

# The Emergent Igala Home Movie (Igawood)

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## Abstract

The Igala home movie sub-industry popularly called *Igawood*, is today the most vibrant emerging entertainment industry in Igalaland and its audiences beyond. It has become a phenomenon projecting the Igala culture and language among the Igala within and in the diaspora. Aduku Armstrong Idachaba produced the first commercial Igala movie, *Amoboni*, in 1994. This opened the floodgates for experiments in these new commercial ventures for especially, the youths. This paper seeks to document the basic issues that will in the future serve as reference points. While the sub-industry is growing, this paper has documented a number of facts on its origin. Qualitative research method was adopted for this paper. Among other factors, findings show that oral tradition influences the thematic preoccupations of *Igawood*. It was also found that the Igala home movie (*Igawood*) needs institutional support especially in the area of training to improve its production quality.

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## Introduction

This paper, "Origin of the emergent Igala Home Movie", has arisen out of a strategic need to develop a research base for film and home video studies in Igalaland. This is in the light of the emergence of *Nollywood*, *Yoriwood*, *Kannywood*, and lately *Igawood* as a branding name for the Igala home movie sub-industry.

The concept of the 'emergent' is used in the paper to refer to the evolving Igala home movie not only to clarify concepts but in an extended way to establish the substantive nature of the sub-industry. In his work-*Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams viewed emergent as, "the new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships continually being created" (65). Williams here believed that it is exceptionally difficult to differentiate between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture and those which are actually alternative or oppositional to it.

The concept of "the emergent" can, therefore, be understood only in relation to a full sense of the dominant. In this case, in relation to the dominant Nollywood, the Igala home movie sub-industry, in terms of style and form, is evolving. Other indigenous 'woods' relate to Nollywood in certain real meanings and values which were generated before their emergence. However, the undercurrents of Nigeria's culture, the inability of Nollywood to reach into the whole range of practices and experiences of communities and the need for regional identity have given rise to the other indigenous home movie sub-industries mentioned earlier. Therefore, the concept of "emergent", as used in relation to the Igala home movie sub-industry, is not only a matter of direct contact with the culture of its origin but indeed depends crucially on finding new forms that will create desirable empathies within the people. Emergent in this context is also associated with the new prevalent modes of human communication.

Nigeria's movie industry stands on a tripod, mediated by the country's historical and political evolution. It also draws heavily from conventional Western narratives. The contents of some of the movies are based on the socio-cultural issues and problems of the society at large while others are specific to the ethnic group for which it is produced. The Nigerian film industry reflects Nigerian's ethnic diversity. As Jonathan Haynes has suggested, this is a directive principle to understanding the character of the Nigerian video industry: "Ethnicity is an example of a submerged issue that Nigerian videos may help us to see, since ethnicity is a basic structuring principle of Nigerian Video Film production..." (10). Filmmaking in Nigeria is, therefore, divided along ethnic margin lines- Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and very recently, Igala. However, within the given cultural matrix of video production in Nigeria, Lagos (Idumota), Onitsha (Upper Iweka), Kano and Anyigba serve as the regional and sub-regional centres.

The emergence of these regional home video sub-industries is conceptualised as a tool of communication, performing two important roles: (a) "cultural projection, promotion and propagation and (b) commerce through the sales (sic) of entertainment products". (Tijani, 170). It should be noted that these sub-regional video film productions are a powerful media in the contemporary struggle for social advancement, and are instrumental in bringing about greater public awareness for moral regeneration in contemporary Nigerian society. The Igala sub-genre of Nigerian home video has its roots in Igalaland, and is located in Kogi East Senatorial District.

## Philosophical Framework

This paper proposes ethics as a spring board. Ethics includes the nature of moral obligation; basic moral principles and what is good for human beings; the nature and justification of social structures and political

systems; and various kinds of behaviour and social policies that involve crucial human interests. In all cultures, there is evidence that people created things, such as statues or songs, that were valued for their “immediate sensory qualities as well as whatever other useful purposes they might have served”(535). The film or home video, as conceived here, is such an aesthetic enterprise, embodying values of immeasurable trans-historicities. The film, through the empathic process, allows us to enter an imaginary world of characters. Which world resembles our own through modes of greeting, eating, worship, dance, dressing and love. Through these, we get emotionally entangled in their choices and conflicts (good and bad), predisposing us to make similar choices in real life. These are componential to the aesthetic dimension, deriving from the given histories and cultures of a people, and constitutive of our ethics.

