



April 2022

The Bible as Relic, Fetish or Talisman in Nollywood Films: A Semiotic Perspective

Floribert Patrick C. Endong

University of Dschang, Cameroon, floribertendong@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf>

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Endong, Floribert Patrick C. (2022) "The Bible as Relic, Fetish or Talisman in Nollywood Films: A Semiotic Perspective," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 26: Iss. 1, Article 54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.26.01.54>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol26/iss1/54>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

The Bible as Relic, Fetish or Talisman in Nollywood Films: A Semiotic Perspective

Abstract

Many Nollywood Christian films tap into a plurality of myths and idiosyncrasies prevailing in Nigeria in particular and the Christendom in general. Some of these myths and idiosyncrasies revolve around the perceived magical powers of the Bible, particularly the Holy Book's 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 typologies of artifacts, signs and special effects to represent the Bible as an object which is more than a mere carrier of holy scriptures and the voice of God. In this paper, attention is given to the different indexical and symbolic signs used in Nollywood filmic productions to represent the Bible as a fetish or a relic. Using a critical review of secondary sources and relevant films, as well as semiotics, the paper identifies the use of visual and sound effects as one of the procedures deployed by Nollywood film directors to naturalize and popularize fetishist beliefs about the Bible. The effects popularly used by these film directors include radiating bibles, open pages of the Bible that generate dazzling light, ardent fire or meteoric energy with which pastors counter the attacks to satanic forces or deliver people in distress.

Keywords

Relics, Fetish, The Bible, Symbols, Indexes, Semiotics, Signs, Special Effects, Talisman, Nollywood Films

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Author Notes

Floribert Patrick C. Endong holds a Ph.D in Media Arts from the University of Calabar in Nigeria. He teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses in cinema and television at the Department of Performing Arts and Cinematography, (IBAF), University of Dschang in Cameroon. His areas of interests include visual anthropology, cinema, theatre arts and development, gender, digital cultures, and religion. He is author of more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters in the above areas of interests. He recently edited "Deconstructing the Images of the Global South through Media Representations and Communication", (2020) and "Popular Representations of America in Non-American Media" (2019) among other books.

Introduction

Many religion-oriented movies born from the Nigerian motion pictures industry (code named Nollywood) are kinds of religious propaganda. They aim not only at moralizing but also at persuading audiences to embrace specific models of spirituality. Those produced by Christian or religiously inclined film directors most often enjoin audiences to adopt a certain version of Christianity. They are based on storylines which “unmask” or deconstruct the Christian God and seek to illustrate God’s potency and readiness to solve all human problems and ultimately change human conditions for the better. Furthermore, the films artistically project the relevance, prestige and *dunamis* of specific spiritual movements. These movies actually portray such spiritual movements as the most appropriate – if not the only – solutions to the country’s socio-cultural, political and economic problems. In addition to these issues, these films’ directors usually anchor their messages in “universal” Christian myths, rituals, and symbols, some of which include life after death, salvation from hell fire, deliverance from satanic powers, new birth (“born-againism”), and the last coming of the messiah, among others. For instance, in many Nollywood Christianity-based films, the Church is presented as the house of God while ecclesiastic figures such as pastors, apostles, evangelists, priests and prophets are paraded as agents responsible for the illustration and application of God’s power on earth. In such films, Christian values and symbols are generally portrayed as superior to those of other religions as well as the unique and most appropriate solution to any political, economic and socio-cultural problem that may exist in Nigeria.

One symbol which is unsurprisingly present in Nigerian filmic productions is the Bible, often referred to as the Holy Book or the Holy Scriptures. In effect, the Bible does not only serve as direct or indirect source of inspiration for these films but also as a “holy prop” in many scenes and sequences of the films. Characters (both ecclesiasts and non-ecclesiasts) regularly quote or paraphrase the Bible to justify their actions and thoughts in the different sequences of

the productions; faithful Christians in these films constantly or circumstantially use the Holy Scriptures as powerful companions; they deploy or cite the Bible to express or exhibit their religious identity, doctrines, or religious cultures. Even negative characters such as witchdoctors, fetish priests, oracles and cultists sometimes create a space for it (the Holy Book) in their spiritual laboratories and “libraries” as well as make the contents of this Book part of their diction.¹ In effect, in many Nollywood films, these witchdoctors and cultists often use the Bible as one of their props or part of their spiritual arsenal. Some of them do not hesitate to cite, paraphrase or adapt selected portions of the Scriptures in view of addressing specific spiritual challenges.

Thus, in many Nollywood films, the Bible is depicted as an object whose meaning is complex. In other words, many Nollywood film directors tend to portray the Bible as an object whose function transcends the limits of a revealed scripture or the voice of God. Some of the Bible’s symbolic meanings in these films are rooted in a number of Nigerian idiosyncrasies and popular myths and imaginations about the Holy Scriptures, while others simply depend solidly on individual filmmakers’ cinematic style or philosophy of the arts. In this paper, attention will be given to the different ways in which the Bible is presented as a relic or a fetish in Nollywood filmic productions. Using a critical review of secondary sources and relevant films as well as semiotics, I will examine how the Bible is sometimes portrayed as a relic and/or fetish in many Nollywood films and how such portrayals challenge or endorse popular understandings of the Holy Scriptures in Christendom in general and in the Nigerian Christian landscape in particular. I will begin by defining the concepts of fetish and relics in the light of popular Christian doctrines, and proceed by exploring the symbolic value of the Bible in general Christendom as well as in Nigerian popular fantasy. I will then examine the ways in which the Bible is represented as a fetish or relic in Nollywood films. In this last section, semiotic analysis is used; by this, I mean an analysis of how signs and symbols are used to generate or construct meaning.

Fetishes, Relics and the Bible in the Christian Imagination

Derived from the French “*fétiche*”, the Portuguese “*feitiço*” and the two Latin words “*facticius*” (meaning artificial) and “*facere*” (signifying “to do” or “to make”), the English term “fetish” refers to any object having supernatural powers. It also refers to a human made object that has or is believed to have magical powers over others and which is thus venerated for such magical powers. Basthold (cited in Matory) defines the term fetish as “everything produced by nature or art, which receives divine honor, including sun, moon, earth, air, fire, water, mountains, rivers, trees, stones, images, animals, if considered as objects of divine worship.”² As an object, a fetish is “activated” not by a soul or a power belonging to it *per se*, but rather by a spirit foreign to it but which, in some way, is connected with or embodied in it. Examples of fetishes abound in religions often considered primitive (notably animism) to the extent that it has become common (although arguable) among critics to associate fetishism exclusively with religious beliefs in traditional Africa and among Native Americans. In his *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Knight notes for instance that many religious practices in West and Central Africa involve the use of small material objects whose names vary according to regions and ethno-religious communities.³ Examples of these objects include:

Bohsum, the tutelary fetishes of the Gold Coast; *suhman*, a term for a private fetish; *gree-gree* on the Liberian coast; *monda* in the Gabun country; *bian* among the cannibal Fang; in the Niger Delta *ju-ju* — possibly from the French *joujou*. i.e. a doll or toy (Kingsley) — and *grou-grou*, according to some of the same origin, according to others a native term, but the natives say that it is "a white man's word." Every Congo leader has his *m'kissi*; and in other tribes a word equivalent to "medicine" is used.⁴

If fetishism seems pronounced in religious beliefs that prevail among aboriginal and traditional people in Africa, Asia, and America, relics worship is also a major characteristic of some modern religions such as Roman Catholicism and Buddhism. The use of relics has also incidentally been observed in Islam.⁵

By definition, relics are the venerated remains of venerable persons (saints, holy men and martyrs among others). They include not only the body parts of saints, martyrs, holy men and women, founders of religious movements and other highly esteemed religious figures, but also objects once owned, used, or touched by these venerable persons. This specific understanding—the inclusion of objects which have once been in physical contacts with venerable persons in the possible list of relics—has motivated many critics into regarding relics as categories of fetishes. Wharton for instance defines relics as “all *sacra* (icons and holy places, even totems, fetishes, and idols).”⁶ He adds that relics are objects which, for many non-Protestant Christians, “have traditionally had significant spiritual force” and have demanded perpetual veneration.⁷ Wharton’s definition tends to make no distinction between fetishes and relics. In fact, this definition clearly categorizes fetishes as types of relics.

