



Portrayal of Gender Roles in Selected Nollywood Movies

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Abstract: *This study examined the portrayal of gender roles in selected Nollywood movies. The study objectives were to; analyze the depiction of women in domestic/familial roles compared to men in Nollywood movies. The study employed both the cultivation theory and gender schema theory to serve as theoretical frameworks for this research. The research design employed in this study is the content analytical design which specifically involves systematic examination of communications to objectively describe and quantify phenomena and the population of the study were the Nollywood movies produced between 2012 and 2020. Iya Alalake (2012), Oloture (2018), Isoken (2017) and The Wedding Party (2016) were selected for the analysis because these movies characteristics represent cultural representation, critical acclaim and exploration of gender themes. The findings reveal that the study on gender portrayal in four Nigerian films can be compared and contrasted with previous studies that have analyzed Nigerian film and other cultural contexts. This confirms that the films are reiterating certain patriarchal expectations while advocating for renewal. In addition, previous content analyzes of African films have emphasized their use of narratives and multiple layers to effectively construct gendered narratives. This study reflects this and sees how films like Isoken and Aya Alalake show many inspiring women who defy the odds through education and participation without killing. The study recommends that there should be an increase the funding and distribution of films with outstanding women and relationships that are stronger than the characters. Also, provide literacy instruction to help audiences interpret social situations and think from new perspectives.*

Keywords: *Gender roles, Nollywood, stereotypes*

I. Introduction

Research has examined gender portrayals in Nollywood films and noted some progressive shifts, several problems remain regarding the industry's reinforcement of traditionally restrictive roles and norms (Ofori, 2024). The repetition of these portrayals in many popular films continues to propagate conceptions of appropriate femininity and masculinity that are often limiting and potentially harmful (Ronson, 2023; Mohammed et al., 2024). Addressing this issue is important given Nollywood's immense cultural influence within Nigerian society and across the African diaspora.

One major problem is the persistence of portrayals that position women in subordinate roles focused on marriage, motherhood, and service of male characters. Repeated depictions of women largely confined to the domestic sphere or defined primarily by their relationships to men promote the idea that a woman's worth and fulfillment are tied to these roles (Ogunbola et al., 2024; Ayodele et al., 2024). This discourages considerations of women's full range of capabilities and potential beyond the private/domestic domain. It also suggests women require male support and approval to achieve status or purpose, undermining messages of independence and self-sufficiency (Bamidele et al., 2024). Relatedly, many Nollywood films still depict men as active decision-makers in relationships and communities while women are more passive. Male characters often hold leadership positions or operate businesses while women fulfill assisting functions (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2024). This perpetuates the notion that the public sphere and positions of authority are most suitable

domains for masculinity. It socializes viewers, especially young girls, to see assertiveness, ambition, and leadership as “male” traits. In turn, this reinforces structural barriers that discourage and impede women’s empowerment and participation in sectors traditionally dominated by men.

Furthermore, certain stock characters continue to be portrayed in overtly sexualized or subservient ways that normalize the objectification and disrespect of women. Recurring scenes depicting female coercion, abuse or harassment risk cultivating a culture of diminished regard for women’s agency, consent and wellbeing (Aondover et al., 2021; Airaoje et al., 2023). The repetition of such portrayals across many popular films, especially those targeting youth audiences, indicates they play a formative role in shaping social and behavioral norms surrounding appropriate gender relations (Southcott, 2021; Hile et al., 2023; Aondover et al., 2023).

In addition, the influential religious and cultural values cited to explain gender norms in Nollywood raise problems. While cultural sensitivity is important, unconditional embrace of all tradition’s risks legitimizing practices proven to impair women’s rights and capabilities. Referencing culture also overlooks the malleability and regional diversity of African traditions. Notions of appropriate femininity and masculinity have evolved considerably both within Nigeria and cross-culturally due to modernization (Kurfi et al., 2021; Idris & Msughter, 2023). A lack of alternative or counter-narratives showing women and men transcending restrictive norms is also problematic. Portraying a wider spectrum of characters pursuing diverse life paths could broaden perceptions of possible gender roles. However, such films may be less commercially successful within the industry’s existing sociocultural context. This highlights the complexity of filmmakers balancing artistic vision, social impact, and economic pressures (Pisotska & Gurses, 2023).

