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Women empowerment and domestic violence in selected Nigerian video films

ABSTRACT. The concept of women empowerment in the society is as vital as the empowerment of their male counterparts. Studies have shown that when people are empowered, they become strong, independent and less vulnerable or susceptible to anybody or group of persons. This study in the film medium is extremely crucial, since it will help in redirecting the minds of the society against domestic violence against the women. This is because it aids the development of the society positively. This study applies textual analysis as a methodological tool to examine how the feminine gender is represented in the popular Nigerian film industry called Nollywood. Among the video-films analyzed are: Michael Jaja's *Thanks for Coming* and *Gallant Babes*. The study applied the purposive sampling technique to arrive at these video-films and observes that the female folks are empowered; there will be less domestic violence, since empowerment brings about freedom, realization, and power to resist and confront enemies. It discovers that domestic violence can be physical, economic, psychological, emotional, etc., thereby having serious negative consequences on the women. Some of the representations on women here revolve around some demeaning attitudes towards the women folks, subjecting them to perpetual ridicule; such as being domestic servants, mischievous prostitutes or others that at best paint a negative picture of the Nigerian woman in the society. Except women are empowered, they will continually experience domestic violence, regular abuses, etc. This research did not deny that instances abound where women are also invested with super-human virtues as in some woman-warrior films, the concern here however to advocate for women empowerment in Nollywood which lead to the eradication of domestic violence. Hence, it argues, that rather than continue to perpetuate old fashioned inhumanity on the women, filmmakers and producers should flow with the tide of presenting women in better light that express their resourcefulness to the society.

KEYWORDS: film, empowerment, violence, domestic violence

Introduction

The media has played many pivotal roles in addressing diverse social issues, including those issues that affect the female folks. These issues can be constructed from different angles, such as being ideological or

conventional, yet, they touch their affairs completely. Such can be affirmative of what obtains in the society, or demeaning as to give impression of alternative or weak viewpoints regarding these issues. These issues have placed a greater percentage of the society at a busy angle, without rest and always pointing them out to reconstruct the society, especially the feminists who are believed to so often engage in the fight for women's rights at all fronts including the media. The main thrust of this research is to approach female empowerment and as such, address the elements of domestic violence against women in Nollywood from a critical perspective using the frameworks of the feminist theory. This is so desired because of now well-established link between film and feminism. Nollywood as the most popular entertainment industry in Africa can no longer be brushed aside as inconsequential. It is actually the most popular form of entertainment that helps not only to shape people's consciousness about realities in the society but also frames the identity of citizens as direct products of the society. Hence if some distortions emerging from the staple of the societies are not critically addressed, it will amount to perpetuating such evils that might persuade audiences to accept falsehoods in place of truths. This is the reason why studies like this seek to unmask the suppressed negative effects of women in the Nigerian film industry while seeking to chart a pathway, after the feminist school of thought, to facilitate a more acceptable perspective of reality in the Nigerian cultural landscape.

In fact, what is the fate of the women in a country where its president proudly and unequivocally states that the women belong to "the kitchen, the living room and the other room" alone? The family is often equated with the sanctuary, a place where individuals seek love, complete provision, safety, security, and shelter. However, this false idea is slowly fading on daily basis. Evidence shows that it is also a place that breeds some of the most drastic forms of violence perpetrated against women, considering that they have long been termed as weaker vessels. Domestic violence and abuse against the women have drawn wider coverage and have continued to be a global epidemic that tortures, maims, and even in most cases kills-physically, psychologically, sexually, and economically the women. It is one of the most pervasive of human rights violence, denying women equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and the right to enjoy fundamental freedom. Although violence against women is ubiquitous, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity, and age, domestic violence is the

most prevalent, yet relatively hidden and ignored form of violence against women.

Violence in the domestic sphere is usually perpetrated by males who are, or who have been in positions of trust, intimacy, power—husbands, boyfriends, fathers, father-in-law, step fathers, brothers, uncles, sons, or other relatives. The term 'domestic violence' as used here includes, violence against women by an intimate partner, including a cohabiting partner, and by other family members, whether this violence occurs within or beyond the confines of the home (Mehrkhan). Violence against women is often a cycle of abuse that manifests itself in many forms throughout their lives. Even at a very beginning of her life, a girl may be the target of sex, selective abortion, or female infanticide, especially in cultures where son preferences are prevalent. During childhood, violence against girls may include; enforced malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and attention, lack of access to education, incest, female genital mutilation, early marriages and forced prostitution, or bounded labor. Some go on to suffer throughout their adult lives and old age-battered, bruised and even murdered at the hands of an intimate partner, as well as being inherited by her in-laws. (W.H.O.). Domestic violence can take any of the following forms, physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects, (battery) or threats thereof; sexual abuse, controlling of domineering, intimidation, stalking passive/covert abuse (e.g. Neglect) and economic deprivation. It can also mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing and harassment.

Most women who leave home as a result of incessant assault often return. This is because, apart from the stress and suffering arising from the violence itself, many women had also experienced stress and problems in seeking help. Majority who turned to relatives and friends for support and temporary accommodation have been turned down due to the fact that these relations and friends do not want to be involved in the couple's domestic problem, even though it is slowly killing the woman. (Borkowski, Murch & Walker, 1983). Many women who are battered loath the battering but find it difficult to leave a terrifying situation. Shame is an important fact according to Owen (1975), the battered wife feels ashamed to let other people know about her situation as she might be regarded as a woman who cannot manage her home properly. One young woman who married at the age of seventeen against her parent's desire did not tell them of her abuse because "she made her bed and had

to lie on it" (Owen, 1975). This goes to show that some women feel that they are somehow responsible for or deserves the beating and maltre-ament they get for one reason or the other. Others even feel that there is something wrong with them.