Similar to the fetish, the relic is believed to have immense supernatural powers. By the principle of contagious magic, it is the saint (its owner) which holds its power; and as such, it is credited with an inherent power or a sacred presence, rather than a symbolic or commemorative significance. In effect, by such principle of contagious magic, any part of a venerable person’s body is equivalent to his whole self, irrespective of how minute the person’s body may be and irrespective of how detached this part may be in terms of time and space. Thus, the bones, hair, body, clothes or footprints of a saint can inherently possess the power or saintliness of the person with whom they were once associated. Such relics can make the saint to be once again “present” and to supernaturally be active. Geisbusch thus notes that “even in contact relics, the primacy of the body makes itself felt as they are virtually incorporated into the very being of the saint, transforming their nature from being related to the being of the saint.”⁸

The veneration of relics and fetishes is not equally emphasized in all Christian denominations. While Christian movements such as Roman Catholicism have endorsed and

continued the practice, other movements such as the Protestant Church and the Pentecostal Christian movements have generally—or at least on the surface—exhibited a serious hostility to relic/fetish worship. Nonetheless, the practice of relic worship in the Catholic faith is backed by the decree of the Council of Trent (Sess. XXV). This decree teaches that in addition to being biblical, the practice has the potential of being very beneficial to faithful Catholics. The decree stipulates that:

The holy bodies of holy martyrs, and of others now living with Christ, which bodies were the living members of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Ghost, and which are by Him to be raised unto eternal life, and to be glorified, are to be venerated by the faithful; through which (bodies) many benefits are bestowed by God on men.⁹

As the Roman Catechism of the Council of Trent puts it: “If the clothes, the handkerchiefs, and even the very shadows of the Saints, while yet on earth, banished disease and restored health, who will have the hardihood to deny that God can still work the same wonders by the holy ashes, the bones and other relics of the Saints?”¹⁰ Following this teaching, it has become common in the Catholic world to find cathedrals, basilicas, and other worship temples that are ostentatiously adorned with the relics of the bones of saints or with objects believed to have been used by specific holy men. The famous Cathedral Notre Dame de Paris (France) for instance housed what is believed to be “the true Crown of Thorns worn by the Christ.” Similarly, in Czechoslovakia, there exists a church which is “beautified” with the bones of 10,000 saints, arranged in the form of shields, crowns, and crucifixes among others. A cathedral in Bruges (Belgium) is likewise adorned with what is believed to be the “relic of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord.” In brief, the Catholic Church has entrenched the culture of making and bestowing veneration or religious homage on very large collections of relics. Little wonder, relics are arguably considered “the most precious treasure of the Roman Catholic Church”¹¹ and the source of much criticism made against Catholicism. Religious denominations or currents such as Jehovah Witnesses, Pentecostal Christians, and Protestants in general have

in various platforms attacked the Catholic doctrine on the ground of its strong affinity with, and embrace of relic worship and covert fetishism. In other words, many non-Catholic currents have virtually demonized relics and fetish worshiping, relegating it to heresies and even Satanism. In his *Treatise on Relics*, John Calvin laments that relic worship is no other thing than practicing misdirected worship. He pointedly notes that “the origin and root of this evil (relic worship), has been, that, instead of discerning Jesus Christ in his Word, his Sacraments, and his Spiritual Graces, the world has, according to its customs, amused itself with his clothes, shirts and sheets, leaving thus the principal to follow the accessory.”¹²

Calvin goes further to associating relic business and worship with spiritual obscurantism. To him, relic worship is a sign of God’s punishment inflicted on humanity for their choice of dishonoring the Creator. He writes:

In this town (Geneva) there was formerly, it is said, an arm of St. Anthony; it was kissed and worshipped as long as it remained in its shrine; but when it was turned out and examined, it was found to be the bone of a stag. There was on the high altar the brain of St Peter; so long as it rested in its shrine, nobody ever doubted its genuineness, for it would have been blasphemy to do so; but when it was subjected to a close inspection, it proved to be a piece of pumice-stone [...] For my own part, I have no doubt that this has been a great punishment inflicted by God. Because, as the world was craving after relics, and turning them to a wicked and superstitious use, it was very likely that God would permit one lie to follow another; for this is the way in which he punishes the dishonour done to his name, when the glory due to him is transferred elsewhere. Indeed, the only reason why there are so many false and imaginary relics is, that God has permitted the world to be doubly deceived and fallen, since it has so loved deceit and lies.¹³

In the same line of argument, *The Watchtower* – a journal published by The Jehovah Witnesses – attacks relics worship noting that the practice is simply unbiblical and absurd. The journal adds that such a practice can only be driven by wrong and misleading interpretations of the Holy Scriptures. In the journal’s words, scriptural facts in no way, give “comfort or support to those who teach that the bones of ‘saints’ and martyrs should be revered and worshiped,” and hence, by instituting relics worship, the Catholic Hierarchy “appeals to tradition and heathen customs for support.”¹⁴

Thus, relics and fetish veneration is subject to controversy among Christian movements. Non-Catholic doctrines reject it even though a good number of neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movements and organizations, particularly in Africa and Latin America have, over the years, adhered to traditions that are subtle replicas of fetish and relics worship. It is for instance observed that many members of Pentecostal and messianic movements in Africa and South America tend to view the Bible in its material/physical form as an object vested with immense supernatural power. Turner examines how a number of pre-literate cultures in Argentina often ascribed magical values in both the material and spiritual forms of the Bible. Turner also shows how these Argentinean Pentecostal movements use the material Bible as a fetish capable of effecting miracles.¹⁵ He notes that:

Written words used in sacred context may be regarded as even more powerful than the spoken words used in [preliterate people's] own traditional rituals, whether religious or magical. Literacy therefore does not destroy the mystic power of such words as in our simpleminded white assumptions—it may even enhance it. Thus the Toba people of the Argentine treated the Bible as fetish object and tied it to their sides while dancing or placed it on the sick for healing.¹⁶

In the same line of argument, Alvarez notes that, from a doctrinal point of view, a number of “indigenous Pentecostal churches” in Latin America regard the physical Bible as an object which is inherently loaded with divine powers to heal all sorts of sicknesses and to work great miracles.¹⁷ Alvarez pointedly writes that the prosperity Pentecostals in particular tend to deploy the Bible “as a fetish and a source of magical phrases as they perform exorcisms and divine healings.”¹⁸ LeMarquand makes a similar observation about African Christians in his article titled “The Bible as Specimen, Talisman and Dragoman in Africa.”¹⁹ He notes particularly that many African Christian movements have entrenched the culture of reverting to traditional African solutions to modern problems. In the course of re-embracing traditional African systems, they most often place the Bible in the framework of African cosmology and see it as a valuable replica or acceptable substitute for various African protection, healing, prosperity or fecundity fetishes. LeMarquand thus writes that driven by an African mindset or worldview,

members of some charismatic and Pentecostal movements in Africa “may carry a Bible for protection, or write verses from the psalms on the side of his vehicle, or put psalm verses into amulets.” They may also deploy imprecatory psalms which they view not “as embarrassing artifacts from a more vengeful Israelite past but as a resource to combat the real evils that one faces every day.”²⁰

In the same line of argument, Vengeyi reviews communities of Pentecostal Christians in Zimbabwe who see the material text of the Bible as a sacred object. He notes that one strong characteristic of Christianity in Zimbabwe is the “Pentecostal belief in the Bible as fetish, the absolute word of God, directly inspired by God.”²¹ Still in Zimbabwe, many neo-Pentecostal communities consider the Bible as the perfect equivalent of a Shona²² traditional religious fetish called *gona*: a horn, a piece of wood shaped calabash, a gourd or an animal bone believed to have supernatural powers. In trying to explicate the reason for the proliferation of magical conceptions about the Bible among southern African Pentecostals, Vengeyi writes that:

At the arrival of the first missionaries [African] people gathered fetishes (*nkisi*) to be burned by the Christian priests, thus following the well-established tradition among Africans of destroying old fetishes to make room for new and more powerful ones. Baptism crosses, statues, church ornaments were seen as the new fetishes and the Christian priests were interpreted as their traditional healers or medicine men (*nganga*). Even the traditional medicine men were afraid of the Christian priests as they saw them as possessing greater powers than theirs. Although the Bible is not mentioned as having been distributed to the people, we can assume that since it was an indispensable object of faith in the missionary work, people should have associated it with fetish.²³

The culture of replacing old fetishes with new ones (mentioned by Vengeyi above) seems pervasive in many Pentecostal communities and charismatic movements across the Black continent. This culture actually dates back to the pre-colonial and colonial eras when Africans made their early encounter with the Bible. Authors such as Saners, Vengeyi, and Carter who have addressed this issue claim there was a remarkable tendency among Africans to equate any spiritual accessory used or possessed by the missionary—including the Bible—with an equivalent or a more advanced replica of their most powerful fetishes.²⁴ This entailed placing

the Bible within the framework of African cosmologies or alongside supposed African parallels. In line with this, Robert Moffat, a Scottish missionary, explains how some aboriginal tribes in sub-Saharan Africa used to regard his books as exotic versions of their local fetishes. He writes that “my books puzzled them; they asked if they were my ‘Bola’ prognosticating dice.”²⁵

The modern era seems not to have really affected Africans’ tendency of placing the Bible as well as other strong symbols of Christianity—such as crucifixes, anointing oil and holy water—within the framework of African cosmologies, and of equating symbols of Christianity with superior and infallible fetishes. The tendency seems to have even become more accentuated thanks partly to the testimonies of iconic opinion leaders or members of African Christian movements. In effect, it is not uncommon to come across prophets, apostles, or pastors who claimed to have directly witnessed the miraculous power of the material Bible either in a context of exorcism, revelation, or trance. The biographer of Rev. John Chol Daau²⁶ describes the latter’s encounter with the Bible thus:

