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Occult African Films as a Reflection of Resurrection Stories: A Socio-Cultural Perspective on Cameroonian and Nigerian Video Films

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Abstract

The African religious landscape is partly characterized by a plurality of vibrant neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Many of these movements are founded, led or influenced by perceived gifted individuals who claim to have had a firsthand experience with the spirit world through diverse mystical or paranormal means. Some of these means include near death experiences or resurrection from the dead. Although some research works have examined the relationship between the narratives of these gifted individuals and the socio-political discourse in Africa, very little attention has been devoted particularly to how their descriptions of the spirit world and the afterlife affect or reflect cinematic production in Africa. This paper seeks to fill this gap in knowledge through an examination of the ways in which resurrection and near death stories driving charismatic Pentecostalism are reflected in some Cameroonian and Nigerian video films. Using secondary sources and a qualitative content analysis of relevant films, the paper specifically attains two main objectives. In the first place, it examines how Cameroonian and Nigerian resurrection stories describe the spirit world and affect the popular culture in Cameroon and Nigeria; while in the last place, the paper examines how these stories are particularly reflected in Cameroonian and Nigerian films.

Keywords: The Spirit World, African Belief System, Spiritualism, Nollywood, Collywood, Cinematic Code, Occult Movies

Diriliş Hikayelerinin Bir Yansıması Olarak Afrika Okült Filmleri: Kamerun ve Nijerya Video Filmleri Üzerine Sosyo-Kültürel Bir Perspektif

Öz

Afrika dini manzarası, kısmen canlı neo-Pentekostal ve karizmatik hareketlerin çeşitliliğiyle karakterize edilmektedir. Bu hareketlerin birçoğu, ruhani dünya ile çeşitli mistik veya paranormal yollarla doğrudan bir deneyim yaşadığını iddia eden, yetenekli olarak algılanan bireyler tarafından kurulmuş, yönetilmiş veya etkilenmiştir. Bu yollar arasında ölümden dönüş veya ölümden sonra dirilme gibi deneyimler bulunmaktadır. Bazı araştırmalar, bu yetenekli bireylerin anlatıları ile Afrika'daki sosyo-politik söylem arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemiş olsa da özellikle onların ruhani dünya ve ahiret tasvirlerinin Afrika'daki sinema üretimini nasıl etkilediği veya yansıttığı üzerine çok az çalışma yapılmıştır. Bu makale, karizmatik Pentekostalizmi yönlendiren diriliş ve ölümden dönüş hikayelerinin bazı Kamerun ve Nijerya video filmlerinde nasıl yansıtıldığını inceleyerek bu bilgi boşluğunu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. İkincil kaynaklar ve ilgili filmlerin nitel içerik analizi yoluyla, makale iki temel hedefe ulaşmaktadır. İlk olarak, Kamerun ve Nijerya'daki diriliş hikayelerinin ruhani dünyayı nasıl tasvir ettiğini ve bu hikayelerin Kamerun ve Nijerya popüler kültürünü nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. İkinci olarak, bu hikayelerin özellikle Kamerun ve Nijerya filmlerinde nasıl yansıtıldığını ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ruhani Dünya, Afrika İnanç Sistemi, Spiritüalizm, Nollywood, Collywood, Sinematik Kod, Okült Filmler

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Introduction

The African religious landscape is remarkably characterized by a plurality of vibrant neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements. This landscape is also culturally influenced by all manner of “end-time” prophets and perceived gifted individuals who claim to have had a firsthand experience with the spirit world. From Ghana through Congo and Nigeria to South Africa, there have actually emerged self-proclaimed oracles (of God) and “clairvoyant” religious figures and even mere devotees who claim to have used diverse mystical or paranormal means to discover and profoundly understand the spirit world. It is actually common to come across native priests, religious leaders, church founders and even charlatans who claim to have died and gone to such places as the afterlife, heaven or Satan’s kingdom in spirit. Such religious figures also claim to have personally witnessed the maneuvers and powers of local deities or paranormal beings. The aforementioned religious entities are fond of making predictions and revelations that touch all aspects of human life in the societies where they subsist. They usually generate and popularize a discourse on the spirit world which re-enforces various tenets of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and re-echoes popular imaginaries and myths about the spirit kingdom. Thus, these resurrection story tellers fuel various forms of popular culture in African religious societies.

Although a number of research works have examined the relationship between the socio-spiritual acts/narratives of these gifted individuals (resurrection storytellers) and the socio-political discourse in Africa, very little attention has been devoted particularly to how their descriptions of the spirit world affect or is reflected in audiovisual and cinematic productions in Africa. This paper seeks to fill this gap in knowledge through an examination of the ways in which the resurrection and near death stories that drive charismatic Pentecostalism are reflected in some Cameroonian and Nigerian video films. Using critical observations, documentary analysis and a qualitative content analysis of relevant films, the paper specifically attains two main objectives. In the first place, it examines how Cameroonian and Nigerian resurrection stories’ describe the spirit world and affect popular culture in Cameroon and Nigeria; while in the last place, the paper examines how these stories are reflected in Cameroonian and Nigerian video films.

