

Rise of the ‘homo erotica’? Portrayal of women and gender role stereotyping in movies: analysis of two Nigerian movies

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Abstract

Over time, the role of mass media as agents of socialization has attracted an array of criticisms from different segments of the society. To social psychologists, the images portrayed in the mass media, often times, alter people’s perception of social realities and are believed to play significant roles in stimulating anti-social behaviours such as crime, delinquency and violence. To critical feminists, the mass media are seen as agents of male chauvinism, systematically deployed for the perpetuation of a male dominated socio-cultural, political and economic order through the portrayal and continuous reinforcement of negative gender role stereotypes of women. This study is therefore designed to analyse the forms and pattern of portrayal of women and gender role stereotypes in selected Nollywood movies. Two movies – Ije (2012) and Mr. and Mrs. (2012) were selected using purposive sampling technique and content-analysed. Findings revealed that women were generally portrayed in the movies as sex objects and objects of erotic gaze for men, domestic servants, “the weaker sex”, “the wicked mother-in-laws” and working class women as insubordinate wives and uncaring mothers, among other negative forms of portrayals. It also found that the forms of portrayal and stereotypes of women in the movies reviewed fit into and can reinforce widely held social beliefs and gender role expectations from women in the larger Nigerian socio-cultural environment.

Keywords: women, portrayal, stereotyping, framing, social cues

1. Introduction

Portrayal of women in the media and gender role stereotyping are two critical issues that have dominated feminist discourse since the 1970s. Margaret Gallagher’s (1979) UNESCO-funded study emphasized the underlying reason why women’s image would continue to concern women for decades to come when she posited that: “The . . . media are potentially powerful agents of socialization and social change – presenting models, conferring status, suggesting appropriate behaviors, encouraging stereotypes” (cited in Byerly & Ross, 2006: 17). Critical feminists have argued vehemently that the image of women has been consistently exploited, abused and trivialized in the media – particularly in the spheres of advertising and motion pictures (films). As such, earliest studies focused not only on women’s routine omission – or symbolic annihilation – from mass media, but also on ways in which women were stereotyped (Byerly & Ross, 2006).

Results of numerous studies conducted on the portrayal of women in Nigerian films and advertisements have also glaringly revealed that women are usually represented as wayward and of low moral standing, materialistic, lazy, subservient to and dependent on men, causes of family problems, fit for domestic rather than professional and career roles etc. (Okunna, 2000; Okunna, 1996). A clear example of this negative portrayal can be inferred from an *Ampi bour* commercial that aired on major Nigerian television networks some years back, in which the three young ladies in the advert were portrayed as being easily lured by men, using material trivialities as little as the scent of an air freshener.

Women are also generally presented as “the weaker sex”, less ambitious than men, sexual objects and looking glasses - subtly displayed to satisfy the erotic gaze of men. (Haskell, 1974). These critical positions, perhaps, explain the unwarranted placement of half-nude and sexually suggestive pictures (both still and motion pictures) of women in films, musical videos and advertisement of products that are not in any way related to women.

Also of particular concern to critical feminists is the examination of the roles that gender stereotypes of women - as portrayed in the media - play in influencing the general construction of social reality about women. Besides, numerous studies conducted in the past have clearly revealed that there is a correlation between stereotypical representations of women in the media and conventional presuppositions or concepts of social engagement of women in the larger society. For instance, some of those studies have clearly established the correlations between stereotyping and violence, stereotyping and inequality, and stereotyping and discrimination (See a compendium of studies in Moranjak-Bamburac, Jusic & Isanovic, 2006).

It is however important to note that, despite the availability of a large volume of literature and studies conducted in the past on portrayal of women in films and gender role stereotyping, bulk of those studies focused on Hollywood and the American society, while a reasonable amount of others focused on the British and French

film industries and the British and French societies. Thus, we observed that there exists a glaring paucity of research and literature on the portrayal of women and gender role stereotyping in Nigerian movies (subsequently referred to as Nollywood movies in this paper). This is despite the fact that Nollywood is rated as the world's second most productive film industry, after India's Bollywood and ahead of America's Hollywood (UN News Center, 2009). This study therefore seeks to fill-in this vacuum, by contributing to the small pool of already existing literature and studies with particular focus on the portrayal of women in Nollywood films.

