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The image(s) of women in Nigerian (Nollywood) videos.

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2011-09-22
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CHAPTER ONE

NOLLYWOOD: ITS ANTECEDENTS AND EMERGENCE

> Film for us is just storytelling. You don't need someone to tell you how to make a story. In Nigeria we just do it our way and we're doing something right because our films are seen all over the world. Nigeria produces 2000 films a year and it works for us…Nigerians make films for themselves. (Amaka Igwe, 2006).

By the end of the 20th century, Nigeria had become a significant player in film production on the African continent and globally. "Nollywood", as the Nigerian film industry is popularly called, has gained immense currency in Africa and beyond. Nollywood has also developed so rapidly that today it is said to be ranked third in the world, coming closely after Hollywood (USA) and Bollywood (India)[1]. Through their thematic preoccupations and story lines which explore the everyday lives of ordinary people, Nigerian videos mirror the national socio-economic, political and cultural concerns of the populace.

This introduction undertakes a historical survey of the key moments and forms that are behind the evolution of Nigerian videos. It briefly explores elements of indigenous performance traditions in Nigeria (including literary drama) in order to unearth their influence on the Nollywood videos. The introduction also analyses the socio-economic conditions that led to the emergence of the video format as a distinct method of film production in Nigeria, as opposed to the previously dominant celluloid productions. I will also locate the Nigerian videos within the larger discourses on African cinema and popular culture. My interest is to establish the fact that the Nigerian video format is a

[1] Cited from the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation: Action Plan for FMINO Project 365. Presented by Nigeria former Minister of Information Frank Nweke, October, 2005.

testimony to African creative ingenuity, especially when it is grasped in relation to the ways in which Africa countries have coped with the economic hardships which have occurred since independence. However, over and above the achievements of Nollywood, I am particularly interested in critically engaging with the ways in which it has explored and represented the experiences and characters of women.

The Evolution of An Industry: Economic and Technological Influences

Nigerian videos are in many respects the product of technological innovation in electronics and the economic downturn which occurred in Nigeria in the 1980s. The technological improvement in electronic media and in the mass production of video machines made the machines more affordable and, as such, many people in Nigeria could afford to own video machines in their homes. This development occurred at the same time when many film producers in Nigeria and Ghana were almost forced out of the film business because of the prohibitive expenses associated with importing equipment and material for the production of traditional celluloid films. Another reason for the demise of the cinematography industry is the high cost of processing the films abroad as was thecase in Nigeria. In the mid-1980s, Nigeria and Ghana experienced serious economic depression which forced both countries to adopt the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. According to Frank Ukadike (2003:128-9), the program which attempted to revive the economies of the two countries, in reality, seemed to make things worse for both countries. He further reveals that under the SAP policy, both countries were forced to devalue their currencies, a decision which in turn increased the cost of imported goods. It became very difficult for filmmakers to purchase and import equipment with which to continue production in celluloid.

The economic pressures resulted in many filmmakers looking for less expensive ways of continuing with their trade. Many of the celluloid film producers turned to video production as an alternative. Jonathan Haynes (1999:140) notes that the cost of producing a video is “about a tenth” of the price for a celluloid film. Once started, they realized that

it was also more economically rewarding than the celluloid films that were capital intensive. The inexpensive nature of video production meant that producers could produce more content and, possibly, accrues more revenue as well. One of the key factors that allowed for increased and more successful distribution, was the large-scale availability of inexpensive video machines. In many ways, the Nollywood phenomenon is also the result of the existence of a huge consumer market organized around home-viewing. The existence of video machines is generally attributed to the proclivities of Nigerians to record important occasions and rites of passage on video tapes. Femi Shaka (2003:42) opines that:

> In retrospect, the popularity of the video format as a narrative medium was first established in private and domestic domain as an equipment for ceremonial documentation. In the early days of its domestication, the work of the so called "video man" [camera man] was to document with the video camera such private and domestic ceremonies like weddings, child naming ceremonies, birthday parties, chieftaincy installation ceremonies, burial ceremonies and communal festivals.

This phenomenon which started among the Yoruba gradually spread to other parts of the country and was particularly taken up by the Ibo and Hausa. The large-scale domestic ownership of video machines paved the way to the evolution of the video industry.

Prior to the SAP period, celluloid production had flourished, intermittently, since the 1970s, with the adaptation of Wole Soyinka's play *Kongi's Harvest* to the screen. Prior to the emergence of a locally driven film culture in Nigeria, and Nosa Owen-Ibie (1998:1-2), dates the commencement of film screenings in Nigeria back to the colonial era. He writes that on the "12th of August, 1903," the first film screening in Nigeria, which lasted for ten days, was held in Lagos at the Glover Memorial Hall. Besides screening, various film organizations were established and tasked, by the Colonial administration, with managing film-related issues in Nigeria. According to Owens-Ibie, an important role was performed by the Colonial Film Unit (C.F.U – established in 1939) which was renamed, in 1947, as the Federal Film Unit (F.F.U). The function of the film units was to propagate government policies on agricultural and health concerns through the screenings of documentary films.

The film units ran a mobile free cinema that covered the district headquarters and environs. The documentary films were popular and were greatly patronized because they were screened alongside American Cow-Boy films which captivated and sustained the interest of the audiences. The documentaries were usually screened first before the American features that Nigerian patrons waited patiently to watch after the documentaries. However, it was not until the 1970s as Owens-Ibie attests that the first set of indigenous Nigerian films were produced. The production of *Kongi's Harvest* came seven years after the Francophone countries commenced their film production[2]. The rate of production in Nigeria was at around four 16 mm feature films per year. Such a rate is quite small, especially when it is compared to the massive number of videos that are currently produced on a yearly basis. Amaka Igwe (2006:27) reveals that "Nigeria produces about 2000 films a year" because the producer is not in a position to know the exact number of films produced in Nigeria within the year.

The example of Nigeria and Ghana resorting to video productions as a way of continuing with their entertainment industries demonstrates how some African countries have been able to withstand the challenges that post-colonialism has generated. The acceptance of aid and loans from international agencies led to further austerity measures that have exacerbated the economic downturn in Nigeria. The latter required some forms of adaptation amongst Africans in many areas of their lives, including the entertainment sector. For instance, Foluke Ogunleye (2003:3-4), writing on the situation in Ghana reveals that:

> The current economic terrain of many African countries presents a battered picture. During the colonial era, the expectation was that Independence would usher in a time of hope and the attainment of aspirations by the African polity. Unfortunately, the governments have rudely burst the bubble of hope….This entails that economic salvation has had to be sought by dint of hard labour and

[2] Kerr (1995) and as Ukadike attests, the first African conceived fiction film was produced by a group of African students who were studying in Paris in 1955. The group was led by Senegal's Paulin Soumanou Vieyra and others, Mamadou Saar, Robert Cristan and Jacques Mel Kane - who made the first short film called *Afrique Sur Seine* (Africa on the Seine). Ukadike (1994:69) further notes that "it was not until seven years later that other films made by black Africans appeared." This according to him was possible because of the arrival of Independence in African states in the early 1960s.

> imaginativeness. 'Postcoloniality', to the average Africa is the non availability of basic amenities… Expectedly, this state of affairs has also impacted upon the entertainment industry. The Ghanaian video film industry came to life as a response to creative impulse and the determination to succeed in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

The ability of Nigerian filmmakers who, faced with the economic depression which almost forced them out of film production altogether, to turn to the video format is in itself a remarkable development. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the video productions have become synonymous with Africa, especially Nigeria and Ghana. However, there are some African countries such as South Africa, Senegal, and Kenya which have continued with celluloid film production.

It is important to note that the socio-economic challenges that confronted filmmakers, paradoxically, created the possibility for the emergence of an autonomous local industry. There is very little reliance on external funding in Nollywood. This serves as a major contrast between the Nigerian film Industry and those of many African countries. The film industries in some African countries have tended to rely on their former colonial rulers for film sponsorship. For instance, French-colonized countries rely on sponsorship from the French Ministry of Corporation and Development. The Ministry's function was to assist in providing necessary funding and assistance in film production to their former colonies. Thus, this sponsorship invariably made it possible for the sponsors to control and to prescribe the type of films that are produced[3]. By contrast, Nigerian films, have since their inception been sponsored by Nigerians. Therefore, they are produced to suit the filmmakers' taste hence the distinctiveness of Nollywood videos in terms of their themes, characterization, structure, aesthetics, and language. The films adhere to Nigerian standards by continually recreating the everyday lives of Nigerians within the context of their space and time. It can also be argued that the sense of autonomy has served to highlight the peculiar way of doing things within the Nigerian video industry (Amaka Igwe, 2006).

[3] For instance, Manthia Diawara (1992:31) notes that "Francophone filmmakers themselves have complained about the conditions and the ways France has given its aid to African film."

The unique peculiarity of the video format makes Nigeria and Ghana, the proud initiators of the video model of film production which has received widespread patronage from film producers. This supports Brian Larkin's (2001) position, as paraphrased by Oguleye (2003: 4), in 1999 alone over 50 videos were produced in Ghana. This according to him shows that, in this one year alone, more videos were produced than in the entire history of feature film production by the government-led film industry in that country. Ogunleye adds that, with this "unprecedented increase, people who never had access to the old celluloid films, both inside and outside Ghana, are now watching the video films" (Ogunleye, 2003: 4). Not only have the African videos enjoyed great patronage from the continent as Ogunleye (2003:4) observes but that the "video cassettes are portable and that they travel very far from the point of production to other African countries and also to the diasporas." The widespread distribution of videos has improved with the introduction of online access to Nigerian video films as video patrons can log onto internet websites like Nigerian Video online, and African video series online, or YouTube to gain access to videos which may be difficult to get from the market. Besides, the Nigerian videos can also be viewed via the DSTV channel 102, *Africa Magic*. This channel airs many African films (mostly Nollywood videos) and this has helped to further make the Nollywood videos more accessible to various parts of Africa and beyond.

Channel 102 has elicited some misgivings amongst some stakeholders in Nollywood who have noted that it is causing a decline in video sales since people can watch the films on the channel. They argue that what started initially as a boost to the industry is beginning to have a negative impact on the industry. For instance Clarion Chukwurah[4] (a veteran Nollywood actress) has noted the negative impact which the airing of videos by *Africa Magic* is having on the profit margins of the industry. She notes that whereas Africa magic pays one thousand dollars per video, the channel airs a single video many times without paying royalties for the additional screenings. According to her, this development is not encouraging to filmmakers' who are losing money as a result of the deal. However,

[4] See Clarion Chukwurah "African Magic has done Great Harm to Nollywood." *Daily Sun* 1st March, 2009.www.Nigeriaworld.com

Chukwurah's position has been challenged by Fidelis Duker (an award winning film producer)[5] who notes that Chukwurah's allegation that *Africa Magic* has ruined the Nollywood market is unfounded because according to him "Africa Magic remains the only platform that has paid the highest amount to Nigeria producers so far. *Africa Magic* has paid as much as $5000 dollars for a film. I think it will be unfair to criticize them. Apart from the payment, *Africa Magic* has given our actors and actresses a pride of place in Africa." Although the arguments point to the fact that Nollywood stakeholders are divided in their views about the impact of *Africa Magic* on the Nollywood industry, the important point is that the industry is going through an economic decline which calls for some measures to be put in place to help redress and reverse it. Other observers, like Duker's, rather blames the market decline of Nollywood videos to the fact that production exceeds the demand for the videos. His contention is that "you cannot keep making 100 movies a week that are being marketed mostly to the same small market, controlled by a few people in Idumota and three other small markets in the country, and still expect the income to continue increasing or even remain at the level it was" (2009:1). Another factor affecting video sales is the world economic recession which is making people to reduce their spending habits (like buying many videos at a time) in order to meet with other financial needs.

Nollywood and Third Cinema

Although my appreciation of the Nollywood videos that are the focus of my thesis will draw mainly on feminist criticism and cultural studies, it is necessary to situate the Nigerian video films within the critical approaches to African cinema and, Third Cinema in particular. Scholars such as Onookome Okome (2003:3) are of the view that "the practice of the popular Nigerian video film is implicated in the idea of Third Cinema." Such a perspective is based on the range of political and ideological concerns that are standard fare in Nollywood: from ordinary people's everyday battles to secure the means of life to historical narratives that explore issues of governance

[5] Also see Fidelis Duker "Backlash: Clarion Chukwurah." *Daily Sun* 15th March, 2009.www.Nigeriaworld.com

and power. Third Cinema is a concept and movement that was attributed to the emergence in the 1960s of alternative visions and aesthetics in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa.

Critics such as Anthony Guneratne (2003)[6], Teshome Gabriel (1982)[7] and Paul Willeman (1989)[8]have postulated the existence of three kinds of 'cinemas': first, second and third. First Cinema generally refers to films (mostly celluloid films) that are meant for commercial distribution and aimed at large audiences as in the case of Hollywood productions. The Second Cinema is associated with art or auteur cinema which generally ascribe their authorship to the single-minded visions of their directors. Thus, in contrast to First Cinema which is more commercially inclined, the Second Cinema would appear to be elitist in terms of its audience and production. Second Cinema films are mostly shown at "art house movie theatres" and tend to appeal more to more sophisticated audience and less so to the general public. The art house movie theatres are usually situated in big cities (Cited in Willemen 1989: 9).

