The 'New Normal' and Gendered Violence in Nigerian Film Space

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Arguably, film is the most magical form of storytelling. It is that genre that is most similar to our dreams; a place where a lot of possibilities abound. In the case of Nigerian films, there is little or no holding back as creativity and imagination are often interlaced with biased and unbiased social constructs. This study considers 'New Normal' as the current thematic preoccupation of Nigerian films to trivialise women's rights and promote abuses. This phenomenon is contextualised as intrusive narratives which are now present as a discomforting trope underscored by subtle and at times brash episodes in Nigerian films. Based on the theoretical framework of symbolic annihilation and objectification, salient mentions of

existing (or comparative) thoughts on gender, violence and filmic presence are examined. These contentions are justified through content analysis with the adoption of coding schemes that frame the forms and results of violence in the films studied. It avers Nigerian film space as a gendered platform that inspires flights of fancy, violence, sexual depravity and mental grossness through its treatment of violence related subjects. It concludes that Nigerian films promote an inconspicuous attitude where the interest of the man often defines the destiny and functionality of the woman.

Keywords: film, gender, masculinism, sexism, violence.

Considerably, the world of film offers array of magic, creativity and imagination. It could be the heaven of inspired storytelling, flight of fancy, beauty, morality and emotions; furthermore, "it could be the depth values, knowledge and wisdom... the best in us, while also being the hell of violence, gore, sexual depravity and emotional and mental grossness, in other words, the beast in us"(Ogundipe, 2004: 88).

Film, as a pictorial based form of storytelling with a range of visual pleasure has the adeptness to provide strong opposition to dominant societal ills and to preconceive better portrayal and treatment of women especially in a country like Nigeria where the film industry is globally recognized as the second largest film producer in the world (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017). The Nigerian film industry is a significant part of the arts, recreation and entertainment sector, which contributes considerably to the nation's revenue base.

The Nigerian film industry is one of the priority sectors identified in the Economic Recovery and Growth plan of the Federal Government of Nigeria with a planned \$1 billion in export revenue by 2021 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017). Nonetheless, the existing bodacious and virulent criticism of femininity as adjudged by extreme masculinism where the interest of a man defines the destiny of a woman is a new normal in Nigerian film, which is worth studying. This paper serves as a statement of canonical exploration about the role of film, Nigerian film in this context—in fanning the founts of gendered violence.

Broadly, gendered violence refers to any form of discrimination that is projected based on gender definition. It is important to recognise that men can, and do, also experience violence and abuse in relationships, and that women may be perpetrators. Nonetheless, the degree and severity of violence, particularly sexual violence, perpetrated against women within intimate relationships is greater (Scott, 2015). Furthermore, the impact of intimate partner violence and abuse can be far reaching, affecting future generations. Children exposed to intimate partner violence and abuse, whether or not they are directly abused, are more likely to either experience or perpetrate as adults. While acknowledging that gendered violence is broad and of myriad types, the hunch of this paper is on intimate partner violence against women. Within the context of this paper, gendered violence and gender-based violence are used interchangeable to construct the framework of harm inflicted upon women in intimate relationships; a situation which could be seen as being connected to the normative understanding of the female gender. Particularly, this paper dwells on the extent, nature and forms of gendered violence against women as promoted by Nigerian films and presented as normal.

Adopting both quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches, this paper seeks to ascertain the extent to which female subjects are licensed as tools for violence in the Nigerian film space. The strategies used in undertaking a gender reading and assessment of the films include the interpretative content analysis framework based on a coding scheme that identifies the forms and results of gendered violence. This paper is not an argument for women to benignly be relegated to some dish out positions but joins voice with the premise that “women actually don't need to be championed and revered; they just need to be treated as equal human beings” (Adichie, 2017: 24).

It suggests that there is a patronizing undertone to the idea of women needing to be championed and revered because they are women, bringing to mind the notion of chivalry, and the premise of chivalry is considered to be female weakness. Consequently, this study maintains that women ought to be treated as

human beings with all rights and benefits that come with being a human being rather than being judged on sexuality.

