

COVID-19's IMPACT OR A SICK PEOPLE? COMMENTARY ON THE RISING CASES OF RAPE AND INCESTS IN NIGERIA THROUGH THE LENS OF THE NIGERIAN VIDEO FILM

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Abstract

The novel corona virus (Covid-19), which broke out in the Wuhan region of China in December, 2019 engulfed the entire world in unprecedented zest. More than any natural or man-induced disasters in recent global history, the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world with a sledge hammer, affecting not only lives, but economic and social institutions in unfathomable proportion. One common strategy adopted in most parts of the globe in curbing the spread of the disease is total lockdown, a system that shuts people indoors with minimal social and economic interactions. Regrettably, the lockdown witnessed a rise in domestic violence, especially incestuous rape. Using the analytical method by examining this thematic thrust through the lens of select Nigerian video films, this paper takes a critical look at this trend and its posttraumatic stress disorders in its wake.

Keywords: Covid-19, incest, rape, posttraumatic stress disorders, movie

Introduction

The novel corona virus (Covid-19), which broke out in the Wuhan region of China in December, 2019 has engulfed the entire world in unprecedented zest. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the dreaded virus a pandemic on March 11, 2020. More than any natural or man-induced disasters in recent global history, the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world with a sledge hammer, affecting not only lives, but economic and social institutions in unfathomable proportion. In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Health confirmed the index case of Covid-19 on the 27th of February, 2020. From the index case, the disease engulfed the entire nation. As at the close of 16th July, 2020, all thirty-six States and the Federal Capital Territory in Nigeria had a total of 34,854 confirmed cases of Covid-19 with 19,793 active, 14,292 discharged, and 769 deaths (NCDC, 2020).

From January to April 2020, the fatalities resulting from the pandemic had hit astronomic proportion, freezing and crippling the socio-economic life of nations. Consequently, overcoming the unprecedented health challenges posed by the pandemic became the main agenda of nations, the world over, including Nigeria. One common strategy adopted in most parts of the globe in curbing the spread of the disease is total lockdown, a system that shuts people indoors for upwards of months with minimal social and economic interactions. The entire world, it seemed was at war with an enemy that they could not fathom in its entirety as it rendered the health systems of even the most developed economies, grossly inadequate. In a period of war, in the words of Bertolt Brecht "man's worse instincts come to bear". Rather than remain indoors as preventive measure to curb the pandemic, "the worse human instincts" for negative tendencies also soared indoors. WHO warns and rightly too, that the lockdown may occasion a rise in crime wave including domestic violence. The astronomic proportion that domestic violence assumed during the pandemic made the United Nations to christen it as a "shadow pandemic" (Mohan, 2020).

One very disturbing "shadow pandemic" in Nigeria is the rising incidents of rape, including incestuous rape. Reports of rape inundate the media during the lockdown even in a most disgusting and disturbing proportion as children, less than a year old, were also victims. It is apropos to note that this article is not suggesting that domestic violence began in this age of the Covid-19 pandemic as domestic violence has been a global pandemic even long before the Covid-19 outbreak. According to Bettinger-Lopez and Bro (2020), as much as 243 million women were subjected to sexual or physical violence globally by an intimate partner in the last twelve months. It is therefore, not a surprise that rape and domestic violence have been subjects of town-hall outpours in the Nigerian media before and during the pandemic.

However, the astronomical proportion in which rape, especially incestuous rape occurred during the pandemic lockdown is worth noting. The lockdown brought in its wake, a devastating paradox; naturally, family members, who due to the tugs and pulls of everyday life's challenges are separated daily, ought to be united at home to spend some quality time together. Unfortunately, being trapped at home paradoxically brings the victims closer to their assailants, with nowhere to run. At home, parents easily molested their children. In Anambra State of Nigeria alone, over eighty (80) cases of father-daughter rape were reported within a short period during the lockdown (The Independent, 9th June, 2020). Decrying the high spate of this ugly trend in the state, the Director of Child Welfare Services in the State Ministry of Women Affairs, Mrs Nkechi Anazodo, laments that the situation was more worrisome as fathers who raped their daughters threatened to kill them if they report.

