

**Images of the Female Character in Nigerian Christian Television Drama Serial:  
Lekan Asikhia’s *The Gatekeepers* in Perspective**

**By**

**Solomon Adedokun Edebor, *Ph.D.***

Department of Languages and Literary Studies  
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria  
E-mail: edeborsolomon@abuad.edu.ng

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**Abstract**

All over the world, controversies regarding the perception and relevance of women in society remain unabated. Prior research on Nigerian literature has largely focused on women's depictions in written and oral literature, as well as films with little attention paid to Christian television drama serials. This paper, therefore, examines the portrayals of the female character in Nigerian Christian television drama serials to categorise female stereotypes that arise from such representations, even as it interrogates whether such representation reinforces socially constructed feminine notions. The study is significant because it extends the frontiers of knowledge by contributing to the existing body of scholarship on soap operas worldwide. Besides, its usefulness in the portrayal of women in Nigerian Christian television soap operas may provide the stimulus needed by producers of this genre to (re)examine their positions on the portrait of the female character offered to the Nigerian audience. Gerbner's cultivation theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Carroll's feminist film criticism were used as the theoretical framework, while Lekan Asikhia's *The Gatekeepers* was purposively selected owing to how women are portrayed in it. Data from the serial were subjected to content analysis using the descriptive approach. The drama serial differently depicts eight signifiers of stereotypes of women. The persistent stereotypes are those that depict women as the tolerant wife who bears her husband's promiscuity and assault; the stay-at-home wife; the adulterous wife who engages in sexual immorality due to financial incentives/sexual gratification; the nasty stepmother that hurts her stepchildren and co-wives; the horrible and intrusive mother-in-law; the nonchalant mother whose actions are characterised by inconsiderateness and avarice; the femme fatale that brings calamitous events upon her victims; and the career woman with failed relationships or marriages. The paper concludes that the depictions of the female character in Nigerian Christian television plays are largely infused with a wide range of socio-cultural stereotypes. Thus, socially constructed feminine notions are reinforced by producers of Nigerian Christian television drama serials.

**Keywords:** Christian television drama serial, empowerment, oppression, patriarchy, stereotype, *The Gatekeepers*, women

Solomon Adedokun Edebor, E-mail:edeborsolomon@abuad.edu.ng

## 1. Introduction

Over the years, women have made significant impacts on different aspects of society. Their relentless contributions in the sociocultural, political, and economic spheres have been acknowledged, particularly by scholars who have underscored the importance and relevance of women in history and in this contemporary time (See Osondu-Oti & Omole, 2016; Dasylva, 2013; Onwubiko, 2012; Awe, 2002; Acholonu, 1995). Indeed, one can safely assert that the kismet of women has somewhat improved in recent times, considering the overwhelming advocacy for gender mainstreaming, thanks, in part, to the UN agenda, which many countries have keyed into.

However, women's importance, dignity, reproductive rights, and immense contributions to human, material, and national developments are still looked upon with certain air of inferiority, suspicion, and/or outright disregard in some countries, most especially, in Africa where patriarchal hegemony still holds sway, where women are still largely and systemically pigeonholed into defined gendered roles. For instance, aside from the exemplary cases of Rwanda, and a few other African states like South Africa, Mauritania, and Mauritius, which have recorded remarkable progress toward gender mainstreaming (Osondu-Oti & Olominu, 2018, p. 174), most African nations are yet to truly embrace the notion of equality of both sexes for collective and national developments.

Despite whatever gains that might have been recorded in recent times, therefore, most traditional African societies remain highly patriarchal, where men are expected to lead the public domain, while women are to manage the home front. Acholonu (1995) calls attention to this marginalization when she notes how the African woman is "trapped in the claws of the taboos and the restrictions that only help to propel male chauvinism" (p. 217). Osondu-Oti and Omole (2016, p. 20), similarly succinctly capture this patriarchal construction of women and men in Africa, noting how roles of men and women are socially constructed, with men expected to work in organisations outside the home, while women are expected to do household chores. Aidoo is swift in lending a voice, noting that this reality not only reinforces gender differences and differences in preoccupations but also less importance attached to women and their social roles, thereby effectively denying them any important standing within the social structure (p. 17).

The foregoing assertions foreground women's enslavement by cultures and traditions that are gender prejudiced in favour of the male folk. In this regard, being a woman throws one off the ladder of dignity, consideration, respect, and recognition. Owonibi (2004) highlights the implication of this social injustice, pointing out that the patriarchal order which makes women occupy less recognised positions in society is caused by men's manipulation. Thus, "... the society... see the female as abnormal to the male's normality, thereby categorizing her as 'sub-human,' an epiphenomenon and a product of after-thought" (pp. 3-4).

Consequently, the woman, as the dominated gender, is rendered voiceless, coerced into submission, and subjugated physically and psychologically. Attempts to promote women's rights and empowerment, and correct decades of injustices meted to women due to their gender construction have consequently led women to organize themselves into socio-cultural groups, which have culminated in feminist movements aimed at ensuring equal social status and opportunities with their male counterparts. Given their importance, it is no surprise that issues relating to women have continued to dominate conversations worldwide, particularly at conferences, seminars, and workshops.

In Nigeria, the condition of women has not improved significantly in many key areas. Admittedly, improvements can be said to have been witnessed in certain areas like the school enrolment of the girl-child and the attainment of career heights- although having what Osondu-Oti and Omole (2016, p. 20) termed the "Success penalty" as a consequence. However, the representation of women in important positions in political decision-making, for instance, remains a far cry (Osondu-Oti & Omole, 2016, p. 174; Adu, 2008). Just like many other African countries, the nation remains highly patriarchal and approaches as women, right from the cradle, are shackled by obnoxious sociocultural and religious expectations, practices, and beliefs. Katrak (1987, p. 163) beams a searchlight on this reality, noting, "as a female child grows from childhood to womanhood to motherhood, she is controlled and owned by her father, her husband, then her sons".

The idea of 'equality of both gender' is, therefore, considered repulsive, evident in the rejection of the first Gender Equal Opportunity Bill presented in April 2016 to the Nigerian Senate. In this instance, the Senators passionately held the view that the nation's 'religion' and culture 'forbids' "women's equality with men" (sic) (Osondu-Oti & Olominu, 2018, p. 178). Of course, the Bill eventually passed the second reading in September of the same year following the removal of the word "equality". The position of the Senators ab initio, nevertheless, testifies to the roles that pejorative cultures and religious norms somewhat play in the marginalisation and dehumanisation of women in the country, and even beyond.