The term Third Cinema was formulated in the 1960s by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's in their manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema" where it was used to describe the film culture and experiences of Latin Americans. Other film critics (Anthony Guneratne, Teshome Gabriel, Onookome Okome, Nwachukwu Ukadike and Willemen) have argued that the term extends to other filmic experiences. Willemen (1989:14) expounds on this perspective when he quotes Gabriel's position that "Third Cinema includes an affinity of subjects and styles as varied as the lives of the people it portrays." Noting further that "[its] principal characteristic is really not so much where it is made, or even who makes it, but, rather, the ideology it exposes and the consciousness it displays." To Ukadike (2003:105), Third Cinema is coterminous with the Third World. According to him, Third Cinema refers to films from Africa. It is an expression which is associated with the relatively poor and developing countries, a

[6] *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (2003)
[7] *Third Cinema in the Third World*. (1982)
[8] "Rethinking Third Cinema" In *Rethinking Third Cinema*. (1989)

category which most African countries fall under. His position is also upheld by Guneratne (2003:7) who notes that Third Cinema is that which is closely associated with poverty. It looks up to the West for much of its "financing." Furthermore, Teshome Gabriel (1982:35) notes that Third World Cinema refers to "films with social relevance and innovative style and above all with political and ideological overtones."

However, there are scholars, such as Ukadike (2003:127), who argue that West Africa video films "attests to the manifestation of what might be called a real 'first' cinema, a cinema which competes with the so called first cinema of the West on its own terms." His premise evolves from the fact that Africa video films are also highly commercial like the mainstream Hollywood films which are supposedly the best examples of First Cinema. Ukadike also suggests that the aesthetical nature of the video films have made them to crystallize into "a unique cultural art" thus, according them a unique position as "First Cinema" (2003: 127). The fact that Nollywood does not look to the West for production finance but relies instead on the viability of its own markets further buttresses its claims to be considered as "First Cinema".

Whatever the cannons which are used to assess and to validate African cinemas, we argue here that cognizance needs to be taken about the video format of film production in Nollywood as well as its novel content and circuits of distribution. As will be argued in this thesis, the political themes and aesthetic strategies used in Nollywood are very varied and do not always allow for easy categorization. The privileging of patriarchal points of view, coupled with varying levels of production values, means that the critical approaches that I adopt, will be partly suggested by the films that form my primary material. This brings to mind Teshome Gabriel's suggestion, paraphrased by Stephen Zacks (1999: 12), when he calls for an "evaluation of non-Western cinemas according to their specific histories and context and systems of production." There should be efforts made to improve upon the quality of the films in order to make them appealing to people beyond Nigeria. This will give the videos more acceptance and credit as products that can compete favourably with other industries like Hollywood and Bollywood irrespective of the video format and its perceived limitations in production quality in comparison to

celluloid. When properly utilized, the video format can favourably produce films with good quality and captivating storylines that can make the entertainment industries which have adopted it to compete favourably with other film industries using celluloid.

Nollywood and Popular Culture

The notion of popular culture is, of course, a highly complex and contested one. I will confine myself to teasing out the approaches that I find useful for my study. Johannes Fabian (1997:18) notes that the term 'popular culture' has a range of key connotations that "suggest contemporary cultural expressions carried out by the masses" which also "contrast to both modern elitist and traditional 'tribal' culture." Secondly, he notes that popular culture also "evokes historical conditions characterized by mass communication, mass production, and mass participation". Thirdly, it implies a "challenge to accepted beliefs in the superiority of 'pure' or 'high' culture, but also to the notion of folklore' as that which is also speculated as being elitist as it is perceived to be tied to "certain conditions in Western society." Lastly, that popular culture signifies "potentially at least, processes occurring behind the back of established powers and accepted interpretations and, thus, offers a better conceptual approach to the decolonization of which it is undoubtedly an important element."

The latter insight is extended by Stephanie Newell (2002:9) who regards popular culture as those "cultural artifacts, produced within (and assisting our understanding of) complex socio-cultural formations". She celebrates its explorations of private and public everyday life concerns in a society in ways that are reflective of the "hopes and fears of social classes excluded from the narration of nationalist histories." Similarly, Karin Barber (1997:2) sees popular culture as those genres that speak to the existential realities and struggles of ordinary people. It provides an avenue through which the people can deal with the realities that confronts them. Barber (1997:2) attests that "popular culture in many discourses occupies a self evidently positive position, and the task then becomes one of distinguishing between what is 'truly' popular, and what is contaminated by hegemonic ideological infiltrations from above. Given its complexities, Barber further

argues that the term 'popular culture' signals a "history of conflicts, assumptions and problems" and that it is difficult to apply to African cultural practices in any straight-forward manner. She notes that in Africa the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' are not as stark and fixed as elsewhere. For instance, 'high' culture hardly exists and it "is not the prerogative of an ancient ruling class but of the fragmented, precarious, conflictual new elite, defined by its proximity to an outside power, nonetheless bound up with local populations by innumerable ties of kinship, language, community membership and patronage. The people are neither the rural, idyllically remembered 'folk' nor the urban industrial proletariat…."

Similarly, Veit Erlmann (1991) contends from his study of popular culture in South Africa, that:

> there is no one –to─one correspondence between class and culture: you cannot deduce an individual's position in the social process, his or her class position, from the musical forms, styles and genres he or she performs, listens to or patronizes (quoted from Adebayo Ladigbolu Abah, 2009:732).

This observation is important for my reading of Nollywood video as popular culture. This is because Nollywood videos are consumed in Nigeria and by extension Africa without any recourse to class nomenclatures. Rather, the videos are appreciated and patronized by a large spectrum of the society irrespective of class or social distinctions within the society. This contributes to make the videos very popular irrespective of their thematic concerns and aesthetic qualities. Nollywood videos have become popular in their production and consumption like the popular Onitsha market literature. Like the Onitsha market literature, the producers of Nollywood videos churn out volumes of videos without standardized publishing or production. Nollywood videos are produced using the video format and this method consequently, does not allow for extensive editing as in the case with celluloid film. The method of Nollywood video production has two implications: it compromises the quality of the videos on the one hand, but on the other hand, it makes the process of production easier than the celluloid format and hence the large volumes that are produced and consumed. We should however, remember Barber's caveat (1997:9) where she cautions that "no one should assume that 'popular'

texts are somehow easier, more available, and less demanding than the productions of the educated elite."

The fact that the themes and techniques are uniquely African often renders them identifiable and more appreciable to African audiences. Nollywood videos appeal to a wide cross-section of audiences and within the same familial space, they are patronized by the houseboy, kids, wife and the husband as the stories have relevance to their existence. Nollywood narratives are easy to relate to because as Adebayo Abah (2009: 733) contends, the videos "carry pertinent information regarding a range of agendas, both individual and collective, that speak of the enduring community, and redefine state and national citizenship. While depicting the everyday domestic, social, political and economic lives of the people is the mainstay of the industry."

Nollywood and the voices from below

The popularity of Nollywood attests to the fact that the videos have been able to reflect the social conditions and stratifications that typify the contexts in which the narratives unfold. This is particularly so with regards to the existence of social inequality, corruption and embezzlement of public funds, and the lack of accountability by those in power to the common person. The videos, in a sense, can be "perceived as a world stage upon which the feelings of powerlessness could be expiated" (Mutonya, 2007:161). He emphasizes J.C. Scott's (1985) position that popular culture presents "everyday resistance" and not "open defiance." Scott "acknowledges that passive resistance is quite informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate *de facto gains*." According to Scott "open insubordination in almost any context will provoke a more rapid and ferocious response to an insubordination that may be as persuasive, but ventures to contest the formal definitions of the hierarchy and power" (Mutonya, 2007: 161).

Nollywood videos, then, function as the channel through which the aspirations of the people are articulated and where they can critique the inadequacies in government policies that are inimical to the growth of the nation and as a way of calling for the

desired change in governance. The videos also enable the masses to air out their grievances against the government even if it is just to criticize the leadership passively as a form of resistance. Okome (2007:9) explains that: "if political and economic powers are lost to this category of the popular audience, narrative power is not. Powerlessness in the roughly organized political and cultural spheres is converted into a peculiar narrative power in the realm of this existential disorder." Okome notes further that "what comes out of the various narrative acts of this ironic chorus is what we may refer to as 'popular narratives'." In other words:

> Proximity to scarce national resources is resoundingly absent to members of this audience, yet members always seek to attain that status of duplicitous politics even when they criticize the duplicity of the politics of the state. In many instances, this audience may give up specific class affiliations, education,age or gender differences for the purpose of a temporary "coming together" but it does not give up the aspirations of a social mobility that seek to replace or even come to the same economic status as the political ruling class, which is perceived as the stumbling block to its common welfare. This is one of the ways that members of this audience perform the helplessness of living in the world of "lottery existence." Popular video audience is clearly an example of this category of the African popular audience, which performs the "discontent" of Africa's postcoloniality.

According to Tom Odhiambo (2004:33) Nollywood occupies and performs a crucial social role and position in assisting viewers to interpret their experiences and society. Nollywood "borrows its subject matter from the public on issues of contemporary importance to that public in particular contexts" and it strives to be of "immediate relevance to the people's worries, questions, experiences and lives." Such issues are rebroadcast to that same audience for the purpose of educating, informing, instructing, and entertaining. Thus watching videos together in the homes, streets or in video parlours creates "uncontrolled sites of consumption" that "render spectatorship in Nollywood as a fluid field of reading culture", and one which also "privileges the presence of an absence as we know it in the production of culture that had been tightly controlled by the ruling and intellectual elite in Nigeria until the emergence of Nollywood in Nigeria." (Okome: 2007:6)

Nollywood and the Postcolonial African City

Arguably, one of the key manifestations of Nollywoods popular disposition and interest in foregrounding the experiences of ordinary people, is its preoccupation with the representations of the trials and tribulations of city life and dwellers. The city of Lagos remains the quintessential location and metaphor through which many videos negotiate their explorations. Lagos became the capital of Nigeria at independence in 1960 and it remains the political and economic hub of the country, even after the Nigerian administrative headquarters were moved to Abuja in the 1990s. Lagos is regarded as the premier commercial city in West Africa and, with many embassies located within its boundaries, it continues to be host to most government activities. The city of Lagos has also continued to capture the creative imaginations of artists across genres, including the pamphlets and novels of the Onitsha market literature and Nollywood videos as well. Videos of Lagos are quite easy to recognize as most often their opening scene is an aerial view of the city's sky-crappers with a good view of well-known landmarks like the Marina, which immediately conjures Lagos up as a nice city. According to Femi Shaka (2003: 62-3), "the breath-taking skyline deceptively romanticizes the city as a site of opulence, thereby effectively masking the spectator from the stark reality of the rot of urban decay, traffic holdups, the maddening crowd, and urban crimes which daily confronts Lagosians- factors hardly adding up to the romanticized image of the city". Shaka views this glamourization of Lagos as an influence from soap operas onto the videos noting that it started in Nigerian soaps such as *Mirror in the Sun, Bassey and Company and Checkmate* among others. Indeed Lagos informs most of Nollywood stories and it remains its major production base and provides it with its greatest audience.

The social realities, contradictions and paradoxes of the city make it an ideal setting since, according to Okome (2003:68), it is a site where good and evil are intertwined. In the postcolonial period, Okome notes the numerous attempts to re-write Lagos, reflecting the need to re-map its "desire and aspirations outside its colonial origins in what Achille Mbembe calls the "hollow pretense of the post-independent state" (Okome, 2003: 69). The postcolonial city becomes the mirage of the modernist ideals of her British

colonizers. Far from representing an "imported European modernity", cities like Lagos have become places that do not meet the aspirations and expectations of their city dwellers. It rather constitutes a place that provides circumstances where people are subjected to forces that test them and often make them change. It provides for new forms of experiences and identities and Lagos can then position itself as the local centre for new ideas and cultural forms. (Okome, 2003: 69)

The different residential areas that make up Lagos are symbolically symptomatic of the anxieties that are inherent in the city. For instance Victoria Island and Ikoyi, where embassies and government offices are located, are glamorized sites in representations of the city. Other areas such as Surulere and Ajegunle, are less glamorous and also reflect the socio-economic status of those domiciled in them. Okome (2007:10) argues that "Lagos is loosely defined and like all postcolonial locations, both the built and dreamed environment displays this fractured psychology. Framed on various notions of cultural bricolage…" He further contends that what gives the city its status as a postcolonial city is "its eccentricity, which is defined in its cultural and political renewals." In the popular imagination in Nigeria, Lagos is said to be "a no man's land". Furthermore, the city is seen as not tied to any particular culture. Rather, it embodies hybridized forms of cultures and identities. It is a city where people from the rural areas and neighbouring countries migrate to in pursuit of happiness and wealth. The village, in contrast, is evoked as the other to the city in Nollywood videos.

Caught up in the plurality of cultures that make up Lagos, people do whatever is necessary to survive, from the innocuous to the transgressive and taboo. Their behavior "reflects the flux of identities and contestatory moralities they negotiate in a dynamic and nervous postcolonial city like Lagos." (Okome 2003: 68) This has implications for my discussion, later, on the representation of women in Nollywood. Suffice to note, for the moment, that the city becomes a site for "producing and at the same time eclipsing the female subject as a speaking body within a new popular public" (Okome 2007:167). Okome, further notes how the city constructs women:

> The images of women so constructed are de-nuded of critical distance in the narratives and confined to the dictates of cultural stereotypes. Dictator of the narrative *Living in Bondage1*&2, *Glamour Girls* 1& 2, *Ritual, The Bastard, Blood Money* 1& 2 is the masculine city under which everything is submerged. The city is rough but it is under the firm control of men who are able to subdue it from time to time.

