastor Ken Egor founded his Pentecostal church more than a decade ago after recovering from a mysterious illness that left him bedridden for three years. He differs in his opinion on Edo language video films. He argues that they are not entirely purveyors of immorality. The fact that they frequently portray African traditional religion does not make them evil. According to Egor, the films represent Edo culture and African traditional religious practices are part of the culture of the people they portray. Coming from an African traditional religious family, he says that he never intended to become a Christian. After being struck down by the mysterious illness, however, he had an encounter with Archbishop Benson Idahosa, a Nigerian Pentecostal leader renowned for his prosperity gospel, who has his church headquarters in Benin City. It was Idahosa who

revealed to him that the only way out of his predicament was for him to give his life to God, by embracing Pentecostal Christianity. After recovering from the illness, he became a Pentecostal Christian. Egor trained as a Pentecostal pastor at the Bible College attached to Idahosa's church. But he contends that although he is a Pentecostal pastor, he does not demonise African traditional religion because the religion contains some values that promote the common good of the society. He stresses that as part of the cultural firmament of Benin society, African traditional religion will always be an integral part of Edo people and that it would be disingenuous of anyone, including the Pentecostal leaders, to assume that the religion would be extinct at some point in time.

Although Egor does not criticise Edo language film producers for downplaying Pentecostalism and does not entirely condemn Edo language films for their apparent immoral messages, he is nonetheless of the view that the industry does not fully understand what Pentecostalism is all about. He says that because of this, he immerses himself in those video films that clearly articulate the Pentecostal doctrine instead, such as those produced by Mike Bamiloye's Mount Zion Ministry:

> I only watch…this Mount Zion Church's productions. That one makes sense [sic], real one and I have learned a lot from it [sic], like '*Blood in the Altar'* and so on and so forth. But this Edo language something, I'm really [not attracted to them]. You see, the problem we have as Africans or Nigerians is that we don't study…when you don't study, you don't find out [things]. Then you start writing, it will not work one hundred per cent. But when you study, go for research, you will find out all these things and you'll write well (Ken Egor, personal interview November 19th 2018).

Unlike Ken Egor, who perceives African traditional religion as a permanent feature of Benin's religious life, Reverend Convenience Osieto believes that the widespread embrace of Pentecostal Christianity in Benin in the twenty-first century spells doom and extinction for every other religion, including African traditional religion. The 'demise' of traditional practices in Benin will begin from the royal court. He argues that the Oba would at some point embrace

Pentecostal Christianity. Once that is done, Osieto says that the rest of the kingdom would follow suit.

The only one to have been born into a mainline Christian family, Osieto graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration from a Nigerian university and transitioned to Pentecostalism over three decades ago. He is currently a reverend and the director of administration of a prominent Pentecostal Church in Benin. The church regularly hosts between three and four thousand worshippers in every Sunday service. He argues that his church strips traditional culture of idolatry whenever they engage with it. He says he does not watch Edo language video films but that he is aware of their existence. Asked why he does not watch them, he contends that the filmmakers dedicate most of their time and space to the visualisation of traditional religion:

> I wouldn't tell you that I watch them but I'm aware of them… a lot of them are just deceptive. They can give almost forty-five to fifty minutes [in a one hour programme] to the portrayal of whatever [African traditional religion]. Then maybe five minutes they will come and mention Jesus… they magnify the African traditional religion more. They give more time to it… if you are watching something that interests you, you are getting more and more enmeshed in it…when you watch it very well, the manifestation and the power demonstrated are those of African traditional religion. A lot of time, they harass Pentecostal Christianity. The power of God is more than that… so much time is given to African traditional religion. They are supposed to give attention to the things of God but they give short time to them (Convenience Osieto, personal interview November 14th 2018).

But regardless of the perceived negative portrayal of Pentecostalism by Edo language video filmmakers, Osieto argues that the religion will keep soaring in terms of the number of adherents in Benin. When reminded that the English language Nollywood actually adopts the Pentecostal narrative in its portrayal of conflict with African traditional religion, he asserts that the English language film producers do not really believe in what they do in their films. He says they are only doing that because they want to profit from the Pentecostal population:

> Human beings by nature, we dance to the market place. They [English language filmmakers] work with the trend of time; they are in business. The filmmakers are in business, which is purely what it is (Convenience Osieto, personal interview November 14th 2018).

Reverend Osieto hopes that like the rest of the population of Benin, the Edo language video film industry will soon be touched by the Pentecostal revolution. Rather than criticising them for their perceived transgressions, he argues that he is always praying for the right people to take over the helm of affairs in the industry. According to him, when that time comes, there will be a transformation in the industry that will portray Pentecostal Christianity favourably

In relation to the future of traditional religion in Benin, Brother Omorede Ologbo holds the opposite view to Reverend Convenience Osieto. He believes that African traditional religion is here to stay in Benin. He argues that there is nothing wrong in the Pentecostal movement infusing some elements of the tradition of the people into its liturgy, although aspects that have to do with idolatry should be avoided. Because of the inseparable nature of traditional religion and the culture of the people, he says it would be dishonest for anyone to think that the religion could be eliminated from the kingdom at some point in the future. This acceptance may reflect his understanding that in the midst of the Pentecostal surge, the ongoing revival of traditional religious practices spearheaded by the Oba in Benin will not survive.

Brother Ologbo is the founder and senior pastor of a Pentecostal Ministry in Benin, which he says specialises in prophecy, deliverance from spiritual, traditional, marital and health problems, and the salvation of souls. He was born into a traditional religious family of nine siblings and founded the ministry after graduation from a Bible College. Rather than be strongly critical of traditional religious priests and adherents, he takes a swipe at some of his Pentecostal colleagues for failing to fully commit themselves to the cause of Pentecostalism.

He argues that some of them have been found to be deeply involved in traditional practices, by sourcing their powers from the traditional realm and collaborating with traditional religious priests. He suggests that the current revival of traditional religious practices in Benin, masterminded by the Oba, is a clear indication of the shallowness of the state of Christianity in the kingdom. He states that even as a Pentecostal leader and a messenger of God, he is still the subject of the Oba and that whatever the king says must be obeyed.

While Ologbo also emphasises that he holds the Oba in high regard for addressing crime and immorality, he resorts to the Pentecostal rhetoric in labelling the Oba's efforts as 'fighting evil through the means of evil'. Here, 'fighting evil' refers to the crime and immorality and the 'means of evil' is indicative of the 'native doctors' that implement the Oba's pronouncements. His interpretation of the Oba's achievement echoes the classic Pentecostal dualism of 'past' and 'present' and 'traditional' and 'modernity', when it comes to delineating African traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity.

Ologbo acknowledges watching Edo language video films and feels very strongly about the way and manner Edo language video filmmakers depict Pentecostalism. He says that they portray the religion in a very bad light and represent African traditional religion as a superb religion. In a very strong term, he says he is very angry at the way they caricature Pentecostalism and grant invincibility to African traditional religion. He declares that if they persist in the derogation of Pentecostalism, he would have no choice but to shut down the industry through the power of words that God has invested in him:

> The way they portray the Pentecostal movement is in a very bad light. Most times, the ones I have been able to watch, they see the traditional religion as superb – more powerful than the Pentecostal realm. That's not true. It pisses me off when I see that because with the power of words, I can shut down the industry. That's what they are yet to know because I have command over words. They have too, by the way of incantation, but I have by the way of prophecy. When the spirit comes upon me or within me or without me or around me, then I prophesy through the scripture and I'll wait for the manifestation. So the way

> they have always portrayed the Pentecostals, it has not always been on a good light [sic] (Omorede Ologbo, personal interview November 11th 2018).

Ologbo even threatened that if the film producers continued to valorise African traditional religion in their films, he would supernaturally bind the evil spirit behind the films and render the films useless and unwatchable. To forestall this, he advises the filmmakers to work towards balancing their films, instead of giving priority to African traditional religion. He says he prefers watching the English language Nollywood films because the producers understand, and are in tune with, the Pentecostal narrative. He attributes this to their 'superior' education, and their 'scientific and research skills'. He believes that the English language video film producers are more God-fearing than their Edo language counterparts.

Although many English language Nigerian video film producers project a facile approach to religious video film spectatorship, the views of the Pentecostal leaders in Benin confirm that the affect of film on the audience is not clear-cut. While Pentecostal leaders reject Edo language video films because they perceive the filmmakers as not fully reflecting the ideals of Pentecostalism, many of them accept the authority of, and pledge their loyalty to, the Oba of Benin. Their rejection is a validation of Edo language film producers' claim of unbiased approach to religion, and their acceptance of the Oba's authority is an affirmation of their Edo ethnicity. Crucially, their attitude is also an admission of the extent to which Edo language video films shape their understanding of royalty in the twenty-first century. Because of their commitment to the spiritual objectives of Pentecostalism, many of them do not come into direct contact with the Oba on a daily basis. This suggests that their perception of Benin royalty is largely influenced by how it is portrayed in Edo language video films, amongst other life experiences.

Moreover, the Pentecostal pastors' repudiation of Edo language video films does not mean that the film producers are immoral. As Brian Larkin highlights (2008: 2), film can sometimes be deployed as a political machine. The filmmakers are

mobilising Pentecostal values for a political or sociocultural cause, which the Pentecostal leaders believe are inconsistent with the overall objectives of Pentecostalism. Therefore, they see themselves as outside of the filmmakers' ethno-national cause. However, some of the Pentecostal leaders also argue that they do not see anything wrong with infusing some traditional practices, such as songs, dance, dress, and idioms, into their liturgy. Again, this clearly affirms their heritage, but it also means that since they do not frequently engage with them, their perception of contemporary Edo traditional practices is shaped by their lived experiences, including with Edo language video films. Pentecostal pastors in Benin reject Edo language video films, but unlike the East African Christian revivalists that repudiated Luo traditional and cultural values (Peterson 2012: 150-1), they do not fully dissociate themselves from Edo tradition and culture, much of which nowadays is acquired through Edo language video films. This confirms that the filmmakers are not immoral. More importantly, it emphasises the complicated experiences, attitudes, and actions the medium of film stimulates from audiences. The Pentecostal leaders denounce the religious element of Edo language video films, considering it morally inappropriate. At the same time, they accept the educational aspect of the medium, making film morally suitable for their purpose.

6.5 African Traditional Religious Leaders' Perception of Religion and Ethnicity in Edo Language Films

This segment focuses on the thoughts of the traditional religious priests and leaders in Benin. Their perception of the portrayal of traditional religion and the construction of Edo ethnic identity in Edo language video films is vital because it illuminates the understanding of how those in the traditional realm see the depiction of traditional religion and the celebration of Edo ethnicity in Edo video films. Although traditional religious worship and paraphernalia may no longer be as visible as they used to be in Benin Kingdom, the religion still possesses widespread moral influence and its leaders are still highly regarded in contemporary Benin society. Many members of the broader Edo language video

film audience are followers of traditional religion; therefore, they fall under the moral purview of the traditional religious priests and leaders. Also, some of the video film producers are adherents of traditional religion, and many others who do not directly profess the religion identify with its practices in one way or another. Thus similar to the Pentecostal leaders, the traditional leaders and priests exercise some level of moral authority over the filmmakers. Having discussed the views of Pentecostal leaders, the thoughts of the traditional religious priests and leaders provide some balance to the discourse of the portrayal of religions and the construction of Edo identity in Edo language video films. Their impression also broadens the overall comprehension of the depiction of religion in Edo language video films, and the stance of the filmmakers.

Many of them are of the view that in their desire to key into the 'lucrative Pentecostal market', Edo language video filmmakers privilege Pentecostal Christianity over and above traditional religion in their films. They also suggest that the widespread embrace of Pentecostal Christianity in Benin has resulted in a corresponding rise in criminality and immorality. The traditional religious leaders argue that because of the Pentecostal emphasis on repentance, it is now easy for the criminally minded and the morally depraved members of Benin society to perpetrate crime and immorality and then plead for forgiveness.

A young man in his early forties, Sam Ikhuen believes that Pentecostal leaders particularly encourage immorality and criminality through their emphasis on forgiveness regardless of the gravity of the offence. He suggests that because people are aware of the swiftness of justice in the traditional realm, they are quick to proclaim Pentecostal Christianity when found guilty of a crime or immorality. Pentecostals avoid swearing traditional oaths, arguing that their religion abhors idol worshipping. Ikhuen describes himself as a traditional religious priest with specialism in herbal medication. He says there are various categories of traditional religious priests, ranging from those who predict the future, to those who perform the roles that Pentecostal pastors are noted for, such as healing and deliverance from evil forces. He was born into a traditional

religious family in a village in one of the local administrative areas that come under the influence of the Oba of Benin. He refers to himself as a doctor and would prefer to be addressed that way without any prejudice. He inherited the art of divination from his father and moved to Benin City after his secondary school education to practice his profession.

Doctor Ikhuen's shrine is located in a building attached to his house in a smallholding on the eastern part of Benin. The shrine is filled with all sorts of human craftsmanship and he says that many of the objects belong to his clients, some of them Pentecostal Christians. He claims that many Pentecostal pastors come to seek powers from him and that some of them also have altars in his shrine. He blames the current moral decline in Benin society on the prevalence of Pentecostal Christianity and the insincerity of its leaders, arguing that before the advent of the movement, honesty, moral probity and the common good of the society were highly cherished in Benin.

Ikhuen is also very critical of his traditional religious colleagues who compromise truth and justice because of financial inducement. He argues that such practices portray traditional religious priests in a bad light. Doctor Ikhuen is of the view that the visibility of traditional religion has been impacted by the widespread acceptance of Pentecostalism in the kingdom. However, despite this, traditional religion remains very influential and many of those who openly identify with Pentecostal Christianity also subscribe to traditional religious beliefs and practices. He also argues that many people in Benin openly profess Pentecostal Christianity because of 'civilisation'; that is, they are attracted to the movement because of its modernist rhetoric. According to him, to claim otherwise; that is, to openly admit to 'idol worship' is to expose oneself to public ridicule, as people believe that traditional religion represents 'darkness'.

Ikhuen states that he watches Edo language video films but that the filmmakers glorify Pentecostal Christianity 'too much' in the films. He argues that in those films, the filmmakers demonise the traditional religious priest and make him look like he is nothing but evil. But even though there are good traditional

religious priests who are guided by truth, justice, and the interest of the common good in the discharge of their sacred responsibilities, the video film producers will never portray them as good because that is not what the audience wants to see. Moreover, in spite of the atrocities perpetrated by some Pentecostal pastors, Edo language video filmmakers never depict them as evil, saying that if they do so, it would be counterproductive to their commercial interests:

> Edo language filmmakers give priority to Pentecostal Christianity. Film is supposed to be a reflection of society but what the Edo language film producers portray is not truly reflective of Benin society. They produce the films to elevate Pentecostalism. Why is it that they always see the traditional religious priest as evil? There are traditional doctors that have the interest of the society at heart. There are many pastors who commit evil. Some of them have been shown on television burying things in their churches. Some of them sleep with married women. Some of them have also been exposed as getting involved in criminalities and spiritually fortifying armed robbers. Society only identifies with the materially successful. The filmmakers are only portraying Pentecostalism as good because there is money in church business. They know that there is power in the traditional realm, but they are only there to glorify Pentecostalism and demonise traditional religion (Sam Ikhuen, personal interview October 25th 2018).

Doctor Ikhuen believes that no matter what the filmmakers do in their films, traditional religion will always be part of Edo people's religious fabric. He advises the filmmakers to always consider the wellbeing of the society when conceptualising religious and moral themes in their films. But Doctor Ikhuen also advances a contradictory argument in his discussion of the filmmakers' portrayal of religion. While some Edo language film producers come to him for advice when they want to portray the traditional doctor in their films, and although they have so far largely adhered to his advice in their portrayal, he also argues that there is a lot of 'film trick' in their films and that the filmmakers do not fully reflect Benin society. His contradictory analysis could be interpreted in two ways: that his advice does not fit into the moral and ethical philosophy of

Edo language video filmmakers, or that the video films do not meet his moral and religious expectations.

