TRADITIONAL RITES, VALUES AND TABOOS IN AFRICAN EVANGELICAL FILMS

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Abstract: The richness of African culture1 is unarguably seen through her filmic projections, particularly with people who may not have had a one-on-one connection with African people of any decent. Consequently, traditional rites, history, totems, and taboos in many African movies are not merely alternate or auxiliary filmic elements; they often reveal Africa's holistic culture regardless of the auteur's perspective. The exhibition of traditional rites and values, cultural elements, totems, and taboos function in the placement of African aesthetic identity, and they may sometimes reveal the extent of research in filmmaking toward preserving African Culture. However, the beauty of African people and their cultures becomes obsolete through conscious culture abandonment, denigration of branded values, totems, and taboos, or misrepresentation of the traditional rites in promoting and projecting Christian values. This study examines the presentation of identified traditional rites, values, and taboos in Christian movies and the implication of such depiction vis-à-vis the cultural history and reality of the Nigerian people. This perspective not only questions the place of creativity by the filmmaker through content analysis by the ethnographic import of the selected movies, but it also queries the extent of damage done to African culture in the process. The findings of the study show that Christian movies sometimes attempt to downplay the significance of these forms. The study, therefore, suggests that to promote Christianity, African culture, value system, history, and people should not be the least protected in any African film.

Key Words: African Culture, Christianity, Indigenous Religion, Nigeria Filmmaking.

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[1] The richness of African culture here encompasses a wide range of cultural and behavioural matters, as much as the totality of peculiar and non-peculiar traits within but which differentiates African people from the rest of the world. These peculiar traits may include but not limited to their languages of communication, their food, cultural artefacts, dress codes, arts and culture, customs, values and taboos, beliefs, and their way of life generally which over the years have accorded them their characteristic identity.

Introduction

Culture, which encompasses a wide range of phenomena, is said to be the social behaviours and norms identified or expressed within different societies of the world.[2] It refers to

> The totality of the pattern of behaviour of a particular group of people…includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passages from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs.[3]

Therefore, to document culture, one must write a story; the one who writes a story writes or rewrites history.

In the same vein, the one who produces a film documents aspects of people's culture and knowledge. These knowledge and communications are conceived in the different embodiments of films, which may range between the rich intertextuality and the crafting of the subject matter, the thematic thrust, actors' dialogues, semiotic language and identities, and the use of different cultural materials, totems and motifs. For instance, the Nigerian Nollywood industry, which has come to be recognised all over the world as the second-largest film-producing industry in the world in terms of movie production volume,[4] documents Nigerian diverse cultural traditions entrenched in social contexts and history in different ways and magnitudes. The industry directly or otherwise influences our knowledge and perception of historical cultures and events, scientific and metaphysical concepts, social and economic issues, political structures, and religious identities; movies influence and determine our worldview. This is because the industry and its producers make deliberate attempts at unravelling and documenting different aspects of culture, to which the extent of coverage may even elude the film producer. Consequently, film producers, including writers and designers, should attempt to conduct

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[2] Igwilo Ikechukwu and Vitalis Ogbo, "African Culture and Values in a World of Change: A Philosophical Appraisal," *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 1, no. 3 (2018): 28-51.

[3] R. C. Aziza, "The Relationship between Language Use and Survival of Culture: The Case of Umobo Youth," *Nigerian Language Studies* 31, no. 4 (2001): 29–41.

[4] Afriff, "Top 10 film industries in Africa," August 4, 2023; Top_10_films

research adequately. While it is not completely permissive for non-Nigerians to project the cultural image of the nation in a distasteful and unappreciative manner, it is also completely unethical and unacceptable for film producers in Nigeria to jettison these cultural identities at the altar of mediocrity in film production.