Research on intimate partner violence has increased dramatically over the past years. Authors like Esther Mbadugha and Michael Kunnuji have carried out general research into intimate partner violence, mapping out general perceptions and health implications. Researchers like Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Ekene Anjah and Ayodele Ogunipe have conducted extensive research on gender-based violence in Nigerian films. An overview of their study supports that violence may emanate from either of the gender, it also reels out the likely causes of violence while passing remarks on the believability and realistic nature of the films' plot. This paper takes this argument further by concentrating on how the treatment of gendered violence in Nigerian films are strengthening the normalisation of violence against women thereby acting as orgy to the continuous flow of violence. Concisely, it serves as a voice against the propagation and normalization of gendered violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Until recently, most governments had considered violence against women (particularly domestic violence by a husband or other intimate partners) to be a relatively minor social problem. However, due in large part to the efforts of women organizations and evidence provided by research, including that of the World Health Organisation (WHO), violence against women is today recognized as a global concern (Abama and Chris, 2009).

Violence against women is not a small problem that only occurs in some pockets of society, but rather, it is a global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action. Relatively, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) could be considered as including threats, attempted, or completed physical or sexual violence or emotional abuse by a current or former intimate partner. It also involves any behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours (WHO, 2013). Consequently, gendered violence can be described as a structural problem, directly linked to the sustaining of patriarchy. International organisations such as the WHO have called attention to the responsibility that key institutions have to eliminate gender-based violence. Addressing the concerns of key institutions in such issues equals saddling the media with the arduous responsibility of improved consciousness and possible means of averting relative instances. This translates to addressing the subject matter with regards to the different platforms offered by the media of which film is one of the main actors.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is the most common form of violence against women and all its forms are recognised as fundamental violation of women's human rights (Huecker and Smock, 2018). Such involves abusive actions which includes physical, sexual, and psychological aggression as well as other coercive acts by a current or former intimate partner. The origin of violence against

women could be traced to the patriarchal structure that oppresses women. It is the manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women which have resulted in the domination and discrimination of women in the society. Consequently, it is not hyperbolic to describe gendered violence as the most extreme expression of unequal gender relations in the society. An interpretation of what it metes out defines it first as a foremost violation of human rights, and a global health issue that cuts across boundaries of economic wealth, culture, religion, age, and sexual orientation. Swedish International Development Agency (2015) observes that wherever gender-based violence occurs, it is a major obstacle for the achievement of gender justice, posing a serious threat to democratic development and public health, and it's also a critical barrier to achieving sustainable development, economic growth and peace. Invariably, if women are not safe, they cannot be full citizens nor fully participate in the development of their own society. This goes on to justify the alludes of technological determinism. Advocated by American sociologist Thorstein Veblen, technological determinism proposes that a society's technology defines the development of its social structure and cultural value. In this context, the reign of violence on women via the media showcases extreme display of patriarchy while encouraging the abuse of women. The treatment of women depicted in film can influence the developmental imperatives of such society because, technology is considered the driving force of culture in a society and it determines its course of history (Hauer, 2017). In the Nigerian situation, it is important to question what history is being created with misogynist films that do more hurt than good to women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is intended to advance knowledge on existing studies that have investigated gendered violence by focusing on the treatment of gendered violence in Nigerian films. Subsequently, theories related with media and female representation are found relevant in interpreting the focus of the study. The theories are the symbolic annihilation theory and objectification theory.

Symbolic Annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) is a concept often used to describe an ongoing non-representation or under-representation of women in prestigious roles in the media as part of the reconstructed reality. The theory argues that contents of the media distort women's status in the social world; the deleterious representation of women, when internalised can impede female accomplishment. It questions why women should be considered only within the domestic and familial realm, or private sphere where women are assigned the role of wife, mother, or homemaker and why men are often depicted as aggressors and women as victims. Implicitly, symbolic annihilation describes the ways in which the media promote stereotypes and deny specific identities.

Tuchman (1978) considered symbolic annihilation in three forms: omission (refraining altogether from featuring women in broadcasts), trivialisation (presenting females with reduced importance or less value) and condemnation

(media representation of women as guilty parties). This multifaceted approach offered by symbolic annihilation with regards to media coverage, not only vilifies communities of identity, but work to make women either invisible or poorly projected through the explicit lack of proper representation in all forms of media ranging from film, song, books, news media and visual art.

Objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997) explains the act of construing an individual as an object. Implicitly, targets of objectification stand to be regarded as less fully human. Building on a framework of psychological essentialism, Heflick and Goldenberg (2009: 599) propose:

People construe certain characteristics as more essential or fundamentally human... de-humanization can take the form of perceiving individuals as lacking this human essence.

Additionally, focusing more on an individual's appearance than who they are could lead to evaluating the individual as less human.

Objectification theory argues that women are objectified when they are viewed as if their body is capable of representing them. A person is sexually objectified when her sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from the rest of her personality and reduced to the status of mere instruments or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her (Bartky, 1990). To say that the sexual part of a person is regarded as if it could represent her is to imply that it cannot, that the part and the whole are incommensurable. It thereby implies that the identification of a person with her sexuality becomes oppressive as it has one's entire being identified with the body or body part thereby regarding her as less intrinsically valuable and indeed less inherently human.

Langton (1995: 150) adds to this argument as she describes objectification as "a second solipsism; treating people as things". Inherently, the reduction of people to things violates the autonomy of the person because it objectifies the other person and makes an Other of the person. Also, objectification fails to do justice both morally and epistemically to the humanity of the person who is treated as a thing; thus, there should be an assimilation of all human beings, rejecting the notion that any human category be considered an object. Attempting to achieve this resonates with the democratic society heralded by Karl Marx which supposes no place for the 'Other'. A world where men compel women to assume the status of the Other is one in which women are positioned as objects that can be used, abused and discarded at will.

Where objectification strives, women are oppressed and the oppression of women produces creatures who are alluring objects and slaves; by that, relations between men and women can be solipsistic as a result (Wollstonecraft, 1992). Oppression signals the degradation of a free human being into an object. Objectification can take the form of instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, denial of subjectivity, reduction to body, reduction to appearance and silencing (Nussbaum, 1995; Langton, 1995). The first seven forms are directly related to how a human's competence can be minimised, they also show how human's self-determination, uniqueness of talents and agentic qualities can be denied. Additionally, the last three forms

focus on the minimization of an individual as a full human, in such ways as denying that their experiences and feelings matter and having less concern about them being physically or emotionally harmed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Central to this study is the identification and analysis of the themes that emerge from filmic representation of gendered violence, with particular focus on the Nigerian film space. Basically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: What extent, nature and forms of gendered violence are promoted by Nigerian films?

In the course of generating responses to above central research question, this paper will also answer the following sub-questions:

1. Do Nigerian films fan the founts of gendered violence?
2. Are females licensed as tools in the Nigerian film space?
3. Has the treatment of gendered violence created a new normal for contents in the Nigerian film space?

METHODOLOGY

This essence of this study is to investigate, identify and analyse themes of gendered violence in Nigerian films using quantitative content analysis through the creation of a coding system and qualitative analysis based on the theoretical framework adopted. The systematic inquiry into the content of Nigerian films required the creation and adaptation of a coding scheme. This process was guided by the objectives of the study, combined with insights gained from earlier researches that have investigated gendered violence in films. The development of a coding scheme and adoption of theoretical interpretation was aimed at ascertaining the extent and nature in which films centre on gendered violence; to critically examine the content of the films identified, in order to ascertain the treatment of gendered violence issues and to determine results that emerge from gendered violence.

Ten Nigerian films with themes of gendered violence were selected for analysis. The selection of these films was informed by prior knowledge of their plots featuring themes associated with gendered violence. The selected gendered violence themes used for analysis are a summary of basic assumptions that theorists argue are common features of symbolic annihilation and objectification. Both the symbolic annihilation and objectification theories were used as references for this purpose. The themes of gendered violence that were looked out for in the films include: Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Psychological Abuse, Financial Abuse and Verbal Abuse.

The films selected were produced between 2010 and 2019, purposively because of their themes. Notably, there are limitations to the method adopted; the films analysed were not randomly selected from a list of films produced

within a particular year or period of time. This is attributable to non-availability of an archive that could be consulted for a list of films with gendered violence themes. This left the researchers with the option of sourcing for accessible films that fell within the criteria stipulated for selection of film for the analysis.

