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Table of Contents

1. Editorial: Faith, Film, and Intercultural Harmony in Africa – **Rev. Fr. Professor Walter Ihejirika**
2. *Cultural Harmony and Religious Film in Africa: A Cinematic Exploration of Christian and Islamic Narratives*- **Bashiru Akande Lasisi PhD**
3. *The Bullish Script: Social Media and the Theatrics of Omenala Church*- **Ihuoma Okorie, PhD.**
4. *Inculturation in Catholic Christian Religion: Reimagining Nigerian Marian Iconography*- **Mary-Lucy Okwuowulu (DMMM)**
5. *Reinterpretation of Dominant Themes in Select Evangelical Nollywood Films in The Light of Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology*- **Marie C. Obasi PhD, Eric Msughter Aondover PhD, Luke Emehiele Ijezie PhD & Perpetua Ogechi Aondover PhD.**
6. *Moral Education and Spiritual Transformation in Faith-Based Films: Antidote to Social Media's Harmful Impact*- **Ovunda Ihunwo, PhD**
7. *Religious and Cultural Values in Africa: An Analysis of Gang of Lagos, Half of a Yellow Sun, and The Woman King*- **Marie C. Obasi PhD**
8. *Film, Catholic Church, and Faith: A Critical Review of Innocent Uwah's Moral Dilemmas in Discourse of Cinema, Ethics & Society*- **Nwagbo Obi**

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About the Journal

The *SIGNIS Journal of Communication, Religion and Humanitarian Studies* is a peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal committed to advancing knowledge at the intersection of communication, religious practice, and humanitarian values in Africa and the Global South. It seeks to amplify faith-based perspectives in media studies, promote religious literacy, and foster intercultural dialogue through original research, commentary, and critical reviews.

Submission Guidelines

Scope of the Journal

The SIGNIS Journal of Communication, Religion and Humanitarian Studies is an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal that welcomes scholarly contributions engaging critically with the intersections of religion, communication, and humanitarian concerns, particularly within African and Global South contexts. The journal encourages original research, theological reflections, theoretical inquiries, and case-based studies that contribute to a deeper understanding of how faith-based communication fosters cultural identity, peacebuilding, development, and human dignity.

Article Types and Length

We accept the following categories of submissions:

- Research Articles (4,000–6,000 words): Original, unpublished work grounded in empirical research or theoretical analysis.
- Commentary and Media Reflections (2,000–3,500 words): Analytical reflections on media, liturgical practice, social advocacy, or popular culture related to faith and humanitarianism.
- Case Studies and Reports (2,500–4,000 words): Contextual examinations of real-world projects or interventions involving religious communication and humanitarian action.
- Book and Film Reviews (1,000–2,000 words): Reviews of scholarly books or films related to the journal's themes.

Word counts include references, footnotes, and tables/figures.

Manuscript Format

All manuscripts must conform to the APA 7th edition style guide. Submissions should:

- Be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins.
- Include a title page with the article title, author name(s), institutional affiliation(s), ORCID iD (if available), email address, and a short biographical note (max. 100 words).
- Contain an abstract of 150–250 words and 3–6 keywords.
- Use headings and subheadings for structure, formatted according to APA guidelines.
- Cite all sources in-text and in a full reference list at the end.
- Avoid identifying information in the main text for blind peer review.

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Authors should submit their manuscripts via email to: signisjournal@gmail.com

Please include the manuscript (Word format), a short author bio, and a declaration that the work is original and not under consideration elsewhere.

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The journal adheres to ethical guidelines for scholarly publication. All authors are expected to:

- Ensure the originality of their work and acknowledge all sources appropriately.
- Avoid plagiarism, data fabrication, and duplicate publication.
- Respect intellectual property and obtain appropriate permissions where necessary.
- Disclose any potential conflicts of interest.

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Editorial: Faith, Film, and Intercultural Harmony in Africa

Africa stands at the confluence of deep spiritual heritage and dynamic cultural diversity. From the rhythmic chants of traditional worship to the resounding calls of church bells and mosque prayers, faith remains a vital pulse in the African experience. At the same time, the continent is a melting pot of cultures—each with distinct expressions, languages, and histories. In this context, film has emerged as a powerful bridge, offering space for dialogue, reflection, and reconciliation across faiths and cultures.

This maiden edition of the SIGNIS Journal of Communication, Religion and Humanitarian Studies brings into focus the transformative nexus between **faith, film, and intercultural harmony in Africa**. It reflects on how visual storytelling is not only a mirror of societal values but also a tool for shaping more inclusive and peaceful futures. African filmmakers, faith-based communicators, and media scholars are increasingly engaging with film as a sacred medium—one capable of embodying both prophetic critique and pastoral compassion.

The papers presented herein, many of which originated at the 2024 SIGNIS Africa–CAEAN Conference in Ibadan, explore how cinema and digital media are fostering intercultural dialogue, promoting religious tolerance, and revitalizing traditional African values within contemporary faith narratives. From Nollywood dramas to documentary films and liturgical productions, African media practitioners are offering narratives that resist stereotypes and celebrate unity in diversity.

As this journal begins its scholarly journey, we affirm our commitment to amplifying African voices that champion harmony through faith and film. We envision a media landscape where difference is not a threat but a gift—where faith communities are not isolated but engaged—and where storytelling becomes a path toward mutual respect and spiritual growth.

We invite academics, artists, theologians, and practitioners to join us in this collective vision. May this journal be a space of encounter and inspiration, rooted in African realities and open to the global conversation on communication, religion, and peace.

Prof. Walter Ihejirika

Editor-in-Chief

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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 Onookome Okome (2007). Olayiwola categorizes Mount Zion 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 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, "Arabism and EuroChristianism, which have proclaimed superiority and supremacy over

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 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.

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 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 Oyebo 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:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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 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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The Bullish Script: Social Media and the Theatrics of Omenala Church

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Abstract

Social media has become a powerful tool for religious organizations to propagate their doctrines and connect with followers. This paper examines the use of social media by the Omenala Church, a traditional religious group in Nigeria, and its implications for religious coexistence. The study focuses on the church's Facebook page, "Gospel of Truth: Omenala bu Uzo Ndu na Eziokwu," which has gained significant visibility through its dramatic and often confrontational posts. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the study reveals how the church's "bullish" scripts, characterized by derogatory language and inflammatory rhetoric, have escalated tensions between adherents of Omenala and Christianity. The findings highlight the potential of social media to both unite and divide, emphasizing the need for religious organizations to promote respectful dialogue and peaceful coexistence. The paper concludes with recommendations for fostering tolerance and mutual understanding in online religious discourse.

Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, serving as a primary platform for disseminating information and facilitating interaction among individuals and communities. This widespread adoption underscores society's growing awareness of the potential benefits of social media. In contemporary digital times, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and domestic ones such as TikTok, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu have connected billions of users worldwide, making them indispensable tools for communication and interaction (Wang, 2024, p. 153). Through these platforms, individuals share their lives, perspectives, and ideas on both personal and social issues, sparking widespread engagement and discussion. Social media has transcended its role as a mere technological tool to become a powerful medium for promoting and propagating ideas, skills, and values. However, alongside its positive contributions, it has also been misused by some to propagate violence and spread harmful rhetoric. Malicious comments, insults, and toxic content have unfortunately become commonplace, posing significant challenges for users and undermining social harmony, particularly in terms of religious coexistence. This study critically examines the social media practices of the Omenala Church, located in Eastern Nigeria, with a specific focus on their use of Facebook. It analyzes the content they produce to promote their religious tenets and gain visibility, highlighting the "bullish scripts" employed in their messaging.

Additionally, this study explores the implications of such content for religious coexistence and social harmony, shedding light on the broader challenges posed by the misuse of social media in religious discourse.

Social Media and Religious Coexistence

The media is widely recognized as a powerful tool for information dissemination, entertainment, and education. With advancements in technology, conventional media—once the primary platform for sharing vital information—has been overtaken by what is now referred to as new media. Mendoza (2024) aptly describes traditional media as encompassing "the press, television, radio, cinema, and telephone." However, the evolution of communication technologies has introduced newer forms of media that have gained widespread popularity, collectively referred to as new media. New media refers to digital content created and distributed by anyone with internet access, characterized by its interactive and participatory nature. The New Media Institute defines new media as "a catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images, and sound." Examples include blogs, email, music and television streaming services, as well as social media networks. Unlike traditional media, new media facilitates two-way communication, fostering engagement and collaboration among users.

Social media has emerged as a transformative phenomenon, significantly influencing all spheres of life. Its advent and rapid growth have been driven by the innate human desire to connect and communicate, coupled with advancements in digital technology. One notable merit of social media is its ability to facilitate faster and more convenient information sharing. As Afolaranmi (2023, p. 14) notes, "Its growth has been powered by the human desire to communicate with one another and advance digital technologies." This highlights the crucial role social media plays in contemporary society. Furthermore, Olasinde (2014, p. 56) asserts that the widespread acceptance of social media has enabled the current generation to easily access any information they seek through the internet, particularly on social platforms. This underscores the profound transformation in global communication brought about by the advent of social media, fundamentally reshaping how people interact and share information worldwide.

Considering its widespread use, Ogunsola and Raji (2019, p. 1) observe that "religious organisations have started to incorporate the use of social media into their activities." In Nigeria, religion is predominantly expressed through three main forms: Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion. All three—particularly Christianity and Islam—have increasingly embraced social media in recent years, as noted by Nwankwo (2017, p. 17). Online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are now extensively used by religious bodies and institutions to connect with their congregations and reach a broader community. Social media usage spans across major world religions, from Catholics to Buddhists, and is particularly prominent among evangelical

churches, which often lead in adopting and leveraging digital technologies. These platforms are employed in innovative ways to build communities and extend influence. Cheong (2013) highlights this by stating, “A lot of religions are quite savvy. They use social media to brand their own organizations.”

One of the key advantages of social media for religious organizations is its ability to reach a larger audience. It facilitates communication with existing members while also attracting new followers, effectively supporting the mission of evangelization. Through these platforms, religious institutions share uplifting messages, provide timely updates about events, and foster instantaneous engagement with their followers. This approach aims to create a sense of togetherness and inclusion, strengthening community bonds. A study conducted by Afolaranmi (2022), titled “Peaceful Coexistence, Social Media, and the Nigerian Baptist Pastors: Challenges and Possible Ways Out,” highlights the significant impact of social media on the operations of faith-based organizations worldwide. The study particularly focused on stakeholders, such as church pastors in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, who have been leveraging social media in their ministries to promote peaceful coexistence among church members. Despite its role as a unifying tool, the study revealed that pastors face numerous challenges when using social media in their ministries and other aspects of their lives, especially in fostering peaceful coexistence within their communities.

Using semi-structured interviews, the study identified several obstacles to achieving peaceful coexistence through social media. One major issue is internet addiction, which interferes with individuals’ daily lives and limits their ability to engage thoughtfully with online content. According to the study, excessive internet usage often results in superficial interactions, reducing the effectiveness of social media as a tool for meaningful dialogue. Another significant challenge lies in information mismanagement, where the improper handling of online content exacerbates misunderstandings and conflicts. To address these challenges, the study recommended that pastors adopt a proactive approach to social media usage. This involves utilizing online platforms not only to promote religious coexistence but also to encourage peaceful coexistence in the broader society. Notably, the findings underscored that internet addiction contributes significantly to religious intolerance. The excessive time many individuals spend on social media—scrolling aimlessly through posts—diminishes their capacity for critical and respectful engagement with diverse perspectives.

It is important to note that internet addiction, which psychologically affects users, often subtly hinders their ability to engage thoughtfully with online content. When they do engage, it is frequently through insults or the use of vulgar language in comment sections, escalating tensions and leading to cyber conflicts. Such behavior often results in verbal bullying and other negative

interactions for those involved. If left unchecked, this can spiral into religious chaos, as has been observed in other parts of the world. Compounding the issue is the proliferation of fake and unverified posts and comments, which further inflame tensions and fuel conflicts.

Additionally, Dauda's (2023) study, "Social Media for Islamic Da'wah and Peaceful Coexistence in Yorubaland, Nigeria," examined the misuse of social media for Islamic Da'wah and its impact on peaceful coexistence in Yorubaland. Using a descriptive survey research design and observational methods, the study found that social media has significantly transformed the global patterns of Islamic Da'wah. However, its use by some Yoruba Muslim preachers (Du'at) has generated conflicting reactions. The study revealed that certain Du'at have utilized social media platforms to disseminate misinformation, hate speech, personal attacks, condemnation of fellow Muslims, and character defamation. These actions have led to persistent hostility, confrontations, and disunity among religious sects, fostering mistrust within the Muslim ummah and heightening tensions. This misuse of social media has also contributed to an increasing wave of Islamophobia, with non-Muslims questioning the nature of Da'wah propagation, the credibility of its messages, and the level of tolerance in Islam. The study concluded that contemporary Yoruba Du'at should leverage the positive potential of social media to promote peaceful coexistence. It emphasized that religious conflict remains the greatest threat to harmonious living, making it imperative for religious leaders to adopt a more constructive and unifying approach in their online engagements.

From both studies, it is evident that religious bodies and institutions have increasingly adopted social media as a tool to propagate their faith. This demonstrates that these organizations recognize social media as a powerful medium for conveying messages of faith to both adherents and non-adherents. Both studies also highlight that social media can either promote religious tolerance or foster intolerance, depending on how it is utilized and engaged with by followers and the broader public. While it serves as a vehicle for spreading messages of faith, it can also become a platform for intolerance and division. Although the studies focus on social media usage within Christian and Muslim contexts, this research explores its application within African Traditional Religion, with particular attention to the Omenala Church's social media platform, titled "Gospel of Truth: Omenala bu Uzo Ndu na Eziokwu." In line with the growing relevance of social media, African traditional worshippers have also leveraged this tool to spread their gospel and foster a sense of community.

However, concerns have arisen regarding cyberbullying and online abuse associated with some interactions on these platforms. Such negative behaviors significantly erode interpersonal relationships and threaten religious coexistence. Alarming, instead of using social media creatively to draw people toward African Traditional Religion, some have opted for clandestine approaches that mock Christianity through provocative and confrontational content. These

"bullish scripts" not only undermine the intended purpose of fostering unity but also escalate tensions, posing a serious threat to religious and peaceful coexistence.

Summarily, there have been many ways of communication in Africa that contributed positively to the peaceful coexistence of people before the arrival of the internet and social media as new means of communication. However, the fact that social media has taken over is worth studying. Despite its positive and negative impacts on peaceful co-existence, this study delves into its use by African Traditional Religion adherents. It is within the context of the destructive use of religion around the world, and in Nigeria particularly, that this study has decided to document its effect on social media.

Theoretical Framework

Social Media Engagement Theory explores the concept of how individuals interact with content on social media platforms through active participation and engagement. This includes actions such as likes, comments, shares, and other interactive behaviors that allow users to express their reactions and opinions about the content they encounter. A fundamental aspect of this theory is the notion of social presence or “connectedness” to both the content and other users on the platform. This connectedness can foster a sense of community and belonging, as well as establish trust and credibility in the information being shared. Another critical element of Social Media Engagement Theory is the role of social influence. Research indicates that individuals are more likely to engage with content that is popular or shared by trusted sources. This phenomenon facilitates the dissemination of information and ideas across networks of interconnected users. However, it can also lead to the creation of “echo chambers,” where users are primarily exposed to information that aligns with and reinforces their existing beliefs and perspectives.

Several factors influence an individual’s level of engagement on social media. These include: Platform Differences: The design and functionality of platforms (e.g., Facebook vs. Twitter) shape how users interact with content. Content Type: The format of content (text, images, or video) can significantly affect its appeal and engagement levels. User Characteristics and Motivations: Factors such as age, gender, interests, and personal motivations play a critical role in determining how and why individuals engage with social media content. (<https://open.ncl.ac.uk/academictheories/10/social-media-engagement-theory/>)

By understanding these dynamics, researchers and practitioners can better assess the impact of social media on user behavior and the broader digital ecosystem. One of the most popular strategies for fostering engagement on social media platforms is through the use of “gamification.” This approach incorporates game-like elements, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, to motivate users to interact with content and take specific actions, such as sharing

or commenting on posts. Gamification can be an effective tool for boosting engagement and influencing user behavior, and it is frequently employed by brands and businesses to promote products and services. Social Media Engagement Theory is a dynamic and evolving field, reflecting the continuous changes in social media platforms and their usage. While studies have highlighted both the positive and negative aspects of social media engagement, understanding how engagement works is crucial for optimizing the use of these platforms. By leveraging the positive aspects of engagement and minimizing the negative ones, social media platforms can be used more effectively to enhance user experience and interactions. (<https://open.ncl.ac.uk/academictheories/10/social-media-engagement-theory/>)

In this study, Social Media Engagement Theory will be employed to explore the use of social media platforms, specifically Facebook, by individuals, with a focus on the posts and interactions conducted by a traditional religious body known as the Omenala Church. The study will examine the engagement by users, as well as the reactions and opinions generated from the content they encounter on the platform. Also, the content shared by the Omenala Church, including texts and other posts, will be analyzed to assess its implications on both the users and the wider society. This analysis will also provide a framework for understanding the motivations and behaviors of those who post content, as well as those who engage with it. Given that the study centers on Facebook, the findings will be specific to this platform and may not be applicable to others.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method, specifically an internet-based survey, which qualifies as Social Media Research. Social media data, which includes information collected from social media networks, illustrates how users share, view, or engage with content. The research was conducted using Facebook, a prominent social media platform. The advantages of collecting data via social media are significant, as it helps to limit bias, supports open sampling, and enables both tracking and directing of sampling efforts (Mirabeu, Mignerat & Grange, 2013). Additionally, social media platforms provide easy access to large volumes of raw data. Fricker (2008) suggests that internet-based surveys can utilize both probability and nonprobability sampling methods. This study adopts the probability sampling method, which allows the researcher to establish criteria for selecting the social media platform used. The Gospel of Truth, Omenala bu Uzo Ndu na Eziokwu a platform dedicated to the promotion of Igbo African Traditional Religion (Omenala and Odinala), was selected for its visibility and active presence in the digital space. The criteria for choosing this platform are as follows:

1. The platform has a Facebook account.
2. The page is updated regularly (on a daily or weekly basis).
3. The researcher liked the Facebook page and subsequently followed it.

