



Inter-Faith Marriages: Engaging Nigerian Religious Identity in the film *North East*

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Abstract

Inter-faith marriage, as a challenge to religious identity is commonplace in many religious societies. In pre-colonial Nigerian society the institution of marriage was hedged with strict ethnic modalities which became weakened by western influences through colonisation. Thus, inter-faith marriage, one of the features of modern Nigeria is beset with challenges deeply reflected in the differences in religious beliefs. The prevalence of this challenge made it open to redress from different social instruments, and specifically film. In the narrative of the film *North East*, there appears to be a negotiation of religious identity instead of the promotion and preservation of it as a sub-set of culture. This study examined this negotiation of religious identity in relation to marriage with the aim of ascertaining the acceptability in the modern African society, and in particular, Nigeria. It employed a qualitative survey as research design, and the data collection instrument was focus group discussion (FGD). The study found that love rather than religious identity should be the foundation of marriage. In addition, the study revealed that the film industry can encourage inter-faith marriages in multi-religious societies despite the challenges as presented in the *North East*. Therefore, the study concluded that since inter-faith marriage is fraught with challenges, film producers, should endeavour to run a follow-up story line that may present a clear picture of aftermath challenges of inter-faith marriage and its management.

Keyword: Inter-faith, marriage, religious identity, religious belief, cinematic influence.

Introduction

The concept of marriage has indeed undergone much contestation and divergent views across societies over centuries. Although, marriage is a common phenomenon in societies, its forms differ from one society to another. The fallout of these differences is manifested in the various terminologies employed in their descriptions. Thus, there are monogamy, polygamy, polyandry etc., and sub-forms such as inter-ethnic, religion or faith, inter-cultural and inter-racial marriages. Among the sub-forms of marriages, inter-faith marriage perhaps appears to have more compelling force of contestations in religious societies and more so than in secular societies. This is because there are societies who hold religious beliefs and traditions as foundational to the marriage institution. Hence, marriages in such societies are regulated by the dictates of religious creeds and dogmas. Since these dogmas are given 'divine backing', it is thus accepted as the



final authority on all matters on earth – marriage inclusive (Leeman 2009; Haralambos & Holborn, 2008; Adewale, 2006).

Nigerian society has had no unified marriage law since gaining its independence in 1960. The laws that regulate marriage in Nigeria are the Marriage Act, the Muslim Personal Law and Traditional/Customary Law, and which together take care of the three major religions in the country. In this perspective, English Law regulates marriage among persons who subject themselves to its jurisdiction, Islamic Marriage Law regulates marriage among Nigerian Muslims, and Customary Law applies to marriages under the traditional system. Under Islamic law, marriage is viewed as a civil contract between a man and a woman which is freely entered into; and subject to certain conditions in line with Islamic principles. Although, Islam protects the rights of contracting parties, Shariah forbids any marriage that falls within a list of prohibited degrees, Quran: (4: 23-24) such as marriage between a man and his father's wife, mother, daughter, foster mother, foster sister, wife's mother, or step-daughters under his guardianship (Quran:4: 22, cited in Imam, 2016). Hence, the Muslims are guided by the Quran, while the Christians are guided by the Bible. Both the Koran and the Bible forbid inter-faith marriages, except in cases of conversion before marriage. For Muslims in particular, the men are permitted to marry only spouses from the "people of the Book" which means they can marry Christians or Jews. However, Muslim women are not given such a privilege (Quran: 4: 144; 60: 1; as cited in Imam, 2016). For the Christians the Bible stresses that people are not to marry unbelievers God says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14 NIV).

Different ethnic groups in Nigeria preserve their identity by maintaining and promoting marriages within the group. This is because many ethnic groups usually share the same religious beliefs and traditional values. To such ethnic groups, inter-ethnic or inter-faith marriages are usually not commended. However, with the intrusion of western influence and its attendant consequences, Nigerian traditional strict marriage modalities have been weakened giving way to intermarriages. Consequently, the concept of intermarriage especially inter-faith has become prevalent, though with its attendant challenges. These challenges stem from the fact that religion, and their beliefs in Supernatural entities play(s) a vital role in African traditional or foreign religious marriages.