Given the above issues, further empirical research is urgently needed to understand Nollywood’s ongoing influence on gendered socialization processes and evolving cultural conceptions. Specifically, the proposed study aims to address gaps regarding relationships between film exposure and induced attitudes over time using theoretical frameworks. It also seeks perspectives from younger generations on how Nollywood’s depictions shape their own values and identities regarding gender roles and relationships (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022; Msughter & Aondover, 2023). Addressing this problem has implications for informing policy measures to leverage Africa’s most prolific film industry as an effective tool for women’s empowerment and social change.

1.1 Objectives of Study

The aim of the study is to critically examine the portrayal of gender roles in selected Nollywood movies released. The objectives of the study are to:

1. Analyze the depiction of women in domestic/familial roles compared to men in Nollywood movies.
2. Compare the representation of women and men’s career/professional lives, conduct and agency at the workplace/business portrayed in the selected movies.
3. Assess and compare the illustration of female and male sexuality, choice of partners, dating/courtship experiences and societal expectations of gendered behaviors showcased in the movies.
4. Evaluate the unequal power dynamics and traditional gender norms influencing the roles and interactions between husbands and wives, mothers and fathers as portrayed by Nollywood movies.

II. Review of Literatures

Gender Schema Theory was first proposed in 1986 by American psychologist Sandra Lipsitz Bem as a way to explain how individuals acquire and organize information about gender. The theory positions gender schema as a major organizing influence on behavior and development. This paper will provide an overview of Gender Schema Theory, its main assumptions and criticisms, and discuss its application to examining the portrayal of gender roles in Nigerian cinema, more commonly known as Nollywood movies (Msughter & Idris, 2023).

Gender Schema Theory was established by Sandra Bem in 1981 based on her own extensive research on gender and cognition (Canevello, 2020; Msughter et al., 2022). Bem proposed that individuals develop "gender schemas", or implicit cognitive generalizations about qualities and attributes of each gender. These schemas influence how social information is processed, organized and encoded, and ultimately shape beliefs and behaviors regarding gender (Canevello, 2020). By establishing gender as a major categorization tool in thinking and behavior, Bem's theory provided a framework for understanding how gender roles are learned and reinforced through socialization.

According to Gender Schema Theory, children develop a gender schema early on through parental reinforcement of gender stereotypes (Obasi & Aondover, 2023; Adil & Malik, 2024). As they mature, these schemas create "cognitive readiness" to encode and process information in ways aligned with traditional gender stereotypes (Beisly, 2020). Individuals use their gender schema "as an organizational lens through which to view themselves and the world around them". Gender-linked behavior then acts to strengthen the existing schema and maintain gender constancy (Delfin, 2022). The theory posits that through social learning, humans adopt society's definitions of masculinity and femininity, embracing qualities deemed appropriate for their sex (Bishara, 2022).

Onyejelem and Aondover (2024a) observed that Gender Schema Theory is grounded in several key assumptions' individuals are motivated to maintain a consistent and coherent sense of self. Adhering to societally-defined gender norms help achieve this (Wilensky, 2022). Early childhood experiences of parental reinforcement shape the initial content of gender schemas. Gender schematic processing leads individuals to pay greater attention to, have stronger memories of, and more accurately interpret gender-schematic information. Well-developed gender schemas make gender a more salient category for self-perception, behavior, and social perception. Men and women are motivated to behave in gender-stereotypical ways to gain social approval and reinforce their own gender identity.

While influential, Gender Schema Theory has also faced criticisms, including: it assumes a universal male/female gender binary that does not account for non-binary gender identities (Wilson, 2023; Onyejelem and Aondover, 2024b). Focusing on social learning may neglect biological factors influencing behavior and identity. Emphasis on cognitive processes risks overstating the conscious, deliberative nature of gendered behavior and downplaying subconscious processes. It fails to adequately address intersectionality and how other social categories like race, ethnicity and class shape gender schemas. Greater acknowledgment is needed of individual differences in gender typing and potential for change over the lifespan. The theory risks pathologizing gender nonconformity by treating it as evidence of failed or disrupted gender development.

