

# The Video-Movie Flourish in Ghana: Evolution and the Search for Identity

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## Abstract

What are the influences, internal and external, shaping the video-movie industry in Ghana? In what direction are these influences heading the industry? How can Ghana craft a unique cinematographic identity for herself based on her culture and performance and artistic traditions? These are the key questions addressed in this paper. The paper also explores and reviews theoretical issues regarding 'authenticity' and what course African cinema, in the opinion of some theorists, should chart so as to be responsive to the artistic, aesthetic and cultural needs of the people.

**Keywords:** Ghallywood, Concert Party, film, video-movie, authenticity, industry.

## 1. Introduction

Ghanaian film dates back to 1948 when the then Gold Coast Film Unit was set up in the Information Services Department. In 1971, the Ghana Film Industry was established as a corporate body. In 1978, the Government of Ghana brought on stream the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), a public institution of Higher Education in Film and Television Production with a mandate to train Ghanaians and Africans in filmmaking, and to tell the African audio-visual story. It produced a number of high quality Ghanaian films and documentaries. However, by 1996, when The Ghana Film Industry Corporation was divested to a Malaysian consortium, a yawning lacuna emerged in filmmaking in Ghana (<http://www.filmbirth.com/ghana.html>). Critical works and archival material which document the trajectory of Ghana's film history from the colonial period to the mid-90s include Odunton (1950), Noble (1952), Agyei-Addo (2004), Bloom (2009), Holdbrook (1985) and Sandon (2009).

In the late 1990s, the gap created by the collapse of the Ghana Film Industry Corporation was quickly filled by video-movie productions. Film critics who have drawn attention to the phenomenal rise of video productions in Ghana include Aveh (2002), Meyer (1998; 2003; 2006), Haynes (2007) and Garritano (2013). But it was not a phenomenon happening in isolation in Ghana. According to Haynes (2007: 1),

Video film production began almost simultaneously in Ghana and Nigeria in the late 1980s, in both cases as a result of general economic collapse that made celluloid film impossibly expensive...In Ghana, the way was led by people like Willy Akuffo, a film projectionist, and Socrates Safo, who was studying to become an auto mechanic. Self-taught as filmmakers, they were outsiders to the Ghanaian filmmaking establishment, but their tales of witchcraft and sentimental romance immediately struck a chord with their audience.

Whereas the Ghana Film Industry Corporation and NAFTI had well defined missions and visions to craft an 'authentic' Ghanaian film culture, the new entrants to the film industry were driven more by commercial instincts than a desire to create a system that captures the vision of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, who saw indigenous Ghanaian or African film as a political, cultural and decolonization weapon. Indeed, as Haynes rightly points out, the Ghana Film Industry, "the bearer of a government-sponsored nationalist tradition of filmmaking, produced a number of more secularly-minded, socially-conscious videos until its demise in 1996" (4).

## 2. Theorizing Ghanaian/African Film

Theoretical and conceptual issues regarding film [1] in Africa are still in a state of flux. Within a broad spectrum of theoretical propositions and positions, there is a propensity towards prescriptive cultural nationalism. This position is summed up by Adeyemi (2009:63) who argues that African cinema, in the service of cultural nationalism, must be seen and used as a revolutionary weapon fashioned "to provide concepts of leadership, community collaboration, economic structures and socio-political mobilization capable of engendering radical change which will help blacks define their own culture, based on their heritage and history."

Perhaps attempts by some cinematographers and film critics at defining "Black Film" would help in

defining “African Film” and, by extension, “Ghanaian Film”. According to Klotman (1978:123-4), “Black Film” is a term which encompasses all those films with black themes or subject matter [...] which have substantial participation by Blacks as writers, actors, producers, directors, musicians, consultants, and films in which Blacks appear in supernumerary roles.

The problematic pertaining to these definitions is that many theoretical approaches to the criticism and evaluation of African film tend to be either grounded on Western critical paradigms, or juxtaposed as a binary, measuring African against Western film culture. With regard to the ‘inauthenticity’ of these approaches, Murphy (2000:241) posits that:

Debates upon the nature of African cinema have too often been trapped within a reductive opposition between Western and African culture. The argument proposes that an ‘authentic’ African film must not only exclude all things European or Western, but must also set itself up in opposition to them. If we follow this argument to its logical conclusion, then all African films are ‘inauthentic’ or ‘Western’ simply because cinema was first invented in the West. However, if we remove this strict opposition between the West and the rest of the world, we get a much better view of the way in which different cultures interact with and influence one another.

