Chapter 7
Trado-Modern Religious Ideology Conflict in Nigerian Films: An Examination of Scorpion God

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ABSTRACT

The concept of traditional religion in the twenty-first century is that which seeks regurgitation. This is so because traditional religion and its values and beliefs are constantly being challenged in the face of Western religion and its values. This chapter is on the contemporary Nigerian movie Scorpion God as directed by Nonso Okonkwo, and its interpretation and presentation of concepts relating to Nigeria’s traditional religion. This study takes a look at traditional religion, the patterns, symbols, and values that have remained relevant till date. It examines the theories and ideologies influencing these ways of life in order to correct the errors presented in this Nigerian film. The study reveals that traditional religion as reflected by Nigerian films is a misinterpretation and misrepresentation, and the findings suggest an urgent need for education in order to correct this error in the evaluation to traditional religion and its place in the socio-cultural life of Nigeria.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5987-0.ch007
INTRODUCTION

Africa and indeed Nigeria is a highly traditional society and most of her traditions are deeply rooted in religion. Religion permeates the entire African landscape, it is embodied in the way its people live, what they believe and what they do. Despite the diversity and plurality of cultures, the average Nigerian, finds his or her essence of being in the various gods and spirits that are deified in his or her tradition. A cursory look at the various traditional practices would reveal a seeming synergy of beliefs, that there exists a supreme being from whom all living creations and creatures source life.

The African, and particularly the Nigerian, prior to the contact with the Whiteman, has devised various processes of worship which are often mediated by priests and oracles. However, the advent of colonialism redefined not only social relationships but also traditional practices, including religion. The Whiteman came with his ‘god’ and superimposed same on wherever he found foothold. In Nigeria particularly, the Southern protectorate was the worst hit, as Christianity ‘stamped’ its people. As a result of massive influx of materials such as Bibles, books, and even the subsequent establishment of Mission Schools across the length and breadth of Southern Nigeria, traditional religion not only became seemingly anachronistic but was also branded as fetish and evil, and the worshippers regarded as ‘pagans’.

Elsewhere in Northern Nigeria, Islam, one such foreign religion, gained ground right from the early 16th and 17th Centuries. The Othman Dan-Fodio Jihad swept more than a third of the entire region spreading the virtues of Islam. As of today, the Islamic religion has been adopted as not just a mode of worship but a way of life by its adherent. It is somewhat difficult to differentiate between Islam as a religion and the tradition or culture of the Hausa or Fulani group in Nigeria.

Tradition is an established pattern of thought, actions and behaviors of a people. This includes their traditional religious practices and modes of worship. Tradition as a concept is very difficult to define. It permeates every facet of the life of man, as it shapes his values and norms. Traditional religion here refers directly to man’s relationship to divine and superhuman powers, bearing in mind all the several indigenous religious forms and systems. Mbii (1963), says that, “people respond to their spiritual world. This response generally takes on the form of worship which is eternalized in different acts and sayings” (p. 65).

The belief in traditional religion is that man’s existence is governed internally and externally by sublime forces belonging to the superhuman or extra-terrestrial realm. The form of veneration he says, may be “formal or informal, regular or extempore, communal or individual, ritual, ceremonial or unceremonial, (Mbii, 1963, p. 58), through words or deed”. It is not in doubt that the subject of traditional religion is quite topical in the 21st Century being a period of great strides in information
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