2. Problem Statement

The subject matter of this study – that is, the portrayal of women and gender role stereotyping in movies - is not a phenomenon that originated from or is peculiar to Nigeria. In fact, it can be argued that the practices of negative portrayal and gender role stereotyping of women in movies were copied – alongside the art and techniques of filmmaking – by Nollywood producers and directors from Hollywood and other film industries such as Bollywood that existed before it.

However, while there has been remarkable improvement in the way women are portrayed in movies and the general status of women in most of the societies where the other major film industries operated, the same cannot be said of Nigeria. For instance, Smith (1999) in a study based on longitudinal data from the US General Social Survey, run by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, reported that over the past 27 years, a lot changed in terms of gender role stereotyping in the US. He concluded that: “Even within marriage, the changes have been profound as more and more women have entered the labor force and gender roles have become more homogenous between husbands and wives” (cited in Gauntlett, 2002: 3). But can the same be said of the level of portrayal of women and gender role stereotyping in Nigeria? Okunna (2002), after analyzing three newly released Nollywood movies, provided a succinct answer to this question thus:

A look at Nigerian video films in Year 2002 shows that it is apparently ‘business as usual’ as far as their representation of women is concerned. Their preoccupation is still to focus on such themes as women’s quest for husbands, childlessness, polygamy, materialism etc to bring out the worst in women who are portrayed in extremely negative ways in the exploration of these traditional themes.

This paper, therefore, set out examine whether or not there has been any remarkable improvement in recent times, as far as the portrayal of women and gender role stereotyping in Nollywood movies is concerned.

2.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the forms in which women are portrayed in selected Nollywood movies and the patterns of gender role stereotypes inherent in such portrayals.
2. To examine the extent to which the identified forms of portrayal and stereotype patterns conform to or reinforce widely held beliefs and stereotypes about women in the larger Nigerian socio-cultural setting.

2.2 Research Questions

To achieve the objectives; this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant forms of women’s portrayal and gender role stereotypes in Nollywood films?
2. To what extent do these manifest stereotypes reinforce or correct widely held beliefs about the expected roles of women in the larger Nigerian socio-cultural milieu?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Portrayal and Gender Role Stereotyping of Women in Films

The exploration – or better still – exploitation of the image of women in all aspects of visual and creative arts is not a recent phenomenon. In fact, the practice can be said to be old as human history itself. Supporting this position, Buckingham and Bragg (2004) posit that the public display of images of naked human bodies cannot be seen merely as a manifestation of our allegedly ‘sexualised’ modern culture. On the contrary, it has a very long historical antecedent. Some of the earliest works of visual arts, such as paintings, sculptures and carvings prominently featured representations of images of the naked human form (mostly those of women), clearly designed for the contemplative erotic gaze. Such that Victorian moral campaign movement at that time went about covering over – and in some cases, defacing or damaging such images.

The development in modern mass communication media that saw the emergence of newspaper, television and film however propelled this trend to an alarming proportion such that, in recent times, the display of the human body (particularly those of women) in advertising images, films, newspapers or music videos is rarely defined as art. Hence, the display of human body is often seen as mere ‘titillation’ – or, in more directly critical terms, as a form of ‘exploitation’ or ‘objectification’. However, unlike ‘art’, which is seen to invite distanced contemplation, the degraded forms of the popular media portrayal of women’s body images are often seen to function on much

more directly physical levels of arousal, sensation and visceral thrills (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). Before proceeding to analyze the dominant forms and patterns of women's portrayal and gender role stereotypes, a brief conceptualization of the key concepts in this study becomes pertinent.

3.2 Portrayal

The concept of portrayal, as used in this study, refers to the ways women are depicted in movies, in comparison with their male counterparts, and pertaining to the display of their physical, emotional and intellectual characteristics – in terms of strengths and weaknesses

3.3 Gender Role Stereotyping and Framing

Stereotyping is the repetition of oversimplified idea/characteristic, which is assumed to belong to a particular group. The repetition of an idea or set of ideas by the media leads to stereotyping because the repetition is in a dimension of representation that is (deliberately or not) capable of stirring up negative tendencies or biases towards a group of people, and can possibly fuel discrimination against, hatred for or 'mal-estimation' of the affected group.