Cultural influence, in Murphy’s view, is not simply a one-way street with the West influencing the rest of the world. He argues that Africa and the West are not mutually exclusive worlds that possess their own authentic and unchanging identities: “They are hybrid identities that influence and modify each other, and this process of exchange applies to cinema” (241). He contends though that in the current world order, the West remains the dominant force in this process of hybridization.

Some of the foremost theorists and critics of African film include Ferid Boughedir (one of the earliest critics of African film), Teshome Gabriel (a leading advocate of critical theory of Third World Cinema), Manthia Diawara (a major film critic, author, producer and filmmaker) and V.Y. Mudimbe. Zachs, quoted in “Theoretical Constructions of African Cinema” (Harrow 1999:3), takes issue with all these theorists. He critiques Mudimbe’s interrogation of the various intellectual movements that have influenced Africanist discourse—Negritude, Sartrean existentialism, missionary writings, ethnophilosophy, anthropological structuralism and Fanonian neo-Marxist nationalism – and disagrees with his attempt to filter African philosophy, and by extension African film, through Western concepts that were initially introduced into African culture through colonialism. In Zachs’ view, It would be hard to avoid the implication that any African discourse making philosophical claims would have to be inherently a hybrid intellectual product, its very effort to link itself to the philosophical tradition having as a precondition some reconciliation with Western culture. Thus, surprisingly, given the political relationship that has obtained between Africa and the West, the question of what “African philosophy” might consist of has been traditionally characterized by a struggle to distil the pure, authentic, original, traditional, or indigenous characteristics from what have generally been considered perverse external influences (4).

Zachs concludes that Mudimbe’s historicizations have led to the suspicion that the concept of authenticity “may itself be implicated in formulations of intellectual originality, cultural appropriation, and mimesis that elide the very historical and cultural specificity that it is supposed to animate” (4). His own proposition for how African film criticism and African films, as objects of criticism, should be constructed to mirror the possibility of an African philosophy, and African cinema as a tradition, is anchored on neo-Marxism, neo-structuralism and modernism.

In my opinion, these theoretical and critical propositions do not adequately define the African film tradition. What we should be looking at is a paradigmatic framework of continuity and adaptation, and, overall, the quintessential elements—in both form and content—that set African cinema apart within the corpus of world cinema, instead of “authenticity,” which is hard to construct, let alone identify.

### **3. Ghanaian Video-Movie and the Identity Crisis: Internal and External Influences**

Contemporary Ghanaian film, in particular the Ghanaian video-film, has been shaped by influences from diverse sources, both internal and external. These influences range from the orature, popular theatre, best known as “Concert Party”, television, technology, Nollywood and Hollywood among others. Below is a discussion of some of the major influences.

#### **3.1 Popular Theatre: The Concert Party Tradition**

There is only a thin line between the Concert Party (popular theatre) and cinema in Ghana; the evolution of cinema is largely shaped by the artistic and aesthetic parameters of the Concert Party tradition. First of all, the development of Ghanaian drama as a mirror of Ghanaian national identity and culture goes back many years. Credit goes to Efua Sutherland, whose pioneering role in the National Theatre Movement cannot be overstated. The National Theatre Movement constitutes the single most ambitious project aimed at indigenizing Ghanaian theatre by giving it a distinctive national character; the kind of drama which derives its definition from popular

theatre and folklore; a theatre which is close to the people wherever they are; a theatre dramatizing the Ghanaian story using indigenous Ghanaian dramatic forms, motifs and infrastructure. The groundwork for such a project had long been laid by the Concert Party tradition. According to Sutherland (quoted in Darkey 1991:14),

The theatre of the Concert Party is vintage theatre in Ghana. Its unbroken history of evolution from the early 1930s makes it the forerunner of the New Theatre Movement...It is in touch with the country, and the best of its art reflects that privilege.

