Uda Ikoro: Nollywood Epic Films and the Marginalisation of Igbo Indigenous Communication in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

Nollywood has become an important cultural site through which Nigerian histories, identities, beliefs, rituals and indigenous knowledge systems are remembered, reproduced and circulated. This is particularly evident in the cultural-epic tradition of Igbo-oriented Nigerian cinema, whose narratives frequently return to precolonial communities, indigenous political institutions, ritual practices, masquerades, music and systems of communal communication. Yet the audiovisual representation of Igbo sonic culture is uneven. While instruments such as the *ogene, oja* and *ekwe* are frequently visible or audible in representations of traditional Igbo life, the monumental and culturally significant *Ikoro* appears comparatively marginal in the accessible textual and scholarly record of Igbo Nollywood. This article investigates this representational asymmetry through ten purposively sampled Igbo historical, cultural and epic films and related screen texts, examining available subtitles, scripts, reviews, synopses, film descriptions and scholarship for references to *Ikoro*/*Ikolo*/*Ụkolo*, *Ekwe* and *Ogene*. The study argues that the problem is not simply the absence of an instrument from individual films. Rather, the relative underrepresentation of *Ikoro* constitutes a problem of cultural memory and audiovisual mediation because the *Ikoro* is not merely a musical instrument but an indigenous communication technology whose material form, sound, ritual restrictions, ecological knowledge, craftsmanship and social meanings are interconnected. Existing scholarship establishes the *Ikoro* as a medium of communal mobilisation, ritual authority, historical

memory and sacred communication. By contrast, Nollywood's more frequent reliance on *ogene* and *ekwe* risks narrowing the sonic representation of Igbo communication and contributing, indirectly, to the marginalisation of knowledge about the *Ikoro* itself. The article proposes the concept of indigenous narrative technology to describe the capacity of the *Ikoro* to communicate, organise, remember and narrate communal experience. It concludes by arguing for systematic audiovisual documentation of *Ikoro* knowledge before further erosion occurs.

Keywords: *Ikoro*; *Ikolo*; Igbo; Nollywood; indigenous knowledge; cultural memory; indigenous communication; audiovisual archive.

Introduction

Nollywood occupies an unusual position within African cultural production. It is simultaneously a commercial film industry, a popular entertainment system and a major site of cultural representation. Since the emergence of *Living in Bondage* in the early 1990s, Nigerian video film has repeatedly drawn upon indigenous languages, rituals, beliefs, folklore, social institutions and historical imaginaries. The significance of *Living in Bondage* for Igbo cultural representation is especially important because the film's use of Igbo language initially appeared to promise a broader cultural and linguistic renaissance. Emejulu and Amadi (2014), however, argue that the Igbo-language component of this early promise was progressively weakened by the commercial orientation of the industry. The relationship between Nollywood and cultural memory is particularly visible in the cultural-epic genre. Haynes (2016) identifies *The Battle of Musanga* and *Igodo* as foundational films in the development of the Nigerian cultural epic, a genre that repeatedly constructs versions of a precolonial past through landscape, costume, ritual, kingship, spirituality and communal conflict. These films do not merely entertain audiences with imaginary worlds. They provide audiovisual representations of ways of life that are increasingly distant from the experience of many contemporary viewers. This archival function of Nigerian cinema raises an important question: what happens when particular elements of indigenous knowledge are repeatedly represented while others disappear from the screen?

This article addresses that question through the case of the *Ikoro*, also known in different Igbo communities and sources as *Ikolo* or *Ukolo*. The *Ikoro* is a monumental wooden slit drum whose significance extends far beyond musical performance. Existing scholarship describes it as a communication instrument, a marker of communal authority, a ritual object and a repository of historical and social meanings. Onuora (2016) distinguishes the monumental Ikoro from the smaller *ekwe*, noting that the *Ikoro's* enlarged material form is associated with community authority, warfare, heroic achievement and the transmission of important information. Madukasi (2016), working among the Aguleri, similarly demonstrates that *Ikoro* sound has religious, cultural, political, ethical and social significance. The drum's sound constitutes a channel through which the community engages with religious meanings, ancestors and deities. Anedo (2012) further demonstrates the relationship between *Ikoro*, oral tradition, funeral practice, master-apprentice transmission and cultural memory. His concern is particularly significant for the present argument: knowledge surrounding the *Ikoro* cannot be completely transferred into written text because the tradition is embedded in sound, performance and embodied practice.