This is one key aspect that this study seeks to evaluate regarding the production of Christian evangelical films in Nigeria. The paper questions the creative license of Christian or evangelical filmmakers in Nigeria. This may be understood further with dimensions in representational semiotics toward engaging African reality. The overarching question in the study is To what extent can religious films be classified as African reality? In order words, do the elements employed or taboos and values projected in these films articulate the cultural aesthetics, identities, and history of the people? Or are these filmic projections merely engaged in the process of projecting the doctrines, principles, and potentialities of Christianity while subjecting Nigerian culture to whips of condemnation inadvertently? The paper, however, acknowledges the efforts of all filmmakers in Nigeria regardless of the genre because a lot of work goes into filmmaking from the point of idea conception, pre-production, production, and post-production stages.

Nonetheless, the criticality of this criticism is necessary, and it aligns with the projections of Jonathan Haynes in his "What Is to Be Done: Film Studies and Nigerian and Ghanaian Videos."[5] The intention, therefore, is not to condemn or lampoon Christian evangelical filmmakers in Nigeria, as secular film producers are also guilty. The purpose herein, however, is to critically identify areas where more work needs to be done for Nigeria to maintain its status quo as one of the nations at the apex of film production around the globe.

Aside from the clearly stated overarching question above, the study also attempts to discuss two raving issues. The first is curriculum development or curricula used in tertiary institutions and self-sustained film schools in Nigeria. The study observes that the emergence of Christian evangelical movies, departments in tertiary institutions and film schools was mainly for pastoral purposes It is, however, imperative to develop a curriculum that caters not just for the requirements

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[5] Jonathan Haynes, "A Literature Review: Nigerian and Ghanaian Videos," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 22, no. 1 (2010): 105 -120.

of the Christian religion but also considers that which addresses and places importance on the cultural wheel through which the filmic contents are projected. A review of the extant syllabus of the Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama developed for the two-year program shows that there is a lacuna to be addressed, namely, the incorporation of African values, history, ethics, and spirituality as prerequisites for a comprehensive study in film making be it for entertainment or evangelical purposes. Similarly, in many Nigerian higher institutions, the curriculum dedicated to film study or filmmaking under the Department of Theatre, Film, Media, or Mass Communication lacks the fundamentals of religious studies. These institutions treat secularity in filmmaking rather than dedicated forms of religiosity, and the Department of Religion only caters for this as part of its departmental "religious" teaching obligations.

The second concern is about the presentation or representation of subject matter in Christian evangelical films. The treatment of specific subject matters relating to African culture and the people have often called attention to whether or not Africa as a continent has left the state of primitivity to embrace modernity, especially if some of our filmic projections still tilt towards the actual display of diabolism, shamanism, and ritual practices. The question is not about ritual and other forms featured in some of these films but that the treatment of these subjects is backed by adequate research to justify and validate the position postulated within the specific movie and not merely being creative at the expense of African culture and people. In this vein, the conscious or unintended negligence of African culture, African values, and other cultural elements has herein called for a critique of some selected films in interrogating African traditional history, values, and spirituality.

As part of its literature review, the study considered and cross-examined two debates. The proponents of the first debate hold the view that African historical traditions have, in modern times, become obsolete, and as such, preference must be given to modern values and identities. Modernisation according to Ciaffa "requires a mental orientation commensurate with the problems of the present, not an attempt to

resurrect ideas from societies of the distant past."[6] This means that Nollywood[7] and the Nigerian film industry need not dwell on past thrusts, displaying cultural matters, ideologies, and philosophies as they may not answer the emergence and inquiries of the present times. This school of thought implies that whatever Nollywood presents becomes authentic only in the moments of presentation and may lack historical facts, hence a nullification of the ideology that the Nigerian film industry presents African reality in absoluteness. On the flip side of the coin, Haynes, in "African Cinema and Nollywood: Contradictions"[8] recognizing and aligning with the advantages in the incredibility of story plots, submits that Nollywood narratives featuring plots themes about money ritual have been the trademark of Nollywood films since the production of the first Nigerian home video, Living in Bondage, and this is seen as a sign of superstitious backwardness. Yet he acknowledges that featuring these themes could also be seen as "a powerful symbolic figure for and critique of Nigeria's predatory ruling class, whose acquisition of unearned oil wealth through opaque politico-economic processes organized around murderous cartels is indeed occulted from public view, if not an occult phenomenon in a magical sense."[9] Thus, resurrecting ideas from societies of the distant past through the regurgitation of themes and subject matter in Nollywood which has attracted scholarly denouncements may yet be appraised from an advantageous position.