The Concert Party has its origins in the Vaudevillian form of theatre and was introduced into the country in the 1920s. Operatic in form, its ingenious blend of music and speech elements of the theatre makes it a unique experience of the Ghanaian performance tradition (Darkey 1991). Darkey also observes that:

An important aspect of the Concert Party form of drama is the “total theatre” nature of its performance tradition. The theatre employs [...] creative and aesthetic elements which appeal to the auditory, visual, verbal and indeed all the human senses and are aimed at arousing intense emotion in the audience (110).

It has to be noted that the Concert Party itself has been greatly influenced by aesthetic elements drawn from indigenous theatre—from Ghanaian festivals, traditional dances and music, the different expressions of poetic and prose traditions such as libations, panegyric, dirges, proverbs, riddles etc. which are all participatory in nature.

Today, the Concert Party remains the most enduring art form in Ghana drawing large crowds of sophisticated theatre-goers and ordinary people, young and old. Its form and enactment may have been tempered by time and technology, yet it remains a very vibrant Ghanaian heritage. As popular theatre, it is today used to raise awareness about many social issues including gender discrimination, violence against women, sexual harassment, marriage, family planning, education for girls, HIV/AIDS and the destruction of certain myths in the society. The establishment of Arts centres in Accra and Kumasi, christened *Anansekrom* (from Ananse folklore) and *Anokyekrom* (from the legend of Okomfo Anokye) respectively, as well as the National Theatre in Accra (in 1990), has in a great measure defined an enduring institutional framework for propagating the Ghanaian heritage through theatre.

It is from the above background that the contemporary Ghanaian video industry has, to a large extent, evolved—a transposition and transformation of the old into new artistic forms and expressions through modern technology. The influence of the Concert Party tradition manifests extensively in how Ghanaian video-film producers and actors/actresses package and enact their stories. These influences are evident in many forms. These include, among others, casting, scripting and language.

### **3.1.1 Casting**

Many of the actors and actresses, especially in the Akan-based movies, are drawn from the Concert Party tradition, a fact affirmed by Haynes (4). These have retained their Concert Party stage-names or nicknames. The most popular among them are Kofi Adu (Agya Koo) Grace Omaboe (Maame Dokunu), Akua Ataa (Kyeiwaa) and Asonaba Kweku Darko (Super O.D.). These actors and actresses, well known for their roles as jokers in Concert Party performances, have, wittingly or unwittingly, carried these characteristics into movies. They are usually assigned such roles. However, they have often reduced every role to a jocular one, which is a hallmark of the Concert Party tradition. These actors and actresses also carry with them the crudity and penchant for playing to the gallery, which often characterizes Concert Party performances.

### **3.1.2 Scripting**

Film script writing is one of the most complicated and challenging types of creative writing. This is no problem, however, for the Concert Parties. There is ample room for improvisation and extemporaneity; the plots evolve from sketches and flimsy synopses, and once roles are assigned, the actors and actresses fill in the rest. From my research, it is evident that this has been carried over into Ghanaian movies. Film producers do not engage the services of professional script writers—if they exist at all. Thus, once a story is conceptualized, the film-makers/producers devise synopses and plots and depend entirely on the memory and ingenuity of individual actors and actresses. The only difference is that, whereas in the Concert Party tradition, the same story could take on different artistic complexions during performances, film is frozen in time and place.

## **3.2 Indigenous Language Videos and the Rise of Kumawood**

In recent times, due to the dwindling popularity of the Concert Party, a subset of Ghallywood has emerged, termed “Kumawood” (derived from Kumasi, where Akan language films are mostly produced; indeed, churned out by the hundreds monthly by anybody with access to a video camera, a lighting man and cast comprising friends, neighbours, family members, market women, school children—virtually any one in sight). Kumawood has effectively supplanted the Concert Party, and, as earlier indicated, its main medium is Twi, an Akan dialect. The influence of Akan as the dominant Ghanaian language in Kumawood video-movies, especially those dominated by actors and actresses with a close link to the Concert Party tradition, also has its origins in the Concert Party. According to Darkey (1991:121),

The Concert Party theatre was introduced in the country with English as the main language of

performance. Master Yalley's shows were in English as his audiences comprised the educated Africans and Europeans...Akan gradually replaced English as the theatre became more popular with the mass of the African population.