The central argument of this article is therefore twofold. First, Nollywood functions as a repository and audiovisual archive of Igbo cultural memory. Second, the archive is selective. The recurrent visibility of *ogene*, *oja* and *ekwe*, alongside the relative marginality of *Ikoro*, creates an uneven audiovisual representation of Igbo indigenous communication. The issue is consequently not simply whether filmmakers "forgot" an instrument. It is whether a significant indigenous communication technology is being progressively displaced in the cultural imagination by more easily recognisable or more frequently represented instruments.

Nollywood as a Cultural Archive

The idea of Nollywood as a cultural archive requires some qualification. Films are not neutral repositories. They select, reconstruct, simplify and sometimes invent cultural practices. Haynes (2016) demonstrates this clearly in his discussion of the cultural epic, where historical and legendary materials are transformed into dramatic narratives. The Igbo cultural epic frequently constructs a precolonial world populated by *Igwe*, priests, warriors, diviners, ritual specialists and

communities negotiating supernatural and political conflicts. The screen therefore becomes a space in which cultural memory is not simply preserved but performed. This distinction is important. A film may preserve an object visually without preserving the knowledge associated with it. A drum may appear in a village square while the audience receives no information about its name, maker, material, ritual restrictions, sonic vocabulary or communicative function. In this sense, representation may preserve an **image** while allowing the underlying knowledge system to disappear.

The history of *Things Fall Apart* demonstrates the potential of screen media to transmit indigenous cultural knowledge. Ugochukwu (2014) argues that the television adaptation became an important precursor to Nollywood's interest in history, ancestral villages, cultural roots, Igbo-English linguistic practices and theme music that reinforces narrative meaning. Munachim (2020) similarly demonstrates that the *Things Fall Apart* adaptation provided substantial representation of Igbo language, rituals, festivals, costumes, foodways, orature, values and religious beliefs. The film therefore offers an important model for understanding Nollywood's archival potential. Yet it also provides an important contradiction.

The *Ikoro*, *Ekwe* and *Ogene*: Related but Not Interchangeable

One of the central problems in discussing Igbo instruments is the tendency to treat all wooden or metallic instruments as interchangeable. Onuora (2016) explains that the *Ikoro* has a relationship to the *ekwe* because both belong to the slit-drum family. However, he distinguishes the monumental *Ikoro* from the ordinary *ekwe* on the basis of size, function, social status, gendered access, ritual association and political significance. In his formulation, the *ekwe* can be a relatively ordinary instrument, whereas the *Ikoro* represents an elevated and monumental form of the slit drum associated with community authority and heroic accomplishment. This distinction is crucial for film analysis. The *ogene* is a metal gong. The *ekwe* is generally a wooden slit drum. The *Ikoro* is also a slit drum but may become monumental in scale and significance. Consequently, the substitution of *ekwe* for *Ikoro* is not necessarily a simple substitution of one musical sound for another. It can involve the replacement of one cultural institution with another. The distinction becomes even clearer when we consider communication.

Things Fall Apart identifies the *ogene* and *ekwe* as instruments used for communication. The *ogene* could attract the attention of community members, while the *ekwe* could summon members of religious associations, announce important events and communicate the death of a significant person. The *Ikoro*, however, operates at another level in communities where it has monumental status. Historical and ethnographic accounts describe it as a community-wide signalling system, particularly for emergencies, war, festivals and significant communal events. An earlier account of the Igbo communication system describes the *Ikoro* as comparable to a traditional telegraph because of its capacity to transmit messages over considerable distances. The conceptual difference can therefore be expressed as follows: *Ogene*/*ekwe* may communicate within a social event; the *Ikoro* can constitute the event of communal communication itself. That distinction makes the *Ikoro* particularly suitable for analysis as an indigenous narrative technology.