Anambra State was not the only area in the country with the atrocity. Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, series of domestic violence, especially incestuous rape were reported. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTF) puts it succinctly that no fewer than 143 cases of incest, rape and other associated violence were reported to it during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown (John-Mensah, 2020). In Abuja, Aluko (2020) reports the bitter incident of how a seven-year old was raped by her father during the lockdown in Wuse Zone 5 of the nation's Federal Capital Territory. The worse about the incident is that her mother threatened her never to tell anyone about it; making the mother, an accomplice.

Similarly, the Nigeria's Inspector General of Police reports that of the 799 suspects arrested by the police force between January and May 2020, 717 were rape suspects (*The Guardian*, 16 June 2020). Some of the most gruesome rape cases that brought the nation to her knees during the Covid-19 lockdown were those of the 22-year-old microbiology student of the University of Benin, Uwaila Vera Omozuwa who was raped and murdered inside a church in Edo State. The very church she worshipped, which she took as a haven to study became her death bed. (Tade, 2020). In a similar occurrence (though with no fatality), the Nation newspaper reports of a young girl raped by Elijah Orhonigbe, a bishop and the founder of Victory Revival Fasting and Prayer Ministry inside his church in Warri, Delta State. The nation will also not forget in a hurry, the dastard rape of Hamira, a 5-year-old girl who was drugged and raped by her neighbour in April, 2020 resulting to severe bladder damage.

While it is said that over 90% of rape cases are not reported, the Minister of Women Affairs of Nigeria, Mrs Pauline Tallen reveals that a whopping 3,600 rape cases were reported nationwide during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown (Elumoye, 2020). The widespread rape cases, especially incestuous rapes made Uroko and Enobong (2021) report the situation thus:

The married, the unmarried, teenagers, children and adolescents, as far as the person is female, were affected. Some were raped in their parents' house; others were raped in their own room. Unfortunately, some were raped in the church, the supposed house of God. Others were raped in streams and farms. No time of the day was safe for girls...

As part of its thematic thrust, the Nigerian movies have chronicled this dark side of society. Since new films treating the subject of rape, probably due to the lockdown are not available, this article looks at this phenomenon through the framing of rape including incest and their post traumatic effect in Nigeria through the lens of select Nigerian films with special focus on *Alter Ego* (2017) and *Slave to Lust* (2007).

Rape and Posttraumatic Disorder: Conceptual framework

Rape, in all its colouration is a very disturbing, dehumanizing and traumatic experience. Though both sexes are prone to rape, the female gender is most often at the receiving end. Victims of rape sometimes suffer from posttraumatic disorder (PTSD). According to the Norooz Clinic Foundation (nd), posttraumatic disorder (PTSD) is "a condition of persistent mental and emotional stress occurring as a result of injury or severe psychological shock". The situation is usually characterized by sleep disorder and constant vivid recall of the experience. In most cases, the experience is so intense that the victim finds it difficult to either recover from it, or overcome it. Persons with PTSD find it very difficult to sleep and may often experience and display symptoms such as nightmares or flashbacks and even depression.

Although writers like Wasco (2003) have argued that trauma response models and applications of posttraumatic stress to characterize the experiences of women who are raped is defective because the model fails to capture the complexities of the experience, posttraumatic disorders in rape cases can be used as model to explain certain behavior associated with such cases (the analysis of the film *Alter Ego* will be used later to justify this argument).

Persons suffering from PTSD, especially in associated with rape case may find it very difficult to overcome as they often hide the experience from people. The more they hide the act, the more it sometimes consumes them from the inside. Experts give various reasons why rape cases are not disclosed or reported to authorities. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2020) inter alia notes some of the reasons to include: victims wouldn't want their family or close associates to know because of stigmatization. Rather than identifying with the victims, society often brands them. Also, because rape cases are often difficult to prove in the court of law, many victims are afraid that either the police will never take the case serious, or they are shamed by the rather ludicrous way they are interrogated by the police. Other reasons include either not being believed, or they are sometimes blamed for providing their assailants with the right environment for their woes. This is why some rape cases are misconstrued to be consensual sex. Again, rape victims may be afraid that even if their assailants are imprisoned for the act, they may come out some time to hurt them much more.