Due to the patriarchy system that pervades the society, women are seldom guaranteed a place in their family of orientation. Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women's rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, although misinterpretation of religious tenets abound. When the violation of women's right takes place within the home, as is often the case, the abuse is effectively condoned by the tacit silence and the passivity displayed by the state and law enforcing machinery. Violence or at least the fear of violence has become a part of every woman's life. Each woman knows someone who has been a victim of violence or in herself been involved in one. Domestic violence against women deprive them of their right to participate in societal life as a whole and holds them prisoners under the "special" conditions set by the immediate social setting such as family, kinship, social norms and values shared by the majority. The major impact domestic violence has on women is therefore hindering their full inclusion and participation in societal life.

Literature abounds on the seriousness of this hydra-headed enigma. Even at that, debate regarding the magnitude of the problem is clouded by the fact that domestic violence is a crime that is under-reported and under-recorded. When women file a report or seek treatment, they may have to contend with police or health care officials who have not been trained to respond adequately or to keep consistent records. On the other hand, shame, fear of reprisal, lack of information about legal rights, lack of confidence in, or fear of the legal system and the legal costs involved reluctant to report incidence of violence. Most of the cases reported are mainly done informally, to relatives and friends who do not have formal documentation of the incidence. Therefore, this work is put together to elaborate on this issue of domestic violence against women, highlighting the causes of domestic violence and abuse against women, its effect, and to proffer a possible solution in curbing the menace.

Empowerment on the other hand, is a word that has been often used to communicate different thoughts and so widely that its definition has almost become distorted and imprecise. Almost all the activist groups often times use the word to bring together diverse issues, while acade-

mic circles frequently cite the word in scholarly articles. It has been generally agreed that empowerment is mostly considered as a viable means of boosting and amplifying the efficacy and successes of an organization, as well as to perk up the quality of work life for employees. In a related development, Mathis and Jackson in 1991 are of the view that there are three kinds of individual performance criteria that organizations need to cultivate in order to flourish, these criteria are: productivity, innovation and loyalty. The aforementioned can only derive their successes through an effectual enforcement of the empowerment principles. Bernstein on the other hand, in the year 1992 volunteers that companies in which employee empowerment has actually been put into force frequently found that such an approach improves keys aspects like morale, productivity and quality. An increase in understanding and commitment however to business objectives throughout the organization was equally noticed. Moreover the empowerment of employees in service organizations has been shown to produce positive outcomes in the form of increased job satisfaction, self-efficacy, better customer service, more rapid decision making, and personal development.

In the scholastic discourses, the word empowerment visited the scene with regards to civil rights. In the same vein, Conyers upholds that the earliest write ups arising from it, first emerged in 1975 with this title "Toward Black Political Empowerment—Can the System Be Transformed." (p. 2). This title however ignited numerous articles discussing empowering the black community, but it also sparked up the use of the word in other circles. 1978 saw the social work community utilized the word in an article which surfaced as "From Service to Advocacy to Empowerment." (p. 3). O'Connell submits that other groups from political bodies to health organizations, family, work place, etc, latched on to the word citing it in articles such as "Grassroots Empowerment and Government Response" in Social Policy (p. 4) and "Counseling for Health Empowerment." (p. 5).

The term however took off with literature discussing empowerment of marginalized people, such as women and the poor, and especially in respect to community development. In 1983, Moglen volunteered that the Women's Studies International Forum discussed empowerment of women in "Power and Empowerment." (p. 6). From then until now, the literature has increasingly been focused on these issues. In 2010, Wallis observed that articles were published entitled "Power and empowerment: Fostering effective collaboration in meeting the needs of orphans

and vulnerable children" and "Women empowerment through the SHG approach", that demonstrate just a few ways how empowerment is being discussed in the academic community. Staples supplies that empowerment is a process, where power can be developed, facilitated or secured with the purpose of enabling challenged individuals or groups to: increase their resources, improve their self-esteem, buildup the ability to act on their own psychological, socio-cultural, political and economic situation (p. 3). For a social worker, empowerment as a method will increase focus on the individual, its self-worth, and ability to act.

On the other hand, the mystique of the family as a private, peaceful cradle of safety and emotional support has influenced the lack of attention given to the violence that does occur, especially to women. And in many societies, paddling a wife for misbehaviour by the husband has become the norm. Violence against women in such societies is thus, condoned and has become institutionalized by it. Battering is viewed as a private family affair, and beating one's wife is considered to be a marital prerogative. A battered woman finds it difficult to take action against her husband. She often finds herself in a financial blind. Living with a violent husband is thus seen as better than trying to make it alone. As a result of abuse, the victims may experience physical disabilities, chronic health problems, mental illness, limited finances, and poor ability to create healthy relationships, post-traumatic stress disorder, and even death.

In recent years, concern for the battered women has mushroomed so that legislation and services have grown to deal with the issue. An international consensus has also been developed but progress has been slow because attitudes are deeply entrenched and, to some extent, because effective strategies to address violence against women are still being defined. There is little or no awareness on the part of the female folks, that women have a right to state protection even within the confines of their family home. Law enforcement and judicial system condone or do not recognize domestic violence as a crime; instead it is tagged "family matter" which should be settled in the home. The bane of this study therefore is—that the appalling toll on this issue will not be eased until families, government, institutions, civic society and organizations address the issue directly. It was Hirsch (1981), who volunteered that "victims of violence are; but perhaps continuing to publicly acclaim our indignation will help to ameliorate the injustice perpetrated against one half of the human race—women".

