



Decline of Marriage System in Nigerian Films: An Impact Valuation of Domestic Violence in Ramsey Noah's *Rosemary's Fight* (2014)

BY

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Abstract

There is a growing concern over amassing rates of failure in marriage system in Nigeria. Reports of break ups, separations and ultimate divorces are on an unimaginable upsurge. While the adverse effects caused by this trend is suggested to have been caused by several factors, the role of domestic violence remains critical. This study examined the impact of domestic violence on the decline of marriages in Nigeria. The study was guided by control theory, a social theory of family violence which beliefs that several family crisis are borne out of the need of an individual to acquire, sustain and control power within a relationship. A qualitative design was adopted for a content analysis of Ramsey Noah's film titled: *Rosemary's Fight* (2014). A critical valuation of the film revealed that domestic violence is indeed, a catalyst to the decline of marriages and family system in Nigeria. The study therefore, recommends amongst other things that a legal frame work should be put in place to protect the Nigerian woman against domestic violence.

Keywords: Decline, marriage system, film, impact, valuation

1.0 Introduction

Marriage is one of the oldest and most important institutions in human history. It is a properly recognized union between a man and a woman, vis-à-vis, husband and wife. Biblical account extends marriage institution to the Garden of Eden were God created Adam and then, Eve and subsequently

brought Eve to Adam after discovering how inappropriate it is for a man to live alone. God therefore ordains the institution and declares favour to the man who finds a wife. This initiation and ordination of the marriage institution by God himself attests to how inalienable the institution is to the human race. Marriage itself has bearing on the

family system and by extension, society. It is through marriage that families are generated while societies are established through families. As Haralambos and Holborn (2004,p.459) put it, “family is the cornerstone of society” A successful marriage is therefore linked to the foundation for strong families and great societies, while, unsuccessful marriages are characterized with high propensity of weak families and defective societies. The need to build strong societies has consequently raised concern of many scholars to protect the smaller units of social organization. Hence, marriage and the family have become issues of serious concern. According to Haralambos and Holborn (2004,p.459);

“Family life has become a topic of political debate. What was once largely seen as a private sphere in which politicians should not interfere is now seen as a legitimate area for public debate and political action as concern has grown in some quarters about the alleged decline of family, politicians have become somewhat more willing to comment on families. Sometimes, they have devised policies to try to deal with perceived problem surrounding the family”.

This study is therefore predicated on the discovery of the alarming rates of failed marriages and broken homes in Nigeria and the adverse effects which they cause on the general well-being of society. Although, failed marriages and shattered homes are associated with multiple factors in Nigeria, domestic violence has become one of the most leading causes in recent times. Many homes are crashing and many more at the verge of collapse due to this menace.

Looking at the observation of Julie Umukoro and Charles Okwuowulu (2010,p225) that Nollywood filmmakers attempt to replicate exactly, in predetermined terms, visual texts culled from social reality, this study attempts to leverage on the copiousness of Nollywood’s reflections to contextualize its subject matter. In this view, Uwah, (cited in Tracie U.and Ekene E. 2017, p.6) suggests that Nollywood has significantly become involved in the process of Africa’s self-reflection and identity

construction by means of its cultural perceptions and ideological standpoints. Against this background, this study concentrates on a textual reading of Ramsey Noah's *Rosemary's Fight* (2014). In consistence with Shaka and Uchendu's (2012, p.14) belief that film scholars and critics need to rise up and cry against negative gender based trends against the Nigerian woman to save her from all forms of inhuman treatments, character assassination and misrepresentation locally and internationally, this study aims at protecting the Nigerian wife against battering, brutalization and various degrees of violence suffered in the hands of their spouses. Recommendations made from this study shall yield significant impact in reducing cases of broken homes, strengthen family bond and build stronger and saner Nigerian society

2.0 Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, this study was anchored on the context of Control theory. This theory

revolves around family violence and it is found appropriate in discussing the issues of this study.

Control theory is a social theory of family violence which beliefs that several family crisis are borne out of the need of an individual to acquire, sustain and control power within a relationship. In this theory, the abuser is motivated by the power and control that he or she wields over other members of the family. In this theory, the more powerful member of family uses threats, force and violence on the less powerful family member to attain compliance. Hence, threat, force and violent conducts are used in barring the weaker member of the family from indulging in activities which are not wanted by the controlling individual while also demanding for the ones desired through the same methods of force, threat and violence.