Before the emergence of Kumawood, a large percentage of the Ghanaian video-films, running side-by-side with the English-medium ones, were in Akan—they came in Akan titles; dialogues were either entirely in Akan or interspersed with code-switching, code-mixing and pidgin. Initially, no attempts were made to reach out to a wider viewership outside the Akan linguistic circle. Later, sub-titling had been employed to bridge that gap. Unfortunately, the sub-titles did very little for the benefit of viewers who are not competent in Akan due to the terribly bad grammar, malapropism and transliterations which had become the hallmark of the translations. Often, the sub-titles rather inadvertently functioned as comic reliefs and side-tracked viewers from the episodes they purported to illuminate, as viewers struggled to come to terms with the bad English translations or interpretations.

The dominance of Akan is a direct carry-over from the Concert Party tradition where Akan is more or less the lingua franca, to the extent that even non-Akan actors and actresses are forced to function in the Akan medium. Indeed, in most productions, there is a long-standing tradition of poking fun at Ewes and Northerners who are projected as incompetent users of the Akan language. Thus, whereas in Nigeria there are many productions in Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa (Larkin 1997; Adamu 2004), in Ghana, with the emergence of Kumawood, Akan is the main or only medium used in indigenous productions.

Without doubt, films in Akan are far more popular than those in English simply because they are a carry-over from popular theatre, targeted at that massive constituency of patrons which includes peasants, market women, semi-literates and children for whom an indigenous language in any narrative context is closer to them linguistically. Like popular theatre, they want to be part of the stories; they see themselves in the stories; they 'own' the stories. Secondly, the actors and actresses, mainly semi-literates, are more comfortable and able to articulate themselves better in Akan than English, which is seen as a handicap.

Kumawood, with its local language medium, may be popular, since it draws extensively on popular culture, occultism and fantasy (Meyer 2003), close to *Anansesem* (Ananse folktales), but not everyone is enthused about its content and quality. Kumawood has come to represent what is mediocre, crude, obscene and vulgar, with its most popular actor, Kojo Nkansah (whose screen name is Lil Wayne), regarded by many as an illiterate 'fool' (in Shakespearean terms). Consequently, Kumawood productions are frowned upon by film critics and middle-class and elite viewers as embarrassing and amateurish. They are also ignored in the annual Ghana Movie Awards, which itself has been mired in controversy over the years for lack of direction and professionalism.

### 3.3 Television

Television has functioned as the bridge between popular theatre and cinema. From the mid-1970s all the way to the 1990s, Ghana Television had succeeded in transmitting and projecting drama onto the screen. The Osofo Dadzie group set the pace, followed by the Oبرا and Daakye groups, all of which were Akan drama troupes drawing on the traveling theatre or folk drama tradition. To give these productions a national character and to widen patronage, shows in Ewe (*Showcase in Ewe*, featuring such groups as the Gomido Theatre Group, also known as 'Agbedefu', and Tsitsige), Ga (*Showcase in Ga*, featuring the Adabraka Drama Troupe) and Dagbani (*Showcase in Dagbani*) were added. It must be emphasized that, like the Concert Party drama of old, these modern-day dramatic forms had succeeded in holding the mirror to national consciousness in terms of contemporary discourses. Again, like the Concert Party, they functioned as folk satires designed to make Ghanaians laugh at themselves and to inform, educate and entertain. They were especially designed for people in the countryside but had nonetheless enjoyed wide patronage across the social spectrum. For the educated elite, *Thursday Theatre*, aired on Thursday nights, was highly patronized due to its high quality in terms of production and acting. It was produced by Wallace Bampoe-Addo and featured the cream of Ghanaian actors and actresses including David Dontoh, Abbey Okai, William Addo, Efo Kojo Mawugbe, Fred Amugi, McJordan Amartey, Abi Adatsi, Mawuli Semevo, Edinam Atatsi, Dzifa Glikpoe, Akorfa Edzeani-Asiedu and Dzifa Gomashie.

