

**REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS OF  
RELIGIOSITY IN NIGERIAN MOVIES AND THE CRISIS OF PERSONAL  
IDENTITY AMONG NIGERIAN ADOLESCENTS**

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Abstract

Nigerian films have become extremely popular with Africans especially Nigerians abroad and a growing number of people of African descent, and have become ready substitutes for Western productions. Through these movies Africans are experiencing a cultural connect worldwide, something which foreign movies cannot provide. This paper examines Nigerian movies as an index of the cultures and religiosity of the people and how they factor into the personality development of adolescents who are exposed to stressful situational and life events which impact on behavior.

In a post-modern world, reality has become fluid, and no medium has done more to make it so than film, with its wide accessibility, its sense-and-psyche altering format, and its effortless ability for persuasion. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Nigeria entertainment media have been leading a cultural shift from historical and written facts to visual images, seizing on the conception that it is easier to educate people by enticing images than by persuasive words. Nigeria movies are very popular among adolescents and youths, and are gradually gaining wide acceptance among blacks across the world because of their socio-cultural and educational values.

From available anthropological and ethnological data the African traditional worldview is characterized by dynamic vitalism, relationality, communion, solidarity, and harmony with nature (Onwubiko 1991, p. 3-5). African scholars such as Mbiti, Nyasani, Nyamiti, Oduyoye, Okure, Onwubiko, amongst others reason that there are categories and processes of thought that are unique to Africa. They also argue that the African way of organizing and cognitively engaging the world is a product of unique

environmental conditioning and long standing cultural traditions (Nyasani 1997). The identity of the individual person is a web of interactions, a network of operative relationships. A person is fashioned by historical, cultural, genetic, biological, social and economic infrastructures. Hence, the individual is always considered in the light of the whole. The dignity of the individual emanates from the network of relationships, from being in community (Onwubiko 1991).

Identity for Nigerians is not an individual or autonomous sense of functioning as is often reflected in Western cultures. Rather, positive identity is an extended sense of self embedded within the African collective. Positive gendered personal identities are essential to the personal and collective well-being of Nigerian adolescents. They must develop a positive sense of self in a society that often devalues them through negative stereotypes, assumptions, and expectations of others. Positive identity is an extended sense of self embedded within the social collective.

Nigerian parents and families are instrumental in transmitting values, beliefs, and ideas about lifestyles based on cultural knowledge of the adult tasks and competencies needed for appropriate functioning in society. However, the trends of western education, media and globalization have raised a whole new spectrum of questions, ideas and attitudes that both challenge and even conflict the traditional perceptions of personal identity.

Erikson believed that “Identity Crisis” was one of the most important conflicts people face in development. It is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. The emergence of an identity crisis occurs during teenage years in which people struggle between feelings of identity versus role confusion.

Adolescents face an identity crisis which needs to be favorably resolved in order for the individuals to become independent, effective adults. An unfavorable resolution leads to confusion of one's adult sense of identity. Nigeria adolescents face a particularly complex task of attempting favorable resolution due to enforced acculturation with views and concerns relating to history, culture, educational systems, religious institutions, philosophy and literature which have little association with African backgrounds. The emergence and growing popularity of Nigeria movies could be a powerful educational platform to facilitate a more favorable outcome of the identity crisis among Nigeria adolescents.

This study utilizes the works of Erik Erikson, Robert Kegan, and Virginia Satir in exploring the relationship between narrative and identity as an active learning site for adolescents to construct integrated identities. The study affirms the significance of Nigerian movies as a portrayal of the history, culture, tradition, religious beliefs and values of the Nigerian society, and offers a philosophical critique of the educational import of these movies.

### **Personal Identity**

The formation of personal identity is seen as the exploration and commitment to roles and social identities. These identities have fundamental influence political, religious and vocational choices, and ethnic and gender reference-group selection. Erikson, a leading psychologist, hypothesizes that identity formation is one of the adolescent's main developmental tasks. His elaboration of the concept of identity has been central in guiding research on personal identity development.