The representation of women in the city foregrounds the kinds of activities and storylines that are accepted as city concerns. Faced with the grind of the capitalistic economy that governs the city, women become key tropes through which the nervous conditions of the city depicted and interpreted. Okome (2007:167) elucidates on the gendered anxieties that the city creates:

> The city video film privileges the city as the topical essence, which dictates the actions of the characters in the narrative. It is by far the most ubiquitous in the video industry. The practice itself is a video phenomenon. The soul of the video film is in the city and the practitioners are themselves part of the upward mobile people who inhabit the intermediate zone of the new postcolonial metropolis. Glamour Girls is an early and representative example of the city video film. It deals with life in Lagos, the quintessential haven for the emancipated woman. This is a city where the uncanny is said to happen on a daily basis.

In the following chapter, I will return to the limits and possibilities that Lagos presents to video-makers in their portrayal of women. This is in order to understand how representations of the anxious city, overwhelmed by the quest for material gain, results in the general tendency to render stereotypical representations of women in Nollywood.

Tracking the influence of Indigenous Performance and Literary Traditions and Repertoires

Even though Nollywood videos are post-colonial phenomena, it is important to acknowledge that much of their thematic interests and aesthetic strategies can be related to the continuing influence of the Nigerian theatrical arts. Most Nigerian theatrical arts performances derive their origins from the Yoruba traveling theatre which evolved from the Yoruba opera. As Yemi Ogunbiyi (1981:22) reveals, Hubert Ogunde, one of the early proponents of theatrical work in Nigeria, was greatly influenced by the Yoruba opera, his theatrical performances are structurally similar to those of the Yoruba operas. Dapo

Adelugba and Olu Obafemi (2004:148) attest to the fact that the Yoruba traveling theatre of Ogunde has a structure that bears a resemblance to one of the earliest Yoruba operas, the "Alarinjo theatre". They share similarities such as the "opening glee," which is usually an eye-catching parade involving dance and song which is always led by the leader of the troupe. This is closely followed by a more grand (elaborate) style of dance and, then, the drama which marks the highpoint of the performance. Finally, the performance comes to a close with a "closing glee". The early theatrical performances had no script guiding the performances', characters where told what to say and they sometimes developed their own dialogue based on their understanding of what their role or character entailed. A similar use and reliance on the improvisatory skills of actors is common in Nollywood videos.

It was another opera artist, Duro Ladipo, as David Kerr (1995:181) notes, who introduced some semi-literate dimensions to these operas by introducing script writing. Until then 1970s, most of the performances were unwritten. These written operas were appealing to media houses such as the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) and Nigeria Television (NTV) who incorporated them into their regular programming and gave them a wider coverage through the Yoruba opera series.[9] This made the operas very popular from the 1970s onwards. Among the popular series of Ladipo was *Bode Wasimi*, (Kerr, 1995: 181) which explored life in the Yoruba village in the 1920s. Karin Barber (1986:6) contends that the overall exploration of the characters and their consciousness in the televised Yoruba plays reflected the interests and styles of the genre's key practitioners, with Hubert Ogunde as the unmistakable leader. Others identified by Barber as either Ogunde's colleagues or successors were Duro Ladipo, Moses Olaiya, Ade Afolayan (Ade love), and Oyin Adejobi. Some of these artists later became involved in the Nigerian video industry, as Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome (1998:111) point out.[10] It would not be an overstatement to say that Nigerian videos developed out of the

[9] It should be however noted that media houses started recording some of the opera's in their unscripted and improvised form but the writing later gave the operas more recognition and popularity as they could be more easily adopted for televion series.

[10] Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome "Evolving Popular Media: Nigeria Video Films." *Research in Africa Literatures*. Vol. 29, 3, (Fall1998) 106-117. Their position on the evolution of Nigerian films is reiterated in their essay "Nigeria Video Films" *Nigeria Video Films*, (2000:55).

influences of the Yoruba traveling theatre. This view is also shared by Wole Ogundele who affirms that "the Nigerian video film industry rose out of the ashes of the Yoruba Traveling Theatre which had been the most visible and pre-eminent form of popular entertainment from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, at least in the Southern part of the country" (quoted in Gabriel Oyewo, 2003:143).

Closely linked to the traveling theatre was the literary drama which emerged in the mid-nineteen-fifties. The main difference between the traveling theatre and the literary drama was that, while the traveling theatre comprised illiterate and semi-literate practitioners, the latter was characterized by highly trained practitioners and academics. Worthy of note is the fact that during this period of literary drama[11] soap operas commenced in Nigeria. The leading practitioners in literary drama included highly trained professionals such as Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, and Ken Saro-Wiwa, and also the semi-literate actors of the Ogunde traveling theatre, among others. Notable among the successful soap operas in the English language was Ken Saro-Wiwa's "*Basi and Company*", a 30-minute comedy. It was a regular national programme on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in 1985. It featured story lines which explored how a trickster tries to outwit other people. For the most part, "*Basi and company*" re-enacted the social problems inherent in Nigeria. In particular, it showcased the various ways in which some individuals wanted to get rich quickly without expecting to work hard for their wealth.

Since its inception, literary drama in Nigeria also sought to retrieve and reconstruct pre-colonial African senses-of-self and art forms. Kerr (1995:114) opines that a good number of African dramatists including J.P. Clark (from Nigeria), Keita Fodeba (from the Republic of Guinea), Ola Rotimi (from Nigeria), Efua Sutherland (from Ghana), Credo Mutwa (from South Africa) and Wole Soyinka (from Nigeria), tried to investigate

[11] Which also included "the thirteen episode plays" of Tunde Kelani who Moradewun Adejobi (2003:51) reveals to be one of the best Nigerian video film directors. His contributions as Adejobi (2003:64) further notes are highlighted in his ability at adopting works "of some Yoruba- language authors to video film". Besides, Adejunmobi quotes Kelani explaining that he became involved in film production in order to protect the cultural heritage of the Yoruba, and to introduce new standards into the video film industry. Kelani's " thirteen episode plays" is of significant relevance to the emergence of the Nigerian video films because it was the first contact that the first set of cast and crew of the Nigeria video film genre had with the electronic media. Besides, some of the thirteen episode scripts were also re-worked for videos.

indigenous genres in a bid to establish their "homologous" effect on contemporary literary and "ideological movements." Such research gave rise to dramatic genres that may be called neo-traditional drama that were deeply anchored in traditional African folklore and myths and also facilitated the inculcation of African cultural and aesthetic values into the literary drama. The experiments of literary dramatists with cultural adaptation were later transferred to the first Nigerian film productions. This was made possible because most of the people involved in the literary drama, such as Soyinka and Clark, were also very involved in the early film initiatives in Nigeria and tried to infuse elements of traditional aesthetics into filmic art. Such experiments were also transferred to video productions since, according to Nwachukwu Ukadike's (1994:100), film cannot escape an engagement with the cultural assumptions and traditions of the society that generates it. Nollywood videos have since their inception engaged with traditional and modern themes – spanning politics, religion, culture and domestic relations amongst other concerns. This in itself highlights that Nigerian videos are grappling with topical issues and anxieties emanating from the society that generates the narratives.

Durotoye Adeleke (2003:53) traces the efforts of early Yoruba filmmakers (including seasoned filmmakers like Hubert Ogunde, Ola Balogun, Olaiya Adejumo and Adeyemi Afolayan also known as Ade Love) in maintaining links with their cultural heritage. Adeleke explains that the above filmmakers, like the literary dramatist, similarly tried to identify Yoruba traits – such as Yoruba ontology, cosmological beliefs, forms of governance, and gender relations – and use these in their attempts in order to bring out 'authentic' Yoruba cultural values into their films and Yoruba TV series.[12] Wole Ogundele (2000:100) attests to the fact that the travelling theatre, and in my view some Nollywood videos, have their "orientation from the *alarinjo* itinerant entertainment

[12] Adeleke (2003: 53) contends that the new "quasi-professional film makers/video makers embarrass their viewers with debased culture." This he blames on "the filmmakers inability to research into Yoruba culture to come up with aspects of films that will showcase it rather than the offensive scenes of murder, and horror." Some of the current themes in the Yoruba video films as Adeleke contend are those which signal negative impressions to the Yoruba, especially urban youths who might think that Yorubas value immorality. Reacting to such anti-cultural portrayals, he cites Olusola (1994:53) who affirms that "Authenticity is the foundation stone for cultural development, and it is from the bedrock of a true and authentic culture that our creative contemporaries can evolve new patterns of arts and culture."

tradition, which mixes spectacles of wonder and magical transformations with acrobatic dances and haunting music in a way that is continuous with the world of folktale."

The various forms of adaptations and influences highlight Manthia Diawara's (1996:210) contention that "African cinema builds on folklore (oral tales) historical or cosmological legends." The influences of the traditional cultural values also made it to the soap operas they have been incorporated into the present day art of video production. They account, to a large extent, for the way themes, characters, and language are constructed in contemporary Nigerian videos. For instance, characterization in many videos is either lifted from folktale or myths. In the video *Test of Manhood* (2005) directed by Michael Jaja, the narrative re-enacts the mythical belief of a nameless Nigerian Ibo society and demonstrates the Igbo society's mythical construction of divinity which is represented by a female character Nkemjika, the priestess of Eberugo. She represents the power of the society and periodically mankind has to commune with her as a representative of the supernatural. Those selected as the emissaries for such communion had a difficult task since they met with a lot of obstacles, as well as supernatural powers, which claimed many lives. But in the case of the hero Omekanaya, he braces up to the end just as his father Amadi who earlier accomplished his journey and test of manhood. (Agatha Ukata, 2008:159). This is an example of how myths, legends, and beliefs are re-enacted in Nollywood character creations, story lines and themes.

Another good example of folklore is the "Ifo" narratives, which are a sub-genre of Ibo folklore and are used to reinforce patriarchal ideologies in the Ibo society. The Ifo narratives thrive on the mother Africa trope, a trope which prescribes the behavioural patterns that women should be associated with within the society. Ifo stories are often told by women themselves and their audience are usually women[13]. The storylines often portrayed young girls who conformed to the societal values regarding marriage. For instance, girls who marry suitors who are approved by their parents live happily with their spouses thereafter. In contrast, girl characters who chose their own husbands

[13] Susan Arndt. Buchi Emecheta and the Tradition of Ifo: Continuation and Writing Back." In *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Ed. Marie Umeh. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1996

become outlaws of the societal norms and values. This category of girls elopes with their self-chosen husbands against parental wishes and they end up suffering great calamities for their deviancy. The moral lesson drawn is that girls and women must always conform to cultural norms or suffer a bad fate as a result of their wanton rebellion against the existing order. When such ideas are adopted in videos, it has led to the depiction of women in ways that conform to traditional patriarchal values that deny women the possibility to negotiate different choices in society. As Florence Stratton (1994:53) argues, the "flip side of the Mother Africa trope" serves to "reproduce the attitudes and beliefs necessary for preserving the otherness of women and hence to perpetuate their marginalization in society."

Another theme that is derived from folklore, which speaks to gender relations, is the Cinderella trope. Here a neglected girl suffers because of no fault of hers but eventually, luck smiles on her and she becomes a celebrity. Another popular trope which draws on folklore is the romantic trope which centres on a love triangle: where those in love are surrounded by difficult obstacles either as a result of parental pressures or supernatural forces trying to interfere with the relationship. Nevertheless, love most often triumphs in such stories, leading to marriage in the end. The influences in thematic construction in films highlights how the "thematic influences of oral traditions show that filmmakers do not only borrow, but also adopt oral themes" (Thackway, 2003:89).

Another example of the influence of folklore is in the use of the trickster figure as the character prototype for modern cons. In Nigerian folklore there is frequent use of animal characters, like the tortoise, which is usually a trickster character that tries to outwit all the other animal characters through his cunning schemes. This can be noted in Ken Saro-Wiwa's soap opera *Basseyi and company* as earlier mentioned. A number of Nollywood videos are beginning to utilize animal characters as archetypes that personify human beings. Then there is the use of proverbs in videos. Apart from their aesthetic function, the use of proverbs becomes functional in the sense that it can identify native speakers of the language and it is the special preserve of the elderly. This accounts for why most Nollywood videos make the elderly to use proverbs and idioms more often in their

speech. In Nigeria wisdom is measured through people's ability to use proverbs properly and to suit the occasion. Proverbs also aid in identifying the geographical area that a work comes from and they also serve as distinguishing generational factors within a geographical area. According to Isidore Okpewho (1992:235) proverbs are the "storehouse of the wisdom of the society", they reflect truth tested over time. This explains why Nigerian artists love to inject proverbs into their works. As Chinua Achebe famously put it in *Things Fall Apart*, "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten." (1958:7) In Thackway's (2003:55) opinion, which is applicable to Nigeria, "the transmission of learning via a system of codified tales, myths, legends, riddles and proverbs helps to account for the predominant role orature continues to play in Francophone Africa's still widely non-literate and also explains the extensive influence it has on more recent cultural forms, such as literature, theatre, and cinema."