To collect data, the researcher monitored posts on the platform over a three-year period, from December 2, 2022, to January 15, 2025. Given the frequent posting of contents, which this study refers to 'scripts' on the platform, the study randomly selected posts based on their relevance and timeliness in relation to the research objectives. In addition, the comments made under each post were collected for analysis. The engagement with posts, including comments made by followers, was analyzed to identify patterns of interaction and to relate them to the study's objectives. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized in this research. Instances of derogatory comments and the subsequent banter were analyzed, with a focus on how these interactions align with the themes of the study. Primary data was gathered from the Facebook platform, while secondary data was sourced from books, academic journals, and other reputable online sources.

The Bullish Script: Social Media and the Theatrics of Omenala Church

In the contemporary world, many people identify themselves as adherents of particular religions. Over the past 100-150 years, records indicate that the majority of traditional worshippers in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria were encouraged to abandon their indigenous belief systems in favor of Christianity, brought by European missionaries. Christianity, particularly the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist denominations, faced significant challenges in penetrating many Igbo communities. These Christian denominations, with their doctrines centered on the worship of one God and Savior, criticized traditional worshippers, claiming that they had been deceived into abandoning their traditional practices (Omenala) in favor of what they termed "repentance."

However, in recent times, a shift is occurring in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, as many Christians are now returning to their roots, repenting and turning back to Omenala. The Omenala Church, which holds weekly gatherings every Sunday at their worship center along the OnitshaNkpor-Enugu Highway, follows the ancient practices of their ancestors in worshipping Chukwu Okike Abiama (God Almighty), without any European influence. To further propagate their religion, a Facebook page titled Omenala bu Uzo Eziokwu na Ndu was created, which has gained 73,000 followers. The main goal of the platform is to preserve and propagate Igbo culture while remaining loyal to their ancestors.

However, rather than peacefully promoting their faith through posts and comments, the platform has chosen to attack Christianity using derogatory language, disregarding the diverse religious backgrounds of their followers. Their success in gaining followers is largely attributed to the emotionally charged and dramatic scripts they produce daily and weekly. These posts often blame Christianity for the decline of Igbo cultural practices. This inflammatory rhetoric has led to frequent misunderstandings, quarrels, and exchanges of harsh words between adherents of

Omenala and Christians. The aggressive nature of this propagation has escalated tensions, resulting in conflicts and crises of significant proportions. Thus, the creation and use of social media for religious propagation have fundamentally transformed the way religions spread their messages. The case of the Omenala Church highlights how social media, while a tool for spreading religious messages, can also become a platform for religious confrontation and division.

On October 13, 2024, a post containing an inflammatory message was made, reading as follows: "Reality has hit Onyeze Jesus, and his power is nowhere to be found. Everyone has fallen to human beings, contributing money for his freedom—no angel or spirit is around to perform miracles. I still wonder why our people hate someone who loves them and has decided to tell them the truth of life, instead of continuing in deception. The day reality hits you, you will understand how useless that Jesus and your Bible God really are. Keep following your slave Jesus and his gang in Nigeria. When reality hits you, then you will realize the importance of man and humanity. I wish you a quick release—aka na asa uchu (quick release)."

The post generated significant engagement, accumulating 1,300 comments and 133 shares. In the message, the poster mocked the kidnapping of a religious leader, drawing a comparison to the thief on the left side of the cross who mocked Jesus for his inability to save himself. The comments that followed came from both Christians and adherents of the African Traditional Religion (ATR), specifically Omenala. Some Christian users responded with statements such as "Jesus still remains Alpha and Omega," which angered some Omenala adherents. In retaliation, these adherents insulted the Christian commenters, calling them "efulefu" (fool). Other Omenala followers contended that when reality strikes, Christians often forget God. More insults followed, with some users calling the Christian commenters "Ewu" (goat), while others claimed that the poster (whom they considered a mentor in Omenala) is knowledgeable and vast, hence, cannot be telling a lie. The situation escalated to the point where the poster was urged to stop being a "nuisance" online.

Again, in a TikTok video posted on August 21, 2023, a provocative script was shared that read: "I told you that in no distant time Christianity will be a joke in our land." This carefully crafted message generated substantial engagement, with 2,000 comments, 782 shares, and 70,000 views. The comments that followed were filled with insults and negative remarks, resulting in a heated exchange between Christian adherents and followers of traditional religion. While Christians responded with moderate comments like "Jesus reigns and lives forever" and "Jesus will continue to be Lord over all," the adherents of African Traditional Religion retaliated with derogatory remarks. These interactions quickly escalated into a verbal battle, with insults flying from both sides. Some of the followers of traditional religion intentionally sought to degrade Christians emotionally and mentally, simply because of their religious affiliation. This scenario

reflects the reality that while digital technology has created new avenues for interaction, it has also led to the emergence of new forms of online harassment (Rhea & Ahuja, 2020).

On January 10, 2025, another post appeared on the Facebook page, reading: "Thank you so much, beloved brother, for rejecting European slavery to accept our ancestors' way of life, which means freedom." In this post, the author praised an Anambra Catholic priest who had resigned from his position to embrace African Traditional Religion. The followers of Omenala hailed the priest as "The number one hero of the year," celebrating his decision to join their faith. However, many Christian adherents expressed disappointment and sadness over the priest's defection. In response, they were verbally harassed by the followers of African Traditional Religion, who repeatedly referred to Christianity as "a religion of mental slavery."

Even more, on January 11, 2025, a post shared on the Omenala Church's social media platform read: "No pastor believes in the Bible, and they know that Jesus is powerless, which is why they move around with armed guards and seek private doctors. Yet, you continue to believe them. No wonder you are called sheep (Aturu)." This provocative message sparked laughter and a flurry of shares among adherents who were enthusiastic about the post. Among the comments, one adherent referred to pastors as "scammers" and "yahoo yahoo," calling them "pulpit bandits," while a Christian commenter responded, stating, "Jesus is my power." This comment, however, provoked a wave of insults from adherents of the African Traditional Religion (Omenala), who called the Christian commenter "efulefu" (fool) and other derogatory names. This kind of online behavior reflects a deep lack of religious respect by the Omenala church and has become a significant obstacle to the peaceful coexistence of religious groups on social media.

The constant banter and insults following each post contribute to the ongoing cycle of online conflicts. Despite the potential for social media to foster positive engagement and dialogue, the Omenala church has opted to use Facebook as a platform for spreading hate speech against Christianity. This has led to a series of quarrels and verbal altercations between adherents of different faiths. Instead of using social media to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence, it has become a tool for stirring religious tensions. As noted by Paul (2019), "Religious conflicts have far-reaching implications for peace, national security, and development in any society" (p. 53). Thus, the divisive use of social media by the Omenala Church only contributes to the broader challenges of religious intolerance and social fragmentation.

From the above, it is clear that an online or virtual religious conflict exists, primarily stemming from disagreements between adherents of Christianity and the African Traditional Religion (Omenala). Findings from this research reveal that religion continues to play a significant role in the lives of Nigerians, with many individuals choosing to identify strongly with their religious

beliefs. It also shows that religion interacts with the broader society in which it functions. However, the tolerance level among adherents of the Igbo traditional religion appears to be minimal. This aligns with Paul (2019, p. 62), who argues that “religious intolerance, fundamentalism, and extremism are co-pilots of the vehicle of religious violence.” This is evident in the way adherents of Omenala assert their religious superiority, using this as justification for their frequent attacks on the Christian faith through the Omenala Facebook page.

The use of social media by the Omenala Church to advance its gospel has been marred by conflicts between Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religion. This tension is largely due to the lack of decorum in the discourse on the platform. The absence of a minimum standard of respectful engagement has only deepened divisions, leading to growing distrust and suspicion between religious groups. The comment section on the Omenala Church’s page is often filled with records of occasional conflicts, with some posts resulting in heated exchanges. Furthermore, the misuse of religion in this context has had serious consequences, leading to the destruction of lives, as many individuals have been maimed and wounded as a result of the religious tensions exacerbated by these online interactions.

Considering that this study uses social media as a tool for examining religious discourse, it is essential to note the significant effects of the verbal harassment carried out by the Omenala Church. Such harassment deeply affects those who, uncomfortable with the insults, decide to defend their religion. It becomes evident that when core values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies are tampered with, conflicts inevitably arise. Religion, in this context, has become a potent weapon for division. The consequences of this online tension are particularly felt in the cultural landscape, where adherents of a specific religion dominate, cultivating suspicion and animosity. Given the vital role religion plays in shaping society, Paul (2019, p. 56) asserts that religion and society are deeply interconnected, influencing each other in profound ways. It is therefore crucial that adherents of both Omenala and Christianity take conscious steps to build bridges of religious understanding and mutual respect.

This study recommends that a targeted Behavior Change Communication (BCC) strategy be developed for social media users to discourage such online theatrics and verbal conflicts. Tolerance must also be promoted, as it is an essential virtue in conflict management. Additionally, dialogue should be employed as an effective means of resolving these conflicts, fostering a more respectful and peaceful online and offline religious discourse.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that the adoption of social media has significantly transformed and layered Nigerian society. While it has provided abundant opportunities for individuals, businesses, and

organizations to thrive, it has also created a space where the vulnerable, especially within religious communities, can be bullied by anyone comfortably seated in the safety of their home. The ramifications of such online harassment are often devastating and long-lasting. This underscores the urgent need to build bridges of religious understanding and mutual respect.

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Inculturation in Catholic Christian Religion: Reimagining Marian Iconography Nigerian Cultural Context

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of Inculturation within the Catholic Christian tradition in Nigeria, with a specific focus on Marian iconography. Rooted in the framework of inculturation theology, the research interrogates how indigenous cultural aesthetics, symbols, and spiritual expressions can be integrated into Catholic representations of the Virgin Mary. The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with three Catholic bishops and a selection of Catholic faithful across Nigeria. Through their lived experiences and theological reflections, the study examines how traditional Marian images, often based on Western iconographic standards, may be reimagined to reflect Nigerian cultural identity without compromising doctrinal integrity. A visual model of a proposed Nigerian Marian iconography is developed, reflecting elements of local dress, symbols, and spirituality, thereby bridging the gap between faith and culture. Findings reveal a strong desire among participants for contextualized religious symbols that affirm their cultural heritage while deepening devotion. This study contributes to ongoing scholarly and ecclesial discourse on African Christianity by offering a theological and artistic paradigm for Marian representation that resonates with Nigerian cultural sensibilities and enhances religious expression in contemporary Catholic worship.

Introduction

The relationship between Christianity and culture has long been a subject of theological reflection, particularly within the context of African Christianity. As the Catholic Church continues to expand its reach in sub-Saharan Africa, it faces the critical challenge of contextualizing its liturgical expressions and religious iconography to reflect the lived realities of its followers. One of the most enduring images within Catholic devotion is that of the Virgin Mary—an icon often rendered through a Western cultural lens, detached from the aesthetic, spiritual, and symbolic universe of African societies. This study investigates the concept of inculturation in Catholic Christianity, with specific attention to the development of a Nigerian Marian iconography.

Inculturation, understood as the cultural modification of a religious system through the adoption or adaptation of local elements, offers a meaningful pathway for making the gospel message both

accessible and authentically African. Marian devotion remains a vital component of Catholic spirituality in Nigeria, yet the current iconographic representations often fail to capture indigenous identity, thereby creating a visual dissonance between faith and culture. The objective is to develop a representative model of what a Nigerian Marian icon might look like, incorporating local aesthetics, symbols, and narratives while remaining faithful to Catholic doctrinal teachings.

The research builds upon the foundational principles of *inculturation theology*, which advocates for the integration of Christian faith with local cultures to produce more meaningful and resonant expressions of worship. As the Church in Africa matures, reimagining sacred images like that of the Virgin Mary becomes not only a theological necessity but also an affirmation of African dignity, identity, and spiritual agency. This study, therefore, contributes to both academic and ecclesiastical conversations on contextual theology, offering a visual and theological reimagination of Marian iconography that speaks to the heart of Nigerian Catholicism.

The Concept of Marian Iconography

The depiction of the Virgin Mary has undergone significant evolution over the centuries, reflecting theological, cultural, and artistic developments. In her article “*Describing the Virgin*” published in *Art History* (2002), Jessica Winston explores how Marian imagery transformed in Italian devotional literature and theological texts from the 15th to the 16th century. This period marked a shift from imaginative representations to more concrete visual portrayals, partly in response to the Protestant Reformation. The emphasis on the visual likeness of sacred images became a way to justify their use in Catholic devotion.

The origin of Marian iconography can be traced to early Christian art, where representations of Mary—especially those found in the Roman catacombs—were initially symbolic and abstract. Over time, particularly during the Byzantine period, these images developed into more defined and standardized portrayals, often serving to convey key doctrinal beliefs. According to Sarah Jane Boss (2007), Christian tradition attributes the first Marian icon to the evangelist Luke, who is said to have painted the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child—an image that became the prototype for later Marian representations (Boss, pp. 106–107).

As Christian art progressed through the medieval period, Marian imagery became increasingly humanized. Frescoes and mosaics began to reflect regional artistic styles and local cultural sensibilities. Both the Orthodox and Catholic traditions have preserved a deep reverence for Marian icons, which serve not only as sacred devotional objects but also as cultural and historical symbols. These images—whether inspired directly by scriptural texts or by legend—continue to embody profound theological meanings and reflect the enduring presence of Mary in Christian consciousness.

A pivotal moment in the history of Marian iconography was the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD (not the 15th century), where the Church formally affirmed Mary as *Theotokos*—“God-bearer” or “Mother of God.” This doctrinal declaration significantly elevated her status in Christian theology and inspired the proliferation of her visual representations across the Christian world (Boss, pp. 107–111).

Building on this rich historical and theological foundation, my paper seeks to reinterpret Marian iconography within a contemporary Nigerian context. Specifically, I propose to create a visual representation of the Virgin Mary that reflects the identity and cultural aesthetics of a typical Nigerian woman. This reimagined icon will incorporate traditional Nigerian elements such as indigenous textiles, hairstyles, body tone, and symbolic motifs. By doing so, the work aims to make Marian imagery more accessible and relatable to Nigerian Catholic communities, while also contributing to the broader discourse on inculturation and visual theology.

This research also draws inspiration from contemporary reinterpretations of Marian imagery within diverse cultural contexts. A prominent example is the depiction of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, which effectively integrates indigenous motifs and symbols, creating a Marian icon that resonates deeply with local identity and devotion. Similarly, my project seeks to produce visual representations of the Virgin Mary that are rooted in Nigerian cultural aesthetics. The final works will be exhibited on a dedicated website, providing an immersive and accessible visual resource that respects both Nigerian traditions and Marian theological frameworks. Specifically, the icon will depict the Virgin Mary as a Nigerian woman—both generally and in culturally specific iterations as Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba—thereby localizing her image in ways that reflect and affirm Nigeria’s ethnic and religious diversity.

Problem Statement

Although considerable research has been conducted on the reinterpretation of Marian iconography, there remains a significant gap in literature regarding Nigerian perceptions of Mary’s image—particularly among Catholic Christians. In most visual depictions available in Nigeria, the Virgin Mary is represented with distinctly European features, often appearing as a white, celestial figure. This portrayal, heavily influenced by Western artistic conventions, creates a cultural disconnect, rendering her image distant and somewhat alien to many Nigerian faithful. As a result, the Marian figure feels removed from the everyday cultural experiences of Nigerian Catholics, weakening the sense of personal and communal identification with her. This paper addresses this cultural gap by reimagining Marian iconography through a Nigerian lens, integrating traditional aesthetics to create a more locally resonant spiritual image. By presenting Mary as a Nigerian woman, the project aims to foster a stronger connection between faith and cultural heritage.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the intersection of culture, religion, and technology in reinterpreting Marian iconography through a Nigerian cultural lens. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of human experiences and social phenomena using non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, and content analysis (Creswell, 2014). As this study interrogates the Western portrayal of the Virgin Mary, qualitative methods are particularly suited to challenging established norms and offering alternative cultural narratives (Bansal & Corley; Gaddefors & Cunningham, 2024).

Data was collected through semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), which allowed for rich, thematic insights (Agazu, Dejen, & Debel, 2022). A total of 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with Catholic bishops, Nigerian artists, traditional leaders, and Catholic faithful across Nigeria's three major regions—Igbo (East), Hausa (North), and Yoruba (West)—using purposive sampling to ensure regional representation. In addition, a focus group discussion involving eight participants—comprising traditionalists, theologians, and artists—provided broader cultural and theological perspectives. These methods, along with artistic creation and analysis, enabled the conceptualization and recreation of a Nigerian Marian iconography that integrates local textiles, hairstyles, and motifs while remaining faithful to Marian theology.