3.0 Methodology

This study was guided by the qualitative design and it utilized content analysis of a film titled: *Rosemary's Fight* (Ramsey Noah, 2014) this film was purposively sampled due to its applicability to the main subject of discourse. The study adopted primary and secondary sources of data collection. A textual reading of Ramsey Noah's *Rosemary's Fight* (2014) was adopted to analyze the main subject of the study.

4.0 Review of Relevant Literatures

Domestic violence is one of the most critical issues of global concern in contemporary period. It is a social condition which threatens the firm and sane psychological disposition of a section of persons in the society. It primarily entails the calculated and persistent mishandling of anyone in the home in a way that causes pain, distress or injury. It refers to any offensive treatment of one family member by another thereby, violating the law of basic human rights. It includes 'battering of intimate partners and

others, sexual abuse of children, marital rape and traditional practices that are harmful to the partner. According to Fareo Dorcas Oluremi (2015,p.24) domestic violence is a "pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner". Citing Office of Violence against Women (2007), Fareo explains that notwithstanding race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender, domestic violence can happen to anyone and it can take any form such as physical abuse, sexual, emotional, economic and psychological abuse. He explains that the term, "domestic violence" can be used interchangeably with domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence and intimate partner violence and notes that it is a pattern of abusive behavior by one partner against the other in a close relationship such as marriage, dating, family or cohabitation. While discussing domestic violence against women in Nigeria, Fareo

(25 citing UNICEF 2007)) posits that traditionally, the beating of wives and children is widely sanctioned as means of instilling discipline in Nigeria and indeed, many other African countries. Thus, beating of children by parents and wife by husband is culturally justified as means of instilling discipline in these cultures. Citing a statistics of 2011 presented by This Day News Paper, Fareo makes a daunting revelation that about 50% of women have been battered by their husbands and shockingly, more educated women (65 %) are in this terrible situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55 %) who believe they have nowhere to go and in any case, believing for good reason that the law will not protect them.. This report also reveals that 97.2 % of them are not reported to the police.

Discussing the commonest kind of violence confronted by women in society today, Philip Acquaye (2022, p.16) identifies physical and sexual violence perpetuated by

an intimate partner relationship; a husband or other intimate male partners as the most prevalent. (Citing Watts and Zimmerman, 2002), Philip explains that in an African country like Zimbabwe, 26 % of women who had ever been married are reported being forced to have sex when they did not want to. He revealed that 23% are reported to be physically forced, 20% are reported to be shouted on by their partners while 12% are reported to be forced while asleep while 6% are reported to have been threatened.

Similarly, Alokun (2013, p18) decries the increasing cases of violence against women in Africa, explains that in Nigeria, about 50 % of women are reported being battered by their husbands. Alokun reveals that most often, the effect of such violent acts result in injuries and some loss of lives, noting that violence perpetuated against women in marriage is not considered an offence and are often condoned and

tolerated in some Muslim communities in Nigeria.

Christine C. Utoh-Ojemudia and Prisca Ifeoma Okeke (<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/cajtm.v.12.1.3>) believe that battering is one of the major forms of domestic violence in every society. According to them, domestic violence is a repeated pattern of inflicting harm both sexually, psychologically and physically. Almosed, Christine and Prisca affirm that wife battering is the most wide spread type of violence against women, explaining that wife battering is a form of physical abuse that includes: punching, threats, kicking, rape or coercive sex, throwing a woman down the stairs, hitting, shoving, kicking, bruising, stabbing, shooting, beating, belittling and slapping. They explain that all these acts come during arguments between married and unmarried couples: This is the view of Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh and Ekene Euphemia Anijah (2017, P14) while

discussing domestic violence in Moses Iwang's film titled: *Damage*. According to them, *Damage* portrays abuse in marriage with the use of high level of domestic violence, incessant battering and acts of violence. They describe how highly temperamental Taiwo, Sarah's husband is and how much he believes in patriarchal system which makes him the man of the house with superseding authority and words over his wife. Taiwo always gets unnecessarily angry at the slightest provocation and ends up getting his wife thoroughly beaten. There are times when Sarah is dragged down from the stairs and battered mercilessly by her husband. In this article, the authors further explain how this incessant quarrels and fights between the husband and wife resultantly impacted negatively on their children. Their son, Junior was in the habit of always settling every argument with a fight. They also explain how their daughter, Bisi is so badly affected to the

extent of shrinking into herself and stops communicating with her parents in words instead, she prefers writing notes to tell them what she wants. Bisi is said to have suffered serious psychological trauma to the extent that she mentally replaces every street fight she has with her parents (Taiwo and Sarah)