On his part, Noel Oke, a traditional leader and prominent Chief in the Palace of the Oba says Edo language video film producers have diverged from the initial objective of the industry. From a long line of family with traditional ties to the royal court and political clout in Benin, Oke attended one of the elite secondary schools in Benin and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts from one of the universities in Benin City. He is a pioneer actor in Edo language Nollywood who began his acting career in one of the theatre troupes that predated video films. His opinions are well regarded by Edo language film professionals and he is widely seen as the bridge between Edo language video film industry and the traditional realm in Benin. Oke argues that in the beginning, Edo language video films were meant to project the sociocultural and religious realities of Edo people. But he thinks that over time, due to pressure from the audience, the video film producers have shifted from that objective for the purpose of profit making:

> I did say earlier that when we started the Edo language movies, they were meant to show what we really are as a nation or people. But now within the last eight to ten years, we are facing a situation where our people are refusing to buy the works unless the story is turned towards ending in the victory for Pentecostal Christianity. If it does not work that way, the people will not buy them so the producers started making the films to end that way in order to make money. But for me, I prefer to go hungry than to produce or participate in films like that (Noel Oke, personal interview September 13th 2018).

He says that the demand of the audience is dishonest and unrepresentative of the religious nature of contemporary Benin, arguing that he has a shrine in his house where dedicated worshippers congregate and celebrate traditional religion every weekend. He suggests that many of the dedicated worshippers, most of them women, also profess Pentecostal Christianity. These devotees would worship with him on Saturday night, adorning the full regalia required for the ceremony, and on Sunday morning, they would swap the regalia for their

gorgeous Sunday dresses and go and worship in their various Pentecostal Churches:

> We are living the life of pretence. Our people are very pretentious. I have *Egun* [Chambers], a worship centre and *Owuegbe* [Secret cult] in my compound where I worship every weekend. Some of our women worship with me on Saturday night, after which they put the red cloth inside their bags, take their baths in the *Egun*, and dress in their lace attires and go to church. This is particular to our Bini [Edo] women. They are used to it (Noel Oke, personal interview September 13th 2018).

Oke likens the current Pentecostal churches to the progressive unions that existed in Benin in the 1980s.[21] He argues that anyone who did not belong to the progressive unions at the time was seen as a social outcast. For Oke, Pentecostal churches are just social spaces where people converge to celebrate materialism. He says the fact that Edo language video filmmakers have chosen to play to the gallery means that his interest now lays elsewhere. He does not plan to participate in the industry until the filmmakers return to the initial objective.

However, another traditional religious priest is of the view that although Edo language video film producers grant supremacy to Pentecostal Christian doctrines in their films, he does not criticise them for doing so because the filmmakers are in the business of entertainment to make money. Ebo Okah, a famous traditional religious priest and a prominent member of the *Iwebo* palace society, says the filmmakers are only responding to the demand of the audience, stressing that because the filmmakers want to remain in business, they do not have any choice but to key into the request of the audience.[22]

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[21] Progressive unions were social organisations that existed in Benin in the 1980s, which claimed to promote the welfare of members. Membership of the organisations was usually based on ethnicity, trade or business links, but many people considered them as organisations that encouraged immorality and social vices, particularly among women.

[22] *Iwebo* is one of the three societies existing in the palace of the Oba of Benin. Its primary responsibility is to fix the complex coral bead outfit and accessories of the Oba and look after his wardrobe and state regalia. The other two societies are *Iweguae* and *Ibiwe* (cf. Bradbury 1957: 37).

Also in his early forties, Ebo Okah also inherited the art of divination from his father. After his secondary education in his native village in one of the local administrative areas within the Oba's sphere of influence, he went on to acquire a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Finance from one of the polytechnics in Edo State. It was after his post-graduation National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) programme that he began practising four-cowrie divination.[23] He believes that the ancestors called him to discharge the sacred responsibility, and his shrine, located in the southern part of Benin, is a hive of activities for devotees of African traditional religion. He celebrates the various deities in his shrine every Friday. Oka notes that he has watched a few Edo language video films that valorise Edo culture and traditional religion but that for the most part, the films venerate Pentecostal Christianity at the expense of the former:

> Today, no producer wants to hear traditional religion triumph in their movie production because of fear of the movies not being sold [sic]. They portray all that for commercial interest. I can also say that the directors [producers] censor what is being said in the movies…. Every reasonable people will ask despite the growing number of churches, why is evil or crime escalating?... There are some Bini [Edo] movies that teach cultural behaviour; that teach how to prostrate and greet elders, while there are others that teach that a lady must be betrothed before they get married… The Bini [Edo] movie producers are playing good roles in teaching the younger generation the dos and don'ts of our culture, despite the fact they tend to promote other religion [Pentecostalism] as compared to the African traditional religion (Ebo Okah, personal interview September 17th 2018).

Ebo Okah contends that rather than blaming Edo language video film producers for the prevalence of Pentecostalism in their films, it is the audience that should be criticised for their dishonesty. While audience members ostensibly desire the

[23] The National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) programme was set-up by the Nigerian government in 1973 as a post-civil war reconstruction, reconciliation and rebuilding mechanism for graduates of universities and other tertiary educational institutions in the country. It is a one year programme that includes paramilitary training, and professional and skills service to the community that the corp members are deployed to serve. Its primary objective is to foster unity, friendship and understanding among the youths from the various component parts of the country and graduates are usually deployed to parts of the country other than their places of birth or origin.

positive messages that Pentecostalism has to offer as proof of their religiosity, they perpetrate crimes, and commit social and moral vices in the society. He emphasises that if the audience members adhered to the messages of the video films, whether they are Pentecostal or traditional religious oriented, Benin society would be a better place than it currently is. He suggests that it is the audience members that are driving Edo language video filmmakers' unrepresentative portrayal of the state of religion in Benin.

Okah says that while the audience members openly demand for the dominance of Pentecostalism in Edo language video films, and many display their religiosity by going to church every weekend, it is the same audience members who come to his shrine every Friday to celebrate with him and worship the various deities in the shrine. He goes on to suggest that many of them maintain altars in his shrine and that some of them even hold key positions in Pentecostal churches:

> I have lots of them as clients [Pentecostal Christians]. Even some of the *Oronmila* installed here are for them and some pastors. All these idols you see around are not mine. But somebody will claim to be a deacon, for that reason, they don't want people to see the idols in their house. One of them here belongs to a prominent woman with a big house in Benin but because visitors frequent her house, she decided to hide them here (Ebo Okah, personal interview September 17th 2018).

Okah argues that despite Edo language video film producers' elevation of Pentecostal Christianity above African traditional religion in their films, the filmmakers are doing a good job in the propagation of the moral values that enhance Benin society.

Offering a much more radical view, Texty Ogie, another prominent traditional leader in Benin, contends that Edo language filmmakers are on a mission to destroy African traditional religion. But he says that regardless of their efforts, traditional religion will always be there because it is intricately intertwined with the culture of the people. He is of the opinion that the filmmakers are aware of

the true state of the two religions but that they are using their films to suppress the popularity of African traditional religion and elevate Pentecostal Christianity just to satisfy the yearnings of those who want to identify with the latter in public:

> That is what they [filmmakers] picture to you because they want to suppress it [African traditional religion]. But has that entirely erased traditional religion? They want to tell you that [Pentecostal] Christianity is uppermost…let them [Nollywood producers] make traditional religion victorious in their films, it will not sell [sic]…what they [filmmakers] do…is like somebody who has a very sharp cutlass, he uses it to trace part of a bush…media [film] are like that…it's like going to farm to use your weapon. That's all they do, using it to suppress. But suppressing can never ever end the [traditional] religion because God knows who is fighting for him (Texty Ogie, personal interview October 1st 2018).

Born into a traditional religious family, Texty Ogie had his secondary education in Benin before travelling to the United Kingdom, where he graduated with an honours degree in Business. He is also a prominent member of the *Iwebo* palace society. He describes his role in the palace as that of a 'seer' for the Oba. Well regarded within the palace circle, he was the secretary of the Benin Traditional Council (BTC) until his retirement. He claims he does not take Pentecostal Christianity seriously because the churches are just places of entertainment and that no matter what the Pentecostal pastors do, the Edo person will remain loyal to the Benin traditional religious beliefs.

According to him, there is no doubt that Pentecostal Christianity is the most visible and probably the most publicly acclaimed religion in Benin in the twenty-first century. But the widespread acceptance of the religion has also led to a correlative rise in the level of immorality and criminality in Benin. He also argues that just like the other social phenomena that were introduced to Benin in the past, Pentecostalism will also eventually fade away while the religion of the people will remain. He goes on to emphasise that it is now easy for criminals and perpetrators of immorality to avoid traditional justice dispensation in Benin by proclaiming Pentecostal Christianity, for the same reason stated above.

Ogie says that the audience's pretentious claim to Pentecostal Christianity has driven Edo language filmmakers to continually demonise African traditional religion in their films. But in spite of this development, he argues that the filmmakers sometimes recognise the role that traditional religion plays in the life of Benin Kingdom in their films, stressing that there are some Edo language films that he has watched, which highlight the importance of traditional religion. He says he acknowledges the fact that the filmmakers are in the business to make money but that they should strive for balance in the portrayal of religions in their films. He advises them to always try to project Edo culture in a way that it would be attractive to non-Edo speakers.

The discourses of traditional leaders in Benin further affirm the complicated experiences various audience members have with the technology of film. The traditional leaders claim that Edo language video filmmakers do not adequately reflect traditional religion because they want to make a profit from the large Pentecostal followership. Also, they blame the audience for making unrealistic demands that do not even represent their own religious outlook. In a sense, this argument strengthens the notion that the filmmakers do not privilege either of the two religions but use their values for the wellbeing of Benin, and shows that there is a distinction between Edo traditional religious culture deployed as cultural product for social and political purposes, and as practised distinctly for spiritual self-realisation. It also means that they do not consider themselves as part of the ethno-nationalistic agenda of the filmmakers.

On a wider scale, like the Pentecostal pastors, the traditional leaders' discourses provide an in-depth understanding of how film engenders different actions, attitudes, and reactions from diverse audiences. The audience members of English language Nollywood video films accuse the film producers of exaggerating Pentecostalism, thus creating a wrong impression amongst those not familiar with the local religious ecology. The Pentecostal pastors in Benin argue that Edo language filmmakers favour traditional religion in their films, while the traditional leaders blame the audience members of Edo language video

films for the filmmakers' prioritising of Pentecostal Christianity. This suggests that while the audio-visual characteristic of film remains the same, the contents of the technology provoke diverse attitudes and responses from audiences at different times, depending on the situation. The attitude of both sets of leaders in Benin further nuances the complicated experiences film generates. Traditional and Pentecostal leaders are in agreement in the sense that Edo language video films do not fully capture their religions, but they diverge in their reasons for Edo language filmmakers' behaviour. Their opinions are vital in contemporary Benin religious cosmology. Nevertheless, as Larkin emphasises (2008: 2), their responses to the messages of Edo language video films illustrate the bond between technology and the body, and prove that unlike the simplistic suggestion of English language Nigerian video films, the experiences of audiences even within a homogeneous linguistic group can be in flux because of varied interests.

6.6 Audience Perception of Religion in Edo Language Films

This section explores the perception of religion in Edo language video films by their audience members. Although the study is fairly limited in scope, it nonetheless reveals the many ways and patterns audience members respond to the messages of film. As Edo language video filmmakers stress their concern for the moral health of Benin, the perception of the audience is crucial in the overall understanding and assessment of this mission. Apart from this, the audience's views also illustrate the current state of Edo language video films as a means of asserting Edo ethnic identity in a multi-ethnic nation-state.

Respondents were made up of audience members that are familiar with the local religious field; that is, native Edo speakers, those who are resident in Benin and interested in Edo history, language and culture, and those who share ancestral and cultural ties with the historical Benin Kingdom who may, or may not, be proficient in the standard Edo language. The respondents were drawn mainly from Pentecostal Christian and African traditional religious backgrounds, but

there were also a few participants from the broader Christian faith and other religions. As stated in Chapter two, a questionnaire was the main tool used to retrieve data and information from the participants. Friends and family members who work at the various outlets administered the questionnaires. Details of the respondents in terms of gender, age etc. are also explained in Chapter two. Using questionnaires ensured that the findings are more representative of the audience's views. Unstructured interviews in the form of conversations were also deployed to elicit more in-depth responses from some of the participants to strengthen the investigation, but some of the information was also based on the author's socialisation with Edo speakers in Benin.

One hundred questionnaires were administered and eighty-six were retrieved. Of the eighty-six that responded to the question 'do you watch Edo language video films?', seventy, representing 81.3 per cent, confirm that they watch Edo language video films on a regular basis. Sixteen participants, representing 18.6 per cent, say they do not watch Edo language video films. The finding confirms Osakue Omoera's (2014a) argument that Edo language video films enjoy a widespread acceptance in Benin. Omoera has also stressed that Edo language video film industry is 'bursting at the seams' (2014a: 123) and goes further to explain that this is evident from the number of production organisations that are scattered around Benin City. This claim is buttressed by the bustling activities of production personnel at the Oba Akenzua Cultural Centre Benin City, the main hub for many of the Edo language video film professionals at the time of the study, especially those who have subscription channels on *You Tube*.

Pentecostal Christianity constitutes the religious background of the majority of the respondents, with forty-eight of the seventy respondents who state that they watch Edo language video films on a regular basis professing the religion, representing 68.5 per cent. Twelve of the respondents, representing 17.4 per cent, adhere to African traditional religion while nine, making up 12.8 per cent of the respondents, say that they belong to other Christian denominations or other religious faiths. In Chapter three, the argument was made that Pentecostal leaders in Benin emphasise the dichotomy between Pentecostalism and African

traditional religion but that the Oba of Benin stresses the compatibility of the two religions based on their shared values. The question 'why do you watch Edo language video films?' was included to find out whether the dichotomy emphasised by the Pentecostal leaders or the compatibility stressed by the Oba is reflected in the way the audience members perceive the portrayal of religious values in Edo language video films. Thus Pentecostal Christian and African traditional religious values were deliberately separated to determine if the audience's answers would reflect any dichotomy or compatibility.

Of the survey participants who provided answers to the question, fifty-nine, representing 84.2 per cent, say they watch Edo language video films because of the portrayal of Edo traditional religious values. Two respondents, representing 2.8 per cent say that they watch the video films because of the portrayal of Pentecostal Christian values. Comic and entertainment values serve as the main attraction for eight participants, which make up 11.4 per cent of the audience. In Chapter two, it was stated that despite the rhetoric of the Pentecostal leaders regarding the distance between the two religions, many Edo speakers – including the author of this thesis – believe that Pentecostalism and African traditional religion share similar values. Edo language video film producers argue that they adopt and adapt the Pentecostal values that are compatible with Edo values to promote the moral wellbeing of Edo citizens and Benin society. The finding of this question confirms the compatibility theory of the filmmakers. Since the two religions share similarities in values, the audience members perceive their values as one.

Many of the respondents state that they watch Edo language video films for their traditional, cultural and moral values. The audience members the researcher interacted with through conversations and unstructured interviews also confirm this position. They assert that Edo language video films teach them the traditional, cultural and moral values of the historical Benin Kingdom, with one informant saying 'I like Edo films for their historical value. They help to keep the history alive… I am also captivated by the way they speak the language. The Edo language they speak in the films reflect how the language was spoken in the

early centuries'. A carpenter by trade, which frequently takes him away from home for a long time, the informant argues that 'Edo [language] films also help to impart moral values on the youth … and I use it [them] to teach my children because I don't spend a long time with them'. This argument could be interpreted as affirming the notion that Edo language video films represent a major source for the dissemination of Benin moral codes. It also reinforces the idea that Edo language video filmmakers are the 'modern elders' through whom wisdom and knowledge are transmitted to the audience, particularly the younger members, in the twenty-first century.

A few non-Edo native speakers also confirm that they watch Edo language video films in the survey. The main reasons that were cited by these members, particularly those that the researcher interacted with through unstructured interviews, were the language and the moral messages contained in the video films. One non-Edo native speaking informant states: 'I love the way they speak the language. Edo films are a good way of getting the grounding in the language'. But the same informant expresses her dislike for how the filmmakers convey the language in a different circumstance. She says: 'what I don't like about the films is the way they curse [invoke the deities against those who have committed moral wrongs]. Sometimes, it makes you really scared of the deities'. In the previous chapter, the argument was made that Edo language video filmmakers and some audience members consider the language as being in a moral quandary in the twenty-first century. The non-Edo native speaking informant's assertion confirms this, but also highlights that as the filmmakers' pan-Edo ethnic project is reverberating with those who have connections to the historical Benin Kingdom, audience members of Edo video films are drawn into a spiritual world that may be frightening to outsiders. By being morally instructive and frightening at the same time, the statement also affirms that the language part of Edo video films is contested. More widely, the informant's argument suggests that audience experience of film as a technology is complex even at the personal or individual level.

