

# **A Christian Construction of Domestic Violence in Electronic Media: A Case Study of *Ìdààmú Ilémoşú* by Kolade Segun-Okeowo**

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## **Abstract**

Domestic violence is often literally used as a metaphor for power relationships and expressed in different forms and contexts. Scholarships on domestic violence focus more on medical and social aspects to the neglect of its representation in electronic media. An analysis of home video films, which forms part of the electronic media, is worthwhile in expounding the prevalence, causes and effect of this social ill in the Nigerian society. This paper explores the representation of domestic violence in *Ìdààmú Ilémoşú*, a popular video film produced by Kolade Segun-Okeowo, a Nigerian Christian producer of Christian home video films. The analysis of data benefits from the sociology of religion.

**KEY WORDS:** Domestic violence, Christian Home Video films, Religion and Society

## **Introduction**

Some literary scholars working on domestic violence are mainly preoccupied with the representation of violence in written texts (Slotkin 1973; Takaki 1993; Perraudin (1998); Roberts 1998; White 2006 and Garret 2009) to the neglect of home video films, an important repertoire of sociology of the African society. The power of fantasy and images in the (re)creation of persons and societies cannot be underestimated (Meyer 2003). Fantasy is now a social practice, which enters, in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies (Appadurai 1996: 54). Representation of various fantasies and other aspects of life in diverse media, especially

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film and video, is pertinent to understanding the society. The role of media in propagating religious issues is paramount in Nigeria and the entire African continent at large. Domestic violence could be termed as an affliction and abuse suffered by an individual and or as a group in society. It could be termed a social problem which can lead to untimely death, sickness and stigmatization, if not attended to in time.

Most of the existing studies on domestic violence focus mainly on prevalence, patterns, causes and its perceptions in Nigeria. There is virtually no published work on the portrayal of Christian perceptions of domestic violence in the Nigerian cinematography. This paper contributes to the understanding of the scourge of domestic violence for two major reasons. One, electronic media, especially the home video films occupy a central space in changing peoples' behavioural attitudes and perceptions. Two, religion also occupy a major space in societal attitudes towards various issues in the society. Domestic violence is deep-rooted in many African societies, including Nigeria, where wife beating is considered a prerogative of men (Odimegwu, 2001; Ofie-Aboagye, 1994 and Okemgbo, 2002). Hence, this essay is important as it points to efforts to mitigating violence, especially against women in Nigeria since changing people's perception is a major step towards behavioural change.

Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe (2005: 39) observes that:

Violence against women is evident in many forms, including domestic, verbal and physical abuse, rape and sexual assault, early and forced marriages, incest and female genital cutting. In most societies, physical abuse is often considered an acceptable behaviour, and where it is frowned at, women are often blamed for inciting men to engage in it.

The observation above reveals the diverse forms of violence that could be found in any society and the fact that no society is free from this retrogressive act. Their assertion that physical abuse is regarded as an acceptable norm in many African societies is plausible. This is because many regard husbands beating their wives and maltreating young girls will in turn make them good housewives. They maintain that violence affects the lives of millions of women in Nigeria irrespective of their socio-economic status. It cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious barriers, impeding the rights of women to participate fully in the society. As grievous and as common domestic violence is both in the public and private spheres, it is often rendered invisible, unrecognized and at best trivialized (Ondicho, 2000).

In Nigeria, reports reveal “shockingly high” level of violence against women. Amnesty International (2007) reports that a third (and in some cases two-thirds) of women are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence carried out primarily by husbands, partners and fathers while girls are often forced into early marriage and are at risk of punishment if they attempt to escape from their husbands. More pathetic is the revelation of gross under reporting and non-documentation of domestic violence due to cultural factors (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005, *Afrol News*, 2007). Women in Nigeria have had various challenges, the co-existence of males and females has been observed to witness inequality and discrimination against females. Women are relegated, marginalized and discriminated in the society. The popular depiction of women in media cannot be overemphasized, the Christian home video films, as we shall discuss below, is one instance of this.

