

## **Enmity between Kinsmen: A Critical Analysis of Societal Imagery Arising from Warfare Prayers**

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14991512>

### **Abstract**

This paper presents a critical analysis of societal imagery that emerged from the practice of warfare prayers, with a specific focus on the manifestation of enmity between kinsmen. By examining the intricate dynamics between warfare prayers and societal perceptions, this article research sheds light on the complex interplay between spiritual practices and the construction of divisions within kinship. It highlights how warfare prayers reinforce existing divisions, and shape negative imagery and biases among families. It investigated the power of these prayers in constructing negative perceptions and deepening rifts between relatives. It explored the impact of hatred between kinsmen on social cohesion, family dynamics, and the overall well-being of communities. By unravelling the mechanisms through which warfare prayers influence societal perceptions, the paper provides insights into potential avenues for conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the restoration of harmonious relationships among kinship. Ultimately, this research aims to foster dialogue, promote empathy, and guide interventions aimed at healing and fostering healthier relationships in the society. Twenty people in five churches comprising Mountain of Fire, Christ Apostolic, Apostolic Faith, Celestial Church of Christ, Cherubim and Seraphim, and five Ori-Òkè-prayer mountains were purposively selected for their aggressive warfare prayers for interview and participant observation within Ibadan metropolis. Relevant texts were also used. The study was able to see how warfare prayers contribute to the creation and perpetuation of enmity both real and imaginary within kinshipbased societies. The study is of the opinion that by enhancing understanding, promoting dialogue, cultivating empathy, and guiding interventions there would be healthier relationships, and nurturing cohesive and inclusive communities.

**Keywords:** warfare prayer, societal imagery, negative imagery, societal perceptions, kinship

**T**he practice of warfare prayers are found in various cultural and religious traditions. It is a spiritual expression that often arises in times of conflict, adversity, or the pursuit of victory. However, the impact of warfare prayers extends beyond the spiritual realm and seeps into societal perceptions, creating a distinct imagery that shapes the way communities view themselves and others. Societal imagery shaped by warfare prayers can have far-reaching consequences. It has the potential to reinforce existing divisions, intensify conflicts, and deepen rifts among different groups. By invoking spiritual forces and appealing for divine intervention in battles or confrontations, warfare prayers often foster a sense of “Me versus them” mentality, emphasizing the separateness and hostility between factions. Warfare prayers can however, shape negative imagery and biases among communities. When prayers are directed towards specific groups or individuals, they can perpetuate stereotypes, create prejudices, and further entrench animosity. This imagery can infiltrate various aspects of societal life, from everyday interactions to social structures and institutionalized discrimination.

### **Imagery Shaped by Warfare Prayers, the Interplay and Societal Perceptions**

The construction of collective perceptions through warfare prayers is a powerful phenomenon. These prayers possess the ability to unite communities around a shared purpose or identity, but they can also deepen divisions and exacerbate conflicts. The collective imagination fuelled by warfare prayers can solidify enmity, making it harder to find common ground and work towards reconciliation. Understanding the impact of warfare prayers on societal imagery requires a multidimensional approach. It entails analysing historical contexts, cultural narratives, and the contemporary dynamics in which these prayers are performed. By unravelling the mechanisms through which warfare prayers influence societal perceptions, provide insights into the complexity of this interplay and identify potential avenues for conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the restoration of harmonious relationships. Unveiling societal imagery shaped by warfare prayers is crucial for fostering dialogue, promoting empathy, and guiding interventions aimed at healing and fostering healthier relationships within communities. By critically examining the influence of warfare prayers on societal perceptions, we can challenge stereotypes, encourage understanding, and strive for a more inclusive and peaceful coexistence.