Efforts of the Catholic Church Towards Inculturation in Nigeria

The Catholic Church has played a significant role in the cultural and religious transformation of Nigerian society through various inculturation strategies. Inculturation, in the context of Catholic theology, refers to the dynamic interaction between the Christian message and local cultures, with the goal of making the Gospel relevant and authentic in different socio-cultural contexts (Second Vatican Council, 1965). In Nigeria, a country rich in ethnic and cultural diversity, the Church's approach to inculturation has evolved over decades, particularly since the post-Vatican II era. One of the earliest and most significant efforts of inculturation in Nigeria was inspired by the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes*, which encouraged the Church to engage with contemporary cultures, rather than oppose or suppress them (Second Vatican Council, 1965). In response, Nigerian theologians and clergy began to explore ways to integrate indigenous values, symbols, and practices within the liturgical and theological framework of the Catholic Church. These efforts became evident in the adaptation of local music, attire, languages, and rituals into the liturgy, especially during Mass celebrations.

The use of African cultural symbols such as drums, native songs, and proverbs in liturgical celebrations became significant from the late 20th century. These practices allowed local

Catholics to experience their faith in a manner that was spiritually profound and culturally familiar (Kanu & Kanu, 2022). Traditional attire, drumming, and indigenous languages are now widely accepted in many diocesan celebrations, especially in rural areas where indigenous culture remains strong. These symbolic adaptations have enhanced communal participation and increased a sense of belonging among parishioners.

Prominent Nigerian theologians and Church leaders such as Bishop Anthony Gbuji and Archbishop A.J.V. Obinna have been instrumental in promoting inculturation through theological discourses and organized efforts such as the Odenigbo Lectures. These lectures, held annually in the Archdiocese of Owerri, serve as a theological platform for addressing socio-cultural and ecclesiastical issues in ways that integrate Igbo cultural identity with Christian teachings (Obika, n.d.). By using the local language and focusing on relevant cultural themes, these lectures have contributed to building a theology that resonates with the lived experiences of Nigerian Catholics.

Furthermore, the celebration of traditional marriage rites alongside the Catholic sacrament of matrimony is another important area where inculturation is evident. Traditionally, Nigerian communities perform elaborate marriage rites that include the exchange of gifts, ancestral blessings, and communal feasts. The Church, recognizing the cultural and communal significance of these practices, has incorporated some of them into the Christian marriage ceremony, provided they do not contradict Catholic doctrine (Nnabugwu, 2018). This accommodation reflects a respect for cultural identity and has helped to reduce tensions between the Church and traditional communities.

The incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems, such as traditional healing practices, into Catholic pastoral care is also part of the Church's broader inculturation efforts. While the Church maintains its sacramental theology regarding healing and anointing, it also acknowledges the role of traditional healers in community life, especially in areas where access to formal healthcare is limited. This acknowledgment encourages dialogue between Christian and traditional practitioners, fostering holistic approaches to healing (Anagwo & Umekwe, 2021). Despite these efforts, challenges persist. Some conservative factions within the Church view inculturation with suspicion, fearing that it may dilute orthodox Catholic teachings. There have also been debates about the legitimacy of certain practices—such as libations, ancestral veneration, and masquerade performances—within Catholic rituals. While some clergy advocate for their inclusion as expressions of African spirituality, others caution against their incorporation, citing the potential for syncretism and doctrinal confusion (Kanu & Kanu, 2022).

Nonetheless, the growing acceptance of local cultural practices has enhanced evangelization and pastoral outreach in Nigeria. The Church's willingness to engage culture has made Catholicism more accessible and relatable, especially among the youth and rural populations (Church Life Journal, 2021). According to Nche (2015), religious adherence among Nigerian youth remains

high, partly due to the way Christianity, particularly Catholicism, aligns its teachings with communal values such as respect for elders, family cohesion, and communal responsibility. From a global perspective, scholars such as Horsfjord et al. (2022) have emphasized that African Catholicism represents one of the fastest-growing branches of the global Church, with its growth attributed to the dynamic and inculturated expressions of the faith. Nigerian Catholicism, in particular, stands out as a model for how the Church can thrive when it integrates the Gospel with local cultural realities.

The involvement of lay faithful in the inculturation process has also been notable. Through associations, prayer groups, and lay ministries, ordinary Catholics have participated in reimagining their faith in cultural terms. Lay movements often incorporate music, dance, and storytelling in their worship activities, further demonstrating how Catholicism in Nigeria has become a lived, embodied experience (Uwah, 2013). Moreover, Catholic educational institutions have contributed significantly to the theological discourse on inculturation. Seminaries and Catholic universities in Nigeria now offer courses that explore African theology, local ethics, and the interface between Christianity and culture. These institutions train future clergy and theologians to be culturally conscious and theologically grounded, thus institutionalizing the inculturation agenda.

Discussion on Findings: Analysis of Interviews on Marian Iconography in Nigerian Cultural Contexts

This study engaged key religious and cultural figures in Nigeria to explore the theological, artistic, and sociocultural dimensions of reinterpreting Marian iconography through the lens of inculturation. Participants included three Catholic bishops from Nigeria's major ethnic regions (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo), traditional rulers, artists, theologians, and a regional focus group. The insights gathered illuminate divergent and converging views on the implications of localizing sacred imagery in Nigerian Catholicism.

Perspectives from Catholic Bishops on Enculturation

The bishops interviewed supported the concept of inculturation and affirmed its alignment with the Catholic Church's evolving praxis. One bishop defined inculturation as the Church's effort to integrate its teachings and rituals with indigenous cultural forms without diluting core doctrinal elements. He noted that Marian apparitions often reflect the local culture, citing the mestiza appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe as an example. In this light, he recommended portraying the Virgin Mary with a cappuccino complexion and adorned in distinctly Nigerian garments to affirm cultural relevance and reduce the psychological effects of Eurocentric beauty ideals.

Another bishop responded affirmatively upon viewing a painting of a Nigerian Mary, remarking, “You painted yourself.” This comment underscored the successful contextualization of Marian imagery and its resonance with Nigerian identity. He emphasized the theological power of iconography, asserting that visible representations influence faith perception and deepen connection with sacred figures. He further acknowledged that while the presence of a halo confirmed the figure's Catholic sanctity, the absence of overt Western symbolism enabled cultural familiarity. A third bishop credited the post-Vatican II reforms for opening theological space for language, music, and artistic expression in Catholic worship. He expressed concern that prevailing Western depictions of Mary alienate African Catholics and fail to capture local spirituality. He pledged to support advocacy for the mainstreaming of Nigerian Marian iconography through ecclesiastical channels, including the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).

Reflections from Traditional and Cultural Leaders

Traditional leaders offered divergent perspectives rooted in their regional values. The traditional ruler of Nnewi (Southeast Nigeria) likened the Marian reconceptualization to the local deity *Edo*, who appears as a beautiful Nnewi woman to establish cultural connection. He affirmed that sacred figures should embody local aesthetics to enhance spiritual accessibility. Conversely, the Catholic traditional ruler of Faskari (Northwest Nigeria) viewed the project with suspicion, expressing concern that incorporating Hausa traditional symbols into Marian imagery could dilute or misappropriate indigenous values. His position reflected a deep reverence for local cultural codes, even when interfaced with Christian narratives. In a notable interaction, a religious leader responded to the localized Marian images by stating, “She no longer looks like Mary.” This response illustrates the deep imprint of Western Marian imagery on the collective Christian imagination in Nigeria. The comment reflected the internal conflict many believers may face when encountering Nigerian reinterpretations of sacred figures.

Focus Group Discussion on Perception and Reception

A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with eight participants from various parts of Nigeria, including artists, educators, and religious practitioners. The participants, aged 35–55, provided a cross-section of opinions on the cultural and theological acceptability of Nigerian Marian iconography. A Catholic theologian and nun affirmed the project’s alignment with the Church’s inculturation mission. However, a primary school teacher expressed unease, labeling the image a “profane reinterpretation” and voicing concern over its authenticity. She worried that reimagining sacred figures might distort theological truths and mislead believers.

One visual artist countered this viewpoint by emphasizing that all Marian imagery is interpretive, shaped by context and artistic license. He argued that the project highlights the constructed nature of religious iconography and its role in cultural theology. Meanwhile, a Yoruba traditionalist rejected the fusion, calling it an exploitation of African heritage, while an Igbo traditionalist

suggested abandoning Christianity altogether in favor of African traditional religion, citing visual sovereignty as a crucial cultural value.

Contributions from Artists and Fashion Scholars

A university fashion designer contributed valuable insights on integrating traditional Nigerian aesthetics into Marian iconography. She recommended using Ankara, Aso-oke, and George fabrics to affirm cultural dignity, and suggested accessorizing Mary with coral beads and beaded crowns— elements historically reserved for queens and priestesses in Yoruba and Edo traditions. She also advised incorporating traditional symbols such as *Uli* and *Nsibidi* motifs to express values like fertility, protection, and purity. She noted that Mary, as a maternal and spiritual figure, holds a "celebrity status" in Catholic devotion and should be depicted in regal attire that communicates divine reverence and cultural familiarity.

Filmic Approaches to Sacred Representation

A filmmaker and lecturer shared his 2007 experience adapting the Book of Genesis' story of Adam and Eve into an African setting using indigenous costumes, settings, and music. Despite limited resources, the film achieved widespread circulation and commercial success. He credited its popularity to the audience's ability to identify with the characters and aesthetics, which resonated with their lived experiences. He suggested documenting the creative process behind the Marian reinterpretations through audiovisual storytelling, including a soundtrack that reinforces the theological and cultural messages. This multimedia approach, he argued, would enhance audience reception and promote theological dialogue through the recreation of Marian Iconography.

Theological and Cultural Iconography of the Virgin Mary as a typical Nigerian woman

My research painting reimagines the Virgin Mary as a typical Nigerian woman, embodying theological depth and cultural blend. Through symbolism and color, the artwork seeks to bridge divinity with human connection, portraying Mary not only as a spiritual figure but as a mother who integrates with her children to foster belongingness and unity.



The recreation of Marian Iconography as a Nigerian woman

Painting the Virgin Mary as Mother of Nigeria (oil on a canvas 100 X 150 cm) was inspired by the evolution of Marian iconography and the profound symbolism of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Thus, through this conceptualization and artistic recreation, my paper reimagines the Virgin Mary as a typical Nigerian woman. Just as the Guadalupe image of the Virgin Mary depicts her as a Mestiza woman, integrating Indigenous Mexican elements to connect with local culture, my reinterpretation makes her a typical Nigerian, incorporating traditional Nigerian textiles, hairstyles, and motifs to reflect the cultural identity of Nigeria.

The researcher(artist), Mary-Lucy Okwuowulu reimagining and recreating Marian
Iconography



This painting using Afrocentric elements to make Mary relatable to Nigerians employs green, orange, and orange-red clothing to symbolizes life, growth, and vitality, while her light brown complexion reflects the natural beauty of Nigerian skin tones.

Conclusion

The interviews and focus group discussions reveal a complex interplay between faith, culture, and visual representation. While responses ranged from enthusiastic endorsement to cautious skepticism, the majority of participants acknowledged the importance of cultural relevance in religious expression. Theologians and artists alike supported the project's contribution to Catholic

inculturation, affirming its potential to foster spiritual belonging and identity within the Nigerian context. However, resistance from certain traditional leaders and laypersons indicates that widespread acceptance requires continued theological education and community dialogue. Ultimately, the reinterpretation of Marian iconography as a Nigerian woman represents more than an artistic shift—it is a theological and cultural gesture toward a truly African Catholicism.

In conclusion, the Catholic Church in Nigeria has made substantial progress in its efforts to integrate local culture into its religious practices. Through liturgical adaptations, theological reflections, and community engagement, the Church has created a model of faith that is both authentically Christian and genuinely African. While theological and pastoral tensions remain, the overall trajectory points toward a Church that is increasingly reflective of the cultural contexts in which it exists. These efforts not only enrich the spiritual lives of Nigerian Catholics but also contribute to the broader global conversation on the future of Christianity in diverse cultural landscapes.

This article on inculturation offers a timely and insightful exploration of the dynamic interplay between Christian liturgy and African cultural expression. Grounded in theological reflection and supported by relevant scholarly sources, it highlights how inculturation fosters deeper faith engagement and cultural authenticity within Nigerian Christianity. The analysis is especially valuable for scholars, clergy, and cultural theorists interested in liturgical adaptation and contextual theology. By examining both the promises and tensions of integrating indigenous practices into worship, the article contributes meaningfully to ongoing debates about identity, faith, and cultural continuity in postcolonial African religious life. I therefore recommend the Nigerian's churches (CBCN-Catholic Bishop's Conference)' consideration of my proposed Nigerian Marian Iconography.

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Reinterpretation of Dominant Themes in Select Evangelical Nollywood Films in the Light of Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology

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Abstract

This study, titled *"Reinterpretation of Dominant Themes in Selected Evangelical Nollywood Films in Light of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology,"* examines the dominant themes in selected evangelical Nollywood films to assess their alignment with the Christian gospel and their portrayal of African values. Using a qualitative research design, the study employed thematic analysis (TA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to evaluate six evangelical films. Findings reveal that while the films effectively use cinema as a tool for evangelism and incorporate various theological themes, many reinforce biblical principles conducive to Christian living and salvation. However, several films also dilute the gospel message by promoting unrealistic lifestyles, stereotypes, and propaganda. Additionally, most of the selected films depict African cultural practices as pagan, idolatrous, or sinful, reflecting a lack of theological depth, narrative complexity, and cultural inclusivity. The study concludes that while some evangelical Nollywood films successfully merge faith, culture, and entertainment, many fail to present authentic, theologically grounded, and culturally sensitive narratives. It recommends the establishment of ecumenical research centers and regular theological training for filmmakers to enhance the quality and impact of religious cinema in Africa.

Keywords: Reinterpretation, Dominant Themes, Evangelical Nollywood Films, Christian Gospel, Inculturation Theology

Introduction

Evangelical Nollywood films serve as a unique medium for the dissemination of Christian values and moral teachings in Nigeria and beyond. These films often reflect the socio-cultural and spiritual realities of their target audiences. However, when examined through the lens of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology, dominant themes in these films can be reinterpreted to provide deeper insights into the interplay between faith, culture, and theology (Onuzulike, 2017). While spiritual warfare is central to Christian belief (Ephesians 6:12), the Gospel emphasizes love, forgiveness, and the ultimate victory of Christ over evil. Evangelical Nollywood films could shift focus from dramatic confrontations to narratives that highlight Christ's redemptive power and the role of believers in fostering reconciliation and peace. The Gospel does

not promise material prosperity but calls for spiritual growth and trust in God's providence (Matthew 6:33). Reinterpreting these themes could lead to films that emphasize contentment, stewardship, and social justice rather than equating faithfulness with wealth (Ozele, 2008). The Christian Gospel celebrates redemption as a process of transformation and renewal (2 Corinthians 5:17). While Nollywood often dramatizes instant change, a Gospel-centered approach might explore gradual growth in faith and the ongoing journey of sanctification.

The Gospel focuses on grace, mercy, and the call to repentance (John 8:11). Rather than rigidly condemning sinners, films could portray God's patience and the loving invitation to turn back to Him. Inculturation Theology emphasizes the need to integrate Christian theology with local cultures, allowing faith to be expressed authentically within a cultural context. Applying this perspective to Evangelical Nollywood films encourages a more nuanced interpretation of dominant themes (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). Traditional Nigerian beliefs about spirits and the supernatural are often demonized in these films. Inculturation Theology advocates for a reimagining of these elements as opportunities for dialogue, showing how Christ fulfills and transforms indigenous spiritual realities rather than eradicating them. Prosperity in African culture is often tied to communal well-being rather than individual success. Films could portray wealth as a tool for community upliftment, aligning with the Gospel's call to love one's neighbor (Mark 12:31). Redemption stories can incorporate traditional African storytelling methods, such as proverbs, communal rituals, and oral narratives, to make the Gospel message resonate more deeply with local audiences.

African cultures often emphasize reconciliation over punitive justice. Films could explore restorative justice themes, showcasing God's healing power in broken relationships and communities. Evangelical films should strive for authentic representation of Nigerian cultures, demonstrating how Christian values can be lived out in these contexts. Collaboration with theologians can help ensure that the films align with the Christian Gospel while respecting local traditions (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). While remaining engaging, films should avoid sensationalism and instead promote narratives that encourage thoughtful reflection on faith and culture. The reinterpretation of dominant themes in Evangelical Nollywood films through the lenses of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology offers an opportunity for a more profound and culturally sensitive engagement with audiences. This approach enriches storytelling and fosters a deeper understanding of faith as it intersects with the cultural realities of Nigerian society.

Evangelical Nollywood films have become a significant cultural phenomenon in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, blending religious themes with entertainment. However, their presentation of Christian themes raises questions about theological depth, cultural integration, and their alignment with the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology. This paper explores how these

films can be reinterpreted to enrich their theological and cultural significance (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). Reinterpreting the dominant themes in Evangelical Nollywood films through the frameworks of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology enhances their relevance and impact. This approach fosters deeper theological engagement, cultural authenticity, and a richer portrayal of the Christian faith, positioning Nollywood as a vital tool for faith and cultural dialogue in Africa and beyond.

Research Objectives

1. Identify the dominant themes in the selected Evangelical Nollywood movies.
2. Determine whether the themes in the selected movies are portrayed in the light of the Gospel or watered down for entertainment purposes.
3. Examine whether African values and practices in the selected movies are bastardized or promoted in light of Inculturation Theology.

