Religion, Religiosity, Leadership Nexus and the Marxist Ideology in Adeoluwa Owu's Adire

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Abstract

The complex religious background and diverse cultural setting of Nigeria make it a nation to investigate the intersections of religion, religiosity, leadership style and ideological drive. With roughly half of its population as Christians and the other half as Muslims, Nigeria has been the site of ongoing tensions and debates around women's rights, religious identity, leadership and the role of religion in public life. This study, therefore, examines religion, religiosity and the Marxists ideology in Adeoluwa Owu's widely celebrated film, Adire. The study adopts the content analysis method, and reveals that religious beliefs and practices often shape economic behaviour and vice versa. It is also revealed that religion empowerment and traditional power structures often shape social norms and perpetuate inequalities in Nigerian and indeed, most African societies. The study concludes that religious syncretism promotes cultural resilience, and that the fusion of traditional African spirituality with contemporary expressions of faith demonstrates the adaptability of religious beliefs and practices in the face of social change and external pressures.

Keywords: *Religion, Religiosity, Leadership, Marxist Ideology, Adire*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a fertile ground from which one can explore how gender, religion, leadership and empowerment intersect. With roughly half of its population as Christians and the other half as Muslims, Nigeria has been the site of the ongoing tensions and debates around women's rights, religious identity, and the role of religion in public life, viewed from the leadership perspective. These debates are mirrored in Nigerian cultural productions, such as film and literature in different productions and performance outlets that bring to the fore challenges and societal demands placed on women.

Contemporary Nigeria has been deeply studied by researchers looking into the union of advocacy, belief, and female efficacy. This circumspect investigation has demonstrated in detail many complex realities that apply to religious beliefs and the havens they create and the way they promote and or frustrate traditional roles and positions of power between the genders. One thing that the academics have attempted to investigate is the attitudes and actions that are deep-rooted in every religious dogma in Nigeria, which promotes social injustice that inflicted on the right to equality by the female gender. The study finds that this devastation is palpable, as it limits the women in Africa's most powerful country from partaking in its wealth drawing and their prevention from being masters of their own destiny. Nonetheless, there is a chink in the armor, given the instance that empowering religion, emancipating resistance, appears to them as the key to unlock the chains of suppression, the answer to their long suffering and dark years of pain in a marginalised society.

The complex religious background and diverse cultural setting of Nigeria make it a special place to investigate these intersections. Consequently, Adeoluwa Owu's 2023 film *Adire* exposes the tensions between orthodox religious viewpoints and the rights of women, thereby raising significant questions about the adjustment of collective and individual expectations in women's roles and rights through religion. The movie is set in a small community while its story revolves around a yarn of Sister Adire, who is previously a sex supplier that later

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turns to engaging in serious business to restore her monetary destination and discover some sense of objective in her life.

The film, *Adire* is the primary focus of this study, which represents the microcosm of the contemporary Nigeria. It explores the nexus between religion, gender, leadership and empowerment in the Nigerian society where a lot of varied cross-cutting issues, debate of scholars seeking to champion the causes of women. Women are perceived as harassed, oppressed, and neglected, and left alone to fight for their rights. In examining the film, the study puts on the spotlight the many forms of the oppression waged against women as a consequence of religion, religiosity, leadership disposition on the other hands and the effort by Muslim women to overcome it.

Women empowerment, religious diversity, and societal changes are subject to debate, and this is the specific objective of the research, a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the issues in question, using as many layers as necessary to address the intersection between religion and gender, the difficulties faced by women as they try to ensure their respect, and the possibility of pushing society to develop a new understanding on the concept of womanhood and in the end, on humanity at large.

The objectives of the paper are to add to add to the emerging discourse on religion and gender empowerment in African hence, the choice of *Adire* to navigate the discourse. The purpose is to eradicate irregular ideologies, especially those aimed at fostering development, particularly as it affects female gender encroachment and women's advancement. The film *Adire* is adequately analysed through a Marxist theory lens, it offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between religion, leadership, social hierarchies, ideological control, and resistance in contemporary African societies. This paper unlocks a heretofore unseen door into the *Adire,* a sanction-chafing film, rife with the moral tension, twixt religion, sex, and the liberation of scriptural spinster nuance. To Musa (1999, p. 29), religion is often pathetically seen as

A subjective, emotional, psychological and spiritual link between man and the elements in the cycle of life…a phenomenon of man's existence (and) the bedrock of man's numerous phenomena. It is man's culture as well as his moral ethics of generation and regeneration.