Television projected these groups of performers, expanded the frontiers of their visibility and sharpened their performing skills. Television transformed the performance culture by easing and taking away much of the encumbrances and hazards of the traveling theatre, without necessarily cutting the performers away from their constituencies. Thus, like the traveling theatre, the television screens brought the drama to the doorsteps of many patrons.

However, with the advent of video, the indigenous drama troupes, particularly the Akan-based ones, and the Thursday Theatre groups, made a quick transition to the big screen. Once they embarked on that path, TV became more or less irrelevant as a platform for projecting dramatic performances. For the indigenous drama troupes, old productions were quickly rehashed and extended into full-length movies with a wider cast and setting. The Thursday Theatre actors and actresses, on the other hand, quickly metamorphosed into local movie stars, in their own small ways, almost rivaling the Hollywood icons. With the exception of a segment of the youth who were not convinced and still stuck to Western film stars such as Denzel Washington, Eddie Murphy,

Wesley Snipes, Morgan Freeman, Will Smith, Forrest Whitaker, Chris Rock, Chris Tucker, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Jackie Chan etc., the greater majority of viewers began to identify with home-grown stars like David Dontoh, William Addo, Fred Amugi and Akofa Edzeani-Asiedu, Mawuli Semevo, and later, new identities like Jackie Appiah, Yvonne Nelson, Pascaline Edwards, Kofi Adjorlolo, Grace Nortey, Nadia Buari, Emmanuel Armah, Ekow Smith-Asante, Majid Michel, John Dumelo, Van Vicker, Chris Attoh and others.

### 3.4 Hollywood and Independent European / Neorealist Cinema

Wilson (1994:225) notes that, "So widely seen is classical Hollywood cinema that it has influenced virtually all narrative films." To this, one must add independent European / Neorealist Cinema. The films which can be described as neorealist have frequently been categorized as a 'film movement'. The critic Andre Bazin has claimed that the development of the use of deep-focus photography in neorealism allowed a greater democracy for the eye by being closer to 'reality'. One major way in which these influences are felt is the gradual seepage of explicit eroticism and nudity into Ghanaian movies.

Over the ages, erotic art has featured in many cultures, including African culture. Especially in the Western world, the theme of illicit, carnal, erotic love provided inspiration for artistic expression. Some of the images were unabashedly vulgar and lurid in their portrayal of licentiousness. However, as Wolk-Simon (2000) asserts, most of these drawings, paintings and objects were made for private rather than public consumption. In recent times, the spread of technology and cultural permissiveness means there are now larger spaces and mediums for the consumption of these images.

The critical literature on eroticism in art has adopted different approaches. From the feminist aesthetic perspective especially, critics argue that the erotic in art is mostly about the power and supremacy [of men] over women. For instance, Duncan (1991:59) asserts that, "Time and again, the male confronts the female as an adversary whose independent existence as a physical or spiritual being must be assimilated to male needs, converted for abstractions, enfeebled, or destroyed."

The experimentation with eroticism and nudity in recent Ghanaian productions has stoked much fury and condemnation from the Ghanaian viewing public which sees it as nothing more than profane soft pornography. It is seen as culturally and artistically inappropriate and alien since in the Ghanaian performance tradition, as in oral narratives, sex is artistically masked or couched in euphemistic and symbolist language. One could hazard a guess that independent European or Neorealist cinema, rather than Hollywood, has influenced Ghallywood in the expression of sex and sexuality. This influence comes from the many Mexican and Venezuelan romantic soap operas that now dominate Ghanaian TV screens. Some of these are: *Esmeralda*, *Acapulco Bay*, *Second Chance*, *Hidden Passions*, *Storm Over Paradise*, *The Shadow*, *Until My Last Breath*, *The Promise*, *Long Wait*, *Stand Up for Love*, *La Supadora*, *Maria de Los Angeles*, *Woman of my Life*, *Sweet Fat Valentina*, *Juana la Virgen*, *The Quilt*, *Don't Mess with an Angel* and *Shades of Sin*.

