Cultural Harmony and Religious Film in Africa: A Cinematic Exploration of Christian and Islamic Narratives

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Abstract

Cultural harmony is essential for peaceful coexistence among diverse socio-cultural groups. While the role of religious films in promoting intercultural harmony has been studied in various contexts, the contribution of Muslim/Islamic films in Africa remains underexplored. This study examines the role of selected Muslim/Islamic films and filmmakers in promoting cultural harmony in Africa. Using Fredric Jameson's postmodernism theory as a framework, the study adopts a descriptive design to explore the contributions of these films. Key questions include the definition of Muslim/Islamic films, their visibility in Africa, and the barriers to their widespread distribution. The findings highlight the potential of Islamic films to promote cultural harmony by addressing themes such as faith, family values, and the correction of misconceptions about Islam. Despite their limited distribution, these films offer a platform for fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse cultural and religious groups in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Intercultural harmony, Islamic films, Muslim films, Postmodernism

Introduction

The relationship between film and religion has been a subject of interest for scholars, particularly in how religious films contribute to societal development. This paper examines the role of Muslim/Islamic films in promoting intercultural harmony in Africa, a continent grappling with cultural and religious diversity. The study is guided by the following questions: What constitutes a Muslim or Islamic film? How visible are these films in Africa? What are the barriers to their widespread distribution? And how can these films contribute to intercultural harmony?

Literature Review

Studies on the intersection of film and religion in Nigeria, and Africa more broadly, have largely focused on Christian evangelical cinema. Olayiwola (2019) offers a comprehensive overview of existing scholarship, referencing foundational work by scholars like Obododinma Oha (2000), Foluke Ogunleye (2003), and OnookomeOkome (2007). Olayiwola categorizes Mount Zion

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Films—arguably Nigeria's most prominent Christian film group—into two primary genres: sermon films and spirit films. However, she concedes that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Many sermon films, for instance, also incorporate spiritual warfare themes, blurring the line between the two. This overlap complicates rigid classifications and suggests the need for a more nuanced framework to assess Christian film narratives in Nigeria.

Ayakoroma (2017) further asserts that Nigerian Christian films primarily function as tools for evangelism. Their objectives include preaching the gospel, restoring backsliders to the faith, and encouraging believers to remain steadfast, especially in times of doubt or moral uncertainty. His perspective reinforces the utilitarian function of Christian cinema in the Nigerian context—films as spiritual tools rather than mere entertainment. Conversely, scholarly attention to Islamic films in Nigeria has been more limited. The most prominent work in this regard is Brian Larkin's Signal and Noise (2008), a seminal ethnographic account of media culture in Northern Nigeria. Larkin traces the emergence of Hausa-language films—popularly dubbed "Kannywood"—to a fusion of cultural influences, including Bollywood films, Hausa romance literature (Soyayya), and indigenous drama troupes in Kano. Given the close ties between Hausa identity and Islam, Kannywood films are often assumed to represent Islamic values. Yet, this conflation of Hausa culture with Islamic doctrine is problematic and requires critical unpacking.

Following Larkin's lead, Abdalla Uba Adamu (2009) explored how Muslim Hausa filmmakers appropriate popular Nollywood narratives to cater to local tastes. Although his study is titled The Appropriation of Nollywood Christian Video Films by Muslim Hausa Filmmakers, the selected films were mostly mainstream Nollywood productions rather than strictly Christian. Adamu's key insight lies in the observation that Kannywood producers adopted popular Nollywood themes— particularly action and melodrama—to increase their appeal, not necessarily to promote Islamic ideology. His study, therefore, challenges the assumption that Islamic films in Nigeria are primarily religious; many are secular, albeit informed by Islamic values and social norms.