Indeed, looking at the society from the fast growing Nollywood industry attests to the fact that the issue of women empowerment in filmmaking projects is huge task with implicating actions around cultural semiotics, identity construction and image aesthetics. Generally speaking, the Nigeria film industry since its emergence in 1992 has been a tool for propaganda, a religious channel for the spreading the gospel, a medium for promoting mass culture and above all a tool for heralding individual and collective ideas on some important issues of the society. But even at this, it is arguable to say most films produced in Nollywood are rather antifeminist, relegating the woman to the background through subject matters, characterization, costuming and display of other performance elements.

The feminist theory and its ideological mindset will be applied in this cross-examination. This is because it is one theory that is strategically known to fight the cause of women in scholarship and praxis. Hence, the history of the feminist schools of thought will be presented to review its position on female characterization. Suffice to say therefore that one of the aims of feminism in its numerous approaches is "to combat patriarchal foundations… and to state the importance of all women's voices being brought to the forefront." (Trier-Bieniek, 2005, p. xxiii). This is the kind of challenge this study brings to Nollywood by looking at its women's domestication. In order to pursue the thrust of this research, it is appropriate to address the problem it confronts as well as marshal out the key research questions that guide its analysis of the selected films, namely *Thanks for Coming* and *Gallant Babes*, from the stable of Nollywood.

The relationship between film and society is that while films build upon cultural indices to fashion its storylines, most people also learn from film to form opinions on some socio-political realities in the society. This is not an effort to valorize the media effects theory of film but to state that given the nature of film appreciation in Nigeria, some people tend to believe that film at most instances has some educational values. It can teach and guide impression on realities. Thus, what this means therefore is that films can be misleading as well be educative, depending on its ideology and thematic message. In the context of this research, one is of the view that the messages about women in Nollywood can be misleading in the kind of treatment of certain issues about female empowerment does not take the centre stage. Thus, the argument here is that when erroneous viewpoints are allowed to flourish, the viewers'

consciousness is made to perceive and judge women on the indices of what they see which is a huge problem that ought to be addressed through both scholarship and practice; hence, a research like this is been undertaken.

History and nature of domestic violence

Domestic violence also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, intimate partner violence, battery or family violence is a pattern of behavior which involves violence or other abuse by one person in a domestic context against another such as n marriage or cohabitation. Intimate partner violence is violence by a spouse or partner in an intimate relationship against the other. Domestic violence can take place in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. Domestic violence can take a number of forms including physical, emotional, verbal, economic and sexual abuse, which can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and to violent physical abuse that result in disfigurement or death.

Globally, a wife or female partner is more commonly the victim of domestic violence, though the victim can also be the male partner, or both partners may engage in abusive or violent behavior, or the victim may act in self-defense or retaliation. Whereas women in developed world who experience domestic violence are openly encouraged to report it to the authorities, it has been argued that domestic violence against men is most often unreported because of social stigma regarding their perceived lack of machismo and other denigrations of their masculinity.

Domestic violence often occurs because the abuser believes that abuse is justified and acceptable and may produce intergenerational cycle of abuse that condones violence. Awareness, perception, definition and documentation of domestic violence differ widely from country to country. There may be a cycle of abuse during which tension rise and an act of violence is committed, followed by a period of reconciliation and calm. Victims of domestic violence may be trapped in domestic violent situations through isolation, power and control, insufficient financial resources, and poor ability to create healthy relations. Victims may experience post-traumatic stress disorder, children who live in a household of violence show deregulated aggression from an early age and stage that may later contribute to continuing the legacy of abuse when

they reach adulthood. Fear, shame or desire to protect the children can also be one of the causes of domestic violence. As a result of abuse, victims may experience physical disabilities, chronic health problems, mental illness, limited finances, and poor ability to create healthy relationships.

The term intimate partner violence (IPV is often used synonymously with domestic violence or abuse, but it usually refers to abuse occurring within a couple relationship (marriage, cohabitation, though they do not have to live together for it to be considered domestic abuse. The world Health Organization defined intimate partner violence as: "any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship". To these forms of abuse, W.H.O adds controlling behaviours as a form of abuse.

Traditionally, domestic violence (DV) was mostly associated with physical activity i.e. violence. For instance, according to the *Merriam-Webster dictionary* definition, domestic violence is: "the infecting of physical injury by one family or household member on another". Traditionally, domestic violence (DV) was mostly associated with physical activity i.e. violence. For example, according to the *Merriam-Webster dictionary* definition, domestic violence is "The infecting of physical injury by one family or house hold member on another", also a repeated/ habitual pattern of such behavior, domestic violence is now more broadly defined often but not always including all acts of physical, sexual psychological or economic violence that maybe committed by a person who is a family member or a person who has been an intimate partner or spouse, irrespective of whether they live together.

In 1993, the United Nations declaration on the elimination of violence against women identified domestic violence as one of the three contexts in which violence against women occurs, describing it as:

> Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other conditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation (p. 9).

Abuse can take the following forms. Physical abuse involves contact intended to cause pain, injury, or other physical suffering or body harm. It includes hitting, slapping, punching and choking etc. but in sexual abuse,

percentages of women who say they have been subjected to sexual assault or attempted sexual assault by an intimate partner has greatly increased. Sexual abuse by WHO is defined as "any sexual act, attempting to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim". It also includes obligatory inspections for virginity and female genital mutilation. The WHO includes the customary forms of sexual violence, such as forced marriage or cohabitation and wife inheritance within its definition of sexual violence as well as forced pregnancy.