The proponents of the second school of thought, mostly of traditional origin, submit that every society of the world is decorated with a specific belief system, values, culture, and philosophical and ideological worldviews, which becomes not only an indicator or cultural identifier but also an important aspect of history and essential code of communication. Even as much as culture continues to advance and

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[6] Jay A. Ciaffa, "Tradition and Modernity in Postcolonial African Philosophy," *Humanitas: Interdisciplinary Journal* 21, no. 1-2 (2008): 121-145.

[7] Nollywood is the name identity for the Nigerian Movie industry. Although the origin of the word itself may have been lost in antiquity, Jonathan Hayne, one of Nollywood's foremost scholars traced its etymology to an article by Matt Steinglass in the New York Times in 2002. It is important to note that while many other film hubs and associations such as ANTP, Callywood, Kannywood, Tampan, etc. have emerged over the years as a result of the industry, Nollywood still remains the umbrella body for all filmic activities within the country.

[8] Jonathan Haynes, "African Cinema and Nollywood: Contradictions," *African Cinema and Nollywood: Contradictions* 4, no. 1(2008): 67–90; https://radicalimagination.institute/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/haynes-2011.pdf.

[9] Haynes, "African Cinema."

appreciate, emphasis must be made to tap into the instructions and insights of the past for a society to progress. That is, connecting the past to the present for futuristic purposes. Given this, movies must promote African traditional culture 'healthily,' protecting, preserving, and propagating the richness of the culture and the people. The sensibility of this school of thought is that African traditional rites, values, totems, and taboos can be artistically created while maintaining their authenticity and preserving the purposefulness for which the movies were made, even in promoting religious values beyond African autochthonous rigidity.

The nexus and crux of these two positions are the submissions' advantages and disadvantages. The first position contrasts the cultural revivalist's stance by giving preference to modern or contemporary worldviews lacking in-depth and originality. This may be the reason why the industry is sometimes described as lacking artistic originality, parading immorality (a strong pointer of contemporaneity), monotony of character stereotypes, and negative portrayal of contemporary Nigerian culture.[10] Using the same parameter for adjudging the demerits of the second school of thought, different scholars have also identified that Nigerian filmic contents are notorious for preternatural and diabolical actions which also accounts for Nigeria being brandished as a "a land of occultists, drug barons, swindlers, and go-go girls."[11] No thanks to the erroneous portrayal of Nigerian people and their cultures, sometimes in the process of recalling Nigerian historical presence, primitive or savage culture. In interrogating the question raised and the two major problems identified in the study with the view to channel the discussion through filmic paradigms, two films titled '*The Gods Are Dead*' and 'Eri Esu' are selected from the stable of the Mount Zion Faith Ministry, for the discourse. The first movie, '*The Gods Are Dead*' is an English medium Christian faith-based film that questions the paganistic worship of gods who only make requisitions for human blood and life to be sacrificed. The movie repositions Christianity above all forms of traditional worship and servitude to

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[10] Moradewun Adejumobi, "English and the Audience of an African Culture: The Case of Nigerian Video Film," *Cultural Critique* 50, no. 1 (2002): 74-103; http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354689.

[11] Hyginus Ekwuazi, "Nigerian Literature and the Development of the Nigerian Film," *Ibadan Journal of Theatre Arts* (IJOTA) 1, no. 1 (2007): 130-139.

faceless and charge-less conventional gods. The second film, titled 'Eri Esu,' like the first movie, is a Yorùbá medium film portraying issues relating to traditional religion and culture, taboos, and African values.