Marriage tradition and practices vary in the Nigerian society (Ekane, 2013). The Northern region condemns marriage between their daughters and non-Muslim men. The Eastern region, predominantly Christians also forbids inter-faith marriage except in the case of conversion. As a form of identity, people relate on the bases of religious background. Thus, when couples profess different faiths some challenges are inevitable. This is because every religion is rooted in beliefs and practices that are different from the others. Hence, societies over time have employed different means and measures to redress the possible challenges arising from inter-faith marriages. One such means is the instrument of film which is a powerful mass medium of communication. Therefore, film as a medium of communication has been a helpful means of reaching a large number of people when it comes to debating such issues (Layefa & Ezenagu, 2019). Film has also often been employed as a medium for the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage. Through the dramatization of the cultural lives of people, especially in a family setting, certain cherished traditions are encouraged, promoted and preserved. In some situations or occasions some of these traditions are reemphasized or deemphasized.

The film titled *North East*, runs contrary to the confessional lines of both religious divides – the Northern region, which is predominantly Muslim and the Eastern region, which is predominantly Christian. Undoubtedly, such societies have undergone radical changes in the current era. These changes are not unrelated to the impact of urbanization, colonization and globalization on virtually all facets of peoples lives – the marriage institution included (Layefa & Ezenagu, 2019). In



addition, the quest for religious proselytes has influenced the marriage institution over time. Consequently, religious beliefs and traditions have been overtaken or modified to accommodate most of these new social realities of which marriage is not an exception. Several studies have been carried out to investigate inter-faith or inter-religious marriage and their variations in societies. Some scholars have examined perspectives of interreligious marriages (Sewenet, Tessagaye & Tadele, 2017; Igundunasse & Fatunji, 2015; Cutrona, 2004). Others investigated the effects of inter-faith marriages (Moses, 2019; Georgas, 2003; Romain, 1997). There seems to be no study at present that has examined interreligious marriage or inter-faith marriage in relation to a movie in the Nigerian context. The present study attempts to investigate inter-faith marriage in relation to a movie; against the background of the capability of film as a mass medium to present and represent images which may either have positive (acceptance) or negative (non-acceptance) impact on society. Consequently, the following research questions guided the study: Should marriage be contracted on religious identity or feelings of love as shown in *North East*? What do you think the role of the parents should be when it comes to giving their daughters out in marriage as eventually done by Hadiza's father in *North East*? Should one yield to parental influence based on religion and traditions when it comes to whom to spend the rest of one's life with as deemphasized in *North East*? Does the movie - *North East* fulfil the role of the mass media in society? Do you support inter-faith marriage as represented in *North East*.

Synopsis of the Film - *North East*

The film – *North East* is a 2016 Nigerian romantic drama film written, co-produced and directed by Muiywa Aluko. The story is set against a relationship between two culturally different persons, and the challenges they faced in obtaining the approval of their parents in inter-tribal and multi-religious consummation of the marriage in modern Nigerian society. It is centred on four main characters – Hadiza, her father Musa from northern Nigeria and Emeka, his mother Ifeoma from eastern Nigeria. Hadiza was hospitalized in the hospital where Emeka works as a physiotherapist. In course of her taking treatment from Emeka, a love relationship developed which eventually culminated into the desire to get married. Meanwhile, Hadiza's father Musa was in a relationship with Emeka's mother – both of whom are divorcees. Before now, Hadiza's father has been persuading her daughter to get into relationship with a Muslim. He, as a matter of seriousness, planned to match – make Aliyu, his fellow Muslim employee with her. Hadiza does not seem to have an emotional tie with Aliyu, and so disagrees with the father. Along the line, the two parents Musa and Ifeoma eventually found out at a get-together ceremony, that their children are both in love. Musa completely refused his daughter any involvement with Emeka, citing that he is not a Muslim and not even from the North.

Ifeoma on her part readily and willingly agreed to let go of her relationship with Musa so as to allow her son and Musa's daughter have their ways. Musa blatantly refused, went to Emeka's house, found the daughter there and in the scuffle that ensued; mistakenly struck Hadiza's face and neck.. The movie closed with the scene of a marriage celebration between Hadiza and Emeka with both parents and relations rejoicing together with them. The film starred: Ini Dima-Okojie as Hadiza Ahmed, OC Ukeje as Emeka Okafor, Carol King as Ifeoma Okafor, Saeed "Funky Mallam" Muhammed as Aliyu, Gbenga Titiloye as Musa Ahmed.