The interplay between warfare prayers and societal perceptions is a complex and dynamic relationship that influences how communities view themselves and others. The idea of maintaining the narrative of one religion as the only truth remains baffling. (Most especially, Christianity and Islam are found in that

category. Ephesian<sup>17-10</sup> explained that it is in Christ and through his blood that we have been redeemed. Also, Ephesians 4<sup>4-5</sup> says there is but one body and one spirit, just as there is but one hope given... and John 14<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. Quran 112<sup>1-4</sup> says He is Allah the one. Allah the eternal, absolute, He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is no one like unto him). This, according to Ajisafe<sup>1</sup> (an informant) has subconsciously inspired the subtle enmity amongst members of a multi religious society such as Nigeria. Such “light vs. dark” philosophies have created a societal perception about people of other religions, demonizing them and making them suspect to bringers of metaphysical harm.

It is relevant to note that the idea of warfare prayers as used to anchor church programs such as deliverance services, prayer meetings etc. are because of the African perception of always warding off evil such as *Ajogun*—the Yorùbá concept and umbrella of chaos, loss, sorrow, poverty, unrest, diseases who are the war lords of the left side of Esu. When the early missionaries arrive Africa, they could not find a representation of the devil among the deities, so they took the trickster and illusion-of-choice manifestations of the Supreme Being such as Esu in the Yorùbá cosmology or Ekwensu of the Igbo religion, and translated that manifestation to be the devil. Subsequently, to ensure the Africans find more interest in the practice of the new religion, indigenous leaders of the church had to use the African perspective to engage Africans such as the need to consult the oracle, offer sacrifices and perform rituals to ward off evil<sup>2</sup>. These early African Church leaders would then translate such acts and perception to “for we wrestle not against flesh, but principalities and powers” as found in Ephesian 6<sup>12</sup>.

However, the demonization of the African Traditional Religions put a mark on the adherents as “worshippers of the devil.” Warfare prayer points began to refer to such adherents known in households. Whether an aged grandmother was a priestess of *Osù unì* or *Ifa*, she is considered evil and dangerous for her practice, without having knowledge of the tenets she lives by. When such people pass on to the greater beyond, those who have been wrestling against principalities and powers rejoice over the news as a prayer answered. Warfare prayers, as spiritual practices are embedded within cultural and religious traditions, however, they have the potential to shape and reinforce societal perceptions in significant ways. Warfare prayers can influence societal perceptions by creating a narrative of conflict and enmity. When these prayers are performed, they often evoke a sense of urgency, emphasizing the need to overcome adversaries who are in some cases believed to be relatives or friends. This narrative can contribute to the formation of a collective identity cantered around the idea of being under siege or engaged in spiritual warfare. As a result, societal perceptions become coloured by notions of division, aggression, and the need to defend one’s beliefs or interests.

The views of the people involved in warfare prayers is that it can ward off evil by invoking spiritual forces against specific individuals, groups, or communities. However, for those who do not share in this opinion, warfare prayers contribute to the construction of negative stereotypes and biases. This can perpetuate prejudice, deepen animosity, and reinforce social divisions. The perceived “otherness” generated by warfare prayers can lead to the dehumanization of those targeted, making it easier to justify hostilities and discrimination. Indeed, there are two forces that can inflict evil; *Ajogun* and Witches (*Aje*)<sup>3</sup> as a result, a woman famously known as a witch in the family will often be accused of mishaps in the community or family even when it is not her doing. In the real sense, witches don’t have the right whatsoever to inflict pain or bring down chaos without just cause and if she does otherwise, she loses her powers or suffers great loss<sup>4</sup>. The observation of Elebuibon here is right based on personal experience and research conducted on witches by one of the writers of this paper. Since not all the groups of witches are agents of afflictions, there are sometimes misunderstanding among the groups on issues. Most especially among the white witches (who are known for protecting people, their families, communities and doing good all the time) and the rest of the groups. Babalola<sup>5</sup> attested to the above fact with his personal experience with white witches in his autobiography.

Importantly, societal perceptions are not only shaped by warfare prayers themselves but also by the broader cultural and social context in which these prayers are performed. Historical conflicts, power dynamics, and intergroup tensions can influence the interpretation and impact of warfare prayers on societal perceptions. The social, political, and economic factors surrounding these prayers play a significant role in shaping the narratives and images that emerge within communities. Understanding the interplay between warfare prayers and societal perceptions requires a nuanced analysis of both the spiritual and sociocultural dimensions at play. By examining the ways in which warfare prayers influence societal perceptions, researchers can gain insights into the mechanisms through which divisions are created and perpetuated. This understanding can serve as a foundation for promoting dialogue, challenging biases, and fostering empathy, with the aim of building more inclusive and harmonious societies.