In evaluating these films, I used Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis approach,[12] which aims

> to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a)discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events, and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power, and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.[13]

The key connecting structures and concepts herein include an interplay of power, dominance, and superiority of religious identities, hegemony, ideology, and discrimination, as advanced by Amoussou & Allagbe.[14] This theory is suitable for this study because it connects fictional works in selected Nollywood films to the reality of the African cultural worldview and the hegemonic interplay between Christianity and African Indigenous Religion and Culture.

The Gods Are Dead and Eri Esu in Discourse

Understanding African autochthonous and contemporary realities differentiated from filmic aesthetics is an essential vista in this study. A film is described as "a series of motionless images projected onto a screen so fast as to create in the mind of anyone watching the screen an impression of continuous motion, such images being projected by a light shining through a corresponding series of images arranged on a continuous band of flexible material."[15] Therefore, filmic aesthetics, on

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[12] N. Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method in Social Scientific Research," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis,* ed. R. Wodak and M. Meyer (London: Sage, 2001), 121-138.

[13] Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 132.

[14] Franck Amoussou and Ayodele Allagbe, "Principles, Theories and Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis," *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature* (IJSELL) 6, no. 1 (2018): 11 – 18; http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0601002.

[15] Francis Sparshott, "Basic Film Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 5, no. 2 (1971): 11-34; https://doi.org/10.2307/3331672.

the one hand, from a less polemical point of view, refers to the compositional structure or outlook of a film; this can be deciphered by dissecting all elements of filmic productions ranging from the subjects through which the plot is woven, against all aural and visual elements. However, knowledge of filmic aesthetics also involves discerning the auteur's style and weaving techniques and engaging all of these elements with the selected locations and the stylistics of characterizations. These ultimately prompt the audience's response to the elements and situations created in the story told through the camera lens.

African reality encompasses a diverse range of perspectives determined by the lens and discipline of study. For this research, the reality is evaluated from the complex and totalistic perspective involving every stratum of the African society to interpret African cognitive and experiential existence, African culture and the history of the people as lived and as experienced in totality and reality distinct from the supposed or the envisioned. This reality may be dissected from the socio-historical legacies, political, cultural, economic, spiritual, and metaphysical actuality, axiological concerns about reality, African thoughts and philosophies, involving African logic and worldview in general. It also pertains to transitioning from traditional or autochthonous realities to modern or contemporary realities and multi-dimensional facets of discussing Africa in totality. One tangible way to understand this reality is through philosophy. The philosophy herein is about conducting "personal reflection about all aspects of reality. It is an exercise in which one tries to give meaning to the world from one's standpoint, given the prevailing circumstances and environmental influences. Philosophizing in the experience of the traditional African takes the character of critical reflection of the African understanding of reality and world view."[16] Thus, the study makes complete reference to African experiences, history, values, ethics, morals and culture through its philosophical belief and outlook, bearing in mind that African aesthetic discourse is also a philosophical enquiry.

Therefore, in attempting to answer the question, "To what extent can religious films be classified as African reality?" further questions

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[16] Jones Jaja, "Myths in African Concept of Reality," *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies* 6, no. 2 (2014): 9-14; https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1075851.pdf.

about morality or moral principles of aesthetics are posed. Klevan cautions that "it is important not to fall prey to a popular misconception…that aesthetics is equivalent to formalism: an adherence to form at the expense of content (for example, subject matter). Nor is it equivalent to Aestheticism if this is taken to mean an exaggerated devotion to beautiful forms, once again at the expense of content."[17] He goes further to note that engaging in aesthetic creation should on no account discount or demean the moral, cognitive, emotional, political, or conceptual content of any work since understanding the content and context, in particular, are critical endeavours. He then submits that because 'content' is important, it should be seen as essential to an aesthetic evaluation, but the engagement will be with the value of its expression through the form of the work.