As a baby, John had trouble sleeping through the night and would cry for hours. A relative was visiting who was one of the first Christians in the area. Hearing of the boy’s problem he held his Jieng language²⁷ New Testament over John’s eyes and said “hey, boy, instead of crying you will proclaim this book; [...] look at the book.” John reached for the New Testament and grabbed it. His crying stopped and they left the Bible in the crib with him, declaring that his name should be “John” after John the Baptist. [...] What they [John and his visitor] had witnessed was not simply a little baby gripping a story with a message, but rather John as an infant had inherited an object of power.²⁸

Narratives like the one mentioned above abound in the popular imaginary of Christian communities across the African continent. Like John Chol Daau, many other leaders of Christian movements on the continent have narrated stories of the Bible generating and “manifesting” kinds of positive force that turned out to be offensive or destructive to specific paranormal beings.²⁹ Cleric figures and ordinary Christians have told stories of the Bible possessing magical properties that repel demons, neutralize mystical attacks or prevent a myriad of natural and supernatural challenges.³⁰ The abundance of these stories in the Black African

popular fantasy has pushed many Pentecostal Christians in Africa to continue to regard the Bible as a fetish. Paranormal investigator Xavier Remington contends that the persistence and psychological potency of the belief in the magical powers/proprieties of the Bible are thanks to the power of human thought.³¹ He believes that the power of pure thought imbues magical proprieties upon the Bible or any other religious artifact. This follows the logic that “the Universe is pure thought at its foundation. Pure thought that is the mind of all Universal Gods and the source of all magical powers.” Remington further explains that:

Luckily the belief of the masses is so strong that it overrides an unbeliever’s lack of belief. So if one is faced with a blood thirsty vampire in a hotel room in the middle of nowhere with nothing but a bedside Bible to aid them, it will indeed work in repelling the vampire even if the person is an atheist. Even [the] religious symbols of long dead religions will still work to some extent thanks to the thousands and millions who once did believe in the religion. Their pure thought never dies and its power lives on forever. This same collective human consciousness has brought countless Earthly Gods and other supernatural beings into existence as well. Mastery of pure thought is the ultimate goal of those who practice magic whether they know it or not. Of course, any religions that are based on worshipping demons won’t have any effect on demonic based entities but may on the other beings.³²

It goes without saying that, besides being arguable, Remington’s contention will likely be a little bit esoteric for the non-initiated reader. Arguing or debunking it is not part of this study’s methodological purview. Here, this author is mainly interested in reviewing scholar’s interpretations of a sociological phenomenon: the belief in the magical proprieties of the Bible and the culture of equating the holy Bible with a fetish and an object of spiritual power.

African Relics, Fetishes in the Nigerian Imaginary and Theatre: A brief Incursion

In many anthropological research works, Nigeria is described as a very religious society.³³ Religiosity in the country dates back to the periods before colonization and early contacts between the tribes that constitute today’s Nigeria and western cultures. In other words, Nigerians have been religious even before the days of Christian and Islamic expansion in their country.³⁴ In effect, before the coming of Christianity and Islam and through the present time,

Nigerians have been practicing various forms of animism. These forms of animism have been determined or shaped by the specific cultural mores or norms of Nigeria's respective ethnic identities. The forms of animism have also been characterized by a system that acknowledges that beliefs and practices are intimately linked to and determine every facet of human life. Such spirituality implies that traditional Nigerian religions cannot be dissociated from everyday life or the mundane.³⁵

Two important features of traditional Nigerian religions are the keeping and veneration of relics and fetishes. In effect, in traditional Nigerian spiritualities, fetishes are strategic tools whose use could be vital in critical situations. As highlighted in Chiorazzi, Nigerians in traditional and pre-colonial communities have ascribed very strong values to fetishes. Devotees of traditional religion strongly believe that a fetish in the form of a talisman, a charm, an amulet or a statute can enable them to enjoy protection, medical relief, and good luck among other benefits.³⁶ Thus, in traditional Nigeria's popular imaginary, a fetish has immense power to ward off evil spirits and purify a haunted living space among other "wonders."³⁷ In line with this, the adepts of Nigerian traditional religion do ascribe very positive values to fetishes and relics. Although mainly utilized by members of traditional African religions, fetishes and relics are also sought after by some nominal members of modern/imported religions as well as politicians and members of cults or pernicious sects.³⁸ A number of such nominal Christians do actually resort to African fetishes and relics in secret, particularly when their exploitation of alternative remedies has not been fruitful or satisfactory.³⁹ This trend is illustrated by the growing number of spiritual leaders from Charismatic, prophetic, and messianic Christian movements who allegedly secretly resort to voodoo and fetishes to grow their ministries or become politically influential.⁴⁰ In recent decades, news of the arrest or denunciation of such religious leaders has sold local newspapers and radio stations.⁴¹

African fetish and relic worship have attracted debate and conflicting reviews from commentators interested in Nigerian cosmologies. Nigerian observers with westernized or “Christianized” mindsets tend to view such worship mainly in a bad light. Such commentators actually regard the practice as an index of Nigerian traditional society’s primitivism or obscurantism.⁴² It is common to come across Nigerian commentators who frame traditionalists’ keeping of African fetishes as a crime, a danger, or a backward practice.⁴³ For many such commentators, particularly those influenced by western modernism or religions, the keeping of African fetishes and relics is part of the dark side of Nigerian traditional religions. In line with this frame of thinking, pre and post-colonial missionary projects in southern Nigeria have, in their majority, sought to discourage or curb fetish-related practices.⁴⁴

A popular practice among Christian movements—be they pre-colonial or post-colonial—has been to demonize the culture of worshiping African fetishes and relics. In tandem with this, most (practicing) Nigerian Christians and Muslims—who constitute the majority of the Nigerian population—tend to ascribe negative connotations to the concepts of fetish and relics.⁴⁵ This is irrespective of the fact that enculturation and acculturation have spurred many among these Christians and Muslims into celebrating subtle forms of fetishism. A 2021 ethnographic study conducted by Uwaegbute reviews a number of pro-fetish movements led by Christian youths in the Igbo city of Nzuka.⁴⁶ The study reveals that, in spite of the puritanical doctrines of their respective churches, the Christian youths under study openly manifested their support for a number of pagan and fetish practices associated with a local masquerade. The youths under study claimed such support was fueled by their attachment to the Igbo culture, the urge to belong to their community, the communitarian aspect of masquerade celebrations and the youths’ desire to engineer cultural revivalism in their community, among other factors.

Although rare, cases studies like the one presented above do exist. Fetishes and relics are likely to be viewed as negative objects by most modern Nigerians. This is in great part

thanks to Christianity and Islam as well as the dominant narratives which associate fetishes and relics with criminal or lugubrious activities such as cultism, sorcery, pernicious sects, ritual killing, political violence and Satanism among other ills.⁴⁷ Only few liberal Christian faithful (like those presented in Uwaegbute's study cited above) tend to accommodate specific fetishes' celebration into their world view. While followers of Christian movements (particularly Pentecostals) tend to demonize the African fetish and relic worship, many devotees of Nigerian traditional religion have in various ways combined symbols of Christianity with their fetish-based rituals for greater efficacy of their spirituality.⁴⁸ In tandem with this, it is common to find oracles and fetish priests in Nigerian rural communities who use the Bible or other Christian symbols as their props.⁴⁹

The dynamics of fetish and relic worship in Nigeria has been a great source of inspiration for many Nigerian theatre artists and film directors. No doubt, fetishism is a dominant theme in many Nollywood films, particularly those that are concerned with themes such as voodoo, cultism and Christian proselytism in rural Nigeria, among others.⁵⁰ With imported religions dominating the world view of most modern Nigerians including Nollywood film directors, African fetishism is most times depicted negatively in Nigerian movies.⁵¹ In effect, this culture is mostly represented as being inferior to key Christian symbols and traditions such as the use of the crucifix, holy water, the Bible, or anointing oil as part of spiritual arsenals.⁵² Such inferiority is in terms of spiritual power and efficacy. It is only in rare epic, exotic or anthropological films that animism and African fetishes are sometimes glorified.⁵³ In most Christianity-based films (one of the genres which dominate in Nollywood), African fetishes are mostly depicted as exotic and undesirable artifacts; that is, as stuff that any right-thinking person should desist from using.