Scholars have drawn attention to some cultural hindrances that have continued to strengthen gender prejudice in Nigeria, contributing to women's perceived helplessness on individual and collective levels. Identified in this regard are obligatory motherhood, preference for male children, polygyny, derogatory myths, and oppressive proverbs (Edebor 2021, p. 185; Dasylva, 2013, pp. 435-436; Balogun, 2013, pp. 25-31). Amaefule (2021, pp. 17-19) adds other resources of sexism in Nigeria like heavy bride price and the dowry paid on and over women, thereby giving the impression of being purchased by their husbands; obnoxious widowhood practices that men in a similar circumstance(s) are excused from; and women's denial of opportunities to inherit property left behind by their late husbands, even after not being "given the grace – except in few areas – to inherit something at their own father's compound". In a similar vein, religion, in its varied manifestations, is viewed as another potent tool that has been used to subjugate women for centuries. In what seems like a bold attempt to protect the dignity of the African religion, Aderibigbe (2013, p. 699) posits that traditional African religion expressly acknowledges and adores women owing to their protected and prized roles in society.

What Aderibigbe (2013), however, fails to mention, as Edebor (2021) points out, "are instances in which religious practices are used to control women. An instance is an *Oró* worship which forbids women- but not men- from staying outdoors during its celebration" (p. 106).

The Christian religion does not necessarily perform better in some respects going by the writings, teaching, and preaching of some theologians, scholars, and renowned Christian thinkers all through the centuries, particularly at the beginning and middle of Christian history. For instance, Tertullian in his treatise, *On the Apparel of Women*, sees women as "the devil's gateway... the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: the first deserter of the divine law" (qtd. in Amaefule, 2021, p. 8). John Chrysostom similarly calls a woman "a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil nature, painted with fair colours" (qtd. Norris 1998, p. 125). In Thomas Aquinas' assessment, a woman is naturally "defective and misbegotten" (*Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 92, a. 1, qtd. Amaefule, 2021, p. 8). Amaefule (2021, pp. 5-6) also underscores women's demeaning stature in the Jewish morning prayers in the past, particularly the way they were regarded as Gentiles, slaves, and inferior to men in all things.

Again, some passages in the Bible have been said to be misogynistic due to what is professed as the women-denigrating nature that they embody. Such verses include Col.3:18; Eph.5: 21-33; Eccl. 7:26; Gen. 3:16; I Pt.3:1; I Cor. 1:7-9; I Tim. 2: 11-14; Gen 2:18-25; and I Cor. 14:34-35. The acknowledged culpability of the Christian religion in disparaging women, no thanks to contemptuous statements credited to Church fathers and other shreds of evidence dug up from the Bible, has birthed what Amaefule (2021) refers to as "Christian feminist theology", defined as :

a form of liberation theology that deals with the liberation of women from the shackles of oppression and patriarchy.... a kind of protest theology, a reactionary theology, that attacks, and critiques such aforesaid male domination in both the Church and theology. However, calling it a reactionary theology is only one part of the story. The other part is that it is also a constructive and proactive theology. It is a theology that advocates gender equality and the proper placement of women in the scheme of things in society, the Church, and theology. It makes a case for a much more complementarity between the two sexes, male and female, that make up humanity. (p. 3)

While no attempt is being made in this paper to critically examine the concept of Christian feminist theology, there are pieces of evidence to show that Christian religion, just like other world religions, has not been, until in recent times, giving women the much-expected opportunities to express their potentials in all facets of life and stand for their rights. In what seems like an acknowledgment of this lacuna, Pope John Paul II, in a letter addressed to women throughout the world on the eve of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, apologised, on behalf of the Church to women, for being exploited, dominated and relegated to the margin of society down the centuries, contrary to Jesus's attitude to women (p. 3).

Indeed, proponents and exponents of Christian feminist theology have always referenced Jesus Christ's reactions and interactions with women as exemplars of what relationships with women should be generally. Therefore, having recognized that there are sociocultural, and even religious encumbrances against women, there is a need for a holistic interrogation of every aspect of society to raise the conscious level of people against every agent(s) that can further propel the propagation of actions that are inimical to the wellbeing of the female folk. This is particularly significant in this instance considering the pivotal roles that forces like culture and religion often play in shaping and determining mass media outputs, thereby influencing not only the viewer's perception of social reality but also strengthening other established stereotypes that are injurious to women (Endong & Obonganwan, 2015, p. 103).

This understanding, therefore, elicits the desire to interrogate the portrayals of women in Nigerian Christian television drama serials due to the paucity of scholarly research on them. This is imperative considering their impact on Nigerian society, especially in defining values for their audience, and shaping their opinions, attitudes, perceptions, actions, emotions, and beliefs (Edebor, 2010, p. 1; Ogunleye, 2003, p. 121). Of course, some studies have been carried out on Nigerian Christian plays, television drama, and video films (see Edebor, 2010; Ukah, 2010; Adewale, 2008; Ogunleye, 2003; Oha, 2002; Adesina, 1998; Agoro, 1996; Adedeji, 1973; and Adedeji, 1971). However, none of these previous studies focused on the representation of women in Nigerian Christian television dramas. The current effort will, therefore, examine the portrayals of the female character in Nigerian Christian television dramas. Specifically, the study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions: (1) What are the recurrent female stereotypes in Nigerian Christian television soap operas? (2) Is the representation of the female character in Nigerian Christian television soap operas laced with a wide range of socio-cultural stereotypes, which show that the producers of Nigerian television soap operas reinforce socially constructed feminine labels? *The Gatekeepers*, written by Busayo Asikhia, and directed by Lekan Asikhia will be used as a case study in this regard. This study is significant in that it extends the frontiers of knowledge by contributing to the existing body of scholarship on soap operas worldwide. Besides, its usefulness in the portrayal of women in Nigerian Christian television soap operas may provide the stimulus needed by producers of this genre to (re)examine their positions on the portrait of the female character offered to the Nigerian audience.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

George Gerbner's cultivation theory, Albert Bandura's social learning theory, and Noël Carroll's feminist film criticism are the paradigms that form the base of our theoretical framework for this paper. Gerbner's cultivation theory holds that individuals who are heavily exposed to television are more susceptible to its messages as they can easily internalize such messages, thereby ending up with a generalized worldview (a stereotype). Gerbner *et. al* (2001:1) point out that "Television is the source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history". As such, Cultivation theory holds that "Those individuals who spend more time watching television are more likely to view the world in a manner that reflects the frequent,

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but are otherwise comparable" (Gerbner et. al, 2002, cited in Idegu, 2011: 69). This is because, as Gerbner points out, "heavy television viewers tend to take the social reality portrayed by television as real life" (cited in Chari, 2008, p. 141).