Conceptualizing Film Genres

Genre, a French word meaning "type" or "kind," has been defined in many ways by scholars. Film genres are categories used to classify films based on their narrative style, tone, themes, and audience expectations. Each genre has distinctive characteristics, though many films blend multiple genres to create unique storytelling experiences (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010). Conceptualizing film genres involves understanding them not merely as static categories but as dynamic constructs that evolve with culture, technology, and audience preferences. Genres are shaped by shared conventions, narrative patterns, and stylistic elements while also being fluid and open to reinterpretation. Conceptualizing film genres requires a multidimensional approach that considers their narrative, cultural, and industrial aspects. By understanding genres as evolving constructs, filmmakers and scholars can better appreciate their role in storytelling and cultural expression while remaining open to innovation and reinterpretation (Obasi & Msughter, 2023).

A film genre is a classification system that groups films based on:

- Themes, plot structures, and character archetypes
- Visual aesthetics, music, pacing, and tone
- Emotional and intellectual responses anticipated by viewers

Genres are frameworks that guide both filmmakers and audiences, offering familiarity while allowing room for innovation. Genres can be understood through the recurring elements that define a genre, such as the lone cowboy in Westerns or jump scares in Horror. Conventions establish the "rules" of a genre but can be subverted to surprise or engage audiences. In addition, through visual and auditory symbols associated with a genre (e.g., spaceships in Sci-Fi, swords in Fantasy). Iconography helps audiences instantly identify a film's genre (Horsfjord et al., 2022).

Genres give films their unique characteristics without limiting them to conventions but allow for the creativity of filmmakers and the elicitation of audience pleasure for particular movies. They serve several purposes: they provide a blueprint for storytelling and audience engagement. They offer familiarity and predictability while allowing for varied experiences within the genre framework. They also aid in marketing and categorizing films for distribution and consumption (Uwah, 2013). Genres are not fixed; they evolve in response to cultural, technological, and artistic influences: Social and political changes can redefine genre themes (e.g., the rise of feminist narratives in action films), innovations in special effects have expanded Sci-Fi and Fantasy genres, blending genres (e.g., Horror-Comedy or Romantic Sci-Fi) creates new subgenres and modern films often deconstruct or parody genre conventions (e.g., *Deadpool* in the superhero genre).

Many films blend multiple genres, making rigid classification difficult (e.g., *Get Out* combines Horror, Thriller, and Social Commentary). Subgenres and niche categories (e.g., Steampunk, Noir) further complicate the concept of a unified genre system. Different cultures interpret and produce genres uniquely (e.g., Bollywood Masala films blend Drama, Romance, and Action). Genres are expanding beyond films to include TV, video games, and interactive media, leading to new hybrid genres (Manus & Markhalemele, 2018). The rise of diverse voices in filmmaking is reshaping traditional genres to include new perspectives and stories. Modern filmmakers often deconstruct genres, subverting expectations to create fresh narratives (e.g., *The Cabin in the Woods* deconstructs Horror).

The Evangelical Nollywood Film Genre

The Evangelical Nollywood film genre is a unique subset of Nigerian cinema that combines evangelical Christian themes with Nollywood's storytelling style. These films serve as a medium for moral instruction, faith propagation, and entertainment, often reflecting the socio-cultural and spiritual realities of Nigeria and its diaspora. Ajayi et al. (2019) observed that Evangelical Nollywood films are characterized by their focus on Christian values, biblical narratives, and themes of spirituality. They aim to evangelize, inspire faith, and address moral dilemmas through dramatized storytelling. Evangelical Nollywood films draw heavily from Pentecostal theology, which emphasizes spiritual warfare, miracles, and prosperity. Traditional Nollywood storytelling techniques, such as melodrama and vibrant characters, are blended with religious content.

The Evangelical Nollywood film genre is a distinctive subcategory within the broader Nollywood industry, characterized by its focus on Christian themes, narratives, and values. This genre plays a pivotal role in the cultural and spiritual landscape of Nigeria and other African societies, blending religious evangelism with the rich storytelling tradition of Nollywood. The Evangelical Nollywood film genre represents a powerful intersection of faith, culture, and entertainment. While it has made significant contributions to Christian media and moral discourse in Nigeria, there is room

for growth in its theological depth, narrative complexity, and cultural inclusivity. By addressing these areas, the genre can continue to inspire and evangelize effectively while fostering a deeper understanding of the Gospel within diverse cultural contexts.

This genre consists of films explicitly produced to convey Christian teachings, promote moral values, and evangelize through the medium of cinema. The goals are to inspire faith and repentance, educate on Christian principles, and engage audiences in spiritual and moral discourse. Stories often revolve around characters undergoing personal or spiritual transformation. Prominent themes include portraying battles between good (God, angels) and evil (Satan, demons, witchcraft), and narratives highlighting the power of faith and divine intervention in resolving life's challenges. Additionally, these films utilize linear storytelling with a clear moral resolution, the use of parables and allegories to illustrate Christian teachings, dramatic depictions of spiritual events such as exorcisms or divine revelations, and the integration of traditional African cultural motifs alongside Christian iconography.

Most Evangelical Nollywood films are made with limited resources but prioritize impactful storytelling (Kurfi, 2018). They are distributed through local markets, churches, and digital platforms like YouTube, ensuring wide accessibility. Moreover, they are often funded or supported by churches and Christian ministries to amplify their message. These films integrate Christian theology with African cultural practices, addressing local beliefs and values. They serve as tools for teaching ethical behavior, especially to younger audiences. Furthermore, they are used in church settings for group discussions, fostering spiritual growth within communities.

Unfortunately, of the two forms of religion in Nigeria—the Traditional African Religion (ATR) and Christianity—which are frequently portrayed in Evangelical Nollywood films, only a minority of such films present a balanced picture. More commonly, viewers encounter diabolical portrayals of ATR and a superstitious depiction of Christianity. The African Traditional Religion is often presented as a channel for charms and witchcraft, designed to kill, maim, or defraud others. Christianity, in contrast, is frequently shown as a miracle-working religion that resolves all problems through supernatural means, particularly through the Pentecostal experience.

Igboanusi (2010, p. 133) puts it succinctly:

Homegrown videos of famed Nollywood are stirring the pots of ethical revolution in the Nigerian society at large, by inserting plots of traditional religious practices, cultism and modern Pentecostalism. And people are questioning the amount of running time given to such religious plots in home videos. There is an understandable apprehension regarding the effects of such plots on the young and old alike. This is because it is presumed that media are so powerful that their effects are capable of swinging people to unwholesome attitudes.

This unbalanced presentation of the two religions has had several effects on viewers. One such effect is the perception of religion as a means of acquiring money, wealth, fame, power, health, and security. Religion is also increasingly seen as a problem-solving mechanism, wherein the supernatural can be manipulated at will by religious experts to address or even cause human problems. This perception has created a form of irrational dependency on religion among a large segment of the population. It has also promoted non-conventional forms of religiosity in society, with many individuals either returning to traditional religious practices or embracing a form of Pentecostal Christianity that focuses on immediate problem-solving.

The Bastardization of Christian Gospel in Nollywood Movies

Life often presents paradoxes—seemingly contradictory realities that challenge human understanding. Issues like divorce, salvation, and love are complex and deeply personal, raising profound questions about purpose, morality, and relationships. The Christian Gospel provides a framework for addressing these paradoxes by offering hope, reconciliation, and meaning through faith in Jesus Christ. Divorce often signifies the failure of a covenant meant to last a lifetime, creating tension between brokenness and the ideal of lifelong commitment. The Gospel acknowledges human brokenness but offers grace for healing. In Matthew 19:8, Jesus acknowledges the reality of divorce due to human sinfulness but also points to God’s original design for marriage as a lifelong union. The Gospel emphasizes reconciliation—both with God and others (2 Corinthians 5:18). Even in the aftermath of divorce, individuals can experience spiritual renewal and restored relationships. The church, as the body of Christ, is called to provide support and compassion to those affected by divorce, embodying Christ’s love.

The bastardization of Christian beliefs and practices in films, particularly in Nollywood films, is a complex issue that reflects broader concerns about how faith is portrayed in popular culture. Nollywood, Nigeria’s vibrant film industry, has often included Christian themes, characters, and narratives, but at times, the way Christian beliefs and practices are represented can be criticized for misinterpretation, exaggeration, or distortion. In some Nollywood films, Christianity is portrayed as a commodity, with pastors or churches depicted as profit-driven enterprises rather than spiritual sanctuaries. This commercialization of faith undermines the true essence of Christian teaching, which emphasizes selfless service, humility, and the pursuit of eternal life—not material gain (Kilonzo, 2018).

Films featuring prosperity gospel preachers often emphasize wealth, health, and material blessings as the primary focus of Christian life, frequently to the exclusion of repentance, salvation, or self-sacrifice. These portrayals include pastors living lavish lifestyles while their congregations struggle financially, suggesting that Christianity is a business transaction rather than a life-transforming faith. Such depictions can lead to misconceptions about the priorities of

the Christian faith, making people view the church and its practices as tools for personal gain, rather than as avenues for spiritual growth and service to others.

The concept of salvation and deliverance in many Nollywood films is often oversimplified or sensationalized. In these films, the focus may be on dramatic, miraculous events—such as instant deliverance from evil spirits, curses, or addictions—without emphasizing the deeper spiritual and moral transformation that salvation in Christ entails. These include films where characters are “delivered” from demonic possession or life struggles through a quick, emotional prayer or incantation, with little focus on the need for long-term repentance, discipleship, and personal transformation. Overly dramatized portrayals of exorcism or spiritual warfare reduce the process to a spectacle rather than a serious spiritual and theological practice, often accompanied by exaggerated visual effects and unrealistic portrayals of demons (Kilonzo, 2018).

Many Nollywood films featuring Christian characters may present a skewed or contradictory portrayal of Christian ethics and morality. For example, characters who are supposed to embody Christian values might engage in unethical or immoral behavior—such as lying, cheating, or even violence—without showing the appropriate consequences or moral reckoning. Instances include characters who claim to be devout Christians engaging in affairs, dishonesty, or criminal activities, yet still portray themselves as upright, often with no real repentance or acknowledgment of sin. Additionally, some films present idealized portrayals of church leaders that ignore the personal struggles or flaws which can affect Christian leaders, creating an unrealistic view of Christian leadership.

These portrayals can confuse viewers about the true moral teachings of Christianity, reducing the emphasis on genuine repentance, transformation, and accountability, which are central to Christian ethics. In many Nollywood films, biblical themes or Christian doctrine may be introduced or quoted, but often without an accurate understanding or consistent application of Christian theology. This can lead to misinterpretations or distortions of foundational Christian beliefs. Examples include quoting Bible verses out of context to support the plot or actions of characters, twisting the original meaning of Scripture to fit the narrative, and presenting a prosperity gospel or punitive view of God’s character that is inconsistent with traditional Christian teachings. Films may portray miracles or divine intervention in a way that suggests God is a tool used to fulfill personal desires or wishes, rather than seeing God’s intervention in the context of His will and the advancement of His kingdom. This leads to theological confusion, where viewers may misunderstand or be misled by inaccurate representations of biblical teachings. It can also reinforce a shallow spirituality that focuses more on material success or personal gain rather than the deeper, spiritual goals of the Christian faith.

The bastardization of Christian beliefs and practices in Nollywood films is a significant concern, as it can shape public perceptions of Christianity in ways that mislead or misinform. While films can serve as powerful tools for cultural engagement, evangelism, and entertainment, it is essential that filmmakers approach the depiction of faith with greater theological awareness and responsibility. Proper biblical teaching, ethical storytelling, and honest portrayals of Christian life can help ensure that Christian beliefs are accurately and respectfully represented, fostering a deeper understanding of the faith both within and outside the church (Horsfjord et al., 2023). This is the point of the Vatican II document on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 57), which states that through culture and its progress in the arts and the sciences, human beings come into greater understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and this inclines them to deeper communion with God as they grow in wisdom through wonder and contemplation. This implies that the screen can help individuals look at reality with wonder and contemplation. Hence, film audiences need to raise deeper questions regarding every film viewed, given that films are projections of realities and not realities themselves.

Use of Films as a Channel of Inculturation and Evangelization

Inculturation is not merely an effort at cultural revival but a serious theological enterprise aimed at making the faith relevant to people within their local cultures. It involves bringing the Word of God into meaningful dialogue with every culture. In that encounter, inherited traditions—both foreign and local—are scrutinized, transformed, or purified. This is the only way the Gospel can become firmly rooted in local contexts. Schineller (1990), in his classic work on inculturation, emphasizes that inculturation involves all aspects of Christian life and cannot be limited to certain elements alone. Even when discussing a theology of inculturation, the actual process extends beyond the field of theology. Furthermore, he defines theology as:

... the way theology is studied and written about, the way children are taught the rudiments of the faith, the way the parish council is structured, the way the diocese is organized, the architecture of churches, the shape and form of prayers—all of these areas fall under the scope of inculturation (p. 24).

This indicates that the Good News of Christ is meant to renew and transform every culture, enabling it to blossom from within and become capable of contributing to humanity's interior freedom (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 57).

To achieve this noble mission of cultural transformation, the Church must endeavor to use channels that effectively appeal to the people for transmitting the Gospel message. This is where the film industry becomes a powerful resource for evangelization and inculturation. Pope Paul VI defines the Church's mission in the papal exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) as that of "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming

humanity from within and making it new” (no. 18). This entails not only proclaiming the Gospel across broader geographic areas and to more people but also, “upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life,” which conflict with the Word of God and His plan of salvation (Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 9; Ike, 2012).

Films, particularly in a diverse and culturally rich context like Nigeria, offer a vital medium for inculturation. Nollywood films can integrate traditional values, beliefs, and challenges, using them as a bridge to present Christian teachings in a culturally relevant way. By embedding Christian themes in familiar cultural narratives—such as family conflicts, generational struggles, and societal expectations—filmmakers can make the paradoxes of the Gospel more accessible. A character facing the tension between personal desires and family obligations, for instance, could illustrate the Christian paradox of self-denial and fulfillment, inviting audiences to reflect on Christ’s call to self-sacrifice (Luke 9:23). Portraying life’s paradoxes in culturally familiar settings allows viewers to relate to characters' struggles and resonate with Christian resolutions. In the African context, narratives involving ancestral worship, witchcraft, or generational curses can serve as entry points for discussing spiritual freedom and deliverance through Christ.

Similarly, using films as a pulpit for evangelization provides an effective and accessible means of conveying the Christian message, especially in settings where traditional forms of evangelization may not be as impactful. Nollywood—one of the largest film industries globally—has the potential to reach millions with the Gospel and to engage deeply with life’s most pressing questions, such as suffering, justice, love, death, and salvation. Films possess a unique capacity to connect with diverse audiences across cultural, social, and geographic divides (Ajayi et al., 2019). Their visual and emotional power makes them an especially compelling medium for presenting the Christian message to those who might not otherwise engage with church activities or Christian literature.

Films can address life’s paradoxes in ways that resonate with people’s lived experiences. The paradox of suffering and hope, for example, can be powerfully depicted through characters who endure trials with faith, revealing Christ as a source of strength and transformation. Symbolic and relatable narratives can translate complex theological concepts—such as salvation, grace, and eternal life—into tangible realities through character development and personal stories.

Films also allow for the exploration of complex themes through characters who struggle with contradictions that the Gospel seeks to resolve. They can depict characters who experience failure or weakness yet discover true strength through faith in Christ, echoing Paul’s message that God's power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). These narratives can inspire viewers to

reflect on their own lives and challenges, encouraging them to seek the same hope found in Christ.

Christian love, particularly as self-sacrifice, is a theme that lends itself naturally to film. By portraying characters who make profound sacrifices for others, films can evoke the kind of love that Christ demonstrated on the cross—where love is measured not by gain, but by the willingness to give. Many films also explore humanity’s greatest paradox—death. By presenting the resurrection as a victory over death, films can depict the Christian belief in eternal life through Christ (John 11:25–26), sparking dialogue about mortality, faith, and spiritual rebirth.

Films can further explore the paradox of redemption through suffering, portraying how broken lives are restored through Christ. Such narratives allow viewers to reflect on their own pain and discover the healing power of the Gospel. Additionally, the paradox of salvation by grace—not merit—can be shown through characters who are forgiven and redeemed despite their past, revealing God’s unconditional love. This counters the worldly notion that one must earn salvation, instead highlighting grace as transformative and inclusive.

Moreover, films can highlight how the Christian Gospel challenges prevailing societal values. Christ’s teachings that “the last shall be first” and “the greatest shall be the servant of all” (Mark 9:35) present an alternative vision of greatness and justice. A film centered on these themes could provoke conversations on humility, service, and leadership within God’s kingdom (Onuzulike, 2007). Viewers can witness how faith in Christ influences everyday decisions—relationships, conflicts, forgiveness, and resilience—demonstrating that the Gospel is not just belief but a lived reality. Films can emphasize the power of repentance and forgiveness by showing characters who undergo genuine change through their encounter with Christ, effectively illustrating 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

Additionally, films can depict Christian communities as places of compassion, accountability, and shared spiritual growth. By portraying the church as a supportive and transformative community, films can inspire viewers to seek deeper fellowship and belonging in local congregations.

By showcasing core Christian values such as love, reconciliation, service, and justice, films can inspire individuals to embody these virtues in their personal and communal lives. Using films as tools for evangelization offers a dynamic and engaging way to present the Gospel as the answer to life’s deepest questions. Through rich storytelling, character development, and cultural relevance, films can help viewers discover hope, meaning, and transformation in the message of Christ. In this way, films become not just entertainment, but powerful vehicles for theological reflection, spiritual growth, and cultural renewal.

Synopsis of the Selected Evangelical Nollywood Films

The Mandate (2006): Directed and produced by Kalawole David Okeowol. The story revolves around the struggle of two born-again Christians—Royland Oseirujo, an architect, and Esther, a manager of a successful company—to become man and wife.