Gender role stereotyping as applied in this study, however, implies the sustained practice of ascribing certain gender-biased labels, identities and social and professional roles to women in movies. Stereotyping finds its perpetuation through consistent portrayal, which if sustained and reinforced over a long period, is capable of providing social cues for evaluating the roles expected of women in the society.

3.4 Forms and Patterns of Portrayal of Women and Gender Role Stereotypes in Movies

Quite a number of studies conducted in the past have clearly identified various forms and patterns in which women are being portrayed and stereotyped in movies. Some of these portrayals and stereotypes are discussed below.

3.4.1 Domestic Servants

This is one of the dominant frame or image of women generally portrayed in movies. Commenting on the portrayal of women as domestic servants, Gunter (1995), cited in Gauntlett (2002) submitted that series of studies carried out in the 1970s consistently found that marriage, parenthood and domesticity were shown on television to be more important for women than men. Similarly, a study by McNeil (1975) also concluded that the women's movement had been largely ignored by television, with housewives being the main female role shown. Women's interactions were very often concerned with romance or family problems (in 74 per cent of cases) whereas men's interactions were not frequently concerned with these matters (only 18 per cent of cases). Female characters portrayed were unlikely to work, particularly if they were wives or mothers, and even when they did, their work was typically not seen on screen (cited in Gauntlett, 2002: 43).

Even when women are portrayed in work places, they are often portrayed - according to Tuchman (1987) - as 'incompetents and inferiors', as victims, or having 'trivial' interests. Even in women's traditional domain of the home, men were shown solving both emotional and practical problems – leaving women with little value in the TV world. (Cited in Gauntlett 2002: 44)

Gauntlett (2002) noted further that, various other studies conducted in the 1970s found men to be the dominant characters and decision-makers on TV. For example, men were twice as likely to make decisions or to give orders, whilst women who were successful at work – where they were to be found – did not get on well with men, or have happy relationships. The portrayal of the two leading female characters in one of the movies reviewed for this study – *Mr. and Mrs.* (2012), produced by Chinwe Egwuagu - also fit perfectly into this stereotypical pattern. While the lead female character, Susan Abbah, a trained lawyer, who ended up as a fulltime wife was portrayed as a domestic servant, the supporting lead female character, a successful career banker was portrayed as not getting on well with her husband and almost lost him to her house help.

3.4.2 Sex Objects

Another dominant stereotype used in portraying women in movies is the sex object frame. A critical analysis of the contents of most of the films coming out from the three leading film industries in the world – Hollywood, Bollywood and Nollywood – clearly reveals the frequent portrayal of women as sex symbols and looking glasses, subtly portrayed to satisfy the erotic gaze or desire of a man. By this frequency of their portrayal as sex objects, women have become systematically and symbolically stereotyped as "homo-erotica" – that is, species of human beings with only sexual values.

Ceulemans and Fauconnier's (1979) UNESCO-funded cross cultural study that examined women's representations within several socio-political and cultural contexts found that advertising, television, films, news, and other genres in Western nations, as well as those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, excessively emphasized women's traditional domestic roles or portrayed them as sex objects (cited in Byerly & Ross: 2006:17). Also commenting on the representation of women as sex objects in movies Smith (1972: 13) declared that:

Women, in any fully human form, have almost completely been left out of film . . . The role of a woman in a film almost always revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters. On the other hand a man is not shown purely in relation to the female characters, but in a wide variety of roles (Cited in Gauntlett 2002: 48).

3.4.3 The Weaker Sex

Apart from being portrayed as domestic servants and sex objects, women are also often portrayed in films as “the weaker sex”. This frame or stereotype is what Haskell (1974) described as the ‘Big Lie’ that Hollywood foisted on the Western society. Also commenting on the notion that women are often portrayed as the weaker sex in movies, Amobi and Sunday (2012:4) noted that:

For several decades, film, movies and television shows have depicted women as lower or lesser beings. Boys and/or men are often portrayed as active, aggressive and sexually aggressive persons while women are portrayed as quaint, passive, pretty and incompetent beings. Women are shown as being helpless and wanting guidance, when they do achieve representation or visibility.