It took Nigeria too long a time to come out with effective legislature that protects vulnerable children, girls and women from domestic violence including rape. The law, tagged Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act which was finally passed into law in 2015, after decades of its birth, may help to curtail the menace of violence against women and the girl child. The law prohibits all forms of violence against persons in private and public life, and seeks to provide maximum protection for such persons. However, how efficient the various regulatory

agencies will wield the apparatus of this law to offer “maximum protection” for the vulnerable in our society is another ball game all together.

Synoptic outlay of *Alter Ego* (2017) and *Slave to Lust* (2007)

Alter Ego is a most entertaining, star-studded 2017 Nollywood cinema movie acclaimed to have extended the frontiers of professionalism in film making with an array of Nollywood’s best and glamorous actors. It has elicited a rave of reviews not only because of its thematic preoccupation with the very topical and touchy issue of rape and child abuse, but most importantly because it deals with the most sensitive but underplayed issue of post-traumatic sex disorders (PTSD) cases in Nigeria; a psychotic ailment suffered by many molested and sexually abused youth who have no voice and little hope of getting justice. Directed by Moses Iwang, the movie features stars like Omotola Jolade Ekeinde, Wale Ojo, Kemi Remi, Tina Mba, Jide Kosoko, and a host of others.

The movie centres around Adaora Igwe (Omotola Jolade Ekeinde), a brilliant lawyer who is passionately motivated to give legal justice to traumatized sexually abused children. She is a human rights activist who would stop at nothing to send all sexual predators and sex offenders to jail using both legal and unorthodox means. Having been a victim of child molestation in the hands of her secondary school teacher who serially raped her at the tender age of thirteen, Ada develops a split personality comprising a combination of a legal luminary and activist and a psychotic nymphomaniac, which she employed as a defence mechanism, to combat a complicated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD) engulfing her life.

The multi-plot movie, *Alter Ego*, opens with an exposition of Adaora’s legal prowess and sexual perversion. This opening gives glimpses into the internal psychological pains she struggles with that prompts her split personality. In contradiction to her status as a successful high profile lawyer, her perverted impulses make her condescend to sleep with all sorts of men and in all manner of places irrespective of their status. Her domestic workers, her subordinates in the office, and any available man gets into her bed when the impulse arises, including her younger sister’s fiancé. Grieved by her actions, and fighting for control, she rewards the men after their sexual encounter and cuts off from them only to fall for the next available man when the urge arises.

After she successfully prosecutes a very influential sex offender, her nympho tendencies showed up as she impulsively made love to her driver at the backseat of her car when stuck on her way home in the dense Lagos traffic. As a consequence of her ailment, she has difficulty keeping a decent relationship. When Jeff, an old acquaintance, shows up in her house, they end up making love after which she throws him out. Her craving for sex notwithstanding, she develops a reputation as a fierce and unrelenting legal pundit and human rights activist who sends many influential and highly placed sex offenders to jail. At the height of her chequered life, she chances on the world-renowned wealthy philanthropist and human rights activist, Timothy Ighodaro (Wale Ojo). The latter proposes that they join forces to give succour to helpless, voiceless, and abused children needing aid and justice. This successful synergy snowballs into romantic relationship that gives Ada a sense of mental, psychological, and emotional balance. It also gives her hope of marital bliss, having found a man to love after years of despicable philandering and sexual depravity. However, her hopes are shattered at the peak of a thriving love affair when the much respected new found lover is accused of being a demonic rapist and child molester by a sexually abused and molested kid. Ada investigates the accusations and found them to be true. Enraged, Ada confronts

Timothy with the allegations and evidence of his dark secrets, which ruined the memorable dinner date during which Timothy arranged to propose marriage. His plea for understanding and confession of being a victim of child molestation in the hands of a nanny is not enough reason to stop Ada from terminating their romance and prosecuting him.