One can also argue that some of the visual and editing strategies used in Nollywood partially reflect the influence of indigenous performance traditions. With regards to editing, for instance, Nollywood pursues narrative transitions in a way that is significantly different from Hollywood films. Hollywood uses rapid cuts and hence shorter scenes as opposed to Nollywood's long, somewhat monotonous scenes which are similar to the oral tradition's preference for gradual rather than quick movements. The former aid easy understanding and carries the audience along.[14] Also, like folklore, Nollywood videos do not only perform an entertainment function but also teach moral lessons to its patrons. According to Birgit Meyer (2001) people expect videos to serve as a pointer to what is happening in the society and to also teach morals. She sees the videos as performing the same duties as folktales in many African societies in terms of how morals are taught and learnt. The latter's ability endears them to Nigerian, and by extension, African audiences, hence their popularity.

[14] According to Haile Gerima (1997: 147), filmmakers all over the world "have been inventing, shaping and restructuring the multidimensional non-linear aspect of cinema in order to accommodate their own cultural voice in inventive cinematic tradition." This includes the "aesthetics of sight and sound by breaking down the elements of the film, frame by frame, shot by shot, sequence by sequence, and ultimately assembling the qualitative structure of the audiovisual codes and medium of cinema." In the case of Nollywood all the analyses show that most of its cultural codes are embedded within it in the attempt to develop t an African film language.

Nollywood and ethnic dynamics and influences

The emergence and development of Nollywood can be partially attributed to the contributions from the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria which have, in their own way, produced films which depict their respective cultural peculiarities. These are mainly the Yoruba video films, the Igbo video films and the Hausa video films. The Yoruba as an ethnic group has a culture of celebrating events in flamboyant ways. They give much importance to naming ceremonies, child dedications, marriages, burials and chieftaincy coronations among others. As a way of remembering an important event they often have those events recorded on video tapes. The video tapes, apart from serving to bring the events to remembrance, were also sent to loved ones who could not attend the event, especially family members who contributed financially towards the success of the ceremony. Such persons could at least see the event and get some sense of satisfaction from watching it on screen. Femi Shaka (2003:42) as earlier stated reveals that the documentation of events which started amongst the Yoruba, gradually spread to other parts of the country. It was one of the first social practices that contributed to people owning video machines in Nigeria. It became a boost to the growth and presence of a video culture in Nigeria which, in turn, paved the way for the evolution of the video industry. Most Yoruba videos are produced in the Yoruba language and the same applies to those of other ethnic groups which are in their respective indigenous languages, such as Igbo, Hausa, Urobo, Ibibio and Efik languages, to mention but a few. The indigenous language videos' ability to cater for the needs of those who do not understand English is a welcome development which has also helped to boost video viewership in Nigeria.

Although Yoruba videos have been criticised for having poor direction and production values, even warranting Haynes and Okome to call the productions "bare-bones", they have been able to initiate a form of indigenization through language exploration which has come to stay, and in crucial ways, also define Nollywood. When Ibo video productions started they were mainly in the Igbo language but they have started to include productions that also use Pidgin English and Standard English. Interestingly, a handful of films have also been first produced in the Igbo language before being later

reproduced in Standard English. For instance Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* came out as a video first in Igbo before the later English version. The Igbo videos, arguably, can also be credited with the sparking of economic vibrancy and viability of the video industry in Nigeria. Films such as *Living in Bondage* (1992) and *Glamour Girls* 1&2 (1994) are considered as pioneering Nigeria videos. The former was first produced in the Igbo language before making its debut in English. The success of these films spurred some of the Igbo film makers to turn to English language film production which, as Haynes and Okome suggests, gave them a much wider market than the indigenous language videos. It was the video *Living in Bondage* that served as an eye opener to producers (such as Kenneth Nnebue who produced *Living in Bondage*) that investment in video productions can yield financial profits. Once the story of Nnebue's profits was heard, other filmmakers knew that good storylines could translate into economic gains in the local market. *Living in Bondage* also spurred many people who were not into video productions before, to also try their hand at making videos. This is more so because Nnebue had no formal training either as a film director or film producer but he got someone else to direct the video. So it is not out of place to also assert that *Living in Bondage* induced and influenced a significant number of Nigerian novices into the Nollywood industry as filmmakers. Coupled with the need to capitalize on the booming market by producing videos rapidly, the industry began to flourish and, arguably, this also led to the quality of videos being compromised because of the precedence given to quantity by producers.

Notwithstanding the concerns about the compromise of quality, the Igbo films are more capital-intensive than the "bare-bones 'traditional' Yoruba films" (Haynes and Okome, 2000:64). The technical and aesthetic quality of these films is as a result of the huge financial sponsorship which they receive mainly from wealthy businessmen from the commercial cities of Onitsha and Aba which are both in Eastern Nigeria. This accounts for why Igbo videos, when viewed, convey a sense of opulence. The opulence can be noted in the beautiful locations and impressive houses where they are shot, the exotic cars which are used in the videos and the flamboyant dresses which the actors/actresses display. The Onitsha and Aba businessmen who finance the videos spend heavily because

they know that good quality productions will attract greater patronage for the videos and translate into greater revenue. The Igbo films, whether in Igbo or English, are given a lot of local colour through the depiction and foregrounding of peculiar Ibo linguistic or cultural practices and values. The videos are also very rich in the use of proverbs and Igbo expressions. Most Igbo videos depict their cultural dances, costumes and cuisine in addition to the use of proverbs and Igbo expressions. Some of these Igbo cultural repertoires are employed in *Omata Women (2003)*. For instance, in the video, Chinasa's beauty is articulated through the Igbo axiom "Ifenkili" meaning a thing of spectacle, and in the process conjuring up her extraordinary beauty. Another character, Ijele, has a name which metaphorically means a powerful masquerade and that adds to the cultural flavour especially when she is hailed for her extraordinary strength as an Amazon.

Lastly, the Hausa video films are distinct because of their tendency to adapt or draw on the aesthetics of Bollywood. The success of the Hausa videos with Bollywood influences has greatly increased the number of productions that imitate Bollywood storylines and themes. As Brian Larkin (2000: 232-3)[15] points out, the Hausa videos, like Bollywood films, thrive in a melodramatic world of romance that navigates through the wealthy "classes of the Nigerian society". Furthermore, just like the Indian films that they imitate, Hausa videos try to address the topical problems and conflicts in the society such as arranged marriages and the perceived decline in cultural values. Larkin (2003:183)[16] explains that while the Hausa videos capture aspects such as materialism, magic and corruption, just as other Nigerian videos do, their peculiar attribute is however, in their ability to depict love and romance through songs and dance routines (waka da rawa in Hausa) that are rarely found in the English language videos.

[15]Brian Larkin (2000:183) writing on "Hausa Dramas and Video Culture in Nigeria" in *Nigeria Video Films*, equally attest that these Hausa videos derive influences from sources like "Igbo novels, Igbo and Yoruba videos, romance books and magazines," which according to him, are usually reworked to fit into the cultural and religious values of the Hausa space.

[16]Larkin (2003:180), writing on "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media" in *Multiculturalism,* Postcoloniality, *and Transitional Media.* Eds. Ella Shoohat and Robert Stam . New Jersey: Rutgers University press, 2003. He notes that the fact that Nigerian videos have been "divided into Yoruba-, English-, and Hausa-, language films." He reveals further that the English version is that which is produced by the Ibos and the minority groups that try to target English speaking urban subjects.

Both Larkin and another critic Graham Furniss (2005:89), also trace the emergence and growth of the Hausa video films to the Hausa-language literary genres such as the "love stories" drawn from the series of literary books known as "soyayya" books. Furniss suggests that their authors' involvement in films made it possible for most of the books to be adapted into films. Furniss further reveals that the first Hausa film appeared in 1998. He equally brings to focus the issue of representation within the Hausa videos, contending that "the issue of how women are portrayed on screen is a matter of continuing fierce debate" (Furniss, 2005*:* 90-91). Given that the Hausa culture frowns at the depictions of women in roles (such as prostitution) that are considered as being anti-religious and anti-social, Hausa films tend to limit the characters that can be played by women. This is because most of the population that constitutes the Hausas in Nigeria is predominantly Moslem. Therefore, for religious reasons, Hausas generally do not believe in the public display of women, let alone depicting them in roles which can be considered as being against their religious and cultural codes. The fact that Hausa videos are making conscious efforts to depict women in roles and ways that are consistent with their Islamic beliefs has both positive and negative implications. Firstly, their agitation to remove roles which 'devalue' women from the screen can be seen as a challenge to Nollywood producers to be sensitive and vigilant in their portrayals of women. On the other hand, implicit in the advocacy promoted in Hausa videos is also the denial of women the right to choose social roles and engage in forms of public life that are deemed inappropriate because of patriarchal or theocratic ideologies. Ultimately both positions indicate the various ways in which the subjugation of women continues to be enforced through various social agencies and practices. One of the negative implications of such practices is that they undervalue and deny women the opportunity to use film to tell and interpret their stories from perspectives that privilege the complexities of their experiences, needs and hopes.

Scope and Limitations of Study

Nigerian videos are produced in a wide range of different genres that include: crime, historical epics, romance, voodoo, evangelical / Christian dramas, comedy and

political dramas. Whatever their particular genre or style, what is common across many Nollywood videos is the use of melodramatic patterns of representations. Melodrama, as will be seen in the videos that provide the primary material to my study, is preoccupied with the teaching of moral lessons, especially that virtue will triumph over vice. My concern is the frequency with which women are depicted as the primary incarnates of evil, vice and wickedness. The aim of this study is to explore and interrogate the different representations of women in Nigerian videos. I am especially interested in what accounts for the contending binary representations that seem to be associated with women in the popular imagination. The binaries tend to divide into groups of either "positive" or "negative" archetypal images. The culturally approved images are images which represent women as either virtuous or good women, gifts to their families and their society. Positive female roles are those which are regarded as depicting women as morally upright, hardworking, industrious and making meaningful contributions to their families and the society. On the other hand, "negative" representations are those which portray women as "dangerous" or *femme fatale*, especially in characters who are seen as home breakers, thieves, murderers, lesbians and prostitutes. Focusing on the politics of the stereotype, I will seek to explore the tensions, contradictions, ambiguities, and paradoxes that result from the false binaries which inform the representation of women.

There are existing studies, such as those by Camela Garritanio,[17] Onookome Okome,[18] Ebele Eko and Imoh Emenyi,[19] Chichi Aniagolu-Okoye,[20] Chinyere Okunna,[21] and

[17] Garritanio Carmela "Women, Melodrama, and Political Critique: A Reading of Hostages, Dust to Dust and True Confession." *Nigeria Video Films,* ed. Jonathan Haynes. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000.

[18] Onookome Okome."Onome: Ethnicity, Class, Gender." *Nigeria Video Films*, 2000. See also, "From the Periphery of the Visual Space: Women and the Video Film in Nigeria." http//www.afrcanfilmny.or/network/news/Rlarin.html2004.

[19] Ebele Eko and Imoh Emenyi. "Female Portrayal in Nigeria Films: An Analysis of *Dark Goddess and True Confession"Ndunode: Calabar Journal of the Humanities.* Vol.3,2, (March 2002),170-181.

[20] Chichi Aniagolu-Okoye. Representation of Women in the Nigerian Film Industry. http://www.Thenewsng.com/modules/news/article.php?storid=1317, 2006.

[21] Chinyere Okunna. " Mass Media Gender Image and the Nigerian Girl Child" [in CD ROM]. Paper presented at the Summit 2000: Youth Children and Media. Toronto, May 2000. See also, Gender and Communication in Nigeria: Is this the Twenty-First Century. http//www.portalcommunication.com/ben2002/neng/programme/progind/papers/0/pd/o005 seo-Okunn.pdf1 2002.

Nwachukwu-Agbada,[22] which have tried to address aspects related to the portrayal of females in some of the Nigerian videos. Carmela Garritanio addresses the depiction of women in two Nigerian videos *Dust to Dust,* and *True Confession* and makes a case for how Nollywood videos dehumanize women, Okunna in her work chronicles the negative impact that outrageous images of women have on perceptions of women in society. Eko and Emenyi approach the videos as a continuation of male's perspectives on women that stretches from the print media to the electronic media. Their study decries how such male views recreate the femme fatale image of women. Okome argues that Nollywood videos represent women in ways which continue to privilege inequality in society and they reproduce patriarchal social relations. Finally, Nwachukwu-Agbada's study looks at the politics behind the binary constructions of women in Igbo-Language videos.

As can be seen from the above list, most of these works are mainly journal articles covering specific issues and they are necessarily limited in the range, depth and articulations of the issues that they treat. For instance, Garritano in her essay identifies areas of further investigation for feminist scholarships: how are films by women different from, or similar to films by men? What do female and male spectators make of the video films? Do films by women and men inscribe spectators differently or in similar ways? She admits that her essay cannot delve into such aspects given that "its scope is too narrow to address these questions in any depth" (2000:172-3). The questions posed by Garritano, and others, are complex ones and necessitate the production of more research on the subject of the representation of women in Nollywood. My study is one such venture and it will consider some of the outstanding questions.

A major focus of this study will also be on the camera-work or 'cinematography' used in the videos. In that regard, things like panning of the camera and other camera effects which facilitate the rendition of the image of women in the films will be looked at. For instance, the study will critically examine the representation of women in ways which depict women as mostly evil and inimical to the smooth running of the society, like

[22] J. O J Nwachukwu-Agbada, "Women in Igbo-Language Videos: The Virtuous and Villainous." Women With Open Eyes. *Matatu* 19,(1997),67-80.