## **Intensifying and Reinforcing Existing Divisions among Kinsmen and Religious Groups by Warfare Prayers**

Warfare prayers, with their inherent focus on conflict and spiritual battles, have the potential to intensify existing divisions within societies. These prayers can reinforce divisions on multiple levels, from interpersonal relationships to broader social, cultural, and religious divides. At the interpersonal level, warfare prayers can deepen animosity and hostility between individuals or groups. By invoking spiritual forces to combat perceived enemies or threats, warfare prayers

accentuate the adversarial nature of relationships. This intensification of division can create a sense of “us versus them” mentality, fuelling resentment and making reconciliation more challenging.

Moreover, warfare prayers often contribute to the solidification of broader social divisions. They can reinforce and perpetuate existing fault lines, such as ethnic, religious, or political divides. A clear example is the recent arrest of a convert from Islam to ATR, popularly known as Tani Olorun shortly after the declaration of Muslim clerics in Ilorin, Nigeria that Ilorin is an Islamic state and as a result no one should openly practice or identify as an adherent of indigenous religion. When Tani Olorun was arrested, several Muslims considered it as victory for Allah and prayers answered by Allah to prove how great He is by punishing a man who burnt the Quran he purchased with his money, and made mockery of certain clerics. By aligning themselves with specific factions or ideologies, warfare prayers can further polarize communities, heightening tensions and exacerbating inter-religious conflicts.

The intensification of divisions through warfare prayers is not limited to the immediate participants but extends to the wider societal context. These prayers often influence collective narratives and social norms, shaping the way communities perceive and interact with one another. They can reinforce negative stereotypes, reinforce biases, and deepen the sense of “otherness” between different groups particularly traditional religion that is seen as their sworn enemy. That is the reason why during these warfare prayers, there are derogatory songs that are interjected to further show their hatred. Such songs like

*Mèle, I cannot*

*Mèle sà wo, I cannot be a doer of secret things*

*Mèle sin Ọlórún pẹ̀l u mámóni o I cannot worship God and*

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*Mammon*

To let the opposing religious sects (Christianity and Islam which are the major religious sects that are full of abusive songs and words) know that they are not the only one in the abusive trade of songs or can be hostile with songs, the song below is song by the traditional religious people in retaliation for the abusive songs from them.

*Babaláwo kú ó sun inú ilé Ifá priest died and was buried in the house*

*Mùsùlùmí kú, ó sùn'ta Muslims died and was buried outside their homes*  
*Ìgbàgbó kò r'ìbì sùn Christians have nowhere to be buried,*

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*Ó dinú igbó Except in the bush (cemetery)*

These kinds of songs can only brew contempt, hostility and create wide gaps among religious people that believed they are serving same God.

Warfare prayers are good, no doubt about that particularly when it is directed to the real enemy or enemies. However, the danger lies on how to know the boundary of extension because can contribute to the entrenchment of cultural and religious divisions if proper care is not taking<sup>8</sup>. When performed within specific cultural or religious contexts, they can strengthen the boundaries between different traditions, deepening the sense of separation and exclusivity. This can hinder interfaith or intercultural dialogue, impeding efforts towards mutual understanding and cooperation. Understanding how warfare prayers intensify existing divisions is crucial for fostering social cohesion and promoting peaceful coexistence. By recognizing the potential negative consequences of these prayers, societies can work towards bridging divides, promoting tolerance, and encouraging dialogue. This requires engaging in critical reflection, challenging biases, and embracing inclusive approaches that prioritize unity and understanding over adversarial frameworks.