Research Method

This paper is based on the descriptive research design. By definition, a descriptive research describes the characteristics of a phenomenon, population or situation without hinging on manipulation of variables or hypothesis testing (Aggarwal and Ranganathan 2019). As its name indicates, the descriptive research design entails making observations, and comparing and analyzing relevant data. It usually aims at answering such questions as what the phenomenon, group, situation or circumstance is? How the phenomenon occurs? Where and when it occurs; and so on. In line with this, the present research work sought to examine how resurrection stories are reflected in Cameroonian and Nigerian video films. To collect data, the paper hinged on three principal methods namely critical observations, documentary analysis and a qualitative content analysis of relevant Nigerian and Cameroonian occult films.

The critical observations part of the methodology consisted in extracting data from relevant true life events that recently happened in the Nigerian and Cameroonian socio-religious landscape. The events considered for the study are all related to the phenomena of resurrection stories in

Cameroonian and Nigerian religious movements and occult filmmaking in the two countries. The documentary analysis part of the methodology consisted in gathering data from secondary sources such as anthologies, journal articles, monographs and online publications. A modicum of attention was given to published books and articles written by Christian entities or spiritual leaders. The books and articles contain or document specific resurrection stories. Finally, the qualitative content analysis of films done in the course of the study consisted in extracting and analyzing both empirical and anecdotal evidence drawn from relevant occult films. These extracts from the movies were also used to buttress points made in the paper. The study considered only relevant occult movies that could be used to illustrate the influence of resurrection stories on Cameroonian and Nigerian video films.

In effect, given that the paper sought to show how local resurrection stories are reflected in relevant Nigerian and Cameroonian occult movies, the study hinged on critical observations and secondary data to explore popular myths fuelled by resurrection stories in Cameroon and Nigerian. The study thereafter hinged on the content analysis of relevant Cameroonian and Nigerian movies to show how the myths mentioned above are reflected in the two countries' video film production. In line with this, the study thematically organized the data collected through the three methods mentioned above, in four interconnected sub-headings namely. These subheadings correspond to four myths fuelled by resurrection stories in the two countries. They include: 1) the invisible world is hard to describe using common human language, 2) the physical and the invisible worlds are connected, but distant one from the other, 3) the visible and the spirit worlds are overlapping thanks to the existence of thresholds that permit transitions from one world to the other and 4) many spiritual leaders are representatives of the spirit world in the physical realm.

Resurrection Stories and Social Constructions of the Invisible Worlds in Cameroon and Nigeria

Nigeria and Cameroon are very religious countries. This religiosity – which simultaneously is fuelled and manifested by the proliferation of all manner of religious movements in the two nations – influences many aspects of life in both countries. Indeed, many communities tend to view everything from a spiritual or religious standpoint (Anderson 2012, Chiorazzi, 2015; Khan, 2017; Nguimfack, 2016). In line with this, Nbuwe (2016, p.17) observes that “It may be thought surprising that in spite of the impact of Christianity, Western culture and the improved level of education, the majority of people still believe in witchcraft, and that this phenomenon not only persists but is actually increasing”.

Thus, most religious Cameroonians and Nigerians view the universe as an extremely complex phenomenon. This complexity makes scientific theories insufficient or only partially relevant to explain the origin and functioning of the universe. According to the popular fantasy in Cameroon and Nigeria, one must view the universe with a spiritual eye. In the two countries, both grassroots people and megacities dwellers believe in the existence of two worlds – one visible and the other one invisible. These two worlds exist in a parallel manner. The invisible world is the spirit world. It harbors transcendental or tutelary beings such as the gods/goddesses, the ancestors, the angels and evil spirits among others. These beings are visible only to people with special gifts (notably oracles, native prophets and “seers”) or those who have gone through the necessary initiation to interact with these tutelary entities (Murray, 2015 Loe, 2012; Horton 1996; Baeke, 1986). Parallel to the invisible world is the physical world, which is the material world. The belief mentioned above is

so diffused that it is observable not only in communities of animist, but across the main religious movements that exist in the two countries (Pementa, Tabenyang & Fubah, 2014).

Rampant religiosity and superstitions in the two countries have over the years, fuelled great obsession with knowing the workings and the contours of the invisible world and the afterlife. In line with this, stories aimed at demystifying deities and revealing the hidden allures of the spirit world have often been very popular in the two countries. These hard-to-swallow stories saturate cities of the two countries. They inspire the sermons of churches' founders and leaders as well as the doctrines of the many neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements (Ameh 2013). The trend is so accentuated that the Nigerian and Cameroonian Pentecostal religious discourse could be said to be in great part characterized by the urge to demystify the devils and the invisible world.