### **Christoline Evangelical Drama Outreach Ministry**

Christoline Evangelical Drama Outreach Ministry was established by Evangelist Kolade Segun-Okeowo (KSO) and his wife Sunbo Segun-Okeowo on November 6, 1993. The initial headquarters was Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria before it was moved to Ogijo, Ogun State, Segun-Okeowo's home town. He studied history at Ogun State University, Nigeria and graduated in 1990. He earned a M.Sc. degree in International Relations at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Segun-Okeowo was a former member of the Palm Wine Drinkers Club (Kegite), a popular student society mostly in Nigerian universities. He claimed to have become a devoted Christian on March 9, 1992 and was involved in Christian drama after he watched a local Christian drama staged by the Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama. This was disclosed in an interview with him in 2011 at Ogijo town:

When I converted I was zealous to serve God. While I was in Ile-Ife as a missionary to a church in town I got to know about Mount Zion Film Production. On campus in Oduduwa Hall I watched a film called 'Lost Forever' and I was thirsty to know the people who did this film. So, I was impressed that film could be used as a source of evangelism. When I had the opportunity of attending their two weeks training course I jumped at it. In the course I got the opportunity of serving God and that is what I was doing up till today.<sup>2</sup>

In 1993, he founded his drama group called Watchtower Drama Ministry. His first film was produced in 1995 titled *Omoge Omi*, with its English version titled 'Daughter of River' that gave him needed popularity. From the time of his conversion he had attended various Pentecostal churches, starting with the Deeper Christian Life Bible Church, moved to the Assemblies of God from where he finally joined the New Covenant Church. He again left the New Covenant church and joined the Redeemed Christian Church of God where he remains a member. His wife, Sunmbo graduated from the Federal Polytechnic, Ede, Osun State where she studied Computer Science. The couple both directs the affairs of the drama outreach ministry. Between 1994 and 2011, Christoline had produced nineteen films, besides those written and co-produced with other Christian drama ministers. Among them are: *Omoge Omi* (1994), *Alade Okunkun* (1994), *Return of the Prodigal* (1995), *Time to Weep* (1997), *Basket of Vengeance* (1999), *The Thorn in My Flesh* (2001), *Too Hard to Bear* (2002), *Free but Costly* (2005), *The Fall of A Thousand* (2006), *Ta Lo n Se Mi?* (2007), *Who Is My Enemy?* (2007), *The Other Woman* (2008), *The Blood on Trial* (2008), *Loving the Foe* (2009), *Idaamu Ilemosu* (2009), *The Gods Are to Blame* (2009), *Isise Kan* (2010), *Hose on the Rock* (2010), and *And When Two Elephants Fight* (2011).

### **Ìdààmú Ilémoşú "The Scourge of a Divorcee": Brief Summary of Content**

Ìdààmú Ilémoşú (the Scourge of a Divorcee), a Christian home video film written and produced by Kolade-Segun Okeowo centers on marital challenges and uproar. It is in connection with ancestral covenants made by their fore-fathers, by one of the kings with ancestral spirits, which the current generation is ignorant of. The play presents Ajoke as a victim of broken marriages, who after bearing four children for four different husbands still found herself in her mother's house. Ajoke's mother takes solace in divorce. In fact,

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<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Segun-Okeowo in 2011 at Ogijo town, Ogun state, Nigeria.

to her divorce is a thing of prestige, glory and a means of wealth accumulation from divorced husband.

*Ìdààmú Ilémoşú* constructs the troubles associated with the practice of spiral polygamy; a woman who had four children for four different husbands; and in each case forced out of marriage. Each of these husbands usually beat her mercilessly. In many instances, she sustains injury from these beatings. This movie enumerates the effects of a covenant made by king of a community and the evil effects of this covenant on generations of indigenes of this community, even on those who reside outside the town. Domestic violence persisted until the affected person 'received deliverance' (is exorcised) from the ancestral spirit before she could secure a successful married life. Thus, it was when Ajoke accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour that she became liberated from the evil effects of the covenant instituted by the king who established that community, as depicted in the play.

As the play unravels, Bayo a friend to Lawon, Ajoke's first husband systematically walks into her life bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to her and revealing the secret of her inability to have a happy and long lasting marital life. The movie shows that the blessings of the spirit of the land of *Igbòòdú* results into curses for the inhabitants. The curse is that they will have unstable marriages in which they will be giving birth to children outside marriage. Ajoke is able to overcome these marital difficulties by accepting Jesus Christ, thus also portraying how she was delivered from all curses.