Literature review

Perhaps a better place to start this discourse is to attempt to trace the various definitions of marriage. The concept of marriage has been variedly examined by scholars. Some of the definitions have taken up the social realities of contemporary times. Marriage is defined as a



legally recognized social contract between two people, traditionally based on a sexual relationship; and implying a permanence of the union. In creating an inclusive definition, variations should be considered such as whether a legal union is required (think of “common-law” marriage and its equivalents), or whether more than two people can be involved (consider polygamy). Other variations on the definition of marriage might include whether spouses are of opposite sexes or the same sex, and how one of the traditional expectations of marriage (to produce children) is understood today. This submission perhaps is an obvious admittance of the changes in society in relation to the concept of marriage in contemporary times. The aspect of legality and acceptance in the society, may suggest an actual inclusiveness of marriage as a construct. Marriage is also regarded as the rite of passage which signified independence from the parental control. Thus, young people saw early marriage as their path to autonomy from their parents. At the same time, it met their needs for sexual intimacy in the only way that was then socially acceptable (Layefa & Ezenagu, 2019).

Adewale (2006) explicates on two broad categories of marriage – endogamy and exogamy. He speaks of endogamy and exogamy in terms of process. He views endogamy as the process of increasing solidarity through marriage within the group, while exogamy is the process of gaining new allies for the group by marrying outside. He noted in particular that there has been a type of evolution of marriage in a progression starting from fairly strict endogamy moving on to more exogamous arrangements. Broadly exploring the two concepts, Adewale (2006) noted that the concept of endogamy and exogamy can apply to all situations. He avers that most marriages are exogamous in some respect and endogamous in others. In West African societies, marriages are generally not permitted among relatives. In this respect, they are exogamous. In the other respect, West Africans always tend to marry members of their social group: the ethnic group, religious set, social class, etc. In a relative sense, West Africans are endogamous. Arguably, there is narrow and a broad sense in which both endogamy and exogamy may be viewed. For instance, in Nigeria, marrying within the Northern region (ethnic), within same group – be it social, economic or religion may be viewed as endogamy; However, marrying outside one’s ethnic region/group, but within one’s social and religious group may be viewed as both exogamy and endogamy. The variations are thus, determined by the dynamisms in the society. Perhaps, the stronger influences within the general mix – be it social, ethnic, economic and religion may help in redefining the senses in which these concepts are to be viewed. Be it as it may, ethnic and religion considerations have been seen as more influential in matters of marriage.

The advent of Christianity and Islam has indeed introduced a shift in marriages in Africa. Marriages conducted in line with Christian or Islam teachings are commonplace in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. Marriages within one’s religious and ethnic belongingness usually draw support from all and sundry. However, the reverse is the case when the marriage is otherwise. Thus, inter-faith or interreligious marriages usually attract the frowns and disapproval of parents and family members. Cavan (1970) sees interfaith marriage as “a marriage between persons of differing religions”. It is a form of intermarriage and a “type of interaction between religious groups, sub-societies, or societies.” Inter-faith marriage is also known as interreligious marriage which is also called mixed religious marriage, religious exogamy. Fiese and Tomcho (2001) defined inter-faith marriage as a marriage wherein the partners belong to different faith groups (such as a Muslim married to Christian etc.). It is a marital union in which the partners believe and belong to different faiths or religious traditions. Sometimes, ‘interfaith marriage’ and ‘mixed marriage’ are used interchangeably, though a mixed marriage may also be equated with a marital union in which partners are of a different race or ethnicity but belong to the same faith (Imam, 2016).

The magnitudes of interreligious marriage (IRM) vary across societies depending on the various personal attributes of the members and the response of structural factors for IRM. People’s



attitude towards IRM, the response of society and religious community, heterogeneity, group size, educational status, prejudice, degree of discrimination, and religiosity are some among the many factors which determine the magnitude of IRM in a particular society. Despite the variations in enormity across societies, social scientists have reported that, at the present time, interreligious marriage is becoming more common and a normal aspect of life. Interreligious spouses are treated differently in different societies. These treatments are subjected to the attitude of the society and the dogma of a particular religion towards the practice. In some societies, the practice is considered as 'deviant' behaviour which goes against the established norms and values of marriage. In societies where IRM is generally not tolerated, interreligious spouses, especially in the past, were often subjected to punishment. The Jews, for instances, consider intermarriage as a threat to the survival of the Jewish people. In Western countries, religious intermarriage has become a common feature of a person's day to day life and it has reached a stage where it is considered as norm rather than as the exception (Sewenet, et al., 2017).