Nollywood has increasingly been recognised as an important medium through which African societies represent, negotiate and transmit cultural memory. Haynes (2016) situates the cultural epic within Nollywood's engagement with the traditional and precolonial past, identifying *The Battle of Musanga* and *Igodo* as foundational films in the genre. The cultural epic frequently reconstructs indigenous worlds through kingship, spirituality, communal organisation, ritual, costume, music and other cultural forms. This establishes Nollywood as not merely an entertainment medium but also a significant cultural space in which aspects of African cultural memory are selected, reconstructed and circulated. The capacity of film to transmit cultural knowledge is particularly relevant to the representation of Igbo culture. Nollywood's cultural films frequently employ indigenous language, ritual, costume, music and traditional instruments to establish a recognisable cultural environment. Such representations can contribute to cultural continuity by exposing contemporary audiences to practices and symbols associated with the past. However, cinematic representation is necessarily selective. A film may successfully reproduce the general atmosphere of an indigenous society without documenting all the specific knowledge systems, objects and communication practices through which that society historically functioned.

This distinction is particularly important in relation to indigenous sound. Local instruments such as *ogene*, *ekwe* and *oja* can serve important cinematic functions by establishing cultural location, historical period and communal identity. Indigenous sound therefore becomes an important component of the cultural atmosphere of Nollywood's traditional and cultural-epic films. Nevertheless, the representation of indigenous sound in general should not automatically be regarded as comprehensive documentation of particular indigenous sound technologies. Onuora (2016) provides an important foundation for understanding this distinction in his study, *Ikoro Drums Among the Igbo: Iconology and Design Symbols*. He describes *Ikoro*, also referred to in some communities as *Ikoro* or *Ukolo*, as a monumental development of the Igbo slit-drum tradition. More significantly, he demonstrates that *Ikoro* has historically functioned not merely as a musical instrument but as a community communication device used for conveying important information and mobilising members of the community. Its location, physical scale, visual designs, craftsmanship and relationship with communal authority also contribute to its cultural significance. Onuora's contribution is particularly relevant to the present study because it reveals the multidimensional character of *Ikoro*. Its significance encompasses sound, communication, material culture, visual symbolism, craftsmanship and communal memory. His observation of the deterioration of some *Ikoro* monuments is also important to the question of cultural preservation. In the case of the Umunze *Ikoro Obibiaku*, for example, Onuora documents physical deterioration associated with neglect, lack of use and inadequate maintenance. Thus, the vulnerability of *Ikoro* involves not only the physical survival of the object but also the continued transmission of the knowledge and meanings associated with it.

Other scholarship similarly positions *Ikoro* within indigenous communication systems rather than treating it simply as a musical instrument. Research on traditional African communication identifies the large wooden gong or *Ikoro* as a means of summoning communities and communicating events such as danger, death and communal emergencies. Such scholarship draws directly on Onuora's description of *Ikoro* as a monumental slit drum associated with Igbo communities. The literature therefore establishes two related fields of enquiry: scholarship on Nollywood as a medium of cultural representation and scholarship on *Ikoro* as an indigenous communication and cultural system. What remains less explored is the

relationship between these two fields. In particular, limited attention has been given to whether Nollywood's extensive representation of Igbo traditional life has also documented the specific cultural knowledge associated with *Ikoro*.

This study addresses that gap by examining selected Igbo cultural-epic films from 1996 to 2003. It distinguishes between the use of indigenous instruments to create cultural atmosphere and their capacity to function as sites for documenting specific cultural memory. The study argues that although instruments such as *ogene*, *ekwe* and *oja* contribute effectively to the construction of an Igbo cinematic soundscape, their presence does not constitute adequate documentation of *Ikoro*. The limited specific representation of *Ikoro* consequently raises an important question about selective cultural memory and the role of Nollywood in preserving vulnerable indigenous knowledge.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative film-analysis approach to examine the representation and narrative significance of indigenous sound and communication in ten selected Igbo Nollywood cultural-epic films. The study treats the film not merely as an entertainment text but as an audiovisual site in which cultural memory may be selected, reconstructed, condensed and circulated. The methodological concern is therefore not simply to identify the presence of musical instruments, but to examine what particular instruments signify, what social functions they perform within the diegesis, and how their visual and sonic representation participates in the construction of Igbo communal memory. The study uses a purposive sample of ten Nigerian video films associated with the early cultural-epic cycle of Nollywood: *The Battle of Musanga, Ojadike, Oracle, Igodo: The Land of the Living Dead, Ijele, Ibuka: King of the Forest, Eye of the Gods, Lion King, Egg of Life* and *Festival of Fire*.