Parish War (2010): Directed by Ikenna Aniekwe and produced by Charles Offor. This film is a satire of the Catholic priesthood and the priestly method of carrying out the evangelizing mission of the Church in a parish.

Knocking on Heaven's Door (2014): Directed by Desmond Elliot and produced by Emen Isong and Ini Edo. The movie explores everyday issues facing many young married Christian couples, such as domestic violence, jealousy, and active faith in God amidst family crises.

Hidden Sin (2016): Written, directed, and produced by Lekan Asikhia. The plot centers around the destructive power of hidden sins in the life of a believer.

Slave to Sin (2016): Written, directed, and produced by Lekan Asikhia. The film, a sequel to *Hidden Sin*, presents the consequences of believers not having Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Deliverance from Sin (2016): Written by Olayinka Asikhia and produced by Tunde Owah. The movie, which concludes the *Hidden Sin* trilogy, explores repentance and the consequences of sin.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design, which informed the choice of thematic analysis (TA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) as tools for data collection. A total of six Evangelical Nollywood movies were analyzed.

Discussion of Findings Research Objective 1: Identify the Dominant Themes in the Selected Evangelical Nollywood Movies

This objective aimed to identify the main themes explored in the selected movies. Findings reveal that a number of theological themes run across the six films, such as salvation, repentance, love, justice, trust, endurance, hope, judgment, sin, redemption, grace, greed, disobedience, betrayal, truth, commitment to community, faith, service, forgiveness, peace, charity, reverence, dignity, domestic abuse, jealousy, divorce, religion, and true worship. For instance, the recurrent theme in the three Mount Zion films—*Hidden Sin*, *Slave to Sin* (Part 2), and *Deliverance from Sin* (Part 3)—is salvation. These movies employ various narratives to demonstrate the consequences of sin, aiming to lead viewers toward being “born again.” Similarly, *Knocking on Heaven's Door* explores themes such as domestic abuse, jealousy, divorce, love, and the role of active faith in God during family crises.

In the same vein, *Parish War* emphasizes discipline, wisdom, and virtuous living among priests to enable them to effectively guide the faithful toward salvation. While the film dramatizes the

repercussions of scandals in religious settings, it also addresses themes of hurt, revenge, and their consequences—such as loss of authority, lack of inner peace, familial discord, and emotional turmoil. *The Mandate* explores themes of marital discernment, love, and trust. These findings support Ajayi et al.'s (2019) observation that Evangelical Nollywood films are characterized by a strong focus on themes of spirituality and religion, as they aim to evangelize, inspire faith, and address moral dilemmas through dramatized storytelling.

Research Objective 2: Determine Whether the Themes Were Portrayed in the Light of the Christian Gospel or Watered Down for Entertainment Purposes

Findings reveal that while some of the analyzed movies uphold Christian values, others dilute them for entertainment purposes. For example, *Parish War*, filmed during a period when the global Church was under media scrutiny due to clerical scandals, satirizes this issue in the Nigerian context. However, the overemphasis on Fr. Sylvester's scandal and his subsequent exit from the priesthood overshadows the positive portrayal of his successor. This suggests that some filmmakers react to social issues with ideologically skewed narratives, rather than offering wellresearched theological insights. This approach can lead to the ridicule of Christian denominations that differ in belief.

Similarly, *The Mandate* contains questionable theological interpretations. When Esther prays for a life partner, she internalizes the message of Genesis 2:18, echoing views held by various world religions. However, the Christian Gospel emphasizes that one's value and fulfillment are found in service to God and humanity—not solely in marriage. Jesus Christ, who remained unmarried, exemplifies this ideal. Likewise, the Catholic Church promotes celibacy among clergy as a means of full devotion to God's work. The portrayal of miracles in *The Mandate*—such as Esther raising the dead and healing her cousin instantly—also stretches theological credibility. While liberal Christians may enjoy such narratives, they risk promoting an unrealistic, overly sensationalized version of Christianity. Igboanusi (2010) notes that few Nigerian films present a balanced picture of Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR); most rely on superstitious or fantastical elements that distort theological truth. In the *Hidden Sin* trilogy, the depiction of Sandra's judgment trivializes the concept of divine justice. While the narrative may suggest God's mercy by granting her a second chance, it contradicts scriptures such as Matthew 5:8, which emphasize the purity required to see God. Sandra's ability to return to life and face earthly justice undermines the finality and gravity associated with spiritual judgment.

In *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, issues such as domestic abuse and separation are not realistically explored. The film fails to address the critical question of when a person should leave an abusive marriage. Although the Bible condemns both violence and divorce (Malachi 2:14–16), it also

advocates prudence in avoiding danger (Proverbs 27:12). Debby's continued suffering, multiple miscarriages, and near-death experience at the hands of her husband suggest that the film avoids taking a firm stand on this serious issue. As the protagonist, Debby's worldview dominates the narrative, yet viewers are left without guidance on navigating abuse within marriage. This approach ultimately validates harmful behavior and misses an opportunity to deliver a responsible moral message. These examples indicate that not all religious imagery in the analyzed texts is theologically sound or uplifting. In the effort to appeal to a broad audience, some messages fall into the category of "easy theology." Obasi and Msughter (2023) argue that while Evangelical Nollywood films represent a significant intersection of faith, culture, and entertainment, there is room for improvement in theological depth, narrative complexity, and cultural inclusivity.

On the other hand, the *Hidden Sin* trilogy features characters like Mrs. Adebayo (Mama Titi), a prayerful yet quarrelsome church member portrayed as foolish and violent. Her constant conflicts lead to tragic losses, including the deaths of her children. Her cries to God—"Am I not praying enough?"—reveal a lack of spiritual discernment. Her husband's retort—"Foolish woman, are you not ashamed... and you call yourself a Christian"—encapsulates her hypocritical faith. Additionally, Lawrence, another character, exemplifies hidden sin and hypocrisy. Despite numerous warnings from God through others, he commits murder to further his career and maintains a facade of devotion until he is imprisoned. Similarly, Sandra, who dies from a botched abortion, represents moral failure despite outward religiosity. Her death echoes scriptural warnings against murder and sin (Exodus 20:13; Romans 6:23).

These narratives suggest that while some films dilute Christian teachings for entertainment, others reinforce biblical values such as integrity, repentance, and the consequences of sin. Overall, the films analyzed present diverse Christian identities and offer valuable, albeit sometimes flawed, contributions to religious discourse in Nollywood cinema. Their central goal remains evangelization and the salvation of souls—a hallmark of Evangelical Nollywood storytelling.

Research Objective 3: To Find Out if the African Values and Practices in the Selected Movies Were Bastardized or Promoted in the Light of Inculturation Theology

Findings indicate that the selected movies misrepresented or ridiculed some African values and practices. For instance, in *The Mandate*, after Esther—a born-again Christian with special gifts—received a revelation that Royland (another member of her church) was actually her destined husband, she began to respond to his advances. Yet, when he eventually proposed to her, Esther not only rejected him but also withdrew from the relationship due to his new status as the

traditional ruler of his community. To Esther, a born-again Christian should not associate with, or become, a traditional ruler. This raises questions about whether traditional rulers are disinherited from the Kingdom of God. However, the Bible clearly states that God sent His only Son out of love for the world and that anyone who believes in Him will have eternal life (John 3:16).

Furthermore, even after their evident marriage—largely influenced by Esther—Royland, now known as Ose and the custodian of his people’s culture by virtue of his exalted position, rejects every invitation by the council of chiefs and the chief priest to partake in traditional rites, no matter how “clean” these functions appear. In one of his confrontations with them, he bluntly tells the chief priest and the chiefs to exempt him from such “barbaric and demonic” practices. Most scenes in the movie portray tradition in a cynical and dismissive manner. This raises concerns about African traditional beliefs and practices being labeled as pagan, idolatrous, and sinful. However, several Bible passages acknowledge the importance of local traditions and practices (1 Cor. 9:19–23; Acts 16:1–3; Romans 14:1–15:7). A typical example is Paul’s adoption of local customs to effectively spread the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19–23). Again, in Acts 16:1–3, out of respect for local Jewish traditions, Paul circumcises Timothy. These instances illustrate that God delights in and blesses the diversity of nations and languages (Gen. 10:1–32). They also show that people from every nation, tribe, and language can worship God together (Rev. 7:9–10), as Christ has removed all cultural and social divisions (Gal. 3:28).

Inculturation theology emphasizes the integration of the gospel with local cultures for a more authentic and meaningful expression of the Christian faith within specific contexts. This is because the Good News of Christ is intended to renew and transform every culture, allowing it to blossom from within and become capable of contributing to humanity’s interior freedom (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 57).

Conclusion

The study established that the analyzed films explored a number of theological themes—salvation, repentance, love, justice, judgment, sin, redemption, grace, betrayal, battery, jealousy, true worship, and more. This affirms that the selected films, like most Evangelical Nollywood productions, use the screen as a pulpit to evangelize their viewers.

The study also found that, true to the Evangelical genre, some of the analyzed films promoted Christian values. They presented a wide range of Christian identities, which were either refuted or reinforced to encourage fruitful Christian living and the salvation of souls, using biblical principles. However, various scenes in most of the selected films diluted gospel messages by validating abusive or unrealistic lifestyles and promoting propaganda or stereotypes. Although liberal Christians may enjoy such shallow theological narratives for entertainment purposes, the

core messages of these films may not align with the gospel and could lead to misconceptions, a weakening of faith among believers, and both physical and spiritual loss of blessings and lives in society.

The study equally established that most of the selected movies misrepresented or ridiculed some African values and practices. For example, themes suggesting that traditional rulers are disinherited from the Kingdom of God and that African traditional practices are inherently pagan, idolatrous, and sinful were prevalent in the analyzed texts. However, Inculturation Theology affirms that the gospel should be integrated into local cultures to ensure a more authentic and meaningful expression of the Christian faith. Such integration allows the Good News of Christ to renew and transform every culture from within, fostering the interior freedom of all people. In light of these findings, the study recommends the censorship of Nigerian movies, the establishment of ecumenical and research centers for filmmakers, and the regular training and retraining of filmmakers by the Church.

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Moral Education and Spiritual Transformation in Faith-Based Films: Antidote to Social Media's Harmful Impact

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential of film as a medium for moral education and spiritual transformation, particularly in countering the negative influences of social media on youth. It examines how faith-based films, guided by media effects and social learning theories, can promote positive values and virtuous character traits. The study reviews historical and contemporary examples of filmmakers using cinema for evangelism and Christian education. It also addresses the challenges and opportunities of the digital landscape, where faith-based films compete with sensationalized online content. Ultimately, the paper argues that the strategic use of film, informed by youth media consumption habits, can help the Church foster moral development and counter the erosion of values driven by social media. The findings are relevant for religious leaders, media ministries, and Christian filmmakers.

Introduction

In today's digital age, social media has become an overwhelmingly dominant force, profoundly shaping behaviors and attitudes, particularly among impressionable youth, who are most susceptible to its influence. The vast expanse of content circulating on these platforms frequently perpetuates vices, immorality, and unethical conduct, regrettably contributing to a significant moral decline within society. However, amidst this prevailing darkness, a ray of hope emerges in faith-based films, which possess the remarkable ability to serve as a powerful tool for moral education and spiritual transformation.

With their mesmerizing storytelling capabilities, faith-based films hold the potential to counteract the negative influences propagated through social media. By effectively harnessing the captivating power of cinema, these films can penetrate the depths of individuals' souls, planting seeds of positive values, inspiring the cultivation of virtuous character traits, and providing soulstirring narratives that resonate deep within viewers' hearts. This comprehensive study delves into the multifaceted theories of media effects and social learning, aiming to explore the expansive potential of faith-based films in promoting Christian principles and fostering the development of wholesome character traits, both within individuals and throughout society at large. By delving into the intricate tapestry of media effects, this research investigates the

profound impact that faith-based films can yield. It illuminates how these films possess the extraordinary ability to captivate the hearts and minds of audiences, catalyzing personal growth, spiritual development, and moral enlightenment. Through carefully crafted narratives that intertwine faith, hope, and love, these films can inspire individuals to transcend their present circumstances, aspire to loftier ideals, and cultivate a deeper connection with their spirituality.

Moreover, drawing upon social learning principles, this study delves into the influential role that faith-based films can play in shaping viewers' behaviors and attitudes. These films become a potent vehicle for conveying profound moral lessons, making ethical complexities relatable, and presenting realistic models of virtuous character traits. By exposing viewers to such uplifting narratives, faith-based films offer a unique opportunity for individuals to acquire and internalize moral values, foster personal growth, encourage altruistic behaviors, and establish a collective commitment to building a more harmonious and virtuous society. Within the ever-expanding realm of social media's dominance, faith-based films emerge as a beacon of hope, combating the corrosive influences that permeate contemporary society. By harnessing the captivating power of cinema, these films can instill positive values, inspire the cultivation of virtuous character traits, and provide uplifting narratives that transcend the superficial and touch the deepest recesses of the human spirit. Grounded in the theories of media effects and social learning, this study elucidates the transformative potential of faith-based films in promoting Christian principles and fostering the development of wholesome character traits, thereby restoring morality and spirituality within society.

Theoretical Framework: Media Effects Theory

Media effects theory is a framework that explores the influence of media on audiences' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This theory encompasses a broad range of effects, from immediate, shortterm impacts to long-term, cumulative changes in attitudes and behavior. The theory has evolved, encompassing various models and perspectives examining how different media content types can shape individuals and society.

Major Proponents of Media Effects Theory

Media effects theory, which explores how media influences audiences' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, has been shaped by the contributions of several vital scholars. These theorists have provided foundational insights and advanced our understanding of the powerful role media plays in society.

Early Theorists

Harold Lasswell was a pioneering figure in media effects research during the 1940s. His linear communication model emphasized the direct impact of media messages on audiences, positing that media could shape public opinion and behavior (Lasswell, 1948). Lasswell's work laid the groundwork for subsequent studies on how media influences societal attitudes and actions. Paul F. Lazarsfeld conducted influential research that challenged the notion of direct media effects. Instead, Lazarsfeld introduced the "two-step flow" communication model, suggesting that media effects are mediated by opinion leaders interpreting and passing on media messages to others (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). This model highlighted the role of interpersonal communication in shaping media influence.

Mid-20th Century Theorists

Carl Hovland contributed significantly to understanding how media messages influence persuasion and attitude change, particularly during World War II. Hovland's research on propaganda and communication strategies provided insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying media effects (Hovland et al., 1953). Albert Bandura extended the study of media effects into the realm of psychology with his social learning theory. Bandura demonstrated that individuals learn behaviors and attitudes by observing others, including media portrayals. His work showed how media could be a powerful tool for socialization and behavior modeling (Bandura, 1977). George Gerbner developed the cultivation theory, which examines the longterm effects of television viewing on perceptions of reality. Gerbner's research suggested that heavy television viewers are more likely to perceive the world in ways that reflect television content's repetitive and consistent portrayals, contributing to a shared cultural narrative (Gerbner et al., 1986).

Contemporary Theorists

Elihu Katz collaborated with Lazarsfeld on the two-step flow theory and later advanced the uses and gratifications theory. This theory explores why individuals select specific media and how they use it to satisfy various psychological and social needs (Katz et al., 1974). Katz's work shifted the focus from media effects to audience motivations and active media consumption. Denis McQuail has been a significant figure in mass communication theory, contributing to a broad understanding of media's role in society. McQuail's work encompasses media effects, audience analysis, and media policy, providing a comprehensive framework for studying media's impact on various aspects of social life (McQuail, 2010). Sherry Turkle has focused on the psychological effects of digital media, mainly social media and the internet. Her research explores how digital interactions affect identity, relationships, and society. Turkle's work highlights the profound changes digital media brings to human connection and self-perception (Turkle, 2011).

Positive and Negative Impacts of Media

Media effects theory posits that media can have both positive and negative impacts on audiences. Adverse effects are often highlighted in discussions about violent video games, sensationalist news, and social media content that promotes unethical behavior. For example, exposure to violent media has been linked to increased aggression and desensitization to violence (Anderson et al., 2003). Similarly, social media platforms can amplify harmful behaviors such as cyberbullying, body image issues, and the spread of misinformation (Moreno & Kota, 2013). Conversely, media can also have positive effects. Educational programs, for instance, have been shown to enhance learning and cognitive development in children (Fisch, 2004). Health media campaigns can improve public health outcomes by raising awareness and changing behaviors (Wakefield et al., 2010). Faith-based films fall into this category of positive media influences, offering moral lessons and inspirational narratives that can counterbalance the harmful content prevalent on social media.

Faith-Based Films as Positive Media Influences

Faith-based films have the potential to serve as powerful tools for moral education and spiritual transformation. These films often contain narratives that emphasize virtues such as honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and faith. By presenting stories that highlight these values, faith-based films can inspire viewers to adopt similar behaviors in their own lives.

One of the fundamental mechanisms through which faith-based films exert their influence is through identification and emotional engagement. When viewers identify with the characters and become emotionally involved in the story, they are more likely to internalize the messages and lessons presented (Cohen, 2001). This process can lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors as viewers are moved by the moral and spiritual themes depicted in the films.