### **Marriage and Family Issues**

To some Pentecostal Christians in Nigeria, social questions are essentially understood as spiritual issues as well. Many of the Christian home videos have strong religious allusions and call audiences to review the traditional and religious values surrounding the institution of marriage. *Ìdààmú Ilémoşú* is a typical example of a home video film that addresses overtly the Nigerian Pentecostal perception of a marriage institution. This pattern is congruent with what happens in real life in many towns in Southwestern Nigeria. The thriving stories of Pentecostal churches seem to confirm their perception and attitude towards the institution of marriage and family issues. The video film activates a number of issues regarding marriage such as divorce, child-bearing and inheritance.

The role of the traditional ruler in the village (*Igbòòdú*) ontology is significant in the community, since he bridges the gap between the real and supernatural worlds, striving to sustain peace and harmony between all members and also to seek the continuity of the community. In the represented community, the so called blessings of the spirit of the land of *Igbòòdú* on its inhabitants is that they shall continue to have many wives, many husbands and they shall keep bearing many children. Ultimately, this was to populate the community.

Central to Christoline productions is Christian spiritual warfare against the forces of evil. The films warn of dangers, but also offer solutions, an approach which is sometimes seen to be effective in popularizing biblical messages. In my interview with the film producer in 2011, he opines that this presentation is in consonance with God's warning to the Israelites that they should forsake the ways of the heathen in order to enter into their promised land. They were given strict and direct orders as to how they were to deal

with the idols in their new land. As he explained further, ‘God told Israel they were not only to destroy the idols, they were to break down their altars and cut down their groves, or destroy completely the high places that the idols occupied. They were also to destroy all their images.’ It is the contention of some Pentecostal Christians that the curses on a particular land can be combated and removed only through fervent charismatic prayers, worship and exorcism, usually led by a faithful pastor. The film emphasizes the doctrines of deliverance and sanctification while constantly reminding believers of the dangers of the occult and ancestral spirits. Some Nigerian Pentecostals argue that all current problems stem from what they call demonic practices; anyone who has participated in traditional rituals, is seen as someone who has been contaminated by demons and needs deliverance as depicted in the home video.

Viewed from another perspective, this film serves as a ‘sermon’ against divorce and separation. The idea reinforced in this film corroborates the way that some Nigerian Pentecostals hold the institution of marriage as hinging on the principle of togetherness. The movie portends that religious leaders should be familiar with the historical foundation of the local context they are pastoring in order to be empowered for a successful ministerial enterprise. In the play, Ajoke was able to know the source of her problem through a European scholar who conducted research on Igbó Òdú, her native town and discovered that a lady that got married must come back home (*dálémoşú*) in order to populate the town. The covenant in this town was depicted as having major effect on all marriages contracted for all indigenes, which means that all marriages must collapse and women will be moving from one husband to another. Ajoke, the heroine of the play was a victim of this ancestral curse until the day she came in contact with the Christian who had knowledge of the community’s history. Through this contact she got to know the genesis of her existential problem. At this juncture, the only solution for her was deliverance from the ancestral curse that has been working against her. In the play, Ajoke begins to enjoy blissful marital life after she has gone through much violence in the hand of various husbands as a result of ancestral curses. It has been demonstrated that the power of Pentecostals serve as power breaker, but through contestation (Ojo 1997; Asonzeh 2008; and Ajibade 2013). The play projects the Christian idea that whenever an individual gives his or life to Christ there must be newness of life and experience. This construction in the film is to sermonize that the Pentecostal power surpasses every other power. Hence, the film is an appeal to the masses to have a change of mind and life for a better life in the society and the life to come.

The worldview underpinning the practice of healing and deliverance in African Pentecostalism is based primarily on Jesus’ encounters with the powers of affliction and Pauline notions of the wrestle with principalities and powers (Ephesians 6); as well as within the indigenous African cosmology. The basic theological orientation of the healing and deliverance phenomenon is the belief that demons may either possess a person and take over his or her executive faculties or simply oppress people through various influences. Whether the human crisis has resulted from possession or oppression, African Pentecostal churches and movements including the classical Pentecostal churches provide the ritual contexts for prayer and exorcism to deliver the afflicted. Moreover, the African worldview of mystical causation looms large in the practice of healing and deliverance. Much of the worldviews underlying the practice of healing and deliverance, especially the belief in mystical causality, resonates with African philosophical thoughts.