Gender Schema Theory provides a useful framework for examining the role of Nollywood movies in socializing gender roles and maintaining traditional schemas in Nigeria. As mass media products consumed across generations, Nollywood films both reflect and reinforce widely accepted norms of masculinity and femininity (Amonyeze & Agbo, 2022; Oreoluwa et al., 2024). Recurring depictions of women in domestic or caregiving roles and men portray.

III. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design using content analysis method. Content analysis specifically involves systematic examination of communications to objectively describe and quantify phenomena. This design fits the objectives of gaining rich insights into gender portrayals across various elements of the selected Nollywood films. The target population for this study includes all Nollywood movies produced between 2012 to 2020 that are representative of the genre. As Nigeria's film industry produces over 1000 movies annually (Campbell et al, 2020), purposeful sampling was used to narrow the population.

The sample size comprises four Nollywood films: "Iya Alalake" (2012), a Yoruba language movie, "Òlòtūrè" (2018), a Yoruba language drama film about sex trafficking "Isoken" (2017), an English language movie and "The Wedding Party" (2016), an English language romantic comedy film. These films were selected through purposive/judgement sampling based on their; cultural/regional representation, critical acclaim and exploration of gender themes. Data collected through content analysis were content analyzed using thematic content analysis. Emerging themes were identified, coded and categorized to interpret gender depictions within broader contexts. Direct quotes were extracted to substantiate interpretations.

IV. Results and Discussion

To achieve these objectives, the selected films have been carefully chosen to represent a range of gender stereotypes while also aligning with previous research findings. By conducting a detailed textual analysis of each film, including its narrative, visual style, and sound design, the study seeks to uncover the directorial intentions and how these are communicated to the audience. Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader understanding of gender representation in Nollywood and its potential impact on societal perceptions of gender roles.

4.1 The Wedding Party

a. Synopsis

The Wedding Party (2016) is an Ebony Life TV production Nigerian film. It was directed by Kemi Adetiba. It follows the shenanigans of a high-profile Nigerian party between two families battling family issues, but have to put aside their baggage and come together to make the day memorable for their children. The different issues being faced by these families are literally related to women. The first woman is portrayed as a promiscuous lady, who is having an extramarital affair with the groom's dad, "Chief Onwuka" in exchange for money and material things; in the story, she is held responsible for the unsettled relationship between her lover and his wife and even extendedly to his children. This woman proceeds to cause a disruption in the said wedding as a means of blackmail. She is tagged as the "home breaker," while the man's extramarital affair is excused by the fact that his wife, "Lady Obianuju Onwuka" is not a "homely" woman, who is capable of keeping her home. This goes on for quite a while until a few scenes toward the end, when the affair is brought to light. The groom,

Dozie, is also a representation of the typical Nigerian film “bad boy” role who is often praised for having so many women at his disposal. The Dozie character is built and enabled by the portrayal of another woman, Rosie, who plays the character of the ex of the groom to be, who tries all she can to get him back, using different feminine means.

b. What gender roles are depicted in *The Wedding Party*?

In *The Wedding Party*, gender roles are depicted through various character archetypes and their actions:

Promiscuous Woman: Chief Onwuka's mistress is portrayed as a character who engages in an extramarital affair, leveraging her sexuality for material gain. This role emphasizes a stereotypical view of women as morally questionable when involved in sexual relationships outside of marriage.

Incompetent Women: Characters like the bride-to-be, Dunny, and the event planner are shown struggling with their responsibilities, often appearing disorganized or unable to handle crises effectively. This portrayal reinforces the stereotype that women are less competent in managing important tasks compared to men.

Heroic Men: Men in the film, such as Chief Onwuka and Dozie, are depicted as problem solvers and leaders. They are shown resolving conflicts and managing crises, reflecting traditional views of men as strong, capable, and decisive.

c. How do these portrayals reflect traditional gender norms?

The portrayals in *The Wedding Party* align with traditional gender norms:

Women as Problematic: The film reinforces the idea that women are inherently flawed or problematic. The mistress disrupts the wedding, Dunny is late and incompetent, and the event planner cannot manage a crisis effectively. These portrayals reflect a traditional belief that women are less reliable and less capable in high-pressure situations.