ANALYSIS OF FILM CONTENTS

In analysing the films, categories were developed to enquire the portrayal of gendered violence in Nigerian films and also identify the extent and results being presented. The analyses are represented in tables. The films were analysed using a coding scheme developed by the researchers. The scheme followed a simple process indicating violent factors and outcomes identified in each film; same is expressed through frequency distribution.

Coding Sheet for Details of Films Analysed

Film Title	Director	Year of Release	Abused Character
A Private Storm	Lancelot Imasuen	2010	Female
Damage	Uche Jumbo	2012	Male and Female
Unforgivable	Desmond Elliot	2013	Female
When Men Promise	Ikechukwu Onyeka	2017	Female
Heart Beat	Moses Eskhor	2017	Female
Pleasure of Pain	Emmanuel Akaemeh	2018	Female
Ruthless	Pat Oghre Imobhio	2018	Female
In Sickness and in Health	Muyiwa Aluko	2018	Male and Female
A Taint on Silver	Femi Akinlosotu	2019	Female
Chances	Ain Tijani Balogun	2019	Female

Source: Own elaboration.

The films studied in this paper present, in each case, scenarios where women are regarded and/or treated as inanimate objects licensed to be owned and deserving to be treated in whatever way the owner/s deem fit. In *Heartbeat*, a husband (Mike) becomes a nightmare to his wife (Thelma) as she suffers hitches in her marriage but refuses to call it quit against all odds. Her persistent and hope for an end to the endless violent leads to her child murdering her husband. Here, Mike treats Thelma as a pre-human consciousness being ripe for invasion and destruction and her only quasi human utterances is one that confirms her suitability for the infliction of pains. This concept of pain inflicting as deserving is replicated by Zino in *Pleasure of Pain* as he reduces Isadora and other women he comes across, to a body ripe for male use.

In *Private Storm*, we come in contact with the story of Alex and Gina. Alex appears as the prince charming of every woman's dream and the picture painted to the world is that of a perfect couple. Alex exerts unending jealousy and does not hold back in abusing Gina whenever she communicates with any other man. Whereas people praise her for having a man like Alex, she suffers untold hardship and torture, being a constant receiver of violent acts from Alex. *Unforgivable* takes a different swipe at normalising violence by enacting the situation of a woman trapped in a marriage where she is unwanted. She struggles to gain acceptance and silently endures all the violence meted on her by her husband.

Damage deals with a home ruled by violence. The violence and stormy relationship of the couple (Taiwo and Sarah) continues and is even exhibited in front of their children, this results in the children being violent prone. Interestingly, Taiwo and Sarah are celebrated by the society and acclaimed role models. *Damage* portrays a world ruled by violence; it paints violence in the light of acceptability and shows how easily it can descend. Taiwo initiated the violent nature and Sarah responds with more violent measures. *Damage* seems to cement the unacceptable, ruling that every violent act should be matched by more violence. This approach to normalising violence resonates with the content of *In Sickness and in Health*. The film centres on the marriage story of Priye and Tinuke who had few months of blissful marriage until Priye starts exhibiting strings of uncharacteristic behaviour, physically abusing his wife Tinuke, he goes as far as raping her. In fighting back, Tinuke gets trained in combat and engages her husband in a fisticuff, an incident that gets Priye hospitalised. While it is recognised that this is rather an unusual narrative in view of perceived Africa's bias definition of marriage, it does not also portray feminism in good light as violence cannot be used to avert violence. The case here is that of double tragedy where violence is normalised beyond the scope of previously mentioned films.