Erikson's classic work *Childhood and Society* (1950) shows his concern for Freud who had created a complex account of child development, centered on the sequential, maturational unfolding of body-based, instinctual drives. Freud's understanding was fundamentally psychobiological; the psyche is an extension and derivative of the body, and the social world is where the drives come up against a reality that necessitates their control, repression or gratification. Consequently, society is an extension of the ego in its campaign to regulate the drives. Erikson takes the Freudian concept of oral libido and builds around it a complex subjectivity which envisions the child as struggling in its orientation to the world, attempting to master its sense of self relation to others, and initiating a way to position itself in a world that will allow for future ego growth.

The idea of identity formation remained the focus of much of his work such as *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959). The core concept in this work is the acquisition of an ego identity. The ego identity of Erikson is associated with adolescence, the transition between childhood and adulthood, the point of intersection between the individual and the social world. Erikson (1950) characterizes adolescence as that period during which the individual must establish a *sense of personal identity* and avoid the dangers of *role diffusion* and *identity confusion*. The adolescent has to find answer to the fundamental questions of "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "What do I want to become?" This is an extremely important period in the life of the individual. Muuss (1996) writes,

"Identity must be acquired through sustained individual effort. Unwillingness to work actively on one's identity formation carries with it the danger of role diffusion, which may result in alienation and a sense of isolation and confusion. The search for an identity involves the establishment of a meaningful self-concept in which past, present, and future are brought together to form a unified whole" (p. 51).

According to Kegan (1982), it is true that infancy marks the beginning in the history of the activity of meaning-constitutive evolution, and initiates themes that can be traced through the lifespan. So the first years of life do indeed have great salience but, it is not a salience *sui generis*. The distinctive features of infancy should be understood in the context of the same activity which is the person's fate throughout his or her life. Growth, then, is actually a response to the complexity of the world, a response that recognizes that the world and the individual are distinct yet more and frequently related.

Satir (1988) opines that “adolescents are striving to accomplish their autonomy and identity” (p. 322). A big part of this period of their lives is to find out what the world is all about. It is a period of philosophical inquiry and scrutiny that many adults find disconcerting. Consequently, there could be so much confusion in the mind of the adolescent. Hence, adolescents endure many false starts, unrewarding paths and, often, hormonal storms. All of these are natural steps in their development and relationships with the cultural environment. Identity, then, is forged in the complexities of interaction with others and the environment, a process that Erikson refers to as *psychosocial reciprocity*. Muuss (1996) writes,

“The adolescents search for a personal identity also includes the formation of a personal ideology or a philosophy of life that will give the individual a frame of reference for evaluating events. Such a perspective aids in making choices and guiding behavior, and in this sense a personal identity based on a philosophy of life may greatly influence the value orientation of the individual” (p. 54).

To complete this search for identity, the adolescent must find answers to the fundamental questions and develop a commitment to a system of values, including religious beliefs, vocational goals, sexuality and intimacy, philosophy of life, etc. In examining James Fowler's *Theory of Faith Development* Muuss (1996) opines that

“Adolescents are in a period of life during which they may experience an existential or religious crisis and may begin to evaluate their religious upbringing, religious ideas, and the role and function of religion in their personal lives” (p. 262).

Erikson had framed the crisis of the ego in terms of a battle, one thing versus another, as though healthy development at each stage would result in a victory or banishment. Kegan framed it as the growth of one and the loss of another. However, one would think that these crises of adolescence are actually dialectical tensions and not battles. This is why this author admits more of the practicalities of Satir’s work in which trust is always complimented and in a creative tension with mistrust, autonomy with shame and doubt, and so on.

With the rapid changes in the ethnic composition of our Nigeria borne out of migration and economic integration, understanding personal identity development has gained increasing theoretical, empirical, and practical salience. With each passing year, the number of cross-regional, ethnic and cultural migration grows, thus necessarily making issues relating to the development of adolescent personality central themes in education.