Abuse can be verbal, economic, etc. Verbal abuse is a form of emotionally abusive behavior involving the use of the language, which can involve threat, name calling, blaming, ridicule, disrespect and criticism. This is a form of abuse when one partner (intimate) has control over the other partner's access to economic resource. Economic abuse involves preventing a spouse from resource acquisition, limiting the amount of resource to be used by the victim, or by exploiting economic resource of the victim.

The motive behind preventing a spouse from acquiring resources is to diminish victim's capacity to support him/her; thus, forcing him or her to depend on the perpetrators financially, which include preventing the victim from obtaining education finding employment, maintaining or advancing their careers, and acquiring assets.

Physical effects of domestic violence on children

Children who are victims of domestic violence suffer the following: Malnutrition, infection, bruises, head injuries, broken bones, and starvation. Mothers on the other, abuse can affect them in form of chronic miscarriage, arthritis, pelvic pain, internal bleeding, head injuries etc. Sometimes, children who witness their mothers been abused, most often become aggressive, nervous, withdraw from people, feel suppressed, have emotional insecurity, may have mental health disorder, etc., considering the psychological effect domestic abuse on their parents. Domestic violence especially against the women has multiple negative consequences, such as, excessive stress, fear, anxiety, depression, even suicidal tendencies on the woman, long term anxiety and panic, post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g. flash backs, intrusive images, exaggerated

stifle response, night mares, avoidance of triggers that are associated with the abuse).

The basic intent of this research is to examine why society hardly empowers the female folks completely, especially from the positive angles in Nollywood films. Exploring how women are subjugated in Nollywood by means of textual analysis of some selected video-films after review of literatures dealing on film and feminism. It will review how these ideologies are influenced by the political, traditional, social conditions of the Nigerian society and how the feminist theory is implicated in them.

As a qualitative research, this study depends a lot on questions to guide its critical analysis. This is the reason why whatever is explored here is anchored on a set of questions to the subject matter of female empowerment in the Nollywood film industry. Among the questions that guide this study therefore are the following:

1. How does Nollywood handle female empowerment and domestic violence?
2. How does socio-cultural context influence these in Nollywood and for what reasons?

From a few researches encountered in the course of this study, a lot appear to have been said on the thematic thrust, technical qualities of the Nigeria film industry with less attention or no deliberate attention paid on positively empowering the female folks, in order to escape from domestic violence. The need to address the feminist course through a critical review of female empowerment makes this study important. The study is also very significant especially in this post-modern era where gender studies have occupied center stage in scholarly discourse. The study is also necessary for the African women as women have become more prominent in the political, educational and economical spheres of the society.

This study of female empowerment and domestic violence in Nigerian Film industry is very broad and complex as there are thousands of films with female characters going through it. However, this work concentrates on a few of these issues in Nollywood using the following as cases in point: *Thanks for Coming and Gallant Babes*. It will explore this from a feminist ideological point of view in order to underscore the place of women in Nollywood representations presently.

Feminism means different things to different people. This is the reason why there are many histories and movements of feminism. The

underlying differences between Western feminist tendencies and that of Africa is also been saliently delineated in many literatures of the world. Yet, in all of these, there is an agreement that the subject matter of discourse is women's equal rights with their men counterparts as can be testified in the works of feminist film theorists such as: *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey, 1975), *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Mulvey, 1989), *The Subject of Semiotics* (Kaja, 1983), *The Acoustic Mirror* (De Lauretis, 1988), *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (De Lauretis, 1987), *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality* (Creed, 2003), *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Doane, 1987), *Black Looks: Race, Representation* (Hooks, 1992), *Feminism and Film* (Kaplan, 2000), *Feminist Theory and Pop Culture*, (Trier-Bieniek, 2015), etc. This is why feminism is variedly discussed not only in play texts but in film studies where the narrative representations of women are subjected to critical examination to underscore the role and rights allotted to women. Trier-Bienieck defines feminism as "a movement focused on the political and economic quality of the sexes" (2015, p. xiv). Significantly the term feminism is a coinage of the word 'finisme' in 1837 by an utopian socialist, Charles, who argued for "the extension of woman's rights in all social processes as early as the 1808s" (1). It is a movement that dates from the enlightenment era down to the present age. One of its primary texts first is Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which paved way for the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, convened by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others that called for full legal equality of rights with men, including full educational opportunity and equal compensation.

Historically speaking, feminism faced particularly stiff resistance in the United Kingdom and the United States, where women gained the right to vote in 1918 and 1920, respectively. By mid-century a second wave of feminism emerged to address the limited nature of women's participation in the workplace and prevailing notions that tended to confine women to the home. Thus, there are several misconceptions on the meaning and application of feminism across the world. Some have seen it as a channel of feminine disobedience to social norms and culture. Some women have seen it as a medium to promote mediocrity and promotion of social vices such as lesbianism and men battering. Lending her voice to the misconception of the meaning of the movement is Ogudipe-Leslie (2009) who itemizes the misconception and application of the term feminism. According to her,

> Feminism is not a cry for any one kind of sexual orientation (…) is not the reversal of roles (…). Is not penis envy or gender envy: wanting to be a man as they like to say to us (…) is not necessarily oppositional to men (…) not dividing the genders (…) it is not patriotism of western women rhetoric (…) it is not opposed to African culture and heritage (…) it is not a choice between extreme patriarchy on the one hand or hateful separatism from men on the other (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2009, p. 545–547).