The place of art in the life of the Igala person is not a modern creation but part and parcel of a continuous search for meaning. This is played out in his performance (greeting, dance, festivals etc) in every event in his life, his sorrows and joys. For instance, a young lady in the village grinding pepper on a grinding stone sings a folk song about her love. She is not taught this in *Romeo and Juliet* or through love songs in Nollywood scenes. The *Igawood* artist therefore, is not different from the traditional artist like Paul Odi, Mohammed Ayuba, OdekeOyaka and a host of other Igala performing artists. The only significant difference is the transfer from the traditional (village playground) to the technological screen; that is, medium or agency through which their audiences are reached. This is the philosophical justification for this paper, defining and identifying the focus of philosophy in relation to the nature of man, sufficient properties of art and of course, concepts of aesthetics and their connection to Igala home movie.

### The Igala

It is needful to examine briefly the history of the Igala people, with a view to linking their religion and politics to *Igawood*. The Igala are the ninth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. According to the 1963 population census, the Igala numbered about 684,880, but the current estimates of the 2006 census put their population at about 1.6 million. They speak a language that belongs to the Kwa group of languages (of the Niger-Congo family) found in West and Central Africa. The Igala language has many local dialects. Among them are Central, Akpoto, and Ibaji dialects. The home land of the Igala is located on the Eastern flank of the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue. The Igala are at present organised in nine (9) local government areas with a total of about 13,150 square kilometres.

### Igala Worldview

The world-view of a people is enmeshed in their practical life, particularly in their economic, political, social, artistic and religious life. The Igala traditional world-view embraces their practical philosophies of life as well as theoretical expression of life. So far, *Ogwu* (that which obtains as the tradition) is the best concept which expresses Igala philosophy. When the Igala are performing some rituals or celebrating some festivities and one asks them why such and such are being done, they would respond: *A che'nwuogwuwa* (We are doing that which obtains in the land or acting according to our tradition). The rituals that are carried out during the burial of an old man are done according to the demands of *Ogwu-* (tradition). When anybody does anything negative to the tradition of the people, the Igala disapprove of this by saying: *Iche'nwuogwuwa n* (It is not according to our tradition). *Ogwu*, thus conceived, refers to what accords to the basic beliefs, ideas and mores without which the community would cease to exist because it will lose touch with reality and the source of its existence. It is the ideological expression of their economic, social, religious and political practice.

In Igala traditional society, there are ideas and myths which embody and describe what we call their cosmogony. The Igala traditional philosophy believes that it is *Ojo* (God), the Supreme Deity, who created the universe the sky (*ojale*), the earth (*ile*), spirits, man, animals and everything in life. This is shown in the belief that the world which works as expressed in *enwu'ogwu*, was actually created and controlled by forces outside of man. The Igala also believe that there are two realms or orders of existence: *efoj'egwu* (the spirit world or supernatural order) and *ef'ile* (the human world or visible order). Very often, one hears an Igala man wondering whether an event is happening in the supernatural world or in the visible order. This shows how close the Igala are to the two realms. There is no sharp line separating the two. The spirits are involved in the day to day affairs of men.

It has already been established that the Igala believe in *ef'ile* (the world of the living) and *efoj'egwu* (the world of the dead). The latter is the realm inhabited by spirit-deities, ancestral spirits and the spirits of the dead which are defined as intermediary forms. The Igala have various names for Supreme Being: *OdobaOga'gwu-OjoChamachaala*, *Ab'ucha Ki n'odaama*, *Aj'ogwuki ma kw'ebutu*, *OjoEn'ate*, *OjoOlisaoke*, *Ojoobabada*, *OjoOnu*, *Ojoacheleki ma kicha*, all of which suggest that He is the Lord of the skies, where He lives.

### Evolution of the Igala Home Movie

That film has become part of human existence is no longer in doubt. Film, like television, newspaper and radio,

is a medium that mediates what goes on in a society and it is greatly consumed by people. Film represents a product or the recreation of a particular event. As Ayakoroma stated; (Film is) “a multidimensional medium that captures snapshots of real life, real people, real places, and even in an imagined setting, real stories of life experience that intend to influence the viewer’s mind” (3).