These soap operas which invariably depict extended explicit erotic scenes including nudity and love-making, and showcase beautiful young women and flamboyant young men, have become attractive as motifs and blindly mimicked and experimented with in Ghanaian movies. Actors/actresses like Michel Majid, Van Vicker, Jackie Appiah and Nadia Buari have come dangerously close to offending conservative Ghanaian cultural sensibilities in films such as *Sinking Sands*, *Love and Sex*, *Love and Politics*, *Heart of Men*, *4Play* etc.

For actors/actresses and producers alike, there appears to be nothing wrong with such erotic scenes. While the actors/actresses claim that they are merely acting out roles in which they have been cast, the producers strongly debunk assertions that these scenes are alien to Ghanaian performing arts. More to the point, they harp on the commercial viability of films with steamy erotic and sexual scenes which, they argue, inure to box-office successes. One popular producer, Leila Djansi, expresses her candid views in the following interview by Deborah Ameyaw: [3]

Deborah Ameyaw (D.A): What does nudity and sex mean to you in terms of being used as an art form?

Leila Djansi (L.D): Nudity is a form of expression. It is a storytelling tool. It's also an aesthetic.

D.A: Nudity and sex are new to movies that are distributed in Ghana. Why do you think both are new to movies in Ghana? What has taken Ghanaian filmmakers so long to incorporate them in their films?

L.D: Just take Hollywood; it is a phase each industry has to pass through. Hollywood went through it with the Catholic Church and other elements... Same way censorship boards in Ghana are getting drastic and same way it was in the early years of the American film industry...The constant thing is change. That strong Ghanaian culture is slowly growing lax with all the globalization.

### 3.5 Nollywood

Nollywood's resources, appeal and reach place it miles ahead of Ghallywood. The latter has benefited from the former in what is now broadly referred to as Ghallywood-Nollywood collaboration. This collaboration seems to be symbiotic, even if the partnership has been an uneasy one. Ghanaian actors and actresses, particularly Jackie

Appiah, Nadia Buari, Nana Ama McBrown, Van Vicker, and Kofi Adjorlolo, now find lead roles in Nigerian movies. Beyond that, Nigerian film producers bring in resources using a combination of Nigerian and Ghanaian artistes to roll out titles in rapid succession. According to Kwaw Ansah, Nigerian filmmakers have altered the landscape of video production in Ghana: “Where it would take Ghanaians six months to make a film, it takes Nigerian producers in Ghana six weeks to complete a film. Thus, Ghanaian filmmakers abandoned film production and started seeking roles in Nigerian film.” [4] However, beyond the box office, and attempts by some Ghanaian actors/actresses to sometimes mimic Nigerian pidgin, the extent to which the influence and success of Nollywood have impacted on the content and quality of Ghallywood remains unclear.

### 3.6 Technology

Most Ghanaian movies run on very low budgets so producers cannot afford to procure high quality equipment to produce movies on 35mm and 70mm celluloid. The video format appears to be a convenient shortcut to doing film business without being bogged down by financial constraints. Initially, low quality video equipment were used, resulting in hazy and fuzzy picture and sound quality. This is becoming a thing of the past as the industry improves.

With the benefit of multimedia technology, Ghanaian film-makers, far from mastering the sophisticated and extraterrestrial stunts that distinguish Hollywood from other film cultures, nonetheless, have been able to spice their productions with make-believe motion photography. They go in for the most fundamental of video editing skills such as shape-shifting and metamorphosing human beings into pythons, skeletons and vice versa, or enacting vanishing and levitation acts. Also, with the advent of computer graphic interface, three-dimensional graphics and animation have been incorporated into Ghallywood productions in their most rudimentary forms. These include mythical figures, beasts and monsters which are chiefly portrayed in their most hideous anthropomorphic constructions. They are usually used to re-enact and reaffirm Ghanaians’ belief in superstition and witchcraft. Computer softwares are also transforming and enriching Ghallywood in other ways. They include Particle Illusion, Adobe After-Effects, Autodesk Maya, 3d Studio Max and others. They are mainly used in the post-production stage by visual effects artists and video editors to create such visual effects as explosions, thunderstorms, man-in-flight, blood spillage and display of mystical and supernatural powers which ranges from heat vision to fireballs among others.