What this means is that for Ogundipe-Leslie, feminism is "an ideology of women: any social philosophy about women" (p. 547). This definition appears broad and may mislead or reduce attention of scholars in identifying with the movement. Lamenting on the origin of female suppression, feminist criticism attribute it to both the biblical and Theological doctrine. According to Charles (1998, p. 25),

> Theologians, Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine declared that women are really imperfect men. These imperfect men and spiritually weak creatures, they maintained possess a sensual nature that lures men away from spiritual truth, thereby preventing men to achieving their spiritual potential.

This position has not only encouraged society to see the woman as an inferior personality but a curse to humanity and spiritual growth. Leading scholars have also not help matters as their critical comments on society have painted the woman to be a property to be used and can never be useful on its own. Writers have painted the man to be a superior and a model for the woman. One of such writers is Aristotle whose creative writings on the woman give a wrong picture that reduces the virtue of women. Charles also informs that: "Aristotle, one of the leading philosophers and teachers asserted that the male is by nature the superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled…" Similarly, Jane Tompkins in *Me and My Shadows* laments thus:

> What enrages me is the way women are used as extension of men, mirrors of men, devices for showing men off, devices for helping men get what they want. They are never there on their own, or rarely. The world of western contains no woman. Sometimes I think the world contains no woman (cited in Charles, 1998, p. 178).

To be free from this inferior and docile state as painted by men and accepted by most women, Bressler advise that; Women must define themselves and assert their voice in the arena of politics, society, education and the arts. By personally committing themselves to fostering such

change, feminist hope to create a society where the male and female voice are equally valued. He clearly posits that:

> They must also reject the notion that marriage is a woman ultimate goal, one that can assure her of financial security. And they must reject that women are mindless weepy, passive, helpless creatures who must wait for a man to come and make their life meaningful (Bressler, 1998, p. 180).

Feminism is an ideology or theory, backed up by social movement that women should be equal politically, economically, and socially. Sometimes, this definition is also referred to as "core feminism" or "core feminist theory". Though this theory does not subscribe to differences or similarities between men and women, nor does it refer to excluding men or only furthering women's causes. A feminist however, is one who believes that men and women should be equal politically, socially and economically. Feminism means different things to different people depending on race, culture and historical experience. In Nigeria for example, many people understand feminism to simply mean women's struggle to gain equality with men, or to obtain access to positions of power. Feminism is more than that. It is first and foremost a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's right and women's position in culture and society. On personal level, it is a state of mind, a way of thinking, and an alternative perspective for which to understand the world. It means a woman becoming aware of a distortion in her social status as a woman. Seeking to correct this distortion, the woman moves in a new direction in search of autonomy, self-assertion and empowerment. (Okoh, p. 7) According to Barbara Berg:

> It is freedom (for a woman) to decide her own destiny: freedom from sex determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that women's essential worth stems from their common humanity and does not depend on the relationships of her life (p. 24).

However, African feminists do recognize the fact that Africa has produced great women, women that have done great things for their communities. But they emphasize that those women with recognized laudable achievements are just too few compared to the huge population of women in, for example, Nigeria. So, those women achievers may have been

the few exceptional women referred to by Toril Moi in *Sexual/ Textual Politics* when she states:

> Throughout history a few exceptional women have indeed managed to resist the full pressure of patriarchal ideology, becoming conscious of their own oppression and voicing their opposition to male power (p. 26).

Moreover, the fact that these few women succeeded in distinguishing themselves does not preclude the fact that gender discrimination existed and still exists in Africa, including Nigeria. For example in Nigeria, women seemed to have had more rights and power in traditional Yoruba society than they had in Igbo society. Moreover, women in Yoruba land can inherit land and properties from their families but this is contrary to what is obtainable in most other parts of the country. In Hausa/Fulani culture, men's ideal of a woman has been and continues to be as it was in ancient Greeks and Roman societies. The woman is expected to be docile, faithful, and subservient wife, whereas the man is rarely faithful. Anderson & Zinsser explain that in the spirit of revolution and bringing all these to an end, De Gouges summoned all women to overturn unjust traditions.

> Woman, wake up, the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe, discover your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The flame of truth has dispersed all the folly and usurpation (p. 351).

Given different understanding of feminism, many interpretations have been adduced regarding the social mindset of feminism as a philosophy, movement, theory and above all as an ideology. Some of these positions are what this section discusses in order to pave way for understanding the concept globally and later on, in the context of Africa where the notion of 'womanism' is highly underscored.

Liberal feminism is characterized by an individualistic emphasis on equality. For this group society itself does not need a major renovation, but rather laws need to be changed and opportunities have to be opened up to allow women to become equals in society. To a liberal feminist, evidence of progress is seen largely by the numbers of women in positions previously occupied by men, especially powerful positions.

Socialist feminism also known as Marxist feminism is different from liberal feminism in that it emphasizes that true equality will *not* be achieved without major overhauls within society—particularly econo-

mic overhauls. Socialist feminists argue that there are fundamental in-equalities built in to a capitalist society because power and capital are distributed unevenly. Thus, it's not enough for women to individually work to rise to powerful positions in society; rather, power needs to be redistributed throughout society. Liberal feminists focus on individual empowerment, while socialist feminists focus on collective change and empowerment.

Radical feminism is similar to socialist feminism in that it emphasi-zes the need for dramatic social change in order to achieve genuine equ-ality for women (and sometimes these two philosophies are grouped together). Radical feminists believe that society is extremely patriarchal, and until patriarchy is transformed on all levels, the system will remain unjust. A minority of radical feminists are *separatist feminists*, who be-lieve that men and women need to maintain separate institutions and relationships.