Some films, however, directly respond to negative representations of Muslims in southern Nigerian films. Titles such as Du'ai, Maraba Da Shari'a, and Tafarki were produced to counteract portrayals in films like *Holy Law* (2001), *Osama Bin La* (2002), and *National Anthem* (2005), which misrepresented Islam and Muslim identities. These Northern films serve as corrective narratives, aiming to reclaim Muslim subjectivity in Nigerian cinema. Rukayat Banjo's study, "A HistoricalAnalytic Perspective on Islam and Cinematic Culture in Northern Nigeria", further explores the limitations imposed by Islamic law and the dominant influence of religious clerics on Northern Nigerian filmmakers. She identifies Sharia regulations and conservative clerical oversight as significant barriers to cinematic innovation in the region. Similarly, Abdallah (2023), in Islam, Hausa Culture, and Censorship in Northern Nigerian Video

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Film, examines how Islamic filmmakers negotiate censorship and social expectations. Both scholars highlight the tension between cultural expression and religious conservatism as a central dilemma for Kannywood.

Additional studies—such as those by Rasit, Misrom, and Hamjah (2020), and Harrow (2013)—focus on how Islamic films are received by audiences, especially in relation to identity formation. Schulz (2012) and Krings (2015) also examine how religious films contribute to shaping youth identities in African Muslim societies, demonstrating the persuasive power of film as both cultural and religious text. This study draws on Jameson's postmodern theory of film as its conceptual framework. Postmodernism disrupts hierarchical boundaries between high and low art, enabling filmmakers to merge styles, temporalities, and realities. Bisbey (2019) notes that postmodern cinema often resists traditional realism, privileging subjective expression and stylistic hybridity. Jameson (2018) posits that only through narrative forms can society explore its contradictions, social anxieties, and collective hopes.

In this context, religious films in Nigeria—Christian and Islamic—may be viewed as postmodern texts that reflect and attempt to resolve societal tensions. They offer imagined worlds where religious ideals can confront moral complexities, enabling audiences to engage emotionally and critically with issues of faith, identity, and ethics. The deployment of religious cinema as a tool for cultural harmony thus aligns with Jameson's call to explore underlying social antagonisms through narrative imagination.

Cultural or Religious Harmony? A Critical Review of Religious Films in Africa

Culture is the total way of life of a people, and cultural harmony would connote a situation whereby there is peaceful coexistence among people of diverse cultures—where there is a high sense of understanding and mutual respect for other people's cultures. It is a situation in which every cultural diversity coagulates and crystallizes into one homogenous culture, where we all appreciate how other people speak, dress, worship, eat, and interact. Does this kind of scenario ring a bell? Have we had such an experience on the continent of Africa where all people relate with an open mind, spirit of tolerance, and understanding? Have we ever had intercultural harmony?

Onwuchekwa (2009) believes that we have always had cultural harmony on the continent of Africa, as we were in the habit of accommodating and welcoming people from diverse cultural backgrounds with open arms. The situation changed when Islam and Christianity found their way into Africa. He believes that nothing threatens cultural harmony more than the attitude and disposition of Christians and Muslims toward adherents of other religions. According to him, "Arabislamism and Eurochristianism, which have proclaimed superiority and supremacy over

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other religious and cultural heritages that believe in the plurality of divinities, have neither been at peace with one another nor with themselves." This implies that the disharmony being referred to is both intra- and inter-religious strife. We have religious organisations with different sects at loggerheads over who is engaging in the right practice of the faith.

If there is inter- and intra-religious disharmony, do we still wonder why cultural harmony remains largely a mirage? Is the cultural harmony we are alluding to here the same as the cultural harmony that was given as one of the justifications for globalization, in which "Traditional socio-cultural, economic, and political boundaries, territories or binarisms yield themselves to systematic erasure" (Tsaaior, 2009:7–21)? Cultural harmony, to me, is not without boundaries but encourages interconnectivity and networking in the areas of social, political, and economic development. While it may be a mirage to expect the whole of Africa to become a monolithic society, it is not inconceivable for Africans to feel at home anywhere they find themselves within the continent, irrespective of nationality, tribe, gender, or religion. It is pertinent to note that the quest for intercultural harmony suggests that there is intercultural disharmony. Problems of ownership and control between natives and settlers in many communities, unending feuds between people of different faiths, as well as high levels of suspicion between people from different ethnic backgrounds are all pointers in this direction.