Supporting the position of Amobi and Sunday, Gunter (1995), cited in Gauntlett (2002: 43) concluded, after a review of several studies on the representation of women in the media that:

Overall, men were more likely to be assertive (or aggressive), whilst women were more likely to be passive. Men were much more likely to be adventurous, active and victorious, whereas women were more frequently shown as weak, ineffectual, victimised, supportive, laughable, or ‘merely token females’.

Haskell (1974) argued further that Hollywood was not interested in sponsoring a smart, ambitious woman as a popular hero. This, in Haskell’s view, is born out of the widely held social belief that a woman who could compete with and conceivably win men would defy emotional gravity and would go against the grain of prevailing notions about the female gender. The larger implication of such portrayal according to Haskell (1974) is that, a man is supposedly most himself when he is driving to achieve, to create or to conquer; and he is at least himself when reflecting or making love (to a woman), while a woman is supposedly most herself in the throes of emotion (the love of man or of children), and is least womanly when she goes in pursuit of knowledge or success.

4. Theoretical Framework

The discussion and analysis of the findings from this study is within the framework of the framing analysis, gaze theory, cultural determinism and biological determinism theories. The framing theory is adopted in this study is to help us explain how women are framed in movies. The gaze and biological determinism theories, on the other hand, are partly to explain why women are framed in some of the patterns identified in this study, while the cultural determinism theory is to help us understand the root causes and origin of portrayal of women and gender role stereotyping in movies.

4.1. Framing Theory

Framing theory, according to Baran and Davis (2012), is based on the central idea that people use sets of expectations to make sense of their social world and media contribute to the framing of those expectations. These expectations, according to Baran and Davis, can also be referred to as stereotypes, attitudes, typification schemes, and racial, ethnic (or gender) bias. This theory implies that we learn social cues through everyday interaction and from observing how they are used in media content.

4.2. Gaze theory

This theory, which Mulvey (1975) propounded, is rooted in Freud’s Psychoanalysis Theory. As earlier stated, this theory is adopted in this study to provide a theoretical explanation of why women are often portrayed as sex objects in movies. Mulvey (1975) cited in Gauntlett (2002:38) argued that there are two pleasures derivable from watching cinemas. One is ‘scopophilia’, a voyeuristic gaze directed at other people, while the second is *narcissistic* voyeurism – seeing oneself in a primary character and identifying with it. Mulvey (cited in Gauntlett 2002: 38) argued further that:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.

Mulvey’s argument in gaze theory - that the female character has no importance in a film, beyond her role as a ‘spectacle’, the erotic object of both the male characters and the cinema spectators – explains the underlying

motive behind the portrayal of women as sex objects in movies. Interestingly, a majority of such movies are most times produced and directed by men – the gender whose erotic gaze the movies were ‘meant’ to satisfy in the first instance.

4.3 Cultural Determinism and Biological Determinism Theories

As stated earlier, these theories were adopted in the study to explain the origins and root causes of negative portrayals and gender role stereotyping of women in movies. Firestone (1970) argued from a radical feminist standpoint in her *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution*, when she opined that the subordination of women is of a biological and not socio-historical origin. She argued that sexual division of humanity into “two distinct biological classes” was the origin of all other social divisions.

Supporting this point of view, Amobi and Sunday (2012) posit that behaviours and what people look like are mediated by biological and cultural factors. They also observe that the major assumption of cultural determinism is that habits, ideas and customs are the major determinants of the shape of a society’s political and economic arrangements. Amobi and Sunday (2012) note further that these theories (Biological and Cultural Determinism) explain why biological differences between men and women - which identify women as weaker vessels – have given birth to role differentiation along hierarchical lines, creating a culture of patriarchy, in which women are subjugated and subordinated. In all this, they argue, the media, as purveyors and disseminators of culture, appear to be perpetuating the status quo by influencing people’s perception of appropriate gender roles.