Men as Protectors and Leaders: Men in the film are depicted as the ones who resolve issues and take charge. For example, the groom and his father step in to address the wedding cake issue and support the bride. This aligns with the traditional gender norm of men being leaders and problem solvers.

d. In what ways do the characters reinforce or challenge stereotypes related to gender?

Promiscuity and Manipulation: Characters like Chief Onwuka's mistress and Rosie reinforce the stereotype of women using their sexuality for manipulation and personal gain. This portrayal aligns with the “femme fatale” and “Jezebel” stereotypes.

Incompetence and Dependence: Dunny's disorganization and the event planner's inability to handle a crisis without male intervention reinforce the stereotype that women are less competent and more dependent on men.

e. Limited Challenge to Stereotypes:

The Femme Fatale: Rosie's character, while complex, primarily reinforces the femme fatale stereotype rather than challenging it. Her use of sexuality to disrupt the wedding portrays her as a manipulative and destructive force.

Agency and Empowerment: The film does not offer strong, empowered female characters who break away from traditional roles. Instead, the women's agency is often undermined by their dependence on men or their use of sexuality for personal gains.

4.2 ISOKEN

a. Synopsis

Isoken is a 2017 romantic comedy that is written, produced and directed by Jadesola Osiberu, under Tribe 85 Productions. The film runs for 98 minutes and stars the following persons: Dakore Akande, Joseph Benjamin, Marc Rhys, Funke Akindele, Lydia Forson, Damilola Adegbite, Tina Mba, Patrick Doyle, Nedu Wazobia, Ayoola Ayolola and Bolanle Olukanni. The film revolves around the life of the eponymous heroine, Isoken (played by Dakore Akande). Born into a family of four (three girls and a boy), Isoken, the eldest child, has to grapple with the challenges that come with not being married at the overripe age of thirtyfour. Although she seems to have the perfect kind of life every lady would practically wish for – she is beautiful, intelligent, successful, and surrounded by great family members and friends – her singlehood in a culture that is excessively obsessed with marriage serves as a great source of worry for everyone in her family.

Her mother, obviously the most concerned of them all, decides to orchestrate a matchmaking between Isoken and Osaze, an Edo man, at the wedding ceremony of Rhema, Isoken's youngest sister. Osaze is good looking, charming, intelligent, successful and above all, from a very nice and well-respected family. Therefore, Isoken's family members see Osaze as the quintessential husband material for Isoken.

Meanwhile, Isoken runs into Kevin, a white man, in what appears to be the most embarrassing of situations: Kevin hands Isoken her underpants which he had found in a dryer at the Laundromat. A few days later, albeit coincidentally, the same Kevin happens to be the photographer drafted by Isoken's company for a grand advertising campaign. Because the campaign demands that Isoken and Kevin work together, both of them had to mingle and in the process, they realize that they have similar passions one of which is music. Based on the advice of Kukwa, one of Isoken's three friends, Isoken decides to simultaneously date Osaze and Kevin.

Not long after, on her thirty fifth birthday, Osaze proposes marriage to Isoken. This is however to the chagrin of Kevin who had brought her a special birthday present. Events move very fast as the families of Isoken and Osaze make preparations for what seems to be a grand wedding. Isoken, however, feels very weird and confused. She is at a crossroads as she feels that Osaze, though perfect, is not perfect for her. Her quagmire is further compounded when she meets Kevin at the naming ceremony of her friend's (Joke's) baby. Kevin, in moment of passion and display of strong emotions, tells Isoken: "Please, don't marry him [Osaze]. Don't. Because I love you. And I know you love me too. So, choose us."

Later, at her pre-wedding dinner, Isoken summons courage and tells Osaze that she cannot go ahead with the wedding. Her action stirs up a hornets' nest in the household. In the family meeting that followed, Isoken discloses that she broke up with Osaze because she loves someone else who is white (oyinbo). Her family is flabbergasted and her mother, in a moment of shock, asks her why she decided not to be normal like her sisters. The meeting, nevertheless, ends abruptly when Isoken reveals that she is going to tell Kevin, who plans to leave the country the day after, that she loves him. Accompanied by her family members (including her mother), Isoken professes her love for Kevin. Kevin responds with an ardent kiss as well as hug which makes the lovebirds become a cynosure of all eyes.