This contrasts with those occasions where, for example, ideological, contextual, or conceptual content, even if it relates to formal or presentational matters, is the primary concern and the basis of the evaluation. Equally, not all values about visual, aural, and sensory, the features ostensibly underpinning aesthetic interest, are automatically of aesthetic value. Something may be visually, aurally, and sensually valuable to some of us at some time for some reason – pornography would be an extreme example– and be of little aesthetic value.[18] In this regard, this study considers the moral principles of aesthetics as a crucial determinant. It explores these identified moral principles through the lens of African reality, dissecting the impacts of the selected forms under discussion, the presentation as well as the representational qualities of scenes or subject matter in the selected films. It also considers cultural and moral appropriateness, the cultural impact of forms vis-a-vis African cultural reality, and most importantly, the artistic integrity of the selected Christian evangelical films.

With this understanding, since African reality is of core concern in this discourse, it is noted first and foremost that the observance of traditional rites, values, and taboos which are all aesthetic expressions, also constitute a very significant part of the cultural life of the African people, and African reality. Taboos, for instance, being sociocultural or religious prohibitions have both moralistic and cultural

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[17] Andrew Klevan, *Aesthetic Evaluation and Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).
[18] Klevan, *Aesthetic Evaluation*, 20.

implications; they serve as a device for moral instruction and guidance and help protect the sanctity and the well-being of people living within a community or region. Traditional rites, a strong indicator of African culture, are often ordered at the beginning and end of life or during the transition from one phase to another in a person's life or community life. These rites are "reenactments of the paradigmatic model set by the divine beings."[19] This means that some of these rites act as a connection between the physical and the spiritual worlds.

Sometimes, these traditional rites are initiated to bestow upon individuals or groups specific obligations, duties, rights, and privileges often flag them. At other times, the rites may reconnect the tribal community with history, and ancestral practices, creating acceptable and relatable cultural patterns. Because these rites are mainly ordered in the partial accentuation of a person or group's cultural or religious affinities, it is primarily believed that aligning or participating in any of these traditional rites is a reinstatement of the belief in traditional worship or religion. For this reason, many Christians consciously try to dissociate themselves and avoid involvement in traditional rites. The sentiment is further emphasised by the ideological philosophy that "what obtains in African traditional religion is the worship of non-existent spiritual beings and idols… traditional Africa do not honour and worship the true God, therefore the religion should be wiped out of the surfaced of the earth."[20] For this reason, the practice of many types of traditional rites in Africa is beginning to go into extinction giving way to only Western acclaimed rites such as Christmas and New Year celebrations. This belief has also affected the prominence of Western values at the demise of African values. Because movies reflect people's reality, this same attitude is projected in many films, particularly religious or evangelical movies.

A few samples are drawn from the selected films for this evaluation to understand whether the films are a true reflection of the African state and reality or merely created as part of the filmic aesthetics of these works of art. The first example is drawn from the movie titled

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[19] M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: HBJBooks, 1959).

[20] Sunday Awoniyi, "African Cultural Values: The Past, Present, and Future," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 17, no.1 (2015): 1-13.

'*The Gods Are Dead*,' and the second example is from 'Eri Esu,' both from the stable of the Mount Zion Faith Ministry. The first movie, one of the first to be produced in the genre of evangelical film in Nigeria, narrates the story of a primitive and savage community where seven gods decided the faith of all individuals through a priest. Thus, humans were sacrificed to unknown gods until the intervention of a man of God who not only introduced members of this community to Christianity but also rescued the *Aremo* (the Prince) from the claws of death and evil prediction. The film employed detailed cultural and aesthetic elements in promoting African culture, such as elaborate costumes, language, properties, and set elements replicating the cultural locale of the Yoruba people living in Southwest Nigeria. Yet, the movie has subjected aspects of African culture to question by misrepresenting specific taboos, African values, and rites. Firstly is the use of humans in sacrifice. The question or objection here in interrogating African reality, values, and spirituality is not in whether or not Africans during the precolonial and colonial era engaged in human sacrifices because history and literature have documented some of the processes of human sacrifice in Africa as part of fulfilling the moral and spiritual obligations of the people to gods. The expostulation, however, is the creation of what can be described as the slaughterous killing of an innocent soul amid a singing and dancing community overjoyed with the knowledge not that life has been truncated but that this is towards an acceptation of the placation of the gods of the land.