Third Wave feminism is popular among younger women, many of whom are children of feminists from the 1970s (who are referred to as Second Wave Feminists). Similar to liberal feminism, Third Wave femi-nism is very individualistic. Although, it does not reject political ac-tivism, Third Wave feminism is focused more on personal empowerment as a starting place for social change. Third Wave feminism celebrates the construction of individual identities in a complex, postmodern world, and invites women to define themselves as they wish from the smorgas-bord of possibilities.

Eco-feminism draws from and links together both the women's movement and the environmental movement. Eco-feminism draws pa-rallels between the domination and exploitation of both women and nature. However, Nigerian feminist critics have in one way or the other identified with each of the feminist movement consciously and un-consciously. Among these critics especially in Africa includes, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nawal El Saadawi, Flora Nwapa, Lauretta Ngcobo, Buchi Emeche-ta, Carole Boyce Davies, Obioma Nnaemeka, Uzo Esonwanne, Zulu Sofolá, Tess Onueme, Irene Salami, Julie Okoh, Barclays Ayakoroma, and Tracy Utoh amongst others.

If feminism is understood as the fight for the rights and self-affirmation of women, then the practice itself preceded the nomenclatu-re in Nigeria (Chukwuma, 1998, p. 150). Though "all over Africa, women often are seen but not heard" (Tasie, 2013, p. 279), Chukwuma believes that the "Nigerian women in this century have variously fought for their

rights in a show of power and resilience". As Shaka and Uchendu would argue, feminism has millennial roots going back to the mythical figures like Liliath, to the legendary fighting Amazons of Greece and down to ancient *Dahomey*, and to the classical plays like Aristophanes'*Lysistrata* (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012, p. 1). In other words, it is not a new thing in Africa and cannot be said to have started only Western authors said it began. Barry, (as cited in Shaka & Uchendu) observes that the Women's Movement of the 1960s was not the beginning of feminism, though the feminist critical theory of today might be a product of the 1960s women's movement that swept through Europe and America before finally getting to Africa. And that what this simply implies is that the struggle for gender equality is a long standing struggle which women are not prepaid to give up.

The African woman's quest for identity takes a centre stage in the creative vision of many contemporary Africa writers, both male and female (Iboroma, 2012, p. 173). In Nigeria, feminism started as an activism with a political orientation when in 1927, the colonialists established taxation in southern Nigeria. Chukwuma (1998) informs that the men so taxed accepted it in the light of the supremacist tendencies already manifested by the colonialists to which they had no resistance. But even with male taxation, the women shared part of the economic burden especially during the periods of scarcity. Nina Mba (1992, p. 78) in Chukwuma (p. 150) remarks that "many women were having to pay for their sons and male relations". The burden was big enough; however, with the news of women taxation in 1929, the women reacted in an unprecedented solidarity and sisterhood across linguistic boundaries. Of course, the reaction was spontaneous and women from Aba, Abak and Opobo moved in protest against the White Administration on two counts; women taxation and abolition of warrant chiefs. Fifty-five women paid the ultimate price for this, but the women got their demands (Chukwuma, p. 150). Twenty years later in 1949, the Abeokuta Women's Union led by Chief (Mrs.) Ransome-Kuti (1900–1978) successfully carried out a three-year campaign for the abolition of the female flat rate tax, the removal of Ademola as Alake, the abolition of the S.N.A. (Sole Native Authority) system and the representation and participation of women in the reformed system of administration (Mba, 1992, p. 141).

Nnaemeka (1993, p. 7) argues that unlike in the West, where men are seen by feminists as enemies and call for the separation of the sexes, African feminism is family-centred, does not see men only as the enemy

but society and some unaware women. Men are accommodated in African feminism but not as overbearing lords and slave masters. Its strength is on sisterhood, and its objective is empowering women and complementarily of sexes. And that African feminist resists the exclusion of men from women issues. According to Nnaemeka,

> African feminists also resist universalization of western notion of sexual harassment because ours is a culture that permits human contact and touch. Therefore, what constitutes sexual harassment in an office in Washington DC, may not be regarded as such in a farm in an African village (Shaka, 2014, p. 44).

Unfortunately, after the first and second generations of these African crusaders, with all the international and national buffers, Nigerian women are rallying rather slowly. Some feminist writers even distance themselves from the movement. As Chukwuma puts it:

> Still on attitude, so much is public critical onslaught on feminism that feminist writers deny any identification with feminism. Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and their Ghanaian counterpart, Ama Ata Aidoo, say they are not feminists. Nwapa preferred the term "womanist" as her reference (Chukwuma, 1998, p. 158).

Nnolim (1998) submits that "women are not their own best friends". According to him the creation of unhappy women in Nigeria literature has not been a sin committed by male authors alone. Women authors equally are guilty of the same offence as they equally depict women in bad light. As Nnolim discloses "if Elechi Amadi shackles Ihuoma (*The Concubine*) with the myth of the sea king who prevents her from achieving conjugal felicity, Flora Nwapa equally yokes Efuru with the myth of Uhamiri which denies her the joys of motherhood" (Nnolim, 1998, p. 167). Indeed, women subjugation is a crime committed by both sexes in our society.

According to Giannetti, feminist critic, Annette Kuhn has pointed out that within the movies themselves, women were usually socially constructed as "the other" or "the outsider" in a male-dominated world. Women did not get to tell their own stories because the images were controlled by men. Their main function is to support their men to live befitting of a humble wife. He observes that,

> They believe mainly in marriage as one of the highways to self-realization and self-fulfillment. Even though most of them view the institution of mar-

riage as a prison house, they are so child-hungry that they submit to all kinds of inconvenient arrangements with men in order to have children as another avenue to self-fulfillment and the "love-trap" keeps enmeshing African women, with their eyes wide open, into all kinds of relationship with those the feminists among them call their enemy—men (Nnolim, 1998, p. 165).