Isoken as a movie is replete with lucid scenes that do not only relegate women to the background, but also present them as folks who cannot but play the second fiddle to their male counterparts. The negative portrayal of women in Isoken is brought to light in the very first scene of the film and runs through the entire film. In the first scene, that is, the wedding ceremony of Osato, Isoken's youngest sister, Isoken is constantly reminded by her aunties present that God would provide her a husband. This is because the aunties ostensibly believe that it is very abnormal for Isoken's two younger sisters to get married before her. A particular aunty of hers unequivocally remarks: "My dear, if it were some people, they would have been crying and hiding by now. First, it was your sister Rhema. Now, Osato, your youngest sister. She should have been the one serving at your wedding, not the other way round."

Still in the first scene, Isoken's mother arranges matchmaking between Isoken and Osaze. This is because she, as well as the other family members, believes strongly that regardless of Isoken's achievements in other areas of life, she is incomplete without a husband. When Isoken begs her Mum to stop what she terms "disastrous matchmaking," her Mum responds: "See your mouth like disastrous. Did you bring a man home?" Isoken's mother's stance, as well as that of the other family members, is a clear reflection of the way the Nigerian society view women who are unmarried at a ripe age. The aforementioned, thus, goes a long way in reechoing the long and common portrayal of women as persons who should not be reckoned with or heard in the society unless they bag husbands for themselves.

Women are also portrayed as sex objects in the film. This is brought to life when Kukwa, out of her urgent need for a man, flaunts her voluptuous figure to entice Chuks. In the second scene of the film as well as a later scene in which Isoken and her friends discuss their urgent need for husbands, Agnes is seductively dressed. Her cleavage, as well as part of her laps, is exposed to the viewers. Not just that; Isoken's friends, on hearing that Isoken would be going for dinner at Osaze's house, persuade her to go for waxing in preparation for their envisaged sexual encounter. Later, when Isoken complains that the whole waxing thing is too painful, Kukwa stresses that she thoroughly enjoys it as Chuks cannot get enough of her. The women, as it is portrayed, believe very much that they are sex objects for the men.

In addition, women are portrayed as persons who should care less about their educational pursuit while they care more about getting married and being good housewives to their husbands.

This is evident in the scene in which Isoken, in the midst of other family members, discloses her need to get an executive Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from a foreign university. Her mother, on hearing this, tells her: "Instead of you to come into the kitchen and assist us, you are here talking all over the place. Will MBA find you a husband, or do they dash people children in the university? A woman should not read too much." This picture is very negative because women are very much in need of education as are men. Even when Isoken and Osaze are dating, Isoken's father pushes Osaze to declare his intentions towards his daughter. This act, for one thing, portrays men as dominant. For another, it speaks of the fact that a woman's family is very swift to let go of a woman who is of marriageable age. This, they do not mind how long they have known the suitor or whether they can vouch for him.

Furthermore, women are portrayed as the "silent ones"; that is, folks who should be seen and not heard. This portrayal is brought to the fore when Osaze proposes marriage to Isoken at her birthday bash. Isoken is yet to think about Osaze's proposal when her family members and other invitees echo "YES." They all say "YES" on her behalf because to them,

Isoken has absolutely no reason to say “NO” to a man when she is thirty-five years old. They feel that getting married to a man, the man’s true character notwithstanding, is a great and unprecedented achievement for Isoken. Also, during the entire process, Isoken’s family members do not take their time to ask her what she truly thinks about Osaze.

Another portrayal of women in the film is that they should care more about a man’s financial and social standing and less about their feelings when they want to choose their husbands. This is revealed when Agnes, on hearing that Isoken also has feelings for Kevin, says to Isoken: “All these butterflies you are feeling for Kevin, na butterfly we go chop? (That is, is it butterfly we will eat?)” She goes further to say that: “Your marriage would be a union of two great Edo families. The asoebi (wedding dress) would be on flick. You can imagine Flavour and Olamide performing at the wedding.” This portrayal, like the others, is also very bad as a man’s financial and social standing cannot take precedence over feelings in matters of marriage.