In Africa, and Nigeria in particular, inter-faith marriage varies in acceptance. The Northern region has less tolerance toward couples and would-be couples. In the Southern part, the level of tolerance is high. For instance, a Southern Muslim can marry Christian woman with allowance for each to practice his/her religion. With the Northern Muslims, this is not altogether tolerated (Nolte & Jones, 2015). The wife, most often than not, is made to practice the religion of the husband. On the part of Muslim women in the Southern part, it is not common but in situations when that occurs, the opposition is not as strong compared to that of the Northern region. In the Northern region, it is seen as a taboo, and not tolerated at all. Imam (2016) stated that while the Shariah accepts the idea of inter-religious marriage between Muslim males and Jewish or Christian women on the one hand, on the other hand such marriages for Muslim women are problematic.

The social construct - religious identity, is a specific type of identity formation. It is particularly adduced to the sense of group membership to a religion; and the importance of the group membership with respect to its linkage to the concept of self. Religious identity is differentiated from religiousness and religiosity. Although, the three may appear to communicate the same concept, religiousness and religiosity refer to the adherence to a religious group membership as well as participation in overt religious activities. Conversely, religious identity refers specifically to religious group membership regardless of religious activity or participation. Identity formation otherwise known as individuation occurs when an individual begins to acquire specific and enduring personal characteristics, at a point in life and by which the person is recognised or known. By this process, one individual is distinct from another (Igundunasse & Fatunji, 2015).

Hence, religious identity is seen as something different from religiosity or religiousness. Although the three terms share a common link, religiousness and religiosity refer to both the value of religious group membership as well as participation in faith-based activities – a blend of different ritual enactment (Ezenagu, Layefa, Okpoko & Okpoko, 2022). In a sense, religious identity refers specifically to religious group membership regardless of religious activity or participation (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

However, Igundunasse and Fatunji (2015) noted that people with an extrinsic religious orientation consider their religious practices to be instrumental in achieving their personal or social objectives (e.g. group acceptance). Conversely, intrinsically oriented individuals consider religion as an ultimate end in itself, which is central to their identity. To this category of believers, religion is a source of motivation for their lives. In other words, individuals who exhibit an extrinsic religiosity are those who participate in religious activities in order to establish or maintain social networks without necessarily internalising religious precepts or teachings. On the other hand, believers with an intrinsic religiosity perceive religion as a driving force to which all others are subordinate in the



context of their lives. It can be safely inferred that religious identity rest on these two categories – those who strictly regulate their lives with the teachings of creed, and those who do not.

Thus, the interplay of a higher or lesser drives of religious identity with marriage; may perhaps increase or reduce the tension against inter-faith marriage before and after. In a situation where persons of differing faiths come together, can they still maintain their religious identity? Or will the religious identity of one person be merged with that of the other person?

Romain (1997: 295-4) helps to resolve the likely outcomes of religious identity challenges in inter-faith marriages through his ten-point possible relationships: 1. *Dual faith harmonious*: both partners have their own strong faith, respect each other's religious needs and are mutually supportive. 2. *Dual faith conflicting*: both partners have their own strong faith, but find it to be a source of tension and rivalry. 3. *Single faith harmonious*: one partner has a strong faith and the other does not, but is happy to be supportive. 4. *Single faith conflicting*: one partner has a strong faith and the other does not, and resents the intrusion of religion into the marriage. 5. *Merged faith*: both partners decide to merge their two faiths into a set of beliefs and way of life that they can share. 6. *Alternative faith*: both partners agree to adopt a third faith, to which they can both belong and feel at ease. 7. *Lapsed faith*: neither partner values religious traditions, and share a common 'lapsedness'. 8. *Converted same-faith*: one partner has converted to the faith of the other, whether before or after marriage, but still carries vestiges of the former faith, including close relatives who are part of the other faith. 9. *Re-emerged mixed-faith*: one partner, usually previously lapsed, has felt a re-emergence of their religious roots and thereby changes the religious balance of the marriage. 10. *Confused faith*: both partners have religious traditions of their own, but are not sure what they believe and go through periods of making a religious effort, jointly or separately, and then giving it up.