Nnolim concludes that African women are the architects of their own misfortune.

An analysis the films *Thanks for coming* and *Gallant babes*

Ene and Frieda are best friends who have fallen out. Frieda seduces Ene's boyfriend who is a government official. This causes an even huger rift in the friendship, with two teams of friends poised against each other, which causes all and out war with each team trying to get the better of the other.

The story is anchored on the subject of greed, power tussle and jealousy, the storyline reveals the lives of young women who will do anything to be rich and counted among the big girls in the society. They engaged in prostitution and pimping to achieve their dream of becoming rich and famous. These friends become rivals to each other after Ene meets Mario, the personal assistant to the governor. Mario gives Ene contracts to import girls for government functions and weekend hangouts. Freda becomes jealous, seduces and lures Mario to bed. This amorous relationship between Freda and Mario creates a shift of loyalty of Mario from s Ene, his Fiancé to Freda. It is in this change of loyalty that the conflict is ignited as both friends employ blackmail, physical combat, quarrel, witchcraft and other diabolic means to maintain supremacy against the other. Mario diverts the runs of the girls to Freda who brags and intimidates the rest of the girls with Ene. Some of the girls in Ene's group desert her (Ene) after the runs contract is removed from Ene to Fred. The daydream climaxes as Freda connection to the government through Mario brought loads of money and prestige to her and her girls. The story is resolves as Ene unable to bear the intimidation and embarrassment resolves to confront Freda through a spiritual means by patronizing a priestess who empowers her to attract men from all works of life.

Gallant babes on the other hand, narrates the end of the different characters in their quest for selfish desires. It begins with Freda and

Ruth in the home of the Priestess to acquire diabolic power to attract men and defeat Freda who is already topping the famous chart. This hunger for power and supremacy drives Ruth mad as men from all classes confront her in the streets. Similarly, Ene wins the favour of different costumers who end up infecting her with cefelies that drives her to death. The action also reveals the end of Mario who loses the favour of the governor and is relieved of his appointment as Freda blackmail the Governor who lost out of his reelection bid. Freda abandons Mario to his fate in search of other men. The families of Jude and Benson reunite as they examine their decision and amend their ways. Mario fines solace in Nickie who consoles him and gives him hope of success despite all that has happened. It is on this note that the film ends.

Thanks for coming centres on the relationship and sex commercial activities between Mario and Freda. The film reveals the life style of young girls in desperate need for money, wealth and affluence. This is as a result women lacking proper empowerment; if the women are properly empowered, their engagement in these illicit activities may either be drastically reduced or completely wiped out.

This study has examined the social implications of female empowerment by looking at these films and other literatures with similar objectives. Later in the movie, it seems that the wife Florence is needed because she has connections to further Pandora's father's political ambition; however at the same time she claims to others that she is only with him to further her political ambitions. How can the women most often be made to appear as always dependant by men when in reality, they have all it takes to remain on top? With the empowerment of the women, they will appear better and high esteemed.

When the women are duly empowered, they become less pimps, greedy, cunning, and a prostitutes. Their flirtatious and careless illicit money making lifestyles by all means will be forgotten when the women are empowered and domestic violence curbed. The regular means of the some females using their bodies to earn a living irrespective of the consequences will be curtailed drastically as a result of empowerment. In the film, the chief protocol officer "Mario" and pimp to the Governor made so much money because of the ladies inabilities in engaging in lawfully productive venture. He arranges prostitutes for the governor and is very generous with money to his girlfriend.

In literatures too, the issue of domestic violence and female empowerment are seen all over. The patriarchal structure of traditional socie-

ty enables men to dominate women. Through the patriarchal system, Nigerian women are socialized in to a culture of female subordination. This is a structure of gender inequality/discrimination and its persistence in the face of national and international initiatives on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (Kalu, 12) A Nigerian woman is born into a culture of male supremacy in which there is a general preference for a "male child" while girls leave home at the time of marriage to become their husband's property.

Utoh-Ezeajuh's *Out of the Mask* has a story that revolves around a young undergraduate Chisolum who is the tragic heroine of the play because she dies fighting for the liberation of the girls in the village. The women in this play are subjected to every form of inhumane treatment without the custom frowning at the act. For instance, when the boys at the village square molested Uju, the village beauty and threaten to terrorize her with masquerade if she refuses to comply with their sexual demands, Uju threatens to report them to the Igwe's cabinet but the boys laugh her to scorn reminding her that, in as much as she is a woman, the matter holds no water. However, the boys live up to their threat but the girls also wore masquerade and flogged the boys in retaliation. When the girls were discovered, the community was thrown into anarchy as they pronounced the action of the girls as abominable. This is how patriarchal institutions in Africa have tried to subjugate and oppress women, making them a mere tool in the hands of men. When the boys wearing masquerade terrorized the girls, the society saw nothing wrong in it but when the girls wore the same masquerade to free themselves from patriarchal oppression, the society rose in anger. Chisolum however, stood for the girls even though she was not caught. She accepted the blame and punishment stating that she was the one who designed the masquerade for the girls even though she was not caught. She was very bold and stood firm for what she believed in. in another instance, when one of the cabinet members of the Igwe, Unamba slapped one of the women, Mrs. Udeh who was sent to solicit for the girl's release, Chisolum attacked him and said: Chisolum: "(Rushes at Unamba and kicks him) How dare you lay your filthy hands on a woman? Barbaric creature!" (p. 127). However, in the encounter that ensued, Chisolum slumped and died but her death marked an end to the use of masquerade to molest girls in the community as the Igwe and his cabinet announced the suspension of masquerade performance in the community. This shows that women can always stick together and stand up for

themselves, and take action in order to provide a better future for both themselves and their family.