Prior to this upsurge of adolescence consciousness, the prevailing culture in many Nigerian societies was to celebrate an elaborate ceremony of initiation to manhood or adulthood. Mbiti (1990, p. 158-159) makes the point that in most cases, coming-of-age rites are group activities designed to build character, foster productive adult behavior, and forge friendships and alliances among initiates who undergo the rites together. Boys and girls usually participate in separate rituals to acquire specialized knowledge they will use throughout their lives. Instruction focuses among others, on domestic life and daily work;

fertility, marriage, and raising a family, and ritual responsibilities. Mbiti insists on the great educational import of these rites. He writes:

“The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated. It is a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawning for the young. They learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of man-woman relationship....” (p. 159)

The rites are generally organized into three distinct phases. First, is a rite of ‘separation.’ The youths are physically and psychologically removed from the community and taken to a special enclosure where the rituals are held. Changes in clothing, diet, furnishings, and sometimes language, reinforce the separation. Second, is the period of transition, lasting from a day to several months, depending on local practice, and they are thoroughly schooled in all the ways of adulthood: including the rules and taboos of the society; moral instruction and social responsibility, and further clarification of their mission or calling in life. Zahan (1979) posits that during this time the initiate may experience a symbolic death and rebirth, and in some societies this is marked by physical alterations, such as circumcision, body decoration, or moderate weight gain to suggest robust health and well-being. Third, is the rite of reintegration when the initiates return to the community, ready to embrace roles and responsibilities that come with being adults. A joyous celebration, the public performance of music and dance, and the display of initiation artworks allow family and friends to recognize the initiates’ achievements and new skills.

At the end of the rites, the youngster becomes a man/woman; a water-carrier becomes a warrior; and an initiate becomes a priest. This is a step through a door, to a higher level of consciousness. These initiations usually deal with insights in the ‘hidden’

knowledge, to share in the 'knowing' or to be part of the group that 'knows.' In many cultures these initiations are very important, because they define life, where one lives and what his/her tasks are.

However, the growing influence of the Western media and the concept of globalization seem to be creating a transition of the traditional culture to the Western culture, especially in the urban areas and cities. To quote Wiser (1986, p. 4) "Cultural identity seems to be on the defensive all over the world as most people live in more than one culture. More and more ethnic minorities claim the right to their distinctive identity." The majority of present day adolescents have received little or no initiation-like transitional education from their parents. Feeling the need to find answers to their questions, adolescents begin to explore on their own. Friends and printed and other media, especially Nigerian movies thus become the main sources of information on various philosophical and value issues. These adolescents easily turn to the movies and the internet as research tools while exploring their own cultural, religious and spiritual beliefs. The movies provide them a new set of heroes and heroines whose thinking and insights they feel offer them better answers to questions that they feel uncomfortable discussing with parents or other adults. With the expansion of Nollywood (acronym for the Nigeria movie industry), Nigerian movies as a source of information and formation will likely become even more significant as availability increases.

### **Traditional Context of Nigerian Films**

The astronomical interest currently generated by Nigerian films in Africa and the Western world, and which has become an important socio-cultural and educational nexus is not totally surprising. Such a potential has always existed in this hugely diversified

cultural tapestry of a nation which attaches prominence to the functionality and performance of roles. The Nigerian state is an ensemble of previously independent nationalities with highly stratified and normative social structures that date back to the Middle Ages.

The anthropological viewpoint of these societies conceives of the human being as not only a personality but also a sociality. Due to the intricate rhythm that constitutes the dynamics of this worldview and of life in general, African scholars hardly speak of a separate and isolated entity called “self.” The “Individual” is almost totally dependent and subordinate to cultural entities and processes. Nobles (1974, p. 10-17) has described it as the ontogenetic concept of self (i.e., “self as an interdependent entity shared with all members of the tribe.”) Mbiti (1990) insists that for the African, “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (p. 106). Conteh-Morgan (1994) puts it well when he writes:

“In these societies, individual conduct and inter-group relations are codified into symbolic movements and actions, stylized gestures and patterned dances, while even speech is formalized into various fixed forms, formulaic expressions and tropes. The result of this expressivity in behavior is that relations between individuals assume the character of relations between role-players (social personae) and social life becomes an elaborately choreographed play, characterized by play-acting (as in stage drama) rather than by spontaneous and natural interaction” (p. 10-11)

The appreciation of social reality in these societies were always through the prism of communal expression, such that the joys and sorrows; victories and failures; grief and laughter, etc., were formulated into chants, dirge, songs, dances and dramatization. However, the communal expression still allowed room for the individualization of the person without damaging the dignity of the human being. The dynamics of the relationship between individual and community is founded on dialogue and reciprocity in

which the individual has ample room to flourish without being completely subsumed by the community.