It is also noteworthy to emphasise here that although informants expressed their concern about the high cost of Edo language video films, they still endeavour to buy them because of the importance they place on the films' role in their personal lives and in the twenty-first century Benin society. In Chapters one and two, it was noted that Edo language video films costs about N200.00 (0.50p), which is twice the cost of English language video films. Moreover, many filmmakers engage in the production of English language video films to off-set the cost of producing the Edo language version. This means that Edo language video films are a labour of love that is supported by both the filmmakers and the audience.

As stated throughout the thesis, many English language Nollywood video film producers elevate Pentecostal Christianity above African traditional religion in their films. The questions 'what do you think of Edo language filmmakers' portrayal of Edo religious culture and tradition?' and 'what do you think of Edo language filmmakers' portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity?' were designed to find out if Edo language video filmmakers are also echoing the dominant Nollywood religious narrative in Edo language video films. Out of the seventy that responded to this question in terms of the portrayal of Edo religious culture and tradition, sixty-one, totalling 87.1 per cent, think that Edo language video film producers portray Edo religion and tradition positively, while six of them, that is 8.5 per cent, think the filmmakers portray the religion and tradition negatively. Three respondents, translating to 4.2 per cent, think they do not know whether the portrayal of the religion is positive or negative. In relation to the portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity, forty-two of the survey participants, representing 60 per cent, are of the view that Edo language video filmmakers depict the religion positively. At the same time, twenty-seven of them, meaning 38.5 per cent, think the video film producers depict the religion negatively.

This finding demonstrates that on the whole, Edo language video filmmakers portray the two religions positively in the eyes of their audience. However, the result also indicates that the audience perceives Edo language video film producers' positive portrayal of the two religions as skewed in favour of Edo

traditional religion and culture. Although the finding affirms the filmmakers' argument that they do not privilege any of the two religions in their films, there is an understanding among the audience members that Edo traditional religion and culture enjoy a more positive portrayal than Pentecostal Christianity. More crucially, it challenges the widely held notion that video filmmakers in Africa demonise African traditional religion.

The findings of the next set of questions further illuminate the filmmakers' portrayal of the two religions. 'When there is a clash between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity in these films, do you think Edo traditional religious culture is portrayed positively or negatively?' and 'when there is a clash between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity, do you think Pentecostal Christianity is portrayed positively or negatively?' were meant to specifically address the issue of the frequent demonisation of African traditional religion by African video filmmakers, especially when there is a confrontation between the two religious doctrines. This is despite the fact that many Edo language video filmmakers hardly portray a direct confrontation between the two religious doctrines. In addition, the two questions were shaped to test the validity of Edo language filmmakers' claim that they objectively engage with the values of the two religions.

Thirty-six participants out of seventy, representing 51.4 per cent, believe that Edo language video filmmakers reflect Edo traditional religion in a positive light when it comes in conflict with Pentecostal Christianity, while thirty-three of them, representing 47.1 per cent, think the filmmakers reflect the religion in a negative light. For Pentecostal Christianity, thirty-seven of them, totalling 52.8 per cent, are of the opinion that the filmmakers reflect the religion positively when it comes in conflict with Edo traditional religion and thirty of them, representing 42.8 per cent think the producers reflect the religion negatively. The outcome of this inquiry is revealing in many respects. First, it reaffirms the film producers' assertion that they strive for balance in the portrayal of the two religions. Second, it indicates that the filmmakers are interested in adopting only the values of the two religions that are in consonance with good ethical

behaviour in Benin. Third, it confirms that the filmmakers' engagement with religious values is insofar as they promote the moral wellbeing of Benin. The split right down the middle in terms of the audience's perception of religious depiction could be interpreted as a validation of the filmmakers' argument that they do not intentionally promote any religious cause.

Audience members' response to whether the depiction of the two religions is truly reflective of their nature further confirms the filmmakers' claim to religious neutrality. Fifty-one of the seventy participants, representing 72.8 per cent, think that Edo language filmmakers' portrayal of Edo traditional religion is truly reflective of the nature of the religion, while seventeen of them, representing 24.2 per cent, believe that Edo traditional religion's portrayal is not truly reflective of its nature. In the case of Pentecostal Christianity, forty-one of the respondents, totalling 58.5 per cent, think the portrayal of the religion is truly reflective of its nature, and twenty-three of them, making up 32.8 per cent, are of the opinion that the portrayal is not truly reflective of its nature. The outcome of this question shows that the majority of the audience sees the filmmakers as unbiased in their engagement with the two religions. But again, even though they depict the two religions positively, it clearly reveals that the filmmakers' positive portrayal of Edo traditional religion is considered more realistic than their depiction of Pentecostal Christianity. This further brings into question the widely held belief that African video filmmakers prioritise Pentecostal Christianity in their films.

The point has also been made in Chapter three that from the late twentieth century onward, Pentecostal Christianity has become the most visible and popular religious movement in Benin. It has also been stated that although most Edo citizens publicly proclaim Pentecostalism, many of them still hold dearly to their traditional religious values and beliefs. The questions 'do you participate in any Edo traditional religious ceremonies or rites?' and 'do you participate in any Pentecostal Christian worship or ceremonies?', were meant to determine the openness of the audience's religiosity. The next set of questions 'do you believe that some Pentecostal Christians are also adherents of Edo traditional religion,

either openly or secretly?' and 'do you believe that some Edo traditional religious followers are also adherents of Pentecostal Christianity, either openly or secretly?' were structured to find out whether the audience members think it is likely that others are either openly declaring one religion and secretly following another. It was also intended to test the claims of traditional religious leaders that many of their followers are also Pentecostal Christians.

On the question of participating in Edo traditional religious practices, twenty-three participants, representing 32.8 per cent, admit to participating in Edo traditional religious activities and forty-four participants, representing 62.8 per cent, say they do not participate in Edo traditional religious activities. On participating in Pentecostal Christian activities, sixty respondents, making up 85.7 per cent, admit to participating in Pentecostal Christian activities while nine of them, representing 12.8 per cent, do not participate in Pentecostal activities. What this result translates into is that it confirms that many Edo citizens openly declare Pentecostal Christianity as their religion and that it is the most popular religion in Benin. However, the result also indicates that a large minority openly subscribes to traditional religious practices. The next set of questions however unpacks this open Pentecostal religiosity.

On whether they believe that some Pentecostal Christians are also adherents of Edo traditional religion, sixty of those surveyed, representing 85.7 per cent, say they believe that some Pentecostal Christians are also adherents of Edo traditional religion. Only nine respondents, representing 12.8 per cent, do not believe that some Pentecostals are also adherents of Edo traditional religion. On the reverse question, sixty-one participants, totalling 87.1 per cent, believe that some Edo traditional religious followers are also adherents of Pentecostal Christianity, while nine, making up 12.8 per cent, do not believe that some Edo traditional religionists are also adherents of Pentecostalism. The implication of the two sets of questions could be taken to confirm that many Edo language video film audience members openly profess Pentecostal Christianity, but that a significant number of them also hold strongly to traditional religious beliefs and values, whether openly or secretly. It also confirms the claims of traditional

religious priests in Benin that many Pentecostal Christians are also their followers.

As Edo language filmmakers, Pentecostal leaders, and traditional religious priests have stressed the moral, spiritual and religious authority of the Oba in the lives of Edo people, the questions 'do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin is still relevant today?' and 'do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin still influences how Edo people identify themselves religiously?' were meant to interrogate this assertion. Given the socio-political, economic, cultural and religious transformations that have taken place in Nigeria since the British invasion of the ancient Benin Kingdom, which have eroded much of his political and economic influence, the first question was to determine the relevance of the Oba in the lives of Edo film audience members. The second was designed to specifically find out the influence of the Oba in how Edo film audience members identify with religion.

Out of the eighty-six participants surveyed for 'do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin is still relevant today?', eighty, denoting 93 per cent, agree that the institution of the Oba is still relevant in the twenty-first century. Four of them, representing 4.6 per cent, do not agree that he is still relevant. On the question of 'do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin still influences how Edo people identify themselves religiously?', sixty-six of the eighty-six survey participants, representing 76.7 per cent, agree that the Oba still influences how Edo film audience members identify with religion, while sixteen, or 18.6 per cent, do not agree that the Oba still influences how Edo film audience members identify with religion.

The findings confirm that the Oba of Benin is still very relevant in the lives of Edo film audience members. Omoera (2014a: 127) argues that Edo language video filmmakers are preoccupied with the portrayal of Benin royalty in their films. This finding justifies the filmmakers' preoccupation with the portrayal of royalty in their films. Also, as the personification of Edo culture and tradition, the widespread acknowledgement of the Oba's influence in the cultural and spiritual

lives of the audience members could be taken to mean that he symbolises the filmmakers' celebration of Edo ethnicity. Although the percentage of the audience members who think the Oba still influences how they identify with religion is lower than that of those who think he is still relevant, the results suggest that the Oba influences how the audience members identify with religion. This may mean that those Edo citizens who, despite having embraced Pentecostal Christianity, still hold strongly to their traditional religious beliefs and practices, an indication that they follow the Oba's lead in religious matters.

Overall, the outcome of the survey shows that Edo language video films are popular with the wider Edo language film audience members for their portrayal of the values of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion, and the use of their values to celebrate Edo ethnicity. It also illustrates that the relationship between Pentecostalism and traditional religion in Edo language films is part of a wider, and internally differentiated debates about identity, belonging, and progress among Edo speakers. In this conflict, Pentecostal Christianity and Edo traditional religion occupy different positions. However, they are not as clearly opposed in Edo language video films as they are in the English language Nollywood films. By serving as moral guidelines that also complement and confirm each other, Edo language video films mobilise the two religions also in partly overlapping roles. Also, while the positions of Pentecostal and traditional religious leaders indicate the binary roles of the two religions in Benin, the roles are not so clearly expressed by the wider audience members of Edo language video films.

In Chapter three, it was argued that the boundaries between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion are blurred and contested. This is also confirmed by the comments of the survey respondents. One of them, a Pentecostal Christian, argues that 'Edo traditional religion and culture has Pentecostal Christian [values and] beliefs as well'. Another respondent, also a Pentecostal Christian suggests that 'Pentecostal Christianity cannot wipe out Edo traditional religion and culture because culture is part of our lives, so nothing can wipe it out. Culture is culture'. In the same vein, a traditional religious

adherent states that Edo language video films represent Pentecostal Christianity 'in all areas because Edo people as a whole understand that Edo traditional religion is almost the same as Pentecostal Christianity'. However, survey responses are usually not unanimous. For instance, Pentecostal respondents also implicitly criticise the depiction of traditional practices in Edo language video films. One Pentecostal Christian respondent says that 'Edo [language] films is more centred on idol, which is not our traditional values [sic]. There are things the Edos [sic] are known for. That is what they [filmmakers] should teach us the new generation [sic]'.

Also, as highlighted in the previous Chapter, language is an important aspect of the culture of a people. While most of the wider Edo language film audience members agree on the fluidity of the boundaries between Pentecostal Christianity and traditional religion and the neutrality of the filmmakers to the portrayal of religion, in conformity with audience experiences of film since the late colonial period, they encounter the language part of Edo video films in a contentious situation. Most audience members embrace the portrayal of Edo language in its Benin Kingdom's 'fullest sense', but some audience members criticise the depiction of the language in its contemporary form in some Edo language video films. For example, in an apparent reference to films like *Ukhure Enikaro*, one respondent argues 'It [Edo language video film] makes me happy seeing others speaking my language and it make[s] me to know more about my language'. Another respondent emphasises that 'I like Edo language and it [Edo language video film] makes us understand culture [and] to practice the language'. But a respondent, in an obvious allusion to films such as *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu*, says 'Some of the producers don't portray Edo language well because when they are acting Edo movies, even the major characters … cannot even speak Edo language [well] at times'.

Even though the question of the portrayal of the misdemeanours of religious figures such as pastors and traditional religious priests was not specifically stated in the questionnaires, discourses about their depiction were noticeable in Benin at the time of the fieldwork. Some Pentecostal adherents reject the

caricaturing and the clandestine collaborations of pastors with traditional religious priests in films such as *Amugbugbe* and *E'Pastor Vbe Ozedu*, arguing that they reflect the Biblical narrative of the Jews rejecting and castigating Jesus Christ. However, as already highlighted, most audience members, including many Pentecostal Christians, do not share this opinion because they perceive the possibility of such collaboration as realistic. For example, the involvement of a Pentecostal pastor with the traditional realm for spiritual powers was in the news during the period of the research for this thesis (Vanguard Newspaper 2015).[24] Many informants openly voiced their knowledge of this and suggested that such acts are a common place. Also, in an apparent agreement with the assertion of Dr Ikhuen, they alleged that some traditional religious priests also compromise justice and fairness for material gratification and abuse their authorities. As such, they contend that the reflection of the transgressions of religious leaders by Edo language video filmmakers is not out of place.

Like the views expressed by the audiences of English language religious films, the responses of the general Edo language film audience members validate the notion that the boundaries between Pentecostalism and traditional religion are hazy and are constantly negotiated and contested. Unlike the approach of many English language religious video film producers, their perception also demonstrates that Edo language filmmakers realistically portray the religious state of Benin. It confirms that identity, belonging, and progress, are expressed in internally differentiated debates. Although clearly identifying with a particular religion, most Edo language film audience members participate in, and identify with, the rites and ceremonies associated with Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. For instance, the same Pentecostal Christian respondent who claims that Edo language films are profuse with idol worshipping also argues that '[I watch the films] for their traditional religious and cultural values' and '[I participate in traditional] *Igue* Festival'.[25] A

[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKPwGHjsxkM

[25] Igue is the flagship festival of Benin Kingdom. It is a month long festival (December – January) that marks the beginning of Edo people's traditional New Year. At the festival, prayers are offered to Osanobua and the ancestors for peace, prosperity, good health, fertility, and progress

traditional religious devotee emphasises that '[I participate in] *Igue* Festival' and [take] 'Holy Communion [in church]', while another traditional religionist says '[I participate in church activities] sometimes only if invited personally'. These discourses of the audience members mean that the dichotomy between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion should not be as clearly defined in religious films as the English language Nollywood producers depict, and that identity, belonging, and progress, are constantly in flux.

The findings of the survey and the narrative of the wider audience members point to the fact that Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion play different but similar and complementary roles in contemporary Nigerian society. On the one hand, for Edo film audience, Pentecostal Christianity symbolises modernity and progress. It grants the audience members access to opportunities offered by the twenty-first century. Identifying as a Pentecostal Christian indicates the level of education and socioeconomic status. On the other hand, professing African traditional religion or identifying with its rites and ceremonies signifies the ethnic identity of the audience members and their spiritual ties to the land. The two religions help to delineate the audience members' sociocultural space in an ethnically diverse nation, and reflect their contemporary religious nature in a globalised world. This intricately interwoven relationship between Pentecostalism and traditional religion in Benin also accounts for the perceived Edo language video film producers' balanced and positive engagement with the two religions to construct the identity of, and celebrate Edo ethnicity.

6.7 Conclusion: Audience Perception of the Portrayal of Religions and Ethnicity in Edo Language Video Films

This Chapter illustrated that audience experience of film is not as simple as the English language Nigerian video filmmakers portray it. While they present a

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in the coming year. It is usually attended by Edo people from all over Nigeria, including those living in Europe and North America

shallow approach to religious video film spectatorship, the perception of Edo language film audience shows that indigenous language film production functions in a highly distinctive local context. Within this local setting, the audience members view Edo language religious films differently, and their varied interests shape these differences. Like the English language counterparts, Edo language video films are popular in Benin. However, in contrast to the English language films that attract criticisms from the spectrum of the audience for their idealistic depiction of the Nigerian religious field, Edo language religious video films are received in a contest of debates.