The Bible in the Nigerian Popular Imaginary

Like their western counterparts, Nigerian Christians understand the Bible as a holy book carrying God's prophetic message to humanity. As a book, it reveals God's love and grace as well as His boundless power to save and provide comfort to mankind. This popular perception does not however exclude the fact that the use of the Bible as a fetish or a sacred object is also pervasive in the country. Like the other strong symbols of Christianity (notably crucifixes, holy water and olive oil), the Bible is popularly believed to be vested with a variety of properties ranging from the power to repel paranormal forces to the ability to heal and provide good fortune. In a study aimed at surveying popular perceptions and uses of the Bible among Nigerians, Ukpong observes that the popular culture of deploying the Bible as both a defensive and offensive spiritual weapon is widespread in Nigeria.⁵⁴ By this popular culture, even illiterate people constantly and religiously place the Bible at strategic corners of their houses, offices or cars in guise of building defensive arsenals against spirits of darkness and attacks from haters. A copy of the Bible placed under the pillow for instance has, according to such popular Christian beliefs, the intrinsic power to neutralize and/or prevent nightmares. Such presence of the Bible is sufficient to let God grant you peaceful sleep/rest. Following such a belief, a pregnant woman will feel the necessity of putting a copy of the Bible under her pillow, hoping that by this act, God will never allow anything evil to happen to her and her unborn child.⁵⁵ Similarly, when placed in one's office, the Bible will spiritually "disinfect" the premises making them a more conducive environment for work. The belief in the Bible as a relevant disinfectant was recently made manifest when a good number of Nigerian Christians used various models of the New Testament to fabricate face and nose masks with which they hoped to protect themselves against the Coronavirus.⁵⁶

You also find Nigerian Christians who believe that the Bible attracts God's presence anywhere it is placed. Thus, such Christians believe that by dropping your Bible in any given

place, you symbolically and spiritually fill that place with the presence and power of God. The place miraculously becomes a protected, consecrated and sanctified space. By such presence, the place also becomes un-conducive to any evil attack or presence.

The use of the Bible as an offensive arsenal is often seen in prayer contexts. Many Nigerian Pentecostals pray holding and brandishing the Bible just like an indispensable accessory for a spiritual ritual. In such contexts, the Bible is not necessarily used for reading or quoting its contents for personal enlightenment or spiritual edification. Rather, the Bible is brandished as a holy object having the power of a spiritually sophisticated weapon. This is an interpretation of Ephesians 6:17, which states that the Word of God (in this case, the Bible) is “the sword of the Spirit” which the Christian is compelled to deploy in the battle against any spiritual adversary.

During what is popularly called deliverance or intercession prayers, it is not uncommon to see interceders lifting up their Bibles as “sacred gadgets” or “spiritual props” having the ability to invoke or relay the invisible powers of God. The Bible is also often used in such a context as an object through which divine powers may emanate to touch an affected soul (the person for whom they are interceding). This again, follows the popular belief that the material form of the Bible is a kind of multipurpose talisman.⁵⁷ Sharing corollaries, the General Overseer of the House of Prayer Ministry of all Nations, Segun Adewumi notes that the written words of the Bible are in themselves loaded with immense magical powers.⁵⁸ Such powers can activate both positive and negative spiritual energy. He writes:

It may surprise believers that invocation of the demonic forces could be done with the use of Bible verses, especially from the book of Psalms. The fact is that the words of the Bible are a collection of the supernatural laws often referred to as graphic. Bible verses are potent with spiritual power that can be released and applied through invocation made on the demons or the Holy Spirit. The words of the Bible are like the military weapons that cannot fight on their own. The gun requires a bullet and firing to create effect and impact. The igniting power, genuine or counterfeit will provide the result. The Holy Spirit is the genuine, while the demonic spirit is the counterfeit.⁵⁹

Not only the material form of the Bible but also its literary contents are used as fetish. Most often, specific books of the Bible like Psalms are mobilized in an incantatory mode. This is in line with the strong and popular belief that such psalms are vested with some magical powers. When recited together with specific divine names and sacred objects, psalms are believed in some charismatic Christian communities or movements to be a working formula to overcome specific challenges. In his book titled *The Mystical Powers of Psalms*, Aladura church pastor Nwokoro E.O. recommends the reading of specific psalms with accompanying actions to address specific unpleasant situations.⁶⁰ He prescribes the reading of Psalms 8 and 21, respectively, in cases of searching for success in business and to overcome danger on a journey or gain the favors of people in authority. The reading of these psalms is generally accompanied by a number of complimentary rituals, actions, or artifacts which are obscure or esoteric. For instance, when reading Psalm 8 in view of achieving business success, the person praying should say their prayer at sunset and apply pure olive oil on their face and hands after the prayer for three days. Similarly, a person reading Psalm 21 to attract the favors of “great men/women” should voice the biblical verse before leaving his house for the journey or interview. When doing that, they must be in their private room. They should face the East and use the Holy Name Jehovah Jehhakhî. Nwokoro prescribes more complex procedures in more serious situations like casting out devils. He writes that in case one longs to deliver another person from an evil spirit, the following steps must be respected:

Fill a new earthen bowl with running water, put 7 palm fronds, recite [Ps 29] 10 times [with] the Holy Name Ahha-Jehovah over the water and bathe the person possessed and he/she will surely be freed. If this is observed for 3 days with fasting, the person who caused the effect on the possessed will openly confess and regret his/her action.⁶¹

A similar practice consists in writing verses drawn from the book of Psalms on strategic parts of houses, notably on principal doors and on external walls as well as on the sides of cars to neutralize any potential source of nuisance and mortal threats. Adepts of this popular culture

also put psalm verses into well-chosen amulets and use such amulets for protection against paranormal creatures and evil powers. Nigerian prophet Ogunfuye (cited in Adamo), for instance, recommends physical and spiritual protection seekers to use Psalm 7, verse one, which reads, “Oh Lord my God, in thee I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me” as an infallible defensive arsenal. The prophet prescribes that this imprecatory psalm be written on a piece of paper and placed into a dedicated bag that will be slipped under one’s pillow accompanied by a prayer for protection.⁶² Adamo opines that psalms used in such context are most often aimed to activate God’s “righteous anger against injustice” and any offensive enemy.⁶³ As he puts it, the use of the psalms in such situations represents a way by which the imprecator takes the offender or enemies to the court of God. Such an initiative should be done with utmost care and in strict respect of the principle which states that he who goes to equity (that is the court of God) should have clean hands and should not be ill intentioned. In his words, “Admittedly, care must be taken in the use of the imprecatory Psalms for evil intention. It should only be used for God’s vengeance [...] All things must be submitted to God with humility and understanding that God is a righteous God.”⁶⁴

Thus, the Bible in the form of designated or strategically placed psalms is used conjointly with other esoteric artifacts as a formula to address diverse spiritual problems or solve difficult mysteries. This way of using the Bible illustrates African Christians’ tendency of reverting to traditional African solutions to quotidian problems. The tendency includes the conception and use of various Christian fetishes and talismans popularly believed to be infallible solutions to any spiritual or physical problem.

The Bible in Nollywood Films

Before delving into a discussion of ways in which the Bible is presented as a fetish or a relic in Nollywood films, it will be helpful to briefly present the Nollywood film industry, highlighting the place of the religious film genre within its evolution since the early part of the 1990s.

A Brief Presentation of Nollywood

Many commentators present Nollywood as the Nigerian film industry. However, it will be more plausible to describe it as a postmodern cinematic movement which sprang up in Nigeria in 1992 with the release of Kenneth Nebue's high grossing movie *Living in Bondage*. The industry is mainly characterized by a home video production culture. Entrepreneurs in the industry have departed from traditional Hollywood film production paradigms (e.g., celluloid film) by shooting and editing their films directly on video. They also base their productions on relatively meager budgets and follow a purely capitalist model of production and distribution which practically consist in going for stories that will likely appeal to (local) viewers.⁶⁵ Reliance on small budget and cheap video technology has enabled entrepreneurs in the industry to produce quickly and in quantity, even though such a production has generally been of very low quality compared to other big cinema industries such as Hollywood, European cinema, and Bollywood.

In 2009, UNESCO ranked Nollywood the third most prolific film industry in the world after Bollywood and Hollywood. This ranking, which was in terms of number of films produced, soon evolved to the second biggest film industry in the world after Bollywood. Presently, volume of production in Nollywood is estimated at 2500 films a year. In less than three decades the industry grew from a local travelling theater culture to a 590-600 million USD commercial giant, becoming Nigeria's second employer after the government.⁶⁶ The industry has also morphed into a pan-African or even global affair, spreading its tentacles to almost all sub-Saharan countries, most of the Caribbean countries, Asia, and African diasporas in North

America and Europe. Thus, although Nollywood may be unknown to some continental Europeans or Americans, it is a popular cinematic culture in African countries and among African Diasporas in the West.

Nollywood started as an industry dominated by romantic comedies, thrillers and dramas. However, over the years, new genres such as horror, musical comedies, nolly noir, period pieces and animations have been strong features of the industry. A genre which has particularly characterized Nollywood is religious films which intrinsically or extrinsically sell specific versions or doctrines of Nigerian spiritualities, particularly Nigerian Pentecostal Christianities. Examples include Mike Bamiloye's *Just a Little Sin* (1998), Peacemakers Outreach Ministries International's *Witches in the Church* (2004), Elvon Jarret's *Invasion from Hell* (2011), Kensteve Anuka's *Goddess and Pastor in Love* (2014) and Sammuell Arinze Eze's *The Power in the Bible* (2019), among others.