Drawing from this paper submits that religion is a social phenomenon, summarily described as a complete process of social habitation, mutual understanding, peaceful co-existence and critical reflection on the 'here' and the 'hereafter.' How it has been ben a catalyst for the emancipation of ideology, which has affected women, leadership and Marxist ideology is the focus of this paper.

Theoretical Frame-work: Marxist Theory

Marxist theory, propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-19th century, emerged as a critique of capitalist societies and a call for revolutionary transformation towards a classless society (Marx & Engels, 1848). Since its inception, Marxist theory has had a profound influence on various academic disciplines, including sociology, economics, and cultural studies (Koller, 2019, p. 33). At the core of Marxist theory lies the concept of class struggle, which posits that social and economic inequalities result from the exploitation of the working class (proletariat) by the ruling class (bourgeoisie) (Wayne, 2016, p. 44). This exploitation is facilitated by the bourgeoisie's control over the means of production, leading to the extraction of surplus value from the labor of the proletariat (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2008, p. 58).

Marxist theory emphasises the role of ideology in maintaining class domination, arguing that the ruling class uses various institutions, such as education, religion, and culture, to propagate ideas that legitimize their power and maintain the status quo (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 68). Additionally, Marxist theory highlights the importance of revolutionary consciousness and class solidarity in challenging and ultimately overthrowing capitalist systems of exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1848). In the context of the film, *Adire*, Marxist theory provides a lens for analyzing the power dynamics between characters and the broader social structures that shape their experiences (Olatunji, 2016, p. 25). By examining the ways in which characters like Adire navigate and challenge the dominant patriarchal and class-based power structures, Marxist film analysis illuminates the transformative potential of individual and collective resistance (Folorunso & Oladiti, 2018, p. 57).

Marxist theory as applied in this paper, offers a critical lens for examining religion's role in perpetuating social hierarchies, maintaining ideological control, and reinforcing class divisions. Central to Marxist thought is the concept of class struggle, wherein the bourgeoisie (capitalists) exploit the labour of the proletariat (workers) in order to maintain their wealth and power. Marxist analyses of religion focus on the ways religious institutions, beliefs, and practices contribute to this exploitative system. The tenets as relevant to this paper include:

i. Religion as an "opium of the people": Karl Marx famously described religion as the "opium of the people." He argued that religion functions as a tool of the ruling class to pacify and distract the working class, preventing them from recognizing their exploitation and revolting against the capitalist system. By offering solace, comfort, and the promise of divine justice in the afterlife, religion dulls the pain of oppression and discourages active resistance.

ii. Religion as a tool for ideological control: Marxist theory emphasise the role of religion in promoting dominant ideologies that reinforce class divisions and support the status quo. Religious teachings often emphasize acceptance of one's social position, obedience to authority, and the spiritual virtue of suffering, all of which serve to maintain the existing social order and discourage rebellion.

iii. Religious institutions and economic inequalities: Marxist analyses highlight the ways religious institutions contribute to economic exploitation by aligning themselves with the ruling class and benefiting from the status quo. Historically, many religious institutions have owned vast tracts of land and accumulated significant wealth, while also promoting charity and almsgiving as a means of addressing poverty and inequality, rather than advocating for structural change.

iv. Religion and false consciousness: From a Marxist perspective, religion creates a false consciousness among the working class, leading them to believe that their suffering is part of a divine plan or cosmic justice, rather than a consequence of systemic exploitation. By obscuring the real sources of oppression, religion undermines working-class solidarity and prevents collective action for social change.

Marxist analysis of religion submits that the tenets of religion, leadership, beliefs, practices, and institutions contribute to the maintenance of social hierarchies, ideological control, and class divisions. By highlighting the role of religion in perpetuating economic exploitation and political passivity, Marxist theory offers an outlet for interrogating the nexus between religion and social justice.