Looking at the focus of this conference and the composition of the participants, one would expect that the discourse would focus more on religious harmony rather than cultural harmony, because religion is a small but highly significant aspect of culture. Small as it is, it will not be too wrong to state that religion is the main cause of most of the incidences of cultural disharmony being experienced on the continent of Africa. People like Tsaaior and Onwuchekwa believe that there used to be harmonious working relationships between people of diverse cultural backgrounds in Africa in the past and that people moved from one community to another and felt welcomed wherever they found themselves. They are of the opinion that welcoming people from other cultural backgrounds with open arms was the hallmark of African hospitality. However, they have both traced the problem of disharmony to the advent of the monotheist religions of Islam and Christianity. This is highly contestable when one takes into consideration the amount of strife, ethnic clashes, and inter-tribal wars that were the order of the day in the past.

What is incontestable, however, is how desirable cultural harmony has become toward the even growth and development of the African continent. The need for mutual understanding of the ways of life of other people and the ability to appreciate where they are coming from and who they are, and being conscious of the fact that we cannot all be doing the same thing at the same time in the same way, is the hallmark of cultural harmony. Thus, it cannot be over-emphasized in our quest for a peaceful, progressive, and prosperous Africa. Cultural harmony should be a

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major concern to all of us, including religious leaders and religious groups, because it is where there is peace that people can practice their religion without let or hindrance.

Religious Films

Religious films are those films that reflect the activities, practices, and doctrines of a religious group. They could be Christian, Islamic, or traditional African religious films. In Africa today, what we see mostly are Christian and Islamic films. While Christians use film as a tool for evangelism and teaching of biblical doctrines, Muslims use it to propagate the Islamic faith and also to portray various aspects of Islamic life. Religious films often borrow from scriptures such as the Bible or the Qur'an, and use religious leaders as models or exemplars. They draw a lot of inspiration from the lives of saints, prophets, messengers, and other exemplary figures found in religious texts.

Religious films, whether Christian or Islamic, are mostly didactic. They teach morals, warn against sin and evil, and promote righteous living. They show how one should live and how not to live. They draw attention to the benefits of living a good life and the dangers of living a bad life. Most of them use punishment and reward as a tool to reinforce moral or spiritual messages. Some of these films have even been accused of promoting fear as a way of getting people to adhere to their messages. Whether this is true or not, the underlying point is that they serve the purpose of social control—regulating people's actions, behaviors, and relationships in society.

Religious films in Africa have grown in both quality and quantity. In Nigeria, for example, we have seen the emergence of full-fledged Islamic and Christian film industries, particularly within the Yoruba film sector. Prominent Christian filmmakers like Mike Bamiloye and his Mount Zion Faith Ministries have revolutionized religious cinema by producing compelling narratives that blend spiritual themes with real-life challenges. Similarly, Islamic filmmakers in Northern Nigeria and among Yoruba Muslims have continued to release popular titles that are widely accepted among Muslim audiences.

One critical area that deserves attention is how these religious films contribute to cultural and religious harmony or disharmony. Do these films promote tolerance, peace, and unity among people of different faiths and cultures? Or do they deepen the divide by portraying members of other religions as evil, misguided, or irredeemable? Do they portray adherents of other religions in a bad light? Do they try to subtly or overtly convert people to their own faith? These are important questions that scholars of film, religion, and African studies must interrogate.

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Religious Films and Cultural Harmony

Culture is a total way of life. It includes people's customs, beliefs, values, behaviors, art, and material objects. Religion, on the other hand, is a set of beliefs and practices often centered around questions of existence, spirituality, morality, and the divine. It is common to see religion and culture intersect, especially in African societies where religion plays a central role in shaping cultural norms and values. In fact, some scholars argue that it is difficult to separate religion from culture in Africa because they are so intricately linked.

Religious films, by virtue of their subject matter and medium, have the potential to influence cultural values and foster harmony or conflict among diverse groups. A religious film can promote understanding and tolerance among people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. It can also do the opposite—fuel religious bigotry, deepen stereotypes, and lead to social tension. The question, then, is: how do religious films in Africa impact cultural harmony?