### **History of Nigerian Movies**

Nigeria is the most populous Black Country in the world, with one of the largest land areas in Africa. While claims can be made of a history of performance arts that dates back to ancient ancestry, this paper will concentrate on the more recent history which evidence is more secure.

When the Christian Missions arrived in Nigeria during the second wave of Missionary Enterprise from Europe about 1860, they introduced Christian concerts and musicals to promote religious education, faith and values. Edgar Rice Burrough's 1935 film "*Sanders of the River*" which was partly shot in Nigeria helped in putting Nigeria on the world film map through the participation of late Orlando Martins (1899 – 1985) who acted in the film alongside the American actor Paul Robeson. Orlando Martins also featured in "*Man from Morocco*", "*Black Libel*" and "*Men of Two Worlds*." Shortly afterwards, documentaries on the Queen's visits to Nigeria, English football matches, Westminster Parliamentary debates, and government-sponsored films on health and education as well as legendary cowboy films soon began dominating Nigerian cinemas in the late '50s up to independence.

The '50s and '60s were regarded as a perfect timing for a love affair between Nigerian film and Nigerian music. But there was neither the technology nor the means to do indigenous films. Soon the country became flooded with wall posters of foreign cultures in the form of American, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese films. Nigerian kids caught on to the Kung-fu and Karate culture and began to know more about Bruce Lee,

James Bond, and the travails of the American Indians than they did about the Wole Soyinka-led Mbari Mbayo cultural group, Hubert Ogunde's troupe or other socio-cultural history of Nigeria.

Some significant successes were recorded after independence when for about ten years after the Nigeria civil war, Nigerian literature and theatre got introduced to motion picture. Representative of this new wave were the works of Ogunde, a doyen of Nigerian art who understood that film and theatre were vehicles for promoting indigenous language, art and culture. Ola Balogun's post civil war flick, "*Amadi*" idealized the pre-civil war days when Nigeria was one huge undivided house where Igbo musicians sang Yoruba highlife and Yorubas sang Hausa songs. "*Amadi*" was an Igbo film made by a Yoruba man and was clearly a glimpse from the future of the film industry in Nigeria.

This early example of Nigerian art on celluloid using the best of Western film techniques, was a breath of fresh air even if it was a low technology, low budget experiment unable to impress the market against the dominance of imports which though exotic did little to promote Nigerian socio-cultural life. The film "*Bisi – Daughter of the River*", as well as "*Dinner with the Devil*" by Sanya Dosunmu and Wole Amele were other laudable efforts on celluloid, which captured Nigerian culture on film. In the 1980's, the TV serialization of Chinua Achebe's "*Things Fall Apart*" proved to be a huge success that awakened an appetite for culturally sensitive movies. This was largely complemented by small screen successes such as "*The Adio Family*", "*Village Headmaster*", "*Cock Crow at Dawn*", "*The Masquerade*", "*Mirror in the Sun*", "*Check Mate*", "*Samanja*", "*Bisi and Company*", "*Sura The Tailor*", "*Awada Kerikeri*" and "*Second Chance*" on national television. These productions were indeed instrumental to

the revival of the local film industry and hence the birth of the home video culture in Nigeria.

The release of the film *Living in Bondage* in 1992 by NEK Video Links set the stage for Nollywood as it is known today. The huge success of this film set the pace for others to produce other films or home videos. Within two decades Nollywood has exploded into a booming industry that pushed foreign media off the shelves, an industry now marketed all over Africa and the rest of the world. The use of English rather than local languages served to expand the market and aggressive marketing using posters, trailers, and television advertising also played a role in Nollywood's success.