The analytical procedure combines textual, visual and sonic reading. Each film is considered in relation to five interconnected categories: (1) the presence or absence of *Ikoro/Ikolo* as an object or sound; (2) the representation of other indigenous instruments, especially *ogene* and *ekwe*; (3) the narrative or communicative function assigned to indigenous sound; (4) the relationship between sound, communal authority, ritual, warfare, memory and identity; and (5) the extent to

which the audiovisual text makes indigenous material culture visible as cultural knowledge. Particular attention is given to scenes involving royal ceremonies, communal assemblies, ritual performances, warfare, mourning, festivals, spiritual encounters and other moments in which sound can organize collective action or cultural meaning.

The analysis is also informed by Chijioke Onuora's study, "*Ikoro* Drums Among the Igbo: Iconology and Design Symbols." Onuora's account is especially useful because it moves beyond treating *Ikoro* simply as a large slit drum. The paper discusses its physical form, carved human and animal figures, heroic associations, martial symbolism, village unity, communal voice, gendered and procreative imagery, sacred animals and the relationship between visual motifs and Igbo worldview. It further argues that *Ikoro* functions as a community's collective voice and that its visual form carries statements about the community's history, values and social imagination. These observations provide the conceptual basis for reading *Ikoro*/*Ikolo* in the selected films as a potential narrative technology rather than merely as background musical accompaniment.

The study does not assume that the absence of a searchable reference to *Ikoro* proves that a film contains no *Ikoro*. The early Nigerian video-film archive is incompletely indexed, and many of the selected films circulated primarily through VHS and later informal digital copies. Consequently, the film analysis distinguishes between evidence established through available filmic material and claims requiring scene-by-scene verification from the researcher's viewing copies. The principal argument is therefore concerned with patterns of representation rather than an unsupported statistical claim about the absolute absence of *Ikoro* in the films.

Chronological Arrangement of the Selected Films

S/N	Film	Release Year Used in Study	Director / Key Credit
1	The Battle of Musanga	1996	Bolaji Dawodu
2	Oracle	1998	Andy Amaechi

3	Igodo: The Land of the Living Dead	1999	Andy Amenechi / Don Pedro Obaseki
4	Festival of Fire	1999	Chico Ejiro
5	Ijele	2000	Fred Amata
6	Ojadike	2000	Ojiofor Ezeanyaeche
7	Ibuka: King of the Forest	2000	Lancelot Imasuen
8	Eye of the Gods	2002	Andy Amenechi
9	Lion King	2003	Andy Amenechi
10	Egg of Life	2003	Andy Amenechi

Analyses of *The Battle of Musanga* (1996)

This distinction is important. The presence of indigenous instruments in a film can produce an appropriate sense of place, historical period and cultural identity. It can make a scene recognisably Igbo and establish what may be described as an indigenous cinematic soundscape. However, the presence of local instruments in general does not automatically constitute documentation of the particular cultural knowledge associated with *Ikoro*. The argument, therefore, is not that the selected films fail to represent Igbo culture. On the contrary, they make considerable efforts to construct recognisable representations of Igbo traditional life. The problem is that their representation is selective. They reproduce some aspects of indigenous culture more consistently than others. In this process, *Ikoro* remains largely outside the audiovisual record created by these films.

The Battle of Musanga occupies an important position in the development of the Nollywood cultural epic. The film constructs a traditional African world through elements such as kingship, warfare, communal life, costumes, music and ceremonial performance. Its significance extends beyond its individual narrative because it helped establish a cinematic mode through which aspects of the African past could be reconstructed for contemporary audiences. The film demonstrates the ability of Nollywood to employ indigenous cultural resources as components of cinematic representation. Traditional music and instruments contribute to the atmosphere of ceremonies, public gatherings and other culturally significant

moments. Such elements help the viewer recognise the social world represented on screen.

However, the film does not specifically employ *Ikoro* as a cultural communication system. The use of other indigenous instruments should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that *Ikoro* has been adequately represented. The film provides a generalised representation of indigenous Igbo sound and performance rather than a detailed audiovisual record of the particular meanings, functions and material culture associated with *Ikoro*. This distinction is significant because a film can successfully represent an indigenous cultural environment without documenting every component of that environment. *The Battle of Musanga* demonstrates the strength of Nollywood's cultural reconstruction, but it also reveals the selectivity of that reconstruction.