Gerbner et al (2001, p. 16) further harp on how television causes a major "cultivating and "acculturating" process, which systematically exposes people to a selective view of society on nearly every aspect of life. In other words, television contributes to the viewers' conceptions of social reality as it tends to shape people's beliefs, values, and attitudes. Gerbner et. al pointedly indicate that "... most of what we know, or think we know, is a mixture of all the stories and images we have absorbed... (which) are likely to become the basis for a broader world view, making television a significant source of general values, ideologies, and perspectives as well as specific assumptions, beliefs, and images".

Considering that television can legitimise any repeated warped portrayals of women by stereotyping gender-related qualities and activities along traditional gender-role lines, repeated exposure to such stereotypical portrayals has deleterious consequences as it can shape people's beliefs about women and ultimately influence people's attitudes towards them and even the way women perceive themselves. Such understanding makes it expedient to examine and vehemently repel any stereotypical manifestation of the female character in whatever mold, television drama inclusive.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning theory is also relevant in this paper as it posits that people learn new behaviours by vicariously experiencing the actions of others. According to Bandura (2011, p. 31), "Much of what we learn is through the power of modelling....". Social Learning Theory posits that learning usually takes place, not only in formal situations such as in classrooms but also by observing models. In Barker's view (2011), "the largest portion of learning to adapt to society takes place through such observational learning" (p. 8). Models employed in this observational learning can be real-life people or mass media characters, such as in television or radio drama. The theory, therefore, underscores the capability of the mass media in producing models that the audience can pattern their lives after. The danger here, however, is that should the mass media repeatedly expose people to characters, roles, or behaviours that are stereotypical in nature, there is a likelihood that they form attitudes and stereotypes. People may end up modelling them despite their deleterious effects, due to how they have succeeded in influencing their conceptions of social reality.

The last theory relevant to our engagement in this paper is feminist film criticism, specifically the image approach developed by Noël Carroll in his seminal paper entitled *The Image of Women in Film: A Defense of a Paradigm* (1990). He later reproduced the approach in his book, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (1996). Carroll's thesis is predicated on the possibility of studying the image of women in film (in this case, television drama serials) without a recourse to psychoanalysis, which, admittedly, has informed many of the other approaches in feminist film criticism. In Carroll's (1996) view, such an attempt will call:

... to our attention, the ways the imagery of women in our culture recurringly (sic) portrayed them through a limited, constraining, and ultimately oppressive repertory of characterisations.... Insofar as the ways of representing women in popular media in some way influence or reinforce the way real women may be construed, the study of the recurrent imagery of women in film, especially where the relevant options were either impoverished and/or distorting, provided an inroad into one of the sources, or at least, resources of sexism in the broader society. (p. 349)

Carroll's (1996) exposition on the image of women in a film makes him emphasise the theory of emotions as a theoretical foundation for the image approach, believing that should help in accounting for whatever measure of influence recurring images of women in popular media may have on how people think of women in real life. The theory states that people learn to identify their emotional states in terms of paradigm scenarios, which also shape their emotions. In this case, the study of the image of women in a film might be viewed as the search for paradigm scenarios that are available in our culture and which, by being available, may come to shape emotional responses to women. Quoting Ronald de Souza, Carroll (1996) states:

... we are made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with paradigm scenarios. These are drawn first from our daily life as small children and later reinforced by the stories, art, and culture to which we are exposed. Later still, in literate cultures, they are supplemented and refined by literature...". (p. 356)

Carroll (1996) explains further that "Given a situation, an enculturated individual attempts, generally intuitively, to fit a paradigm scenario from her repertoire to it" (p. 356). Carroll has noted that there is a continuous accumulation of paradigm scenarios throughout life and that the emotions elicited in the process, become more refined and more culturally dependent. While noting that paradigm scenarios have certain advantages over competing hypotheses about the best way to characterise the cognitive and conative components in emotional states, Carroll is quick to point out that the notion of paradigm scenarios has something to tell one about a component of emotional state; hence, he suggests how recurring images of women in the film may have some influence on spectators.

Carroll (1996) asserts that most paradigm scenarios are acquired through sources such as gossip; observation and memory, stories told us by friends and school teachers, stories told us on our caretaker's knee, self-help books, newspapers articles, films, plays, novels, and TV shows (p. 356). He emphasises how these scenarios may influence someone's emotional behaviour. In Carroll's view, male emotional responses to women, for instance, will be shaped by the scenarios that they bring to those relations; hence, his submission: "One way to construe the study of the image of women in film is as an attempt to isolate widely disseminated paradigm scenarios that contribute to the shaping of emotional responses to women"<sup>25</sup> (p. 357).

Carroll (1996) has underscored some approaches to studying the image of women in film. One such is to identify negative recurring images of women that may have some influence on the emotional response of men to women, bearing in mind that such negative portrayals of women are capable of supplying paradigm scenarios that may shape the emotional responses of real men (and women) to real women. Carroll goes further to opine that

Recurring, negative images of women in film may warp the emotions of those who deploy them as paradigm scenarios in several different ways. They may distort the way women are attended to emotionally by presenting wildly fallacious images.... Or, the problem may be that the range of images of women available is too impoverished: if the repertoire of images of women is limited in certain cases, for instance to contraries like mother or whore, then real women who are not perceived via the mother scenario may find themselves abused under the whore scenarios. (p. 357)

Carroll believes that such negative imagery should generate special interest as it may illuminate some of the sources or resources that mobilize sexist emotions. Another identified perspective to the image approach is the study of positive images of women in film. This, Carroll believes, may play a role in positive emotional responses to real women. Furthermore, the image approach looks for recurring images of women in film with marked frequency, without commitments to how women always appear in film, even as it makes no claims to how all (male) viewers respond to those images.

The three theories examined above will be applied in reading *The Gatekeepers*, a Nigerian Christian television soap opera. Particular emphasis will be placed on the portrayals of women in the serial, highlighting their implications, particularly in shaping the viewer's conception of reality, beliefs, and attitudes, and whether such present wildly misleading images that serve as sources or resources of sexism in the broader society.

#### **4. Methodology**

In conducting this research, the primary data are taken from *The Gatekeepers* written by Busayo Asikhia and directed by Lekan Asikhia. The choice of this television drama is predicated on the fact that it remains the first Nigerian Christian television drama with a wide range of female characters. Besides, it is the first indigenous longest-running Christian television drama that somewhat mirrors the standard British/Mexican soaps, as it has 52 episodes with each episode running for an hour, even without intermittent commercials. The duration makes in-depth developments of the various characters portrayed possible. The whole episodes constitute the sample size for analysis.