Thus, it is common to find members of Pentecostal or charismatic churches whose beliefs and constructions of the invisible world draw on resurrection stories. These are stories of people – mostly devoted Christians or repentant spiritualists – who claim to have either had “near-death-experience” or died momentarily and seen heaven or hell. On October 28, 2022 for instance, Nigerian elite newspaper *The Sun*, published the resurrection story of a certain Godwin Agele Amadu – a native doctor – who allegedly died on September 5 of the same year and resurrected three days later. According to the newspaper story, the native doctor allegedly visited heaven in spirit after his death. This visit made him discover various heavenly entities and “realities”. The near-death experience also convinced him to convert to Christianity and start an evangelical mission. A similar resurrection tale was published in Nigeria's *Daily Post* on August 18, 2013. This tale purports that a retired Nigerian soldier, Kayode Sotunde, died in a ghastly motor accident on April 11 2013 and resurrected three days to the bewilderment of friends and relatives. Like Amadu (earlier mentioned in this paper), the retired soldier claimed in the newspaper story to have had paranormal experience with heavenly entities and to have inherited some supernatural powers before coming back to life.

In some of the bizarre and hard-to-swallow narratives mentioned above, the resurrected people are church figures. A case in point is Pastor Daniel Ekechukwu who allegedly died in a motor accident on December 29, 2001 and was later resurrected by famous German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke. Actually, Pastor Ekechukwu is said to have seen both heaven and hell during his short stay in eternity. In an interview granted the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) Reinhard Bonnke – who brought him back to life – evokes pastor Ekechukwu's experience in the afterlife thus:

An angel took him to show him Paradise. He showed him the mansions that are waiting for the saints. And he showed him hell. He saw the people in hell. He said one shouted to him, 'I was a pastor and I stole money. Help me to return the money.' He said it was so frightening to him that the angel turned to him and said, 'The prayer of the rich man in Luke 16 will now be fulfilled, and you will be sent back to earth as a last warning to this generation (cited in Christian Broadcasting Networks, 2024).

One may easily notice that pastor Ekechukwu's description of hell is as gloomy as the Bible's own. However it is strangely not perfectly conform to popular Christian imaginations of hell. For instance, his depiction does not relay the popular belief that hell is characterized by a lake of fire. In his testimonial, Bonnke underlines this lacuna thus:

He said he saw no fire [in hell] but he said he saw these people cannibalizing themselves. Every time they had done it, the flesh seemed to jump back to the same places and then the torment started again. He said it was so horrible. He came back and said, "Heaven is real. Hell is real. Become serious with God. You need to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ and live a holy life" (cited in Christian Broadcasting Networks, 2024).

In their narratives, authors of resurrection stories mostly represent heaven, hell and the afterlife in ways that are somewhat concurrent to biblical depictions. They also usually come up with strange doctrines and prophecies that usually elicit controversies and suspicions from spiritual watchdogs such as Christian associations. In 2022 for instance, the Christian Association of Nigeria (cited in Leonard 2022), issued some warning against resurrection narratives after the Amadu story (mentioned above) was trending on both traditional and new media in Nigeria. The Association – through its chairman Sunday Ennah – not only doubted the veracity of Amadu’s story, but also called on the Nigerian Christian communities to desist from such tales. This warning was founded on the observation that resurrection tales tend to contradict the popular Christian belief that after death comes judgment. In line with the aforementioned suspicion, Sunday Ennah simply associated Amadu’s tale with the Christian myths of end-time prophets and the ante-Christ. In his words, “There are many false prophets in the world today. They go about confusing the people, using the resurrection approach to possess wealth. I want to advise Christians to desist from such insinuation” (cited in Leonard, 2022 para 16).

In spite of their unusual, controversial and hard-to-belief nature, most resurrection stories are extremely attractive to Nigerian and Cameroon masses including non-Christians. This attractiveness is in part attributable to the ubiquity of a fetish mindset in the two countries (Abar 2019; Murray 2015, LeMarquant 2012). Authors of these resurrection stories usually become the talk of the town and their narratives often function as strong baits used by church founders to attract masses to their spiritual temples or ministries. In effect, church founders such as Helen Ukpabio (of Liberty Church), Emmanuel Eni (of Assemblies of God) and pastor Tsamma-Essomba (of Cameroon) have deployed such resurrection stories to propagate their own versions of Christianity. Resurrection stories have also inspired various forms of popular cultures in Cameroon and Nigeria. They are reflected in cultural productions ranging from religious music and advertising to literature and popular cinema.

Screening Resurrection Stories: Nollywood and Collywood’s Representation of the Spirit World

Nigerian and Cameroonian video film industries respectively nicknamed Nollywood and Collywood are good peepholes into their respective societies of origin. Films from both industries reflect the popular religious beliefs prevailing in the two countries. These films are therefore likely to bear certain features of the resurrection stories that are ubiquitous in both countries. The Nollywood industry in particular sprang up in 1992 with the straight-to-video release of Chris Rapu Obi’s *Living in Bondage*, an Igbo language film about blood money. In just few decades, the industry grew to a \$590-600 million global giant (Oh 2014; New Africa Magazine 2013) having tentacles in the whole of Africa and in parts of the African diasporas in Asia, Europe, America and Caribbean countries. In a 2009 UNESCO report, Nollywood is ranked third largest film industry behind India’s Bollywood and US’ Hollywood. In a 2011 BBC report however, the industry is considered second to Bollywood. Thus, although many continental European and American audiences may know little or

nothing about Nigerian movies, Nollywood is today counted among the largest film industries in the world. The industry produces more than 50 films per week and is the second major employer after government in Nigeria (Oh, 2014).