Analyses of *Oracle* (1998)

Oracle participates in the broader tradition of Nollywood films that engage with indigenous spirituality, traditional authority and supernatural belief. Its cultural world is constructed through visual and auditory signs associated with traditional African society. As in *The Battle of Musanga*, indigenous sound contributes to the creation of cultural atmosphere. The use of traditional instruments helps establish the setting and reinforces the perception that the narrative belongs to a traditionally organised social world.

Nevertheless, *Ikoro* is not specifically employed as a central communicative or symbolic instrument, especially when the oracle is stolen in the film. Consequently, the film does not provide documentation of the knowledge embedded in *Ikoro*, its physical form, construction, performance, communicative codes, community ownership, social occasions, symbolism or relationship to communal authority. The distinction between cultural atmosphere and cultural documentation is particularly relevant here. The film communicates "traditional Igbo-ness" without necessarily communicating the specific cultural knowledge attached to *Ikoro*.

Analyses of *Igodo: The Land of the Living Dead* (1999)

Igodo: The Land of the Living Dead is particularly important to this discussion because it is one of the films through which the cultural-epic genre became firmly established in Nollywood. Haynes (2016) describes epic genre as one that represents the traditional or precolonial past. The film makes extensive use of traditional cultural forms, including indigenous performance, music, communal rituals, traditional authority and supernatural imagery. These elements contribute to the construction of an elaborate indigenous world. The film consequently demonstrates Nollywood's considerable capacity to preserve visual and auditory traces of traditional culture through popular cinema.

Yet the film's representation of indigenous sound does not amount to specific documentation of *Ikoro*, even when the calamities in the land require the sounding of the *Ikoro*. The use of other instruments creates a convincing cultural environment, but it does not record the distinctive knowledge associated with *Ikoro*. This is where the concept of selective cultural memory becomes useful. *Igodo* preserves certain images and sounds of Igbo traditional life, but preservation is never necessarily complete. What is remembered on screen depends partly upon what filmmakers choose to represent, what production circumstances permit and what cultural forms can be incorporated into the narrative. Thus, the significance of *Igodo* lies not only in what it preserves but also in what its representation leaves undocumented.

Analyses of *Festival of Fire* (1999)

Festival of Fire further demonstrates the capacity of Nollywood to represent indigenous ritual, communal practices and the tension between traditional belief systems and changing religious orientations. The film's use of indigenous sound and performance contributes significantly to the atmosphere of the traditional environment. Music, ritual activity and other cultural signs allow the audience to encounter a representation of an indigenous social world. However, the film does not specifically document *Ikoro*. Its indigenous soundscape should therefore be understood as part of the broader cinematic construction of tradition rather than as a detailed record of *Ikoro* culture.

This limitation is important because *Ikoro* is not simply another musical instrument that can be substituted by *ogene*, *ekwe* or *oja*. Each indigenous instrument may possess its own history, social function, symbolic vocabulary and relationship to community life. Consequently, replacing one with another for purposes of cinematic atmosphere can produce cultural recognition without producing cultural documentation.

Analyses of *Ijele* (2000)

Ijele offers another significant example of Nollywood's engagement with Igbo cultural performance. The film constructs its traditional environment through costumes, ceremonies, dance, music, social hierarchy and indigenous performance traditions. The presence of local instruments contributes to the film's cultural authenticity at the level of atmosphere. The soundscape helps communicate that the characters inhabit a recognisably indigenous environment.

Nevertheless, the film does not specifically employ *Ikoro* as a sustained narrative or communicative resource. The absence is significant because the film's extensive engagement with Igbo cultural materials might otherwise suggest a more comprehensive documentation of indigenous cultural forms. The case of *Ijele* therefore demonstrates the difference between representation of culture and documentation of cultural knowledge. Representation may select those elements that are visually spectacular, narratively useful or readily recognisable to audiences. Documentation requires a different level of attention to the specific knowledge attached to a cultural object or practice.

Analyses of *Ojadike* (2000) *Ojadike* similarly constructs a traditional cultural environment through indigenous social practices, music, performance and visual elements. Its use of local cultural materials helps situate the narrative within a recognisable Igbo world. Yet *Ikoro* does not occupy a specific role within the film's narrative or soundscape. This is particularly important when considering film as a potential archive. An archive does not become comprehensive simply because it contains several examples from the same cultural category. Recording *ogene*, *ekwe* and *oja* does not automatically preserve the knowledge of *Ikoro*. Each represents a particular body of knowledge, practice and memory. Therefore, the cinematic representation of some indigenous instruments can coexist with the under-representation of others.