In the ensuing lawsuit, the dark side of Ada's split personality becomes the subject of contention. Shamed by the events in court, she almost gives up on the case. However, when she realizes that Aisha and her brother's lives might be in jeopardy, she rekindles her passion and resilience to finish the case. Extra zest to continue the case further comes from other girls sexually abused by Timothy who offered to testify against him. Ada wins the case and Timothy is sent to jail. In the quest to get to the root of her emotional trauma, Ada goes searching for her secondary school teacher with the intent to kill him. When she finds him, he is but a shadow of a human being; he is a sick, paralysed recluse at the verge of death. On her way out of his presence, she is confronted and shot by her sister, Ngozika and her fiancé. A seemingly contrived ending intended to achieve questionable poetic justice.

Alter Ego is not the only film that captures these dastard images of rape. In *Slave to Lust* (2007), an influential Chief Justin (Olu Jacobs), adopts two little children from an orphanage, a boy Jay Jay (Van Vicker) and a girl, Natasha (Ini Edo) and raised them as his own. As Natasha grows into puberty, her father just couldn't control his infatuation to her beauty and turns her into his sexual slave to satisfy his insatiable lust for her body. He locks her in a room for most of the time, sexually abusing her. Chief Justin will never allow any visitors in to see her on the pretence that he does not want her corrupted by her friends. He even gets her pregnant twice and forcefully makes her to abort the pregnancies. When posttraumatic stress disorder begins to manifest in Natasha, it takes the house keeper's eavesdropping to know the actual situation in the dark home.

Concerned about the health and emotional situation of his sister, Jay Jay probes deep to fathom her challenges and vows to kill whoever was silently killing her. Afraid that his son, Jay Jay (Van Vicker) is getting to probe into the matter, Chief attempts to send him to Iceland. In one of his attempts to rape her again, Jay Jay walks in and warns him to stay away from her. In the ensuing confrontation, he shoots and kills him.

Rape and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in *Alter Ego* and *Slave to Lust*

Despite the avalanche of criticism in different departments of the Nigerian film industry, ranging from the nomenclature to plot recycling and defects in language and technical elements, one fact is certain: the Nigerian films, as Umukoro (2019) puts it, "are telling the Nigerian story, using the prevailing Nigerian idioms". It is these recognizable idioms that pull the audience to the films as millions of Nigerians "see and hear themselves on the screen" Umukoro (2019).

The acceptability of the Nigerian film makes it an alternative mass mobilization medium through which positive ideologies geared toward cultural reconstruction are disseminated. Ihunwo (136) also notes this, emphasizing that Nigerian films act as stabilizing agents as they contribute to the maintenance of social order. Bergman ([http://www.newmark.co.kr/who we are.html](http://www.newmark.co.kr/who_we_are.html)) avers that the reason why films are able to propel audience towards positive cultural armament is because they go "directly to our feelings, deep down into the darkrooms of our souls". Sometimes the films coming from the Nigerian film industry may not be palatable to sections of the society. The industry has screened dark and gory images; images of corruption, of political decay, of familial rot, of robbery and kidnapping, of gruesome occultism, of domestic violence, and of rape including incest.

Some of these dark images represent the dark side of our collective consciousness; who we are, what we stand for, and what we ought not, as a people. As the human mind on the general scale may want to identify more with good, there have been copious criticism against some of these dark representations. For instance, in response to the occultism often portrayed in some of the films, Eze-Orji (np) and Ekwuazi (2019) condemned some of the producers. For instance, while acknowledging the positive contribution of the industry to the socio-economic gains in the country, Eze-Orji (np) frowned at the movie industry for projecting “Nigeria and the Igbo in particular as ritualistic society where sacrifices involving human beings are perpetuated per second billing”. Ekwuazi (2019) is even more critical of the movie makers, calling them “scoundrels” who “have turned Igbo myth around from sublime to the ridiculous”. Responding to some of these criticisms, Umukoro (2019) notes that while taking the Nigerian movie industry to the cleaners, critics should be aware that the producers are not taking their materials from the void, but from the residue of images the society thrust at them. Umukoro cites the 1999 Clifford Orji’s case, the Okija Shrine saga in Ihiala local government area of Anambra State and the Otokutu Bridge murder saga in Delta State as vivid cases.