Gradually, Nollywood is becoming a regular feature on channels which specialize in the black and African audiences via satellite or cable. A few years ago, the South Africa's satellite TV Company Multichoice/DSTV introduced its AfricaMagic channel which shows mostly Nigerian movies to millions of its subscribers in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. This has been followed by BEN TV. And since January 2008, Nollywood has a dedicated channel offering 24 hour movies service on Sky digital platform to audiences in the UK and Ireland. A March 2006 article in *The Guardian* cites Nigeria's film industry as the third largest in the world in terms of earnings. The paper cites unknown sources estimating the industry to bring in US\$200 million per year.

Many of Nollywood films bestride the entertainment and educational strata. They deal with a wide range of contemporary issues such as culture, AIDS, corruption, women's rights, and other topics of concern to ordinary Africans. An interesting aspect of Nigerian films is that the most popular plot lines feature the clash of culture and religions, old and new. The key characters are villains who use aspects of traditional

African cultures and religions, often characterized as witchcraft or voodoo, to work their wicked ways. In the end, however, Christianity triumphs by redeeming the victims and vanquishing the evil doers, although they may be forgiven upon conversion to Christianity. Given the film industry's cutting-edge character in Nigeria and its popularity among younger Nigerians, these Nollywood plots help solidify Christianity's increasing influence on the populace.

### **Cultural Resilience in Nigerian Movies**

Neill (2006) opines that resilience refers to the capacity of an entity or system to maintain and renew itself particularly in the presence of stressors, that is, when the existence or viability of the entity or system is challenged or threatened. Cultural resilience refers to a culture's ability to maintain and develop ethnic and cultural identity, as well as promote cultural awareness, pride and practices. Despite challenges and difficulties, a resilient culture is capable of maintaining and developing itself, while engaging other cultures and exigencies.

Cultural resilience is the capacity of a distinct cultural system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to retain key elements of structure and identity that preserves its distinctness. Kofinas (2005, p. 5) argues that resilience is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that incorporates the multi-dimensional and multi-directional interaction between individuals and their environments within contexts (family, peer, school and community, society). Resilience is a fluid process.

Most theorists and researchers have recognized resilience as a dynamic process and that resilience cannot occur in the absence of real or perceived risk or adversity (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Spencer et al., 2006). The emphasis here is that culture is condensed human experience; a set of values, ideas and norms expressed in varying categories. It is both rooted in history and tradition; dynamic and changing; past as well as future. Some cultural expressions are passed on from one generation to the other such as traditional dresses, food, and folktales while others are being transformed through encounters with other cultures and through technical developments such as music and dramatic arts.

The cultural world view of Nigerians is grounded in fundamental beliefs and values which guide and shape life experiences. In spite of the ethnic differences, there are core values that transcend ethnic and regional boundaries. These include: religiosity; extended family; tradition and rituals; community; respect for elders; and veneration of ancestors. Religion is at the core of this world view, and it is evident in various forms of practice.

In the 1950s and 60s, African filmmakers started creating images of post-colonial Africa with nuanced understanding of Africa's cultural riches and diversity. Over the last half century, having sliced through stereotypes with exacting social critique, African cinema has become a unique blend of aesthetic experimentation, humor, religion, history and politics.

As African nations have constructed modern identities from traditional and colonial experiences, the role of visual culture in communicating these new transitional identities has immediacy for audiences around the world. The impetus for themes such as

colonialism, post-independence corruption and chronicles of “tribal” customs often erupts from the ironies of contemporary life. But Nigerian filmmakers also draw from the wellsprings of myth, fantasy, humor and magic to nourish a narrative sensibility in which tradition and modernity encounter each other.

The tension between culture, tradition and change is the hallmark of many Nigerian films. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is a classic case of the dynamic tension that characterizes many movies of that genre; whether change should be privileged over tradition. The primary character, Okonkwo, resists the new political and religious orders because he feels that they are not manly and that he himself will not be manly if he consents to join or even tolerate them. To some extent, his resistance of cultural change is also due to a gnawing fear of losing societal status. His sense of self-worth is dependent upon the traditional standards by which society judges him.