At the other end of the scale are sound effects and beat making softwares. Among them are Adobe Sound Booth, Fruity Loops, Reason and Sound forge which enable sound effects artists and music score artists to compose motion picture soundtracks to complement the films. Often, the viewer can grasp the entire storyline of the film just by listening to the soundtrack which accompanies the film. Alternatively, popular Rnb, Hip-hop, hip-life and classical songs are borrowed without permission or due acknowledgement.

It is worth mentioning that animated feature films are springing up at a rather slow pace as compared to live action films. Recent animated feature films include *Ananse Must Die* and *28<sup>th</sup> February Crossroad Shootings*. The slow pace of cartoon animation is most likely due to the labour-intensive nature of animation, inadequate professional animators, lack of expertise in animation and the high cost involved in producing animated feature films. Nonetheless, there are quite a number of animated T.V commercials by some leading animators like Zingaro and Akroma Productions.

Technology has not only transformed the presentation of Ghallywood films but has also crept into the storylines themselves. Examples are films based on cyber-fraud, popularly known as 419, in which foreigners are lured and deluded into fraudulent deals leaving them bankrupt. A recent influence of technology in Ghallywood storylines is *2016*, a quasi-futuristic science-fiction film themed on alien invasion, in which robotic aliens from space invade Ghana in their quest to conquer and dominate the entire country.

On the whole, these technologically-induced images have enthralled and appealed to a large percentage of unsophisticated patrons who now have concrete visual expressions of the occult and other narrative tropes which exist in folklore and popular theatre but are confined to the imagination.

There are other ways in which technology has influenced not only the movie industry but also popular culture. What the video revolution is doing to the cinema culture in Ghana is also a function of the advancement of technology. Cinema houses, such as Opera, Rex, Orion, Palladium, Regal, Oxford and Plaza in Accra as well as Casino and Vision 66 in Tema, which flourished in the country from the 1950s till the 90s, have been converted by the many charismatic and Pentecostal churches into houses of worship. Thus, the mass appeal of popular theatre, which was translated into the massive patronage of cinemas, is all but dead due to the portability of films on compact discs (CDs) and other storage devices. GAMA’s Executive Theatre (TV3) and Global Media Alliance’s Silver Bird Film Theatre (located in the Accra Mall) are striving hard to revive interest in the big screen. However, across the country, even in the remotest areas where there is the luxury of electricity, individual households prefer to screen movies in the comfort of their living rooms and compounds. The flooding of the market with cheap DVD players has made all these possible. This is a clear indication that, indeed, the future of the entertainment industry in Ghana belongs to the video-movie industry.

#### 4.0 State of the Art

The conclusions to be drawn from this study are self-evident. Contemporary Ghanaian performing arts is moving from the stage to the screen. Although predicated on the aboriginal performance tradition, drawing extensively on popular/traveling theatre, the new artistic products are filtering through a process of cross-fertilization, as it were - the industry is still in its formative stages, and is being shaped by many influences, internal and external. Compared to Nollywood, it is a small industry with a huge potential to blossom in terms of scope, artistry, technique, infrastructure, identity and marketing. This will, of course, materialize through the injection of capital, monitoring, regulation and training.

However, one must be quick to point out that the influences discussed above have not turned around the Ghanaian video-movie industry by way of quality. About 95 percent of the productions are, to say the least, substandard. Generally, the storylines are thin and flimsy and are laboriously sustained by boring dialogue stretched over long periods. Lead roles are assigned to half-baked actors and actresses who are most times more conscious of their presence on the screen than what they are doing. Above all, the propensity towards magic, witchcraft and other forms of occultism has rendered Ghanaian films, particularly the Akan-based ones, nothing more than a packaging of flimsy infantile fairy tales with little or no artistic value. They draw on the high degree of Ghanaians' belief in superstition and the occult, which in itself is not the problem, but rather the flippant recourse to it as a shortcut to plot structure and development. According to veteran actress, Rama Brew, "It has to do with the refusal to learn, lack of application of knowledge where it exists, passion for shortcuts and the attitude of producers who are consumed by ego" [5]. A *Daily Graphic* columnist, Manasseh Azure Awuni, in a scathing feature article, sums up the state of the Ghana movies in the following words:

Today, love seems to be the only theme available to our film makers. And one finds it difficult to differentiate between Ghallywood's love films and pornography. Love and romance are not bad themes but our inability to domesticate the theme to suit our socio-cultural context makes the films not only boring to those with literary eyes, but also very irrelevant [6].