Film as a cultural product

Film is defined as a series of motionless images projected into a screen so fast as to create in the mind of anyone watching the screen an impression of continuous motion. Its dynamism is based on persistence of vision (POV) and optical illusion (Sambe, 2005). It is a series of moving pictures recorded with sound that tell a story, shown on television or at the cinema/movie theatre (Horby, 2010). It could also be regarded as meaning and articulated moving pictures that relate or present a story or an idea. Thus, it has been described as an effective medium of communication because it pervades our culture and helps to form attitudes, values and ways of organizing experience. Film is, therefore, a process of image-making in various cultural aspects, traditions and norms. It allows the producer to articulate a series of issues affecting peoples' lives both personal and official (Thompson & Bordwell, 2008, cited in Mainasara, 2017).

In analyzing film, Kayode (2011) highlighted an 8-point normative self-regulating approach: 1) Who is the determinant of the Gaze? The producer or culture? 2) Whose and what cultural agenda is each geo-graphical sector of the country shown to be representing? 3) Is the movie a correct depiction of Nigerian cultures? 4) In what ways are the images formed on Nigerian movies likely to affect Nigerians? 5) Is the movie generally audience-sensitive? Can every Nigerian or any viewer for that matter watch it freely? 6) In what ways do artistes appearances on the screen affect them extra- cinematically? 7) What is the focus of the message? 8) How are acting and technical devices in the movie reinforcing the identities of the people on whom the movie is produced? Given this, Layefa and Ezenagu (2019) noted that the richness of film as a mass medium can well be seen in its essence in the promotion and preservation of the collective identity of a people with distinct cultural uniqueness, though alive to cultural diffusion and innovations. As



a people, Africans have no doubt had their cultural uniqueness diffused; nevertheless, the distinctiveness is still visible.

Studies have been conducted on inter-faith marriages. Imam (2016) worked on Shariah and human rights perspectives on interfaith marriage: Challenges against practice in Nigeria. The study was exploratory in forms and content. It concluded that Muslim women should avoid marrying non-Muslim. His conclusion is purely based on the provision of Shariah law especially on family inheritance. Such submission perhaps falls short of contemporary social realities that are bearing hard on religiosity and closed system of living. The work of Romain in 1997 on the effects of mixed-faith marriages on family and identity draws strength from contemporary social realities. The study employed a phenomenological approach. It copiously made use of secondary sources and empirical studies to substantiate the narratives. It concludes that inter-faith marriage is on the increase due to some factors such as inter alia, secularism and urbanization. Jonathan's submission no doubt addresses the dynamism of societies across times and settings. The impact of industrial revolution, urbanization and advancement of technology, and others such, as education have indeed given room for individual freedom in decision making.

Sewenet, et al (2017), in their study examined interreligious marriage from the social and religious perspectives. It employed secondary sources in its exploration. The study addressed both the social and religious constraints on religious marriages from both the Christian and Muslim perspectives based on the Bible and Quran. It is the view of the authors that the scriptural injunctions leave little or no room for inter-faith or interreligious marriage. Their views mainly derived from secondary sources which somewhat limits the extent of outcomes that bear on present social facts. Moses (2019) also did a study on 'mixed marriage' and the politics of difference in Imperial Germany with a poser - from faith to race?

The study was exploratory in approach and limited to Imperial Germany. The focus was on the contention that 'mixed marriages' drew among confessional lines; resulting in various kinds of bans alongside individual plights to circumvent confessional rules on intermarriage. The study utilized secondary sources. In a similar study by Igundunasse and Fatunji in 2015, the relationship between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriages was sought using a survey research design. The finding revealed a weak negative association between religious identity and attitude to interfaith marriage among Lagos residents in Nigerian.

In a similar study by Layefa and Ezenagu (2019), the dynamism of culture was examined in relation to career, marriage and family as mirrored in a movie. The study employed ethnography as a research approach. It found out that most participants disaffirmed the reality of overlooking a wife's infidelity in Nigeria. Very few contended that some men in Nigerian society for fear of God, may overlook such acta. Although, the last study examined cultural change in relation to career, marriage and family as mirrored in a movie, its concern was not on inter-faith marriage. The present study is concerned with examining inter-faith marriage in relation to Nigerian religious identity with a view to ascertaining (in a relative sense) its acceptability or non-acceptance in the Nigerian society.

Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on Social Structure theory. The central theme of the theory lies on the assumption that individuals' behaviour within the society is constrained by historical, socio-cultural, and political influences that surrounded them. Individuals may react against historical norms; but this reaction may be futile because of the influence of the social structures on them. Above all, the constraint that social structure imposes on the individual is inescapable. This



assumption goes back to the works of the known classical sociologist Emile Durkheim. Durkheim, in his study of social fact, had explicated on the power of social structure on the fruitless reaction of individuals. In fact, people's behaviour, their practices, and attitudes towards certain issues cannot be viewed as a mere product of structural determinants instead they are the outcome of the interplay between both agency and structure. But the degree of personal freedom an individual has within the society is independent of the influence of structural constraints, and may in essence vary from society to society (Romain, 1997).

The relevance of the theory to the study is to be seen in the broader perspective that underscores an understanding of the stiff opposition that would present itself to the party or individual who goes against the laid down structure of the society in which the live. Here, the women from the northern part of Nigeria may not be able to withstand the conflict, and the opposition that may trail a woman's decision to get married to a non-Muslim. She may be disowned, completely disinherited if she decides to go along with a marriage that is unsuitable societally speaking. For the man, who is coming for her hand in marriage, he may be completely refused and if he decides to go ahead, he may be barred from having anything to do with the family. Would-be-couples may not altogether be able to cope with such treatment. Thus, the social structure theory helps in understanding the gravity of these oppositions that the couple may be subjected to. However, a weakness of the theory is also played out in the eventual marriage that took place; which is a clear case of the extent to which social facts/realities sort of modify and readjust social structure overtime.

Methodology

A qualitative survey was adopted as the research design. This research design was used because it makes room for understanding people, their knowledge, beliefs, attitude and opinions and related events. The population of the study comprised 64 students of the Department of Media and Communication, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

The sample size of 24 was purposively selected to include all the students who were offered the course titled "Film review and Criticism". It was thus a non-probability sampling technique in which units were selected because they had characteristics that were needed in the sample, i.e. they were acquainted with the film under discussion and they did a thorough critique of the film under study. Ethical aspects were considered and no incentives were offered for participation. Participants were free to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the study. The focus groups were held in a suitable venue.

The instrumentation was guided discussion and the data collection instrument was a focus group discussion session (FGDs). The focus group discussion involved gathering people from similar backgrounds and experiences together to discuss this specific topic of interest. Questions were asked about their perceptions attitudes, beliefs, opinion or ideas relating to inter-faith marriages. Data obtained from FGDs were analysed using textual presentation.

Analysis of participants' responses

The analysis of participants was divided into two parts. The first part addressed the questions raised in the study while the second part was a discussion on participants' responses across theoretical perspectives. However, the analysis was guided by the five research questions raised in the study: (1) Should a woman marry based on feelings of love and not on religious convictions as shown in *North East*? (2) What do you think the role of the parents should be when it comes to giving their daughters out in marriage as eventually done by Hadiza's father in *North East*? (3)



Should one yield to parental influence based on religion and traditions when it comes to whom to spend the rest of one's life with; as de-emphasised in *North East*? (4) Does the movie - *North East* fulfil the role of the mass media? (5) Do you support inter-faith marriage as represented in *North East*?

In response to the first research question, all the participants strongly affirmed that a woman should marry based on feelings of love and not on religious identity or convictions. Observe some of the responses:

I think a woman or anyone for that matter should marry based on love because love is the only true religion, a relationship can last because of love but a relationship might not survive because of religion.

I strongly do believe and advise everyone both male and female that they should marry based on feeling of love... I feel love should lead not religion because this marriage of a thing we 're talking about is a life time something, you can imagine being with a woman or man you don't love, that is living in strong bondage and this often times lead to infidelity in marriage

No, I believe marriage should be based on love not religion or tribe or even culture, love and understanding are the only things that should be considered when someone wants to marry and not religious differences.

I believe religious identity should have nothing to do with emotions and marriage. At the end of the day, one should do what makes one happy and be with who makes them happier.