The specialist audience members do not embrace the films albeit for different reasons. Pentecostal leaders reject Edo language religious video films because they think the filmmakers pander to African traditional religion. Consequently, they do not perceive themselves as part of the pan-Edo ethnic cause of the filmmakers. Edo traditional religious leaders distance themselves because they perceive the filmmakers as being driven by the large Pentecostal followership to favour Pentecostalism. Although in a subtler manner, they also see themselves as outsiders to the filmmakers' ethno-national agenda. Nevertheless, the wider audience members that are constituted of both Pentecostals and traditional religionists view Edo language filmmakers as the 'modern elders' of the twenty-first century. They see the filmmakers' portrayal of the two religious doctrines as unbiased, and perceive them as making valuable contributions to the moral and social wellbeing of Edo citizens and Benin more generally.

The analysis of the experience of seeing film as having more impact than the content of film itself echoes with the Benin situation (see Larkin 2008: 2). Here, it is not the atmosphere the purpose-built space generates around cinema that influences the differentiated actions and reactions to film, but the interests of the various segments of Edo language film audience. Edo speaking Pentecostal pastors denounce the films because they are more interested in the realisation of the ultimate objective of Pentecostalism, which is the attainment of eternal after life, and traditional leaders condemn Edo language video films as a result of their interest in the preservation of Edo traditional religious culture in its spiritual

form. However, for the broader audience members, it is the fact that Edo language films teach them the values of old, and galvanise those who trace their ancestry to the historical Benin Kingdom into a sense of nationhood, that attract them to the films. Although they disagree on the language aspect, most audience members appreciate Edo language films for the moral and educational values, and the frequent portrayal of Benin royalty, which defines their ethnicity. In rejecting the films, many Pentecostal and traditional religious leaders argue that they do not watch them because they believe the films favour the other religion. In a sense, their argument suggests that they watch the films, as it is only on that basis that they can reject the contents.

Unlike the simple approach by English language Nollywood filmmakers, the case of Benin also shows that film can order and be ordered by audiences in different ways. The diverse interests of the various segments of Edo language video films determine whether the films are considered as appropriate rather than moral, or inappropriate instead of immoral. The films are not moral or immoral because although they disagree with the representation of their religions, Pentecostal and traditional religious leaders still consider certain elements of Edo language video films as important. And given a different scenario, Pentecostal and traditional religious audience members of Edo language video films may see the portrayal of their religions differently. This suggests that the medium of film and the actions and reactions it generates are fluid, and can be as varied as the ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. Furthermore, even though the broader audience members perceive Edo language filmmakers as being more positive of traditional religion than Pentecostalism, overall, they see the filmmakers as objectively deploying the values of the two religions for the benefit of Edo citizens and Benin society. It also means that they are embracing the filmmakers' pan-Edo ethnic project.

The audience's perception of Edo filmmakers' more positive portrayal of traditional religion brings into question the narrative that Nigerian video film producers privilege Pentecostal Christianity over traditional religion in their films. It is true that many English language Nollywood producers prioritise

Pentecostal Christianity, but the perception of the audience members shows that a new approach is needed in the study and discussion of Nigerian religious video films. Rather than focusing on the resolution of the battle between good and evil in favour of one religious doctrine in a film, the new approach should be cognisant of the understanding of the overarching philosophy of film in a given locale. For Edo language video filmmakers, religious video film is about mobilising the values of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion for the promotion of the moral and ethical wellbeing of Benin and the celebration of Edo ethnicity. It is not about locating good or evil in the Pentecostal or traditional religious universe or about the propagation of any explicit religious agenda.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of the Focal Points of Study

This study focuses on Edo filmmakers' portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in the Edo language video film version of the Nigerian video film industry popularly known as Nollywood. The dissertation argues that Edo language religious video films mirror the Benin religious landscape, which is dominated by Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. In contrast to the English language Nigerian religious video films, the messages of Edo language video films are not simple in the sense that the moral values embedded in each religious video film are not necessarily a validation of the doctrines of one religion. The main concern of Edo language video filmmakers is not pursuing the religious cause of either Pentecostalism or traditional religion, but using their respective values to addressing the moral health of Benin, which they believe has come under strain from globalisation and migration. Thus the doctrines of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion become only important to Edo language video filmmakers insofar as they are relevant to the moral needs of Benin. As a result, they do not promote one religion over the other in their films but use both as vehicles to nourish the moral health of Benin society and Edo citizens, whether at home or in the diaspora.

The thesis contends that Edo language video filmmakers engage with the values of Pentecostalism and traditional religion as part of their agenda to construct a pan-Edo ethnic identity and cultural nationalism. This project is related to discourses about marginalisation, with many filmmakers asserting that because of their population size, Edo people are sidelined from participating in the socio-political and economic mainstream of contemporary Nigeria. To address this,

they mobilise the values of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion that reverberate with the values of the historical Benin Kingdom to celebrate Benin and Edo ethnicity in the twenty-first century. The aim is to bring together the various groups that trace their ancestry to the ancient Benin Kingdom and to confirm the values and importance of Edo identity. In addition to Pentecostal and traditional religious values, the filmmakers also draw on iconic sites and symbols, such as the institution of the Oba of Benin, traditional and historical landmarks, songs, idioms, the exploits of past heroes, and other accoutrements, in their pan-Edo ethnic construction and celebration. Edo language video film producers also deploy their films to address a perceived lack of understanding of Edo culture and proficiency in the language, in particular among the younger generation and those living in the diaspora.

The dissertation also illustrates that the audience members understand Edo language religious video films as part of a contested debate that reflects audience experiences of the medium since the twilight years of colonialism in Nigeria. Most audience members appreciate the appropriation of Pentecostal and traditional religious values in enhancing the moral wellbeing of Benin, but they disagree when it comes to the language aspect of Edo language video films. While many audience members value the expression of the language that reflects its Benin Kingdom's nature because of its perceived educational and moral enlightenment, some condemn the way it is deployed in some video films that echoes its contemporary form of moral and ethical decline. Furthermore, the specialist audience groups of Pentecostal and traditional religious leaders are more reserved about the films, albeit for different reasons. Even though they affirm their Edo ethnicity by acknowledging the authority of, and pledging their loyalty to, the Oba of Benin, the Pentecostal pastors distance themselves from Edo language video films because they perceive their messages as pandering to African traditional religion. This suggests that they are more interested in the Christian self-actualisation of an eternal after-life than in the utilisation of their religion's values for socio-political purposes. On their part, the traditional religious leaders and priests dissociate themselves from Edo language religious video films because they see the portrayal of their religion as an attempt to

commodify Edo religious culture. Their position indicates that they are more focused on the preservation of Edo traditional religious culture in a 'pure' sense; that is in its practice strictly for spiritual self-realisation, rather than as a deployment for social or political causes.

The findings of this thesis have consequences for the study and discourses of African religious video films, the philosophical underpinnings of African religious video films produced in English or any other colonial inherited language and those produced in indigenous languages, and the role and place of mass mediated technology such as film and video in the construction of ethnic identity and pursuit of cultural nationalism. These consequences are set out in the subsequent sections.

7.2 Key Findings

The study establishes that generally, Edo film producers portray Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion positively in Edo language video films. Largely, the audience perceives African traditional religion as enjoying a more positive depiction in Edo language films than in English language video films. The films are also seen as engaging with the values of Pentecostalism and traditional religion in an unbiased or equitable manner to address and enrich the moral wellbeing of Benin. The filmmakers' attitude towards the two religious doctrines is formed by the religious landscape of Benin.

In the twenty-first century, Pentecostal Christianity is the most widely professed and practiced religion in Benin. However, a significant minority of the population also adhere to African traditional religion, and most of the Edo population still hold strongly to many of its beliefs and practices regardless of their religious affiliations. Although many of the filmmakers are Pentecostal Christians, and some are African traditional religious adherents, their religious affiliations do not play any significant role in their portrayal of the two religions. The film producers' main concern is the overall moral health of Benin, which

they feel is supported by both religions. This view is closely linked to the leadership of the Oba of Benin, who stresses the compatibility of the two religious doctrines. Despite the transformations that have taken place over the years, the Oba's position as the spiritual leader of Edo people means that his moral authority remains significant in the spiritual and religious lives of the people.

Based on this, the research suggests that Edo filmmakers use their films as a form of cultural and national assertion of Edo ethnic identity. They mobilise the values of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in this regard. The filmmakers' commitment to Edo culture is often explained by the experiences of Edo people in an ethnically diverse Nigerian nation, where they are perceived to be marginalised because of their relatively small population size. But the films also appeal to Edo speakers in the diaspora.

7.3 Video Film, Morality, Religion, and Self-Assertion in Benin

As illustrated in the thesis, video films have grown to become a significant part of the many sources of shaping moral and ethical behaviour in Benin in the twenty-first century. Whether in celluloid or video format, scholars have emphasised the ability of film to speak to and mould the moral fabric of society (Akpabio 2007, Ebewo 2007, Krings and Okome 2013, Maton 2018). For instance, Amaefula (2016: 168) makes the case that by depicting the norms, values and beliefs in a realistic manner, film becomes a mirror through which society sees itself. More crucially, by making powerful use of audio and video, which people can easily relate to, he stresses that film readily becomes a potent medium for shaping attitudes and behaviour in society.

In the ancient Benin Kingdom, the responsibility of shaping attitudes and behaviour was bestowed mainly on the elders, who disseminated morality through the wisdom of storytelling under the trees by moonlight, idioms, songs and proverbs. However, over the years, the socio-economic changes that have

taken place both at the global and local levels introduced a new form of transmitting moral messages in Benin. From the late twentieth century onward, the emergence of video film as a form of cultural expression in Edo language has broadened the scope and mode of cultural and moral edification, by transporting storytelling from under the trees by moonlight to the small screen in the living room. As set out in the thesis, Edo language video filmmakers have become the elders of the twenty-first century. And they see the dominance of traditional religion and Pentecostalism in contemporary Benin as a veritable chance to reinforce and propagate the Benin moral values and to project the Edo ethnicity. Hence, they are appropriating the values of the two religions in equal measure for that purpose.

The coming together of Christianity and traditional religion for the wellbeing of Benin in the twenty-first century, which the Edo language video filmmakers see themselves as being in the vanguard of, is not an entirely new development in history of the kingdom. As has been stated in the dissertation, over five hundred years ago, Christianity and traditional religion also converged in the interest of Benin Kingdom, when with the aid of the Portuguese missionaries; the kingdom was able to defeat the Attah of Igala in a war that is known in Benin as *Okuo Atta* or the Idah War (Aisien 2013: 10). Afterwards, the two religions co-existed in the kingdom, with Christianity recognising the existence of traditional religion in Benin but considering it harmless to its cause (Kalu 2008: ix). This co-existence was exemplified by the Oba's maintenance of access to the two religions, and the symbolic depiction of the Benin traditional swords of *Ada* and *Eben* in the mould of the Christian cross on the attires of traditional chiefs even in the twenty-first century. However, the growth and visibility in the public sphere of the Pentecostal thread of Christianity from the latter part of the twentieth century, with its mantra of urging its adherents to 'make a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998), ruptured this innocuous relationship.

As explained in the thesis, the Pentecostal doctrine of rupture is problematic in Benin in the twenty-first century not only for Edo citizens but also for the filmmakers. Many of the Edo language video filmmakers, as with most Edo

citizens, are Christians, particularly of the Pentecostal type. Although some of them are rigid in their religious views and outlook, when it comes to the edification of Benin society, most of them see Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion as two sides of the same coin. In fact, there is a strong sense among many of them, as it is with many Edo people, that the two religions share similarities in terms of doctrines, in the sense that they both encourage good moral behaviour and reflect their identities in the twenty-first century. African traditional religion reflects their ethnic identity, symbolises their spiritual connection to the land, and defines their place in the globalised world, while Pentecostal Christianity represents the progress they have made and reflects their modernity in terms of the privileges offered by the globalised twenty-first century. This understanding shapes the moral messages of Edo language video films. Therefore, the embrace of the two religions by Edo filmmakers is not a rejection of the Pentecostal mantra of rupture or an affirmation of the supremacy of traditional religion in Benin. Rather, it should be seen as the filmmakers' direct contribution to the moral wellbeing of Edo citizens at home and in the diaspora, and as their attempt to outline Edo people's socio-political, religious, and economic space in an ethnically plural Nigeria and the globalised world.

Furthermore, Edo language film producers' appropriation of the values of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion goes beyond the moral edification of society. It is an essential part of a wider process of constructing and celebrating Edo ethnicity in a diverse Nigerian nation. Before the British occupation, Benin was a thriving kingdom with an established administrative system that had the Oba at the helm (Egharevba 1960: 81-2, Igbafe 1967: 702). He was the chief executive and commander-in-chief of the kingdom, and Benin existed as an independent geopolitical entity. Above all, as already shown in the thesis, the Oba symbolises Edo identity. While the new administrative system set up by the British in what is known in Benin history as the period of interregnum undermined much of the Oba's political authority, the 1914 amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates that gave birth to the Nigeria nation also had a lasting impact on the status of the kingdom (Gore 2007:

24, Osadolor 2011: 45-58). It effectively reduced Benin from a powerful independent kingdom to a minority unit in a nation where access to political and economic resources became determined by the size of its component parts (Ukeje and Adebanwi 2008: 577-8, Gore and Pratten 2003: 212-3, Lawal 2016: 3-4).

To break out of the cycle of marginalisation, some ethnic minority groups in the country have resorted to a range of strategies, including militancy, to make their voices heard and to push through their demands (Ukeje and Adebanwi 2008: 583-6, Gore and Pratten 2003: 212-3). But through the 'non-threatening' (Dias, cited in Maton 2018: 659) medium of video film, Edo filmmakers are providing a voice for the citizens of Benin to express their aspirations. Their messages of the exploits of the Oba and the past heroes of Benin Kingdom are particularly intended to inspire the youths who have been mostly impacted by globalisation and migration, with many of them increasingly growing up outside of Benin and in the diaspora. Also, Edo video filmmakers recognise the marginal nature of Edo language in contemporary Nigeria and the threat it faces from both globalisation and the three dominant ethno-linguistic groups in the country. They believe that many Edo youths are no longer proficient in Edo language because of the external forces of globalisation and migration. Hence, as part of the cultural nationalistic celebration of Edo ethnicity, they use the medium of film not only to preserve Edo language but also to serve as a key instructional medium especially for the younger generation and those in the diaspora.

Edo language video filmmakers are critically aware that preserving Edo language is crucial to their agenda. Many of them argue that it is precisely because of their concern for the future of the Edo language, and the moral health of Benin, that they are engaged in indigenous language film production. Ultimately, the stated ambition of the filmmakers is to reinforce the values of the historical Benin Kingdom that can imbue the younger generation with the values of being a good person in the twenty-first century. In the process, they also hope to equip them with the language skills that will make these moral values appear natural to them. The filmmakers believe that this will help guarantee peace and harmony

not only in Benin but also among Edo citizens in the diaspora. To this end, Edo language video films are not just about using the values of religion to improve the welfare of society; they are also a socio-political commentary on the state of Benin and Edo ethnicity in the twenty-first century Nigeria and the globalised world.

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge

The focus of this dissertation is African video filmmakers' representation of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion. The dominant discourse of this narrative is the privileging of Pentecostal doctrines by African video filmmakers producing English and other colonial inherited languages films. This study is an attempt to contribute to and perhaps explore new ways of looking at this discourse. In addition to challenging the status quo in relation to the discourse of the portrayal of the two religions, it also advocates for a new paradigm in studying the role of African language films in ethnic identity construction and the formation of a cultural nationalist agenda.

By exploring the representation of Pentecostalism and traditional religion in Edo language video films, this thesis contributes to the existing discourses of the representation of Christianity and African traditional religion by African video filmmakers. Its argument is premised on the fact that not all African video film producers demonise traditional religion at the expense of Christianity. In Edo language video films, good or evil does not reside exclusively in the realm of Pentecostal Christianity or traditional religion respectively, but is seen in both religions. It is the use of these values that determines whether the adherents of these religions are good or evil. Hence, this study challenges the current narrative about the relationship between Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in video films. It calls for a new approach to this discourse based on the fact that even in the positive portrayal of the two religious doctrines, the audience members of Edo language video films think that the

filmmakers give more prominence to African traditional religion than Pentecostal Christianity.