It is noteworthy that the serial is not analysed episode by episode; rather, it is treated as a story. This approach is adopted because the serial is first and foremost a story (although having some sub-plots), but has been divided into episodes due to the structure of television drama serials. A content analysis procedure is employed in this paper. This involves watching, analysing, and discussing images of the female character as shown in the selected television

serial using Gerbner's cultivation theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Carroll's feminist film criticism. The study is also critical because the various images of women given in the serial are subjected to rigorous scrutiny to identify the recurrent stereotypes of women that are differently portrayed in the drama and the implications of such representations on the viewer. The paper adopts the descriptive approach in presenting its findings and discussion, thereby concluding whether or not the representations of the female character in Nigerian Christian television drama serials are laced with a wide range of socio-cultural stereotypes.

##### **5. Women Through the Eyes of the Silver Screen: *The Gatekeepers (TG)* in Focus**

*The Gatekeepers* (henceforth TG) is a Christian TV drama written by Busayo Asikhia and directed by Lekan Asikhia. The 52-episode TV drama serial, widely acknowledged as the first indigenous longest-running Christian serial drama in Nigeria, tells the interwoven stories of eight major families: Kunle and Tinuke, Bola and Tunmise, Adelana and Banke, Benson and Jumoke, Bishop Badmus and his wife, Femi and Labake, Ronke and Biola, and Mama Esther and Deji Banjoko. The serial follows the lives of these diverse characters, revealing those that exude Christian virtues of love, forbearance, and obedience, as well as those that display objectionable traits of debauchery, disobedience, occultism, and unrestrained quests for power, influence, and wealth, among other things. The drama particularly foregrounds several important themes like domestic violence, barrenness, extramarital relations, and love and forgiveness, all of which accentuate the tempo of the serial.

However, of utmost importance and relevance to our engagement in this paper is the depiction of women in the serial. *TG*, it should be pointed out, portrays women at diverse levels in different roles, imbuing them with what can be considered positive or negative traits. For instance, Tunmise, Jumoke, Banke, and Angelina are not only irresponsible, insensitive, and/or materialistic wives, they are equally manipulative, adulterous, and wicked, which shows them as negative/evil characters. Tunmise's adulterous nature, for example, makes her see nothing wrong in sleeping with and getting pregnant for Sesan, a randy man, even while still married to Bola. She deliberately takes all necessary precautions not to get pregnant for Bola so that she can easily end their marriage and return to Sesan who is rich enough to satisfy her inordinate financial and material needs. As a bad and irresponsible wife, Tunmise bothers less about Bola's welfare as she deliberately comes home late after spending most of her time with Sesan. She also intentionally makes life horrendous for Bola, harassing and disgracing him everywhere. On one occasion, she pours dirty water on him and their neighbours for meddling in her affairs. Tunmise never offers Bola any support in his search for a job; rather, she hides the interview letter that is brought for him. She also refuses to help with the payment of their expired house rent, yet she vehemently kicks against the free accommodation that Tinuke and Kunle Coker provide them in their new house, insisting that Bola must secure alternative accommodation within one week.

Tunmise further makes attempts on Bola's life by poisoning his food at different times, just as she maltreats Bola's mother, forgetting how she intervened by convincing Bola not to back out of his proposed marriage to her. At a point, Bola's mother has to kneel for her to let peace reign. She later confesses to Labake: "... I want to deal with Bola and Mama", yet she has no tangible reason to offer for her action. As far as Tunmise is concerned, marrying Bola is a

mistake, and a nightmare she wants to wake up from to go back to her boyfriend, Sesan. Having studied Tunmise's behaviour for quite some time, Bola comments sorrowfully:

Oh my God! The greatest mistake I ever made in life was to marry this woman. She is not giving me joy; she is not taking me seriously at all. Ah! And I have always been fair to her. I love her. Despite the fact that all my friends have girlfriends, I chose not to because of my faith. Why did I make this mistake in my life? ... I have missed it.

Tunmise's self-centredness and materialistic nature further manifest in how her attitude towards Bola changes the moment she discovers that Bola has secured a lucrative job with MIGMAT Oil Company, so she starts reconsidering her plan to end their marriage. She never hides the fact that she is mainly in the marriage for material gains. Jumoke is another example of a bad wife and a nonchalant mother. She fails to give an audience to her pastor and even fails to heed his counsel to pray for Benson, her husband, to avert an impending danger. She also dismisses Tessy's nightmare concerning her father (Benson), insisting she has better things to do than wasting her time praying for Benson. Benson's untimely death, however, sobers her as she admits her wrong and laments: "I have failed; I am a loser. I have allowed the enemy to destroy my home. I killed my husband. And the pastor warned me." Ordinarily, one would have assumed that Benson's death taught her one or two lessons. Quite unexpectedly, Jumoke's actions afterward demonstrate that making money is more important than anything else in her life. This explains why she has no time to attend to her children's emotional and psychological needs. Jumoke believes she has fulfilled her motherly role as long as she meets up with her children's material needs. Tessy captures Jumoke's (her mother's) neglect in this manner:

I have always been telling you, Mummy. All you ever care for is your business. You think everything is money. All you ever think of is your trip from one country to another: today Canada, tomorrow America. You never care about us. You never give us any attention. Your businesses are your children. All you do is to leave us at the mercy of the house help and the driver. Anytime I felt like discussing my experiences with you, you always turned me down. Anytime we need your counsel as a parent, even when Dad was alive, you never care about it.

Interestingly, Jumoke always has reasons to justify her actions, especially with talks like "... You know...I'm the only one in charge of the company your father left behind.... All my running (around) is for you and your brother". Her neglect later has dastardly effects on Tessy and David as they commit incest which results in an unwanted pregnancy. It is by sheer providence that Tessy does not die in the process as she takes some harmful substances to abort the pregnancy.

Bishop Badmus' wife also fits into the category of a bad, temperamental, and covetous wife and mother. Like her husband, she is carried away by her inordinate ambition to be like Bishop Mathew's wife in ministry, and so has no time for her children, especially Dayo who later becomes a popular prostitute. She betrays her temperamental nature when she quarrels with her husband and wrongly accuses him of infidelity when he tells her how Mrs. Philip has been trying to manipulate him. Her refusal to join her husband in prayer that night makes it possible for Mrs. Philip to destroy her home and her husband's ministry.