When Men Promise tells the story of a man (Ifeanyi) who believes the only way to keep his wife (Chioma) under check is by getting her pregnant yearly thus reducing the possibility of men approaching her. Ifeanyi sees and treats Chioma as an object he bought off the supermarket shelf with which he has unrestricted authority to do as he pleases. The sexploitation in *Pleasure of Pains* is second to none. It tells the story of Isadora's marriage to Zino which turned out to be worse than a death trap. Before marriage Zino was the perfect gentlemen that suited the title of a loving husband. After marriage the monster in Zino is unleashed. Not only is Isadora subjected to the life of a sex object, she is also turned into a receiver of unusual sexual activities. Zino stopped at nothing in destroying Isadora emotionally and psychologically; so much such that after his death Isadora had to be confined in a mental hospital. Zino approaches sexual activities with the adoption of different tormenting activities including the use of whips, restraint of movement and mouth sealing; an approach quite alien to Isadora but which she is forced to be part of. In *A Taint on Silver*, the issue of women violation in marriage is also treated. Kingsley and Julia appeared all so happy together until they got married, after which a lot is unveiled about Kingsley's terrible temper and overly reaction. This excess attitude of Kingsley leads him to inflict lots of pains on Julia through incessant beatings, rape, psychological torture and

emotional trauma. This also happens to be the case in *Ruthless*. The film relates the story of a young lady (Amaka) who faces the worst kind of violence from her husband (Dayo). She stayed on in the marriage, hoping for a change but things only turn worse as each day passes.

Coding Sheet for Types of Violence

Unit of Analysis	Frequency	Total Possibilities	Percentage
Physical Abuse	10	10	100%
Sexual Abuse	9	10	90%
Emotional Abuse	10	10	100%
Psychological Abuse	7	10	70%
Financial Abuse	5	10	50%
Verbal Abuse	10	10	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Coding Sheet for End Result of Violence

Unit of Analysis	Frequency	Total Possibilities	Percentage
Death	4	10	40%
Psychological Challenges	6	10	60%
Violent Prone Children	5	10	50%
Miscarriages	4	10	40%
Separation / Divorce	2	10	20%
Continuous Union	3	10	30%
Child Crime	2	10	20%

Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION

Identified gendered violence in Nigerian films range from inflicting physical, emotional and mental pains to sexually prone harm and suffering. Other forms of violence include verbal abuses, economic restraint, death, child influence to be violent prone/commit crimes, threats of violent acts and coercion. While some of these violent acts are expressly displayed, others take subtly modes which do not in any way justify the prevalent of violence. With such violent mosaic, it could be reckoned that some Nigerian films are celebrated agendas of gendered violence, promoting extreme masculinism. In all ramifications, gendered violence breaches specific provisions; they impair and, in some cases, nullify the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom by women.

Within the frame work of the films studied, marked out conditions that often characterise or act as base for the growth of violence include: perceived gender supremacy (as seen in *Pleasure of Pain*, *Ruthless*, *When Men Promise*, *A Private Storm*, *A Taint on Silver*, *Heartbeat* and *Chances*); Quest for total control of economic power (this is exemplified in *Pleasure of pain*, *Ruthless*, *Heartbeat* and *Chances*); fear of cultural criticism and societal insistence on staying married (reflected in *When Men Promise*, *In Sickness and in Health*, *Heartbeat*, *Chances* and *A Taint on Silver*) and outrageous sexual preferences (vividly expressed in *Pleasure of Pain* and *Ruthless*). Above identified factors tend to support or increase both the frequency and brutality of violence faced by women.

The continuous portrayal of men as unlikely caricature of hard-breathing sadistic testosterone that is far from what is expected of human beings is unimaginable. The men in the films mentioned seem to live just for the purpose of inflicting pains on their partners; torturing them with cruel mind games and expressing ownership over them and all that they represent. They seem not to have any other reason for existence —this is the implied message passed and it has the propensity of brewing more violence in consumers or being used as basis for judging how patient women should be.

The forms of violence adopted by some films take on the societal prism that being a man equals wholesome acceptance of all deeds that emanates thereof—a pitiable inference which can be adjudged as an absurd idea, which means having a much lower standard for men (Adichie, 2017). There is need, to promote, through film spaces the fact that decisions to unleash violence on a woman, treating her as not being an end in herself but as a mere tool, leads naturally to a failure of imagination. Once violent motives are hatched, it becomes quite easy to stop asking basic questions morality usually dictate, such include questioning one's self thus: what is the next person likely to feel if I indulge in X? What does my partner want and how will my involvement in X affect her with regards to her expectation of me?