Collywood on the other hand saw the light of the day in 2008. It is hard to find reliable statistics on the industry. However, since its inception, the industry is known to have adopted the Nollywood model of cinematic production in various ways. This model is characterized by shoestring budget films that are shot rapidly, following non-conformist cinema paradigms. Scholars such as Zigoto (2012), Robold (2017), Santenera (2016, 2019) and Endong (2022) observe that issues such as small budget, philistinization and unprofessionalism in the industry usually lead to the production of movies marred by various technical issues.

Nollywood and Collywood thrive on a variety of filmic genres but occult and religious movies tend to be predominant in the two industries. No doubt, Nollywood in particular has often been branded the “specter of the occult”. In effect, although most of the highly grossing films of both industries have been romantic comedies, the most visible films of both industries are stories about occultism. Thus, most Nollywood and Collywood films explore themes such as voodoo, black magic, demonic possession, blood money, ritual killing and the like. In other words, films from both industries have in various ways been regurgitating popular imaginaries about the spiritual world and the afterlife. This will be illustrated in this section through an exploration of four ways in which films from both industries reflect resurrection stories and represent the relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds. The section actually examines four myths often relayed by resurrection stories and reflected in Collywood and Nollywood occult movies. These myths include:

- 1) The invisible world is hard to describe using common human language,
- 2) The physical and the invisible worlds are connected, but distant one from the other,
- 3) the visible and the spirit worlds are overlapping thanks to the existence of thresholds that permit transitions from one world to the other and
- 4) many spiritual leaders are representatives of the spirit world in the physical realm.

Thus, the section analyses Nollywood and Collywood representation of the spirit world and the afterlife in the light of some resurrection stories generated by neo-Pentecostal and charismatic church leaders. The intention of this author in this section of the paper is not to validate the popular resurrection stories prevailing in Cameroon and Nigeria. This cautious attitude towards the resurrection narratives follows from the fact that, most of the stories may not be convincingly established or scientifically proven. Analyses in this section therefore seeks to rather argue that Collywood and Nollywood filmic representations of the afterlife, the multiverse and the spirit world are in line with some resurrection stories. Some of the resurrection stories considered here include Eni Emmanuel’s (1996) *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, Tsala-Essomba’s (1993) *Vas et Raconte ce que j’ai Fait Pour Toi*’ and Ukpabio Helen’s (1996) *The Seat of Satan Exposed* among others. Written by Christian authors, the stories mentioned above have overt religious undertones.

Happenings in the Spiritual World are Hard to Describe with Human Language

Resurrection stories most often exoticize the spirit world. This exoticization is done through sensational depictions that portray the invisible world as a place with so many extraordinary and unthinkable allures. These allures are either bizarre or extremely hard to describe in simple

quotidian terms. Like fairytales, and science fiction tales, these resurrection stories usually represent the spiritual ecosystem as a surrealistic one and a world that is hard to perfectly portray using (common) human language and storytelling techniques. In his book titled “*Delivered from the Forces of Darkness*”, Emmanuel Eni (1996) repeatedly makes allusion to this difficulty. In various parts of his book Eni underlines his inability to portray what he saw in the spirit world. In one such parts, he imperfectly attempts a description of a pact between him and a hybrid entity that was half woman and half spirit. The author writes that:

Early one morning, she [a partly human and partly spirit being] told me there was an important ceremony to be performed in the house. At 2.00 a.m. she brought a crawling child, a girl, alive. Before my eyes, Alice [the hybrid entity] used her fingers and plucked out the child eyes. The cry of that child broke my heart. She then slaughtered the child into pieces and poured both the blood and the flesh into a tray and asked me to eat. I refused. She looked straight at me and what came out of her eyes cannot be explained in writing (Eni 1996, p.15-16).

In another instance, Eni tries, still in an imperfect way, to describe an initiation ritual that involved him in the spirit world. In his account, the author acknowledges that he is short of the right vocabulary to depict the extra-terrestrial things he saw in the spirit world. He writes that:

After seven days of agony I was brought out and sent to a place called ‘INDIA JUNGLE’. In this jungle, I saw different types of demonic birds; demonic because some had faces like dogs, some like cats, etc. Yet with wings. Inside this jungle was a cave, and this cave is only opened by these demonic birds. They opened the cave and I went inside. The things I saw are hard to explain. There were terrible creatures, some looked like human beings but with tails and without human faces, etc. This was another place of torture. The torture there could best be described as semi-hell (Eni 1996, p.18)

The surrealism and exoticized values mentioned above are reflected in numerous Nollywood and Collywood occult movies. A case in point is Chizoba Nwoye’s *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* (2023) which reflects various tales about the mythical Mami Wata kingdom. Nwoye’s film is about a spiritually gifted young girl called Mwammiri who, since her conception, is dedicated to Mami Wata, a water goddess believed to be the head of a spiritually powerful marine kingdom. Mwammiri loses her biological mother in her early childhood and is subjected to the wickedness of the human kingdom where she dwells. However, Mami Wata, her spiritual mother provides her protection anytime she is in danger. The water goddess also gives Mwammiri spiritual powers to heal all sorts of ailments using water. *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* reflects many myths about the surrealistic allures and accents of the Mami Wata’s kingdom.