Also, Banke's actions reveal her vengeful nature. Although she seems like the easy-going type at first, her merciless character surfaces the moment she gets to know of her husband's (Adelana's) debauchery. To her, terminating the lives of Toyin and her son, Lolu, is the proper thing to do to secure her marriage. Her unforgiving spirit manifests further in how she pours hot water on Adelana and damns the consequences by refusing to take him to the hospital for medical care. Rather than feeling sober for causing her husband's untimely demise, she takes her cruelty to the next level by using her witchcraft power to kill the two daughters of Adelana's younger brother because he threatens to avenge his brother's death. Banke sees nothing wrong in causing Bimpe's (her younger sister's) violent death since it will make her get witchcraft powers to fight her husband's family. She never considers the fact that it was Bimpe that made her aware of Adelana's extramarital relationship. Her excuse is, "I have no other option if indeed I want to be protected from my enemies" — referring to her husband's family members.

Banke becomes worse as she manipulates her friend, Jumoke, to join her witchcraft cult, claiming that Jumoke needs the protection and influence that the cult offers. However, she never reveals to Jumoke the attendant consequences of joining the secret cult. Even when Jumoke expresses her disinterest in the cult, she threatens to harm her. As it later turns out, Banke's real interest is not to fortify 'her friend' against any evil attack, but to ensure that she loses, at least, one of her children due to her deep-seated envy. Therefore, when Jumoke's daughter (Tessy) could not be killed or harmed in any way, she manipulates Jumoke so that she can die in Tessy's place.

Angelina, in her case, is materialistic and wicked as she never hesitates to offer her only child as a sacrifice for her admittance into the Shadow of the Widows' cult in a desperate effort to become rich and powerful. Bola's mother's actions similarly fall short of expectations. For instance, she bothers less about Bola's jobless state. However, the moment Bola secures employment with MIGMAT Oil, she turns out to be the first to make it known to her neighbour, Adufe. Her careless talk makes Adufe resolve that Bola must marry her daughter, Funke, at all costs. Ordinarily, one would have expected Bola's mother to be mindful of her actions considering the pains and humiliation Bola has experienced in life, particularly at the hands of Tunmise. But, as it turns out, her action of telling Adufe how rich Bola has become exposes Bola to the danger of being charmed and made to marry Funke against his will.

Labake, however, differs considerably from these characters as she demonstrates her faithful and forgiving nature by enduring Femi's infidelity, public embarrassments, and constant merciless beatings. Rather than engaging in physical fights with Femi, she chooses to remain patient with him, while praying to God for a change of heart. In one instance, when Femi drives off and leaves her behind simply for asking that they pray together before going to work, she decides not to quarrel with him; when she later sees another lady in his car who addresses her rudely, she maintains her composure despite knowing that the lady is her husband's mistress and that Femi is following the lady home to pay her house rent. In another instance, Femi mercilessly beats her for getting pregnant, even when he never stops having unprotected sex with her, or agrees to her having family planning.

Other female characters, like Tinuke, also exhibit some positive behaviour similar to that of Labake. Tinuke is loving, forgiving, and accommodating. She is a tower of strength for her husband, Kunle, as she helps him grow his counselling ministry. Her accommodating and forgiving nature manifests in how she treats her mother-in-law nicely despite her meddlesomeness and fiendish schemes occasioned by her barrenness. The fact that her mother-in-law wants her to run mad never stops her from joining Kunle in praying for her restoration when her evil plan boomerangs.

Again, some female characters are portrayed as manipulative, intrusive, deceptive, cruel, and inconsiderate. Adufe is a cruel and diabolical stepmother. Aside from using charms to marry Tinuke's father and send her mother away, she sees nothing wrong in killing Tinuke's father and inheriting all his property. Her monstrous nature manifests further in how she constantly maltreats Tinuke, turning her into a hawker and eventually making her drop out of school. In one instance, she beats Tinuke mercilessly before sending her out at night for losing her goods to some thugs that attacked her. Adufe never bothers about the well-being of Tinuke who now embraces a life of cheap prostitution in her desperate attempt to keep body and soul together. Instead, Adufe shows off her inhumane nature by using charms on her and banishing her from her father's house. Again, Adufe manifests her greedy and wicked disposition by preventing her daughter, Funke, from marrying her police lover, insisting that she must marry Bola who is richer. She goes as far as using a charm on the police officer so that he can forget about Funke while she tries desperately to kill Tolu, Bola's fiancée so that Funke can marry Bola without hindrance.

Also, Kunle and Femi's mother is meddlesome and evil as she makes life difficult for Tinuke and Labake, her daughters-in-law. She constantly mounts pressure on Kunle to send Tinuke away and marry a new wife to have a grandchild after eight years of 'fruitless' marriage. Besides, she sees Tinuke as a rival and force that is preventing Kunle from taking care of her. Her constant refrain about Tinuke is, "... She is depriving me the enjoyments of my son. She wants to eat where she did not sow..." (sic). She, therefore, goes as far as calling a family meeting on Kunle and Tinuke, claiming that Tinuke has cast a spell on her son so that she can always manipulate him. She sows seeds of hatred for Tinuke in her daughter, Joke. Her evil nature manifests further in how she engages the services of Dayo, a prostitute, to disrupt Kunle's marriage. She later casts a spell of madness on Dayo for asking her the balance for the job done for her. She also does not hesitate to use the same spell on Tinuke when her plan to send her away fails.

Again, Kunle and Femi's mother makes life horrendous for Labake, Femi's wife, claiming that she does not take proper care of her. She, thus, causes constant quarrels between the couple. She demonstrates her animosity towards Labake by supporting Femi's decision to send her packing for getting pregnant again. She sits down and supervises Labake's eviction from her matrimonial home, stating repeatedly, 'You had better go'. She never desires Femi and Labake should reconcile. She only stops her wicked acts towards her daughters-in-law after her plan to make Tinuke run mad boomerangs on her.

Tinuke's paternal grandmother is another meddlesome mother-in-law. She is a thorn in the flesh of Tinuke's mother whom she hates with passion for not bearing another child for his son, Mayowa. Without prior notice, she brings Adufe to stay with Tinuke's parents on the pretext that she is to serve as their maid. When Mayowa kicks against the idea, she threatens to make their home a living hell which makes Tinuke's mother quickly agree to Adufe's stay. But then, her motive is to ensure that Adufe gets married to Mayowa. As it turns out, Adufe is evil as she not only uses charms on Mayowa so that he can "fall in love" with her and impregnate her, but she also kills him and takes away his fortunes after sending Tinuke and her mother away with her charms.