### **Influence of Warfare Prayers on Kinsmen in shaping Negative Imagery and Biases**

Warfare prayers have a profound influence on shaping negative imagery and biases among kinsmen within a societal context. These prayers, when directed towards specific groups or individuals, can create and perpetuate stereotypes, prejudices, and animosity among kinsmen, contributing to a divisive and hostile environment. One way warfare prayers shape negative imagery is through the construction of a dichotomy between “us” and “them.” By invoking spiritual forces against perceived enemies, warfare prayers establish a narrative that accentuates differences and highlights the “otherness” of kinsmen outside the prayers focus. This narrative can lead to the formation of negative perceptions and biases towards those not included in the prayer, fostering an environment of exclusion and mistrust.

The shaping of negative bias towards certain kinsmen can be traced to the demonization of a religion. As earlier stated, the idea of people worshipping the devil was inspired by the mistranslation of the devil to to Èṣù , a divinity of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. Esu is not Satan nor a demon, but the inspector general among the divinities that inspects the sacrifices offered and an emissary of Olódùmarè.<sup>9</sup> This misconception of what or who Esu is, has trademarked the worshippers of Esu as the worshippers of the devil or Satan. As a result, a war is declared on such adherents when they refuse to remove the symbol of such a deity from an ancestral compound so a church can be erected. African scholars’ like Nkwoka,<sup>10</sup> Asaju,<sup>11</sup> Ayegboyin and Ishola,<sup>12</sup> Olaleye and Gbadamosi,<sup>13</sup> among others insights underscore the need to critically examine the influence of warfare

prayers on societal perceptions. By acknowledging the perspectives of these scholars, we gain a deeper understanding of how spiritual practices shape negative imagery and biases among kinsmen. Their research highlights the importance of context, history, and culture in comprehending the impact of warfare prayers on interpersonal and communal relationships.

It is imperative to engage in dialogue with African scholars, both past and present, to explore ways to address the negative effects of warfare prayers. By drawing on their expertise and insights, societies can work towards promoting inclusive narratives, challenging biases, and fostering harmonious relationships within kinship-based communities. This requires a concerted effort to bridge divides, promote understanding, and cultivate an appreciation for the diverse cultural and spiritual practices that shape African societies that understands that God loves variety and not monotony.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, warfare prayers can reinforce existing societal biases and stereotypes about specific kinship groups. By singling out certain kinsmen for spiritual intervention or protection, these prayers inadvertently perpetuate the notion of superiority or inferiority among different kinship factions. This can lead to the entrenchment of negative images and biases, further dividing kinsmen and inhibiting harmonious relationships. This happens when someone is told that one's mother child (usually daughter) one of the siblings or distance relation is behind one's predicament. This will definitely generate bad blood in the family. The influence of warfare prayers on kinsmen extends beyond the immediate prayer session. The collective narratives and social norms shaped by these prayers can seep into various aspects of societal life, such as cultural traditions, intergenerational dynamics, and institutionalized discrimination. This can lead to the normalization of negative imagery and biases, making it more challenging to break free from divisive patterns of thinking. Understanding the influence of warfare prayers on shaping negative imagery and biases among kinsmen is essential for fostering inclusivity and harmony within kinship-based societies. It necessitates critical reflection, open dialogue, and efforts to challenge and dismantle stereotypes and prejudices. By promoting empathy, understanding, and equal treatment among kinsmen, societies can strive towards reconciliation, unity, and a more inclusive vision of collective identity.

## **Warfare Prayers, Fragmentation of Kinship Relationships and Deepening Rifts**

Warfare prayers have the potential to deepen rifts within kinship relationships, leading to the fragmentation of these important social bonds because unfounded excuse may be given that somebody in the family may be accused wrongly as the brain behind some members of the family predicaments. While kinship is traditionally seen as a source of support, unity, and shared identity<sup>15</sup>, the influence



of warfare prayers can disrupt and strain these relationships in several ways. Firstly, warfare prayers can create a sense of division and enmity among kinsmen. By invoking spiritual forces against specific individuals or groups within the kinship network, these prayers reinforce the notion of adversaries or enemies within the family or clan. This can result in a breakdown of trust, communication, and mutual understanding, as kinsmen perceive each other through the lens of spiritual conflict. For instance, a prayer like *otà, ilé' iyà, ó tà, ilé baba, ó tà, ilé á na tò ndí mi ló wó, ire ayó, mi, ogun ò run bà, mi kó lú, wò n'-* enemies in my father's house, enemies in my mother's house, enemies in my in-law's house that are trying to hinder my success, host of heaven hit them.