Lastly, but by no means the least, is the depiction that a woman in dire need of a husband is abnormal if she decides to break up with a man. This is reflected when Isoken finally breaks up with Osaze during their pre-wedding dinner. Not only is all heavens let loose, her family members – especially her Mum and aunties – also strongly feel that something is wrong with her. Isoken’s aunty says that something is wrong with her spiritually whilst her mother asks if she is gay. This portrayal, a very negative one, buttresses the way members of the Nigerian society view a woman who, at an overripe age, would break up a relationship or call off a wedding. Corollary to this is the fact that women are cheap properties meant for men in a male dominated society. The aforesaid portrayal takes a different twist when Isoken reveals that she is in love with a white man (an oyinbo). The family members are dumbfounded and her Mum, shocked and aghast, says: “Isoken, why can’t you be normal like your sisters?” Rooted in this is the depiction that a Nigerian woman should marry a Nigerian man rather than white men. Put in another way, it portrays racial discrimination.

b. Portrayal of Women in *Isoken*

The film portrays women in ways that reflect both the traditional expectations of Nigerian society and the subtle critiques of these norms:

1. Marriage as the Ultimate Goal

The narrative begins by establishing that Isoken, despite her many accomplishments, is considered incomplete without a husband. This is a common societal expectation for women in many cultures, particularly in Nigeria, where marriage is often seen as the ultimate achievement for a woman. The aunties’ remarks and the mother’s matchmaking efforts underscore this pressure, which relegates a woman’s other successes to secondary importance. The film criticizes this societal norm by showing the emotional and psychological toll it takes on Isoken. Her singlehood is not merely a personal choice but a source of anxiety for her entire family, reflecting how deeply ingrained these expectations are.

2. Women as Sex Objects

The film also touches on the objectification of women, as seen in Kukwa’s attempt to use her physical appearance to attract Chuks and the emphasis on Isoken’s appearance and preparation for potential sexual encounters. This portrayal reinforces the idea that women’s value is often tied to their physical attractiveness and their ability to please men. The conversations about waxing and preparing for sexual encounters illustrate how societal expectations pressure women to conform to certain beauty standards, often at the expense of their comfort or desires.

c. Educational Ambitions vs. Marriage:

Isoken's desire to pursue further education is dismissed by her mother, who prioritizes marriage over academic achievements. This scene highlights the conflict many women face between pursuing personal ambitions and fulfilling societal expectations. The mother's reaction ("A woman should not read too much") reflects a broader cultural attitude that discourages women from pursuing education or careers that might delay or interfere with marriage. This reinforces the notion that a woman's primary role is to be a wife and mother, rather than an independent individual with her own goals and aspirations.

d. Women as Silent and Submissive:

The film depicts women as being expected to be submissive and not to question the decisions made on their behalf. When Osaze proposes to Isoken, the immediate and enthusiastic acceptance by her family and friends, without waiting for her response, illustrates this expectation. The collective "YES" on her behalf suggests that society often silences women, assuming that they should be grateful for any opportunity to marry, regardless of their personal feelings. This reinforces the idea that women's voices and choices are secondary to the expectations of the community.

e. Oloture

Oloture is a 2019 Nigerian crime drama that offers a gritty, unflinching look into the world of human trafficking, specifically focusing on the exploitation of women in the sex trade. The film follows the story of Oloture, a young and ambitious Nigerian journalist who goes undercover to expose the harsh realities of human trafficking in Lagos. The movie, directed by Kenneth Gyang, is inspired by true events and seeks to shed light on the complexities and dangers faced by women entangled in this dark industry.

f. Plot Overview

Oloture (played by Sharon Ooja) infiltrates a trafficking ring by posing as a sex worker. Her mission is to gather evidence that can lead to the exposure and eventual dismantling of the network. However, as she delves deeper into this perilous world, she finds herself entangled in a web of deception, danger, and moral quandaries. The film begins with Oloture entering a brothel, where she meets other women who are either trapped in the sex trade or looking for a way out of poverty through prostitution. Among these women are Linda (played by Omowunmi Dada), Beauty (played by Ada Ameh), and Blessing (played by Lala Akindoju), each with her own backstory of desperation and betrayal.