Bola's mother is similarly meddlesome and insensitive. First, she pressurises Bola into marrying Tunmise against his will., not minding the fact that Bola is not convinced about the relationship any longer. Her excuse is that Bola's decision will humiliate her in front of her friends and admirers. Though she is fully aware of the physical and emotional traumas that Tunmise made her and Bola go through before Tunmise's untimely demise, she never stops mounting pressure on Bola to marry another wife. Surprisingly, she is not willing to accept Tolu as Bola's new wife. Her excuse is that Tolu will bring him ill luck, not knowing that Adufe, her supposed friend, has merely deceived her in an attempt to get Tolu out of the way so that her daughter, Funke, can become Bola's new wife. After treating Tolu with disdain, she announces to Bola her decision regarding their proposed marriage:

You have not seen the woman you will marry... if you marry Tolu, she will not have children and even she will be the one to send you to the early grave.... Let me tell you the truth... You cannot marry her. Never! Over my dead body!

To underscore her resolve, she walks Tolu out of her house after refusing the provisions that Bola and Tolu had brought for her. Her manipulative attitude, in her bid to have her way, clearly shows that she has learnt nothing from her nasty experience with Tunmise. Rather, it indicates how meddlesome, impulsive, self-seeking, officious, and manipulative some mothers-in-law can be, thereby bringing avoidable problems into their sons' marriages. As for Bola's mother, she (un)wittingly serves as the gateway to many of the marital problems that dot Bola's life.

Similarly, Angelina is evil as she instigates Banke against her husband, Adelana, counselling her to deal ruthlessly with him for impregnating another woman. Her unguarded counsel makes Banke pour hot water on Adelana which eventually results in his untimely death. She also encourages Banke to join Shadow of the Widows' cult even when she is well aware that Banke's admittance into the cult will cost her the life of her only sister. Her wicked nature further manifests in how she uses her witchcraft power in destroying the life of any man that has sexual relations with her, like the case of Deji Banjoko who eventually runs mad. Angelina never stops her wicked practices until her nemesis catches up with her, as she dies untimely, following the divine deliverance of Deji Banjoko from her shackles.

Mrs. Philip is another ruthless character as her sole mission is to go after successful men purposely to destroy their lives and become wealthy thereby. She inflicts Bishop Badmus with epilepsy after wrecking his life and ministry. She even offers him as a sacrifice for the renewal of her covenant with Shadow of the Widows' cult.

Mama Esther is another materialistic woman because her marriage to Deji Banjoko is driven by her quest for material possessions. At a point, when the thought of possibly ending her marriage to Banjoko crosses her mind, she quickly dispels the idea to maintain the financial and material benefits she enjoys in the marriage. She only regrets marrying Banjoko following his madness and his family's insistence that she should either sell the house Banjoko built in her name or make available eight hundred thousand nairas for Banjoko's treatments abroad.

## **6. Findings and Discussion**

From the close examination of the female characters portrayed in TG, it is evident that there are positive and negative perceptions of how women are portrayed at different levels, most especially at the family and the economic/professional levels. A good number of female characters are portrayed as wicked, dependent, sly, money-oriented, diabolical, irresponsible, meddlesome, inconsiderate, jealous, wayward, manipulative, immoral, unsupportive, troublesome, unreliable, and/or deceitful. Angelina, Banke, Dayo, Bola's mother, Jumoke, Tunmise, Mrs. Philip, Adufe, Mama Esther, Tinuke's grandmother, and Kunle and Femi's mother largely fit into these descriptions, going by their (re)actions. All these characters (save Kunle and Femi's mother, Dayo, Bola's mother, Mama Esther, and Jumoke, who eventually turn over a new leaf), therefore, constitute bad models who are punished in front of the audience for embodying anti-social values that are being promoted by the drama, as stipulated by Bandura's social learning theory.

Also, it is discovered that some other women are portrayed as sensitive, caring, forgiving, supportive, enterprising, peace-loving, faithful, and tender-hearted. Tinuke and Labake mostly conform to these descriptions and are, therefore, regarded as good models in front of the viewer to convert the value grids that are being promoted by the drama into behaviour. Beyond any doubt, portraying women with either positive or negative character traits in this drama is beneficial to the viewer. First, it emphasises that society is peopled by good and bad women; and, as such, generalisations about women's behaviour based on one's experience with a particular woman or a set of women may be inaccurate. Besides, it is implied, through the depictions of characters like Tinuke, Jumoke, Kunle, and Femi's mother, that irresponsible depraved, and/or promiscuous women can be transformed if given the right motivation. Again, the results of the actions of some of the female characters underscore the need for the audience to carefully make their choices in life as they ultimately define them and also determine whether or not society will be a better place for all.

Presenting women in conflicting positions is a clear demonstration of the fact that writers and producers of TV drama understudy human nature in general and Nigerian society in particular. This is evident in positive and negative roles often assigned to women, purposely to reinforce people's perceptions of women in Nigerian society. There are, nevertheless, some fundamental issues in the serial under reference, particularly about stereotypical depictions of most female characters. The specific recurrent stereotypes in the serial are those that portray women as the tolerant wife, the adulterous wife, the stay-at-home wife, the femme fatale, the nonchalant mother, the nasty stepmother, the horrible mother-in-law, and the career woman.

In this serial, Bola's mother, Tinuke's grandmother, and Kunle and Femi's mother fit into the description of the intrusive and horrible mother-in-law as their actions have dastardly effects on their daughters-in-law. Kunle and Femi's mother, for instance, does everything in her power to ruin Kunle's marriage because of her deep-seated hatred for Tinuke, especially because of her transient barrenness. She even desires that Tinuke should run mad and so makes efforts to cast a spell on her. She similarly causes constant quarrels between Femi and Labake, and even supports Femi's decision to send Labake away. Tinuke's grandmother is not better off as she brings another woman, Adufe, into Mayowa's house (her son's house), insisting that Adufe must live with them. As it turns out, Adufe destroys the family and inherits all of Mayowa's property. The only mother-in-law that shows some measure of consideration for her daughter-in-law is Bola's mother, but then she cannot be absolved from blame as her meddlesomeness forces Bola to marry Tunmise who becomes a thorn in his flesh. Even after Tunmise's untimely death, she never stops interfering in Bola's marital life, and this almost makes Bola commit another marital error.

Undoubtedly, there are bad mothers-in-law in society; but then there are good ones too which, (in)advertently are not given prominence in this drama. Such recurrent presentation of a mother-in-law with negative traits could, therefore, be deleterious as it is, among other things, capable of striking terror into the hearts of many (un)married Nigerian ladies, and even making them hope for a man without a mother or pray for speedy death of such an existing mother. Aje-Ori's (2010, p. 101) position is apposite here:

Mothers-in-law are a subgroup of women and when women are portrayed this negatively, it undermines the contributions that women make to society..... Such images might lead women to fear marriage... Bad in-laws exist, but when the bad is depicted more than the good, it cultivates a mean world syndrome in people.