The villagers in general are caught between resisting and embracing change and they face the dilemma of trying to determine how best to adapt to the reality of change. Many of the villagers are excited about the new opportunities and techniques that the missionaries bring. This European influence, however, threatens to extinguish many of their traditional beliefs and practices.

The utilization of film to critique the dynamics of traditional culture in the face of globalization is a powerful intellectual and emotional force for social change, especially for adolescents. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Nigerians are witnessing a great revolution in mass communications capabilities that drastically reduces the distances between cultures. Images, sounds and ideas are exchanged almost instantaneously, creating dynamic hybrid cultures.

## Popular Religiosity in Nigerian Movies

In the course of the spread of the Christian faith in Nigeria by foreign missionaries, the native population was not a group of passive recipients; their minds were not a tabula rasa. On the contrary, they actively appropriated Christianity according to their cultural-religious way of feeling, thinking and behaving in an example of the dictum, "*quidquid recipitur secundum modum recipientis recipitur*" ("Whatever is perceived is perceived according to the mode of perception of the perceiver."). In this way Christianity became part, no matter how unsystematically, of the Nigerian reality. Popular religiosity confirms in its own way the real acceptance of Christianity by the people. But there is an ongoing debate as to whether the people were truly Christianized, or whether Christianity was simply indigenized.

Many Nigerians were baptized with Western Saints' names; they memorized Western hymns and prayers; and they used English language in worship. Despite these realities, the primal religious orientation of the people was hardly radically altered. Such cultural imaging of Christianity is evident in the blockbuster movie *Living in Bondage*, by Kenneth Nnebue in 1992. The film tells the story of Andy, a jobless man who was determined to get rich not minding the cost. He is persuaded to sacrifice satisfies his devoted wife to a secret cult. He soon becomes extremely wealthy but immediately finds that the demands of the cult are endless. To further complicate his situation, the ghost of his wife haunts him. He breaks down, enters a Pentecostal church for recovery, and is saved by Christ. This movie followed in the heels of the hugely successful Television series *Agbara Nla (Mighty Power)* by Mike Bamiloye which was a woven around the

spiritual conflict between traditional religion and Christianity, and the resolution of this conflict through deliverance.

Many Nollywood movies have themes that deal with the moral dilemmas facing modern Africans. Some movies promote the Christian or Islamic faiths, and some movies are overtly evangelical. Others, however, address questions of religious diversity, such as *Not Without My Daughter*, which is a story about a Muslim man and a Christian woman who wanted to get married but had to confront the obstacles of religious differences and prejudices.

Andy Best's 1995 production *Ikuku* (Hurricane), tells the story of a community's search for a priest of *Ikuku* to revamp the shrine of the gods and put an end to the devastating hurricane ravaging the community. Akin Adesokan (2004, p. 195) writes, "Spiritualism is often presented as spectacular 'rituals,' Pentecostal exorcism, or spiritual resolution."

The tandem of the cultural and popular religiosity is further precipitated by the fact that there is no clear demarcation line between the sacred and the profane in the Nigerian culture. Whatever one did was considered as having a repercussion in the sacred order.

The God of Christianity is seen as all powerful and responsible for whatever blessings or curses people experience in life. What happens in the present happens because God had pre-willed it as part of the divine plan. God's existence and the identification of what happens in the world with God's will are cultural-religious presuppositions into which the Christian understanding of God had been locally recast.

There is something genuinely positive about this. In search of someone who can help them out of their socio-cultural predicament, they look up to the God who, not only had given them life, but is also full of understanding and compassion.

Another example of popular religiosity that provides a glimpse of primal religion in Nigerian movies is the way Catholic priests and Pentecostal pastors are regarded. While the Christian church considers its priests and pastors as community leaders who preach and teach the Gospel, and administer the sacraments, practitioners of traditional religiosity somehow perceive them as Christian versions of the *babalawos* (*traditional priests*). The priests of traditional religions were highly valued by the people. They were especially chosen for their office because they were not only specialists regarding the gods and spirits, but they also possess extraordinary powers for curing, exorcism and intercession with the good spirits. Like these *babalawos*, the priests and pastors are considered to be both knowledgeable and powerful, a feature that runs through in many Nigerian movies.