In many African countries, particularly in Nigeria, religious films have become a major platform for expressing not just faith, but also identity. They often mirror the social realities of the communities in which they are produced and consumed. For example, a Christian film that condemns polygamy may be interpreted as an attack on a cultural practice that is accepted in certain parts of Africa. Similarly, an Islamic film that upholds gender segregation might be viewed as a reinforcement of patriarchal norms that some cultural groups are seeking to challenge.

Thus, religious films are not just spiritual tools—they are cultural artefacts that reflect and shape social discourse. They help define what is considered "good" or "bad," "acceptable" or "unacceptable," and in doing so, they contribute to the construction of moral and cultural boundaries in society. To promote cultural harmony, filmmakers must be conscious of the diverse contexts in which their works are received. They must understand that Africa is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural continent. Sensitivity to these differences can help reduce the tendency to offend, misrepresent, or alienate certain groups. Instead of presenting a binary view of good versus evil, where one religion is always right and the other always wrong, filmmakers can explore more nuanced narratives that highlight shared values, interfaith cooperation, and mutual respect.

Muslim or Islamic films?

Many people do not know the difference between Muslim and Islam. While the latter is the religion, the former is the adherent of the religion. Thus, a Muslim film would mean a film produced by a Muslim while an Islamic film would mean films with contents focusing on the

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tenets of Islamic religion. That is why most literature uses Islamic films instead of Muslim films. It is pertinent to note that while the likes of Mike Bamiloye of the Mount Zion Film Ministry, Kayode Oyebode of Kay Technical Christian Evangelical Film, and Evon Jarrett were committed to using film as a platform for evangelisation, the same could not be said for Islamic filmmakers as the idea of full commitment to religious propagation through the use of film is not well pronounced among
Muslim filmmakers. Thus, there is a sharp difference between Islamic evangelism films that are specifically produced to promote the Islamic religion and mainstream films that have Islamic religion-related content in their quest to inform, educate, or teach morals. Rasit, Misrom, and Hamjah (2020) prefer the latter as they contend that "A good film is one that has shariah compliant narrative and can positively impact as well as influence people." We shall examine films in both categories starting from Nigeria.

Islamic Films in Nigeria

Films with Islamic religion-related content can be found among films from the Northern part of Nigeria known as Kannywood and in Southwest Nigeria where many Yoruba secular films include themes and subject matter that are related to the basic tenets and principles of Islamic religion. Whenever Islamic film is mentioned particularly here in Nigeria, what comes to mind are Hausa films produced in Northern Nigeria. It is important to state however that most of the films produced in Northern Nigeria have nothing to do with Islamic religion. They are fashioned along the Indian movies with romance being the predominant feature (See Larkin, 2008). However, "Like contemporary Indian films, Hausa videos often critique the erosion of cultural values associated with Western materialism while at the same time visually revelling in the spectacle of consumer goods and lifestyles that materialism brings about. Above all else, the popular nature of Hausa videos has led to a concentration upon themes of romance and thus a close engagement with the styles of love presents in Indian films- by far the most important visual medium dealing with the theme of love." Promotion and edification of Hausa culture is another prominent issue.

In recent times, however, there have been more films in the Hausa language that are devoted to the propagation of Islam and took a radical departure from the adaptation of popular Nollywood films. These Hausa films that promote Islamic religion cater primarily to Hausa-speaking Muslim audiences and often emphasize Islamic teachings, values, and cultural practices. Here are some notable examples of Hausa films that promote Islamic religion:

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1. ***Bincike* (2014)**
   Directed by Ali Nuhu, "Bincike" (Knowledge) explores the importance of seeking knowledge and understanding Islamic teachings. The film follows the journey of a young man who embarks on a quest for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment, encountering various challenges and lessons along the way.

2. ***Rai Dai* (2015)**

   Directed by Ali Gumzak, "Rai Dai" (Trust) revolves around themes of trust, faith, and perseverance in the face of adversity. The film depicts the struggles of individuals who rely on their faith in Islam to navigate life's challenges and uphold moral values within their community.