Omata Women depicts. The major women characters like Chinasa, Ijiele, Ifeoma and Nkechie, in the video are tailored to show women in ways that tradition stipulates. At the same time, the study will engage with how artists try to undermine the other choices available to women as unacceptable. Thus many videos can prejudice the viewers attitudes to certain characters through the camera-angles, art direction and other choices that the narrative and director privileges. The study will cover thematic constructions such as those dealing with some of the moral dilemmas confronting women in the 21st century. In addition, evangelical themes will also be highlighted to show what role evangelism plays in Nigerian films and how it is often consistent with the representations of women as wayward and evil in society. However, the study will not look at the issue of religious diversity nor will it focus on how women are captured within the dichotomy of Islam and Christianity. This is because the portrayals of women in Islam, and as reproduced in Huasa videos, has conditioned them to see their exclusion from public life as the will of God and that it must not be questioned.

Synopses of Primary Videos

The study will focus on five films: *The Tyrant* 1 and 2 (2003 and 2004) directed by Mc Collins Chibede; *Masterstrokes* 1 and 2 (2004) directed by Lancelot Odua Imausuen; *I was Wrong* (2004) directed by Frank Vaughan; *More than a Woman* 1 and 2 (2005) directed by Tarilla Thompson; and *Omata Women* (2003) directed by Ndubuisi Okoh.

THE TYRANT

A film produced by Chimeze Ogozie (2003/4) and directed by Mc Collins Chidebe, looks at women in a positive light, in line with what Eko and Emenyi (2002: 175) attest to as one of the 'very few exceptions' of films which portray women in a positive manner. *The Tyrant* is an exception in its depiction of women even though the makers of the video are men. *The Tyrant* explores the heroic intervention of women in national politics. Jenny, the heroine, helps to redeem her country from the tyrannical dictatorship of General Idris

Amino, the President. She is initially portrayed as just helping her husband, Barrister Nelson Moremi, by advising him that there can be no justice under military dictatorships.

As the narrative progresses, her son Sunny, who recently came for a brief visit from America, is murdered by a soldier at the instructions of General Amino. This made Jenny to ask her husband to discontinue with his activism against the President out of the fear that other members of the family could be the next targets of General Amino's violence. In the scene that follows the murder of her son, she is portrayed as somewhat weak and scared but her husband insists on continuing the fight against military rule. However, this would be the last time that she is portrayed as lacking courage. For, in the subsequent scenes, she regains her nerve and leads the fight to save the nation and fearlessly confronts the President to release her husband from detention. Jenny immediately swings into action and organizes a women's rally and demonstration which rattles the government. That is not all, she travels abroad to liaise with the United Nations and to seek their intervention in the country's political problems. The highpoint of the movie is the successful overthrow of the dictator General Amino. This brings freedom to her husband, who is made the President of the interim Government. This gives her the opportunity to inject positive ideas into the polity as she insists on accountability in the spending of public funds by political office bearers. We see her advocacy work when she advises the wife of the governor of Kakawa state to be prudent in spending state money.

Meanwhile, her visit to Kakawa State almost ruins her marriage. During the visit one of the security aids answered a call from her husband and he became suspicious of her. His fears of infidelity led to a disagreement between them. Despite this crisis, she triumphs in the end as an enviable embodiment of female positivism. Her ability to reconcile with her husband speaks to the way some husbands treat their wives harshly and how, in contrast, women persevere since their ambition is to return to their position as a wife. In the end, Jenny's image is thus redeemed as a true nation builder, home maker and women's symbol of political emancipation. While it is possible to fault the appointment of her husband as President instead of herself, she is portrayed as a beacon as the story ends. The video makes the case for the complimentary relationship between both sexes and

where female individualism and character are given ample opportunity for life and expression [Helen Chukwuma: 1994].

MASTERSTROKE

The film is produced by Bob Emeka Eze and Ebere Eze (2004) and directed by Lancelot Odua Imasuen. The heroine, Simba Richards, is portrayed as having stellar qualities. Her educational prowess and good moral standing is extolled in the video as it shows her speaking and behaving as a responsible young woman, full of leadership potential. This image is in line with the arguement this study makes about the images of women in Nollywood videos. With more characters like Simba Richards, the representations of women in Nollywood videos will take a new turn for the better. Her character serves as a good role model of what representations of women in Nollywood should aim at. This video shows the solidarity that she garners from women which also serve as a boost to her eventual success. In the video the friends of Simba Richards (the sisters for emancipation) rally round her to ensure her victory in the election. The phrase 'sisters for emancipation' aptly captures their goodwill and support for their friend.

This video, like *The Tyrant*, celebrates the giant strides of women in nation building. Here the heroine, Simba Richards, negates the traditional domestic roles prescribed for women and instead she chooses the political arena where she eagerly contests for a seat in the State House of Assembly in her constituency. She is the only woman who vies for the seat against five male opponents. She has to contend with a number of challenges including securing financial commitments for running election campaigns, intimidation, and a series of politically motivated killings of electoral candidates. When the only remaining credible opponent in the race, Donald Adams, drops out of the race, she emerges victorious. The heroine is represented in a way that would spur women video patrons to participate in civic duties and in governance. Notably, Simba's role shares some similarities with feminist calls for the equality between women and men in political and social matters. Most Nigerian women would have left the race for fear of their lives or they would have succumbed to the patriarchal refrain that politics is for men.

I WAS WRONG

This video, produced by Helen Ukpabio, (2004) and directed by Frank Vaughan, contributes to the interrogation of the representations of women in Nollywood videos by exposing the different choices open to people and the resultant effect of their choices. In the video, Lydia can be viewed as the evil image that keeps haunting the Nollywood video industry. But the foil for Lydia in the story is Pauline Clark who dramatizes the virtue of making good choices and shows how those lead to lasting benefits. Such a depiction is consistent with Aniagolu-Okoye's advocacy for films to serve the purpose of guiding people towards more meaningfully futures as in the case of Pauline Clark.

I Was Wrong is a melodramatic film which portrays women within the divide of positive and negative stereotypes. From the negative angle, many aspects of misconducts are explored that relate to Lydia as she is the villain in the story. She does not have a good upbringing. This is made worse by her mother's failure to live up to her own duties. Both Lydia and her brother, King, grew up in a household where their father insisted on a better upbringing of the children, while their mother had a relaxed and indifferent attitude. Lydia becomes pregnant and she delivers the baby without the knowledge of her parents and then abandons the baby. King on the other hand moves from small time stealing and staying away from school to joining a gang. The gang, in an effort to rob his father, frightens Mr Itohowo and he dies of shock. Though King blames his mother for his state of affairs, he still realises that he was wrong. The mother also discovers that she should have brought her children up in a better way than she did. Lydia on her part, wants her baby back from Sister Rachael who picked the baby up when she was abandoned. From the positive angle, the heroine, Pauline Clark, is a women rights activist. The visuals present her as a celebrity who has won many awards for excellence. She is supportive to her husband, Chief Clark and she is shown representing her husband during a launch at church. At the launch she also makes the choice to repent and give her life to God. Accordingly, she renounces most of the things she gave importance to as she considers them at that point to be earthly glories. Her refusal to accept an earlier awarded

chieftaincy title in her honour angers her husband, whose reaction was to start bringing girls into their home in order to humiliate Pauline for her choice of becoming a born again Christian. Pauline's reaction to this situation is commendable since she tries to counsel these girls not to have relationships with older men and to pay greater attention to their education. She also leads them to church.

Meanwhile, Chief Clark brings a girl that Pauline is not able to change. In the interim, Chief Clark becomes sick and requires medical attention overseas. However, the money meant for his medical treatment overseas is stolen by his new concubine. It will take Pauline's intervention to right the wrongs. She not only agrees to provide the money for him to get treatment, she also brings in her church members to pray for him. In the process he recovers miraculously. In addition, she liaises with a security outfit, Interpol, which tracks down the concubine who had escaped to Canada and Chief Clark's money is recovered. This latter event makes Chief Clark to realize his mistakes and he informs her of his decision to join the membership of his wife's church. It is not surprising that this film pursues its goal of evangelizing Christianity as a way of also changing the society for the better through art by making the characters that embody negativity to rediscover themselves and affirm that 'I was wrong.' Arguably, Pauline's emergence as a 'virginal image' here could be due to the fact that the producer of the film is a woman, and knows how far the video can be used to reshape society for the better by presenting a positive image for women. Therefore, in this film, characters with bad behavior are poised to change for the better. This echoes Adolf Vazquez's (1973:39) assessment of the relationship between art and the society. He opines that "art itself is a social phenomenon…because a work of art affects other people, and contributes to the affirmation or devaluation of ideas, goals and values, and is a social force which with its emotional or ideological weight shakes or moves people."

MORE THAN A WOMAN

The video produced by Ossy Okeke (2005), and directed by Tarilla Thompson, exemplifies the *femme fatale* image which Eko and Emenyi (2002:172) identify as one popular image which has been transferred from the print media into the Nollywood videos. Such a disposition has been greatly criticized for continuing women's derogatory representation in videos. The video, which utilizes the conventions of the thriller genre (action, car chases and explosions), eulogises rather than condemns roguery through its celebration of Trechia's expertise and success. Her prowess and ingenuity, which are unfortunately used for criminality, exceed those of an ordinary woman. She is a thief who successfully shoplifts some of the most expensive and heavily guarded jewellery, no matter how superb the security is at the shops. She is very resourceful and clever at organizing and mapping out strategies for prospective operations. A character like Trechia, who possesses great beauty and smartness, is open to ambiguous readings and can be regarded as potentially corrupting to those women who may identify with her. Also, the manner in which her beauty and criminality is aestheticised and presented as seductive, positions her as an enviable model rather than as a bad person. As a female villain, Trechia is the complete incarnation of a dangerous woman.

OMATA WOMEN

This film is produced by Okigwe Ekweh (2003), and directed by Ndubisi Okoh. The image of women in this video debases womanhood and should be discouraged in Nollywood videos. The protagonists in the video are represented as evil women but who can easily recruit other women who choose to identify with aura of being 'Omata Women' who are notorious because of their beauty and the flamboyant lifestyles that they lead. The narrative is another use of the *femme fatale*/ 'dangerous woman' trope in Nollywood. Here four married women, Chinasa, Ijiele, Ifeoma and Nkechi, devise a dangerous plot to dominate their own husbands, even if this means killing them. They seek to acquire riches at all cost. Their consortium results in the formation of the Onitsha Market Women Association and they tag themselves as "the live wire of the town." They

recruit other women, promising them better recognition. However, the zeal with which they pursue their goals gets the better of them as these four central characters have their families destroyed in the end.

For instance, Chinasa kills her husband through the assistance of hired assassins. The primary motive for her act is the need to avoid the shame that would follow once her husband learns about her extra-marital affair with Dozie. Her other motivation is the desire to inherit all the worldly goods that her husband has acquired. Later, she also goes after Dozie killing him and taking his money too. Her last victim is a minor, Ejike, whom she lures into a relationship and then she dupes him of 1.5 million naira. She makes him hand over the money to her and later swears an oath that she had not received the money from Ejike. This becomes her undoing for she ends up being struck dead by the deity, Ogugwu. Ijiele on her part reduces her husband, Nduka, to a mere house boy by casting a spell on him. By so doing, she destroys her own home. Meanwhile, she also destroys her friend Ifeoma's home. She achieves this by divulging to Ifeoma's husband the secret affairs the latter has been engaging in with her landlord. Ijiele is motivated by spite following a disagreement with Ifeoma. Consequently, Ifeoma is driven by her husband to the village and asked to report herself to her parents. She is also asked to face the same village deity and confess. She however refuses to do this and instead seeks to embark on a revenge mission which sees her pouring chemicals on Ijiele's face and mutilating her beauty forever. It is at this point that Ijiele's husband is released from the spell earlier cast on him. The last of the women, Nkechi, is a trained lawyer who initially seeks to practice the profession. However, her husband thinks otherwise and sets up a super boutique in the Onitsha Market for her to manage. This compromise marks the beginning of the disintegration of their familial harmony as she comes in contact with a group of friends purporting to be running a business association. She is thoroughly proselytized into prostitution by the trio - Chinasa, Ijele and Ifeoma, having been made to believe that it is the fastest means of making wealth. Her husband's knowledge of her extra marital affairs results in a fight and he dies in the fight. Being widowed makes her miserable and she becomes a drug addict. In one of her inebriated moments, she is stabbed to death by

her little daughter. Her death ends the tale of four women whose behaviour leaves much to be desired.

The five videos summarized above represent the contrasting representations of women in Nollywood and they form the primary material for this study. Chapter Two is an overview on the portrayal of women in Nollywood videos and the attendant debates that it has generated. Drawing on feminist film theory and the image approach, it locates the social, cultural and gendered nature of Nollywood in terms of its production ethos, thematic preoccupations and aesthetic strategies and choices.

Chapter Three is an appraisal of *I Was Wrong* as an example of the Christian evangelical genre and elaboration of the life-style choices that face women. I am interested in how *I Was Wrong* deploys melodramatic conventions in its exploration of sentiments that are often associated with positive and negative choices in life. Such sentiments create a moral universe that affirms the idea of virtue always triumphing over vice. It focuses on the strategic device of inventing the evangelical myth of salvation in moments of crisis of its protagonists. The chapter also looks at the Pentecostal religious upsurge in Nollywood videos and its attendant aesthetic values.