A good number of Nollywood Christian films popularize the myth of the superiority of imported religion (Christianity and Islam) over animism, ancient demons and other paranormal beings.⁶⁷ Christianity-based and Christian movies in particular generally emphasize the tendency among Nigerian Christians to associate any quotidian occurrence with the works of supernatural powers. They, among other things, report and mostly celebrate the Nigerian Christians' tendency of attributing any human challenge to some "enemy forces" working behind the scene. As reviewed by Amobi, these films tend to popularize the Nigerian fetish mindset. By such a mindset most, if not all setbacks in life and all health challenges or business misfortunes always have a spiritual cause.⁶⁸ They are the handwork of some evil powers and supernatural forces ever present and ever ready to antagonize humans. Everything that befalls a man must be reduced to a conflict between God and the devil and tackled with the assistance of reliable spiritual tools. Still by this fetish mindset, every dilemma is tackled best with the help of a very spiritual and powerful pastor who uses the bible in the same way a native prophet

or an oracle will use magic to resolve a mystery or a supernatural problem. Furthermore, this fetish mindset gives credence to the belief that there is always someone obstructing another person's progress with spiritual means and that one must use spiritual arms such as prayer, Christian relics and fetishes to survive and prosper in life.⁶⁹

Thus, religious Nollywood films glorify the culture of associating any unpleasant situation with the supernatural. They also tend to celebrate the popular culture of deploying Christian tools such as prayer, exorcism and prophecy among others, in the resolution of any dilemma or challenge in life. In so doing, they have most often advertised the perceived magical powers of strong Christian symbols such as crucifixes, olive oil, anointing oil, holy water and the Bible, as well as the indispensability of pastors, prophets and exorcists. Adesokan describes most Nollywood Christian films as being based on plots that emphasize the “manifestation of the power of the word of God for which the Bible becomes an accompanying fetish [and] not necessarily a book from which to read.”⁷⁰

The Bible as Fetish and Relic in Nollywood Films

The least one could say is that the fetishist conceptions about the Bible highlighted in the preceding sections of this discourse are reflected in most Nollywood Christianity-based films. One thing which is however striking is the ways in which Nollywood film directors most often deploy special effects to convey these fetishist conceptions about the Bible. At least two contexts can be explored to examine this striking use of special effects: (i) situations where the Bible is represented as an offensive or defensive spiritual weapon and (ii) scenes where the Bible is represented as an infallible solution to both natural and supernatural (spiritually provoked) illness.

The Bible as Offensive or Defensive Weapon

In contexts where the Bible is represented as a weapon, Nollywood film directors most often used explosive and firing effects that give the Bible the appearance, properties and function of a firearm. In such contexts, the Bible is made to ooze out meteor-like energy and to function either as a sort of portable mortar or a bomber that is powerful enough to shoot paranormal targets. In Ifeanyi Azodo's *Other Side of the Bible* (2015), for instance, the director deploys such special effects in a scene where a Minister of God (Mike Ezuruonye) confronts a village totalitarian king (Obi Okoli) who for a long time has used satanic powers to hypnotize and enslave his own subjects (see Plates 1 and 2). In this scene, the Minister of God uses a firing Bible first to block and neutralize the spiritual offensive of the wicked king and second, to launch a counter offensive with the same fetish-like Bible.



Plate 1: Man of God uses his Bible to block an attack in Ifeanyi Azodo's *Other Side of the Bible*

A similar scenario is observed in Dim Chibuikem's *The Hidden Sin* (2019), particularly in a scene where a group of evangelists get involved in a fierce face-off opposing them and three different powerful voodoo priests. The face-off aims at determining who among the four

parties will have the custody of the corpse of a wealthy cultist. The evangelists confront the three malevolent priests on the request of the deceased's daughter while their three adversaries (the voodoo priests) each want to keep the body of the deceased as the fulfillment of a secret pact which the latter separately entered with each of them before his death. In this scene, the leading member of the group of evangelists uses his Bible as an impermeable shield to block and divert the mystical 'missiles' his adversaries use against his collaborators and himself. He also uses the holy book as a firing weapon with which he successfully neutralizes the three voodoo priests.



Plate 2: Man of God uses his Bible to fire a witch in Ifeanyi Azodo's *Other Side of the Bible*

In another movie titled *The End Time Pastor* (2019), film director Malachy Ugwoke deploys a scene where a man of God is attacked at the middle of the night by an intruding occult entity. The intruder attempts to confound and kill the man of God with the aid of a strange but dreadful spiritual weapon. This is to no avail as the man of God is covered by a protective circle which is clearly powered by the man of God's Bible. The protective circle acts as a mystical shield behind which the religious man fervently prays and invokes the intervention of God,

brandishing his Bible menacingly against the dreadful aggressor. A smoke-like substance is profusely generated by the pastor's Bible. This substance moves rapidly and strikes the aggressor on his chest (see Plate 3). Neutralized and defeated, the aggressor disappears immediately.



Plate 3: Pastor uses his Bible to neutralise a paranormal creature in *The End Time Pastor*

The use of visual effects in the three examples given above could, at first look, be viewed more as an index aimed at suggesting that there is a fierce spiritual battle opposing Holy-Spirit-filled Christians and some paranormal forces in the scenes. This understanding stems from the logic that a mystical attack is naturally supposed to be invisible to natural or ordinary people and perceptible only to people who are initiated. However, at second look, the visual effects are indexical not only of the spiritual battle but also of the magical powers and efficacy of the Bible, particularly in the domains of spiritual protection and spiritual deliverance.

Additionally, the use of visual effects showing the supernatural potency of the Bible enables Nollywood directors to invest their films with a host of aesthetic features usually found

in most Hollywood action, horror, or science-fiction movies. The bibles which ooze out meteoric energy or kinds of bullets are in some ways similar to the sophisticated firearms that armies, notorious characters, and extra-terrestrial entities use in popular Hollywood action films such as James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), Roland Emmerich's *Stargates* (1994) and Robert Rodat's *Falling Skies* (2011), among others. Thus, through the fetishization of the Bible, Nollywood directors invest their films with the features of action movies; their films are actually action/war movies of some kind. By depicting the Bible as a fetish, Nollywood film directors also make their movies to look like popular Hollywood exorcist films such as Gil Kenan's *Poltergeist* (2015), Rupert Wainwright's *Stigmata* (1999), and William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). It may thus be said that Nollywood directors' depiction of the Bible as a fetish or relic participates in the adaptation of popular Hollywood tropes and aesthetics as well as the blending of global symbols with local imageries. In other words, Nollywood cineastes simultaneously replicate Hollywood aesthetics and imageries and dramatize/interpret local myths.

Besides replicating Hollywood film aesthetics, the depiction of the Bible as fetish enables the development of two core themes, namely, socio-political insecurity in Nigeria and the preponderance of the African/Nigerian belief system. The two themes are particularly topical issues in contemporary Nigeria. In effect, widespread religiosity has made most Nigerians to believe that life absolutely involves a series of battles against both physical and obscure forces. It is common to come across Nigerians who believe that any or most of the evil that befalls them or their neighbors is automatically the handwork of some occult powers operating within the spiritual realm or behind the scene. These powers are so dreadful and solid that only the supernatural and supreme power of God (or the gods) may provide adequate protection. Governed by this belief or similar myths, many conservative Nigerians have entrenched the culture of seeking supernatural protection either from traditional priests and pernicious sects or from prophetic/messianic movements. In a bid to provide this protection,

many messianic and charismatic Nigerian churches strongly encourage their devotees to believe in the invincible powers of the Bible and other religious artifacts such as the crucifix, anointing oil, holy water, and the pictures of saints and prophets, among others. Nollywood directors simply tap into all these popular beliefs to represent the Bible as a fetish or relic. It goes without saying that through their representations of the Bible, Nollywood films perpetuate both the Nigerian belief system and the concept of the spiritual potency of the Bible.

The Bible as Therapeutic Solution for Mystically Provoked Illnesses

Scenes where the Bible is represented as a cure for natural and supernatural malaises also integrate a great deal of visual and sound special effects. One however observes that instead of the explosive and warlike effects used in contexts where the Bible is to be presented as a weapon, film directors here tend to deploy relatively different and milder artifacts to suggest the magical powers of the Bible. Some of the artifacts or effects used here include a Bible that radiates or one that generates an ardent or dazzling light, sparks, or smoke-like signs (See Plates 4 and 5). In Pascal Atuma's *Lagos Billionaires* for instance, a scene is designed around the spiritual power and prowess of a pastor who, while interceding for a mentally ill person, places his Bible on the head of the latter. The Bible radiates and generates sparks and smoke-like signs and the man in distress immediately recovers from his mental malaise.



Plate 4: A Bible generating thunder and lightening in Nkem Alu's *The Mighty Power of the Bible*

In Nkem Alu's *The Mighty Power of the Holy Bible* (2017), a similar dramatization of the perceived fetish nature of the Bible is done in a scene where a pastor visits a sick woman in her hospital bed. The woman is in a coma and has her body entirely punctuated with grave wounds. The pastor prays for the woman and in the process, he applies his Bible on the woman's wounds. Lightning emanates from the open pages of the pastor's Bible and touches the sick woman. Immediately, the sick woman recovers her health to the astonishment of nurses present on the scene.