3. ***Mai Farin Jini* (2016)**

   Directed by Falalu Dorayi, Mai Farin Jini (The Spirit Seller) tells the story of a spiritual healer who grapples with ethical dilemmas and the consequences of his actions. The film delves into themes of faith, repentance, and the complexities of spirituality in Hausa Muslim society.

4. ***Mai Zamani* (2018)**

   Directed by Kamal S. Alkali, Mai Zamani (The Era) explores the historical context of Islam in Hausa culture, highlighting the contributions of early Muslim scholars and leaders. This historical film aims to educate viewers about the rich Islamic heritage and traditions that have shaped Hausa society over the centuries.

5. ***Sirrin Da Ke Raina* (2019)**
   Directed by Ali Nuhu, Sirrin Da Ke Raina (The Secret in Our Hearts) is a romantic drama that incorporates Islamic values and teachings into its narrative. The film portrays the challenges faced by a couple as they navigate love, faith, and societal expectations within a Hausa Muslim community.

6. ***Daga Ni Sai Ke* (2020)**
   Directed by Kamal S. Alkali, Daga Ni Sai Ke (From Me, It Continues) focuses on forgiveness, reconciliation, and personal transformation through the protagonist's journey of spiritual awakening and redemption in accordance with Islamic teachings.

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These Hausa Islamic films not only entertain audiences but also serve as educational tools, promoting Islamic knowledge, values, and cultural heritage among Hausa-speaking Muslim communities in Nigeria and beyond. They contribute to the preservation and dissemination of Islamic teachings while addressing contemporary social issues and moral dilemmas within a religious framework.

Yoruba Islamic Films

Yoruba films that promote the Islamic religion are a vibrant subset within Nigeria's prolific film industry, often referred to as "Nollywood." These films typically blend Yoruba cultural elements with Islamic teachings and narratives. They are produced within the scope of mainstream Nollywood films, and most of the filmmakers who produced these religious-inclined films also produced secular films.

Unlike people like Helen Ukpabio and Mike Bamiloye who are strictly committed to promoting the Christian religion through films, most of the Yoruba filmmakers who are Muslim occasionally dive into the production of films with Islamic religious content integration. The first

Muslim filmmaker to produce films with Islamic religious content is Adebayo Akanni of Dash Waves Films. The producer of Agbo Ogede diverted from mainstream Nollywood films into the production of Islamic religious films with the first one titled Omo Eleha, which was followed by Zico the Radical directed by this researcher in 1999. Both films centre on the triumph of good over evil through prayer. (See Lasisi, 2009). Few other religious groups through their drama groups also produced films that are usually distributed among their members and rarely distributed through mainstream channels. However, the resurgence of films promoting the Islamic faith started in 2013 with Alubarika as directed by Bayo Tijani. In recent times, filmmakers like Ibrahim Chatta and Muyideen S. Ayinde have been at the forefront of such endeavours. Some of such Nollywood films produced with Islamic religion-related content are listed below:

1. ***Alubarika*** **(2013)**

    Directed by Bayo Tijani, Alubarika is a Yoruba-language Islamic film that emphasizes the importance of faith and perseverance in the face of adversity. It follows the journey of a young woman who faces various challenges but finds solace and guidance through her faith in Islam.

2. ***Ayinla Alagbara*** **(2014)**

    Directed by Muyideen S. Ayinde, this film explores themes of righteousness, forgiveness, and the consequences of one's actions from an Islamic perspective. It portrays the struggles and triumphs of individuals striving to live according to Islamic principles in a contemporary Yoruba society.

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3.*Ore Meta* **(Three Friends) (2016)**

Directed by Muyideen S. Ayinde, Ore Meta tells the story of three childhood friends whose lives take different paths as they navigate challenges such as love, betrayal, and redemption due to their Islamic faith. The film underscores the importance of friendship, moral values, and spiritual growth within a Yoruba Muslim community.

4. *Ija Ashura* **(2015)**

Directed by Ibrahim Chatta, Ija Ashura revolves around the historic Battle of Karbala in Islamic history. It portrays the bravery and sacrifices of Imam Hussein and his followers, highlighting themes of martyrdom, faith, and the struggle against oppression from an Islamic perspective.