Within the African ontological scene, human sacrificial killing during the precolonial and colonial eras may be accepted as part of the ritual process of veneration. Therefore, the rejection of the act in this movie is based on the gruesomeness and perceived dearth of research which has not only plunged the audience into believing that, indeed, African Indigenous Religion and rites are deeply steeped in savage culture and barbarity. Are such sacrifices carried out openly, burning at the stakes as if the victim committed an inexcusable crime? The response is no. This is not replicating the process of human sacrificial killing in Africa. Even though Africans during those Dark Ages sacrificed humans, the perpetrators understood the sacredness of life. Such sacrifices, whether substitutionary, preventive, or the entombment of servants or slaves intended to accompany the deceased into the afterlife, were never done openly but by initiates. Such presentations only

ignite the audience's sensibilities, believing that African culture and people are uncivilised.

The movie's second objection is presenting a corpse before the king. This is considered a taboo among the Yoruba people of West Africa. It may be described as a superstitious belief, but the Yoruba people believe philosophically that kings must only see good things throughout their lives. As such, seeing a corpse to the point of beholding a dead son, accompanied by a successive act of crying, which is equally taboo for a man described as a representative of the gods, signals a bad omen for the king and the entire community. Many people would ask, what happens if a king cries? We must understand that African kings are not ordinary people and must never be seen as ordinary. They embody many things, the people, history, and culture. They are sacred, revered, and seen as institutions.

In line with the observations of the first film, the question of artistic integrity resurfaces in the second movie titled 'Eri Esu' as regards the representation of traditional rites, the treatment of taboos and the juxtaposing of African motifs against Western religious ideologies. 'Eri Esu' narrates the feud between African traditional practice (taboos, otherwise known as Eewo) and Christianity and the passivity with which many Western religions treat elements of African culture and philosophies. Ifabunmi, a staunch man of God, is confronted with the reality of his wife's inability to procreate due to a taboo that occurred in his first few years on earth. One night, Ifabunmi's mother, who had gone for days on a business trip to another village, returns to her town late in the night in the company of her entourage, who were accosted by initiates of an Oro and Egungun Cult. In the process of scampering for their lives, Ifabunmi, who was strapped to his mother's back, falls off. As she picks him up and runs away, she eventually enters the Oro courtyard, unknowingly committing two taboos in one night. Unfortunately, while Ifabunmi, now known as Olubunmi, prayed for many years without success for the fruit of the womb for his wife, his father, an unrepentant traditional worshipper, approaches the Shrine of a herbalist who reveals that he fell off his mother's back and that he was cursed shortly before his mother's disappearance after entering the Oro courtyard while he was a toddler. This taboo is what has prevented his wife from conceiving and procreating for over ten years of

their marriage. Ifabunmi is then advised to prepare some sacrificial elements before the Oro and Egungun cults cast off the evil spell, which he rejects automatically as a Christian.