The depiction of the Bible in Nollywood films as a working therapeutic solution enables Nigerian film directors to develop another set of topical themes. One of these themes is the failure or unreliability of the Nigerian/African health system *versus* the infallibility of religious/spiritual solutions. Many of the films which depict the Bible as a working therapy tend to suggest that Nigerian medical centers are poorly equipped and inefficacious so long as they have a deficit in spiritual tools and strategies. This naturally follows from the popular belief that many sicknesses dealt with in Nigerian health care establishments have their roots in supernatural sources. In other words, Nollywood film directors tend to suggest that many of the sicknesses taken to Nigerian hospitals and dispensaries warrant supernatural approaches of which the Bible is one, and they support this belief through their representation of the Bible.

Another striking thing in Nollywood films' representation of the Bible lies in the fact that most often, the Bibles that radiate fire and do wonders are those held or owned by pastors and prophets and not ordinary Christians. In effect, in most cases, it is the Bibles of pastors, prophets or evangelists, and not those of their followers or companions, that have such magical powers. In scenes involving battles between a group of Christians and paranormal entities, it is most often the Bible of the spiritual leader (pastor, prophet, or apostle) which ends up being the efficacious solution. In Dim Chibuikem's *The Hidden Sin* (2019), for instance, the concluding scene of the film shows a group of evangelists involved in a fierce face-off with three different

powerful voodoo oracles. In the spiritual battle, it is the Bible of the group's leader which makes the difference and gives the group the ultimate victory over their adversaries.

The above observation brings to the fore two notions. The first is the concept of the Bible being represented as a relic or an object "spiritually contaminated" by its owners. In other words, the Bible is represented as a holy and powerful object which is just an extension of its owner (the pastor, prophet, apostle or religious leader). The second notion to underscore here is the popular belief that these men of God are replicas of traditional oracles or native doctors (locally called "babalaos"). This is suggested by the fact that the manipulation of the Bible by these men in such Nollywood films is in many regards similar to native doctors' utilization of local fetishes for healing or for arresting spiritual challenges. First, these men of God, together with their Bibles, are in most cases depicted as the only contact point through which other characters in the film experience the presence and power of God. Secondly, the men of God are depicted as the elect and anointed, called to save other characters from deadly situations. Third, their spiritual arsenal, the Bible, is depicted as a *sine qua non* for success in any spiritual battle. Such a representation of the Bible and its owners calls to mind the function and *modus operandis* of native doctors or oracles in the traditional Nigerian society. In effect, in traditional Nigeria, native doctors and oracles use fetishes as *sine qua non* instruments in their spiritual operations. They are the only contact point and intermediaries between spirits/the gods and humans. In some ways, they are the voice, eyes, and "generals" of the gods.



Plate 5: Magic Power of the Bible implied through the use of dazzling light

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Nollywood films are a reflection of the Nigerian social system. The films tap into a variety of myths and doctrines prevalent in the Nigerian society, particularly among Christians. One of these myths that fuel the contents of Nollywood films is the belief that the Bible has magical powers. In line with this myth, the Bible, otherwise known as the word of God can be used to fight spiritual battles, neutralize paranormal creatures/spirits, heal spiritually provoked sicknesses and deter satanic spirits from having access to specific spaces, among other purposes. Nollywood films have been dramatizing and popularizing this fetishist belief related to the Bible in various ways.

This essay has identified the use of visual and sound effects as one of the procedures utilized by Nollywood film directors to naturalize and popularize the fetishist beliefs around the Bible. The effects popularly used by Nollywood film directors include radiating bibles, open pages of the Bible that generate dazzling light, and fire or meteoric energy with which pastors counter the attacks to satanic forces or deliver people in distress. The use of such special effects

exaggerates the perceived magical powers of the Bible as it is hard in the literature available to find testimonials from people who have witnessed or benefited from such spectacular manifestations of God's intervention through the material Bible.

The use of the sound and visual effects mentioned above also helps popularize a myth which, although pervasive, is not enjoying the general acceptability of members of Nigerian or African churches. In effect, a good number of critics have debunked or castigated this myth and culture of using the Bible as fetish or relic. Detractors from this myth have mostly viewed such use of the Bible as a deceptive and heretical current rooted in African animism.⁷¹ To such critics, using the Bible as a fetish or relic is no other thing than superimposing animism on presumed Christian traditions. In other words, it is adulterating or syncretizing Christianity. A case in point is the United Evangelical Mission which recognizes the contents of the Bible as the basis of its doctrine and its evangelical and deliverance related actions, but rejects the idea of using the material Bible as a symbol and a fetish during deliverance sessions.⁷² In the same line of thought, the African Bible Study criticizes Christians' tendency of using the Bible as a fetish. The Christian organization argues that such use of the Bible is reminiscent of tenets of African traditional religions.⁷³ In light of these critiques, it is worth noting the contrast between the ways in which the Bible is depicted in Nollywood films and the way the Bible is viewed by African Christian organizations. When we are aware of this difference, we can have a more accurate understanding of African Christianity, rather than relying on media presentations that exaggerate the use of Bible as fetish.

¹Okechukwu, Daniel. "Old Nollywood Demonized Traditional Religions. New Cinema Says 'No More'". *African Argument*, Accessed September 9, 2021 from <https://africanarguments.org/2020/01/old-nollywood-demonised-traditional-religions-new-cinema-says-no-more/>

²Matory, L.J. *The fetish revisited*. (London: Duke University Press, 2018), 19.

³Knight, K. (2017). Fetishism. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (London: Cambridge), Accessed September 30, 2019 from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06052b.htm>

⁴Knight, *Fetishism*, 5.

⁵Pemberton, Kelly. "Muslim Women Mystics and Female Spiritual Authority in South Asian Sufism", *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 18, no. 2, (2004), 1-23; Aiyub, Palmer. "Introduction", In *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi's Theory of Wilaya and the Reenvisioning of the Sunni Caliphate*, ed. Aiyub, Palmer, (London: Brill, 2019), 1-30.

⁶Wharton, W.B. "Relics, Protestants, Things", *Material Religion*, 10, no. 4 (2014), 415.

⁷ Wharton, "Relics, Protestants, Things," 415.

⁸Geisbusch, W.J. "Awkward Objects: Relics, the Making of Religious Meaning, and the Limit of Controlling the Information Age." A PhD Thesis Submitted to the University College of London, 2008.

⁹The Council of Trent (Twenty Fifth Session), *The Cannons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, ed and Trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 234.

¹⁰ John Ambrose McHugh and Charles J. Callan, trans. *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* (Literary Licensing LLC, 2011 [1923]), 227.

¹¹The Watchtower, "Should Christian Worship Relics", *The Watchtower*, 5, no.11/15, (1950), 457

¹²Calvin, John, *A Treatise on Relics*, (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter and Co, 1870), 162

¹³ Calvin, *Treatise on Relics*, 162.

¹⁴ The Watchtower, "Should Christian Worship Relics?", 459.

¹⁵ Turner W. Harold, "The Hidden Power of the Whites. The Secret Religion Withheld from the Primal People", *Archives de Sciences Sociales*, 46, no. 1, (1978).

¹⁶Turner, "The Hidden Power of the Whites", 44.

¹⁷Alvarez, C. "Pentecostalism in Latin America and the Caribbean". In *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, ed. Palmer Collins, A. and Gale, T., (Detroit: MacMillan, 2006), 212.

¹⁸ Alvarez, "Pentecostalism in Latin America", 212.

¹⁹LeMarquand, G. "The Bible as Specimen, Talisman and Dragoman in Africa: A look at some African Use of Psalms and 1 Corinthians 12-13". *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 22, no.2,(2012), 189-199.

²⁰LeMarquand, "The Bible as Specimen", 195.

²¹Vengeyi, O. "An Analysis of the Indigenous Pentecostal Churches of Zimbabwe's Magical Conception of the Bible. In *From Text to Practice. The Role of the Bible in Daily Living of African People Today*, ed. Kugler, J. & Gunda, M.R., (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013), 85.

²²The Shona are an ethnic ground in southern Africa. They occupy parts of Zimbabwe and South Africa.

²³ Vengeyi, "An Analysis of Indigenous Pentecostal Churches", 97-98.

²⁴Sanders, U.L.. "Changing after the Cross: The Early Life of Rev. John Chol Daau." A MAR Thesis Submitted to the Trinity School for Ministry,2011.; Vengeyi, "An Analysis of Indigenous Pentecostal Churches", 97-98; Carter, J.O. *Inside the Whirlwind : The Book of Job through African Eyes*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017.

²⁵ Cited in Carter, "Inside the Whirlwind", 21.

²⁶ John Chol Daau is a Sudanese man who spent his childhood as a refugee.

²⁷Otherwise called “Dinka”, the Jieng is an ethnic group occupying various parts of East African. They mainly occupy South Sudan.

²⁸ Cited in Sanders, “Changing after the Cross,” 5.