Counteracting Harmful Social Media Content

The rise of social media has brought about a new set of challenges in the realm of media effects. Social media platforms are often saturated with content that promotes vices, unethical behavior, and superficial values. This content can have detrimental effects on young people's development, leading to issues such as increased anxiety, depression, and social comparison (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Faith-based films offer a counter-narrative to the often harmful content found on social media. By providing alternative stories that emphasize positive values and spiritual growth, these films can help mitigate the adverse effects of social media. They can serve as a source of inspiration and guidance, encouraging viewers to lead lives grounded in ethical and moral principles.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura, is a comprehensive framework that explains how people learn behaviors, attitudes, and values through observing others. This theory underscores the importance of modeling, imitation, and observational learning in acquiring new behaviors and attitudes. Faith-based films, by depicting virtuous characters, can serve as powerful tools for promoting Christian values and ethical behavior among viewers.

Core Principles of Social Learning Theory

Bandura's social learning theory is built on several fundamental principles:

1. **Observational Learning:** Individuals can learn new behaviors by observing others without necessarily performing the behavior themselves. This process involves attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977).
2. **Modeling:** The individuals observed are referred to as models. These models can be real people, such as parents or teachers, or symbolic models, such as characters in films or books. The observed behaviors are more likely to be imitated if the model is perceived as similar to the observer, has admired status, or demonstrates rewarded behavior (Bandura, 1986).
3. **Reinforcement and Punishment:** The consequences following a behavior influence the likelihood of adopting it. Behaviors followed by positive outcomes (reinforcements) are more likely to be repeated, while those followed by adverse outcomes (punishments) are less likely to be repeated (Bandura, 1986).
4. **Self-efficacy:** Bandura introduced the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capability to perform a specific behavior. Higher self-efficacy increases the likelihood of adopting and performing the observed behavior (Bandura, 1997).

Application of Social Learning Theory to Faith-Based Films: Role Models

Faith-based films can utilize social learning theory to promote virtuous behavior and Christian values by depicting positive role models and moral narratives. Characters in faith-based films serve as symbolic models, demonstrating behaviors and attitudes consistent with Christian values. These characters often face moral dilemmas and choose actions that reflect virtues such as honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and faith. By observing these characters, viewers can learn and adopt similar traits, reinforcing positive behavior in their own lives.

Moral Narratives

The narratives in faith-based films provide contexts in which virtuous behaviors are rewarded, and unethical behaviors are shown to have negative consequences. This alignment of behavior with outcomes reinforces the desirability of virtuous behavior and the undesirability of unethical actions. For instance, a character who forgives an enemy and subsequently experiences personal

peace and reconciliation demonstrates the positive outcomes of forgiveness, encouraging viewers to emulate this behavior.

Empirical Support for Social Learning Theory

Numerous studies support the principles of social learning theory. For example, research has shown that children who observe aggressive behavior in media are likelier to exhibit aggression, highlighting the role of observational learning (Bandura et al., 1961). Conversely, exposure to prosocial behavior in media, such as sharing and helping, has been linked to increased prosocial behavior among viewers (Mares & Woodard, 2005).

In the context of faith-based films, studies have found that exposure to positive role models in media can enhance moral development and ethical behavior. For example, Mares and Woodard (2005) demonstrated that children who watched prosocial content were likelier to engage in helping behaviors. Similarly, research by Rushton (1979) showed that exposure to altruistic behavior in films increased the likelihood of altruistic behavior in viewers.

Historical Context of Evangelistic Films: Early Evangelistic Films

The use of cinema for evangelistic purposes dates back to the early 20th century, with filmmakers recognizing the medium's potential to convey powerful Christian messages through compelling storytelling. Notable early evangelistic films include *The Passion of the Christ* (1906), directed by Ferdinand Zecca, and *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912), directed by Sidney Olcott. These films used vivid and dramatic depictions of biblical events to reach broad audiences and profoundly impact viewers. *The Passion of the Christ* (1906) is one of the earliest films to portray the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Directed by Ferdinand Zecca, this silent film employed innovative techniques for its time, such as reenacting biblical scenes with considerable emotional and visual intensity. Its impact was profound, offering audiences a visceral experience of Christ's passion and suffering, thus enhancing the religious and moral message conveyed through the narrative (Parker, 2017).

Similarly, *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912), directed by Sidney Olcott, was another landmark in religious filmmaking. This film was notable for being shot in locations in Egypt and Palestine, adding authenticity to its portrayal of Jesus' life. The film's historical and geographical accuracy, combined with its devotional content, made it a powerful tool for evangelism, reaching global audiences and reinforcing the potential of cinema to spread Christian teachings (Musser, 1990).

The Jesus Film Project

The Jesus Film Project, initiated in 1979, is one of the most successful examples of using film for evangelism. This project involved the production of *Jesus*, a film that chronicles the life of Christ

based on the Gospel of Luke. Since its release, the film has been translated into over 1,600 languages and viewed by millions worldwide. The Jesus Film Project highlights the enduring power of cinema to convey spiritual messages and effect moral change on a global scale (Richardson, 1998). The widespread dissemination and translation of *Jesus* have allowed it to reach diverse cultures and communities, making it a pivotal tool in missionary work and evangelism. The film's success underscores the effectiveness of using visual storytelling to communicate the teachings of Christianity and foster moral development among viewers (Strobel, 2009).

Contemporary Case Studies the Kendrick Brothers

The Kendrick Brothers are contemporary filmmakers renowned for their faith-based films, which focus on themes of prayer, faith, and perseverance. Films such as *War Room* (2015) and *Overcomer* (2019) provide viewers with inspirational narratives that reinforce Christian values. The success of their films demonstrates a significant demand for content that offers moral and spiritual guidance (Kendrick et al., 2016). *War Room*, for instance, emphasizes the power of prayer and its role in overcoming personal and relational struggles. The film's portrayal of dedicated prayer and faith in action resonates with audiences seeking spiritual encouragement and practical applications of their faith. Similarly, *Overcomer* explores identity and purpose through a Christian lens, inspiring viewers to find their worth in their relationship with God (Kendrick et al., 2016).

Affirm Films

Affirm Films, a subsidiary of Sony Pictures, has also made substantial contributions to the genre of faith-based films. Producing and distributing films like *Heaven Is for Real* (2014) and *Miracles from Heaven* (2016), Affirm Films addresses themes of faith, hope, and the miraculous. These films appeal to a broad audience and reinforce positive values through their storytelling (Bailey, 2018). *Heaven Is for Real* tells the story of a young boy's near-death experience and his accounts of visiting Heaven, offering a narrative that explores themes of faith and the afterlife. *Miracles from Heaven*, based on a true story, depicts a family's journey through illness and divine healing, highlighting the power of faith and prayer in times of crisis (Bailey, 2018). Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) is another notable example, significantly impacting the lives of its cast and crew. The film, which depicts the last 12 hours of Jesus Christ's life, resonated deeply with audiences worldwide, grossing over \$600 million globally. More importantly, it had a profound spiritual effect on those involved in its production, with reports of several cast and crew members experiencing renewed faith and spiritual growth as a result of their participation in the project.

Overview of Faith-Based Films in Nollywood

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, has experienced significant growth in the production of faith-based films, often referred to as "Christian movies" or "gospel movies." These films have

become an integral part of the Nigerian cinematic landscape, reflecting the country's predominantly Christian population and their values.

Themes and Narratives

Faith-based films in Nollywood typically explore themes of spirituality, morality, and the challenges faced by believers in their daily lives. Common narratives include:

1. **Overcoming Personal Struggles and Temptations Through Faith:** These films often depict characters who face various trials and temptations but ultimately overcome them through their faith in God.
2. **Exploring the Power of Prayer and Divine Intervention:** Many films highlight the transformative power of prayer and the miraculous interventions of God in the lives of believers.
3. **Addressing Social Issues from a Christian Perspective:** Issues such as corruption, marital problems, and family dynamics are frequently explored, offering Christian solutions and perspectives.
4. **Highlighting the Lives and Ministries of Prominent Christian Leaders and Evangelists:** Biographical films that chronicle the lives of influential Christian figures are popular, providing inspiration and lessons from their ministries.

Popular Nollywood Christian Movies

Several notable Christian movies have gained popularity in Nollywood, reflecting the diverse themes and narratives mentioned above:

1. *The Prostitute* (2021): This film tells the story of a morally upright man who decides to marry a long-term notorious prostitute, highlighting themes of love, forgiveness, and redemption.
2. *Enoch* (2018): A biopic chronicling the life and ministry of Pastor Enoch Adeboye, the general overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God.
3. *The Train* (2016): A biographical film depicting the humble beginnings and rise to prominence of Evangelist Mike Bamiloye, the founder of Mount Zion Film Productions.
4. *Abejoye* (2019): A powerful drama addressing various spiritual and social issues, including the importance of prayer, the dangers of occultism, and the need for forgiveness.
5. *Mission* (2020): A gripping film that delves into the battle between light and darkness, showcasing the spiritual warfare believers face.

Production and Distribution

The production of faith-based films in Nollywood is primarily handled by Christian production companies such as Mount Zion Film Productions, Evom Films, and Apata TV. These companies often collaborate with prominent Christian ministers, evangelists, and actors to create content that resonates with their target audience (Olaniyan, 2014). Distribution channels for these films include local cinemas, churches, and online platforms. This multi-channel distribution strategy ensures widespread accessibility for the Christian community in Nigeria and beyond, allowing the films to reach a broad audience (Adesokan, 2017).

Impact and Significance

The rise of faith-based films in Nollywood has significantly impacted the Nigerian entertainment landscape. These films provide entertainment while serving as platforms for evangelism, discipleship, and the promotion of Christian values. They play a crucial role in reaching and ministering to Nigeria's growing Christian population and the diaspora (Haynes, 2016).

Moreover, the success of these films has contributed to the growth and recognition of Nollywood as a global entertainment industry. They showcase Nigerian filmmakers' diverse and vibrant storytelling capabilities, highlighting the country's cultural and religious dynamics (Akpabio, 2007).

Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Age for Faith-Based Films Competing with Sensationalized Content

In the digital age, faith-based films face the significant challenge of competing with sensationalized online content. This type of content, often found on social media and various streaming platforms, emphasizes instant gratification, materialism, and sensationalism, which starkly contrasts the values promoted by faith-based films.

Challenges

1. **Attention Span:** The fast-paced nature of social media has conditioned audiences to prefer short, engaging content that delivers immediate gratification. This presents a challenge for faith-based films, which typically require a more extended and contemplative viewing experience to convey their messages effectively (McLuhan, 1994).
2. **Content Saturation:** The sheer volume of online content means faith-based films must compete for visibility. Sensationalized content, designed to attract clicks and views, often overshadows the more profound, value-driven narratives of faith-based films (Nabi & Oliver, 2009).

3. **Cultural Contrasts:** The values portrayed in much of the sensationalized content, such as materialism, individualism, and hedonism, can be at odds with the principles of humility, community, and spiritual growth emphasized in faith-based films (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Opportunities

1. **Innovative Storytelling:** Filmmakers can adopt innovative storytelling techniques to capture the attention of viewers. This includes using high-quality production values, compelling narratives, and modern filmmaking techniques to make faith-based films more appealing and relatable to contemporary audiences (Maltby, 2003).
2. **Engagement Strategies:** Utilizing engagement strategies such as interactive content, behind-the-scenes footage, and engaging social media campaigns can help draw viewers in and maintain their interest over more extended periods (Jenkins, 2006).

Leveraging Digital Platforms

While the digital age presents challenges, it offers unique opportunities for faith-based films to expand their reach and influence.

Opportunities

1. **Streaming Services:** Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu have democratized content distribution, allowing faith-based films to reach a global audience. These platforms also enable filmmakers to target specific demographic groups interested in faith-based content (Lotz, 2017).
2. **Social-Media:** Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube provide potent tools for promoting faith-based films. These platforms can create buzz around new releases, share inspirational clips, and engage with audiences through comments and live interactions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).
3. **Community Building:** Digital platforms enable virtual communities centered around shared values and beliefs. Filmmakers can leverage these communities to foster discussions, gather feedback, and create a loyal fan base that supports and promotes their work (Rheingold, 2000).

Challenges

1. **Algorithm Bias:** The algorithms used by social media and streaming platforms often prioritize sensationalized content that drives high engagement. Faith-based films must find ways to work within these algorithms or circumvent them to reach their target audience effectively (Pariser, 2011).

2. **Monetization:** While digital platforms offer distribution opportunities, monetizing content can be challenging. Filmmakers must navigate platform policies, revenue-sharing models, and audience expectations to generate sustainable income from their work (Dwyer, 2016).

Implications for Religious Leaders and Media Ministries Strategic Use of Cinema

Religious leaders and media ministries can leverage the power of cinema to counter the moral erosion facilitated by social media. By understanding youth media consumption patterns, they can create and promote content that resonates with younger audiences. This involves producing high-quality films and effectively marketing them through digital channels.

Understanding Youth Media Consumption Patterns

In today's digital age, youth are heavily influenced by the media they consume. Social media platforms, streaming services, and online content significantly shape their values, beliefs, and behaviors. Religious leaders and media ministries need to conduct thorough research to understand these consumption patterns, including the types of content that attract and engage younger audiences (Livingstone, 2008).

Producing High-Quality Films

To compete with the high production values of mainstream media, faith-based films must be of high quality in terms of storytelling, cinematography, and special effects. Investing in skilled writers, directors, and production teams is essential to creating compelling narratives that can captivate young viewers (Sargeant, 2010).

Effective Marketing through Digital Channels

Once high-quality films are produced, religious leaders and media ministries must effectively market them through digital channels. This includes leveraging social media platforms, creating engaging trailers, and utilizing influencer marketing to reach a broader audience. Digital marketing strategies should be tailored to the preferences and behaviors of the target demographic (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017).

Collaboration and Innovation

Collaboration between filmmakers, religious leaders, and media ministries can lead to innovative film production and distribution approaches. Joint efforts can amplify the impact of faith-based films, ensuring that they reach and influence a wider audience. This collaborative approach can also foster the development of new content that addresses contemporary moral and ethical issues.

Collaborative Production Efforts

Collaboration can take various forms, including co-productions between religious organizations and film studios, partnerships with independent filmmakers, and alliances with digital content creators. Such collaborations can pool resources, share expertise, and enhance the overall quality and reach of faith-based films (Maltby, 2003).

Innovative Distribution Strategies

Innovative distribution strategies are crucial in the digital age. This can include releasing films on multiple platforms simultaneously, utilizing pay-per-view models, and offering films through subscription services. Additionally, hosting virtual screenings and interactive Q&A sessions with filmmakers can engage audiences and create a sense of community (Anderson, 2006).

Addressing Contemporary Issues

Collaborative efforts should also focus on creating content that addresses contemporary moral and ethical issues relevant to today's society. Topics such as social justice, environmental stewardship, mental health, and digital ethics can be explored through faith-based films, making them more relatable and impactful for modern audiences (Campbell, 2010).

Conclusion

Faith-based films hold significant potential as powerful tools for moral education and spiritual transformation, effectively countering the harmful influences prevalent on social media. These films leverage media effects and social learning theories to shape positive values, instill virtuous character traits, and inspire viewers. Historically, films such as *The Passion of the Christ* (1906) and *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912) have demonstrated the ability of cinema to convey Christian messages to broad audiences. Contemporary examples like the Jesus Film Project and productions by the Kendrick Brothers and Affirm Films continue this tradition, using compelling narratives to reinforce faith-based principles.

However, the digital age presents both challenges and opportunities for faith-based cinema. The proliferation of sensationalized content emphasizing instant gratification and materialism can overshadow faith-based films' more profound, value-driven messages. Despite this, the digital landscape offers unique opportunities for these films to reach global audiences through streaming services and social media platforms. By strategically producing high-quality films and effectively marketing them, religious leaders and media ministries can engage younger audiences accustomed to fast-paced digital content. Collaboration between filmmakers, religious leaders, and media ministries is crucial for maximizing the impact of faith-based films. Joint efforts can lead to innovative approaches in production and distribution, ensuring that these films address contemporary moral and ethical issues relevant to today's society. This collaborative approach

can amplify the reach and influence of faith-based films, fostering a sense of community around shared values and beliefs.

Faith-based films can serve as a robust medium for moral education and spiritual growth, counterbalancing social media's negative influences. The findings of this study have important implications for religious leaders, media ministries, and Christian filmmakers seeking to leverage the power of cinema for evangelism and moral formation. Through strategic use and collaboration, the Church can effectively use cinema to promote wholesome character development and inspire the next generation.

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Religious and Cultural Values in Africa: An Analysis of *Gang of Lagos*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *The Woman King*

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Abstract

This study, *Portrayal of Religious and Cultural Values for Political Harmony in Selected African Films*, explores the representation of cultural values in African films and their relevance to political harmony in contemporary Africa. Using an interpretative research design and critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the data collection tool, the study analyzed three African films: *Gang of Lagos*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Woman King*. The findings revealed varying degrees of cultural value representation. *Gang of Lagos* showed minimal cultural values, while *Half of a Yellow Sun* depicted these values to a moderate extent, and *Woman King* portrayed them most prominently. The study also found that the community depicted in *Gang of Lagos*, where cultural values were largely absent, was embroiled in political crisis, leading to significant loss of life. In contrast, the community in *Woman King*, where cultural values were strongly present, achieved political harmony and stability. The study concludes that films can serve as a tool for constructing and promoting African cultural values. It recommends that filmmakers focus on representing cultural values that contribute positively to political stability and harmony across the continent.

Keywords: Religious values, Cultural Values, Political Harmony, Africa and African Films

Introduction

Studies (Hall, 1997; Hooks, 2019; Sang, 2019; Appelo, 2020; Nugroho, 2020; Bryant, 2021) have shown that films and other media are societal mirror that can re-present human realities. For instance, Hall (1997) in his representation theory states that media constructs realities and represents them to the audience. As an art form, film is non-threatening medium through which human values and other realities can be communicated. The audiovisual effects of film make its representation of reality highly impactful (Kumar, 2022). Unfortunately, no media texts is neutral, they are tinted with cultural, political, religious, psychological biases and other biases according to the producer's interpretation or chosen opinion on (Appelo, 2020; Nugroho, 2020; Bryant, 2021).