The instrumental use of women, negating the autonomy that is proper to them could leave women so denuded of humanity in the eyes of the violator, and rather emphasising that they seem ripe for other abuses as well. This can be expatiated with *When Men Promise*. The film passes an indelible remark that violence perpetrated against women by intimate partners is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior; often surfacing as a systematic pattern of dominance and control. *When Men Promise* represents sequences of increasing violent episodes strung together to constitute the entire film. This strengthens the contention that society's continuous hit on women to be morally upright while men are allowed to do as they please, is a terrible crime against humanity. This could be related also to some misconstrued sentiments that sometimes surface in gender discourses, supposing that women ought to be morally "better" than men. It need not to be so, as women are as human as men are. Female goodness is as normal as female evil (Adichie, 2017).

The violence in *Pleasure of Pain*, *When Men Promise*, *A Taint on Silver*, *Heartbeat*, *Ruthless* and *In Sickness and Health* seems to justify the assertion that "marriage, with its historical connotations of ownership and non-autonomy, is one of the

structures that make sexuality go bad” (Nussbaum, 1995). In above cited films, mutually satisfying passionate sexual relationships turn sour as soon as the partners get married, symbolic annihilation also steps in and the women are only recognised within stereotyped roles of reduced importance. Encouraged by the institution, the men in the above cited cases began to assert their dominance sexually, and the relationships degenerate into terrible saga of sadism and abuse. Similarly, in the case of *Pleasure of Pain*, the institution brewed in Zino the eroticization of forms of sexual conduct that dehumanises and brutalise. Nussbaum (1995: 269) suggests that the remedy for this state of affair “is no single institution, but rather the gradual undoing of all the institutional structures that lead men to eroticise power”.

In *When Men Promise* and *Chances*, just as in *A Taint on Silver*, the excuse offered is that of the men being exposed to frequent violent acts exhibited by their parents. It then leaves one to wonder if women are rehabilitation centres for badly raised men. It pricks further why men are mostly exempted from the many scrutiny women face when growing up. In a seeming response, Adichie (2017: 36) notes:

Society does not expect men to feel ashamed of pursuits... In the same way, men’s grooming is never suspect in the way women’s grooming is.

If a man has a personality problem, why not he finds solution to it rather than put women in harm way and then blame love for it? But when the tables are turned, women are criticised for not delivering as expected in some kind of parochially defined duties. Considering that Mike’s reason (in *Heartbeat*) for brutalising Thelma at some point hinges on cooking, is ridiculous. It was even at one of such instances that his child stabbed him to death. This brings to question the numerous straight jacketed rules tied to women and their supposed duties in marriage. Adichie provides a suitable point to this in her *Feminist Manifesto* as she responds to Nigerian social media debates about women and cooking, and how wives have to cook for their husbands. She maintains:

The knowledge of cooking does not come pre-installed in a vagina. Cooking is learned. Cooking —domestic work in general— is a life skill that both men and women should ideally have (Adichie, 2017: 11).

It is pertinent to recognize cooking as a skill that can elude both men and women. There is also need to question the idea of marriage as a prize to women, because that is the basis of these absurd debates. If women are conditioned to stop seeing marriage as a prize, then there would be fewer debates about a wife needing to cook in order to earn that prize.

Adding to the case of women facing violence because of cooking, is the case of Amaka in *Ruthless*. For the sake of having timely homemade meals among other things, Dayo insists that Amaka quits her job and concentrate on house chores because he, presumably, ‘owns her and she is meant to serve him diligently’. It then leaves one to wonder why the society often use biology to explain

the privileges that men have, the most common reason being men's physical superiority. It is of course true that men are in general physically stronger than women. But then, if biology should be used as a measuring tool for social norms, children ought to be identified as their mother's rather than their father's because when a child is born, the parent everyone is incontrovertibly (and biologically) certain of, is the mother. Considerably, it is high time women are seen and valued in an individual way, with respect to their specific identities rather than being measured on a scale of what society presumes every woman should be. Implicitly, "if X is criticized in women but not criticized in men then the society does not have problem with X, but with women" (Adichie, 2017: 22). This ought not to be the case.