Film is a creatively packaged body of human activities aimed at entertaining the viewers and serves as documenting history. The current video film industry in Nigeria owes a huge debt to the pioneers of Nigerian theatre, particularly practitioners of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre who branched off from mainstream theatre to experiment with celluloid. The recorded stage productions on celluloid were meant for exhibition in cinema houses. Some businessmen, like Kenneth Nnebue, saw the prospects in that business, and started with the production of Yoruba language films. Confirming this, Haynes stressed that Nnebue had also attempted packaging “Yoruba films for sale, when he produced *Aje Ni IyaMi* for Sola Ogunsola, with the sum of two thousand naira (N2000) and made quite some profit” (24).

Following the demise of feature film production was the emergence of Home Video Movies which feature films shot on video. The Nigerian video film, therefore, came in response to audiences’ demand for an alternative means of relaxation with the death of celluloid cinema.

Although many productions had preceded *Living in Bondage*, Kenneth Nnebue’s successful production of *Living in Bondage* which appeared in 1992 is credited with “jumpstarting” the Nigerian video film industry. This industry has come to be called “Nollywood”. Nollywood films are popular in Nigeria because they have indigenous content and address issues relevant to a mass audience. Through the amalgam of Nigerian narrative techniques and western technology, those films recreate socio-political and cultural events that occur within and beyond the country’s borders. The industry is now widely mainstreamed into Nigerian consciousness.

The need to use films as a tool for regional cultures and moral re-arming gave birth to regional “woods” such as Yoriwood (Yoruba Home Video), Kannywood (Hausa Home video) and *Igawood* (Igala Home Movie). These indigenous language movies are integral part of the Nigerian film industry.

These regional film sub-industries bear resemblance to Nollywood in terms of origination, sociology and aesthetics, and they all contribute to the growth of Nigeria economically, socially and politically. *Igawood* and other “regional woods” have arisen partly because Nollywood films are not reflective of Igala values and partly because the economy of Nigeria has created demand where film production has become a way of survival.

Unlike the Yoruba movie industry, the Igala home movie has no major antecedents beyond the residual folk media, ritual and masquerade performance. The first time Igala viewers ever had opportunity to watch Igala drama was when Igala programmes on television were aired in 1982 on the National Television Authority (NTA), Makurdi. The programme, *IkoOlukaAme’lu*che (Farmers’ Forum) was produced once in a week for 30 minutes. According to Usufu Yakubu, the programme was a “chit chat show” aimed at promoting Agriculture. 10 minute dramatic scenes were infused into the programme which glued Igala audiences to their television sets. The programme was sponsored and presented by Usman Otijenu. It was short-lived as it was stopped due to logistic problems in the 1980s

Though of recent birth, the Igala home movie sub-industry (*Igawood*) is beginning to make a statement around the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria. The setting is in Igalaland and it uses Igala language. It draws from the rich tapestry of Igala culture in terms of myth, rituals and other folkloric motif. Unlike its counterparts elsewhere, Igala movie sub-industry does not have its roots in the activities of drama groups. However, it can be said to have started with the production of *Amoboni* (1994), written and directed by Aduku Armstrong Idachaba. Below is a brief summary of details of the movie.

**Title:** Amoboni  
**Year:** 1994  
**Producer:** Ray Akintola  
**Director:** Aduku Armstrong Idachaba  
**Script:** Aduku Armstrong Idachaba  
**Starring:** Ali Odekina, Andrew Ward, Rose Ojile, Philip Omale, Amade Abdul

*Amoboni* is a historical movie rooted in the oral tradition of the Igala people. The oral story of the movie is about the great late Attah Igala, Ameh Oboni. In the movie, *Amoboni* believes in the culture and tradition of the Igala people and desires to preserve it. This drive to preserve his people’s tradition informs his yearly celebration of *Ocho* festival which involves a lot of sacrifices. The *Ocho* festival commences with people drumming, singing and dancing while Atebo (chief priest) performs his function of making sacrifices. Achi accuses *Amoboni* of using human beings for sacrifices, making a formal report to Mr. Muffet, the Idah Divisional District Officer. A plan is hatched to depose *Amoboni*. In the attempt to depose him, he commits death with the conviction that an Attah is only dethroned by death. Today, Ameh Oboni is celebrated in folklore and Igala music e.g. Agale, Ugworo. This movie re-narrates his heroism. Following *Amoboni* (1994), is *EbiliD’ojukolonwu* (The Devil is at His Work), was produced in 1995 by a Christian organisation (Christian Evangelical Fellowship of Nigeria-CEFN) based in Kaduna.