Plate 1. Mwammiri visits the marine kingdom to receive instructions from Mami Wata

Mwoye's film reflects many myths around the allures of Mami Wata's spirit kingdom. It particularly reflects the bizarreness and surrealism associated with the spirit world in general and Mami Wata's marine kingdom in particular. This surrealism is shown in Plate 1 which gives a glimpse of the water goddess' kingdom. In this Plate, one can see that the human characters survive and even smoothly operate in an aquatic environment even though they are not fishes or semi-aquatic species. The surrealism is explained in greater details in the subsequent paragraphs.

It is important, from the outset, to explain that, according to Nigerian popular imaginations, Mami Wata's marine world is a place situated at the bottom of seas and other water bodies. It is accessed through mystical means by initiated people. In other world, social representations suggest that people go to that kingdom in spirit. Most resurrection stories – including Eni's *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* – represent this marine kingdom as a place where human visitors need neither swim masks nor oxygen tanks for breathing. All human beings who find themselves in such a universe breathe normally, in spite of their prolong submersion into waters. This surrealist depiction is reflected in *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* particularly in the film's scenes showing the journeys of some characters to the marine kingdom. In the scene captured in Plate 1, Mwammiri the protagonist in the film can be seen in one of her journeys to the marine kingdom. The scene shown in the Plate 1 is designed to represent the myth that stipulates that Mami Wata's kingdom is accessed in spirit. This makes it possible even for non-aquatic beings to breathe normally and to naturally survive in the goddess' kingdom, given that their presence in that kingdom is only in spirit. Being submerged into water is in no way an obstacle to anyone who find themselves in the marine kingdom. Such people can act, interact and even transact with host spirits in the marine kingdom in spite of the aquatic environment. In the scene shown in Plate 1, Mwammiri is in a meeting with Mami Wata. Although frightful, bizarre and under the waters, the goddess's

world proves conducive to human living. Such a scene defies natural laws and is against all expectations.

The Visible and the Spirit Worlds are Connected but Distant one from the Other

Many of resurrection stories tend to represent the visible and the spirit worlds as universes that are distant (one from the other), but connected through mystical routes, paranormal itineraries and thresholds. This paradoxical notion is suggested in these resurrection stories through the mention of concepts such as teleportation, astral projection and spiritual journeys. These concepts are believed to constitute some of the means by which initiated people – notably sorcerers, cultists, native priests and spiritualists – move from one realm to the other. The aforementioned notion of distant but connected worlds is for instance evoked in the story of Ugeelu Amadu, a native prophet who allegedly died and came back to life three days after his death. The native prophet claims in his story published in Nigeria's *The Sun* that, he went to heaven during his three days in eternity. The native priest – who afterward turned to prophet – describes the spiritual world where he went to, as a place one can liken to another planet of the cosmos. In his words, "My journey to heaven was a tranquil one. [...] The cloud opened up. I saw something like a giant golden satellite, suspended in space. I wouldn't know whether this is what the Bible calls heaven. There, I was greeted by a seven-foot tall angel. He stood in front of the gate" (cited in Leonard 2022, p.9-10).

Similarly, books such as Eni's (1996) *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* and Tsama-Essomba's (1993) *Vas et Raconte ce que j'ai Fait pour Toi* [Go and tell the world what I have done for you], suggest this long distance separating the spirit from the physical world. Both Eni (1996) and Tsama-Essomba (1993) claim to have used teleportation and astral projection to move from the physical world to the spiritual realm. The two religious authors' accounts of their journeys to the spirit world are reminiscent of popular Cameroonian and Nigerian myths, which suggest that people with immense esoteric knowledge usually deploy mystical ships and vehicles to travel by night to the spirit world. It is actually not uncommon in both Cameroon and Nigeria, to stumble on newspaper stories or media reports which recount the misadventures of sorcerers who experienced terrible accidents during their nocturnal journeys to the spirit world (Kouenedji, 2021; Eni 1996; Baeke 1986). Cities in both countries are full of stories about witches who crashed on top of some houses' roofs and were even caught at the scene of their crash in the morning. Such witches are, in most cases, subjected to jungle justice.