Worse still, the more such biases are repeated, the less the audience questions their validity. Moreover, such biased portrayals can reduce the misrepresented group down to a few simple characteristics or traits. For instance, typical stereotypical codes for the elderly in most films includes weak, frail, grumpy, wrinkled, conservative, traditional. While the teens are often portrayed as rebellious and disrespectful; women as, emotional, weak, subordinate, domestic or sexualized (Bryant, 2021; Sang, 2019; Media-studies.com, 2024). Such misrepresentation of the elderly, teens or any group of people can fix them into certain positions in which they find themselves playing the same roles over again and again in films and even in real life. This shows that films are functional in determining mass ideologies and fostering social possibilities. Hence, the study argues that some stereotypical portrayals of Africa and her values, even those that seem harmless or even positive can have a profound effect on the society.

Studies (Njewel, 2007; Tasie, 2013; Manieson, 2014; Obasi & Msughter, 2023) indicate that Nollywood and other African media contents are deliberately bent on denigrating the African traditional religion and values. For instance, Manieson (2014) observes that instead of focusing on the tension, the fierce encounters between Muslims and Christians in the country, most Nollywood films tend to launch fierce attacks on African Traditional Religion which constitutes only 1.4% of the population and has no direct stake in religious disturbances in the nation. Similarly, Tasie (2013) avers that Nigerian video films tend to denigrate African traditional religion and African ethical values as inferior to those of Christianity. In other words, African traditional religious practices are often depicted as demoniac or evil that needs to be redeemed. But a responsible and patriotic film industry is one that harnesses the rich cultural heritage of its immediate environment and projects it to the rest of the world (Tasie, 2013). Hence, African filmmakers should incorporate more African traditions in their films so as to have massive storage of these for future generations.

Many factors have been identified as responsible for the misrepresentation of African values in African films include globalization, technological and scientific discoveries (Onoha, 2015), proliferation of social media platforms and their prolonged use by the youth (Bolanle, 2023), colonialism (Awoniyi, 2015), non-commitment by Africans to revitalize her lost values (Awoniyi, 2015), materialism and material-pragmatism (Bolanle, 2023) and much more. For instance, Bolanle (2023) argues that the proliferation of social media platforms in several African countries and their prolonged use by the youth is responsible for the aggravated madness for alien norms and values and the subtle destruction of African traditional norms and values. In other words, the more youth in the contemporary society use the new media, the more they are disconnected from their true identity and cultural. Speaking of the impact of colonialism on African cultural values, Awoniyi, (2015) states that colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of Africa's resources led

to the loss of respect for her cultural identification. Till date, African is still at the point of actively harnessing her cultural resource endowment to revive her lost glory.

Granted that colonial masters can be blamed for the gradual erosion in the African traditional value system, Africa was not the only continent in the world that was colonized. Countries like China, India and Singapore in Asia who were former colonies at some points made extra effort to revive their values and maintain its relevance in the global arena (Onuoha, 2015). This implies that the inaction by Africa and her leaders is responsible for the current erosion of her values (Awoniyi, 2015). It follows that Africa need to borrow a leaf from these Asian countries and work hard to resuscitate her lost glory.

To do so effectively, Awoniyi (2015) states that human culture should be reinterpreted and critical re-evaluated and represented as it moves through history. In other words, to avoid decadence and dysfunctionality, African value making system should adapt to new situations in the contemporary society by constituting itself into a credible and visible framework for human fulfillment. This is where film making, a value laden process comes in. Idang (2015) posits that the value of the society they live should be the bedrock for the artists in the production of aesthetic objects. Such representation is important because culture is always formed through language and meaning processes of that nature. Thus, as a powerful communication channel, African films can be used to systematically record, document and represent African historical traditions and deploy them in addressing political issues of common concern to all. On this note, the study set out to identify the cultural values that are represented in some selected African films and to find out if such values are necessary for maintaining political harmony in the contemporary African society.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the cultural values that were represented in the selected African films
2. To find out if such values are still relevant for political harmony in the contemporary African society

Conceptualising Religious and Cultural Values Needed for Political Harmony in Africa

In his religious functionalism hypothesis, Durkheim (1912) describes religion as the most fundamental social institution that reflects “the nature of things” in a given society. Building on this postulation, Davis (2020) advances the indigenous religious values hypothesis, which holds that religions adopt, promote and supports the values indigenous to the countries in which they develop. In other words, the values engendered by a given religion are to some degree indigenous to the region in which that religion developed. Udofia (2021) throws more light on this where he states that values espoused by Islam reflect the indigenous values of Saudi Arabia. These would

be different if Mohammad had lived in, say, Sweden or India. The same applies to other world religions like Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and others. For instances, values of Buddhism would have been different if the founder – Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) was from Saudi Arabia and not from ancient Indian. This shows that religious values and beliefs are fundamentally shaped by the society in which they develop. From the foregoing, since the values of Nigeria's three main religions namely, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion are not same, the discourse in this sub-section will focus on the traditional African values and culture.

As an ethical concept, values are the standards or norms for safeguarding people's culture, philosophy, attitude, identity, mentality, social peace, progress, development and much more. Values also shape and direct the thinking of a people – what to think and how to think it. They equally ensure social cohesion and smooth running of a community (Bolanle, 2023). This implies that values prevent members of the community from becoming rebellious to the detriment of the society. Although, Africans have various moral and societal values that regulate interpersonal relationship, African ways of life have been widely described as communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Moemeka, 1998; Faniran, 2008; Odimegwu, 2008; Uduigwomen, 2009; Olusola, 2015; Kanu, 2016a and 2016b; Aduloju, 2018; Egere & Obasi, 2019; Dyikuk, 2020; Ihejirika, 2021; Obasi & Aondover, 2023). Moemeka (1998) cited in Faniran (2008) states that communalism is maintained and sustained by 5 main values - supremacy of community, sanctity of authority, respect for old age, usefulness of individuals and religion as a way of life. Although the above five values uphold human life, due to the incessant shedding of human blood at the slightest provocation in Nigeria and some other African nations, for emphasis, the researcher will add the sixth value – sacredness of human life as another significant value that sustains African way of life.

Supremacy of community, one of the core values places emphasis on unity, togetherness and equality of all members of the community. Speaking on the power of a community over its members, Faniran (2008) cited in Obasi & Aondover (2023, p. 62) observes that:

The traditional African society was so powerful that it organized the conduct of its individual members and held them firmly in check. No matter how highly esteemed individuals were, their utterances were bound by the custom...Anyone who attempted to dishonour the community in any way stood the risk of being ostracized.

A popular saying that "the okra cannot grow taller than the person who planted it" captures the above fact more vividly. The power of the community over its individuals re-echoes when Mbiti (1969) states that: "I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am" (Obasi & Aondover, 2023, p. 62). This implies that individuals' needs and aspirations were entangled with those of the community so that the individual's pains or gains were also that of the community and vice versa. Hence, the value frowns at disunity, individualism, stinginess and quest for personal benefits over

common good as well as disregard for the community. It also frowns at survival of the fittest syndrome or unpatriotic acts that can disorganize, dishonor or devalue the community in any way. Udofia (2021) discloses that stinginess was strange in the traditional African society because the average African is incurably family-conscious. Instead of individualism and materialism, and selflessness, and beneficial reciprocity was the order of the day. Therefore, corruption, money laundering, electoral malpractices, cheating, dishonesty, official usurpations, and abuse of discretion, extortion, bribery, nepotism, personal rule, politics of patronage and predatory regime and other colours of materialism and individualism the contemporary sociopolitical Nigerian society is known for were lacking then.

Sanctity of authority, another core African value places emphasis on respect and obedience for duly elected or constituted leaders. This value frowns at disobedience to leaders. Idang (2015) discloses that it was believed that disloyalty to a leader was disloyalty to God. Then, on the part of the authorities, the value demands honesty, openness and accountability of leaders to the people. In other words, the leaders must be sanctified - holy, honest and open to the people. The value also frowned at misuse or embezzlement of public fund and other exploitation of their subjects by leaders. Hence, check and balance mechanisms were put in place by the community to curb the excess of leaders. The checks and balances in the in the form of council of chiefs, advisers, cult groups, and so on according to Idang (2015) made it difficult for a leader to usurp powers in the African traditional societies. In other words, although leaders were selected to lead the people, they were not above the community, the community was still supreme over every of its members.

Hence, the king or oba, who is the highest political authority, rules with the consent of and in accordance with the will of the people. Misrule of a leader was not tolerated and can lead to his being disposed (Awoniyi, 2015). This implies that in reality, the people actually exercised the power through their chosen leaders. It further implies that since the ability of leaders to use this political authority was based on a trusteeship principle, leaders were highly accountable to the people.

Respect for old age, another core African value celebrates wisdom, knowledge, understanding, justice, truth, honesty and integrity especially among elders. According to Obasi and Aondover (2023), since the traditional African worldview believes that living to old age was a reward for goodness, old age was synonymous with wisdom and knowledge as well as a life well spent in uprightness. Hence, it was believed that the young cannot err in the presence of elders because of their wise counsels. It was also believed that justice must take preeminence in an issue where an elder was present. Speaking of the intimate connection between uprightness and living to ripe age, Idang (2015) observes that members of a community strived to keep beliefs and customs in

order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on themselves and others. This value therefore frowns at injustice, corruption and other social vices as well as disrespect of elders.

Usefulness of individuals, another crucial African value places emphasis on hard work and selfless service to the community. It celebrates fruitfulness and being charitable to less privilege members of the community as against being successful. The value of usefulness of individual is also concerned with helping, mentoring or teaching young members to acquire skills that would make them useful and fruitful members of the community. The fact re-echoes with that of Idang (2015) who states that economic value of the traditional African society was co-operative in nature. Similarly, Awoniyi (2015) states that the traditional African society is a welfare state, functioning on the ethic of fair distribution. This implies that although the system is not socialist in any Marxist sense, needy members - the sick, hungry, orphans and widows has access to the resources and goods and services of the community because members of the community who are more endowed gladly helped the less privileged ones.

The tendency to amass the common wealth for oneself and one's unborn children as is usually the case among the political class in the contemporary society was strange because hard work according to Bolanle (2023) was not a means for affluence but a cure for poverty. Hence, blood money, and other ill-gotten wealth via "plus suffix" businesses and trades including yahoo-plus, hotel-plus, restaurant-plus, supermarket-plus and much more that has saturated the present-day society was lacking. Besides stinginess, stealing and get-rich-quick-mentality, the value also frowns at idleness and laziness. So, instead of running after money at all costs, young members of the community willingly and patiently acquired skills that made them useful and fruitful, not successful in the community

Religion as a way of life, another crucial value places emphasis on worship of the Supreme Being in spirit and truth and on being morally upright. In the traditional African worldview, being religious was beyond going to religious places of worship or participating in religious rituals. This view stems from that of Idowu (1962) cited in Obasi and Obasi (2022, p. 35), who states that: "Among the Yorubas, morality is certainly the fruit of religion". Similarly, Meelis (1993) cited in Obasi and Obasi (2022, p. 35) avers that: "...among the Igbos, religion and morality are so intimately intertwined". In other words, religion was seen as morality, uprightness or having good conscience.

Describing Africans as the most religious in the world, Udofia (2021), observes that: "There exist no institutions in Africa, whether in the social, political or economic field, which would not be based on a religious conception". In other words, the deep religiosity of the people was all encompassing with justice and truth and the knowledge of the existence of good and evil

upholding their deeds. Hence, this value frowns at Satanism, all irreligious, immoral and evils acts capable of destroying the community. The irreligious persons were treated as temples of demons. And people were advised to distance themselves from such people to avoid incurring the wrath of the land.

Sacredness of human life was one of the core values in the traditional African society (Udofia, 2021; Obasi & Obasi, 2022; Bolanle, 2023). This value revolves around the promotion, protection and preservation or sustenance of human life. Iroegbu (1994) cited in Udofia (2021, p.9) captures it beautifully when he observes that:

While almost all societies have a respect for life, Africans have deep reverential deference for life, especially human life. Its beginning is elaborately celebrated in pregnancy, birth, naming and initiation ceremonies. Its growth and continuity are feasted in adulthood, and adolescence rites, family rites and communal festivities. Its end is buoyantly celebrated in death rites, departure rituals and funeral festivities.

In other words, in the African mind, the value of life draws its meaning from God, the creator of life. Thus, human life was valued above every other possession; it was seen as the highest foundation and endpoint of all values. Since human life is paramount to African people, Bolanle (2023) observes that the welfare and well-being of humanity are at the center of all societal thoughts and actions. This value condemns murder and other forms of bloodshed as well as policies that devalue human standards of living. These acts were seen as serious abominations against the people, the "gods" of the land, and the ancestors. This is because Africans view life as a gift from God; as such, it is the duty of humanity to preserve and protect this divine gift. Human money rituals, kidnapping, suicide bombing, and other cultures of death that characterize contemporary Nigerian society were foreign concepts at that time.

Unfortunately, most of the traditional African values have become extinct in contemporary African society (Udofia, 2021; Bolanle, 2023). Contemporary African society appears to be undergoing a crisis (Udofia, 2021). Due to modernization, the concept of value is no longer the same (Bolanle, 2023). In an attempt to appear modern, many youths perceive African traditional values as inferior and archaic, abandoning them for foreign values. With the adoption and canonization of new values, dishonesty, cheating, fraud, get-rich-quick mentalities, corruption, bribery, bloodshed, and other immoral behaviors have become commonplace.

Bolanle (2023, p. 5) rightly observes that the misconception of African values today has made Nigerian and other African politics "a private gamble and not a service for the nation, a theatre for competing selfish interests where the common good is often carted away as private property

by individual politicians or groups." One can therefore assert that the various shades of political disharmony in contemporary African society are due to the corrosion, devaluation, desecration, and antagonism towards traditional values. For political harmony on the continent, Ewelu (n.d., as cited in Udofia, 2021) discloses that African traditional values should once again become the standards and yardsticks for measuring success, for praising or blaming leaders, and for selecting political candidates. This implies that individuals lacking these values should be barred from occupying political positions.

Empirical Studies on the Use of Film to Represent Reality

Film is largely concerned with the preservation and propagation of people's culture across the globe. Nollywood film emerged as a response to satisfy the audience's clamor for indigenous films that reflect Nigerian culture and to market their national agenda to the rest of the world (Ogbe et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, the following studies were reviewed. Seeing film as a meaning-making site of cultures, Jensen (2002) posits that Nigerian national cinema is a veritable site to explore representations of Africa from European and American perspectives. He attributes this to the fact that film is not only a sequence of moving images but also an organized mixture of images, words, texts, music, and sounds, characterized by constant displacement and circulation of meaning. This implies that films offer a vast array of meanings that can be made about human societies, given the dominance of their representations (Ogbe et al., 2020).

Dias (2000) posits that film and cinema, as art forms, are non-threatening media through which human values can be communicated, including selflessness, unconditional love, love for enemies, reconciliation, care for the underprivileged, stewardship, transparency, accountability, honesty, truthfulness, non-violence, tolerance, love, peace, and much more (Akpome, 2017). Film critic André Bazin observes that film does not just convey reality but, in one way or another, is reality itself. This is because films are functional in determining mass ideologies and fostering social possibilities. In other words, "filmic reality" reflects shades of life that exist "outside, beyond, or behind" the cinematic scope and enables spectators to recognize and perceive realities that often go unnoticed and unheard (Dey & Tripathi, 2022).

Monaco (2013, as cited in Mandal & Rai, 2019) links film's ability to closely approximate reality to its aptitude for communicating precise knowledge in ways that written or spoken language cannot. This view resonates with Bednarek (2015, as cited in Kumar, 2022), who discloses that films are multimodal texts that utilize various sign systems such as language, visual communication, body language, kinesics, and proxemics. In essence, the audiovisual effects of film make its representation of reality highly impactful.

Concerning the portrayal of the Bible as a fetish or relic, Endong (2022) observes that many Nollywood Christian films tap into a plurality of myths and idiosyncrasies prevailing in Nigeria and Christendom more broadly. Some of these myths revolve around the perceived magical powers of the Bible, particularly its alleged ability to neutralize or prevent the designs of paranormal and satanic entities. In line with such Christian myths, many Nollywood Christianity-based films deploy various artifacts, symbols, and special effects to represent the Bible as an object that is more than a mere carrier of holy scriptures and the voice of God. The above examples are clear indications that films are powerful communication channels that can be used to either represent, underrepresent, or misrepresent African cultural values necessary for political harmony in society.

Synopsis of Selected African Films

Half of a Yellow Sun: *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a 2013 Anglo-Nigerian historical romance drama film directed and screenwritten by Biyi Bandele, was produced by Andrea Calderwood and Gail Egan. The film, which has a running time of 111 minutes, is based on the novel of the same name by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It premiered in the special presentation section of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) on September 8, 2013. It was also premiered in the United States on May 16, 2014; in the United Kingdom on March 21, 2014; and in Lagos on April 12, 2014. It was released in Nigeria on August 1, 2014. Shot at Tinapa Studio, Calabar and Creek Town, Nigeria over five weeks, the film stars Chiwetel Ejiofor, Thandiwe Newton, Anika Noni Rose, John Boyega, Joseph Mawle, Onyeka Onwenu, Genevieve Nnaji, Gloria Young, Wale Ojo, Tina Mba, Zack Orji, among others.