**Title:** Ebilid'ojukolonwu  
**Year:** 1995  
**Producer:** CEFN Church, Kaduna  
**Director:** Simon Ebiloma  
**Starring:** Emmanuel Jessey, Nathaniel Omale,  
 Sunday Agbanw, Roseline Achile.

The screenplay is weaved around the work of the devil. In the movie, the devil causes destruction and crisis in Christian homes in order to take them to hell fire. He succeeds in most of the families but is disgraced in Elder Adegbe's family. Elder Adegbe, possessed by the devil, plans to use his wife for money ritual. Sister Adegbe, is rescued by Angel of God and is set free. While Elder Adegbe, her husband, dies instead of her.

This was followed by *EneK'oyo do* (The One Called by God) (2003). The gap of nearly a decade cannot really be explained from the data available, except that some local practitioners complained of lack of funds and motivation in terms of movies not yielding money. Another reason some gave is that video machines were not common then until 2000 when many people were able to purchase DVDs for home use. Between 2000 and 2003 therefore, few ventured into writing, directing, acting and producing Igala movies. The emergence of the Igala movie sub-industry is traceable to this constellation of factors. *Igawood*, as the Igala movie sub-industry is popularly called, has witnessed a lot of patronage over the years because of its content and themes which its audience is familiar with. The content and themes revolve around the Igala worldview which believes in the Supreme Being who is omnipotent, the world of the living and the world of the dead. Commenting on this aspect of Igala culture, Miachi stated:

Generally, the Igala have a tripartite hierarchical ordering of supernatural or divine beings all superceding the position and role of the ordinary man in their pantheon. This is not to say that the Igala are a polytheistic society; the fact of hierarchy already suggests that in their religious system there is an ultimate being who is at the apex of the hierarchy (115).

The Igala tradition is tied to the influence of the supernatural powers, destiny, ancestral spirit, the deities/gods, masquerades etc. Like other regional movies, Igala home movies rely on the people's beliefs, expressing their core values. Igala filmmakers pick their subject matters from these, with the current themes reflecting contemporary social issues. They portray such issues as land disputes as seen in Ali Muhammed's *UjaAne* (Land Dispute) and marital conflicts as in Sule Maji Baka's *Iye Oko Bibi* (Wicked Mother-In-Law). They also reflect fetish practices, clan conflicts, rebellious wards and so on, as found in *Aiko Male* (Mallam's Cock), *Aj'ogwu* (Warrior), and *UchaOda* (Power Pot).

## Conclusion

The study has traced the origin and development of the emergent Igala home movie (*Igawood*). Thus, the paper covers the general Igala area, which is Kogi East Senatorial District. The Igala home movie has become widespread as a mode of social and family entertainment in Igalaland and beyond. *Amoboni* was the first Igala movie produced in 1994. The paper has examined the history of Igala and has noted the vast potential offered by Igala traditional society for the Igala home movie.

Since *Igawood* is a private sector-driven enterprise, the intervention of the organized private sector may help the local industry to consolidate. There are grounds for optimism that *Igawood* is on the threshold of great productions and profit. However, a clear road map to take the Igala home movies industry to its dreamland should be marshalled out by practitioners and stakeholders alike. This should include:

- Registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) by the Igala Movie Makers Association (IMMA).
- Alignment with national guilds and associations.
- Enhancing capacities through workshops and formal training in universities and other institutions of higher learning.
- Registering films with the National Film and Video Censors Board.
- Networking with the bigger movie industry in Nigeria.
- Entering films for the annual Zuma Film Festival.

Some of the general quality assurance issues will resolve themselves as the studio and editing outfits acquire better technologies and experience.

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