Nollywood and Collywood filmmakers tend to tap into the aforementioned myths and resurrection stories. They represent astral projection and spiritual journeys as two of the means commonly used by both paranormal entities and human beings to move from one realm to the other. Films that depict this inter-realm movement are usually about protagonists and antagonists who journey to the spirit world in view of searching esoteric powers that will enable them influence the course of events in the physical world. A case in point is Andy Amaechi's *Igodo: The Land of the Dead* (1999) which recounts the story of an African village which is under the attack of sorcerers and evil spirits. To defeat their spiritual aggressors, the villagers chose seven of their most energetic men whom they send on mission to the evil forest. The ultimate objective of this mission is to recover a sword blessed with the extraordinary power to neutralize the evil spirits that are spiritually brutalizing the village. In Amaechi's film, the evil forest is used as a metaphor of the spirit world and the land of the ancestors. The film uses the metaphor of a physical journey to represent

a spiritual undertaking. In effect, although represented in a physical form, the evil forest is a spiritual universe infested by various invisible powers that manifest through strange animals' or monsters' attacks. The adventurers in the film must brave the onslaughts of these evil forces to lay hand on the mystical sword. Unfortunately, out of the seven men sent on mission, only Igodo (played by Norbert Young) successfully accomplishes the task. Six of the adventurers are hunted down and killed by the predatory spirits and monsters of the evil forest. Andy Amaechi's *Igodo*, portrays the spirit world as a universe that is distant to the physical world, and accessible only through physical movement and psycho-spiritual maneuvers (the ability to perform the relevant ritual).

While Amaechi uses physical movement as a metaphor of spiritual journeys to the spirit world, other cineastes prefer to deploy the notion of astral projection. A case in point is Teco Benson who, in his *End of the Wicked* (1999), taps into the popular myth of sorcerers who fly into the spiritual world or astral-project themselves anytime they undertake a movement to the invisible realm. The movie actually tells the tale of a coven of witches and wizard who regularly meet with Beelzebub in the spiritual world. Their meeting is a platform for the planning and execution of satanic ploys against innocent people in the visible world. In Teco Benson's film, the notion of a spirit world which is distant to the physical one is clearly represented. So too is the notion that astral journey is the means by which both physical and invisible entities successfully move from one world to the other.

The Spiritual and the Physical Worlds are Interwoven

Another notion being popularized by authors of resurrection stories is that the spiritual and visible worlds are interwoven or overlapping in a complex way. This notion is constructed in two principal ways: 1) the use of concepts such as thresholds and strategic doors into the spirit world and 2) the use of the myth of emissaries from the invisible world. The first way mentioned above consists in suggesting that the spirit and the physical worlds meet at specific thresholds. By definition, these thresholds are earthly places or bodies that spiritually function as exit and entry points into the spirit world. They are kinds of spiritual doors. Some of these thresholds include spiritually charged places such as graveyards, shrines, evil forests and sanctuaries among others. Dyer (2016) explains the binding role of thresholds thus:

The threshold has its guardians – gods and spirits who forbid entrance both to human enemies and to demons and the power of pestilence. It is on the threshold that sacrifices to the guardian divinities are offered [...] The threshold, [and] the door show the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely; hence their great religious importance, for they are symbols and at the same time vehicles passing from one space to another. (p. 25)

In his book titled "*Vas et raconte ce que j'ai fait pour toi*", pastor Tsama-Essomba (1993) corroborates the aforementioned notion of the threshold. In the book, Tsama-Essomba describes how graveyards used to serve as threshold or mystical doors to the invisible world. He explains how gaining access to the spirit world often entailed going at the middle of the night to the graveyard in order to perform the necessary rituals. The ritualistic acts always helped him open the gates of the invisible world. The acts also enabled him travel to Satan's kingdom. In his language, "He [Satan's prophet] had asked me to go alone to the cemetery at 11:30 PM so as to start the

incantations at exactly midnight. The prophet said that it was from the cemetery that I will get access to the spirit world” [My translation²] (Tsama-Essomba, 1993).

This notion of graveyards that spiritually function as threshold is represented in Chika C. Onu’s 1996 horror movie titled *Karashika*. The film tells the story of a charming young woman (Karashika played by Bekie Ngozi) sent on earth by Lucifer (played by Obi Madubogwu) to accomplish various diabolic chores. Vested with immense satanic powers, Karahika serially seduces men, lures them into carnal sin and ultimately causes their death. She also successfully destabilizes some religious movements, derailing randy pastors and causing whole congregations to abandon the ways of God in favor of satanic doctrines. Her ultimate mission is to sow suffering and doom on earth. In the film, Karashika uses graveyards and tombs as door into the spirit world. In effect, anytime she travels for a meeting with Satan, she uses an old tomb found in a sinister graveyard as transit or entry point. This is reminiscent of the popular myth stipulating that cemeteries are thresholds into the spirit realm.

The notion of thresholds as convergence points between the physical and the spirit worlds is also conveyed in Chizoba Nwoye’s *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* (earlier mentioned in this paper). The film contains many scenes where Mwamiri, the protagonist, visits the marine kingdom to receive instructions and spiritual powers from her spiritual mother Mami Wata. In such scenes, the village’s main river functions as threshold into the spiritual world. Plate 2 shows how the film director uses visual effects to convey the aforementioned notion about threshold.



Plate 2. Mwammiri is back to the visible World

The notion of emissaries from the spirit kingdom is the second way used by authors of resurrection stories to convey the idea of a spirit world that overlaps with the physical one. Authors who evoke this notion, usually suggest that, although a distant place, the invisible world is paradoxically embedded in the physical one following at least two indicators. First, some envoys of the spirit kingdom cohabit with human beings on earth. This cohabitation in itself is evidence of the spirit world’s presence in the physical world. The aforementioned envoys of the spirit world mingle with human beings, act in furtive ways and execute the designs of the supernatural forces they represent and serve.