Additionally, warfare prayers may contribute to the formation of factions or subgroups within kinship networks. Most especially, in an extended family where success is not evenly distributed which is natural. As prayers are directed towards specific individuals or factions, they can intensify existing disagreements or grievances, deepening the divisions and creating sub-identities within the larger kinship group. This fragmentation can lead to strained relationships, reduced cooperation, and even intergenerational conflicts.

Again, the influence of warfare prayers on kinship relationships extends beyond the immediate prayer sessions. The narratives, biases, and stereotypes perpetuated through these prayers can shape long-term dynamics within the kinship network. Understanding the impact of warfare prayers on the fragmentation of kinship relationships is crucial for promoting healing and restoration within kinship-based societies. It requires recognizing the complexities of spiritual practices and their potential consequences on interpersonal dynamics. By fostering open dialogue, empathy, and conflict resolution strategies, societies can work towards repairing rifts, rebuilding trust, and fostering healthier and more harmonious kinship relationships.<sup>16</sup>

## Enmity between Kinsmen, Community Wellbeing and its Impact on Social Cohesion

The enmity between kinsmen resulting from warfare prayers has a profound impact on social cohesion and the overall well-being of communities. Kinship relationships form the foundation of social fabric, and when these relationships are strained or fragmented due to enmity fuelled by warfare prayers, it can have far-reaching consequences for community dynamics such as forgotten and abandoned family houses that used to bring everyone together as one happy family. One will drive past Bẹrẹ (a major road in Ibadan Nigeria) and be tempted to curse the descendants of an ancestor's collapsed building due to abandonment. In several cases, these compounds are abandoned because of prayers against relatives who practice African religion. One significant impact is the erosion of trust and cooperation among kinsmen. Warfare prayers, by highlighting divisions



and adversarial relationships, create an atmosphere of suspicion and animosity within the kinship network. This hampers effective communication, collaboration, and mutual support, leading to a breakdown in social bonds. The lack of trust and cooperation among kinsmen can hinder community development, compromise collective decision-making processes, and impede the over-

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all well-being of the community .

As said earlier, enmity between kinsmen resulting from warfare prayers can perpetuate a cycle of conflict and hostility. (This is a view shared by a former member of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Church, Eleyele, Ibadan. According to him, he sees the work of enemies in all things he does until an incidence he declined to disclose (that made him left the church) happened. It was after the incident that he realised that things could happen naturally. He then asked, does it mean that enemies themselves have nothing to use their time for than to be pursuing another fellow?<sup>18</sup> The deepening divisions and negative perceptions fuel conflicts, both overt and subtle, within the community. This ongoing conflict disrupts social harmony, undermines community resilience, and diverts energy and resources away from collective goals. It can lead to the depletion of social capital, strained relationships, and even intergenerational tensions, further compromising the well-being of the community.

Furthermore, the presence of enmity between kinsmen can create a sense of insecurity and fear within the community. Individuals may feel unsafe or marginalized due to tensions resulting from warfare prayers. This can lead to the formation of subgroups, cliques, or even exclusionary practices, fragmenting the community and hindering social integration. As a result, several children and adults hold back from visiting their extended families out of fear of being attacked by witches or being poisoned by someone who is not of the same religious group as them<sup>19</sup>. The lack of a cohesive and inclusive community environment can have detrimental effects on individuals' mental health, sense of belonging, and overall quality of life.