In their contextual study of the second film titled *Mr. and Mrs.* as directed by Ikechukwu Omyeka, Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh and Ekene Euphemia Anijah explain how the movie captures the realities of gender discrimination and domestic abuse of women and marriage in a patriarchal society. the film narrative reveals Ken Abbah (Benjamin Joseph), a business tycoon married to Susan Abbah (Nse Ikpe Etim) a Lawyer and he is always bent on keeping his wife at home as a full time house wife Susan is adequately exposed with a Master's Degree. She is been subjugated and kept as a prisoner in her marriage. The more she tries to show her husband love and keep him

happy, the more the husband keeps maltreating her and uses her as an object of sex and often demands sex from her in the bathroom. The inhuman cases meted against Susan by her husband in this film aptly represents the virility of gender inequality in Nigeria and by extension, other parts of the world. The protection of the rights of women under international law was therefore, predicated on the United Nations determination to fundamentally guarantee gender equality to both male and female sexes. In the well thought Charter of the United Nations, one of the goals is therefore to “reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of human person, (and) in the rights of men and women” (United Nations Human Right, 2014, p.3).

5.0 Discussion: Impact valuation of Domestic Violence to the Decline of Marriage System in Nigeria: A Critical Reading of Ramsey Noah's *Rosemary's Fight*

Rosemary' Fight tells the story of abuse, assault, battering, molestation and different manners of domestic violence against Rosemary (Rita Dominic) by her husband, George (John Dumelo) in their marital relationship. Rosemary, a young loving, beautiful, committed, selfless and resourceful lady who gives out everything within her reach to achieve a happy home could not pull her dreams through as her husband's unrepentant penchants for violence against her leaves her with a sense of frustration and shattered dreams. George, a very jealous, overbearing, possessive and violent husband always puts his wife in a throat cutting condition to be able to remain in the marriage.

George (John Dumelo) tells his wife, Rosemary to choose between her job and the marriage. Rosemary who treasures her job so much and does it with all sense of commitment and legerdemain and finding it

self-fulfilling feels that even though a husband is economically comfortable, a wife should not be discouraged from picking up jobs. Her ingenious innovations in her office had placed her on a spotlight. She is a worker with great value, a solution to every challenging situation in the office. A technically competent expert and frequently sought to deliver on critical responsibilities. Rosemary is very zealous about her job and ready to make sacrifices. George's demand for her to leave the job as a condition for remaining in the marriage is throat cutting and unpatriotic. Ordinarily, Rosemary can earn a good living with her job based on her expertise and placement. In a very tough decision however, she chooses to save her marriage at the expense of her job. This preference of marriage over job changes her status from a career woman to a full time house wife.



Plate 1. Pictorial exhibition of Rosemary's unconditional love for her husband

Rosemary's Fight reveals the constant unprovoked violation and defilement of the self-esteem and dignity of a woman by her god-playing husband. In the scene where Rosemary and her husband George are in a party having fun with others, George, utterly disregarding the fact that he is in a public space where courtesy and decency are required, goes about battering Rosemary in the presence of everyone for merely having a conversation with Paul. Paul and Rosemary are cousins who have not seen each other for a long while, possibly after Rosemary's wedding. They have just met coincidentally in the party after a long while of seeing each other. George cannot even wait for an

introduction to be made. He just walks up straight, unethically drags his wife from the conversation and beats her up mercilessly to the puzzlement of all. This incident however results to Rosemary's resolve to quit the marriage for which she had protected with dexterity. She packs her cloths in a luggage and determined to leave when George walks into the room, surprised and yields to his usual deceptive song, "Baby, I am sorry". The expression, "I am sorry" as usually used pretentiously by George each time Rosemary is dehumanized beyond enduring limits has always played magical effects on his victim. Rosemary wants a happy home. She wants a changed man for a husband, she wants her human dignity and self-esteem restored. She always feels those apologies are reflections of sincerity and indications of genuine change for a happier home, unfortunately, they only pave the way for greater brutalization and humiliation in the future.