Second, these envoys who are spirit in human clothing epitomize in themselves the embodiment of both the physical and the spirit worlds. In *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, Emmanuel Eni (1996) mentions the case of a certain Alice, whom he identifies as the person who

introduced him to occultism and the spirit world. Alice is identified in Eni's book as a good example of such envoys from the spirit world who every day beats the vigilance of humans. The description of Alice is in line with popular social representations of emissaries from the spirit world. Eni (1996) writes:

One night, I woke up in the dead of the night and found a boa-constrictor beside me. I wanted to shout but could not. Some nights, I would wake up to see Alice's body as transparent as a cellophane bag. Some nights, she would disappear and reappear [...] The outside world saw her as a very beautiful and harmless girl working with a big Bank but she was the devil's agent. There are a lot of Alices in the world today [...] (p. 12-13).

In another instance, Eni ameliorates his description of Alice. He writes: "That same night, at 2.00 a.m. (and this is the usual hour of meetings and dangerous operations by all the forces of darkness and their agents), Alice woke me up and revealed certain things to me. She said: 'I am not an ordinary human being. I am half human and half spirit but mainly of the spirit. What you see in my chamber is what I use during my prayers every morning, so that the spirits will guide me through the day'" (Eni 1996, p. 14).

This notion of envoys and emissaries from the spirit world is replete in Nollywood and Collywood occult movies. A case in point is Roland Thierry Ntamack's *Sur la route d'un ange* [standing on the way of an angel]. Released in 2011, the French language movie tells the story of a young man named Tony Essakara (Thierry Ntamack) who, on a fateful day, stumbles on a very beautiful lady Elia (Willy Mbo). A practicing Christian, Essakara has just attended church service and is on his way home. He is destitute and jobless, in spite of his impressive academic credentials. The young woman whom he encounters is a dove only on surface. Her real identity is that of a mermaid on mission to tempt him and lure him into carnal sins. Essakara soon develops sexual appetite for Elia (the mysterious beautiful lady), but little does he know that his new female friend is an evil spirit in human clothing sent on mission to destroy him physically and spiritually.

Thierry Ntamack's film reflects resurrection stories as well as the popular myths that suggest the existence of agents or emissaries from the spirit/invisible world who take the appearance of living beings – notably very attractive persons, seductive maiden/harlots or influential personalities – to lure their victims or targets (real humans) into various immoral and irreversible acts that may, in some circumstances, even provoke their demise. Through the character of Elia, Ntamack's film particularly brings to the fore the myth of Mami Wata, the water goddess who is believed to take the form of a seductive young woman to lure male victims into sexual intercourse and pull them into her spiritual kingdom.

The overlapping nature of the visible and invisible worlds is similarly evoked in Niyi Akinmolayan's *My Village People* (2021). This Nigerian film tells the story of a chronic womanizer, Prince (played by Bovi Ugbonna), whose weaknesses for women land him in a very complicated relationship with witches and water spirits. Prince's misfortune starts when he goes to his village for a brief sojourn. Despite his sister's warnings to not relate with his village people, the young man recklessly and randomly makes friendship with villagers and also makes advances to young girls including the daughter of the village's native prophet. His womanizer's allure attracts a coven of witches and some female carriers of water spirits (Mami Wata). These female characters seek both

revenge and romance with Prince. The young women's ambitions land the womanizer into a bizarre love triangle with marine spirits and witches.

Like in Ntamack's movie, the overlapping nature of the visible and the invisible worlds is portrayed in *My village people*. This is evidenced by two things: first, Niyi Akinmolayan actually foregrounds the popular Nigerian myth which stipulates that spirits and humans cohabit and interact in the same ecosystem. The human folk are by their religiosity, aware of the presence of their spirit counterparts meanwhile the latter is not only aware of the human presence, but seeks in various ways to shape human life in this ecosystem. Second, through the acts of the witches and the marine spirits in the film, Akinmolayan indirectly highlights the duality of the human body possessed by a marine spirit. This duality is revealed in the fact that the possessed human body simultaneously belongs to two worlds. Actually, the possessed human bodies of the women who seek revenge and romance with Prince in the film are characterized by the above duality. These bodies are symbols of the fusion of the visible and the invisible worlds.

Spiritual Leaders as Representatives of the Spirit Kingdom in the Visible World

Another trope in Nollywood and Collywood movies that is in line with resurrection stories is the idea that the spirit kingdom has its representatives in the visible world. These representatives operate as envoys with specific missions. They take human forms and mingle with the humans and execute various spiritual chores based on the purity or ungodliness of their origins. The emissaries that come from destructive deities accomplish negative assignments. For instance, they cause human deaths and resist rival spiritual enterprises (e.g. the conversion of masses to genuine Christianity and the prosperity of churches). These destructive emissaries also orchestrate various misfortunes on the earth. This trope is observed in Chika C. Onu's *Karachika* (earlier mentioned) which recounts the story of a female envoy of Satan, whose mission on earth is to destabilize Christian ministries and orchestrate untold sufferings in Christian homes. The same trope characterizes Helen Uppabio's *Highway to the Grave*, which is about another female envoy of the kingdom of darkness whose mission on earth is to seduce men and lure them into mortal sexual intercourse.