5. *Alukoro* **(2015)**

Directed by Adebayo Tijani, Alukoro explores the challenges faced by a young woman who embraces Islam after experiencing personal hardships. The film delves into themes of spiritual transformation, forgiveness, and the empowerment that comes from embracing Islamic teachings and values.

6. *Esin Islam* **(2017)**

Directed by Ibrahim Chatta, Esin Islam (The Essence of Islam) is an educational film that aims to enlighten viewers about the fundamental principles and practices of Islam. It combines storytelling with teachings from the Quran and Hadith to provide guidance on living a righteous life according to Islamic teachings.

7. *Oro Aye* **(2018)**

Directed by Ibrahim Chatta, Oro Aye (The Worldly Affairs) examines the challenges faced by individuals who struggle to balance their religious beliefs with worldly temptations and responsibilities. The film encourages viewers to reflect on the importance of faith, morality, and spiritual fulfillment in their lives.

These Yoruba films not only entertain but also educate and inspire their audiences, promoting Islamic values, teachings, and cultural traditions within the context of Yoruba society. They serve as cultural artifacts that contribute to the preservation and dissemination of Islamic knowledge and perspectives among Yoruba-speaking Muslims in Nigeria and beyond.

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Islamic Films Outside Nigeria

Elsewhere in other parts of Africa where Islamic films are produced, early films often focused on educational and religious teachings, aimed at educating Muslim communities and propagating Islamic values through visual storytelling. They serve as educational tools, focusing on teaching Islamic principles, rituals, and histories. These films are often produced to spread religious knowledge among Muslim populations who may have limited access to formal education. They frequently explore themes related to cultural identity and the expression of Islamic values within local contexts. They often depict everyday struggles, ethical dilemmas, and community dynamics within Muslim-majority societies.

They highlight the diversity of cultural practices and interpretations of Islam across the continent. Most of these evangelism films can be found in the Northern part of Africa and very few in East and West African countries like Somalia, Sudan, Senegal, and Nigeria. However, most of them are circulated within the religious circle and rarely distributed through main channels, thereby making it difficult for the vast majority of people to have access to them. This also explains why they easily faded off the radar and could not find their way into the annals of popular films. The producers of these films are those who produce films with one main agenda, which is, to use one of Anwar Alam's titles; For the Sake of Allah. The aim is not for popularity or commercial benefits but simply to promote the religion of Islam and lead many lost souls to Allah. "Islamic history is primarily pregnant with a discourse of Tawhid (Monotheism) and Iman (Faith). There is no finality and consensus on the interpretation and understanding of various Islamic doctrines." (Alam, 2020:51). Most of the films listed below focus on one area or the other expatiating on monotheism or Iman.

1. *Barakat* **(2020) - South Africa**

   The film, directed by Amy Jephta, depicts the life of a matriarch Aisha Davids who decides to accept a marriage proposal but meets strong resistance from her four sons. Aisha, her fiancé, and her daughters-in-law have to work hard to bring the sons around to her way of thinking using the one thing they can all agree on–the Barakat associated with her action. Barakat, an Arabic word meaning blessings, is a story about celebrating life, the importance of family, and profound knowledge of the tenets of Islamic religion.

2. *Lamb* **(2015) – Ethiopia**

   Directed by Yared Zeleke, Lamb tells the story of a young Ethiopian boy, Ephraim, who is sent to live with relatives after his mother's death. The film explores themes of cultural identity, family bonds, and the challenges of maintaining faith and tradition in a changing world. It speaks to issues relating to cultural harmony.

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3.*Timbuktu* **(2014) - Mali**

Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako, "Timbuktu" is a critically acclaimed film that portrays life under Islamist occupation in Mali. It explores the impact of extremism on a peaceful community and the resilience of individuals striving to maintain their faith and dignity amidst chaos. It condemns all forms of extremism in the name of Jihad for the propagation of Islam. It emphasizes that Islam as a religion is different from what the terrorists preach. It describes the terrorists who seize the village by its jugular as bloodthirsty and self-serving individuals who are acting in their own interest instead of God's interest.