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Analyses of *Ibuka: King of the Forest* (2000)

Ibuka: King of the Forest continues the cultural-epic tradition through its engagement with indigenous authority, communal life, traditional belief and cultural performance. The film's indigenous soundscape contributes to the construction of its traditional environment. Local instruments and other cultural forms help establish a sense of historical and cultural location. However, the specific cultural knowledge associated with *Ikoro* is not documented. The film therefore reinforces the broader pattern identified across the films: indigenous sound is present, but *Ikoro*-specific knowledge is largely absent.

This pattern raises an important question about the role of Nollywood in cultural memory. If popular films repeatedly reproduce certain instruments, ceremonies and visual symbols, these forms become more visible to contemporary audiences and potentially more available for intergenerational recognition. Conversely, cultural forms that remain outside these representations may receive less audiovisual reinforcement. The implication is not that a film must document every aspect of a culture. Rather, the cumulative effect of selective representation deserves scholarly attention, particularly where the excluded cultural form is already experiencing weakened intergenerational transmission.

Analyses of *Eye of the Gods* (2002)

Eye of the Gods continues the films's engagement with traditional spirituality and indigenous cultural imagination. As with the earlier films, the construction of the traditional world depends on a combination of visual and auditory cultural signs. Indigenous instruments contribute to the atmosphere of the narrative and help distinguish the represented world from contemporary urban life. They operate as signs of cultural location and historical difference. Yet *Ikoro* remains outside this specific cinematic construction. The film consequently contributes to the broader pattern in which indigenous instruments appear in generalised form while the particular knowledge surrounding *Ikoro* remains undocumented.

Analyses of *Lion King* (2003)

Lion King similarly draws upon indigenous cultural forms to create its narrative world. Its traditional setting is supported by local performance practices, indigenous sound and other cultural signifiers. Nevertheless, the film does not specifically employ *Ikoro* as a cultural communication technology. Its use of other indigenous instruments may create an appropriate atmosphere, but this atmosphere does not constitute documentation of the particular cultural memory of *Ikoro*. The distinction is especially important because audiences may encounter repeated representations of certain indigenous instruments and gradually associate those instruments with a general understanding of Igbo tradition. Such repetition can strengthen the cultural visibility of the represented forms. However, it can simultaneously leave less frequently represented forms at the margins of popular cultural memory.

Analyses of *Egg of Life* (2003) *Egg of Life* completes the selected films and further demonstrates Nollywood's interest in traditional belief, spirituality, indigenous social structures and supernatural narratives. The film employs cultural and sonic elements that help create a convincing traditional environment. Such devices are effective within the grammar of popular cinema because they communicate cultural location quickly and economically. Nevertheless, the specific cultural system surrounding *Ikoro* is not documented in the film. Its absence from the films is therefore not an absence of indigenous sound generally. Rather, it is an absence of a particular indigenous sound technology and the cultural knowledge embedded within it. The film consequently reinforces the central finding of this

analysis: the selected cultural epics preserve aspects of Igbo cultural atmosphere without providing a comprehensive audiovisual archive of Igbo indigenous communication systems.

Discussion: Cinematic Representation and the Loss of *Ikoro* Cultural Memory

The analysis of the ten films reveals an important paradox. Nollywood has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to represent Igbo traditional life, yet this representation remains selective. The films preserve kings, warriors, traditional rulers, masquerades, rituals, shrines, costumes, dances, indigenous beliefs and various forms of traditional music. They therefore constitute valuable cultural texts. However, the representation of an indigenous cultural environment should not automatically be equated with comprehensive documentation of indigenous knowledge. The repeated use of *ogene*, *ekwe*, *oja* and other local instruments is effective in producing a recognisable Igbo atmosphere. These instruments perform important cinematic functions by establishing place, historical period, communal identity and emotional tone. They can make a scene sound culturally appropriate and help audiences recognise the represented world as indigenous. Yet they cannot be regarded as adequate substitutes for the documentation of *Ikoro*.

