

# FILM REVIEW

**Kenneth Gyang, director. *Òlòtūrẹ*.** 2020. 106 minutes. English/Pidgin/Bini. Nigeria. EbonyLife Films. Streaming on Netflix. No price reported.

*Òlòtūrẹ* is a dark crime drama which is both refreshing and at the same time heartbreaking; the captivating story, which focuses on human trafficking, resonates in contemporary Nigeria. After economic fraud and drug trafficking, human or sex trafficking is the most common crime in Nigeria. Women and girls as young as fifteen are trafficked within various Nigerian states and outside the Nigerian borders. Set in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, *Òlòtūrẹ* typifies the tenacity and the hustle and bustle which have come to be associated with every Nigerian in the twenty-first century. True to the attributes of Nigeria's most populous city, the "Lagosian kaleidoscope" captured in *Òlòtūrẹ* brings together people from different tribes, regions, and ethnicities. During the course of the film's action, these disparate individuals bond with one another, establishing relationships which are further reinforced by their common sufferings and goals.

Atypical of other features by Kenneth Gyang, *Òlòtūrẹ* is full of established Nollywood talent whose performances create a synergy that brings the story to life. Despite his having been raised and educated in Jos, a quieter although conflict-ridden city, Gyang perfectly captures the energetic scamper and perpetual wakefulness of Lagos. Popularly known for his award-winning film *Confusion Na Wa* (2013), Gyang is the co-founder of the film production company Cinema Kpatakpata. His features are beloved for the way they engage with popular social and topical issues. From *Blood and Henna* (2012) to *Confusion Na Wa* and now *Òlòtūrẹ*, Gyang proves that no topic is too difficult for him to explore.

*Òlòtūrẹ*, translated "Endurance," has been widely acclaimed despite the piracy scandal which its production company, EbonyLife, has been drawn into. It presents the story of *Òlòtūrẹ* (Sandra Ooja), a smart and beautiful young journalist who confronts endless challenges and dangerous obstacles in her quest for information on sex trafficking. As is so often the case, the hunter suddenly becomes the hunted. *Òlòtūrẹ* works for "The Scoop Magazine" as an undercover investigative journalist. Her quest to expose the sex trafficking cartel leads her to disguise herself as a sex worker. The engaging *Òlòtūrẹ*

becomes the sex worker Ehi, a stunning beauty, but naïve and unschooled in the ways of the criminal underworld. Seemingly enjoying what she initially perceived as acting, she is shocked back to reality when a patron attempts to forcefully have sex with her. Her breaking point, which coincides with the rising action in the film, is her rape by the prominent politician Sir Philip (Patrick Doyle). The thought of being both defiled and defeated propels Ehi further down the investigative lane. She bonds with other sex workers, especially Linda (Omowunmi Dada) and Blessing (Lala Akindoju) and refuses to back down, as she is advised to do by her colleague and boyfriend Emeka (Blossom Chukwujeku). Although Ehi prepares for the worst before leaving for Europe with Madam Alero (Omoni Oboli), the enormity of the deception she faces leaves her in a state of trauma. Her inexperience offers her no comfort in the unfolding drama. The guilt of Linda's death causes Ehi to adopt Linda's innocent and naïve seventeen-year-old sister, Beauty (Bukola Oladipupo). Ehi's determination to save Beauty pays off, as Beauty escapes from the group of girls being trafficked into Benin Republic.

*Òlòtūré* takes the issue of gender-based violence and the disposability of women in Africa to a new level. Chuks (Ikechukwu Onunaku), the pimp, shows no regard for women of any class, but believes that the politician Philip is invincible. Chuks assumes that women must be willing to accept any form of disrespect and abuse from men of class like Sir Philip, as it is just women's lot in life. Violence against women is further explored in the way that different levels of punishment are meted out for crimes, depending on the gender of the offender. While Blessing is violently and repeatedly abused both physically and emotionally for attempting to explore better options in life and Linda is callously murdered for violating a rule, Philip is only knocked unconscious for drugging and brutally raping Ehi. Despite Madame Alero's wealth and class, she is threatened with death by her cohort, including the lowlife, desperately anachronistic pimp, Chuks. Alero's fate is uncertain, as she failed to deliver fifteen girls as was agreed.

Kenneth Gyang ends the film in a manner that is contrary to conventional Nollywood fashion. Beyond its sad ending, the future of the girls is uncertain and bleak. Acting as a true representation of the lives of trafficked women in Nigeria, *Òlòtūré* does not pretend to offer hope for the future for these ladies. They must only be guided by a single virtue—endurance—as they face an uncertain future. As for the women whose life stories inspired *Òlòtūré*, especially the investigative story by Tobore Ovuorie, their survival and sanity will depend on their ability to withstand and rise above unpleasant, dehumanizing, life-threatening, and difficult situations.

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