Two major concerns are raised in this study about this film; the first centres around Ifabunmi falling from his mother's child as a toddler, which is considered taboo amongst the Yorùbá people of Southwest Nigeria. Adeleye observes that it is indeed an abomination. It is calamitous among the Yorùbá people for a baby to fall off the back of their nursing mother,

> If the baby falls from her mother's back, if he is a boy, there is the probability that his wife will die in the future and if she is a girl, any man that has sexual intercourse with her in the future will die…One may applaud this because it serves as a means of inculcating discipline in the mind of the mother and also give [gives] room for proper care of the child.[21]

Perhaps a more logical reason to uphold this philosophical belief is the position further advanced by Adeleke,[22] which justifies the conscious efforts by nursing mothers to protect their children from any eventuality of this fall that may lead to head injuries or any other type of disabilities, even death considering the fragility of the baby at this age. The reportage from the narrative has no correlational fact since the story, first and foremost, ties its thematic thrusts against, not the consequential effect of the action but has built on the aesthetics of the writer and auteur's artistic licenses, hence the watering down of the complications resulting from committing the taboo simply by redirecting the perspectives of selected prayer warriors. One cannot but ask to know if this was a conscious effort to nullify and discredit African taboos in an attempt to glorify the potentiality of prayers and Christianity against taboos that may have been upheld for centuries.

This is, however, in dissonance with another perspective noting that every society of the world is adorned with a specific belief system, values, culture, and philosophical and ideological worldviews, which becomes not only indicators or cultural identifiers but also an

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[21] Olusola Adeleye, "Eewo (TABOO) In Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Investigation," *Amamihe: Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, no. 6 (2020); https://www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/o_journals/amamihe_18.6.6.pdf.
[22] Adeleye, "Eewo in Yoruba Culture."

important aspect of history and essential code of communication. Therefore, promoting these cultural values, whether in reality or fictional works of art, by simply connecting the past to the present for futuristic purposes, in the advancement and appreciation of modern culture becomes a sine qua non to upholding the culture and values of the people. This perspective, as portrayed in this film, subjects an aspect of African traditional history, values, and spirituality to questioning and condemnation, discountenancing the efficacy of the taboos and, by extension, African Indigenous Religion and culture.

The second observation in the narrative relates to the culture and belief that it is taboo for women to consciously or otherwise enter into the 'Igbo Oro' (Oro/ Egungun grove or Shrine erected in the worship for the Oro cult. The Yorùbá believe that the veneration of Oro and Egungun in traditional African societies is an essential aspect of the culture employed in creating ontological connection and balance between the world of the known and the unknown, and the world of the living and the dead. Again, this movie played down the cultural significance and signification of this taboo, justifying its position with the sudden reappearance of Ifabunmi's mother after about twenty years of her disappearance.

Conclusion

This study has interrogated two films, '*The Gods Are Dead*' and '*Eri Esu*' as paradigms in discussing the richness of African film culture. The study has identified three distinctive perspectives in African (Nollywood) films, questioning the creative license and artistic integrity of Christian or evangelical filmmakers in Nigeria. The overarching question raised in the study is 'To what extent can religious or evangelical movies be classified as African reality?' Curriculum developments in tertiary institutions and the treatment of subject matter relating to African culture and people are some of the issues further raised in the study. The study observes, on the one hand, that many Christian movies downplay the cultural significance and significations of many traditional rites, taboos, and motifs in an attempt to articulate the superiority of the Christian religion. The most significant vilification of African culture and reality is the outright condemnation of all African gods and religions in favour of Christianity. The impression in many Christian movies is that African Indigenous

Religion and the worship of their gods are not merely brutal; they are sure gateways to hell. The perspective presented by these filmmakers not only subjects African culture to ridicule and rebuke but also the impact of such denunciation on cultural life and people cannot be over-emphasized. The negligence and shambolic treatment in films blur and impede ideological reasoning, thereby subjecting African culture to further ruins. The beauty of African people and their culture becomes obsolete through conscious or inadvertent cultural abandonment, denigration of her branded values, totems, and taboos, or misrepresenting of her traditional rites in promoting and projecting Christian values.

The study, on the other hand, also submits that as much as the nature of an academic study mainly determines the educational curriculum in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, efforts must be made to teach the propagation and reproduction of African culture and history in the most non-injurious way, whether the curriculum for the study is developed purely for entertainment or other educational purposes.

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