Synopsis of *Adire*

Adire is a story of a young lady named Asari (Adire) who works for a man, Captain who exploits her for years. Asari is able to escape with Captain's money to start a new life in another town. She settles in a small Christian community in Oyo town but meets with a fierce Deaconess called Sade. Asari starts a new life even though she encounters lot of issues and threats from fellow women within the community she moved into. Also, the men in the community see her as a prey they can feed on due to her outlook and view of life, but she sees them otherwise. Adire is able to gain the trust of so many women after gifting one of them a lingerie to entice her husband in having the sexual fulfillment she desires and to spice up her marriage. The news gets to the other women who eventually become her friends and feel more comfortable due to the wonder lingerie and advices she gives to them. This makes the Deaconess angry, betrayed and uncomfortable, but she gets the final stroke when her daughter becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Women mock her for failing to discipline her daughter and wondered why she stigmatised the late Abeni for the same mistake. However, the Captain finds Asari, but she maneuvers her way out of Captain's clutch after much torturing and inhumanity. Deaconess Sade is also forced to accept Asari as part of the society as she welcomes her into the church.

Religion and Modernity

Religion has long been a central aspect of human society, influencing culture, politics, and individual beliefs. Nonetheless, the advent of modernity has sparked intense debates about the role of religion in contemporary life. Scholars have explored various sides as to this relationship, examining how modernity shapes religious beliefs, practices, and institutions.

One perspective suggests that modernity challenges traditional religious authority and belief systems. As argued by Weber (1904, p.37), "modernisation leads to rationalization and disenchantment, eroding the influence of religion in private and public spheres." Similarly, Durkheim (1912, p.82) posits that: "the transition to modernity weakens corporate solidarity, diminishing the social significance of religious rituals and symbols." Others like Berger, Taylor argue that modernity does not necessarily diminish religion rather it transforms it. While Berger introduces the concept of "religious re-enchantment," and suggests that modern societies experience a shift from traditional religious structures to new forms of spirituality and meaning-making (Berger 1967, p.45). Taylor submits that modernity fosters a "nova effect," wherein individuals have diverse religious options and identities, leading to a vibrant religious landscape (Taylor 2007, p.112).

In the same vein, scholars such as Sigmund Freud, Vilfredo Pareto, Vladimir Lenin and Friedrich Engels variously see religion as the product of mental reflection of economic interest; biological needs or class experiences of deprivation. Their submissions however, cannot be equated with Taylor (2005, p. 2) who defines religion as "the belief in Spiritual Beings." Taylor further expresses that this belief originated as explanations of natural phenomena. Thus, belief in spirits grew out of attempts to explain life and death. Primitive people used human dreams in which spirits seemed to appear as an indication that the human mind could exist independent of a body.

On the other hand, modernity reconfigures the relationship of individuals to other people and to their society by promoting individualism. Both modernity and postmodernity are notoriously difficult terms to define, which was why Lyon (1994, pp. 19-21) submits that: "modernity has often been viewed as being in opposition to and representing a break from tradition. If tradition looked to the past, modernity presumably turned its eye to the future." Swedish social theorist Therborn (1995, p.4) notes that "modernity is closely associated with words like progress, advance, development, emancipation, liberation, growth, accumulation, enlightenment, embitterment, and avant-garde. It is of worthy of note that change is primarily the idea behind modernity. Religion on other hand is fixed doctrines, and peculiar values that have survived a large number of centuries till present. how then does change affect religion? Does religion get affected or can it pass the test of change? Nonetheless, we must bear in mind that change can be positive or negative, which may be as a result of leadership disposition.

Consequently, Leadership is a significant phenomenon in the area of role playing such as providing enduring direction, irrespective of a society's disposition to the political, economic and religious pattern. Nebo (2019, p.10) captures aptly the nexus between politics, economic, religion and leadership as it affects self and community development when he describes Leadership as "the action of leading a group of people or an organisation or even a Nation…it has little to do with the position one occupies as a leader but it has a lot more to do with what the person does with, and on that position." Looking at leadership from the artistic point of view, a theatre director's leadership role is that which bestowed on him the appellation of 'one whose finger is in every pie.' His position has little to do with the status he occupies but what he does with it hence, leaders could use religion to navigate and redirect the path of those they lead.