The point being made here is that writers and producers of Nigerian Christian television dramas should be mindful of stereotyping mothers-in-law in such a manner that further reinforces prejudiced beliefs of people about women. Instead, they can consider presenting an alternative perspective that either celebrates or captures a more balanced depiction of the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationship so that their outputs will not be deemed counter-productive and/or sexist.

Similarly, *TG* portrays stay-at-home wives who depend on their husbands for survival. Mama Esther is a fine example as she has no identifiable business or works even though she is a graduate. She lives off Banjoko which makes it impossible for her to assert herself. Her marriage to Banjoko is simply based on the economic benefits she gets from the union. This makes it impossible for her to do away with him even when his second wife publicly humiliates her. Ronke is also a full housewife as her relevance is restricted to caring for her children's wellbeing. Undoubtedly, the actions of her philandering and negligent husband, Biola Adeyanju, evidently show that he sees her importance only in taking care of their children and satisfying his sexual urge. While there might be nothing wrong with a woman being a full housewife, failure to explore the totality of the woman, in terms of showing her enterprise, and expertise, and also demonstrating her daily toils in an attempt to meaningfully contribute to the economic status of her home could be injurious to the advocacy for women's empowerment and recognition. Besides, it is a non-acknowledgment of the laudable contributions of women who have excelled in different fields of human endeavour. Rather, it is confining women to domestic affairs, which can be viewed as endorsing oppressive traditions, especially when their relevance is seen in the light of Chukwuma's (1989) submission:

... female character's trained ambition revolves around marriage and procreation. Her other female obligations ranged further to cooking the family meals, honouring her husband's bed, on invitation; and other items merging with the home environment peacefully. (p. 2)

Chukwuma's statement shows how women can easily be enslaved by cultures and traditions that are gender prejudiced in favour of men folk. Osofisan (2001) holds cultural practices responsible for such prejudice against women, noting:

Several scholars have recognised both prejudice, which endures against women, as well as the laws which consolidated and encode this prejudice, are born from mental attitude inculcated in the individual by the cultural processes of his or her development. (p. 5)

It should, nevertheless, be acknowledged that there are women portrayed in different professions and/or economically empowered positions, including as journalists, nurses, doctors, businesswomen, teachers, secretaries, etcetera, just like their male counterparts. Normally, one would assume that the producer has demonstrated that women's capabilities and relevance should not be limited to the home front alone as they can likewise make laudable contributions in different fields of human endeavour, if given the much-desired opportunities and empowerment. However, it is largely observed that most of these women are portrayed as career women with failed marriages/relationships. It is generally noticed, in this instance, that for a woman to be portrayed as successful, economically empowered, and/or professional in elite jobs, some extraneous and/or compromising circumstances are often involved. This is the case with Tunmise who has to keep on sleeping with Sesan to continue getting money to stock her supermarket, even while still married to Bola.

Also, Debby acts as Bishop Badmus' secretary but has to sleep with him from time to time to meet up with her financial obligations; both Bishop Badmus' wife and Jumoke have to sacrifice their homes to do well in *their* chosen careers; Banjoko's first wife is a nurse but she experiences a failed marriage for over ten years; Angelina and Banke Adelana are widows who have to use the glory of men they sleep with to make successful business women. The skewed portrayals of women in all these instances serve no useful purpose to the women's folk; rather they give the viewer erroneous impressions about women's resilience, capability, strength, virtuousness, and self-esteem.

The image of the adulterous wife is another prominent stereotype that is depicted in *TG*, amplified through the character of Tunmise who is not only involved in an extramarital affair with Sesan due to financial inducements, but also makes life unbearable for her husband, Bola, and his mother. She even makes attempts on Bola's life by poisoning his food. Tunmise, therefore, falls into the cultural definition of a bad and unfaithful wife. Her actions certainly validate the popular Yoruba maxim that depicts women as capricious, especially concerning marital and sexual issues:

Baa fi gbogbo ile nla jin kolekole, kope o ma jale die kun; bi a si fi gbogbo odede jin iyawo agbere, kope o ma tara re f'ale ("Give a mansion to a thief - that does not prevent him from stealing; give a promiscuous wife all you have in a beautiful house - that does not preclude her from selling herself cheaply to a paramour"). (Cited in Balogun, 2010, p. 26 italics in the original).

The nasty stepmother is another stereotype and this is evident in the character of Adufe who not only kills Tinuke's father and inherits all his property but also uses charms to send Tinuke's mother away. Thereafter, she starts maltreating Tinuke whom she eventually turns into a hawker. When Tinuke revolts and accuses her of causing the misfortunes that befall her family, she casts a spell on her and banishes her from her father's house. Adufe's depiction is a testament to the cultural belief in Nigeria that stepmothers are generally evil and can engage in any diabolical activity in their desperate attempt to make their children outdo the children of their co-wives. What is, however, generally observed in this serial is that no attempt is made to create an alternative stepmother whose character is dissonant with Adufe's nature. Given Carroll's (1996, p. 349) assertion that "... the ways of representing women in popular media in some way influences or reinforces the way real women may be construed", the likely detrimental implications of this kind of persistent depiction of wicked stepmothers in Nigerian television drama may be far-reaching, especially on the impressionable viewer.

Moreover, it is found that some women are presented as tolerant wives. Labake, Ronke, Mrs. Banjoko, and Labake's mother are women that fit into this stereotype. Labake, for instance, has to endure Femi's immoral acts. She once laments about her agonies to Tunmise, "... I do all things alone. I plan alone; I sleep alone; I eat alone. And, what is the essence of the marriage?" Later, she sobs out while discussing with her pastor, "He still drinks, keeps late nights. He doesn't even eat my food anymore. The worst aspect of it is that he engages... in extramarital

affairs. He doesn't even keep it from me.... He separated me completely from his room.... He hates me...." Labake also has to put up with Femi's imposed decisions. A case in point is when he just comes home one day and announces to her that they have to change their church to Bishop Mathew's church and that is final. Interestingly, this imposed decision happens after he has become a Christian— a trait that shows his blotted patriarchal ego as a man has not altered in any way. Before then, Femi had singlehandedly made some similar impositions like banishing her to the children's room, and commanding her not to get pregnant again, even when he will not stop having unprotected sex with her.