The study also makes a contribution to the literature currently discussing African video film as an area of relatively homogenous cultural production. On the basis of its exploration of Edo language video films, this thesis suggests that there may be a difference in philosophy or attitude underpinning video films made in foreign or colonial inherited languages in Africa and those made in African indigenous languages. Therefore, lumping African video films made in foreign or colonial languages and those made in indigenous languages together as one genre is misleading, and silences the objectives and or purposes of African language video film production. As discussed in the thesis, aimed at large audiences, some scholars have argued that English language religious video films are more oriented towards commercialism (Ukah 2003, 2012, Meyer 2005). However, indigenous languages video films, as illustrated by this study, may be mobilised for highly particular reasons, which may include the social, moral, and political status or wellbeing of the group they represent.

The research also contributes to the debates about ethnic identity and cultural nationalism and the factors that foster them. Existing literature on this discourse is profuse with the prominent role of religion, especially Christianity, and the media in this regard. This study highlights that while religion, print, and music, are important in the formation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism, the role of mass mediated technology such as video and film is equally as crucial in the cause of ethnic identity and cultural celebration. The thesis also adds to the discourse of minority ethnic marginalisation by illustrating how film and video could be used to assert ethnic identity and cultural nationalism. It also highlights the role mass mediated technology play in the preservation and teaching of ethnic minority languages threatened by globalisation and migration.

Although this study has focused on Edo language video films, the findings may have implications for video film production across Africa. The exploration of Edo language video films could offer a valuable means of comprehending how African

indigenous language video films may work differently from English or any other foreign language video films. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the portrayal of religious values in video films transcends face value judgment.

7.5 Areas for Further Research

In the process of writing this thesis, it was found that Edo language video film is closely involved in constructing a pan-Edo ethnic identity and cultural nationalism. Because the filmmakers see many of the values of Pentecostal Christianity and contemporary Edo traditional religious values as chiming with the values of the ancient Benin Kingdom, they believe that adopting them on equal terms would galvanise those who trace their ancestry to the kingdom into a cohesive entity in the twenty-first century.

This pan-Edo ethnic cause becomes even more imperative for Edo language video filmmakers because of the perceived marginalisation of Edo ethnicity in Nigeria. As already stated, some of the filmmakers and members of Edo language video film audience are already keying into this agenda. And the author of this thesis has also seen some indigenous language video films that seem to suggest that the pan-Edo ethnic agenda is taking root.[26] However, it is an area that should be further investigated by future researchers. It is necessary to examine whether film producers from other groups that trace their ancestry to the historical Benin Kingdom, such as Esan, Afenmai, Owan and Akoko-Edo, are engaging with pan-Edo ethnic ideas. It is important also that future research should focus on the reception of Edo language video films among the diasporic audience, especially on the contested language strand. Going forward, this will form part of the author's plan to further broaden the knowledge of indigenous African language video films' consumption in the diaspora. Future research is

[26] *Ikhue Ebe* is one of the video film productions that seem to promote the pan-Edo ethnic agenda. The film is an Edo-Esan production and the dialogue constantly switches between the two languages. The actors are drawn from Edo and Esan and the video film displays accoutrements, values and norms that are commonly associated with ancient Benin. The video film can be viewed on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZ86R6eQL9M.

also needed to investigate whether indigenous language video film production is central to the construction of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism in other parts of Africa.

Future scholarship of African religious video films need to also closely engage with the technical details involved in the construction of religious encounters and symbols. Besides helping to illuminate the understanding of African religious video filmmakers' thinking when it comes to ascribing good or evil to a religion, such engagement will also provide a knowledgeable insight into the processes involved in the depiction of religious accoutrements in African films more generally. Also worthy of further research is the adoption of Pentecostal and traditional religious values in equal measure. Exploring this in other African indigenous language video films will further enrich the discourse of religious video films on the continent.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Synopses of Edo Language Religious Video Films

The following synopses have been arranged in the order in which Edo language video filmmakers' engagement with religion is discussed in Chapter four, that is Pentecostalism, traditional religion, and their ambivalent attitude towards the two religions. The order is broken into three sequences for easy cross-referencing and understanding. Although the dates of productions of the video films are not chronological, together with the analysed films in Chapter four, they however illustrate the filmmakers' consistent philosophical approach over at least a decade. Also, where possible, the links to these films have been provided for future researchers interested in the films.

Orobosa (In God's hand)

A 2011 Moonlight Concept International Ltd production, in the film, *Orobosa*, the character, Orobosa (In God's hand) is the only child of a wealthy woman, and they live in the city. She is married to Izekor (I am reserved [Not quick to anger]), a commercial motorcycle rider, popularly known as *Okada*. Despite the poverty and the willingness of the mother-in-law to help, Izekor is determined to carve a life for himself and his family without her assistance. But his business is floundering and he is unable to pay their house rent. The landlord threatens to evict the family, but the mother-in-law intervenes and pays the rent, including the backlog.

Afterwards, the mother-in-law promises to get them out of their desperate situation, by sending Izekor to the United States. Initially, Izekor declines the offer, opting instead to invest the money in a business in Nigeria. But his wife, Orobosa, insists that he has to travel to the US. The pastor of their church warns her against mounting pressure on

Izekor, but she does not heed the warning. Izekor eventually agrees. By now, the mother-in-law's fortune has taken a turn for the worse. However, in order not to disappoint them, she goes to borrow money from her friend, a loan shark. Eventually, Izekor travels to the US. Thereafter, in her bid to ensure that Izekor and his mother-in-law are unable to pay back the loan, the loan shark seeks the help of an African traditional religious priest. Her ultimate goal is to take possession of the estate used in securing the loan.

Meanwhile, Izekor's older sister also plots to blind his focus on Orobosa, who is now pregnant with Izekor's child. She also consults an African traditional religious priest, who supernaturally cages Izekor. Now, he is spiritually under her control. Then, calamity engulfs the family. To start with, Izekor neglects his responsibilities to his wife and the unborn baby. He refuses to pay their house rent in Nigeria and Orobosa is evicted as a result. She then becomes destitute. Izekor also refuses to repay the loan used to finance his trip to the United States. In her determination to get her hands on the property used to guarantee the loan, the loan shark poisons Izekor's mother-in-law with a lethal substance, and she dies.

After a while, Izekor falls sick in the US and is deported. Back in Nigeria, a now rehabilitated Orobosa is seen in the company of the pastor and his wife, picking up Izekor at the coach station. She now lives with them. Later at the home of the pastor, Izekor is cured of his ailment and he is offered a job in an oil company. His sister also confesses her misdeed. Then, the husband of the loan shark walks in and hands over the documents of the property used to secure the loan to Orobosa. He tells them that the loan shark has died mysteriously. The pastor then prays for the forgiveness of everyone's sin. In the end, the moral order is restored.

Link 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFN8SObNoeE
Link 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR5athIhVtg

Emwinkure (The one that was rejected by all)

Produced in 2020 by Itohan Igbinidu Film, the film, *Emwinkure*, focuses on a child that was sent by the ancestral gods to perform healing and miracles, and to restore order to a rural community. Named Emwinkure (The one that was rejected by all), she grows up to become not only a powerful woman but also an attractive lady that is desired by all the young men in the community. In the beginning, Emwinkure is seen on her knees. Her mother, Ovbigbaghon (Daughter of the ocean), the High Priestess of the community, is circling around her and ringing a bell. Seemingly in a trance and mumbling incantations, she looks up to the sky and speaks loudly, heaping praises on Emwinkure and asking the gods to fortify her with extreme power so that she can ensure the community's prosperity and save its members from untimely death. She also admonishes Emwinkure never to abuse the power of the gods. After the fortification ritual has been performed, Ovbigbaghon takes Emwinkure to the palace, where she informs the Enogie that the gods have ordained Emwinkure as the next High Priestess of the community. Enogie formally ratifies the anointing and urges Emwinkure to emulate the sterling precedence set by her mother.

Then Iyayi (I believe), a widow, is seen lamenting the mysterious disappearance of her son, Omokaro (Child is the frontier of the home). Years later, Emwinkure has grown into a beautiful woman brimming with supernatural power. Standing before her mother, she tells her that the Enogie needs her attention at the palace. There, the Enogie, with his daughter sitting next to him, thanks Emwinkure for resolving his problem. Surprised at the reverence the Enogie shows Emwinkure, the daughter asks him the reason for such reverence. Enogie informs her that Emwinkure is the cornerstone of the community. Immediately she defers to Emwinkure. Next, Ovbigbaghon comes to see Iyayi. She instructs the

distraught Iyayi to wipe her tears, saying that the gods have revealed to her that Omokaro will soon return home. Pleasantly surprised at the prediction, Iyayi smiles and thanks the High Priestess and the gods of the land and sea for the message. Later, we see the High Priestess and Emwinkure sitting at the backyard of their house. Ovbigbaghon advises Emwinkure against having any sexual relationship until such a time that the gods permit her to do so. She tells her it is a key requirement of the office and that it is a taboo to go against the wishes of the gods. Ovbigbaghon assures Emwinkure that when the time comes, she will let her into the secret of procreation in the lineage.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the community, Efianayi (You must leave this one), an elderly man, is bedridden and dying. He summons up enough strength to call his wife, who is somewhere else in the house. On arrival, Efianayi tells her that he is not likely to recover from the illness and advises her to take good care of their daughter, Ifueko (Comfort). Afterwards, he dies. Not giving up, the wife rushes him to the palace of the Enogie, who summons Emwinkure to bring Efianayi back to life. Emwinkure then recites some incantations and sprinkles some concoctions on the face of Efianayi. Seconds later, he sneezes, opens his eyes, and rises on his feet. Everyone is in awe of Emwinkure and they sing her praises. Later, Efianayi comes back to express his gratitude to the Enogie, who tells him to go and thank Emwinkure instead.

Then we see that in the midst of a thunderstorm, a male figure emerges from the forest. It is Omokaro, who was swept into the forest about twenty years previously. Now grown up and in dreadlocks, he surveys the environment for a while, and then slowly walks away. Moments later, he arrives home and finds his mother sweeping the premises. Unsure of what she is seeing, Iyayi moves closer to examine Omokaro. She spots a birthmark on the side of his face, confirming that it is indeed her missing son. Ecstatically, she ushers him into the house. Later Iyayi takes Omokaro to see the Enogie, who blesses and welcomes him back to the

community. As time passes, Omokaro becomes very popular with the single ladies in the community, who all want him for a husband. First we see Ifueko doing the chores for Iyayi to impress Omokaro that she has the qualities of a good wife. Then we see him with Imuetinyan, another young lady. The two want him for a husband but he turns them down. His action is more devastating for Ifueko, who has already told her mother that Omokaro is planning on marrying her. She goes on hunger strike but the father prevails on her to forget about Omokaro.

However, while the ladies are falling over themselves to attract his attention, Omokaro is focused on marrying Emwinkure. We then see him and Emwinkure on the path leading to the farm. Omokaro seizes the opportunity to express his love but Emwinkure lambasts him for making such a sacrilegious offer. She warns him never to repeat it and walks away in annoyance. In the next scene, Ifueko's father, Efianayi, is at the palace reporting to the Enogie that he caught Emwinkure cavorting with a man under the tree on his way from the farm. By now, Omokaro and Emwinkure are in a relationship. The Enogie summons Omokaro to the palace and tells him that what he is doing with Emwinkure is an abomination. Enogie warns Omokaro that if he does not stay clear of Emwinkure, he will banish him from the community. However, Omokaro is determined to marry Emwinkure. Later, he is in search of Emwinkure at her house but runs into her mother, the High Priestess. She confronts him and Omokaro tells her he wants to see Emwinkure. Angered by his impudence, Ovbigbaghon asks Omokaro to leave the premises.

However, she then recognises Omokaro's spiritual power and calls him back. She politely tells him that Emwinkure is not at home and tells him that he should not come back there until she invites him. After sometime, the High Priestess invites Omokaro, and her daughter, Emwinkure, to a meeting. She informs Omokaro that the gods have given their permission for them to marry. Ovbigbaghon also relays the message of the gods to the Enogie, who also gives his approval. Enogie admonishes them to use

their combined supernatural powers for the good of the community. Eventually, Omokaro and Emwinkure become husband and wife, live happily after, and the community enjoys peace, harmony, and prosperity.

Link 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xu6loHtWfpE
Link 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCQrT1Cx8Hk

Osahenrunmwen (God has heard my prayer)

A 2020 production of Degbueyi Oviahon Film, the film, *Osahenrunmwen*, is about Pastor Osahenrunmwen (God has heard my prayer). He is a pastor who is relentless in his championing of the Pentecostal narrative of rupture and is able to convince many members of the community to abandon their traditional and ancestral gods. Notable among the converts is Sister Gloria, who is a widow with two daughters, Osayuki (God created the moon) and Imuetinyan (My strength rests on [God]). At the behest of Pastor Osahenrunmwen, Sister Gloria burned the late husband's ancestral shrine and prevailed on the daughters to become choir members at Pastor Osahenrumwen's church.

We see the head of Sister Gloria's late husband's family calling on her to implement the instruction of the gods that the ancestral shrine should be restored, but she refuses. Her daughter, Osayuki, urges her to carry out the family's wish but her mother rebukes her and expresses disappointment at Osayuki's utterance. Also, Pastor Osahenrunmwen advises Gloria not to give in to the family's demands, saying the traditional gods belong to the past and that Jesus Christ is the only guarantor of peace, prosperity, and moral order. Irked by Gloria's intransigence, the family head complains to the traditional religious priest of the community, who appeals to him to calm down. The traditional religious priest assures the head of the family that Gloria will come back

to him begging for forgiveness. Moments later, Sister Gloria is seen preaching to one of her friends to also give up her ancestral worship and become a member of Pastor Osahenrunmwen's church. Reluctantly, her friend agrees to accompany Sister Gloria to church the next Sunday, but stresses that she will not abandon her ancestral gods until she gets a spiritual confirmation of Osahenrunmwen's calling.

We then see Gloria plucking some vegetables from her back garden. Suddenly, her friend comes running to her. Panting, she tells Sister Gloria that she has just seen Pastor Osahenrunmwen emerging from the shrine of the traditional religious priest. Sister Gloria laughs off her friend's suggestion that the pastor was there to seek for power from the traditional realm. She convinces the friend that Pastor Oshenrunmwen went to the shrine to preach to the traditional religious priest. After a while, the friend comes running back to her again. This time, she insists on Gloria accompanying her to the shrine of the traditional religious priest. There, in the midst of traditional religious worshippers, they catch Pastor Osahenrunmwen dressed in full traditional regalia. He is seen kneeling down and invoking the power of the ancestors to boost the membership of his church.

Shocked beyond belief, Sister Gloria accuses Pastor Osehnrunmwen of deceit. Whereas he knows that there is power in the traditional sphere, she argues that Pastor Osahenrunmwen convinced her to part with her own shrine while he continues to depend on the traditional gods. On hearing this, the traditional religious priest is livid. He brands Osahenrunmwen a 'sacrilege pastor' and threatens to invoke the wrath of the gods on him if he does not restore Gloria's traditional shrine. The traditional religious priest calls Osahenrunmwen a fake pastor and accuses him of giving the few genuine pastors a bad name. On second thought, he decides against invoking the gods because pastors like Osahenrunmwen keep them in business, but the traditional religious priest insists that he must restore Gloria's shrine.

Gloria also asks Osahenrunmwen for a two and a half million naira (£5,700) compensation for her loss of the spiritual protection of the gods. Osahenrunmwen protests against the amount, saying that it was precisely because of poor membership and the concomitant insufficient offerings they give that drove him to seek for power from the traditional realm. Gloria threatens to expose his duplicity if he does not cooperate, but the traditional religious priest intervenes. He appeals to Gloria to accept one and a half million naira (£3,000) while Osahenrunmwen compensates the traditional realm with the sum of five hundred thousand naira (£450). In the end, Pastor Osahenrunmwen promises to refrain from condemning traditional religion and the traditional priest forgives him.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCTxvM3Yqeg

E'Pastor-Igue (Village pastor)

Produced by Ehis Agoba Film in 2019, the story of this films focuses on a Pentecostal pastor who moves to a rural community to preach the gospel. In the community, he is simply known as '*E'Pastor-Igue*' (Village pastor). E'Pastor-Igue is a man with disability who fervently prays for the people, healing the sick, and restoring sight to those who were blind. He limps on one foot and suffers from speech impairment. Because of his exploits, some members of the community begin to doubt his source of power. Some even mock his disability, arguing that if he is genuinely so powerful as he claims, he should be able to heal himself first before curing others.