Scholars have also studied how globalisation accelerates the intersection of religion and modernity. As discussed by Casanova, globalisation facilitates the spread of religious ideas, practices, and movements across borders, challenging conventional understandings of secularization and modernization (Casanova 1994, p.73). Likewise, Hervieu-Léger emphasises the emergence of "believing without belonging," wherein individuals engage with religious ideas and practices outside of traditional institutional frameworks (Hervieu-Léger 2004, 91). The nexus between religion and modernity is complex and multifaceted. While some say that modernization reduces the influence of religion, others highlight its transformative effects. In another direction, globalisation is said to further complicates the dynamics, presenting new opportunities and challenges for religious communities worldwide.

Religion and Economic Survival

Religion has always been related with economic activities, impacting individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and choices related to survival and economic prosperity. This study takes examines the multidimensional relationship between religion and economic survival in various dimensions and perspectives. One notable

aspect to consider is the function of religious beliefs and practices in shaping economic behaviour. Studies have revealed that religious beliefs can tremendously impact economic decision-making, in the area of savings, investment, and consumption patterns. For example, Stark and Finke argue that certain religious doctrines, such as the Protestant work ethic, promote values of industriousness and frugality, which can contribute to economic progress (Stark and Finke 2000, 78).

Studies have also shown that religious institutions often play a vital role in providing economic support and resources to their members, particularly in times of need. Churches, mosques, temples, and other religious organisations frequently engage in charitable activities, including providing food assistance, financial support, and job training programs to assist individuals and families navigate economic hardships (Iannaccone 1998, p.148).

In addition, religion often serve as a source of resilience and coping mechanisms during economic crises. Religious faith and community engagement have also provided individuals with emotional support, a sense of belonging, and hope for the future, which are crucial factors in navigating economic challenges (Pargament 2013, p.92).

Conversely, the economic context can also influence religious beliefs and practices. Economic instability, inequality, and poverty can lead individuals to turn to religion for solace, meaning-making, and a sense of control in uncertain times (Deaton 2020, p.207). In the same vein, economic development and globalisation can reshape religious landscapes, leading to the emergence of new religious movements, syncretic practices, and shifts in religious identities (Berger 1967, p.29). Economic wellbeing means people have their most of their basic survival needs met and have sustainable income and assets so they can prosper. However, during and after crises, people may be forced to make short-term decisions to survive. One of such step is economic survival. Economic survival is the process whereby people make choices during periods of crises that enables them to secure sustainable income and assets to counter and transform their economic woes for the better. Basically, man's needs for survival includes food, clothing, shelter and water. Any family that lacks any of these options is in an economic crisis and will have to struggle for survival. It is also a worthy of note that some economic crisis can occur due to many reasons such as, poverty, unemployment, divorce amongst other things. How does religion contribute to tackling such issues?

African Cinema, Religion Empowerment and Traditional Power Structures in Shaping Social Norms and Inequalities in African Societies

African cinema has long served as a powerful medium for exploring the potential of empowerment and resistance in the face of oppressive forces (Diawara, 2010, p. 67). By foregrounding the experiences of marginalised communities and individuals who challenge the status quo, African films contribute to the broader discourse on social change and the dismantling of entrenched power structures (Ogundokun, 2020, p. 38). Consequently, African cinema have provided unique lens through which the examination of the complex interplay between religion, traditional power structures, social norms, and inequality within African societies are brought to bear. (Ogundokun, 2020, p. 34). The films *Adire* under examination and other inspiring cinematic works offer a critical perspective in the ways religious institutions and cultural practices contribute to the perpetuation of social hierarchies and the marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

Traditional power structures, such as patriarchal kinship systems and village councils, also play a crucial role in shaping social norms and reinforcing hierarchies within African societies (Ntiri, 2017, p. 89). These institutions often perpetuate inequalities by restricting women's access to economic resources, limiting their participation in decision-making processes, and upholding strict gender roles (Folorunso & Oladiti 2018, p.56). Many African movies highlight these dynamics by showcasing the struggles of the female gender, the protagonist in this case, as they confront the patriarchal power structures within the village community (Olatunji 2016, p. 27).