Chapter Four turns to the politics of governance and gender in *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke*. Both works explore the heroic interventions of women on the nationalpolitical stage and challenge the popular representation of women as only pursuing selfish interest rather than contributing to governance and the nation. The chapter will locate the heroines as role models who break out of the confines that dictate governance as male prerogatives and who extol the idea of solidarity among women. The latter supports Aniagolu-Okoye's view that women do lend support to one another and are not each other's enemies.

Chapter Five privileges the intricacies of the domestic sphere and familial relations through a reading of *More than a Woman* and *Omata Women.* While the narrative of *More than a Woman* is centered around an individual character, *Omata Women* presents

us with a bevy of married women whose hallmark is the destruction of both their own husbands and their family lives for the enhancement of their professional and economic careers and wellbeing. The perceived aberrations of the women are symbolized in and critiqued through their association with lesbianism.

Chapter Six, in conclusion, will revisit the major concerns and insights of the previous chapters with regards to the representations of women in Nollywood videos. The chapter will also reflect on the possible reasons and biases behind the various imaginary representations of women in the videos and the marginal presence of women in Nollywood as an industry. Finally, a case will be made for why more positive representations of women in the Nigerian video industry will arguably be a positive development for the society at large. The need to engage with this concern is crucial since the videos are receiving a lot of currency within Africa and the world. It is very necessary to represent women in relation to their real-life experiences, challenges and identities.

CHAPTER TWO

MAPPING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NOLLYWOOD VIDEOS

> Since African films, rather than allowing viewers to escape the reality of their lives, actually shake viewers up and leave them with deep existential questions to reflect upon, African cinema inevitably ought to be "read" against the backdrop of schools of thoughts, such as structuralism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, postmodernism, feminism, postcolonial theories, but also across disciplines, such as history, archaeology, and the likes.
>
> Martial Friendethie (2009:1).

This chapter sets the scene for my subsequent exploration of the politics of gender and its representation in Nollywood by teasing out the major writings and perspectives that shape my grasp of the concerns and debates that are central to my argument. This is done in order to establish the major influences that have led to the dominant forms of portrayal of women in Nollywood videos and that generally fail to portray Nigerian women in their diversity and complexity. It commences with a consideration of the critical responses that have addressed the gendered nature of Nollywood narratives and some of the key socio-cultural determinants that partially account for the proliferation of stereotypes of women. The chapter then elaborates my recourse to feminist film theory, the theoretical approach that will guide this study. It further interrogates some of the different approaches within feminism that are pertinent to readings that will inform my interrogation of the representation of women in Nollywod videos. The two main approaches that are highlighted are Laura Mulvey's ideas on "the image approach." Even though Mulvey's work has been subjected to criticism that also led her to revise some of her ideas, I still consider her interventions useful for my study. It is also because of my awareness of the limitations in Mulvey's work, that has led to my use of "the image approach".

Nollywood and the Representation of Women

The Nollywood video industry is now a major player across the globe. Yet, Nollywood videos, as has already been pointed out, have not been subjected to a level of critical appraisal consistent with their widespread popularity and impact on society. It is fair to surmise that given Nollywood's large viewership and the popularity of the videos, Nollywood videos deserve to be more carefully analyzed and evaluated for their impact on society in general and on women and their role within society in particular. This is especially so with regards to whether and how the videos reproduce patriarchal gender relationships in Nigeria. Often Nollywood videos depict women mostly in the traditional roles of house-wives, mothers and cooks. This is as a result of the society's cultural values which mainly place women within marginal traditional roles. Such a depiction of women in only domestic settings is arguably at variance with the modern-day reality of Nigerian women. Today, in addition to the typical domestic roles that women perform, women are also engaged in a range of activities in virtually every walk of life. In contemporary Nigerian society for instance, apart from being mothers or house-wives, women are also lawyers, pilots, pharmacists, medical doctors, and engineers, to mention just a few. The crucial question which arises therefore is why do Nollywood videos continue to portray women mostly within traditional roles? Secondly, are women's traditional roles and values better than their changing modern roles and values?

In contrast to African Literature which has been subjected to an appreciable number of feminist appraisals over the years and which, in turn, has created a positive impact on the portrayal of women in African Literature, the same cannot be said about Nollywood and the interrogation of the stereotypes of women in Nollywood videos. The issue of the marginalization and the silencing of women in literary works, which denied women their historical roles and social statuses, permeated the works of early canonical writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and others. In their foundational texts they tended to ignore women and their socio-economic and political roles in the pre-colonial societies. However, female writers like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Akachie

Ezeigbo, amongst others, have for example, used their works to write back at male writer's stereotypical ways of representing women. The emergence of such African women writers, most of whom were influenced by the early African male writers, has also influenced male writers to adopt revisionist strategies in their later texts. For instance Achebe's later text *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) deviates from his earlier texts to reposition women and acknowledge their contributions to society. Similarly, it is my contention that with more Nigerian women being involved in the video industry, as well as more feminist criticism of the representations of women in Nollywood videos, the current state of play can be changed and allow for a positive impact on the portrayal of women in the videos.

The selected videos of this study represent most of the general tendencies that are typical of the representation of women in the Nollywood videos. As noted before, women are portrayed from perspectives that are stuck in the stark and false binaries of women as being either 'good' or 'evil'. They are either praised for fulfilling patriarchal and limiting roles and identities or they are presented as murderers, thieves, home breakers and as incarnations of many forms of evil. Women are rarely presented in more complex terms and as making solid contributions to the betterment of the lives of their families and societies. My argument is that, on the first level, the problematic depiction of women is the result of soico-cultural influences that reproduce gendered bias and stereotypes.

Melissa Thackway (2003: 149) contends that African women face a lot of cultural constraints which could be reversed through sensitization programmes. She intimates how women's societies and Non Governmental Agencies (NGO's) have been trying to educate women on the need to end certain traditional practices like female circumcision and child marriages among others. She points out that women who have been sensitized by various women's agencies have started applying such knowledge to their respective situations. This trend is best seen in women's active participation in social movements and in becoming more politically concerned with how governments are run. This is the type of activist role that Jenny in *The Tyrant*, one of the videos of our study, undertakes

which leads the President, General Idris Amino, to summon her to the presidential village.

It becomes important to inquire why this same collective spirit cannot be exercised to break down traditional practices and tenets that infringe on women's rights, especially those that reduce women to 'voiceless types'. There is also a popular position that tends to assume that traditional practices against women are stronger in the rural areas than in the urban centres. Buttressing this argument, MacRae (1999: 252) affirms that "conditions for women are more especially rigid and harsh within the rural society but to some extent more open to change in the cities." The reason could be that women in the cities are gradually becoming more apprehensive of certain practices which they cannot submit themselves to and that cities such as Lagos allow for greater degrees of agency. For instance, in Nigeria women who live in the cities will not subject their daughters to circumcision as they know the negative effects of such practices. But those in the rural communities have no choice since they continue to live in the village and failure to yield will mean contravening traditional laws. However, the fact that the society has continued to privilege traditional practices against women suggest why MacRae's (1999: 252) analysis of women in films may be seen as championing "the cause of justice for women and reform of traditional sex roles."

In trying to question such strong traditional practices on women in the rural societies, one cannot refute the fact that rural societies are upholding the myths which support patriarchal values. This is where M. H. Abrams' (1957:111) contention on myths becomes relevant to the discussion:

> Myth is a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain…why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, as well as to establish the rationale for social customs and observances and the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives.

Simon Gikandi (1987:150) contends that in Africa "myths have actually been naturalized by the dominant culture or class to justify its hegemony". He further notes that ''through

myths and ritual the activities of the ruling class are recycled as the will of the god." This explains why and how the role of women in the society is rationalised as divine will through myths that reproduce class and gender inequalities. With regards to patriarchy and women, Mary Kolawole (1998:7) argues that many cultural myths have a negative effect on women because they contribute "significantly to women's self-devaluation and sense of communal belonging, economic, social and political status." This explains the paucity of videos that concern the representation of women in political governance in Nigeria since political power is associated with men. Instead, women are portrayed almost always in domestic spheres, fulfilling what is regarded as their traditional roles. Similarly, economic power is also considered a male prerogative and big businesses are owned by men who are also the bread winners for their families. This helps to condition women to see themselves as dependants who must rely on men for their upkeep and survival.

The role and significance of myths is consistent with Homi Bhabha's (1994:35, 37) insight that, as an element of culture, traditions are the "mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed …how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory, but a strategy of representing authority". The struggle for independence created opportunities for the creation of new, enabling and non-sexist myths in the arts. For as Ukadike (1994:25) suggests, "with the clamor for freedom and subsequent ushering in of post independent structures … individual stories became synonymous and indicative of national character." In the postcolonial era, Ukadike alludes to Jameson's contention that what was earlier seen as "the story of the private individual destiny[becomes] an allegory of the embattled situation of the third world culture and society"(Ukadike, 1994:25). Ukadike further insists that "cultural productions, literature of protest, and cinematic practices, for example, take the form of deliberate fragmentation and are suffused with particular authorial voice" (Ukadike, 1994:25).

In reference to African cinema, Suzanne MacRae[23] (1999:252), points out that many African directors portray characters that exemplify "urgent social and ethical problems for women" such as polygamy, poverty, heavy domestic responsibilities, deprivation of widows' legal rights, physical brutality and the indignity of a second class status. MacRae therefore calls for the use of social realism to document issues pertaining to woman rights in Africa. She identifies African films as a powerful social tool for the emancipation of the women. According to her, films can empower women and facilitate their ability to undertake social action that will help to eliminate destructive traditional practices on women (MacRae 1999: 247). Similarly, Med Hondo (1996:40) defines the role of cinema in the following terms:

> "most important is the role of the cinema in the construction of peoples' consciousness. Cinema is the mechanism par excellence for penetrating the minds of our people, influencing their everyday social behavior, directing them…."

Hondo emphasises that films can influence the social behaviour of people and that film can shape people's characters either positively or negatively. It is incumbent then that we remain cognizant of the ways in which Nollywood videos replicate pre-existing stereotypes in Nigeria in their representation of women.

Bias and Representation: the politics of stereotyping women

Since recorded human history, women in Nigeria have been associated with mythical and other societal stigmas that have assumed the status of stereotypes that pass as common sense. Such stereotypes are used to prescribe and restrict their activities in the society that, in turn, privilege patriarchy. By stereotypes I am referring to conventional or formulaic conceptions or images which, according to Renata Rabichev (1996:104), provide a platform where certain groups in the society are "categorized and represented in a generalized manner." It is most common to find stereotypes in rumours, stories, legends, myths and folktales among others. Rabichev, argues that stereotypes have

[23] Suzanne MacRae (1999:252) further contends that many films indicate a serious moral/ ethical dimension in women's defiance of social rules and agree in the women's revolt.

become a tool to "perpetuate certain ideologies in the society through the reading, explanation, anticipation and prediction that it generates". Such opinions however are often erroneous because those who anticipate or predict the behaviour or abilities of others may not have had the opportunity of relating or engaging with the people that they classify. One important fact as Jordan and Jordan note is that stereotypes are unable to represent truth (quoted in Rabichev, 1996:105), rather they feed into political ideology.

One of the functions that stereotypes perform is that they have become a way of reading gendered divisions in society. Not surprisingly, sexist stereotypes perform a key factor in representations of gender in Nollywood videos. They validate and rationalise why and how women are marginalized in their roles in Nollywood stories. This brings to bear Chichi Aniagolu-Okoye's (2006:1) views on how drama, cinema and the Nigeria videos have replaced the traditional storytelling and are "influencing behaviour, perpetuating stereotypes or re-inventing new ones." The old stereotypes are ones that are variations on the general characterization of women as the weaker sex and as evil or wicked. Men, in contrast, are the custodians of virtue, strength, competence, leadership and managerial abilities, as well as always being very rational in their thinking. As they age, men gain in maturity and widom and are associated with benign dispositions towards their families and societies. Elderly women, on the other hand, are reduced to caricatures of the mother-in-law who often is rendered as disturbing her son's marriage because she wants to continually gain her son's attention from his wife. Thus, in Nigeria, mothers-in-law have been branded as witches and gossips abound about how mothers-in-laws are responsible for most broken homes in the country. Such stereotypes continue to depict fathers-in-law as peacemakers and well wishers of their daughters-in-law. It becomes questionable when the society knows that some marriages break-up even when there is no surviving mother-in-law. However, no fingers point to the father-in-law as constituting any threat to the peace and tranquility of his son's marriage.

Women are equally rumoured to employ supernatural powers [like the use of charms popularly known in Nigeria as *Juju*: an extra ordinary power that coaxes people to do the things they will not ordinary do if they have control of themselves] to make their

marriages work or to gain their husband's attention. Marriages where the husbands help their wives to do domestic chores are rumoured to be those where women have resorted to *juju* in order to enslave their husbands and taken over men's roles. This is because traditionally, a man is not supposed to take on any roles that suggest he is 'turning himself into a woman'. Any married man seen washing dishes or clothes in Nigeria is reviled and dismissed as being reduced to a woman by his wife's fetish powers. Such rumours are enough to change the man who may really think that he has been emasculated by his wife.

Another area where women are accused of using *juju* to influence men is in marriage decisions. Talk on the streets of Nigeria is full of accounts of how women have used diabolical means to change a certain man's heart from marrying his parent's desired wife. For instance, like in most other ethnic communities, women from Calabar in Nigeria, are said to use *juju* on men to compel men to marry them. This has led most male migrants or visitors to Calabar to be warned by relatives or friends to beware of Calabar women. Even the realization that the hospitality of the women of Calabar is the reason that endears them to most men who visit the town has not changed their stereotypes.