### Some Characteristics of Nigerian Movies

**Critical mindedness:** Some of the movies coming out of Nollywood deal with issues of perceptions of culture and Western influences, examine experiences of discrimination, and facilitates a critique of existing social conditions.

**Active Engagement:** Some others x-ray issues which include youth behavior in school, at home, and with peers, exposing the consequences of negative affiliations, and portraying adolescents and young people proactively and positively impacting their environment.

**Communalism:** Nigerian cultural groups, advocate more of a communal orientation than an individualistic one. Another aspect showcased in Nigerian movies involves the importance of social bonds and social duties, reflecting a fundamental sense of interdependence and primacy of collective well-being, and offering the drive for connection and fellowship within and across ethno-cultural boundaries.

**Religiosity:** The need for successful negotiation of social interactions and the development of optimal functioning are particularly important for the development of African American children regardless of their socioeconomic background and neighborhood context. Central to the Nigerian cultural discourse are individual characteristics such as empathy and religiosity (personal beliefs in God or a higher power). Concern for others and a sense of a higher purpose may help adolescents become engaged leaders and advocates for their community. This is very well projected in Nigerian movies.

**Cognition:** Cognitive skills are one of the most important markers of child and adolescent development, and it is highly unlikely that children with underdeveloped educational and cognitive skills will be successful. Nigerian movies have brilliantly articulated a contrast between a materialistic attitude of 'get rich at all cost' and a more intellectual, academic, and vocational mentality.

**Flexibility:** There are movies that promote adaptation to cognitive, emotional, social, and physical situational demands across the multiple cultural contexts that young people must traverse. The role of ritual in art and in life as a tool that embraces contradictions and paradoxes, evinces truths and values, and holds every experience in an embracing tolerance is well portrayed.

## Critique of Nigerian Movies

Despite the laudable achievements of Nigerian filmmakers, the case can be made that the industry has still to critically address fundamental issues of gender equality and equity, violations of the rights of a woman, traditional stereotypes of females, and the struggles of the female child for equal educational opportunities.

For example, mothers-in-law are often cast in vindictive and unsavory roles; widows facing extreme persecution in the community because of superstition, women involving in prostitution to get ahead in society, etc.

In some cases the Nigerian woman has been portrayed as an unsophisticated personality whose only assets is her sexuality. For instance, films like *Glamour Girls I & 2*, *Nneka the Pretty Serpent*, *Prostitution*, *Domitilla*, *Shattered Home*, among others, are clear examples of the negative roles and stereotypes of women. Such uncomplimentary depiction of the 'Africanness' in women undermine the lofty virtues of the African woman, especially in other spheres of life. The influence of these negative portrayals on adolescent minds who view movie actors as their heroes could only be left to the imagination.

Film, as an aspect of art or literature which is a mirror that reflects the contradictions of society is meant to raise public awareness on the problems facing women. But in contrast, many local filmmakers have often exaggerated what is happening in the society. It is the view of this author that films should be used to articulate women's identity and social issues especially those that touch on the woman's role in the socio-economic development of the country. Filmmakers should explore the lives of great African women who have made meaningful contributions to the success of

the family and the country, and whose stories are both powerful and compelling, keeping in mind the importance of culture as a vehicle for young and adolescent women's positive self-esteem.

### **Challenges for Religious Education**

Vrame (1999) writes that "Religious education, as an effort of the entire community, strives to nurture all of its members in all stages of life toward whole personhood through the ministries and curricula of the Church" (p.11). The faith that education nurtures is not just the individual's trust in God or blind loyalty to particular defined doctrinal propositions, but an engagement of the individual's intellect and affectivity which is subsequently manifest and sustained by one's actions in the world. It is educating for a faith that is an existential reality. Vrame opines that "religious education is seen holistically, that is involving: a) the whole person - mind, body, spirit; b) the whole community - all believers and their collective wisdom, knowledge, and experience of past and present; and c) the whole Tradition - *orthodoxia and orthopraxia*" (p. 11-12).