In essence, the portrayal of women as sex objects and objects of erotic gaze for instance appears to have a connection with the biological features of women. Women are generally perceived to be the more physically appealing of both genders – a feature that players in the still, motion picture and advertising industries have often exploited to attract and sustain the attention of clients – particularly the male audiences of their movies. Similarly, it can be argued from a cultural determinism point of view that the manner in which women are portrayed and the social roles assigned them in movies are have firm roots in the prevailing cultural beliefs and practices in the society within which such films are produced. However, movies have the power to amplify, modify or downplay these beliefs and practices. As Akinfeleye and Amobi (2011: 5) rightly pointed out: “film plays the role of stereotype, using portrayals to help shape perspectives on a people’s culture.

5. Method

The collection and analysis of data for this study by content analysis. This research method according to Sobowale (2008) is appropriate for analyzing the manifest content of communication. This method according to Wright (1986), cited in Berger (2000:173) may involve quantitative or qualitative analysis of communication contents, or both. Akinfeleye and Amobi (2011:8) also posited that in analyzing the content of popular culture (such as film), the questions that are being raised are primarily those relating to the amount and nature of the content i.e. the quantity and quality of variables that make up the entire content.

This study, however, adopts the qualitative approach for the analysis of the two variables of study (content categories) – **forms of portrayal** and **gender role stereotyping of women** in two Nollywood movies: **Ije** (2012), produced by Chineze Anyanene, and **Mr. and Mrs.** (2012), produced by Chinwe Ekwuagu. This implies that for this study, we are more concerned about nature of the variables of analysis than the amount (quantity) of occurrence. Furthermore, the films content-analyzed for this study were selected using purposive sampling method, based on their currency, storyline, and their perceived popularity among local and international audiences of Nollywood.

5.1 Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

5.1.1 Mr. and Mrs.

Mr. and Mrs. is a movie that vividly captures the realities of gender discrimination, domestic abuse of women and gender role stereotyping in a male-dominated social order. It tells the story of Susan Abah, a trained lawyer who is reduced to a domestic servant by her husband, Kenneth Abah, a proud and arrogant son of a petroleum minister, who feels the place of a women is in the kitchen, where she must cook; take care of the house and satisfy her husband’s sexual desires anytime. While the physical and emotional assaults and insults on Susan by her husband and mother in-law continue, Susan grows pachydermatous (develops a strong resistance) and becomes rebellious. In a bid to force total submission from Susan, Kenneth threatened divorce. While the divorce process is on-going, Susan and her lawyer-friend, Mrs. Brown devised a creative scheme to rescue her marriage and get Kenneth back into his senses and get him to appreciate, respect and love Susan as his wife. The scheme eventually worked out as planned. Kenneth became frustrated by the new found freedom and confidence displayed by Susan, he became depressed, finally ‘compelled’ to reunite with his wife, totally accepting her conditions for reunion. Thus, they lived happily together thereafter.

5.1.2 Ije (The Journey)

This movie tells the story of Anyanwu (Omotola Jolade-Ekehinde) who left Nigeria for the US in search of fame

and fortune in Hollywood. On getting to her dreamland of the United States, Anyawu marries a white man, Mr. Michael Machino, who also doubles as her producer. Mr. Machino exploits Anyawu's sexuality to achieve his selfish motives and to sustain his reckless life styles. On one of such occasions, he places his wife on bet in a poker game with his friends. He loses the bet and watched unconcerned as his friends cum co-gamblers assault and rape his wife, right in their living room. He even wanted to shamelessly have his turn after his friends, but Anyanwu, to save herself, pulls the trigger from her husband's pistol, killing him and two other rapists. Consequently, she was arrested and charged for murder.

When the news of Anyawu's ordeals filters to Nigeria, her kid sister, Chioma (Genevieve Nnaji) embarks on a rescue mission to save her from being convicted of murder. She herself almost gets trapped in the web of intricacies surrounding the investigation of her sister's murder case; she is arrested for concealing implicating evidence against her sister. After frantic efforts with the support of a young, disillusioned attorney (Jalen Turner), she unveils the truth behind what led her sister's murder of the husband and the husband's friends. Anyawu eventually regains her freedom after serving a 210-day jail term, being her punishment for committing voluntary manslaughter under extreme physical and emotional duress. Chioma also found love in the process, gets engaged to Anyanwu's attorney – Jalen Turner. It is pertinent to note the "In Africa, there are kings and no queens" submission by Anyanwu in court. This underscores our earlier position concerning prevailing cultural beliefs and practices in the society having some influence on the cinematic roles of women.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The results of the findings from this study are discussed in line with the broad objectives of the study, and the research questions we raised at the beginning of the study.