As Oloture navigates this treacherous environment, she forms a close bond with Linda, a fellow sex worker with dreams of escaping to Europe, where she believes a better life awaits. However, the reality of their situation becomes increasingly grim as they are subjected to brutal treatment by traffickers, corrupt law enforcement, and the very clients they are forced to serve. The traffickers, led by ruthless kingpins like Chuks (played by Sambasa Nzeribe), exert control over the women through violence, threats, and psychological manipulation.

Throughout the film, Oloture's resolve is tested as she witnesses the horrors of the trade firsthand. She struggles with the ethical dilemma of how far she should go in her undercover mission, especially when it becomes clear that her presence puts herself and others in grave danger. The story reaches a climax when Oloture and the other women are trafficked to another country, only for their dreams of freedom and better lives to be shattered by the brutal realities of modern-day slavery.

4.3 Depiction of Female Characters

a. Women as Victims of Exploitation

Scene Example: One of the most poignant scenes in *Oloture* is when the female characters are introduced in the brothel. Here, the women are shown in vulnerable positions, often engaging in sex work not by choice but as a last resort. The setting—a run-down brothel—reinforces the idea that these women are trapped in a life of exploitation. The camera angles often focus on the women’s expressions of despair, fear, and resignation, emphasizing their powerlessness.

Theme: This scene underscores the theme of women as victims, reinforcing the stereotype of women as vulnerable and helpless, particularly in the face of male-dominated systems of power like human trafficking.

b. Women’s Resilience and Agency

Scene Example: As *Oloture* dives deeper into the trafficking ring, her determination and bravery are highlighted. For example, in a tense moment where she is almost discovered as a journalist, *Oloture*'s quick thinking and courage save her from being exposed. Despite the dire circumstances, she remains resolute in her mission, showcasing her strength and resilience.

Theme: While the film portrays women as victims, it also offers moments where they exhibit agency and resilience, challenging the stereotype that women are inherently weak or passive. *Oloture*, in particular, is depicted as resourceful and intelligent, qualities that allow her to navigate the dangerous world she is investigating.

4.4 *Iya Alalake*

a. Synopsis

Iya Alalake is a richly woven narrative that explores the intricate layers of gender roles, tradition, and women's empowerment in a rural Nigerian setting. Directed by Okiki Afolayan, the film features a stellar performance by Fathia Balogun as the titular character, Ije, a woman who navigates the complexities of a patriarchal society with determination, resilience, and a strong sense of self. The film begins by introducing Ije, a young woman living in a traditional village where gender roles are rigidly defined. Unlike many women in her community, Ije is not content with the domestic sphere typically reserved for women. Instead, she takes on roles traditionally assigned to men, such as working on her fiancé Bolaji’s maize farm. This decision is not just a financial necessity but a personal statement of Ije’s belief in equality and self-reliance.

Ije's relationship with Bolaji is central to the narrative. Bolaji, though supportive of Ije’s independent spirit, is also a product of the same traditions that Ije subtly challenges. The couple plans to marry, and their union is seen as a fulfillment of societal expectations. However, the happiness of their impending marriage is marred by Bolaji's first wife, Ida, who struggles with infertility a situation that creates tension within the family and prompts traditional solutions that Ije must confront.

In accordance with cultural traditions, Bolaji is pressured to take a second wife to ensure the continuation of his lineage. The introduction of Taiwo, the new wife, into the marriage is a turning point in the film. Taiwo is initially depicted as a rival, someone who threatens Ije's position and the stability of her relationship with Bolaji. The dynamics between the co-wives are marked by jealousy, competition, and the societal expectation that they must vie for their husband’s favor to secure their place in the household. As the film progresses, the tension between Ije and Taiwo evolves. Instead of continuing to compete for Bolaji's attention, the women begin to empathize with each other’s struggles. Taiwo, much like Ije,

finds herself trapped in a system that values her ability to produce children over her own desires and autonomy. This realization fosters a sense of solidarity between the two women, as they recognize that their true adversary is not each other but the patriarchal norms that dictate their lives. children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are faced with interpersonal relationships, and their maladjusted behaviours are only a way of coping with difficult situations (Gadour, 2009).