The globalization process with increased interaction of peoples and cultures, communication technologies, modern media and movies, it is evident that teachers of religion are faced with the challenge of adolescents who are in the process of accepting and recreating their own identity and culture. Understanding culturally endorsed values and culturally infused practices is very important role for religious educators working with Nigerian adolescents and their families. It is pertinent that all religious teachers' education include such cultural competence training.

The concept of chance is alien to African cultures; nothing is attributed to chance. African cultures do not take for granted that people automatically grow and develop into responsible, culturally conscious, and community-oriented adults. Hence, the development of the person is ritualized. It is imperative then, that religious organizations, institutions, and educators be strategically conscious in assisting Nigerian adolescents develop a healthy sense of personal identity in order to foster well-being, productivity and strength. The context and content of Nigerian movies can be strategically employed in the development of programs aimed at leveraging healthy adolescents' development. It is recommended that policymakers, religious organizations, religious educational and training institutions:

- Develop policy and implement practices ensuring that Nigerian adolescents are empowered and strengthened through evidence-based, culturally informed religious programs and projects.
- Religious education needs to change the focus from the objective into the real influence and impact of Nigerian movies on adolescents. It means that the struggle to maintain the religious orthodoxy is not adequate only by stating it on the learning objectives. It needs to be applied within a real framework. We need new literary forms of educating adolescents to solve the congealment of education supported only by theological and philosophical arguments which may be too abstract in practice.
- Engage in practices that integrate the religious and cultural heritage of the various Nigerian societies.

- Promote collaboration among educators, parents, and adolescents in developmentally friendly manner.
- One place to start answering to this challenge is in seminaries and institutes of pastoral education. The church must begin by educating its educators. These institutions should incorporate religious art appreciation, movies, interdisciplinary learning, dialogue and exchange in their theological training techniques.

### **Conclusion**

The identity crisis is a real problem for many adolescents today. It is arguable that many Nigerian adolescents easily take up Euro-centrist values and actually believe that the customs and traditions of their own society are inferior to those in the Western world while others fall into the trap of defending customs that had originated at another time and place about which they know little. Some take sides in the inferiority-superiority debate while some others stay aloof. But in the end, all of us end up becoming hyphenated Americans.

The path toward personal identity formation for Nigerian adolescents starts at a young age. Initial exposure to culture and religion is usually provided by the parents who begin teaching their children the basic principles of religion. Nigerians are born into a religious society and they are exposed to the rituals and beliefs from an early age. This introduction often takes the form of modeling. This is typically followed by more focused learning during the elementary school years. During their adolescent years, they begin to question who they are and what they are about. They try to reconcile conflicts between what they have been taught as children and what they see occurring around them.

Nigerian adolescents are faced with the challenge of inculturating Western principles into a traditional African society considering the fact that sometimes principles of the two societies are dialectically opposed to each other. Personal identity formation in this population occurs within the context of a cultural and religious atmosphere, exposure to alternative value systems, and a desire to appreciate cross-cultural principles and practices, all of which must be taken into consideration to fully comprehend the complexity of this process for these adolescents.

Nigerian movie writers offer an understanding of the person from a clearly cultural philosophical prism of not only his existence, but more importantly through his actions in community. The person is a concrete being, broader and more comprehensive than the concept of the “individual,” just as the person is more than individualized nature. Essentially, while on the one hand the person is unique and irreducible in character, on the other hand, he is in dynamic association with the cosmos.

If indeed we do define ourselves in relation to the world, then that definition should reflect the diversity that is the current state of the world. With the spread of world-wide communication technology, the growing popularity of Nigerian movies, and the cross-regional migration of people, we no longer exist in isolated societal, ethnic or religious enclaves. This means that as we educate each other, we must do so in a way that allows us to respond to and reflect the changing world. For Christian religious education, the challenge is to utilize movies as a catalyst to show adolescents how to define themselves authentically and spontaneously in relation to the diverse world in which they live.

Having examined the historic-cultural background of the Nigerian film industry vis-à-vis the deep religious roots of the peoples, it will be fair to assert that Nigerian movies gather all the complexities of Nigerian life, past and present and shape these disparate elements into epic coming-of-age stories that both capture and educate the minds of adolescents in powerful

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