5.2.1 Research Question 1: What are the dominant forms of portrayal and gender role stereotypes in the selected Nollywood films?

Analysis of the results obtained in this study clearly revealed that the portrayal of women by the two movies reviewed perfectly fits into the same old frames, often used to portray women in movies. Generally, the female characters in both movies were portrayed as sex objects and objects of erotic gaze for men, domestic servants, "the weaker sex", "the wicked mother-in-laws" and working class women as insubordinate wives and uncaring mothers. Also, young ladies were portrayed as promiscuous and always resorting to using what they have (their sexual appeal) to get what they want (material gains or positions) from men; and women as the cause of their husband's marital infidelity or death.

Citing specific examples from the two movies reviewed, Susan Abah, the lead female character in **Mr. and Mrs.** was clearly portrayed as a domestic servant throughout the movie as she was always seen either in the kitchen cooking or in any other part of the home doing one household chore or the other. Also, almost all the female characters in the two movies were either sexually abused or exploited in one way or the other. Susan, the lead female character in **Mr. and Mrs.** suffered what can be described as marital rape in the hands of her own husband (Kenneth Abah), as she was forced to have sex with him against her own wish and emotion. Kate, the house help of Linda, Susan's friend was also sexually exploited by Charles (Linda's husband). Similarly, Anyanwu, the lead female character in **Ije** was also sexually exploited, first by her own husband and later raped by his friends and associates. Chioma (Anyawu's sister), it may be argued, was also sexually taken advantage of by Anyawu's lawyer (Jalen Turner) in the course of assisting them in defending Anyanwu in the murder trial.

Furthermore, Linda, Susan's friend in **Mr. and Mrs.** was portrayed as an insubordinate wife, uncaring and insensitive mother and the cause of her husband's infidelity and sexual immorality with their house help (Kate) – simply because she is a working class woman who is ambitious of getting to the peak of her banking career.

Similarly, Anyawu, the lead female character in **Ije** was still convicted of murdering her husband and his rapist friends - despite the fact that evidence and testimonies presented in court proved beyond reasonable doubt that she was actually not to be blamed for the circumstances leading to the death of the three men. It was clearly proven by Anyawu in her final testimony in court that her husband, apart from endangering the life of his wife by using her in bet with friends in a gambling game, also failed in his responsibility of protecting her during the rape incident preceding the murders. In fact, the husband even wanted to have his own turn after his friends have finished raping his wife. This scenario clearly captured in the evidence and testimony presented before the court, not only proved that Anyawu's husband was an accomplice in the rape incidence, but that he was also a culprit in the entire act because he would have had his own turn too, if he had his way. Despite the court's jury ruling that Anyanwu was not guilty of the murder of her husband and friends because she committed the crime (voluntary manslaughter) under physical and emotional duress, it still convicted and handed a 210-day jail term for use lethal force to prevent three drunk and violent men from sexually assaulting her.

Also, Mrs. Abah (Kenneth's mother in **Mr. and Mrs.**) was portrayed to perfectly fit into "the wicked mother in-law" frame by the roles she played in the marriage of her son and wife, as well as in their divorce saga.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: To what extent do these manifest portrayals reinforce or correct widely held beliefs and stereotypes about the role of women within the larger Nigerian socio-cultural milieu?

A critical analysis of the story lines, climax and resolution of conflicts in the two movies reviewed in this study clearly revealed that the images of women portrayed in the movies and the stereotypes attached with these portrayals tend more to reinforce widely held beliefs about the expected roles of women and their rights within the larger Nigerian socio-cultural environment. For instance, a justification for Charles' bouts of sex with their house help (Kate) in *Mr. and Mrs.* when his wife was too busy to make love to him reinforces the belief in most Nigerian cultures that marital infidelity is permissible to a reasonable extent for men but is an outright taboo for women.

The producer could have used the medium of the film to correct that wrong belief by making Charles pay some price for his immoral act, just the way Anyawu was made to still face the wrath of the law, despite the fact that she was not morally guilty of the death of her husband and her friends.