The reason is that *Ikoro* embodies more than sound. It represents a combination of material knowledge, craftsmanship, communal ownership, performance practice, communication, symbolism, spatial organisation, social authority and historical memory. Its cultural meaning is therefore embedded in a wider system of relationships. A film that merely uses *ogene*, *ekwe* or another indigenous instrument can communicate the idea of "traditional Igbo culture", but it does not necessarily communicate what *Ikoro* means, how it is constructed, who makes it, who performs it, when it is sounded, how particular rhythms or patterns communicate messages, how communities interpret its sound, or how its visual form relates to local history. This is the central distinction between cinematic atmosphere and cultural documentation.

A film may be culturally evocative without being ethnographically comprehensive. It may successfully recreate the atmosphere of a traditional community while leaving particular cultural technologies undocumented. The selected Nollywood films illustrate precisely this problem. The issue becomes more significant when considered alongside the weakening transmission of knowledge about *Ikoro* in some communities. Existing scholarship has documented concerns about the deterioration of *Ikoro*, weakening intergenerational transmission and declining knowledge of its meanings and uses. These concerns suggest that the problem is not merely that *Ikoro* has received insufficient attention from filmmakers; it is that the cultural knowledge surrounding it may itself be becoming increasingly vulnerable.

The absence of *Ikoro* from the selected films should therefore be understood within this wider context of cultural change. It would, however, be too strong to claim that Nollywood itself has caused the loss of *Ikoro*. Cultural transmission is affected by numerous factors, including modernisation, religious transformation, changing patterns of community organisation, declining apprenticeship systems, changing musical preferences, migration, reduced communal use of traditional spaces and the physical deterioration of old cultural objects. The more defensible argument is that, while these broader processes have contributed to the vulnerability of *Ikoro* knowledge, Nollywood has not substantially compensated for this loss through sustained audiovisual documentation of the instrument and its associated knowledge.

This creates a significant cultural-memory gap. Nollywood remembers the king, the warrior, the masquerade, the shrine, the festival and the indigenous soundscape, but it does not necessarily remember every cultural technology that organised the community. This selective memory has implications for future generations. What is repeatedly represented on screen has greater potential to remain visible within popular cultural consciousness. What is absent from the screen does not automatically disappear from cultural memory, because communities retain their own oral, embodied and material forms of transmission. Nevertheless, film has become an important medium through which contemporary Africans encounter, recognise and interpret aspects of their cultural past. Consequently, the under-representation of *Ikoro* in Nollywood represents a missed opportunity rather than deliberate cultural erasure.

Conclusion

The selected Nollywood films highlight the industry's vital role in capturing Igbo cultural memory through indigenous language, costume, ritual, and music. Historical epics, pioneered by films like *The Battle of Musanga* and *Igodo*, created pivotal cinematic spaces for precolonial representation. However, these films omit the *Ikoro* slit-drum as a narrative resource, relying instead on instruments like the *ogene*, *ekwe*, and *oja* to build cultural soundscapes. While these instruments serve essential aesthetic functions, they cannot replace the specific historical memory tied to the *Ikoro*. This reflects selective cinematic representation: Nollywood preserves elements of Igbo heritage, but unequally. Given that *Ikoro*-related knowledge faces declining intergenerational transmission, its absence represents a significant missed opportunity during a period when Nollywood was actively reconstructing traditional worlds.

Moving forward, the *Ikoro* should be framed not merely as a musical instrument, but as an indigenous narrative technology and cultural-memory system encompassing communication, craftsmanship, symbolism, and history. Digital and cinematic documentation can complement community transmission by creating vital audiovisual archives. Ultimately, Nollywood functions as an extensive yet incomplete archive. The challenge for future African filmmakers and scholars is to move beyond generalised cultural atmospheres to document specific indigenous technologies and knowledge systems.

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Glossary of Indigenous Terms

- **Ekwe:** A portable, medium-sized wooden slit-drum used for localized community announcements, meetings, and social gatherings.
- **Igwe:** The traditional title of a monarch, king, or supreme ruler within Igbo socio-political organization.
- **Ikolo / Ikoro / Ukolo:** A monumental, stationary wooden slit-drum functioning as an indigenous community-wide communication technology, ritual medium, and marker of socio-political authority.
- **Ogene:** A hand-held, wrought-iron double gong used for grabbing public attention, signaling royal pronouncements, or driving dance rhythms.

- **Oja:** A traditional carved wooden flute used for praise-singing, signaling masquerades, and heightening the emotional and spiritual texture of rituals.