Religion has long played a significant role in shaping social norms and moral values within African societies (Parsitau, 2020, p. 67). In many African films, religious leaders, such as pastors and traditional spiritual leaders, serve as arbiters of communal morality, often enforcing strict codes of conduct and stigmatising those who defy societal expectations (Haynes, 2018, p. 45). This dynamic is particularly evident in *Adire*, where the village

Deaconess condemns the protagonist's past as a sex worker and her attempts to establish a lingerie-making business, illustrating the ways in which religious dogma can perpetuate gender-based oppression and economic inequalities (Olatunji, 2016, p. 23).

In her analysis of women's resistance in Nigerian video films, Folorunso (2018, p.73) emphasises the significance of grassroots initiatives in fostering solidarity among marginalised women and promoting collective action against patriarchal oppression. Film *Adire* as seen by Olatunji (2016) showcases the ways in which female protagonists navigate and challenge traditional power structures, underscoring the transformative potential of individual and communal resistance (Olatunji, 2016, p. 26).

The intersection of religion, leadership and traditional power structures in African cinema further underscores their collective role in perpetuating inequalities and marginalising vulnerable populations (Adenuga & Ayodele, 2018, p. 76). By critically examining these depictions, we can gain valuable insights into the complex dynamics of power, oppression, and resistance within African societies (Ogundokun, 2020, p. 45). African cinema offers a platform for envisioning alternative futures and modes of social organisation that foreground the agency and resilience of marginalised communities Harrow (2018, p. 89) attests to this. This Niang (2014) had earlier underline that films depict the formation of grassroots movements and coalitions that challenge oppressive forces and advance the interests of vulnerable groups (Niang, 2014, p. 44). Adesokan also underpin the role of African cinema in facilitating dialogues on grassroots empowerment and resistance (Adesokan, 2015, p. 65). Folorunso & Oladiti, 2018 also submit that by presenting nuanced narratives that illuminate the complex dynamics of power and oppression, African films encourage audiences to critically reflect on the social, economic, and political forces that shape their lived experiences (Folorunso & Oladiti, 2018, p. 58).

The potential for empowerment and resistance in African cinema highlights the transformative power of storytelling as a tool for social change and the advancement of marginalised communities as captured in the submission of (Diawara, 2010, p. 74). In fostering critical dialogue and promoting collective action, African films contribute to the ongoing struggle for equity, justice, and solidarity within the African continent and beyond.

Marxist Theory and its Application in *Adire*

This paper adopts the Marxist theory, which had earlier be enumerated and discussed I this work to analyse various scenes that highlight the role of religion in maintaining social hierarchies, promoting ideological control, and reinforcing class divisions in *Adire*.

Adire's Arrival in the Village

When Adire, a former sex worker, arrives in the conservative rural community. Her arrival is greeted with gases and stares as villagers, especially the men admire her beauty epitomized in her mode of dressing This makes every man in the community lust after her and therefore makes the women insecure. She also faces instance resistance from a Deaconess, who represents religious authority in the village. The Deaconess perceives Adire's presence and ways of life even without the knowledge of her past and former profession as a threat to the village's moral order, reflecting religion's role in policing social norms and marginalising those who challenge traditional power structures. Adire explores subversion and resistance. Despite the attempts to control and marginalise her, Adire embodies resilience and resistance. She defies the expectations of the conservative village community and empowers other women through her business, illustrating the potential for individuals and marginalised communities to challenge oppressive power structures. The tool of religion that the Deaconess try to apply to exercise control as the village moral order is what Marxist theory describes as applying religion as a tool by the ruling class to pacify, distract and prevent the people from recorgnising their exploitation.