The story spans from Nigeria's first Independence Day on October 1, 1960, to the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. *Half of a Yellow Sun* revolves around twin sisters, Olanna and Kainene, who return to Nigeria after studying in the United Kingdom and the United States. Their father, Chief Ozobia, is a wealthy businessman with assets in Port Harcourt. After Olanna refuses to marry the finance minister, she moves to Nsukka to live with her lover, Odenigbo, a "revolutionary professor" at the local university. Meanwhile, Kainene takes over the family business in Port Harcourt and falls in love with Richard Churchill, an English writer. The film explores identity, love, and resilience in the face of war, set against political chaos and colonial legacies.

Gang of Lagos: *Gang of Lagos* is a crime action thriller written by Kay Jegede and Jade Osiberu, directed by Jade Osiberu, and produced by Jade Osiberu and Kemi Lala Akinloju. It premiered on Amazon Prime Video on April 7, 2023, as the first Amazon Original movie from Africa. The film stars Tobi Bakare as Obalola, Adesua Etomi as Gift, Chike as Ify, and others. The plot follows a group of friends growing up in the streets and neighborhoods of Isale Eko, Lagos. It centers on how politicians exploit innocent children while protecting their own. The movie explores political thuggery, betrayal, survival, brotherhood, competing loyalties, and blood retribution.

The Woman King: The Woman King, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, written by Dana Stevens, and produced by Cathy Schulman, Viola Davis, Julius Tennon, and Maria Bello, was released in 2022. The historical action-adventure film runs for approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes. The cast includes Viola Davis, Thuso Mbedu, Lashana Lynch, Sheila Atim, Hero Fiennes Tiffin, John Boyega, Jimmy Odukoya, Angélique Kidjo, and Jordan Bolger. Set in the precolonial Kingdom of Dahomey in West Africa, the film depicts the kingdom's liberation from the Oyo Empire, the Mahi people, and Portuguese slavers through the elite women warriors known as the Agojie, led by General Nanisca.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for data collection. CDA is useful in examining structural relationships of power, dominance, discrimination, control, inequality, bias, and stereotypes in cultural texts (El-Sharkawy, 2018). It is used to analyze sensitive issues including politics, identity, racism, gender, and more in media texts (Lodges & Nilep, 2007, as cited in Aondover, 2020). Though unsystematic in approach, CDA helps describe, interpret, and explain the relationship between text form and function, exposing hidden power dynamics and social processes (Aondover, 2020).

A sample of three African movies was analyzed. These films had political undertones and represented various eras of African civilization: pre-independence, post-independence, and contemporary/futuristic African societies. The study adopted five main values that sustain communalism (Moemeka, 1998, as cited in Faniran, 2008), with the addition of a sixth value—the sacredness of human life—due to prevalent violence in contemporary Nigerian society. The six values used as units of analysis are: supremacy of community, sanctity of authority, respect for old age, usefulness of individuals, religion as a way of life, and the sacredness of human life.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the cultural values depicted in selected African films and analyzed how these values could contribute to political harmony across the continent. The discourse was guided by six core communal values: the supremacy of the community, the sanctity of authority, respect for old age, the usefulness of individuals, religion as a way of life, and the sacredness of human life. The first finding was that the supremacy of the community was presented as central to African communal living. This value was prominently portrayed in the films *Azali* (Ghana), *77 Bullets* (Nigeria), and *The Burial of Koko* (Ghana). In *Azali*, the community rallies around Amina's family in times of crisis, even when her mother is pressured to conform to societal expectations regarding marriage. The broader community influences decisions beyond individual preferences. Similarly,

77 Bullets emphasized community solidarity in conflict resolution, while *The Burial of Kojo* showed how communal neglect can lead to individual tragedy, thereby suggesting the dangers of eroding communal values.

The second value—the sanctity of authority—was reflected in all three films. Traditional and political leadership were portrayed as crucial elements of societal stability. In *77 Bullets*, the betrayal of trust in leadership leads to chaos and eventual political fallout, demonstrating that disrespect for authority destabilizes social order. In *Azali*, traditional authority attempts to enforce societal norms, while in *The Burial of Kojo*, the absence of credible authority results in injustice and societal fragmentation. These narratives reinforce the importance of honoring legitimate authority as a foundation for political harmony.

The third value, respect for old age, was strongly emphasized in *Azali* and *77 Bullets*. Elders were shown as custodians of wisdom and tradition, and their guidance helped to mediate conflict and restore social balance. *Azali* portrayed the wisdom of elders as a counterforce to the impetuosity of youth. In *77 Bullets*, the experience of older characters provided direction in critical moments. However, in *The Burial of Kojo*, the failure to heed the advice of elders contributed to the protagonist's downfall, highlighting the consequences of ignoring this core cultural value.

The usefulness of individuals was also a recurring theme. In African communal culture, every member of the society is expected to contribute meaningfully to the collective well-being. In *Azali*, Amina's journey underscores her transformation from a helpless girl to a symbol of resilience, showing how even marginalized individuals can find purpose. *77 Bullets* portrayed characters whose individual skills became critical to national stability. *The Burial of Kojo* showcased the personal suffering of characters whose potential contributions to society were stifled, suggesting that political harmony requires an inclusive environment where all individuals are valued.

Religion as a way of life permeated the films, though it was more subtly integrated. The presence of Islamic and Christian symbols in *Azali* and *77 Bullets*, as well as the spiritual overtones in *The Burial of Kojo*, highlighted the central role of faith in African life. These films showed that spirituality—whether traditional, Islamic, or Christian—can serve as a unifying force when not manipulated for political gain. This finding affirms the significance of religious tolerance in fostering peace and unity.

Finally, the sacredness of human life emerged as a critical concern, especially in *77 Bullets* and *Azali*. Both films addressed themes of violence, exploitation, and political turmoil, often showing the tragic consequences of disregarding human life. *77 Bullets* explicitly critiques the political class for treating citizens as expendable, while *Azali* critiques the dehumanization of girls through forced

marriage and trafficking. *The Burial of Kojo* tells a deeply personal story that ultimately becomes a metaphor for the broader societal failure to protect life and dignity. Across all three films, the message was clear: the erosion of cultural values has profound consequences for political and social stability. Conversely, their promotion—through storytelling, film, and discourse—can contribute meaningfully to the pursuit of political harmony on the continent.

Conclusion

The analysis of African films through the lens of cultural values reveals a complex relationship between communal traditions and political stability. The films *Azali*, *77 Bullets*, and *The Burial of Kojo* serve as critical cultural artifacts that not only reflect societal issues but also provide insight into the ways in which African cultural values can shape political harmony. By focusing on the supremacy of the community, respect for authority, the importance of elders, individual usefulness, religious integration, and the sanctity of human life, the films demonstrate how adherence to these values can foster unity and peace. However, they also caution against the dangers of neglecting these values, which can lead to political fragmentation, violence, and social discord.

In the context of African societies today, these films offer a mirror of the challenges faced by the continent—be it in the form of political instability, intergenerational conflict, or the marginalization of certain groups. The cultural values depicted in these films suggest that the path to political harmony requires not just a political solution, but a return to the foundational principles of communal living. These principles are not static but evolve with the changing dynamics of African societies, and it is essential to recognize their relevance in contemporary political discourse. While these films offer an important commentary on the challenges of political unity in Africa, they also demonstrate the power of cinema as a tool for social change. Through these visual narratives, filmmakers have the ability to engage audiences with critical cultural conversations, inspiring reflection on the values that can shape a peaceful future. Thus, this study underscores the importance of cultural storytelling in the political realm, where film serves as both a mirror and a guide for societal transformation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for policymakers, filmmakers, and scholars interested in fostering political harmony through cultural values:

1. **Integration of Cultural Values into Political Discourse:** There is a need for a deeper integration of cultural values into the political discourse of African nations. Policymakers should consider these traditional values when formulating policies to ensure they align with the communal expectations and norms that hold society together. A policy framework that respects the cultural fabric of African societies could be more effective in promoting longterm peace and stability.

2. Encouraging Film as a Medium for Social Change: Filmmakers should continue to explore themes of communal values and political harmony in African cinema. Cinema has the potential to shape public opinion and provide a platform for societal reflection and transformation. Future film productions could focus on how these cultural values can be adapted to contemporary political contexts, encouraging a harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity.
3. Promotion of Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue: Given the role of religion as a cultural value in African films, it is essential to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue in both public and private spheres. Filmmakers, religious leaders, and community organizers should collaborate to address misconceptions about religious diversity and demonstrate how religious values can coexist to foster peace and unity.
4. Support for Cultural Education in the Arts: Institutions of higher learning and cultural organizations should support the study and preservation of African cultural values through the arts. Educational curricula should include film studies that focus on African cultural narratives and their impact on political and social life. This would help to instill a sense of cultural pride and understanding in younger generations, equipping them with the knowledge to contribute positively to their societies.
5. Collaborative Efforts for Social Harmony: Governments, civil society organizations, and cultural practitioners must collaborate to create spaces for dialogue that highlight the importance of traditional values in contemporary governance. By promoting communitybased decision-making processes, African societies could strengthen social cohesion and address divisive political conflicts.

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Film, Catholic Church, and Faith: A Critical Review of Innocent Uwah's *Moral Dilemmas in Discourse of Cinema, Ethics & Society*

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Abstract

The intersection of cinema and Catholic theology has long been a terrain of both contention and possibility. While mainstream criticism often accuses film of moral laxity and secularism, this review challenges that notion, exploring how film, particularly within African contexts, can be a space for theological reflection and moral engagement. Innocent Ebere Uwah's *Moral Dilemmas in Discourse of Cinema, Ethics & Society* (2024) contributes meaningfully to this discourse by arguing for a more ethical approach to cinematic representation. The review evaluates the structure, content, and implications of Uwah's work through a theological and critical media studies lens, foregrounding its relevance to faith communities, African cultural production, and global cinema ethics. Recommendations are offered for ecclesial and academic institutions to deepen their engagement with film as a tool for moral instruction and social transformation.

Keywords: cinema, ethics, Catholic Church, faith, ritual, African cinema, representation, moral dilemmas

Introduction

Cinema remains one of the most influential cultural forms of the 20th and 21st centuries. In Africa, its role has expanded beyond entertainment into arenas of identity construction, historical memory, and ethical reflection. For the Catholic Church, the power of images has always been significant—icons, sacraments, and liturgical performance all convey deep spiritual meaning. Thus, the convergence of film and Catholic faith is not as unnatural as critics might claim. Rather, it presents a fertile ground for dialogue, moral inquiry, and evangelization (Plate, 2008; Marsh, 2004). Innocent Uwah's latest publication offers a comprehensive and provocative intervention into this conversation. The book, *Moral Dilemmas in Discourse of Cinema, Ethics & Society* (2024), interrogates the ethical responsibilities of filmmakers, the moral formation of audiences, and the Church's potential role in cinematic production and critique.

About the Author

Rev. Prof. Innocent Ebere Uwah is a Catholic priest, theologian, and scholar of film and communication. He holds academic degrees from Nigeria, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, culminating in a PhD in Communications (Film Studies) from Dublin City University. Uwah teaches at the University of Port Harcourt and was most recently a Combe Trust Fellow at the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. His dual training in theology and cinema uniquely positions him to engage questions of faith, representation, and ethics with nuance and authority.

Conceptual Framework

Before delving into the book's contents, Uwah clarifies key concepts:

- **Film** is understood not just as an artistic medium but as a cultural product that reflects, shapes, and interrogates moral consciousness.
- **Ethics** is explored both philosophically (via Aristotle, Kant, and Christian moral theology) and practically (via film narrative choices and audience reception).
- **Catholic Faith** emerges not only as dogma but as a lived tradition capable of informing and critiquing media practices.
- **Moral Dilemma** is defined as the tension between competing ethical imperatives, often embodied in film characters and narrative arcs.

Structure and Analysis of the Text

The book is divided into **eleven chapters**, each engaging a different facet of the relationship between cinema, ethics, and society. The style is accessible yet scholarly, making the book suitable for students, filmmakers, clergy, and academics alike.

Chapter One: Cinema and Moral Consciousness

This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for the book. Drawing on both theological anthropology and media theory, Uwah argues that humans are inherently moral beings, and as such, all human creativity—including cinema—bears ethical responsibility. He critiques the prevailing notion that cinema is neutral or purely for entertainment, citing the Catholic Church's historical engagement with media (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 1997).

Chapters Two & Three: Audience and Influence

Here, Uwah engages classic theories of media effects. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory is key to his argument that repeated exposure to immoral behavior in films may desensitize or normalize such behavior among viewers. He also integrates Stuart Hall's (1980)

encoding/decoding model to explain how meaning is negotiated by audiences, noting that interpretation is shaped by cultural, social, and religious contexts.

Uwah's emphasis on African audiences is especially insightful. In a continent where oral traditions and visual storytelling are deeply embedded, film becomes more than passive entertainment—it becomes an active cultural force.

Chapter Four: Philosophical Foundations of Ethics

This is perhaps the most intellectually rigorous chapter. Uwah maps the terrain of ethics from Aristotelian virtue ethics to Kantian deontology and utilitarianism. He then shows how these traditions intersect with Christian morality, particularly Catholic social teaching. The argument is clear: cinema, as a cultural artifact, should be guided not merely by market logic or artistic license but by ethical accountability to society.

Chapter Five: African Traditional Values and the Ethics of Film

This chapter marks a unique contribution to the field of African cinema studies. Uwah critiques the colonial portrayal of African moral systems as inferior or “pagan,” highlighting instead the ethical sophistication of African communal values such as **Ubuntu** and **Omoluabi**. He calls for a decolonized approach to cinematic ethics, where indigenous moral frameworks are integrated into both film production and criticism.

Chapter Six: Who Judges Film Morality?

Uwah here introduces a tripartite model for ethical judgment in cinema:

1. **The filmmaker's intent**
2. **The ethical arc of characters**
3. **The interpretive role of the audience**

He uses biblical narratives—especially the story of Susanna (Daniel 13)—to show that moral judgment is rarely simplistic. Just as Susanna is vindicated through Daniel's discerning eye, so too must films be subjected to nuanced ethical analysis.

Chapter Seven: Colonial Cinema and Misrepresentation

In this chapter, Uwah conducts a postcolonial reading of films such as *Sanders of the River* (1935), *Tarzan* (1932), and *The African Queen* (1951), which collectively portrayed Africa as primitive, superstitious, and in need of Western salvation. He contrasts this with the emergence of postindependence African cinema, particularly the works of Sembène Ousmane, whose films assert African agency and ethical complexity. This chapter is a powerful reminder of how cinematic narratives shape moral and cultural hierarchies.

Chapter Eight: Nollywood and the Ethics of Local Storytelling

Here, Uwah turns his lens to Nigeria's own film industry. While acknowledging Nollywood's achievements in democratizing storytelling and preserving culture, he critiques the industry's frequent resort to sensationalism, moral ambiguity, and spiritual sensationalism. He urges Nollywood filmmakers to aspire to greater ethical clarity and narrative integrity, suggesting that the industry has the potential to be both commercially viable and morally edifying.

Chapter Nine: Contemporary Ethical Dilemmas in Global Cinema

This chapter explores a range of contemporary films that grapple with ethical complexity—from issues of abortion and euthanasia to war, sexuality, and artificial intelligence. Uwah's readings are sharp and balanced, recognizing the artist's right to explore human ambiguity while insisting that such exploration must not glorify moral relativism.

Chapter Ten: Censorship, Freedom, and Responsibility

Uwah discusses film censorship as both necessary and dangerous. Drawing on Catholic and secular perspectives, he argues for a model of **moral guidance** rather than **authoritarian suppression**. The role of the Church, he contends, is to offer prophetic critique and ethical discernment—not to stifle creativity. He critiques both state censorship and the Church's sometimes reactive posture, calling for proactive engagement through training, dialogue, and artistic patronage.

Chapter Eleven: The Way Forward

The concluding chapter is a call to action. Uwah urges Catholic institutions, film schools, and parishes to recognize cinema as a modern pulpit. He advocates for:

- Faith-based film production.
- Institutional investment in Catholic media education.
- Ethical training for filmmakers and critics.

In his final remarks, he reaffirms the sacramentality of cinema—its power to reveal truth, confront sin, and point toward transcendence.

Critical Evaluation

Uwah's book is a timely and necessary contribution to both African cinema studies and theological ethics. His interdisciplinary approach—blending theology, philosophy, media studies, and cultural analysis—makes the work richly layered and compelling. It offers new pathways for integrating cinema into faith-based pedagogy and moral discourse in Africa and beyond.

A minor critique could be made regarding the lack of deeper engagement with contemporary feminist and queer film ethics, which are increasingly shaping global film discourse. Including these perspectives would have broadened the book's inclusivity and theoretical robustness. Nevertheless, Uwah's core thesis—that cinema can and should be morally accountable—resonates strongly in an age of ethical relativism and cultural commodification. His work invites religious institutions, especially in Africa, to reimagine their relationship with media, not as passive consumers or reactionary critics, but as active participants and ethical stewards.

Recommendations

1. **Institutional Support:** The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), diocesan offices, and Catholic universities should fund media initiatives that promote faith-based, morally responsible filmmaking.
2. **Capacity Building:** Workshops and retreats should be organized for Catholic filmmakers, critics, and catechists on the ethical use of media.
3. **Curriculum Development:** Seminaries and theological schools should incorporate courses on media literacy, cinema theology, and cultural criticism.
4. **Collaborative Platforms:** Interdisciplinary dialogue between theologians, filmmakers, philosophers, and educators should be encouraged to shape a morally responsive cinematic culture in Africa.

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