Participants' responses to the second research questions were also uniform. They all affirmed that the role of parents when it comes to marriage of the sons and daughters should be advisory. They see it as abnormal when parents try to compel their daughters or sons to marry based on their (parents' religious convictions/traditions) is not normal. Observe their flow of thoughts:

The role of the father should be to give advice to the couple to be, making sure that the groom is suitable for the daughter.

The role of parent or the father should be advisory the child before he or she gets married is to make sure the child is happily married to whoever she or he will be happy with.

The role of a father when his daughter wants to get married should be advisory and making sure that she marries a good person despite religious differences. He should be after her happiness not what we make her sad.

It is the job of the parents to guide their children into making the right decisions for themselves. It is also normal for parents to have their various preferences of religion and ethnicity for their children's partners. But what is not normal or good is the parent trying to force their preferences down their children's throat.

On the third research question, responses of participants were uniform in disaffirmation. Participants strongly held that one should not yield to parental influence when it comes to who one will spend the rest of his or her life with. They are in sync with this position as showcased in *North East*. Consider some of these disapproving responses:



No, I strongly believe that no one has the right to determine who makes you happy, if you are a Christian and marrying a Muslim will make you happy, then do it, you only live once, try and be happy.

One should do what makes one happy and not what makes the parent happy because your parent won't marry you or stay with you forever. So you must be wise especially when making a decision that will affect you forever.

Sometimes our parents feel that we should be raised the way their parents raised them. So because of that our parents can make funny moves that you might not understand.

No, parents should not influence or make you change your mind about who you want to marry except if they are protecting you from a bad person; that should be the only reason. I believe they got married to the love of their life so if you are a Muslim, and a Christian is the love of your life you should do what will make you happy, your parents won't be there if you marry the person you don't love.

I do not think parental influence based on their faith should be yielded too. Sometimes Parents do not know better; that is, sometimes parents can be wrong all because they are trying to look after their kids even when those supposed kids are now adults.

Also, participants' responses on the fourth question were also uniform in the affirmative. They affirmed that the movie – *North East* fulfils the role of the mass media. Observe some responses on this:

Yes, it is enlightening telling us that it is not just about religion or what our parents want for us. It is about what we want, what we make us happy.

The movie fulfilled the role of entertaining, informing and educating.

This movie is educative, informative and entertaining.

The movie entertains and educates us on parents view on inter- tribal marriage.

Similarly, responses of participants to the fifth question were also uniform. All participants affirmed that they support inter-faith marriage; appealing to parents not to force their son and daughter to marry based on their parents' religious beliefs. Observe some of these responses below:

Yes, I believe that as long as there is love, understanding, peace, happiness, everything else is just a bonus.

Yes, I do support interfaith marriage because it's very certain the two people are truly in love to get married regardless of their faith.

Yes, anybody should marry whomever makes them happy and helps them in their success in life.

Yes, as long as there is love and understanding nothing should be a barrier in marriage not even religion.



I believe one should marry who they want regardless of their religious identity or background not omitting the fact that whoever they choose have to be God fearing and respectful.

Discussion

Virtually all the participants affirmed that marriage between two persons should be strictly based on feelings of love and not on religious identity. This position, in part, does not support the submission of Imam (2016) that Muslim women should avoid marrying a non-Muslim. His submission was purely based on the provision of Shariah law especially on family inheritance. It is instructive to note that the participants of the study are Christians and Muslims of marriageable age and all are exposed to westernization; thus, they all strongly disapproved of marriage on religious identity. It is rather obvious then that contemporary social realities are bearing hard on religiosity and closed system of living as found in traditional Nigerian society. Thus, adjustments to these social realities (contemporary times) which in themselves are not evil should perhaps be the focus and not wholly denying, and or strongly opposing them. That all the participants accepted and embraced inter-faith marriage may also be taken as adaptability to cultural dynamism. The contemporary Nigerians are adapting to changes. On this wise, Sam and Ibekwe's submission that despite drastic changes, perhaps in the direction of family improvement among Nigerian families; the notion that they are still trailing behind an array of changes, was not supported (Mezieobi & Ibekwe, 2017).