Recognizing the impact of enmity between kinsmen resulting from warfare prayers is crucial for fostering community well-being and social cohesion. It requires efforts to promote reconciliation, dialogue, and understanding among kinsmen. Community initiatives that encourage empathy, conflict resolution, and bridge-building can help mend strained relationships and rebuild social bonds. By nurturing positive internship dynamics, communities can enhance their collective well-being and foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

## **Pathways/Insights for Resolution and Reconciliation towards Dialogue and Empathy in Kinship-Based Societies**

The influence of warfare prayers on societal perceptions presents important insights for conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts within communities. By understanding the impact of these prayers on shaping divisions and biases, valuable pathways towards resolution can be identified. One pathway to resolution is through fostering dialogue and promoting understanding. Recognizing the role of warfare prayers in perpetuating enmity and division, engaging in open and respectful dialogue becomes crucial. Creating spaces for individuals from different factions or groups to come together, share their perspectives, and listen to one another can help break down barriers and bridge divides. Through dialogue, misconceptions can be challenged, empathy can be cultivated, and common ground can be discovered, paving the way for reconciliation. Another pathway is to address the underlying fears and insecurities that drive the reliance on warfare prayers. Oftentimes, these prayers are employed as a response to perceived threats or conflicts. By addressing the root causes of these fears and providing alternative avenues for security and protection, communities can move towards a more peaceful and cooperative approach. Investing in initiatives that address socio-economic disparities, promote social justice, and provide conflict resolution mechanisms can alleviate the need for warfare prayers as a means of protection.

Additionally, fostering intergenerational dialogue and understanding is essential for sustainable resolution. Warfare prayers and the resulting enmity can create deepseated rifts within families and communities that are passed down through generations as explained by Mojirola an informant.<sup>20</sup> By facilitating conversations and interactions between different generations, knowledge and experiences can be shared, enabling healing and the cultivation of mutual respect. Breaking the cycle of enmity through intergenerational reconciliation is vital for long-term resolution and the restoration of harmonious relationships. Furthermore, through proper education formal or informal, awareness about the negative impacts of warfare prayers can be created and contribute greatly to resolution efforts. By providing information on the consequences of these prayers and fostering critical thinking, individuals can question existing biases and challenge the divisive narratives perpetuated through warfare prayers. the attention of scholars have been drawn to the need for interaction of Islam and Christianity with ATR as all religious leaders pray for peace in our multi-religious society<sup>21</sup>. Education can empower individuals to seek alternative methods of conflict resolution, emphasizing peaceful dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. Pathways to resolution require collective efforts and a commitment to healing and reconciliation. By utilizing insights gained from understanding the influence of warfare prayers on societal perceptions, communities can embark on a journey

towards resolution, fostering understanding, empathy, and ultimately, a more harmonious coexistence.

By delving into the complexities of warfare prayers and their influence on societal perceptions, this research enhances our understanding of the dynamics within kinship-based societies. It provides valuable insights into the factors that contribute to divisions, biases, and enmity, shedding light on the root causes of conflict and strained relationships. One of such significant implications of this study is the promotion of dialogue among individuals and communities as those who know one know none<sup>22</sup>. By recognizing the impact of warfare prayers on societal perceptions, the research encourages open and respectful conversations that bridge divides. Dialogue can lead to increased understanding, empathy, and the deconstruction of stereotypes, fostering a culture of communication and collaboration.

Another important implication is the cultivation of empathy within kinshipbased societies. The shared experiences, challenges, and aspirations of individuals across different factions or groups within kinship-based, this will promote empathy as a powerful tool for building bridges and fostering healing. This can contribute to the development of more compassionate and inclusive communities. This will also provide insights into the healing and reconciliation processes necessary to address the wounds caused by enmity resulting from warfare prayers. It offers guidance on interventions that can facilitate healing, restore trust, and promote reconciliation within kinship-based societies. This has implications for the well-being and social cohesion of communities, as healing relationships and fostering harmonious interactions contribute to overall community health.

## **Conclusion**

This study's contributions and implications will pave the way for dialogue, empathy, healing, and reconciliation within kinship-based societies affected by warfare prayers. By enhancing understanding, promoting dialogue, cultivating empathy, and guiding interventions, this research offers pathways for the transformation of societal perceptions, fostering healthier relationships, and nurturing cohesive and inclusive communities. After all, regardless of our prayers, majority of Africans who believe in destiny know that what would be would be.

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