Furthermore, the incident when Rosemary is to drive out from the car park near her house, a street boy rushes in high speed and steals away her bag containing undisclosed valuables, as he runs to escape with his loots, a heavily built Charles (Desmond Eliot) single handedly apprehends him and recovers the bag. As Rosemary gets to the scene and expresses thankfulness to Charles for his good deed, George who drives pass from a nearby distance sights them stand in conversation. Without enquiring to know what is going on, as seen in plate 3 below, George bullies and brutalizes wife, Rosemary before Charles for indulging in conversation with him (Charles). This incident causes another major violence against Rosemary at home where she is almost strangled to death by her husband.



Plate 2 showing George embarrassing Rosemary before Charles, a man who helped her recover her stolen bag from a thief

The public humiliation of a wife by her husband and consequent violence against her at home is another point in focus which the film; *Rosemary's Fight* exposes. The scene where Rosemary is dining with her two old time friends brings this notion to bare. In this scene, Rosemary and her friends are dining on a table at a place that appears to be a fast food hub. In the conversation that ensues, Rosemary's friends are so disappointed with the inhuman treatment which Rosemary suffers in her marriage. They advise her to save her life by quitting that toxic relationship. In response however, Rosemary refuses her friend's advice and affirms her commitment to her husband, George. Just

then, George walks in from nowhere, drags his wife out on her friends like a man dragging a goat to the slaughter and takes her home where she receives one of the worst beatings of her life. In this scene, Rosemary is seen with heavy wounds and bruises all around her.



Plate 3 showing Rosemary in a seat out with her friends and her husband comes in and drags her out disgracefully



Plate 4 showing the face of a brutally battered wife by her husband

George exhibits more dangerous propensities of maltreatment against Rosemary after she had given birth. These negative attitudes range from taking to plenty alcohol, not being intimate with his wife anymore, raping her each time he has need to mate with her and many more.



Plate 5 Sexual abuse of Rosemary by George, her husband

In the scene when their son is admitted in the hospital and the medical officer in charge tells them that one of them would have to stay back in the clinic to take care of the child, George quickly asks his wife, Rosemary to stay back in other to pave way for him to have fun with one of his numerous *side chicks*. Rosemary however refuses and

insists that he should show responsibility by staying back for his child. This incidence does not however discourage George from keeping his earlier scheduled date with his side chick as he brings her to the house, introduces her as Michelle, a cousin and asks Rosemary to go dress the guest room for her. At this point, Rosemary discovers how irreparably worthless her husband regards her in the marriage. In a gym scene, Charles, the gym instructor who had earlier helped her to recover her stolen bag from a thief warns Rosemary to save her life by leaving the “monster” and “wife beater” who calls himself her husband. He tells her the story of how his own father abused his mother and how they as their children became traumatized and took to street struggling just to earn a living. Rosemary suffers physical, emotional and psychological abuses all through her marriage relationship with George. She feels very disillusioned, fragmented, heartbroken and deeply

uninspired in her emotions. In the final analysis, she quits the marriage with the help of her lawyer who helps in preparing the documents and Mr. Charles, the gym instructor.

The effects of divorce on children in the family is revealed in this film through the experience of Charles who narrates how him and his siblings ended up in the street. It is worthy of note that the street is a volatile place to grow. It is a breeder of various kinds of felonious and anti-social activities. Crime, cultism, prostitution, Yahoo and the likes find an easy breeding place in the street.

6.0 Conclusion

This study examined the rampant decline of marriage system in Nigeria and its adverse effect on the general wellbeing of society. It identified marriage as the foundation of the family and cornerstone of society and established that the failure of marriage has direct negative bearing on the family system and by extension, the larger society. The

study identified domestic violence as a critical factor responsible for home shattering in Nigeria. Relying on Ramsey Noah's *Rosemary's Fight* (2014) as a paradigm the study revealed how a very promising marriage between George and Rosemary crumble beyond repairs, leaving the children physically, psychologically and emotionally disarranged. The study therefore concludes by reaffirming that domestic violence is a catalyst to the decline of marriages and family system in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Drawing from the above study, the following recommendations have been made: That:

1. Public campaigns and sensitizations should be made to create awareness on the ills of domestic violence on the Nigeria people
2. Domestic violence should be discouraged with penal consequences in Nigeria.

3. There should be legal framework to protect the Nigerian woman against domestic violence in Nigeria

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