The film uses this relationship to critique the simplistic portrayals of female relationships in polygamous marriages, often depicted as filled with unrelenting animosity. Instead, *Iya Alalake* portrays the possibility of unity and support among women, even within such complex and traditionally fraught dynamics. Ije's character is a symbol of resistance against the societal pressures that seek to limit her potential. Throughout the film, she faces numerous challenges that test her resolve and her belief in her own autonomy. Despite the expectation that she should prioritize marriage and childbearing over her personal ambitions, Ije remains steadfast in her pursuit of education. Her commitment to continuing her studies, despite the discouragement from male relatives, exemplifies her desire to break free from the constraints imposed on her by traditional gender roles.

This resistance is not just personal but also social. Ije's actions challenge the deeply ingrained beliefs of her community, particularly the notion that a woman's worth is measured by her ability to conform to traditional roles as a wife and mother. By choosing to support her household financially and pursue her education, Ije demonstrates that women are capable of much more than what society often prescribes for them. Her journey is one of self-discovery and empowerment, as she learns to navigate the complexities of her world without losing her sense of self. The film's depiction of Ije's resilience and agency provides a powerful commentary on the potential for women to redefine their roles and challenge the status quo.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

An analysis of the portrayal of gender in four Nigerian films - *The Wedding Party*, *Isoken*, *Oloture* and *Iya Alalake* - revealed similarities and differences in the nature of gender roles and method. All of the films reflect society's expectations that emphasize women's role as wives, mothers, and caregivers over their ambitions and independence. The patriarchal power structures that place men as the leaders and decision makers in the family are also reflected in the stories. However, the films differ in how strongly they reinforce or challenge these gender stereotypes.

Isoken and *Iya Alalake* presented very progressive pictures where feminists resisted societal pressures by learning and redefining gender roles. Instead, the wedding party presented women in small and meaningful roles and relied on stereotyped images of "femme fatales". *Oloture* is a strong critique of patriarchy by showing how it can make women vulnerable. But even this film captures moments of female empowerment that challenge the stereotypes of victimhood. Although these films highlight gender differences in Nigerian culture, they advocate for change by presenting stories of women's empowerment and unity that defy traditional norms.

The findings of this study on gender portrayal in four Nigerian films can be compared and contrasted with previous studies that have analyzed Nigerian film and other cultural contexts. A theme emerges about the dual role of film in reflecting and challenging social norms. Studies of Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, have also seen its ability to emphasize and criticize aspects of Nigerian culture (Tsika, 2017). This confirms the current analysis, which shows that the films are reiterating certain patriarchal expectations while

advocating for renewal. In addition, previous content analyzes of African films have emphasized their use of narratives and multiple layers to effectively construct gendered narratives (Mondal, 2023). This study reflects this and sees how films like *Isoken* and *Aya Alalake* show many inspiring women who defy the odds through education and participation without killing. This is similar to human images recorded in previous studies.

However, controversies also arise. For example, studies of early Nollywood productions show a strong adherence to tradition through weak female characters (Buitelaar, 2023). The study found that images have grown, offering stronger criticism of patriarchy in *Oloture* and radical activists in *Isoken* challenging restrictions. Arguably, gender stereotypes in Nollywood have evolved over time. Comparison with Western film analysis reveals similarities and differences. Research shows that Hollywood continues to maintain stereotypes of passive women during second wave feminism (Dowd, Crabtree, and Cannon, 2023). Although this study found that even new block chains such as the *Marriage Reserve* are criticized when they rely on simple principles. Like most Westerns, however, films such as *Oloture* and *Iya Alalake* used live history. This shows that film can play an important role in creating information about gender relations.

V. Conclusion

Nigerian cinema is an important space for the reflection and transformation of social discourses on gender. Reinforcing existing stereotypes, the films re-analyzed patriarchal constraints and advocated the role of women. Through simple images of resistance, unity and love, they focused on women's strengths, not just their vulnerabilities. By provoking stories, provoking perspective and exemplifying powerful relationships, Nigerian films can support cultural development towards equality and understanding among all people. Continued work that captures multiple experiences will help address gender disparities that slow Nigeria's development. With media awareness, fair laws and strong citizenship regardless of gender, future Nigerians can build their country on true equality, dignity and progress for the whole.

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