The flip side of women using *juju* on men are the rumours of how women have killed their spouses in order to take over their wealth. This stereotype of women as narrow minded and money-mad schemers is very common in most societies in Nigeria and is the cause of widows being made to take an oath or being given the water used in bathing their husband's corpse to drink to prove their innocence after the death of their husband. Failure to accept such practices either on religious grounds or for hygienic reasons, only helps to condemn the women as murderers or of having a hand in their spouse's death. But the same society that fingers the wife as being responsible for the killing of her husband does not provide for men to be subjected to similar practices when their wives die, however rich the women were. Rather, the men are free to remarry even within a short period of time.

The stereotype of women as money-mad schemers is also a variation on the caricature of women as lazy and dependent on men for their survival. Such women are said to be unwilling to work and be economically productive since they assume they can entice rich men into marriages. This is despite the general knowledge and evidence of Nigerian women as hardworking and industrious and providing food, clothing and shelter for their families. Aniagolu–Okoye (2006: 63) suggests that:

> Nigerian women are perhaps one of the hardest working African women who have excelled in almost every endeavour in life. Yoruba women as far back as the 18th century were recognised as great merchants and traders and played major roles in the then Oyo Empire. The Igbo woman has always been the consummate matriarch of her family who works very hard to ensure the welfare of her family.

Aniagolu–Okoye's positive appraisal of Yoruba and Igbo women also applies to women from other parts of the country.

Women have also been labeled as prostitutes, husband snatchers and adulteresses. As prostitutes, they are seen as parasites that drain money from men and leave them with incurable diseases. Men's role in prostitution, whether as pimps or patrons, is never considered nor turned into stereotypes. Likewise, adulterous women as stereotypes, have male accomplices whose liaisons with the adulterous women receive no publicity at all. When women are either labeled as prostitutes or adulterous it points to how unreliable they are, but the male figure has no queries to answer for having illicit affairs with the same women tagged as prostitutes or adulteresses'. These double-standards are consistent with the fact that in Nigeria polyandry is not practiced and is a great social taboo while polygamy which, gives men the right to marry as many women as they can afford is generally accepted. However, women who decide to opt out of marriages that do not cater for their needs, are immediately labeled prostitutes.

Women are also rumoured as not being capable of keeping secrets and, consequently, they should not be trusted with information since they have a primordial instinct to

divulge whatever information they get. This ensures their exclusion from governance and policy formulation which results in their exclusions and silencing.

Most Nollywood video makers have been greatly influenced by the regional and national stereotypes and it becomes necessary to inquire if stereotypes constitute an expression of male video makers' hidden fears and anxieties about women. This is because Nollywood videos have continued to strongly feed on stereotypes in their representations of women as they prefer to only portray women in sensational roles. This is irrespective of the fact that some women are the bread-winners, some have become Director Generals, Managing Directors, and Chief executives of banks, industries and government establishments among others.

The issue of male dominance in film production has been identified as one of the reasons for the portrayal of negative images of women in Nigerian videos. However, such depictions are not peculiar to Nollywood and they can be traced back to Hollywood's visual iconography as well. Claire Johnston (1999:32─ 33) reveals that women working in Hollywood are not given ample opportunity for self-expression under the sexist ideology which conditions roles for women. Consequently, women's position and roles rarely change except for a few modifications in the area of fashion. Commenting on the development of Nollywood as an industry, Ebele Eko and Imoh Emenyi (2002:170) bemoan the fact that most of the Nollywood producers and directors are male. As a result, these male practitioners have tended to use the camera to privilege the position of men at the expense of women. They support their contentions by analysing the representation of women in *Dark Goddess* (1995) and *True Confession* (1995), Eko and Emenyi argue that the principal characters in the movies *Dark Goddess* and *True Confession*, Akin Thomas and Mabel Joshua, depict dehumanized womanhood regardless of their exalted positions as skilled women in the two movies. They go on to conclude that the trend goes a long way to "attest to Althusser's claim on the use of 'Repressive State Apparatuses' to naturalize oppression" (Eko and Emenyi, 2002:172). They equally allude to the fact that the electronic media seems to have latched onto the popular image of the *femme fatale* from the print media.

In their analysis Eko and Emenyi show that many of the videos "which have littered the Nigeria polity" still continue with the old negative portrayals of women, confirming what they describe as "perhaps the completion of women's story as told by men." The duo, however, notes that there are "a few exceptions" which includes three of the videos that will be analysed in this study: *The Tyrant* 1&2, *Masterstrokes* 1&2 and *I Was Wrong.* These videos portray women in a positive manner and they celebrate womanhood by giving their heroines identities and agency alongside the male characters in the narratives. The heroines' admirable characters engender emulation. The latter videos are in contrast to most Nollywood videos that "recount sordid tales of female atrocities against the social system" (Eko and Emenyi, 2002: 172). Eko and Emenyi's list of films which portray negative images of women include *Glamour Girls* 1&2. *Without Love*, *Deadly Affairs*, *Disappointment*, *Neka the Pretty Serpent*, *Flesh and Blood*, *Blackout*, *Most Wanted*, *Visa to Hell*, *Chain Reaction*, *The Price*, *Highway to the Grave*, and *Black Power,* amongst others. The question then is if Nollywood videos depict women negatively, what negative influences do they have among women who are arguably the greatest consumers of these videos? Afolabi Adesanya (2002:48) and Carmelia Garritano (2002: 167) reveal that women watch Nollywood videos more than their male counterparts. This is because videos have become more accessible within the confines of individual homes and they continue to be a major source of entertainment for women whose social life is restricted by traditional laws that bar them from public arenas like the cinema.

Chinyere Stella Okunna's (2000 and 2002) research findings on Nollywood videos also confirm that Nollywood videos are filled with negative and stereotypical images of women. According to Okunna, women are presented in Nollywood videos as morally bankrupt, wayward and easily drawn to material things which, in turn, cause them to break traditional moral codes by committing taboos such as murder, infidelity, child abandonment and lesbianism. Ironically, even though women are seen as the cause of many family problems, they are still regarded as suited for domestic rather than professional careers. As we will see in Chapter five, the characters of 'Nkechi' and

'Ifeoma' in *Omata Women* have to contend with this paradox. While Nkechi is forced by her husband to abandon her legal profession and to rather become a market trader at the Onitsha Main Market, Ifeoma is forced by her husband to become a full time housewife. It seems an anathema for Nollywood videos to depict career women as successful wives and mothers and that women can both manage successful families and good careers. Instead, the videos only show the reverse that women with careers are unable to have good family relationships because of their professional lives.

In Chichi Aniagolu-Okoye's (2006: 4-5) view, the recurring stereotypical portrayals in the videos range from those of housewives whose husbands cheat on them, to the "husband-snatching bitch." It also includes women who dabble in the occult as a way to achieve supernatural powers with which they try to get lots of money from the men with whom they are involved and at the expense of the first wives, to "the young suffering girl from the village…." For Aniagolu-Okoye, Nollywood depicts women as each other's worst enemies. She however debunks this position and suggests that such woman to woman enmity is overblown and does not conform to the life experiences of women. Aniagolu-Okoye argues that, in reality, women have always cultivated good friendships among themselves and often serve as "each other's companions, confidantes, protectors and advocates." In her summation, she advises that:

> While cinema is said to be in many ways a depiction of reality, it is also an excellent vehicle for projecting society into the future and giving it a glimpse of what it could aspire to be. The censors' board should pay more attention to the message of Nigerian films instead of being solely concerned with nudity or lack thereof. Cinema is the window through which others view a people… an excellent vehicle for giving Nigeria and indeed African woman a new image of self worth, pride, values and aspirations.

Carmela Garritano (2000:167) examines the images of women and their significance in *Hostages*, *Dust to Dust*, and *True Confession*. She is of the opinion that women do not fare well in these three videos given that they are portrayed, for the most part, "as helpless objects acted on by others…." And they are presented as morally bankrupt and without any redeeming qualities. Garritano concludes that such representations clearly brings into focus the gendered and biased ways in which the female characters are created

and portrayed.For his part, Onookome Okome (2004:12) draws attention to how Nollywood narratives "displace the critical and intellectual voice of women," even when they try "to reaffirm the beauty of their bodies in this space of being." He further cautions that attention needs to be paid to how negative depictions play a role "in shaping the real language of gender and power relations." Okome (2002:12) notes that until recently, scholarship and feminist writings and debates are starting to inform people's responses to the veracity and stereotypes peddled by Nollywood and that practitioners are likely to be "concerned with the changes in the traditional image of women in Nigeria's post-colonial framework." Videos, according to him, have opened new debates for scholars and cultural enthusiasts.

An important aspect of Okome's argument comes through in his reading of the politics of gender in *Glamour Girls* 1&2 where he shows the myriad of ambiguous and contradictory factors that come into play in the representation of women. *Glamour Girls 1 & 2*, in their exploration of the perennial theme of prostitution went beyond the mere repeating of social and gender stereotypes. It explored a pertinent contemporary reality and did so in ways that foregrounded the 'nervous conditions' of Lagos. The videos look at the practices of call girls in Lagos, initially, in parallel to that of Sandra who is located in the movie's village space. Part one of the video explains how girls like Sandra are lured into prostitution when they migrate from their local villages to Lagos and have to survive under difficult and harsh circumstances. This sets up a conflict between the ideal moral values they grew up with in the village and the contrasting values of the fast moving city of Lagos with its hybrid cultures and where anything goes. Village girls are thrown into confusion and the end result is that Lagos changes them to see previously taboo practices such as prostitution as an acceptable profession that guarantees survival amidst the high unemployment rates. The second instalment of the video explores how human trafficking is destroying young girls by seducing them into false promises of fame and wealth in Europe. In Nigeria young women have been promised good working opportunities in Europe but when they get there they discover that they are forced into prostitution by those who misled them and took them to Europe. In this sense, Volume 2 of *Glamour Girls* (the Italian Connection) is an example of Nollywood video serving as a

mirror to the Nigerian society through its ability to draw the attention of the patrons of Nollywood to the contemporary social realities and dangers.

It is important, however, to remain mindful of the fact that "a film should not be judged against reality because reality is not understood to be 'out there' waiting to be described". Rather, reality is always mediated, in which case film "represents one mechanism of this mediation" (Gledhill quoted in Garritano 2000:190). To Ayari (1996:181) the biased representations of women in African cinema "is the result of the male gaze at a mostly male society" and this applies to *Glamour Girls* even though the project is one example of Nollywood considered to have had a positive impact on the society. Farida Ayari (1996:182) captures the appropriate disposition of scholars: "[t]his does not mean that the portrayal of women in African films is utterly false; only that regardless of the degree of realism, veracity or sensitivity, the representation remains a male one". Consequently, on the other hand, in *Glamour Girls* prostitution also continues to be used as a metaphor for the social degradation of those women who practice the trade. The latter position is confirmed by Okome (2002:22) through his observation that "when the stories in which women are overwhelmed are resolved, it is often the male voice of the city and the domestic arena that triumphs." Ultimately, the settings of Nollywood videos (be it village, town or city) has no significant impact or difference in the representations of women.

Nollywood, Romance and the Politics of Gender

According to Oyeroke Oyewumi (1997: 39) gender is best understood as "an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals [based on their body-types], orders the social process of everyday life, and is built into major social organizations of the society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics." It is no wonder then that even the most innocuous narratives in Nollywood engage with gender relations and politics in one way or the other. Arguably, the latter is particularly true of popular genres. As Newell (2002:4) reveals that popular genres like romance have been important forms for writers whose works do not belong to mainstream or canonical works and such

popular texts are "capable of conveying messages about gender and society which are saturated with new meanings." She argues that the reading of romance in West Africa aids men's understanding of women's behaviour (Newell,2002:2). Newell (2002: 2) further uses Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to exemplify how it generates responses amongst African readers who are anchored in "popular" local conceptions of gender roles, the self and society. The subversive impulse in the romance genre is because:

> The romance formula serves to license attitudes and opinions which are challenging to established social practices such as bride price, arranged marriage and polygamy…Through the romances intense, personalized commitment to individuals, as well as its promotion of young female characters and their right to marry self-selected partners, authors can express criticisms and protests that might otherwise have been censored by their society.

By providing alternatives to characters, romance writers are expressing their personal ideals but they are also "promoting alternative social models for the community at large" (Newell, 2002:3). This arguably explains why women as writers, filmmakers, or as audiences, read and like romances that often present melodramatic resolutions to the problems that characters face in a story. Women work more with romances as it provides them the space to re-write the existing gender relations and ideologies. Women as Newell (2002: 3) recounts:

> Rather than overthrowing existing gender ideologies, these writers work within them and rewrite the most rigid beliefs about the moral qualities that make women into good wives, spiritual mentors, or good - time girls. Positioned thus, they might problematise the figures of the ideal wife, the rural mother or the good- time girl, but they do not necessarily reject these popular constrictions of femininity.