Deliverance doctrines evolved from those seeking an explanation of the evil influence often demonstrative in believers' actions. Deliverance from demonic forces was a sincere effort to explain the influence of the spiritual powers in a Christian's life. Deliverance ministers teach that part of their "spiritual armor" was to get "delivered" from the demons that had "strongholds" in their lives. Some Nigerian Pentecostal Christians who practice deliverance service use the very words of Jesus to justify their practice, and they attribute almost any serious problem or sickness at least potentially to demons:

And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.<sup>3</sup>

Advocates of deliverance feel that they are privy to the devil's best kept secrets. The factor of guilt and generational curses also play a major role here. Deliverance tradition has been one of perfectionism. It has been believed that once one has experienced "entire sanctification" or "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," or both, one is responsible for, and capable of, maintaining a largely curse and sin-free life and attitude. To eradicate curses and sinful actions and attitudes, one need only remain faithful in devotional practices and "claim the victory" by appropriating God's power over spiritual forces and moral problems. This is visible in the movie where the housewife, Ajoke, who has been married to four different husbands, was told to accept Jesus as her Lord and savior and be delivered from generational curses in order to be freed from curses. It was shown in the movie that it was deliverance from curses that guaranteed Ajoke's marital bliss and stability. When things are not going well, the appeal to the work of demons and witches come in handy as explanations.

Pentecostals draw attention to the fact that the gospel is about restoration, so it is expected that the transformation of the personality would be manifest in personal health, well-being and care. In short, salvation is holistic and includes spiritual as well as physical abundance. The process of restoration is not individualistic as people are encouraged to disengage from generational curses; and through fasting, prayer and personal ministrations release family members from any such bondage. Salvation here gives a holistic meaning that includes "a sense of well-being evidenced in freedom from sickness, poverty and misfortune as well as in deliverance from sin and evil (Anderson and Hollenweger, 1999:215).

It must be pointed out however that the Pentecostals and Charismatic groups who engage in deliverance ministry provide a ritual context in which the enslaving effects of generational curses can be dealt with and they substantiate their claims with the prophetic declaration in the book of Ezekiel, "The sins of the fathers shall no more be visited on their children." This is seen as a path to enjoying the fullness of life in Christ. The producers of the movie thus maintain that Ajoke's misfortune is linked to the generational curses that must be broken by accepting Jesus and deliverance. It would seem that one lesson the film attempts to convey, though controversially, to the audience is that majority of people who experience marital hardship and instability need to recur to deliverance as their problems might be rooted in generational curses. This will resonate mostly with the audience in the specific local context in which the film was produced.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:17-18 (NAS).

## Conclusion

The producers of entertainment media appear to present their perspective of domestic violence from a somewhat realistic view, which adds validity to media representations of domestic violence. The examination of the cinematographic representation of domestic violence establishes the fact that women suffer a great deal. Domestic violence, such as intimate partner violence has led to much havoc such as untimely death, sickness of various kinds, social stigma and lots more. The play unravels the fact that the place of culture and history in religion is very significant in order to achieve sustainable development in any given society. More importantly, a proper understanding of home video films is revealing and illuminating; it shows that home video film is a repertoire of societal issues, especially those that are regarded as hidden. The movie reveals an emphasis on the empowering effect of the gospel of Jesus Christ; but also a relationship between transformation and empowerment. African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches maintain that demonic influences and generational curses has led to the provision of ritual contexts in which people could renounce such stumbling blocks through healing and deliverance in order that they may be empowered to live victorious life. Through the film, Pentecostal Christianity emerges as a counter power to attempt solution to societal problems. It shows how the spiritual dimension of domestic violence should not be underrated in addressing the scourge of domestic violence. Likewise, the role of culture in religion and the knowledge of history are germane to achieving the desired results of ameliorating violence, in this instance domestic violence.

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