However, findings of the study supports the work by Romain (1997) that inter-faith marriage is on the increase due to some factors such as secularism, urbanization. Jonathan's submission no doubt addresses the change in societies across times and settings. Mpofu and Nicolaidis (2019) state that: "The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is an expression, which is now used to frame and assess the impact of emergent technologies in the 21st century. The rapidity and quantity of changes that are occurring will result in socio-economic and also political upheavals as there are likely to be increasing shifts in power dynamics, wealth acquisition, and information. This is clearly a foremost transformation in society, and especially the IT worldview demands appropriate ethical insights, actions and sanction". The impact of this industrial revolution, urbanization and advancement of technology in the era of 4IR, and others such as education, have indeed given room to individual freedom in decision making. In Nigerian society this impact of colonization, urbanization is clearly seen in the ways of lives both in public space and in private. Cultural changes are indeed visible, and religion which is a sub-culture is not unaffected. Culture, it is said, is dynamic and not static. The earlier this is understood, the less pain will result in the case of some unusual eventuality (Layefa & Ezenagu, 2019).

Hence, the responses of participants that parents' role should only be that of an advisory one, attests to the dynamism of culture. The issue of marriage in Africa, and Nigeria in particular is strictly parents' and family affairs. Most times, African youths have no say at all in their marriages where match-making is adopted as the modus operandi. He or she marries whom the parents, especially the father deemed to be acceptable regardless of whether the concerned parties love each other or not. Today, most contemporary Nigerian parents, though painfully, know and accept that such overriding power has been weakened with the dynamics of colonization, globalization, industrialization and religious diffusion. Considering the following responses: *The role of parent or the father should be advisory to the child before he or she gets married; No, I strongly believe that no one has the right to determine who makes you happy.* Evidently, participants are not anyway in support of marriage influenced by parents or society's norms and traditions when it goes against the feelings of love for a partner. This position as revealed in the study exposed the



weakness of the social structure theory. The theory holds that an individual's behaviour within society is constrained by historical, socio-cultural, and political influences that surrounded them. Individuals may react against these, but this reaction is futile compared to the influence of the social structures on them. Above all, the constraint social structure imposes on the individual is inescapable. In societies today, these social structure influences have been weakened by the forces of globalization, industrialization and urbanization (Romain, 1997) and continue to be affected by them.

Furthermore, these forces of industrialization, globalization, and urbanization have perhaps weakened religiosity. It is noteworthy to understand that religious identity cannot be equated with religiosity or religiousness. The two categories – intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations of individual are quite different. While the former sees religion as a driving force and an end in itself, the latter sees religion as a means to an end (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010). Families and by extension societies that have more of their sons and daughters with intrinsic religious identity may not have a disruption of the social structure but reinvigorate and uphold the tenets of the society's religious equilibrium as regards marriage. The reverse may be case for families and society with sons and daughters of extrinsic religious identity. The participants of the study appear to belong to the extrinsic religious identity group. Religion to them may not be an end in itself, but rather a means to end. Hence, they all supported inter-faith marriages. Perhaps, the same can be said about the two main characters in *North East*. The implication of these two categories of religious identity is that since religion is a sub-culture and culture is dynamic (as a result of external forces), every parent, family and by extension the society, may experience relative changes of social structural orientation overtime.

Conclusion and recommendations

Inter-faith marriage has become common place in the Nigerian society due to the forces of colonization, urbanization and industrialization. Film as a medium of communication has been employed to mirror these contemporary social realities as occasioned by the forces described earlier. In the narrative of the film – *North East* – social reality in relation to religious identity was strongly showcased. Participants strongly affirmed that it is the feelings of love rather than religious identity or difference that matter in marriage; and that the role of the father should be strictly advisory; that they wholly support the notion of interfaith marriage. All participants affirmed that the film fulfils the role of the mass media of educating, and negotiating cultural and religious changes. Based on the responses of participants the following recommendations are given:

- i. Since, inter-faith marriage is fraught with challenges. After crossing parental unwilling approval, a follow-up can be done on the aftermath to assist a would-be couple. Thus, the film producers, especially with inter-faith marriage should endeavour to run a follow-up story line that may present a seemingly clearer picture of all the various inter-faith marriage apparent challenges.
- ii. As a corollary to the above, film producers should endeavour to always capture prevailing social realities and especially when those realities are not evil in themselves.
- iii. The present study concerned itself with inter-faith and religious identity in relation to a movie from a stand-point of parental refusal, a similar analysis of film that showcases a daughter's refusal based on religious convictions to marry a father's choice of groom based on wealth and fame can be done to give room for comparison.



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