²⁹LeMarquand, “The Bible as Specimen,” 190.

³⁰Ukpong, Justin, “Popular Readings of the Bible in Africa and Implications for Academic Readings”, In *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald West and Musa Dube, (Leiden: Brill.2000), 588-605; Ashon, Enimil, “Fetishes and Charms – Bible by Africans for Africans. *Graphic Online*. Accessed May 4, 2020 at <https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/opinion/fetishes-and-charms-bible-by-africans-for-africans.html>;

³¹Remington, X., “Why do Crosses, Holy Water and Bibles have Powers over Paranormal Entities. *Mystic Investigations*, Accessed March 13, 2020 from <https://mysticinvestigations.com/paranormal/why-do-various-religious-artifacts-have-power-over-paranormal-entities/>

³²Remington, “Why do Crosses”, 1.

³³Amadi, Elechi. *The Ethics in Nigerian Cultures*, (Lagos: Bookraft, 2005); Metala, A.C. “Christianity and African Culture in Nigeria”, *Journal of Religion and Theology*, 3, no.2, (2019), 26-33.

³⁴Aminu, Alhaji B., “Da’wah towards Alleviating Spirit Worship and Devil Possession (Bori) in Hausaland (Northern Nigeria)”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 4, no.7, (2015). 9-12.; Strother, Z.S., “‘Breaking Juju,’ Breaking Trade. Museums and the Culture of Iconoclasm in Southern Nigeria”, *RES*, 68, (2017), 21-41.

³⁵Chiorazzi, A. “The Spirituality of Africa”. *Harvard Gazette*, (October 17, edition, 2015), 29..Accessed July 26, 2021, from <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/10/the-spirituality-of-africa/>

³⁶ Chiorazzi, The Spirituality”, 29.; Beyers, J., “What is Religion? An African Understanding”, *Hervormde Theological Studies*, 66, no.1, (2010), 1-8.

³⁷Matory, “*The fetish revisited*”, 19.

³⁸ Oviasuji, P.O., Ajagun, O. and Isiraojie, L. “Fetish Oath Taking in Nigerian Politics and Administration: Bane of Development”. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 27, no.3, (2011), 193-200.

³⁹Anaukwu, K.O., The Advent of Christianity in Omabala Area of Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State. An MA thesis submitted to the National Open University of Nigeria, (2012); Nwaka, Chiamaka J., “The Return of the Gods? Trends and Implications of the Rising Popularity of Fetish Rituals and Occult Practices among Nigerian youths”, *Africa Development*, XLV, no.3, (2020), 53-76.

⁴⁰Akure, Dada, .Peter. “Cherubim and Seraphim Seals Four Churches in Ondo for Fetish Activities”, *Vanguard*, April 7 edition, (2021), 21.

⁴¹Sammuel, T. “End Time Shocker. See the 8 Times Nigerian Pastors’ have Allowed the Devil to Use Them Badly”, *Tori ng*. Accessed September 9, 2021 from <https://www.tori.ng/news/45166/end-time-shocker-see-the-8-times-nigerian-pastors.html>

⁴²Abar, Emmanuel M. “Islam, Christianity, traditional religions and power politics in Northern Nigeria since pre-Islamic period.” A PhD Thesis submitted to Andrews University, 2019.

⁴³Tasie, ‘From Ritual to Film”, 24.

⁴⁴Amadi, “Ethics in Nigerian Cultures”, 19.

⁴⁵Matory, “*The fetish revisited*”, 19.

⁴⁶Uwaegbute, Ikechuckwu .Kingsley, “Christianity and Masquerade Practices among Youth in Nsukka, Nigeria” *African Studies*, 80, no.1, (2021), 40-59.

⁴⁷Oviasuji, Ajagun and Isiraojie, “Fetish Oath Taking in Nigerian”, 195.

⁴⁸Nugteren, Albertina. *Religion, Ritual and Ritualistic Objects* (Basel: MPI Publishing, 2019).

⁴⁹ Akungba, A., Religious Interaction among Akoko of Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 8, no.18, (2018), 42-54.; Taliani, S. “Coercion, Fetishes and Suffering in the Daily Lives of Young Nigerian Women in Italy”, *Africa*, 82, no.4, (2012), 579-608.

⁵⁰Olawole, Famule F., Art and Spirituality. The Ijumu Northeastern Yoruba Egugun. A PhD Thesis Submitted to the University of Arizona,2020; Afolayan, S. “The Aesthetics of alienation in modern Nigerian drama: A Marxist reading of Obafemi’s Suicide Syndrome”, *European Scientific Journal*, 8, no.11, (2018), 108-124. Uwah, Innocent Ebere. From Rituals to Films : A Case Study of the Visual Rhetoric of Igbo Culture in Nollywood. A PhD thesis submitted to Seventh Day Adventist Theological Seminary, Dublin City University, 2009.

⁵¹Madukasi, Francis Chucks. “Divine Rites of Kings and Rituals of Royal Regalia: Its Symbolism and Ensemble among the Traditional Igbo People of South-Eastern Nigeria” *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 8, no.4, (2021), 1-19.

⁵² Okechuckwu, “Old Nollywood Demonized Traditional Religions”, 15; Tasie “African traditional Religion”, 26.

⁵³ Okechuckwu, “Old Nollywood Demonised Traditional Religions”, 15.

⁵⁴Ukpong , “Popular Readings of the Bible”, 588.

⁵⁵Ashon, “Fetishes and Charms”, 52.

⁵⁶The Net Naija A Woman Using a Mini Bible as Face Mask against the Novel Coronavirus”, *The Net Naija*. Accessed May 4, 2020, at <https://www.thenetnaija.com/forum/entertainment/social-media/75845-woman-mini-bible-face-mask-coronavirus-video>

⁵⁷LeMarquand, “The Bible as Specimen”, 195.

⁵⁸Adewumi, Segun,“What Believers should Know about Juju Medicine”,*The Guardian*, (May 14 edition), 31, Accessed May 4, 2020, at <https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/ibru-ecumenical-centre/what-believers-should-know-about-juju-medicine-part-1/>

⁵⁹Adewumi, “What Believers should Know”, 31.

⁶⁰Nwokoro, E.O, *The Mystic Power of the Psalms: On Selected Chapters for Daily Use*. (Calabar: MAP, 1994).

⁶¹Nwokoro, “The Mystic Power of Psalms”, 8.

⁶²Adamo, D.T.,“The Imprecatory Psalms in African Context”. In *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, ed., David T. Adamo, (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2006),146-162.

⁶³ Adamo, “The Imprecatory Psalms”, 151.

⁶⁴Adamo, “The Imprecatory Psalms”, 151.

⁶⁵Endong, Floribert. Patrick C. and Vareba, Anthony L. “Debunking the Concepts of Double Standard and African Inferiority Complex in Nollywood Criticism”. In *Reflections on Theatre, Media and Human Conditions: A festschrift in honor of Edde Iji*. ed.Adora U. & Adie U. (Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2018), 173-181.

⁶⁶Oh, Emmanuel,“Nigeria’s Film Industry: Nollywood Looks to Expand Globally. *Executive Briefings on Trade*, (New York: United States International Trade Commission USITC, 2014), 1-3.

⁶⁷Uwah “From Ritual to Film”, 3; Tasie, “African Traditional Religion”, 24.

⁶⁸Amobi Ifeoma T., “Perception and Implications of the Theme of the Supernatural in Nigeria’s Igbo Home Video Movies” In *Emergence, Growth and Challenges of Films and Home Videos in Nigeria*, ed. Olufemi Onabajo and Ritchard M’Bayo, (Lagos: African Renaissance Books Incorporated, 2009), 184-204.

⁶⁹Ikwuagwu, A. Onwumere, Initiation in African Traditional Religion, A PhD Thesis Submitted to the Julius-Maximilians Universität, 2017.

⁷⁰Adesokan, Adeniran. “Jesus Christ, Executive Producer: Pentecostal Parapolitics in Nollywood”, In *State and Culture in Post-Colonial Africa: Enchantments*, ed. Tejumola O, (Indiana: Indiana University Press 2017), 199.

⁷¹ Timo, Kallinen. Christianity, Fetishism and the Development of Secular Politics in Ghana: A Dumontian Approach”, *Anthropological Theory*, 14, n.2, (2014), 153-168.

⁷² United Evangelical Mission, *UEM Africa Region, Think tank on Magic, Witchcraft, Demon Beliefs and Deliverance. Pastoral and Theological Foundations for a Deliverance Ministry in UEM Member Churches*, (Butare: United Evangelical Mission), 2012.

⁷³ Ashon, Fetishes and charms, 52.

References

Abar, Emmanuel M. Islam, Christianity, traditional religions and power politics in Northern Nigeria since pre-Islamic period. A PhD Thesis submitted to Andrews University, 2019.

Adamo, D.T., “The Imprecatory Psalms in African Context”. In *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective*, ed., David T. Adamo, (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2006), 146-162.

Adesokan, Adeniran. “Jesus Christ, Executive Producer: Pentecostal Parapolitics in Nollywood”, In *State and Culture in Post-Colonial Africa: Enchantments*, ed. Tejumola O, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 199.