The films cited as violence nests in this paper are so justified because of the accompanying moral complexities they prelude and the wings they give to symbolic annihilation of women. Amongst other things, the violent acts enacted in the films have led to capital child crime, miscarriages, death, sustenance of bodily injuries, frequent illness, shortened attention span, regression in development, physical, mental and psychological instability; lethargy and so on. A quick look at the films studied, reveals elements of objectification in different forms. These include the notion of instrumentality in *When Men Promise*, *A Taint on Silver*, *Heartbeat*, *Pleasures of Pain* and in *Ruthless*. Instrumentality describes a situation where a man treats a woman as an object of his or her purpose (Nussbaum, 1995). In *Pleasure of Pain* and *Ruthless*, women are treated as lacking in autonomy and self-determination. These are forms of violence that beget the denial of subjectivity and the notion of a human being 'owning' another and having the liberty to do with the other as he pleases. Same is also replicated in *A Private Storm*, *Heartbeat*, *Damage*, *Unforgiveable*, *When Men Promise* and *A Taint on Silver*. The identified factors are different forms of objectification which involve treating a human being as something that is owned by another or can be bought or sold; it also involves treating women as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account (Nussbaum, 1995). Ifeanyi exemplifies these attributes (in *When Men Promise*) when he beats Chioma to an unconscious state because of her choice of dressing and hairdo at home. He describes her as not dressing 'like a married woman but seeking men's attention'. This is very troubling as it projects a dehumanising tone which reduces women to mere props used to manage the appetite of men. More so, it presents that the shame attached to female sexuality is about control. Particularly, as many Nigerian cultures and religions control women's bodies in one way or another. If the justifications for controlling the bodies of women were about women themselves, then it would be understandable; instead, the reason is not about women, but about men. Women are urged to always 'cover up' to protect men.

CONCLUSION

While it could be argued that factors such as poverty, lack of education and livelihood opportunities could be encouraging factors for women to stay-on in

abusive relationships. The films studied reveal that even women who have risen above such levels of human needs/conditions still subject themselves to slavery in relationships, accepting all the violence that comes with a violent prone man. Some of the highlighted factors include men's impunity for crime and abuse as well as the selective use of tradition to justify anything. No culture is static; all cultures are subject to change though some may strive for changeless stability but it is believed that the world has come to a point where individuals are empowered to purge themselves of ill-gotten or badly weaved cultural expectations.

Film spaces should outrightly reject the propensity to normalise or reinforce a culture of violence and discrimination based on gender. Gendered violence is a grave human rights violation that can cause long-term and life-threatening injury and trauma to victims/survivors. All human rights and humanitarian actors must ensure that efforts are made from the onset of a situation to prevent and respond to acts of gendered violence. Films ought to provide guidance on prevention and respond favourably to quests that condemn violence. Whereas the primary responsibility lies with individuals and relevant institutional authorities, the theories adopted for this study insist that film makers equally have an important role in preventing and responding to violence against women.

This study recognises the efforts of some film makers like Omoni Oboli and *Ebony TV* who have used film as empowering tools for women. Credence must be given to the few films that have stood out as exceptions to narratives that normalize violence. Such films include Omoni Oboli's 2017 and 2018 *Wives on Strike* and *Wives on Strike Revolution* respectively; also, in this category is *Ebony TV's* 2014 *New Horizon*. *Wives on Strike* and *Wives on Strike Revolution* settle on how women from all social strata leverage on their unity and population to curb violence against women while also lending a hand to correct other socio-cultural discriminations against women. The films send strong messages to the government of the day as it exemplifies how government can take measures to curb the menace of violence against women. The underlying message insists that women should be allowed to take charge or at the least be in the front row in tackling issues affecting women, these present as condemnation to the act of annihilation. *New Horizon* on the other hand dwells on how women can overcome abuse by finding courage in themselves and each other. The scope of women issues highlighted is quite wide, mirroring issues across Africa and proffering solutions while not justifying any act of violence against women. Films like *Wives on Strike*, *Wives on Strike Revolution* and *New Horizon* recognise the experiences and accomplishments of women, providing important avenues for cultural representation and community building that are not framed by violent lenses. It will be a boost if Nigerian films adapt more of this approach instead of dramatizing a misogynist concept of treating women.

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