The myth of the religious leader or church founder who functions as a representative of the invisible world (Satan's kingdom) on earth is vindicated by Helen Ukpabio's (1996) purported eye-witness account of the spirit world in *The Seat of Satan Exposed*. In this book, Ukpabio claims to have served Lucifer in the spirit world along with Olumba Olumba Obu³, the founder of a charismatic religious movement – operating in the south eastern part of Nigeria. The writer – who is also founder of the Liberty Church – additionally claims that many African church founders and leaders of Pentecostal/charismatic churches, function as ambassadors or representatives of Satan on earth. They make recourse to occult powers to run their Christian ministries. They go to the invisible world and enter into pacts with Lucifer. These pacts help them receive powers to operate all manner of miracles and wonders from the devil. With such powers, they can attract gullible masses of miracle-seekers into their churches. In return, the churchmen act as representative of Lucifer on earth. Their churches have the appearance of holy and powerful temples; but in reality, these churches are strategic arms of Satan's kingdom on earth. They function as systems aimed at recruiting Satan's followers and devotees. Ukpabio's account is only spiritually revealed; it is not scientifically proven, although Nigerian dailies seasonally publish stories of end-time neo-Pentecostal pastors controversially embroiled in issues of occultism and sorcery (Sammuel, 2021;

Akure 2021; Nwaka 2020). On this basis, Liberty Church founder's book remains controversial. No doubt, the book has been questioned by many critics (Ngbea 2019; Moyo & Meer, 2014). In spite of its controversial nature, Ukpabio's account – like many other similar narratives about the invisible kingdom – are reflected in Nollywood films.

Conclusion

Cameroonian and Nigerian communities have always had an obsession with knowing what happens in the afterlife, the multiverse and the spirit world. This obsession has paved the way for the ubiquity and popularity of all manner of resurrection stories as well as myths that attempt an explanation of the invisible world and the paranormal. This paper has explored the various ways in which resurrection stories generated by some neo-Pentecostal and charismatic church founders contribute to the construction of social representations of the afterlife, the multiverse and the spirit world in Cameroon and Nigeria. The paper also examined how these ubiquitous resurrection stories reflect or relay some tenets of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and fuel popular cultures – notably popular cinema – in Nigeria and Cameroon. Specific attention has been given to four myths that are on the one hand, regularly evoked by these resurrection stories and on the other hand, reflected in Nigerian and Cameroonian video films. These myths include the beliefs that 1) the invisible world is hard to describe using common human language, 2) the physical and the invisible worlds are connected, despite being distant one from the other, 3) the visible and the spirit worlds are overlapping thanks to the existence of thresholds that permit transitions from one world to the other and 4) many spiritual leaders function like representatives of the spirit world in the physical realm. The paper has argued that Nigerian and Cameroonian films have reflected the aforementioned myths in their tropes and their storylines, as well as in the visual effects and other cinematic codes that they deploy.

The myths explored in this paper could be said to partially be fuelled or vindicated by resurrection stories published mainly by religious authors. Because of their non-scientific and non-empirical nature, both the myths and the resurrection stories are subject to controversy. Although popular and visible in the Nigerian and Cameroonian cinema, the myths and resurrection stories remained basically associated with religiosity or mere phenomenology. This paper focused on representations of resurrection stories in Nollywood and Collywood movies. Future studies may interestingly examine how audiences receive these filmic representations of resurrection stories.

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Notes

¹ The title “*Va et raconte ce que j’ai fait pour toi* » is Fench for « Go and tell the world what I have done for you ». According to Martin Tsala-Essomba the author of the book, these were the words of Jesus Christ who delivered him (Tsala-Essomba) from the claws of the devil after many years of servitude for Satan in the spirit world.

² Il m’avait dit de retrouver ma route tout seul et que je devais partir du cimeti re. Il fallait que je me rende au cimeti re a 23 h. 30, pour commencer mes incantations a minuit cinq.

³ Olumba Olumba Obu is a religious leader who lived from 1918 to 2003. He is believed by his followers to have been God in the human form. These followers claim their leader is the Holy Spirit and that he is greater than Jesus Christ. Olumba Olumba founded the Brotherhood of the Red Cross and Stars, a movement which remarkably departs from many core tenets of Christian doctrines. Principally based in south-eastern Nigeria (particularly in the city of Calabar), the movement has over the years been somewhat controversial. Many Christian observers and critics associate it to a secret cult.

Arařtırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors

Arařtırma tek bir yazar tarafından y r t lm řt r.

The research was conducted by a single author.

 ıkar  atıřması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

 alıřma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kiři ile  ıkar  atıřması bulunmamaktadır.

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

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