4.**Grigris (2013) – Chad**

Directed by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, Grigris tells the story of a young dancer who dreams of becoming a professional despite his physical disability. The film touches upon themes of perseverance, ambition, and the role of faith in overcoming challenges associated with disability.

5.**Samba Traoré (1992) - Burkina Faso**

Directed by Idrissa Ouédraogo, this film portrays the story of Samba Traoré, a petty criminal whose life is transformed by his love for a married woman. The film explores themes of morality, redemption, and the consequences of one's actions within the context of Burkina Faso's Muslim community. It addresses a wide range of themes including faith, identity, social justice, and human rights, and preaches cultural harmony.

6.**Karmen Geï (2001) – Senegal**

Directed by Joseph Gaï Ramaka, Karmen Geï is a modern adaptation of Bizet's opera "Carmen," set in contemporary Senegal. The film explores themes of love, desire, and freedom through the eyes of its protagonist, Karmen, a captivating woman who challenges societal norms and expectations. It raises fundamental questions about gender and religion.

7.*Yaaba* **(1989) - Senegal/Burkina Faso**

Directed by Idrissa Ouédraogo, Yaaba (Grandmother) is a co-production between Burkina Faso and Senegal. It tells the story of a young boy who befriends an old woman accused of witchcraft in the village. The film explores themes of community, compassion, and cultural values that are influenced by Islam and traditional beliefs. It also preaches cultural harmony.

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8.*Faat Kine* (2000) - Senegal

Directed by Ousmane Sembène, Faat Kine is a Senegalese drama that follows the life of its titular character, a single mother and successful businesswoman in Dakar. While the film primarily focuses on gender dynamics and social issues, it depicts the cultural and religious context of Senegal, where Islam plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and values.

9.**Fanie Fourie's Lobola (2013) – South Africa**

While not solely focused on Islam, this romantic comedy directed by Henk Pretorius includes a subplot involving an interfaith relationship between a South African man and a Muslim woman. The film touches on cultural and religious differences and how cultural harmony can be achieved.

10.**Al-Gamaa (2009) – Egypt**

Directed by Sherif Arafa, this film examines the radicalization of a young man within an extremist group in Egypt. It explores complex issues related to religion, ideology, and society's response to extremism.

11.**Chronicles of the Years of Fire (1975) – Algeria**

Chronicles of the Years of Fire (Chronique des années de braise) directed by Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, is an epic film that depicts Algeria's struggle for independence from French colonial rule. While primarily a historical drama, it reflects the contributions of the Algerian people's faith in Islam during a transformative period.

All the films above vary in genre and style but share a common thread of exploring Islamic themes, historical figures, or ethical dilemmas within their respective countries. Most of them are largely secular in nature and produced by mainstream filmmakers but have Islamic faith-related content. These types of films in Africa represent a significant cultural and artistic expression, blending religious themes with local narratives and filmmaking traditions. They have a rich history, often rooted in the continent's deep Islamic heritage and diverse cultural expressions. They cover three key thematic focuses which include the role of faith in individual and community development, promotion of family values in line with Islamic injunction, and promotion of harmony and correcting misconceptions about Muslims and Islam. The tables below summarize the thematic preoccupation of selected Islamic films.

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Table 1: Summary of Thematic Focus of Selected Films from Northern Nigeria.

FILM FOCUS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
The role of faith in individual and community development	5	83.3
Promotion of family values in line with Islamic injunction	1	16.7
TOTAL	**6**	**100**

Table 2: Summary of Thematic focus of Selected Yoruba Films from Southwest Nigeria.

FILM FOCUS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
The role of faith in individual and community development	6	85.7
Promotion of family values in line with Islamic injunction	0	0
Promotion of harmony and correcting misconceptions about Muslims and Islam	1	14.3
TOTAL	**7**	**100**

Table 1: Summary of Thematic focus of Selected Films from other African Countries.