Adire's Lingerie Business

The commencement of Adire's lingerie business is challenged because a native woman feels her husband is lusting after her. She goes to her house to challenge her only to experience a life-changing "sex education." She goes into the village thereafter to invite other women to come and be educated by Adire who was hitherto regarded as a bad influence in the community. Adire's education which bother on mode of new dressing, which

is referred to as"packaging". Adire starts a lingerie-making business, using the traditional *adire* (tie and dye) clothing material. Her business empowers local women by enhancing their beauty, sexuality and femininity. However, the Deaconess condemns Adire's venture as immoral and sinful, showcasing how religious dogma can be employed to suppress expressions of sexuality and reinforce gender-based oppression.

This presents religion as a tool for social control. Throughout the film, religious leaders such as the Deaconess and her Personal Assistant attempt to impose their moral values on the village community. They used Adire's past as a sex worker to condemn her lingerie-making business, labeling the outfits as immoral and ungodly. This demonstrates how religion can be employed by those in power to maintain social order and suppress challenges to traditional norms and hierarchies.

The film's exploration of female sexuality and desire serves as a critique of patriarchal norms and religious dogmas that suppress women's agency. Adire's refusal to conform to traditional gender roles and embrace of her sexuality can be seen as an act of resistance against the ideological control exerted by religious institutions and social norms.

Paradox of Piety in the Pastor's Household

Adire x-rays paradox of piety in the household of the pastor. It identifies in the Pastor's family embodiment of contradictions inherent in religious ideology. While the pastor preaches piety and moral righteousness, his wife, Sade, grapples with her own desires and impulses. This tension demonstrates how religious dogma can create a false consciousness, leading individuals to deny their own needs and desires in the pursuit of spiritual salvation. This is seen in the scene where a teenage girl, who gets pregnant, later dies with her baby at the point of delivery and was neglected by members of the church because she was seen to have broken the law of piety. Unfortunately, the fear of the Pastor's wife's negative disposition to act of fornication as seen in the aftermath of the teenage girl's case makes the pastor's under-aged daughter wanting to elope with her boy-friend when she realizes she is also pregnant. Another case of woman burden inflicted by the society

The Confrontation between Adire and her Pimp

Economic exploitation and power dynamics is portrayed where Adire's struggle to escape her former pimp and build a new life highlights the economic inequalities perpetuated by capitalism. Marxist theory helps reveal how religious institutions and beliefs can contribute to these inequalities by aligning with the interests of the ruling class and promoting the acceptance of suffering as part of a divine plan.

When Adire's former pimp tracks her down, he attempts to blackmail her and exploit her vulnerability. This encounter highlights the economic exploitation perpetuated by the capitalist system and the ways religion can be co-opted to justify and maintain such exploitation.

Religious Syncretism and Cultural Resilience

The movie, *Adire* underpins the oppressive aspects of religion as seen in the expression of Sade's resentment against Adire. She physically challenged when she realised that other women including those that are church members prefer Adire's way of life over hers, on realising that her ways are too strict. She became more annoyed when she realized that her husband welcomes her into the church without considering her ways of life. The movie also showcases the potential for religious syncretism which promotes cultural resilience and the fusion of traditional African spirituality with contemporary expressions of faith that demonstrates the adaptability of religious beliefs and practices in the face of social change and external pressures.

Furthermore, *Adire* illustrates the interplay between religion, social hierarchies, and ideological control. By applying Marxist theory to analyse the scenes, we gain valuable insights into the complex dynamics of power, oppression, and resistance in contemporary African societies. The character, Adire, presents a multi-layered narrative that addresses various aspects of religion, social hierarchies, ideological control, and resistance in contemporary African societies. Thus providing an enabling pathway to faithfully apply Marxist theory to analyse the film's portrayal of these dynamics. The movie exposes how religion has been used to assert social

control and exploit vulnerable populations while also serving as a source of empowerment and solidarity for marginalised communities.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that religious syncretism promotes cultural resilience, and that the fusion of traditional African spirituality with contemporary expressions of faith demonstrates the adaptability of religious beliefs and practices in the face of social change and external pressures. Consequently, it opines that the ongoing tensions and debates around women's rights, religious identity, leadership and the role of religion in public life can be ameliorated when an approach like the Marxist's ideology is explored. Therefore, African and world at large needs to draw from the wealth of ideological postulations to solve knotty societal issues.

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