On one of his several evangelising exercises in the community, E'Pastor-Igue encounters Iye-Osazee (Osazee's mother), an elderly woman. She is stricken with grief over the state of her son, Osazee, who migrated illegally to Europe but finds himself in limbo, as he does not have the legal

status to work or participate in the real society of the unnamed European country. E'Pastor-Igue spiritually identifies the cause for this predicament. He prays over it and reveals to Iye-Osazee that her son's status in Europe will soon be regularised. He also predicts that very soon, her son will phone her to let her know of the change of status. Meanwhile, a woman (character unnamed in the film) complains to the Odionwere (Non-hereditary chief) of the community that E'Pastor-Igue is in the community for no good, and that Odionwere should expel him. Odionwere however turns her down, arguing that he has not seen anything evil in whatever E'Pastor-Igue has done. Unhappy with Odionwere's response, the woman goes to complain to Iye-Osazee, who also agrees with the Odionwere.

Later, Osazee is seen driving his car into the community. He surveys it with his eyes and reminisces about his childhood. He has just returned after a long time. His mother gladly welcomes him back home and later the audience see Osazee driving his car past the woman who complains about E'Pastor-Igue. He immediately stops and emerges from the car to greet the woman, who is shocked to see him. After exchanging pleasantries, Osazee gives her money, promising that he will come over for a visit. In the next scene, we see Osazee and his mother at the 'church' of E'Pastor-Igue'. The 'church' is nothing but a table and a chair under a tree in the back garden of a mud house in the village. Osazee is shocked at the state of the pastor but his mother pricks him to show some respect. E'Pastor-Igue prays for him and then Osazee gives him money in return, which E'Pastor-Igue reluctantly accepts because he is in the community for good and not for money.

As they arrive back home, Osazee suddenly loses his sanity. He runs mad and begins to utter gibberish. The mother calls for help. Among those who come to help is the woman who always complains about E'Pastor-Igue. She begins to shout at the top of her voice, saying that Osazee's madness is a confirmation of her suspicion of E'Pastor-Igue'. She accuses

him of casting madness on Osazee. Now confined to a bed in his mother's house, Osazee's condition continues to deteriorate. His mother cries to E'Pastor-Igue for help. Later, we see E'Pastor-Igue praying fervently for Osazee. After a long while praying intensely, he strikes Osazee's head with the Bible and commands the evil spirit to depart. Suddenly, Osazee regains his sanity and he is shocked to find himself in a decrepit state. He thanks the pastor for the healing but E'Pastor-Igue is modest and says that the glory should go to God instead. In the final battle, as E'Pastor-Igue walks back to his 'church', the woman who always complains about his presence in the village suddenly confronts him. She accuses him of always undoing her evil deeds and says that she is here to finally put an end to the antagonism. A protracted duel ensues between the two. Eventually, the forces behind E'Pastor-Igue overpower her and she dies.

Link 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFsO0Rya-4k
Link 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTenoBKUSPE

Iyobo (Help)

Iyobo is a 2018 film written, co-produced, and directed by Anita Tongo for Idowu Agbes International Company Ltd. It is about two young ladies, Iyobo (Help) and Ivie (Priceless gift), who live with their mothers in the village. They are frustrated by the routine of life in the village and Iyobo expresses her desire to move to the city, where she thinks opportunities abound for any ambitious individual. Even though Ivie is also disenchanted with village life, she is sceptical about going to the city where she knows no one. Iyobo is however determined to take a chance by living with Otasowie (The end is greater than the beginning), an orphan who left the village after her parents were killed in a car crash. She moves with Otasowie to the city while Ivies stays behind in the village to look after her mother, as well as Iyobo's mother.

In the city, Iyobo is introduced to a group of young ladies, who also live with Otasowie and spend time discussing and hanging around men – a lifestyle she begins to emulate. Later, she is introduced to Nosa (What God says), a young single man who immediatey falls in love with her. She eventually decides to go back to the village to visit her mother. Immediately on arrival, she is seen by a young lady, who goes straight to Ivie's house to inform her that her friend is in the village. Irate that Iyobo has been in the village for some time without coming to see her, Ivie vows to deal with her for not acknowledging the sacrifices she has been making for her mother while she (Iyobo) has been away in the city. Ivie takes the matter to her mother, who promises to sort it out for her.

Ivie's mother is later seen consulting a traditional religious priest, who gives her a magic charm that will ensure that she supernaturally spins Iyobo around her finger. Moments later, as a result of the effect of the magic charm, Iyobo invites Ivie to join her in the city. On arriving the city and seeing the progress Iyobo has made, Ivie's jealousy hits the roof and she sends words back to the mother in the village. Her mother gets her some more magic charms. She attempts to harm Iyobo but her (Iyobo) dead father's spirit rises to her defence every time she tries. Her mother goes back to the traditional priest to inform him of the ineffectiveness of the magic charms. In the meantime, Nosa engages Iyobo and gives her a ring to that effect and moments later, she announces that she is pregnant and Nosa promises to marry her.

They later go to the village for the marriage, accompanied by Ivie. During the ceremony, Ivie smears some substance on Iyobo's face but again, the spirit of Iyobo's dead father comes to her defence. Ivie's mother runs back to the traditional priest, who comes to the marriage ceremony with Ivie's mother to engage in a duel with the spirit of Iyobo's dead father. In the end, Iyobo's dead father's spirit triumphs over the traditional

religious priest, who dies along with Ivie's mother. Ivie later confesses her sins and is forgiven by Iyobo.

Link to Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exyz97gKMNc
Link to Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5_o5c5ThsI

Ohen-Osa (Priest of God)

Ohen-Osa (Priest of God) is a 2020 Twinko Avielele Film. It is about a Reverend Father posted to a rural community by the Catholic Church. In the opening scene, Reverend Father Gabriel is seen introducing himself and Zacchaeus, his assistant, to the Odionwere (Non-hereditary chief) of the community. The Odionwere gives him the blessing and admonishes him to be of good behaviour so that his presence impacts positively on the community. The community is made up mainly of youths, but also some elderly community leaders. Among the youths is Imuetinyan (My strength rests on [God]), a young lady who lives alone in the village. Both parents are dead but she has a younger sister, Christabel, who lives in Benin. Even though he has never met her, Osasenaga (God is worth serving), one of the young men in the community, is attracted to Christabel. Together with his younger brother, Aigbogun (No one kills the god of iron), he places himself at the disposal of Imuetinyan, doing chores and tending to her needs, including hewing firewood, fetching water from the stream, sweeping the premises etc. These are all in the hope of winning Christabel's love. Osasenaga and Aigbogun also have a young sister called Orhue (Happiness), who is irritated by Osasenaga's slavish attitude. Osasenaga and Aigbogun also strike an unequal friendship with Reverend Father Gabriel, and they run errands for him.

Osasu (God leads), a young lady who also lives in the community is the girlfriend of Friday, a young man who stammers. Friday is seen warning Osasu not to go near or be seen with Reverend Father Gabriel because he

does not trust his conduct, which he perceives as pretentious. Meanwhile, Father Gabriel, now widely known in the community as 'Pope', embarks on evangelising the community, starting with the children. Then we see Christabel arriving from Benin to visit Imuetinyan, who is so glad to receive her. Osasenaga and Aigbogun become aware of Christabel's presence and they work hard in fulfilling their domestic chores to impress her. But rather than interpreting their effort as love, Christabel sees it as comic relief and refers to them as comedians. Later, the 'Pope' is seen strolling around the community in the company of Osasenaga, Aigbogun, and Zacchaeus. Then Christabel and Imuetinyan are also seen walking down an adjoining path. They meet at the junction. Dressed provocatively, Christabel greets Father Gabriel and flaunts her cleavage. Angry at her attitude, Imuetinyan pulls her away and lambasts her for cheapening herself. Moments later, we see Esohe (Grace), another young lady who lives in the community, and her widowed mother at the residence of the 'Pope'. Esohe's mother complains about her immoral ways and pleads with the 'Pope' to pray for her.

Next we see Christabel coming to visit Father Gabriel at home, saying that she wants to be his friend. The 'Pope' accepts her proposal and prays for her. On her second visit, Christabel turns up in an even more revealing outfit. She flashes her breasts in the 'Pope's' face. Unable to resist her, they go inside the house to make love. Thereafter, the 'Pope' throws caution to the wind. He begins to sleep with every young lady that turns up at his place for prayers and gets them pregnant. First in the line of pregnancy is Christabel. Although Osasenaga still has not made his intention known at this stage, he sees this as an affront and threatens to deal with the 'Pope'. Then Father Gabriel gets Osasu, Friday's girlfriend, pregnant, and then Esohe. News gets to the headquarters of Father Gabriel's Church in Benin about his escapades. They send a priest of the church to the community. The member tells the 'Pope' that he has been defrocked.

Later, the 'Pope' and the priest sent from Benin are at the palace of the Odionwere. The priest from Benin informs the Odionwere that the 'Pope' has been expelled from the church and that they can deal with him in whatever manner that suits the community. Odionwere advises the 'Pope' to go and take care of his 'wives'. He takes a walk of shame and leaves the Odionwere and the delegate from Benin to continue their discussion. After finishing their discussion, the Odionwere escorts the guest out of his compound. On the way, they encounter Ifueko, an intellectually disabled girl in the community. As she walks past them, she mutters a greeting. Immediately, the visitor from Benin senses something wrong with her in the spirit. He calls her back, prays for her, and calls on the name of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to heal her. Suddenly, Ifueko falls to the ground. Seconds later, healed of her affliction, she rises up and begins to check her body to see if everything is back to normal. At this juncture, Imuetinyan appears. Surprised to see Ifueko healed, she screams in joy and takes her away, saying that at least the delegate has shown that there is good in Catholicism.

Moments later, the 'Pope' comes to see the Odionwere, pleading that since he has been punished by the Catholic Church, the Odionwere should appeal to the ancestral gods not to penalise him for violating the young ladies in the community. Odionwere tells him that he cannot speak for the ancestors and that their instructions are always carried out accordingly. Frustrated, the 'Pope' walks away. On his way, Osasenaga, Aigbogun, and Friday, confront and humiliate him for the laughing stock he has become in the community. At home, we see Christabel, Esohe, and Osasu, arguing outside over who is the rightful wife of the 'Pope'. They have now moved in with the 'Pope'. Soon, the argument deteriorates into a fight. In the midst of the commotion, the 'Pope' emerges from the house. Looking obviously helpless and depressed, he walks away from the fight and towards the camera. As he is lamenting his predicament, special effects indicate that the ancestral gods strike him down supernaturally and he dies, bringing the film to an end.

Link 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVnlMFjRua0

Link 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5pMa1xjsk0

Etin-Osa (The Power of God)

Ebuwa (Child born in affluence) has been married to Odigie (One that is established) for over a decade without offspring. Ebuwa is a devout Pentecostal Christian while Odigie is a firm believer in African traditional religion. They, and especially Ebuwa, are under pressure from Odigie's extended family, which blames Ebuwa for their inability to have children.

One day, the in-laws come to the couple's home with another wife for Odigie. Not long afterwards, Esohe (Grace), the new wife, is pregnant. She gives birth to a baby girl and she begins to torment Ebuwa over her infertility. Ebuwa is resolute in her belief that God will gift her with a child. Shortly thereafter, she falls pregnant and gives birth to a son named Osaebueku (God does not pervert justice).

Esohe becomes even more pugnacious towards Ebuwa and her son, and with the aid of an African traditional religious priest, she hatches an evil plan to eliminate Osaebueku. The traditional religious priest however warns her that there is a grave price to be paid if the gods find Osaebueku innocent. Later, Osaebueku is falsely accused of murder. He is found guilty in court and sentenced to death. Ebuwa is distraught and she consults her pastor who assures her that her son will not die.

Eventually, the criminal who committed the murder is arrested in a bar and confesses to the killing. Osaebueku is set free at the last minute by the governor of the state. In the end, Esohe pays the price, and she is killed in a car crash.

Link 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvS9qo1saRU

Link 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmX6sw6Tp1g

Iyodo-Niko (Atrocious Mother-in-Law)

Directed by Maris Iyamu for Triple .O. Production Resources Nigeria Ltd in 2018, *Iyodo-Niko* (Atrocious Mother-in-Law) features Ogieva (Comrade) and Eronmwon (Precious jewel) as a young couple with a daughter. In the opening scenes, we see the husband, Ogieva, dressing in front of the mirror and calling on Eronmwon to hurry up as they are getting late for a scheduled ceremony and Eronmwon scampering out of the bedroom and in a panic. She informs Ogieva that their daughter, Ughegbe (Mirror), has fallen sick and that they need to take her to the hospital. Ughegbe is taken to the hospital and there, the doctor, after examining her, confirms that she urgently needs a bone marrow transplant to save her life, at a cost of nine million naira, of which the hospital's NGO partners will subsidise by seventy per cent. The transplant is done but could not save her.

Ogieva and Eronmwon are distraught and Ekhoe (Mind), Ogieva's mother, is invited to come and look after Eronmwon in her period of mourning, while the husband goes to work. Rather than console her on her loss, she begins to torment her, accusing her of killing her daughter and constituting a barrier in her son's desire to have another child. Eronmwon's friend, Esohe (Grace), on a visit to commiserate with her, gets a taste of Ekhoe's repugnant attitude. She informs Eronmwon's mother of her daughter's situation and Eronmwon's mother decides to go and see for herself. At the couple's home, Ekhoe interrogates Eronmwon's mother on why she has decided to visit, telling her she is not

welcome in the house. Irate at Ekhoe's temerity, she fights back and the house is turned on its head. Unable to take it anymore, Ogieva and Eronmwon decide to send them both back to the village and the two mothers leave at the same time.

Moments later, we see Ekhoe come back to the house. Shocked, Ogieva questions her and she claims that she is back to collect something she had left behind. With that excuse, and unbeknown to Eronmwon's mother, she returns to the house. Esohe goes back to the village to let Eronmwon's mother know that Ekhoe is still at her daughter's place. She decides to go back as well but before she can do that, she is murdered by some young men. Later, Ekhoe tries to convince her son to marry another wife but he resists. Regardless of this, Ekhoe goes to the village to make arrangement for another wife for Ogieva. She brings the woman to Ogieva's home but he is resolutely committed to Eronmwon and refuses to sleep with the woman. Frustrated at his intransigence, Ekhoe goes to a traditional religious priest and gets a magic charm that will work on him to make him love the new 'wife'. They are not married and Ogieva hardly knows the 'new wife'. The spell works on Ogieva and he is 'in love' with the new 'wife'. Eronmwon loses her sanity, runs mad, and becomes destitute.

Later, we see the new 'wife' cleaning their bedroom and she stumbles on the magic charm Ekhoe placed under the matrimonial bed. She picks it up, takes it to the living room where she meets Ekhoe and Ogieva discussing, and confronts Ekhoe with it. Misunderstanding the situation, the new 'wife' accuses Eronmwon of influencing Ogieva with the magic charm so that he would love her eternally. But Ekhoe screams at her saying she has violated the golden rule governing the charm and as a result has brought the repercussions on her mother-in-law. Ekhoe begins to confess her misdeeds, revealing that she sent hitmen to kill Eronmwon's mother and that she is responsible for Eronmwon's state of mind. After that, the curse reverts to Ekhoe and she runs mad, while the

new 'wife' abandons her 'marriage', flees back to the village, and Ogieva recovers from the spell and goes after Eronmwon. After searching for a while, he finds her at a rubbish tip. Moments later, she also recovers and they are both re-united as husband and wife.