FILM FOCUS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
The role of faith in individual and community development	2	18.2
Promotion of family values in line with Islamic injunction	6	54.5
Promotion of harmony and correcting misconceptions about Muslims and Islam	3	27.3
TOTAL	**11**	**100**

From the tables above, it is evident that most Islamic films produced in Nigeria either from the North or Southwest Nigeria focus largely on the role of faith (Iman) in facilitating individual and community development. In those films, characters navigate turbulent moments and face crises that seem insurmountable but through faith, such problems become resolved. This may not be too far-fetched knowing that one of the highlights of the mainstream Nollywood film is to use religion as the antidote for solving all problems. The result is however different from the

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selected films from outside Nigeria with films promoting family values in line with Islamic injunctions being the most produced. Countries like Senegal and Egypt contributed significantly in this direction. It is equally important to note that none of the three areas of focus is mutually exclusive as most films contain elements that cut across these three areas in varying degrees. The conclusion made with the tables above is based on the prevalent issue in each of the films.

Key Findings

1. The conscious efforts aimed at using film to promote Islamic religion are still in their infancy in most countries in Africa compared to Christian evangelism film counterpart

2. There are few films produced in the continent of Africa that are dedicated largely to the promotion of Islamic religion, Islamic ways of life, and basic principles associated with Islam. Out of these films, only very few speak to the issue of cultural Harmony.

3. Secular films with some Islamic religion-related content also contribute overtly or covertly to the promotion of Islamic religion and sometimes the promotion of cultural harmony even though that may not be the original intention of the filmmaker. This is because filmmakers can only control what they produce but cannot control what is eventually received by the audience of such films since the apriori experience of a typical audience would determine what he receives from the film's message

4. Films with Islamic religious content are not as popular as mainstream secular films because they are very few, not centrally distributed and they do not command the kind of attention that other secular films command.

5. Islamic films in the real sense of it are not very visible at the moment due to limited marketing and distribution networks. Most of them are only distributed in mosques and other Islamic religious fora. The few films that enjoy visibility are those secular films but with some religion-related content. Producing solely Islamic films in many countries including Nigeria is a precarious business.

6. Key barriers to the widespread distribution of Islamic films include limited institutional support, low quality of film particularly by the amateur groups, non-viability as well as criticism and restrictions imposed on films by religious zealots

7. Most of the Islamic films produced and distributed may not focus directly on the promotion of cultural harmony. The basic Islamic principles articulated in those films like religious tolerance, good neighbourliness, caring and sharing, and being open-minded have a strong potential for facilitating cultural harmony

Conclusion

There is a strong nexus between the focus of the majority of Islamic films studied in this paper and the promotion of cultural harmony. The promotion of faith in Islam is not only about having faith in God but also about having faith in all his prophets including Jesus Christ and faith in

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destiny and the efficacy of prayer to turn bad situations into good. All these have the potency to restrain people from taking laws into their own hands when they feel aggrieved and suspect that whatever problems they are confronted with were caused by some individuals or a group of people. That is not all, sustaining good relationships at the family and community levels by inculcating key religious principles is capable of encouraging individuals to have fear of God, tolerate opposing views, and live in harmony with their neighbours. Correcting misconceptions about Muslims and Islam as a religion will equally go a long way in facilitating cultural harmony among the people in different parts of Africa.

On a final note, a film should naturally be made to achieve the objective or whatever the producer sees as the reason for producing that film. Since film as a platform has the power to improve dialogue and facilitate behaviour change, our quest for cultural harmony should not be dropped at the doorsteps of religious-inclined filmmakers alone. All hands must be on deck to ensure that all filmmakers whether producing secular films or not pay attention to the use of films for cultural harmony because it is when there is peace and understanding that film can sell very well and even growth and development can also manifest in the continent of Africa. If a concerted effort is made by all, we will be able to boast of a continent where there is a high sense of mutual respect and tolerance for one another. We will be able to live together as one big family. Cultural harmony within the continent of Africa will also be possible if there is intra-country harmony. It is this intracountry harmony that would spread across the continent. Thus, it is important to look inward and start the journey from the basic unit of social interaction, our respective homes. Filmmakers alone cannot achieve it, it is a job for us all.

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