Adewumi, Segun, “What Believers should Know about Juju Medicine”, *The Guardian*, (May 14 edition), 31, Accessed May 4, 2020, at <https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/ibru-ecumenical-centre/what-believers-should-know-about-juju-medicine-part-1/>

Afolayan, S. “The Aesthetics of alienation in modern Nigerian drama: A Marxist reading of Obafemi’s Suicide Syndrome”, *European Scientific Journal*, 8, no.11, (2018), 108-124.

Aiyub, Palmer. “Introduction”, In *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi’s Theory of Wilaya and the Reenvisioning of the Sunni Caliphate*, ed. Aiyub, Palmer, (London: Brill, 2019), 1-30.

Akungba, A., Religious Interaction among Akoko of Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 8, no.18, (2018), 42-54.; Taliani, S. “Coercion, Fetishes and Suffering in the Daily Lives of Young Nigerian Women in Italy”, *Africa*, 82, no.4, (2012), 579-608.

Akure, Dada, .Peter. “Cherubim and Seraphim Seals Four Churches in Ondo for Fetish Activities”, *Vanguard*, April 7 edition, (2021), 21.

Alvarez, C. “Pentecostalism in Latin America and the Caribbean”. In *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, ed. Palmer Collins, A. and Gale, T., (Detroit: MacMillan, 2006), 200-212.

Amadi, Elechi. *The Ethics in Nigerian Cultures*, (Lagos: Bookraft, 2005); Metala, A.C. “Christianity and African Culture in Nigeria”, *Journal of Religion and Theology*, 3, no.2, (2019), 26-33.

Aminu, Alhaji B., “Da’wah towards Alleviating Spirit Worship and Devil Possession (Bori) in Hausaland (Northern Nigeria)”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 4, no.7, (2015). 9-12.

Amobi Ifeoma T. "Perception and Implications of the Theme of the Supernatural in Nigeria's Igbo Home Video Movies" In *Emergence, Growth and Challenges of Films and Home Videos in Nigeria*, ed. Olufemi Onabajo and Ritchard M'Bayo, (Lagos: African Renaissance Books Incorporated, 2009), 184-204.

Ashon, Enimil, "Fetishes and Charms – Bible by Africans for Africans. *Graphic Online*. Accessed May 4, 2020 at <https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/opinion/fetishes-and-charms-bible-by-africans-for-africans.html>.

Beyers, J., "What is Religion? An African Understanding", *Hervormde Theological Studies*, 66, no.1, (2010), 1-8.

Calvin, John, *A Treatise on Relics* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter and Co, 1870).

Carter, J.O. *Inside the Whirlwind : The Book of Job through African Eyes* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017).

Chiorazzi, A. "The Spirituality of Africa". *Harvard Gazette*, (October 17, edition, 2015), 29, Accessed July 26, 2021, from <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/10/the-spirituality-of-africa/>

Endong, Floribert. Patrick C. and Vareba, Anthony L. "Debunking the Concepts of Double Standard and African Inferiority Complex in Nollywood Criticism". In *Reflections on Theatre, Media and Human Conditions: A festschrift in honor of Edde Iji*. ed. Adora U. & Adie U. (Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2018), 173-181.

Geisbusch, W.J. *Awkward Objects: Relics, the Making of Religious Meaning, and the Limit of Controlling the Information Age*. A PhD Thesis Submitted to the University College of London, 2008.

Ikwuagwu, A. Onwumere, *Initiation in African Traditional Religion*, A PhD Thesis Submitted to the Julius-Maximilians Universität, 2017.

Knight, K., *Fetishism*. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (London: Cambridge), Accessed September 30, 2019 from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06052b.htm>

LeMarquand, G. "The Bible as Specimen, Talisman and Dragoman in Africa: A look at some African Use of Psalms and 1 Corinthians 12-13". *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 22, no.2, (2012), 189-199.

Madukasi, Francis Chucks. "Divine Rites of Kings and Rituals of Royal Regalia: Its Symbolism and Ensemble among the Traditional Igbo People of South-Eastern Nigeria" *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 8, no.4, (2021), 1-19.

Matory, L.J. *The fetish revisited*. (London: Duke University Press, 2018).

Nugteren, Albertina. *Religion, Ritual and Ritualistic Objects*. (Basel: MPI Publishing, 2019).

Nwaka Anaukwu, K.O., *The Advent of Christianity in Omabala Area of Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State*. An MA thesis submitted to the National Open University of Nigeria (2012).

Nwaka, Chiamaka J., "The Return of the Gods? Trends and Implications of the Rising Popularity of Fetish Rituals and Occult Practices among Nigerian youths", *Africa Development*, XLV, no.3, (2020), 53-76.

Nwokoro, E.O, *The Mystic Power of the Psalms: On Selected Chapters for Daily Use*. (Calabar: MAP, 1994).
Oh, Emmanuel, "Nigeria's Film Industry: Nollywood Looks to Expand Globally. *Executive Briefings on Trade*, (New York: United States International Trade Commission USITC, 2014), 1-3.

Okechukwu, "Old Nollywood Demonized Traditional Religions", 15; Tasie "African traditional Religion", 26.

Okechukwu, Daniel. "Old Nollywood Demonized Traditional Religions. New Cinema Says 'No More'". *African Argument*, Accessed September 9, 2021 from <https://africanarguments.org/2020/01/old-nollywood-demonised-traditional-religions-new-cinema-says-no-more/>

Olawole, Famule F., *Art and Spirituality. The Ijumu Northeastern Yoruba Egugun*. A PhD Thesis Submitted to the University of Arizona, 2020.

Oviasuji, P.O., Ajagun, O. and Isiraojie, L. "Fetish Oath Taking in Nigerian Politics and Administration: Bane of Development". *Journal of Social Sciences*, 27, no.3, (2011), 193-200.

Pemberton, Kelly. "Muslim Women Mystics and Female Spiritual Authority in South Asian Sufism", *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 18, no. 2, (2004), 1-23.

Remington, X., "Why do Crosses, Holy Water and Bibles have Powers over Paranormal Entities. *Mystic Investigations*, Accessed March 13, 2020 from <https://mysticinvestigations.com/paranormal/why-do-various-religious-artifacts-have-power-over-paranormal-entities/>

Sammuel, T. "End Time Shocker. See the 8 Times Nigerian Pastors' have Allowed the Devil to Use Them Badly", *Tori ng*. Accessed September 9, 2021 from <https://www.tori.ng/news/45166/end-time-shocker-see-the-8-times-nigerian-pastors.html>

Sanders, U.L.. "Changing after the Cross: The Early Life of Rev. John Chol Daau." A MAR Thesis Submitted to the Trinity School for Ministry, 2011.

Strother, Z.S., "'Breaking Juju,' Breaking Trade. Museums and the Culture of Iconoclasm in Southern Nigeria", *RES*, 68, (2017), 21-41.

The Council of Trent (Twenty Fifth Session), *The Cannons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, ed and Trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 232-89.

The Net Naija. "A Woman Using a Mini Bible as Face Mask against the Novel Coronavirus", *The Net Naija*. Accessed May 4, 2020, at <https://www.thenetnaija.com/forum/entertainment/social-media/75845-woman-mini-bible-face-mask-coronavirus-video>

The Watchtower, "Should Christian Worship Relics", *The Watchtower*, 5, no.11/15, (1950), 457.

Timo, Kallinen. Christianity, Fetishism and the Development of Secular Politics in Ghana: A Dumontian Approach", *Anthropological Theory*, 14, n.2, (2014), 153-168.

Turner, W. Harold, "The Hidden Power of the Whites. The Secret Religion Withheld from the Primal People", *Archives de Sciences Sociales*, 46, no. 1, (1978), 44.

Ukpong, Justin, "Popular Readings of the Bible in Africa and Implications for Academic Readings", In *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald West and Musa Dube, (Leiden: Brill.2000), 588-605.

United Evangelical Mission, *UEM Africa Region, Think tank on Magic, Witchcraft, Demon Beliefs and Deliverance. Pastoral and Theological Foundations for a Deliverance Ministry in UEM Member Churches*, (Butare: United Evangelical Mission), 2012.

Uwaegbute, Ikechuckwu .Kingsley, "Christianity and Masquerade Practices among Youth in Nsukka, Nigeria" *African Studies*, 80, no.1, (2021), 40-59.

Uwah, Innocent Ebere. *From Rituals to Films : A Case Study of the Visual Rhetoric of Igbo Culture in Nollywood*. A PhD thesis submitted to Seventh Day Adventist Theological Seminary, Dublin City University, 2009.

Vengeyi, O. "An Analysis of the Indigenous Pentecostal Churches of Zimbabwe's Magical Conception of the Bible. In *From Text to Practice. The Role of the Bible in Daily Living of African People Today*, ed. Kugler, J. & Gunda, M.R., (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013), 85.

Wharton, W.B. "Relics, Protestants, Things", *Material Religion*, 10, no. 4, (2014), 400-415.