Julie Okoh, on the other hand presents the same subject of subjugation in *Our Wives Forever,* at the death of Victoria's husband, Thomas the brother in-law lays claim on Victoria as his inheritance from his late brother, Hector. Many attempts by Victoria to refute the inordinate advances of Thomas towards her led to a lot of chaos as Thomas threatens to deal with her decisively and bars her from receiving male visitors. Victoria is subjected to ill kinds of barbaric maltreatment all in a bid to exonerate herself from being her husband's killer; she was made to shave her hair, not take her bath for several months and was asked to drink the water used in washing Hector's body. And then when Victoria asks Thomas what gave him the right to control her, he replied "as long as you continue to answer Imodu, you are our wife" and when she says she will change her name, he asks her if she will return her bride price which has added interest given the number of years she has stayed married to Hector. He also reminds her that "according to our custom, when a widow decides to remarry, she forfeits every entitlement to her late husband's property" (p. 36–37) this shows that in our society, a woman's marriage is like taking away all her rights and what makes her a woman and giving it to her husband and his people. Thomas relegates Victoria to a mere property and also backs his actions with the traditional custom and norms. However, it takes the goodly intervention of Felix Tanka, a friend of the family to put Thomas in his rightful place with accusations and counter accusations. Felix Tanka stood his ground to call a spade a spade and finally won the heart of Victoria.

The question from these cases treated above clearly demands an answer. Why shouldn't girls wear masquerade, why should it be the woman that will shave and drink the water of a dead person when the husband dies, why do men not perform the same act when they lose their wives? Why punish girls for being raped and pregnant and spare the men who put them in that condition? Why shouldn't women climb palm trees? Why is it an abomination for women to do some of the exact thing men do? Why why? why? Is tradition and custom the only answer to these questions? Who made these traditions if not men themselves? Only when these question and other questions bothering on women violence are answered can thee society be a better place. But until then, women just have to learn how to survive and fight to be significant.

Causes of domestic violence

The causes of domestic violence include, but are not limited to the following:
a) Misunderstanding
b) Disagreement
c) Impatient
d) Pride
e) Joblessness
f) Inferiority complex
g) Discontentment
h) Frustration and disappointment
i) Insecurity
j) Jealousy
k) External interference
l) Lack of self-control
m) Fear of the unknown
n) Idleness and gossip

Recommendations

The recommendations in this study are that there is the need for feminist scholars to utilize the film medium to preach and promote the feminist course the more, especially as many filmmakers are still rooted in the old patriarchal culture of seeing women as subservient. In this regard, they must stand as watchdog to the film maker in prescribing rules for female characterization and proper positioning in the video films. It is for this reason that female film makers must rise up to counter such misrepresentation. Nollywood film producers and director must attempt to project positive image of the woman and uphold the family virtue through appropriate and condemn all sorts of domestic violence against the women folks. More women should be encouraged be financial independent, as this can help reduce economic dependency on anything for survival, certain roles should rejected. They should be increase availability and accessibility of information, knowledge, and resources for to the women victims. The law enforcement agencies should improve their ability and intervention techniques timely and in an effective manner. The society at large should reduced long-term physical,

psychological, and emotional trauma against the women. There should be increase of awareness and knowledge of the issue within communities that affect the women folks. Self-esteem, confidence should increase and there should be greater ability to cope with and recover from violence.

Conclusion

Filmmakers should now represent the image of the woman in the positive light, even though majority are still in the trend of the negative representation which has been so since the emergence of the Nigerian video film industry in 1992. It is not out of place to see the male characters possess the authoritative gaze while the woman has a history of being portrayed as a sacrificial lamb, the toiler and object to be gazed at. Based on this, it is arguable to say that these stories and characterizations as represented or portrayed in the films under study are still anchored on the patriarchal culture of Africa without putting into consideration the new realities of events presently. The confusion this creates is that while the costumes tend to reflect modernity and change in cultural mindset, the portrayals of females as directed by filmmakers are done after the confinement of women to the periphery by some socio-cultural or patriarchal standpoints where women are only appreciated based on the beauty of their bodies and not on the worth of their persons. This made David (2013) for instance, to remark by watching the films that,

> It was almost as if they didn't know what to put in the movie and thought what the hell! Let's just throw in some potbellied dudes and some naked girls shaking their asses, that'll entertain most. Erm no! Not for 10–15 minutes straight. If we wanted to see this bullshit we would just go to a club and not watch a movie (p. 4).

David's position above is an expression of the audience resentment on the portrayal of the woman's image. The question of women brutalizing women and women lacking the consciousness to redirect these portrayals is more of a concern to the researcher.

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FILMOGRAPHY

Title of film: *Thanks for coming*
Story: Uche Nancy
Screenplay: Michael Jaja
Producer: Uche Nancy
Editor: Ejike Eze
Director: Michael Jaja
Company: Onye-Eze Production Ltd
Year of production: 2011
Duration: 1.13ms

Starring: Mercy Johnson, Yul Edochie, Ibol Ene Angelica, Eve Esin
Executive producer: Uche Nancy
Title of Film: *Gallant babes*
Story: Uche Nancy
Screenplay: Michael Jaja
Producer: Uche Nancy
Editor: Ejike Eze
Director: Michael Jaja
Company: Onye-Eze Production Ltd
Year of production: 2011
Duration: 1.13ms
Starring: Mercy Johnson, Yul Edochie, Ibol Ene Angelica, Eve Esin
Executive producer: Uche Nancy