It is worthy of note that *TG* links the suffering of wives in Labake's state to the wrong choice in marriage or the fact that their husbands are not Christians. The serial further makes it clear that the lonely nights, beatings, neglect, infidelity, and impositions that these women are subjected to are expected to be borne by all wives who desire to win the hearts of their wayward or abusive husbands. Tinuke describes how to win over such husbands in this manner:

The only way to win him over is to be patient. Allow yourself to suffer. You must be a fool— a complete fool— if you have to win your husband to yourself... there is no other shortcut. You must suffer.... the key is suffering, patience, and to be a complete fool (sic).

Tinuke's submission in the serial is a clear endorsement of women's subjugation, which is at variance with Emecheta's (2012) position, "... I still believe in families... I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither do I have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respectable" (p. 553). Tinuke's position is, therefore, an attempt at trivialising domestic violence which many women are subjected to in their marriages. By implication, women that try to reject such intense anguish and assert themselves and their rights are cast in the cultural mould of bad and impatient wives. This is evident in the case of Ronke who stands up to Biola's irresponsibility, beatings, and immorality. She is blamed for Biola's untimely death because she cannot endure his rough treatment and continue praying for him to escape the ghastly accident orchestrated by Jumoke. Tinuke describes women as the gatekeepers that determine what happens in their families:

A gate is like a wall... like a fence.... The woman is like a protector; she is like a shield... she stands in the gap for her family. So, if she does not understand the role of a gatekeeper, then she will be missing a lot and her home is in danger.... It is whatever the woman wants for her home that will stand. If the woman wants peace, love, joy, and progress in her home, that is what will happen. But if she wants sadness, sorrow, discouragements, and backwardness, that is what will stand. I hope you remember the case of Adam and Eve. God had beautiful plans for Adam and Eve, but Eve destroyed the purpose and counsel of God for their family. Imagine if she had not disobeyed God; imagine if she had not taken the fruit from the devil, our lives, and the world would have been better today. But because of her disobedience, she destroyed God's purpose and counsel for manhood... Of course, the woman is the gatekeeper.

Tinuke's assertion holds women responsible for whatever goes wrong in the family. This is like giving men the license to do evil and then blaming it on their wives. For instance, Biola's death is blamed on Ronke, not on his promiscuity which makes him a soft target for Jumoke's evil plan; Benson's death is blamed on Jumoke for not praying enough for him, not on his son who colluded with some miscreants to rob his father; and Bishop Badmus' fall into immorality is blamed on his wife for not being patient enough with him. Of course, Tinuke's standpoint has its springboard in the biblical teachings that show that God hates divorce (although the Bible somewhat approves of it based on immorality) and that women must submit themselves to their husbands (Ephesians 5: 22). But then, emphases are not equally placed on those portions of the Bible that stress that husbands must love their wives and that both must submit to one another (Ephesians 5: 25; Peter 5: 5b).

The fact that only aspects of the Bible that highlight women's submission are often amplified has made some scholars consider religion as one of the instruments of the subjugation of women in society (Moaddel, 1998 p. 108). The portrait of women as long-suffering wives, in this circumstance, therefore, stereotypes wives as individuals that have limited or no option but to continue putting up with their bestial and immoral husbands, even when their lives and wellbeing are threatened. In many instances, as evident in the drama, such women/wives are rewarded with the husbands coming to their senses, apologising to their wives for their mistreatment with a promise to be better husbands. One is left to wonder what would have become of characters like Labake if she had died or developed life-threatening complications as a result of incessant battering from Femi, even in her pregnant state. Such a skewed depiction of the tolerant wife, therefore, is capable of encouraging domestic violence and irresponsible actions on the part of the men folk. Besides, it offers no practical steps in ending assaults from one's spouse, beyond prayers. Sadly, other possible approaches like going for professional counselling are unexplored in the serial.

Besides, women are stereotyped as the femme fatale as they bring disastrous events upon others. Adufe, Mrs. Philip, Angelina, Tunmise, Banke, and Rebecca are women that largely exhibit this villainous nature. For instance, Mrs. Philip uses her charm and occult power to seduce Bishop Badmus and ensure he sleeps with her, thereby rendering him useless as she casts a spell of adultery and epilepsy on him. This is aside from destroying his home and ministry. Adufe, in her case, hypnotises Tinuke's father and makes him her lover. She, thereafter, turns Tinuke's mother to her maid before sending her away with her evil power. She later kills Tinuke's father and then inherits his property. She never spares Tinuke as she turns her into a hawker and prostitute before casting a spell on her, which makes her leave her father's house without a definite destination. She even almost kills Tolu in her desperate desire to make Bola marry her daughter, Funke. Both Angelina and Banke similarly use their beauty to seduce men purposely to destroy them by donating their souls to Shadow of the Widows' cult and taking over their fortunes.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has interrogated the place of women in society, emphasising how obnoxious socio-cultural practices and objectionable religious sentiments have contributed significantly to the marginalisation of women despite their immense contributions to the socio-cultural and political developments of society. Specifically, the paper has examined Lekan Asikhia's *The Gatekeepers*, a Christian television serial, highlighting recurrent female stereotypes that are portrayed in the serial. Eight indicators of stereotypes of women that are differently depicted in the TV drama include the tolerant wife, the stay-at-home wife, the adulterous wife, the nasty stepmother, the horrible mother-in-law, the nonchalant mother, the femme fatale, and the career woman. The paper affirms that the serial under reference has largely reinforced socially constructed feminine labels which can be injurious to the realisation of the dreams and aspirations of women in general. Given the fact that films can empower women, facilitating their ability to undertake actions that can help in eliminating destructive traditional practices on women (MacRae 199, p. 247), and also the fact that the cinema can help in the construction of people's consciousness, "penetrating the minds of our people, influencing their everyday social behavior, directing them...." (Hondo 40), there is a need for writers and producers of Nigerian Christian television drama to harness and utilize the potential of this important aspect of the mass media in demonstrating immense contributions women can make (and have been making), even to nation building. Therefore, while it may be imperative for producers of Nigerian television serials to take cognisance of the paradoxes in society and reflect them accordingly vis-à-vis biblical injunctions to foreground certain moral lessons, care should be taken not to characteristically stereotype women, especially as backdrops by limiting their activities and usefulness to the domestic sphere without demonstrating their relevance socially, politically, and even economically in this contemporary time, as the consequences of these could greatly hamper the advocacy for self-reliance, recognition, empowerment, and more participation of women in the socio-cultural, political and economic life of the Nigerian society for global competitiveness.

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### About the Author

**Solomon Adedokun Edebor, Ph.D.** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Edebor does research in Gender and Cultural Studies, Film and Television Studies, African Literature and and Dramatic literature.

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