He is equally critical of indigenous language productions which are haphazardly packaged and generally lacking artistic merit:

Lately, the local language productions have come with their own myriad of flaws. While there has been a significant improvement in the quality of productions of these local movies, the story lines are not worthy of any good commentary...Some of these stories are just like the "maame ne papa" kind of thing that children learning to come to terms with reality perform on playgrounds. The theme is rather that of spirituality or litigation in which razor-sharp tongues such as Agya Koo or Kyeiwa subject their victims to insults [7].

In Nigeria, for instance, in the wake of the growing concern that the Nigerian video films industry requires significant improvement in technical standard and artistic qualities, Mainframe Film and Television Productions (shortened to Mainframe), has responded to the challenges by addressing some of the immediate problems (Adeoti 2010). Unfortunately, there is no such intervention in Ghana. The Ghana Film Censorship Board has not done much to set standards and benchmarks to guide the industry. Until something similar to the Nigerian Mainframe project happens in Ghana, shoddy video-movies will continue to flourish in Ghallywood, notwithstanding the fact that the annual Ghana Movie Awards continue to recognize and reward 'excellence'.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

Like folklore and music, film is a cultural activity and an identity-marker. Carmela Garritano is right in pointing out in the introduction to her *African Video Movies and Global Desires* (2013), titled 'African Popular Videos as Global Cultural Forms: A Ghanaian History', that the emergence of popular video industries in Ghana and Nigeria represents the most important and exciting development in African cultural production in recent history. It is a phenomenon which is reversing the paradox of Africans viewing themselves from alien perspectives and, as she notes,

Though the film medium has failed to take root in Africa, video has flourished. An inexpensive, widely available, and easy to use technology for the production, duplication, and distribution of movies and other media content, video has radically transformed the African cultural landscape. In perhaps its most consequential manifestation, video has allowed videomakers in Ghana and Nigeria, individuals who in most cases are detached from official cultural institutions and working outside the purview of the state, to create a tremendously popular, commercial cinema for audiences in Africa and abroad: featuring "films" made on video (1).

However, one must be quick to add that the industry must shed its large baggage of mimicry of Western popular culture, Latin telenovellas, magic and witchcraft and, generally, spurious, flimsy and monotonous content and strive to achieve high artistic standards through training and capital injection. Ghanaian popular culture, art, music, the state, its people and institutions and the various ways in which these are evolving within the global environment, must crystalize positively and creatively through the corpus of the current boom

of video-movies. It remains to be seen whether William Akuffo's Ghallywood Village (a film training school situated about 30 kilometres east of Accra) would turn the Ghanaian video-movie industry around and give it some national character and identity.

#### Notes

1. 'Cinema', 'film', and 'video-movie' have been used liberally and interchangeably in this article.
2. Used here as a Black universal construct rather than Black American 'blackness'.
3. Ameyaw, Deborah. 'Leila Djansi Interview: Sex Sells, Even if the Subject Matter is Serious.' The full interview is available at: <http://www.thenigerianvoice.com/nvnews/36866>. Accessed February 6, 2011.
4. Kwaw Ansah made this remark in his key note address delivered at the Second Ife International Film Festival held at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Quoted in Adeoti, 'Nigerian Home Video Tradition and the Challenges of 'Border-neutering': The Mainframe Paradigms,' p.5.
5. Personal communication with Rama Brew, E-tv Ghana, Accra, December 22, 2010.
6. 'Agya Koo's SUV and the Ghallywood Awards', Daily Graphic, February 12, 2011.
7. Ibid.
8. The name 'Ghallywood' has been roundly criticized by many Ghanaians, including popular Actress Anima Misa of Kwaw Ansah's *Love Brewed in the African Pot* fame, who thinks that 'Ghallywood' is unimaginative and a ludicrous mimicry of 'Hollywood', 'Bollywood' and 'Nollywood'.

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