Both movies, *Alter Ego* and *Slave to Lust* as well as other films with similar thematic thrust project rape as a social malaise that is not only inimical to the individual but as scourge in the society that must be curbed. The films draw attention of all stakeholders, government and the general public to give serious attention to rape and child abuse in order to avert the dangerous consequences it triggers both on the physical, mental and psychological state of not only the victims, but the ripple effects they have on society.

Although *Alter Ego* and *Slave to Lust* are both pre-Covid-19 movie, there is symbiotic relationship between the cause of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD) suffered by the protagonists of both films and the series of incestuous rapes perpetuated by family members during the lockdown period of the pandemic. In *Alter Ego*, Adaora Igwe’s Physical and Health education (PE) secondary school teacher is like a guardian. Adaora’s mother is always preoccupied by her business so much that she always comes to pick her daughter from the school late. At this point, all the children and teachers would have closed home except the PE teacher, who always offers to wait for her until the mother comes to pick her home. The innocent thirteen-year old Adaora saw in the teacher, a family member who meant well for her until he removed his camouflage to reveal his real intent. Each time the mother comes late to pick her, the teacher sleeps with her in his office. As is common with children this age, Adaora could not summon the courage to report the teacher to the mother nor the school authority.

The movie *Alter Ego*, deals with themes such as child abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder, brings to fore the consequence of rape and child molestation in a country where rape is becoming endemic. The movie exposes the multi-level areas where the perpetration of rape and child abuse occur and they include; educational institutions where male teachers and students molest hapless female students. There is domestic or environmental front as seen in the case where the landlords rape their tenants’ daughters. The movie also projects the corporate environment where superiors sexually harass their subordinate as a turf that festers the scourge of sexual molestation. The church or religious houses are not exempt as adherents are subjected to sexual abuse by clerics and clergymen to whom they turn for spiritual succour. The most excruciating revelation is the sexual abuse of children in government agencies such as orphanage and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps where children are ready victims of sexual harassment by perverted and morally twisted care-givers or social workers.

The movies succinctly reveal the plight of hapless victims who helplessly die in shame and silently suffer untold consequences for fear of societal stigma or reprisal attacks from their abusers. Also indicted in the movie is the judicial system where many influential sexual predators succeed in manipulating the law or perverting judicial processes and go scot-free.

In the *Alter Ego*, Ada Igwe suffered posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after she was serially abused sexually by her PHE teacher. The psychological traumas of her sordid childhood experience not only made her sexually perverted, it left her with an altered ego which truncated all sense of balance in her life and left her socially, mentally and psychologically depressed. Her dislocated social, psychological, mental and emotional mechanisms put a strain on her ability to have a decent emotional relationship that could culminate in marriage having been turned in pathological nymphomaniac without a sense of emotional commitment to the male folk for whom she could hardly develop an affinity for except to be used to quench her libidinous sexual desires. Timothy Ighodaro (Wale Ojo) a very influential and world renowned philanthropist and care-giver in the movie is a character used to expose the dangerous consequence of rape or child abuse. He was serially raped by his nanny as a child and also suffered the consequence of sexual abuse. Despite being a human right ambassador and provider of succour to destitute children, his traumatic childhood experience turned him into a violent sexual predator who sexually preyed on the children in his care. At the apogee of his blooming career and commendable performance he is torn down by the disclosure of his nefarious activities and is prosecuted and sent to jail. In *Slave to Lust*, Chief Justin gets the ultimate punishment, dying for his atrocities.

Conclusion

The dreaded Covid-19 pandemic brought untold human suffering in its wake. In the economic, social and religious lives of the people, a drastic dislocation occurred that brought all nations of the world to their knees. Regrettably, while the lockdown measure was put in place to curtail the spread of the pandemic, it awakened the beastly nature of man, creating a “shadow pandemic” where family members preyed on their weaker ones. Both movies under study show how the predators are one way or the other “locked in” with the victims just as the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown “caged in” the incestuous assailants and their family victims. The ending of both movies is a warning that the day of judgement must come to all who takes side with evil.

Recommendations

Nigerian movies makers must continually strive to contribute to the social reengineering of society by screening images that awaken people to their humane responsibilities. The Federal and State government must take the issue of domestic violence seriously and punish all offenders irrespective of their social location.

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