Link Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w70tImDtK7s
Link Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zjz7_xKmb0

Alagiebo (The one who stirs up trouble)

Alagiebo (The one who stirs up trouble) is a 2011 Wavido.com production. It is set in a community featuring Uzebu (Great), a young man who goes to the village to marry Ivie (Priceless gift), a beautiful, but uneducated young lady. Pastor Samuel also lives in the community. He is a Pentecostal pastor who preaches around the community, calling on members to abandon their traditional religious worship and to embrace Pentecostalism. Before conversion, Pastor Samuel was known as Alagiebo. Although he openly advocates the cause of Pentecostalism, he is a closeted African traditional religious worshipper, and traditional religion is also his source of power. Iye-Osaro (Mama Osaro[God is alive]) is a shopkeeper in the community. She has little contact with formal education but considers herself to be better educated than everyone else in the community. She is also Uzebu's lover. Other members of the community are Okoro (Prince), who is also uneducated but parades as a teacher, Akpako (Older twin), Uzebu's close friend, 'Doctor', who runs a local chemist that dispenses expired medicines to community members, and Imade (I defied [the evil intentions of the world]), a beautiful but naughty young lady, who is widely believed to sleep around with men for money.

In the beginning of the film, Uzebu is seen coming from the village with Ivie. They stop by Iye-Osaro's shop to buy groceries. Being lovers and

having not seen Uzebu for sometime, Iye-Osaro embraces him enthusiastically and enquires about his long absence. Uzebu is in an awkward situation and he cannot wriggle his way out. Angered by his uneasiness, Ivie walks out on Uzebu and threatens Iye-Osaro that she will be back for her. Later, Ivie comes to Iye-Osaro's house to confront her. In response, Iye-Osaro reels out gibberish in English and Ivie leaves in tears, perceiving it as a humiliation. On getting home, she convinces Uzebu to hire a teacher to home school her in the English language. Uzebu hires Okoro to do the job, but he plots to use the opportunity to sleep with Ivie.

In the following scenes, Okoro is also seen to verbalise love references in meaningless English. He is able to charm her, and later Ivie sits on his lap and they get cosy. Then, Uzebu walks in and catches them in the compromising position. He flares up and chases Okoro away from the premises. Later, he narrates the ordeal to Akpako and they arrange to teach Okoro a lesson. On the way to Okoro's place, they stumble on Pastor Samuel proselytising. Pastor Samuel turns to them and prophesies that they should cease from the evil act that they are about to perpetrate. Because they know Pastor Samuel's background in traditional religion, they mock him and brand him a hypocrite. But later, Uzebu and Akpako give serious thought to Samuel's advice. They eventually decide against carrying out their plan.

Meanwhile, Okoro is seen ambling down the street and a few metres later, he runs into Pastor Samuel at an intersection. Excited to see him once again, Okoro addresses him as Alagiebo, but Pastor Samuel rebukes him for doing that, saying that he no longer goes by that name. He tells Okoro that since embracing Pentecostalism, he has adopted the name of Samuel and that he is also now a pastor. Shocked, Okoro demands to know what happens to the Ogun shrine he presides over in his house on Samuel's behalf. Pastor Samuel tells him to continue the propitiation on his behalf. Bemused by his advice, Okoro probes further on what his church members will make of his insincerity. Pastor Samuel tells him that they

do not doubt his commitment to the Pentecostal cause and that he simply gets around it by telling them to 'do what I say and not what I do'.

On their part, Imade is seen at Doctor's chemist purchasing a condom. Her beauty immediately captivates Doctor and he wants a romantic relationship with her. They exchange numbers. Later, Doctor picks her up at her house on a motorbike and they go to a beer parlour for a drink. Doctor assumes that they will go to his house after the drink, but Imade has another plan. After drinking, she feigns a phone call, collects some groceries, asks Doctor to pick up the bill, and she leaves on the basis that she will visit Doctor on another day. Imade never turns up as promised and Doctor is determined to sleep with her at all cost. He narrates his experience to Akpako and Uzebu, but they ridicule him for his naivety, saying that Imade has taken him for a ride. After a while, we see Doctor coming back to Akpako. He tells Akpako that he needs to replace the drugs in his chemist's shop, as they are expired. However, he is broke and cannot afford to do so. They hatch a plan to sell the expired drugs to members of the community so Doctor can raise the money.

In the closing scenes, Akpako and Doctor are seen selling the drugs to unsuspecting members of the community. Then, Pastor Samuel is also seen seated outside with Iye-Osaro, preaching to her. He tells Iye-Osaro to give her life to Jesus Christ, but Iye-Osaro reproaches and verbally humiliates him. She dismisses him and threatens to expose his double standards, arguing that she was a witness to his initiation into the Ogun shrine. Iye-Osaro warns that if he does not come clean in his religious ways, she will expose him to his congregants. Mortified, Pastor Samuel walks away. Then, we see members of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) walk into Doctor's chemist's shop. Unaware of their status, Doctor enquires from them what drug they want to buy. They request for the drug and Doctor provides it. Convinced that it is fake, they brandish their identity cards. In the end, Doctor is arrested and take him away, and his chemist's shop is sealed up.

Link 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hZ4pXfukM4

Link 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HntfxY3-Noc

Appendix 2: List of Questionnaires

Edo Language Filmmakers

a) What made you decide to go into Edo language video production rather than the dominant English language Nollywood?

b) What is your religious belief?

c) How do you see other religions in relation to the one you believe in?

d) Does your religious belief influence the themes and production of your films?

e) When you produce an Edo language film, in the end, what do you expect it to achieve?

f) How do you view the Benin monarchy in the 21st Century?

g) Do you participate in any traditional ceremony or rite?

h) How do you portray conflicts between African traditional religion and Christianity in your films and why?

i) How do you get the money to produce your films?

j) When producing an Edo language film, do you give a thought to the financial gain and does this influence how you produce the film?

k) Who are the people that watch your films?

l) What religious background form the majority?

m) Do you get any feedback from them? If so, do their feedback influence how you produce other films subsequently?

n) What is the future of Edo language films?

o) What is your thought of Edo language and culture, and Pentecostalism in the 21st Century?

p) Do you feel any obligations to either of them?

q) What is your advice to anyone who wants to go into Edo language film production?

Pentecostal Pastors/Leaders

a) What religion where you born into

b) What is your thought on the state of Pentecostal Christianity in Benin today

c) What is the membership strength of your church

d) How do you view African traditional religion

e) Why does Pentecostal Christianity vilify African traditional religion in particular

f) Why does Pentecostal Christianity seem to thrive in the urban centre of Benin and not in the rural areas of the kingdom

g) Do you watch Edo language films

h) How do you see the portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religion in Nollywood in general and Edo language films in particular

i) How does Pentecostal Christianity view this portrayal

j) Some filmmakers argue that the dominant portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity triumphing over African traditional religion is driven by commercialism rather than the actual beliefs of the filmmakers and the audience. What do you have to say to this

k) Given the prevalence of Pentecostal churches in Benin Kingdom, you would think that African traditional religion would have been wiped out from the kingdom in the 21st Century, but that is not the case. Why is this so

l) How do you view the Benin monarchy in the 21st Century and how the Edo people identify themselves in terms of religion

m) Some traditional religious priests I have talked to argue that it is the same people who claim to be Pentecostal Christians that keep them in business. What is your response to this

n) Do you think there is a future for African traditional religion in the face of the seeming dominance of Pentecostalism

o) Some traditional religious priests say the people are now aware of the failings of Pentecostalism and as a result, Edo people are now flocking back to ATR. What do you have to say to this

p) Your final advice for Pentecostal Christians and Edo language filmmakers

Edo Traditional Religious Priests/Leaders

a) Could you describe for me the origin and religion of Edo people?

b) What is the position of the Oba in the religious life of Edo people?

c) How is Benin Kingdom organised in terms of administration?

d) What is the situation of Edo traditional religion in the 21st Century, given the prevalence of Christian churches in the kingdom?

e) Do you watch Edo language video films?

f) How do you see Edo films in relation to the religion and cultural life of Edo people?

g) How do you see the portrayal of traditional religion and Christianity by Nollywood producers?

h) What is the response of the traditional institution to this portrayal?

i) Do you think there is a future for Edo traditional religion in the face of the onslaught from globalisation, of which Pentecostal Christianity is a significant part?

j) Do Edo language filmmakers get feedback from the traditional institution?

k) What is your advice for Edo language filmmakers?

l) What changes do you want to see in Edo language films, apart from those relating to the technical quality?

Edo Language Film Audience 1

1. Do you watch Edo language films?

   Yes ☐ No ☐

2. Why do you watch Edo language films?

a) For their traditional religious and cultural values
b) For their Pentecostal Christian religious values
c) Other. Please explain

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What do you think of Edo language filmmakers' portrayal of Edo religious culture and tradition?

a) Positive
b) Negative

4. What do you think of Edo language filmmakers' portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity?

a) Positive

b) Negative

5. When there is a clash between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity in these films, do you think Edo traditional religious culture is portrayed:

a) Positively?
b) Negatively?

6. When there is a clash between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity in these films, do you think Pentecostal Christianity is portrayed:

a) Positively?
b) Negatively?

7. Do you believe that this portrayal of Edo traditional religious culture is truly reflective of its nature?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Please explain
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Do you believe that this portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity is truly reflective of its nature?

a) Yes
b) No

c) Please explain

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. What is your religious belief?

a) African traditional religion
b) Pentecostal Christianity
c) Other. Please specify _____

10. Do you participate in any Edo traditional religious ceremonies/rites?

a) Yes
b) No
c) If yes, please specify

_____

11. Do you participate in Pentecostal Christian worship/ceremonies?

a) Yes
b) No
c) If yes, please specify

_____

12. Do you believe that some Pentecostal Christians are also adherents of Edo traditional religion, either openly or secretly?

a) Yes
b) No

13. Do you believe that some Edo traditional religious followers are also adherents of Pentecostal Christianity, either openly or secretly?

a) Yes
b) No

14. Do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin is still relevant today?

a) Yes
b) No

15. Do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin still influences how Edo people identify themselves religiously?

a) Yes
b) No

16. Do you think Edo traditional religious culture is still relevant today?

a) Yes
b) No

17. Do you think Pentecostal Christianity will at some point wipe out Edo traditional religion and culture?

a) Yes
b) No

Edo Language Film Audience 2

1. What is your gender?

a. Male
b. Female

2. What is your age group?

a. 18-24
b. 25-34
c. 35-44
d. 45-54
e. 55-64
f. 65+

3. Is your first language Edo (Bini)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If No, please specify: _____

4. Do you watch Edo language films?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Why do you watch Edo language films?

a. For their traditional religious and cultural values
b. For their Pentecostal Christian religious values
c. Other. Please explain

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. What do you think of Edo language filmmakers' portrayal of Edo religious culture and tradition?

    a. Positive
    b. Negative
    c. Any other:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

7. What do you think of Edo language filmmakers' portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity?

    a. Positive
    b. Negative
    c. Any other:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

8. When there is a clash between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity in these films, do you think Edo traditional religious culture is portrayed:

    a. Positively?
    b. Negatively?
    c. Any other:

    _____
    _____

_____

_____

9. When there is a clash between Edo traditional religion and Pentecostal Christianity in these films, do you think Pentecostal Christianity is portrayed:

    a. Positively?
    b. Negatively?
    c. Any other:

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

10. Do you believe that this portrayal of Edo traditional religious culture is truly reflective of its nature?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Please explain

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

11. Do you believe that this portrayal of Pentecostal Christianity is truly reflective of its nature?

    a. Yes
    b. No

c. Please explain

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. What is your religious belief?

a. African traditional religion
b. Pentecostal Christianity
c. Other. Please specify

_____

13. Do you participate in any Edo traditional religious ceremonies/rites?

a. Yes
b. No
c. If yes, please specify

_____

14. Do you participate in Pentecostal Christian worship/ceremonies?

a. Yes
b. No
c. If yes, please specify

_____

15. Do you believe that some Pentecostal Christians are also adherents of Edo traditional religion, either openly or secretly?

a. Yes
b. No

16. Do you believe that some Edo traditional religious followers are also adherents of Pentecostal Christianity, either openly or secretly?

    a. Yes
    b. No

17. Do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin is still relevant today?

    a. Yes
    b. No

18. Do you think the institution of the Oba of Benin still influences how Edo people identify themselves religiously?

    a. Yes
    b. No

19. Do you think Edo traditional religious culture is still relevant today?

    a. Yes
    b. No

20. Do you think Pentecostal Christianity will at some point wipe out Edo traditional religion and culture?

    a. Yes
    b. No

       Please explain:_____

       _____

       _____

       _____

       _____

21. Do you have any other comment?

a. Yes
b. No

If yes, please state:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

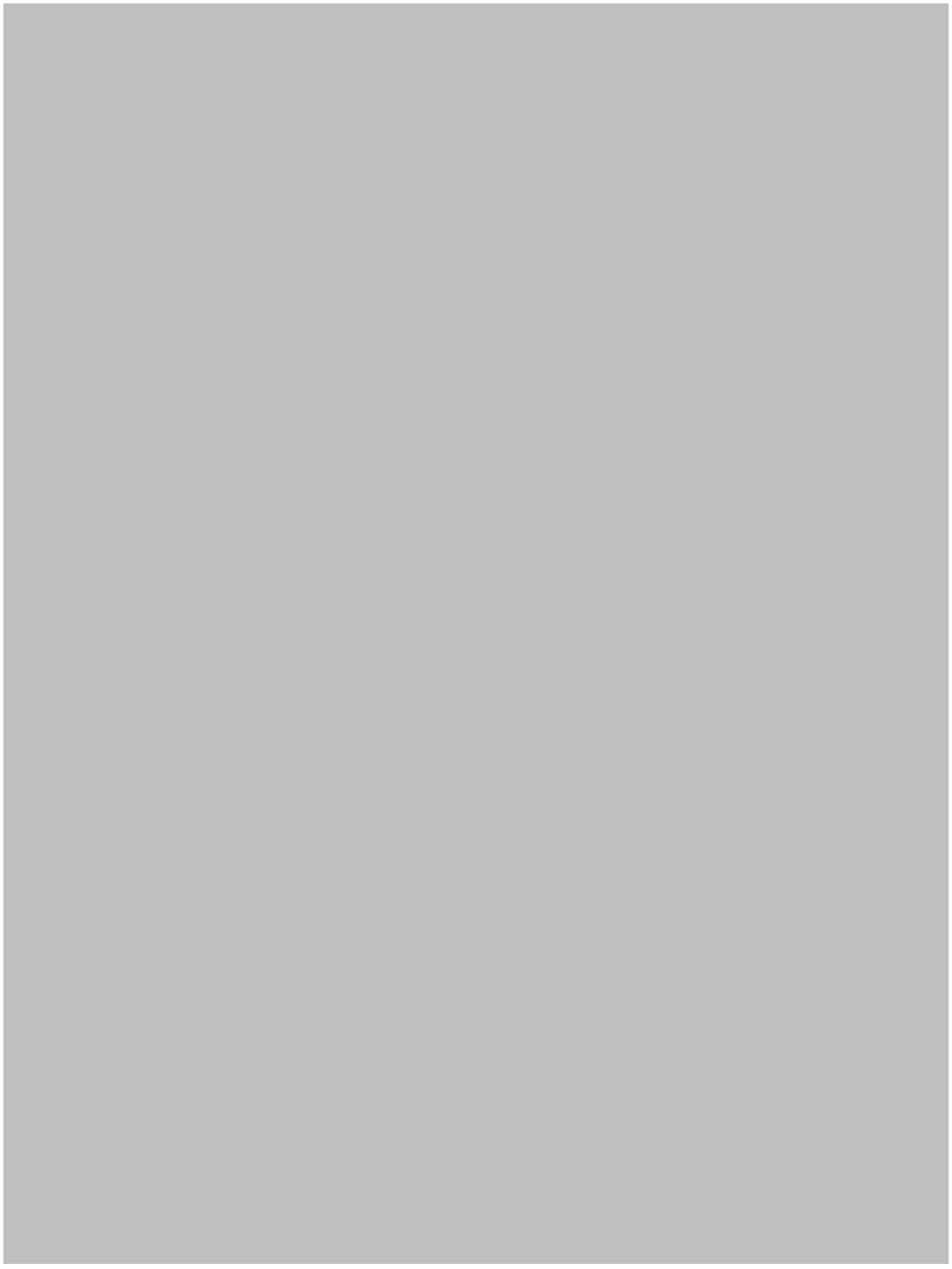
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Appendix 3: Photograph



Aiyoboru: shooting a scene

Source: Edorodion Osa

Appendix 4: Photograph



Plaque presented to Peter Ovbiogbe for excellence in Edo language filmmaking by the Oba of Benin