The portrayal of Mrs. Abah as a wicked mother-in-law and her husband as a caring father-in-law in *Mr. and Mrs.* reinforces the widely held belief and stereotype in Nigeria that mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law are always the cause of troubles in most marriages with challenges. Similarly, the fact that Chioma (Anyawu's sister) in *Ije* had to engage in a romantic relationship with her sister's lawyer in the course of securing legal services for her sister case in court also reinforces the popular stereotype that most women often do not work hard to achieve success. Rather, they use what they have (sexual appeal) to get what they want from men.

Furthermore, the form of portraying the sexual, physical, verbal and emotional abuse of Susan by her husband also reinforces widely a held cultural belief that once a woman is married to a man, she becomes his property, and he decides what use to put her – without any recourse to her own feelings, emotions or ambitions. The fate that befell Linda in *Mr. and Mrs.*, who almost lost her husband to their house help, because she was ambitious of getting to the top of her banking career, reinforces the widely held belief within the Nigerian socio-cultural context that a woman can be said to be successful, only when she is a “good mother and wife” – regardless of any other feat she attains in other spheres of life.

The advice of Susan to her friend (Linda) after Linda caught her husband in bed with their house help drives home this point. She said of women:

“Our home is the most important thing in our lives. Any woman who cannot keep her home has failed. A woman who has a home and a career has to learn to marry them both – that is success”

Finally, in her response to an allegation by the prosecuting counsel that she killed her husband so she could inherit his wealth and return to Nigeria to live like a queen, Anyanwu (the lead female character in *Ije*) in her testimony before the court responded thus:

“In Nigeria, there are no queens, only kings. A woman does not take her husband; she is given to him by her family and herself. He becomes the center of her world, her protector, even ruler. I brought this belief to my marriage here.”

These statements highlighted from the two movies reviewed in this study further reinforce the dominant belief of a patriarchal social context in which a woman cannot freely take any decision on matters – even those that affect them personally - such as marriage. Rather, she ought to depend completely on men (either her father or husband) to think and decide for her.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the foregoing analysis and discussion of findings, we can safely conclude that: In the movie world, especially Nigeria's Nollywood, women are repeatedly portrayed as objects of sexual pleasure, domestic servants, passive, inferior to and dependent on their male counterparts; a development that has further reinforced widely held societal norms and negative stereotypes of women in the society. One worrisome dimension to the conspiracy against women in the Nollywood movie industry is that, women themselves play active role in their own negative portrayal and stereotyping. They do this by willingly presenting themselves to be portrayed in negative light. Some of the new entrants and upcoming female actresses in the industry are willing to take up sexually demeaning roles in movies, just to make name and become popular.

In the same way, the few female producers and directors in the industry are not doing enough in using the authority at their disposal to correct the negative portrayals and stereotypes. For instance, the two movies reviewed in this study were written and produced by women, yet, they still followed the traditional forms of portraying women and reinforcing gender role stereotypes. There are controversies and counter-arguments on who is actually responsible for the negative portrayal of women in movies. While some scholars, harping on the cultivation theory, argue that the movies are guilty of the negative portrayal, others, who premised their argument on social construction theory, think that media portrayal is a mere reflection of the existing status quo (prevailing social realities).

The submission of this paper however is that: whichever way we choose to look at it, the media (particularly

movies) still play a significant role in the portrayal of women and gender role stereotyping. This could be in the form of creating frames that serve as social cues for forming expectations about women; or, reinforcing already existing and popular stereotypes about women. We therefore recommend that moviemakers (particularly the women among them) should be more gender-sensitive right from the conception of scripts to the actual production of movies. They should desist from portraying women in negative lights, but should rather serve as change agents in correcting the negative socio-cultural stereotypes against women by educating the society on the evils and dangers of such stereotypes.

But the women in the industry (particularly the producers, directors and script writers) need to be the ones to champion this cause themselves. They should engage their male counterparts in the industry constructively on the need to respect womanhood and avoid exploiting women's image. The older female actresses also need to sensitize younger and upcoming ones on the need to be sensitive to the need to protect their image and dignity as women in whatever movie roles they accept, while still striving for professionalism and excellence in their careers.

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