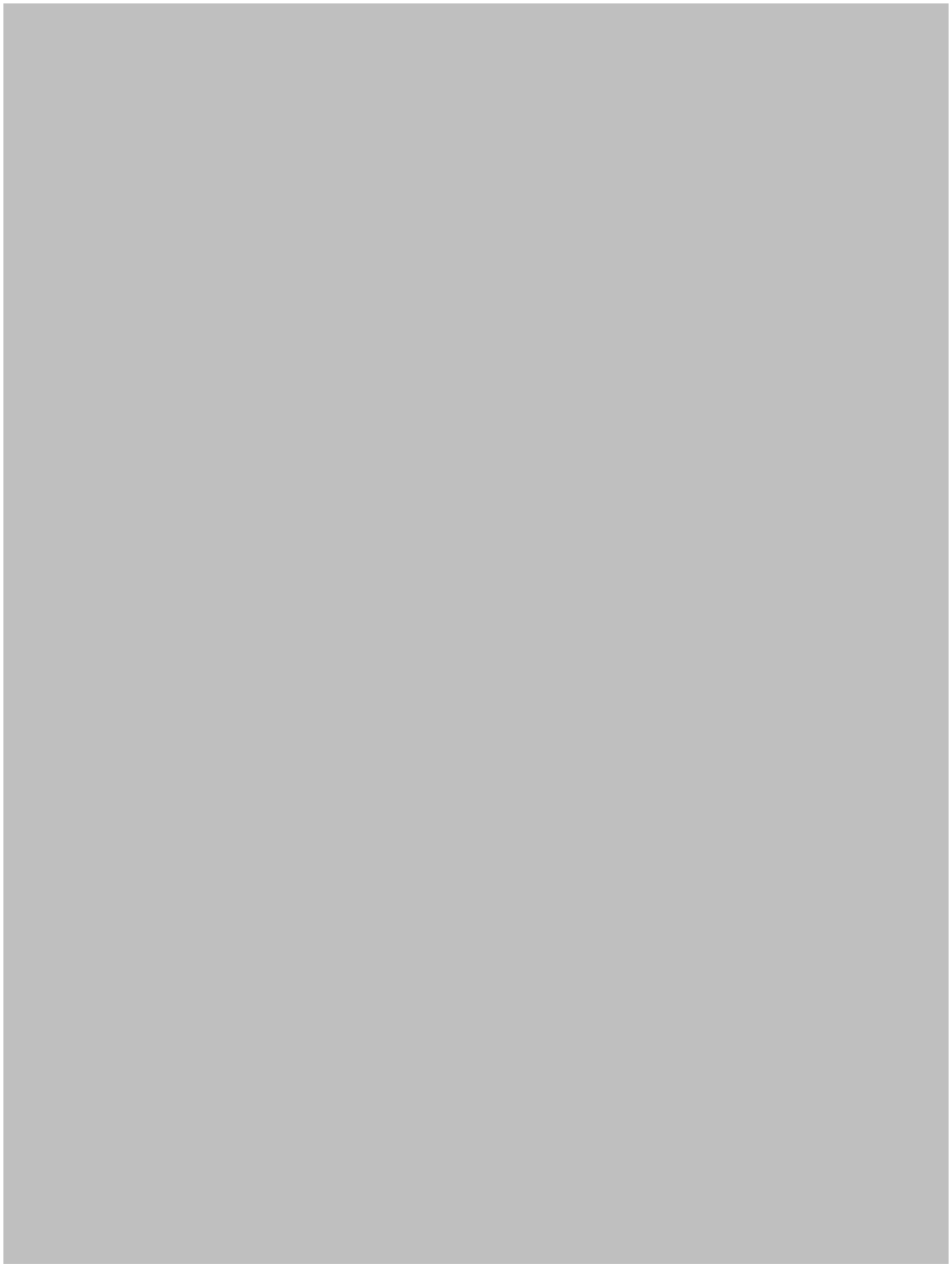
Source: Edorodion Osa

Appendix 5: Photograph



One of the rows of altars at the shrine of Dr Sam Ikhuen. Traditional religious priests in Benin allege that some of the altars belong to Pentecostal Christians. Source: Edorodion Osa

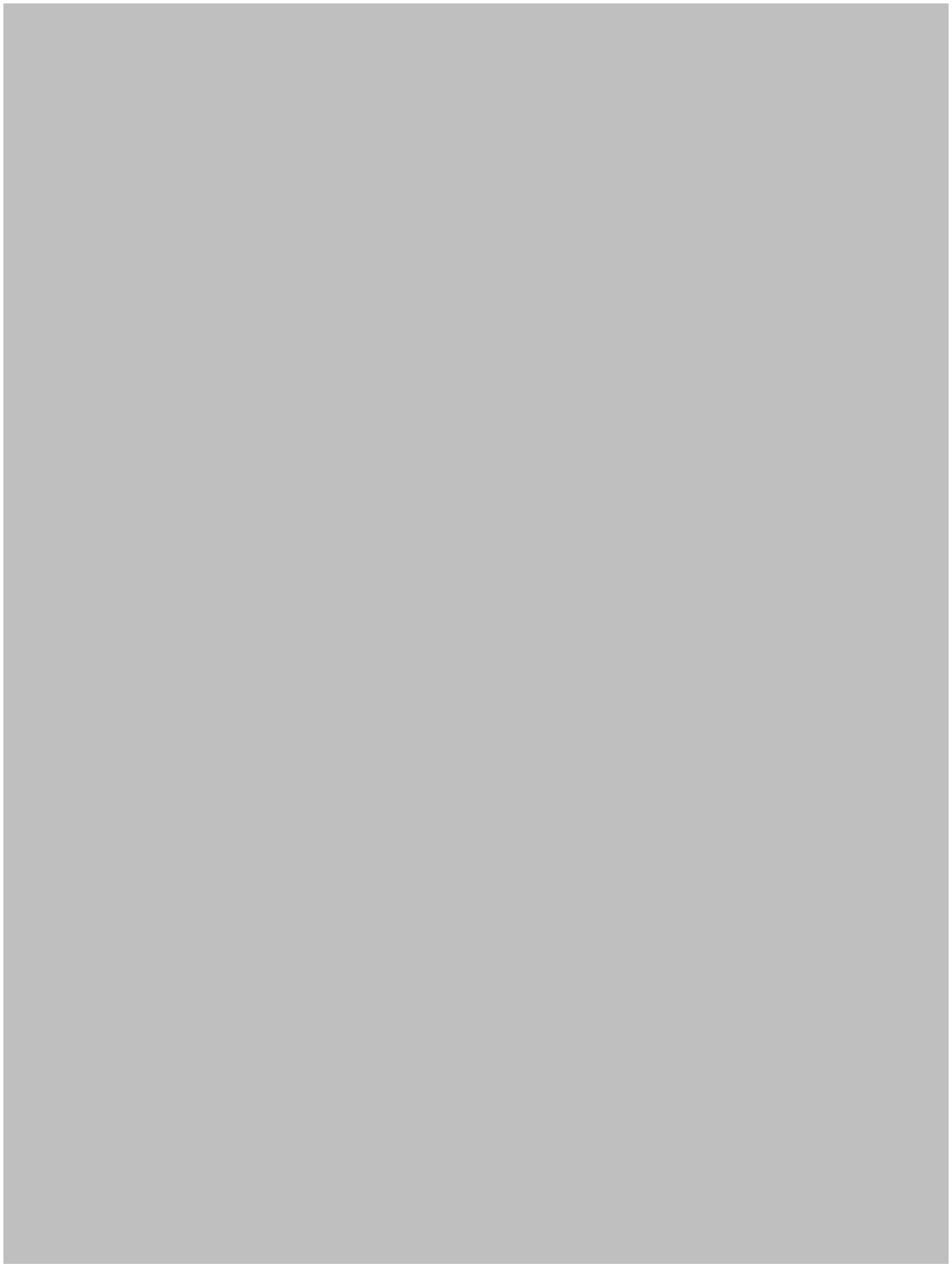
Appendix 6: Photograph



Erecting a traditional religious altar on the set of *Aiyoboru*

Source: Edorodion Osa

Appendix 7: Photograph



Peter Ovbiogbe addressing a meeting of Edo Film Producers and Distributors Association.

Source: Edorodion Osa

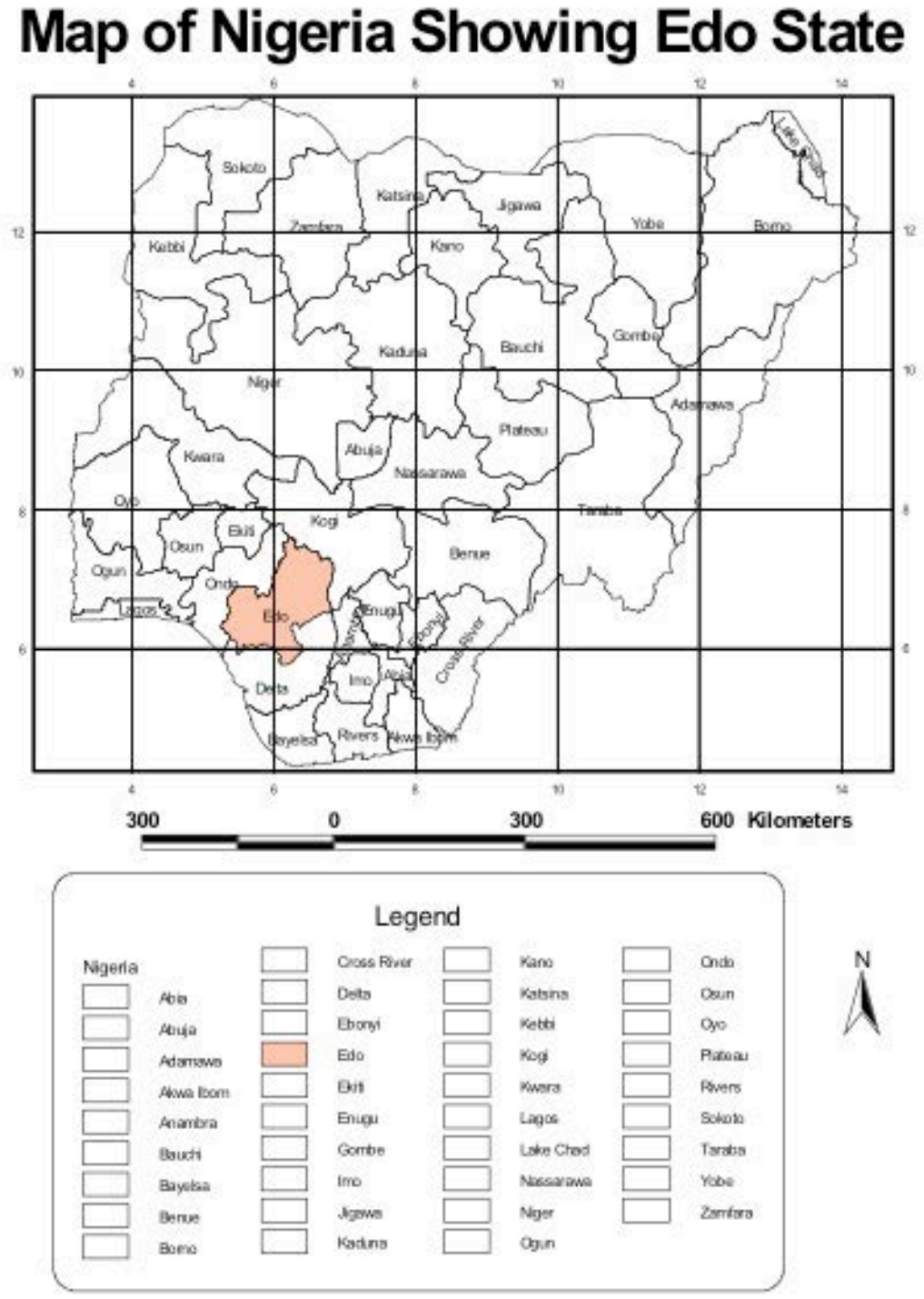
Appendix 8: Photograph



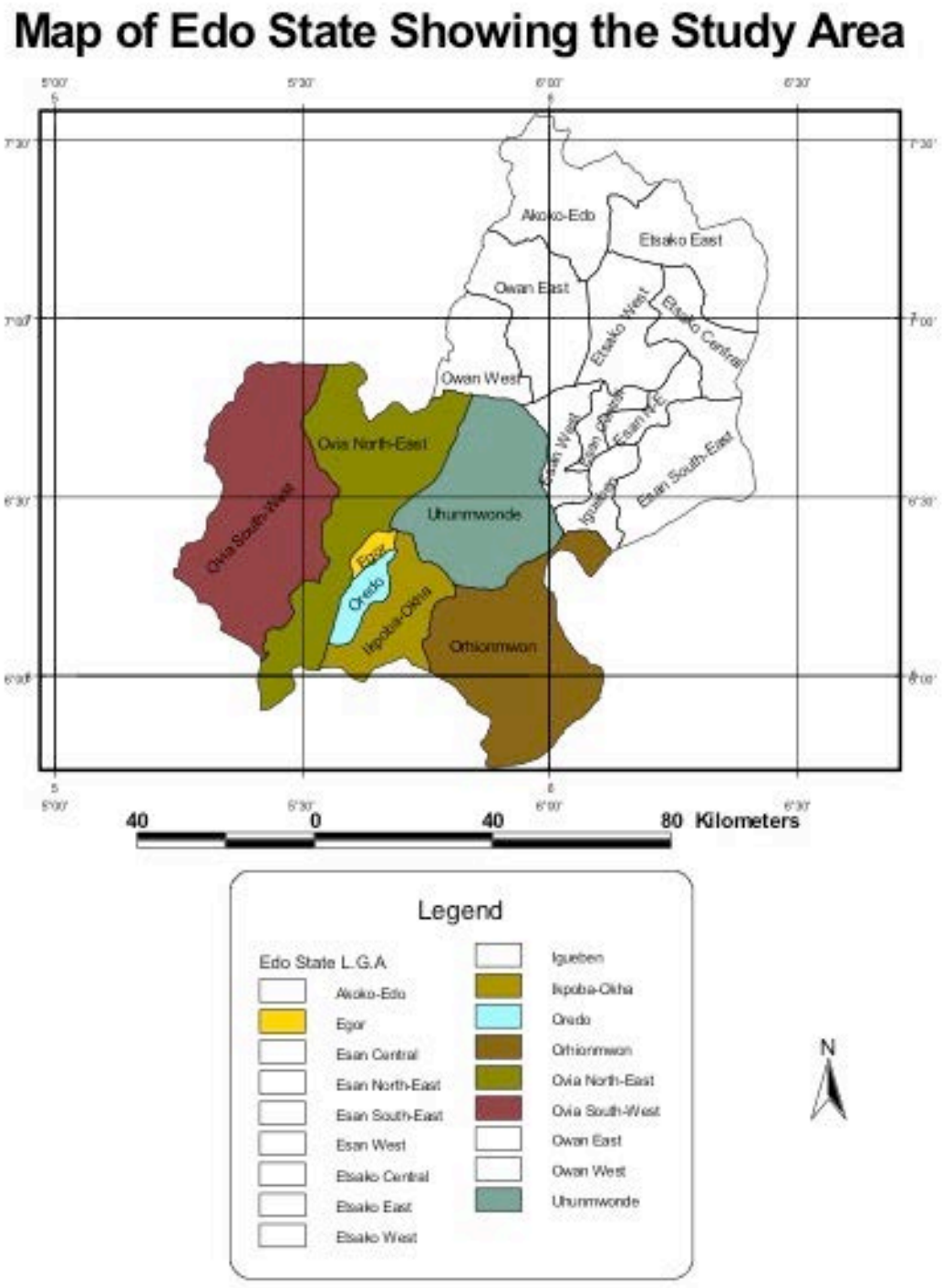
Billboard showing the wife and leader of the church of one of the research participants. The church hosted its international gathering of worshippers during the time of the field study.

Source: Edorodion Osa.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Source: Osakue Omoera (2014a). *Audience Reception of the Benin Video Film*



The map also shows the area where the Edo language of the video films is spoken. It is also contiguous with the sphere of influence of the Oba of Benin. Source: Osakue Omoera (2014a). *Audience Reception of the Benin Video Film*