It is also important to point out that popular fiction use storylines and themes that are drawn from the every-day experiences of characters. Newell (2002:4) argues that even recurring character types, such as the good-time girl and the gangster, can be of importance as they provide later generations with the opportunity to "glimpse the kinds of didactic, historically specific commentaries that have been composed by Africans in the distant and more recent past." She concludes that such popular character types that engage in sexual promiscuity or crime "symbolise different things at different times"

(Newell, 2002: 4). In a similar vein, Okome (2007: 13) argues that Nollywood's engagement with promiscuity could, apart from casting women as symbolic of the decay/evil in the society, suggest other coded meanings. Prostitution, for instance, also surfaces the socio-political and economic contradictions in the postcolonial cities of Nigeria and how they destroy women's lives as a result of the capitalistic materialism that has eaten deep into every facet of city lives. In his discussion of the video *Domitila* which is also the name of the heroine, Okome suggests that Domitila's engagement in prostitution helps in reading the city of Lagos as evil. Domitila's experiences are also used to depict gender relations in the society and to draw attention to the tactics of survival that women in big cities are forced to participate in. Domitila also signals the gap between the rich and the poor in the society as seen in the fact that Domitila has a job that does not pay enough for her to meet her own needs let alone those of her family at home (Warri). The search for greener pastures, as Okome argues, is one of the foremost reasons why people emigrate to cities such as Lagos and Abuja. The movement of Domitila to Lagos becomes a national commentary considering the fact that she comes from Warri a town in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which is one of the foremost oil producing towns. Symbolically, the oil producing industry has not translated into better living conditions for ordinary people. It has rather impoverished them because of the various forms of pollution that the industry generates.

However, apart from the occasions where prostitution is used as a metaphor for the 'ills of the nation', Nollywood's use of prostitution tends to enforce the unequal gender relations in the society. Nollywood tends to use the romance genre in a manner that also draws on the conventions of the soap opera and melodrama. Dina Ligaga (2008:82) shows in her reading of the Radio theatre play *Immoral Network*, how romance can present contending meanings that audiences are meant to filter. Romance, she opines, provides "spaces that encourage audiences to engage with the message being given in the texts for purposes of self development." She argues that in a bid to "emphasise a developmental lesson," the binaries of good and evil "have to be made clear". This is because the play seeks to "encourage a particular kind of reading among listeners." In a bid to achieve that purpose, different strategies are employed like "multiple storylines,

exaggeration and 'misrepresentation' to emphasis different lessons in the play." Similarly, most Nollywood videos that depict women within the dichotomies of good versus evil employ such strategies. Viewers are given the chance to choose between what the producers impress as good and, in most cases, characters who make wrong choices in life are eventually, punished.

Arguably, latent in the above depictions and possibilities of social transformation, is still the fact that the romance genre can also be used to reproduce and privilege gender inequality and patriarchy. Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (1997:126) argues that "because most of the complex issues around gender construction and stratification in Africa have not been fully addressed by Africa women themselves, we have been denied the analytical tools to question assumptions made in critical circles about such areas as popular culture." So even what are supposed to be exemplary characters who uphold "Christianity and the nuclear family ideal of marriage" which "were supposed to liberate and propel them into a progressive life" can end up leaving women with "powerless, handmaiden roles at the side of husbands" (Patel, 2006:5) In a sense, there are many ways in which the binary of good and evil can devalue the role and status of women. Ligaga (2008:88) makes the important point that popular forms need to exemplify the "necessity of demonstrating lessons rather than presenting them as general moral axiom." Ogu Enemaku (2003:74) has gone further and suggested that many Nollywood videos are not able to teach moral lessons properly because of "the sordidness of the plot and characterization as reflected in weird rituals, sexual orgy, debauchery and esoteric scenes that can create fear, panic and moral recklessness."

Nollywood videos on romance tend to reproduce patriarchal tenets where women have limited rights and men have unbridled rights and privileges which must not be questioned and are enforced to the letter by men. It makes Nollywood, and other media platforms such as television, sites for enforcing the gendered notions of the society. Nollywood's use of the romance genre also reinforces stereotypes that are gender specific, and in the process it institutionalizes patriarchy. Romance is called up to rationalise the norms of the patriarchal society and the stereotypes enshrine the expectations that are patriachally,

defined as male prerogatives. This accounts for why women in political videos are either wives, as in first ladies, and those who are used sexually for men's pleasure still perform their primary socially expected roles as women.

Feminist Theoretical Approaches and Nollywood

Any study of film soon unearths the fact that there are many competing theories which can guide film analysis with the key ones being semiotics theory, feminist theory, anthropological theory, neo-Marxist theory, and neo-structuralism theory, amongst others. While I will be drawing on a wide range of theoretical ideas depending on the videos and issues that I will be dealing with, my appreciation of the Nollywood videos under study will be mainly informed by feminist film theory. According to Hilde Hein (1993:33), feminist film theory "enhances our experience of art by accounting for it more accurately" especially because of the ways in which "it expands the range of what we consider to be art and prepares the way to legitimate new art forms; and how it revalue's subjectivity in art and augments it to include women's experience and how it valorises new modes of production; and support more active responses." Hein's position of what feminist theory seeks to achieve in analysing art will guide my analysis of the videos.

Feminism as a film theory, according to Noel Carroll (1996:268), "is the most visible movement in film criticism today, and the most dominant trend in that movement is psychoanalytically informed." He contends that it is necessary to analyze the way the image of women is portrayed in films, thus revealing further that "the investigation of the image of women in film begins with the rather commonsensical notion that the recurring images of women in popular media may have some influence on how people think of women in real life." His position is validated by discoveries which have shown that people learn to identify their emotional states "in terms of the paradigm scenarios, which, in turn also shape our emotions." To buttress his suppositions, Carroll quotes Ronald de Sousa's claims on the working of the paradigm scenarios:

> My hypothesis is this: we are made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with the paradigm scenarios. These are drawn first from our daily life as

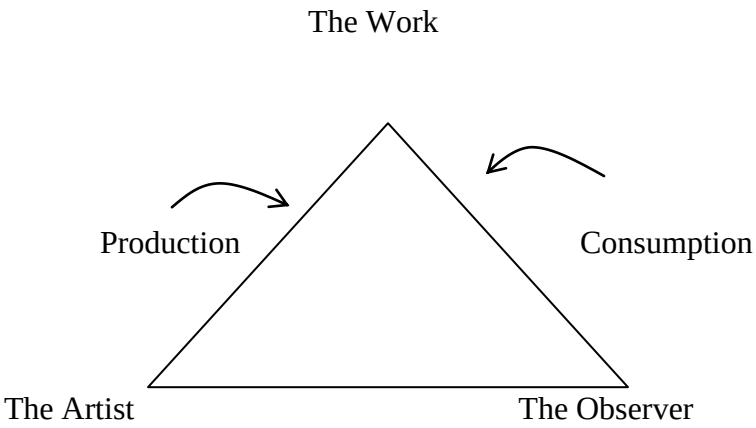
> small children. And later reinforced by the stories, art and culture to which we are exposed.

Carroll notes that psychoanalysis has helped to sharpen the theoretical direction of feminist research. He is of the view that psychoanalytic feminist film theory provides the paradigm with which the image of women in film can be redeemed. This is since feminism is convened with how women can have a better self definition for themselves.

Feminism thus goes beyond merely understanding the ways in which the image of women is represented to what Boyce Davies (1994:28) regards as feminisms ability "to transform what it is to be a woman in the society". Indeed identifying a problem is one thing and being able to know what choices can be employed to bring about a positive solution is another exercise. This presupposes that changing the images of women from those which the patriarchal social order has constructed, requires a concerted effort by both female and male film artists, using any available medium including film.

Diane Waldman (1990:17), explains that the effectiveness of film and video as tools which can be used to inject "new-sexist values and equally be used to encourage awareness of alternative possibilities for growth" should be re-valued especially in relation to correcting stereotypical representations which have been transferred into films from the society's cultural inclinations. This suggests that the cultural ethos embodied in patriarchal systems, through which societal norms can be changed or revised, should be re-evaluated to remove various forms of biases which have been seeped into films as a result of how the society sees and places women.

How then can this be achieved when women, who should be at the vanguard of bringing about a positive image of women, are relegated to the background in film production? Brian Moon (1992) makes clear that "most critics argue that gender inequalities are produced at three levels: 1).Through the production of text. 2). Through the structure and language of the text .3). And through the reading practices". This in turn brings to focus James Monaco's artistic "triangle" which captures the network of these relationships.



He notes that the relationship between the artist and the work yields theories of the production of art, while analysis of the relationship between the work and the observer gives rise to the theories of its consumption. Through the triangular description of the sum total of a work of art we see that the woman fits in mainly as the observer of the finished product in which most often she constitutes the primary focus of narratives and discourses. This situation reflects how women are not actively involved in film production in order to also contribute to their representations but are only there as actresses to act out the characters and visions conceived by male filmmakers, many of them based on stereotypes. As far as Nollywood is concerned, the triangle of production identifies why depictions of women remain the way they are given the absence of women in Nollywod videos as producers and directors. An increase of women in video production will be an important catalyst in expanding the possible representations of women in Nollywood productions. The triangle further expounds on the idea that the producers of the work of art have control of the thematic focus and, again, this is why the participation of women will help to address the challenges of negative images. Francois Brugman (1988:10) identifies three key phases in the making and consumption of film. He shows that the subject of cinema is firstly derived from the immediate experiences of the creative team. Secondly, the film is realized and appreciated through the use and decoding of its narration and transmission. The third dimension is what he says the French call “rapport de production” (the relationship of the production). Underpinning

the phases are the following important questions: How and why does art get produced? How and why is it consumed? These questions are significant in my attempt to interrogate what women are made to watch and who is producing the work. These concerns are crucial especially, as in the case of Nollywood, where the industry targets women. It should follow that one dimension of a feminist standpoint with regards to the gendered production and consumption of art, should advocate for more women to be involved in the entire production process (scripting, directing and editing) to ensure a better representation of women. This is because in order to valorise patriarchy, male filmmakers will continue to represent women in ways which will continue to oppress them. Brungman's emphasis on the relations between the three phases validates Paulo Freire's (1993) advocacy for a form of education and participation that will lead to conscientization which is a precondition to the bringing about of social change.

Writing in his *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire attests that in order to facilitate oppression, the education which was being given by the oppressor was aimed at preparing men (in the generic sense) for the society which was awaiting them. It is not an education that enables man to realize his position and to effect social changes which is the purpose of "pedagogy" (Freire, 1993:57). The Nigerian society is very rooted in male chauvinism and this cannot be overlooked by women if the representations of women in Nollywood videos are to be changed. This is because what male script writers, producers and directors will project is arguably that which will continually hinder women from reversing the traditional patriarchal ethos of the society. The five videos in this study are a good example of this male dominance. Only one out of the five videos examined in this study is produced by a woman. The film, *I Was Wrong*, was produced by Evangelist Helen Ukpabio. However, the director is a man who can manipulate the camera in a way that conforms to his patriarchal purpose. The male artist, through his pre-informed notion of what the character representation of women in the Nollywood videos should be, makes thematic and aesthetic choices that are often consistent with the general representation of women in the Nollywood video industry.

One of the key factors, according to feminist film theory, that informs the representation of women in film can be related to the aesthetics and politics of the 'male gaze'. Laura Mulvey, in her famous essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1989:26), makes the case for how the male viewer of a Hollywood film, derives pleasure from looking at a female character in a film as an erotic object. The viewer of the female object she contends, then identifies with the object of his gaze. This means that the woman only becomes the bearer of the image and not the maker of the meaning. Much of Mulvey's attention goes to the identification process in Hollywood films which she says are modified towards the patriarchal system which seems to favour the male gaze rather than the female gaze. The depiction of the female portrays her as a passive character while the male is depicted as an active character. Mulvey will be an important theoretical anchor in my study. Mulvey's suggestions on how the camera erotizes women for the male gaze can help me in analysing the representations of women in Nollywood videos, especially in *Omata Women* and *More than a Woman.* Mulvey's contribution to feminist concerns will also help me to understand how men become the subjects and women the objects in Nollywood videos. It will further help us to understand the male filmmakers' fantasy and how it is foundational in how Nollywood videos privilege patriarchal ideologies**.** Mulvey (1989:26-35) further illuminates how "psychoanalytic theory is appropriated here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form…woman then stands…as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker of image." Mulvey's works on psychoanalysis revolves around the issue of "pleasure" and "un-pleasure" within the traditional narrative film. This is a situation where the whole idea of "the gaze" is directed at the scopophilic instinct (pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object), and in contradistinction, ego libido (forming an erotic identification process). It is Mulvey's contention that the actual image of a woman is passive, serving as it were as raw material for the male gaze which is active.

Mulvey's arguments have also come under a lot of valid criticism by scholars for its privileging of the male gaze, its neglect of the female spectator and for its silence on a range of social, cultural and political factors that are integral to the consumption and reception of films. Even though Mulvey has tried to re-evaluate some of her earlier views raised in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in the essay "Afterthought on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey, 1989) her revisions have not adequately addressed a number of issues related to the shortcomings in her arguments. Inspired by King Vidor's film *Duel in the Sun* (1946), the latter essay did not really show that she had moved away from her earlier position on male spectatorship when compared to what she terms as "the woman in the audience"(Mulvey, 1989: 29). Instead, she takes solace from the claim that the film *Duel in the Sun* has a female hero. Thus, she points out that "…the emotions of those women accepting "masculinization" while watching action movies with the male hero are illuminated by the emotions of a heroine of a melodrama whose resistance to a 'correct' feminine position is the critical issue at stake"(Mulvey, 1989: 29). Mulvey here reinforces the point that a heroine of traditional cinema cannot have a fixed sexual identity. This exemplifies the fact that the female has to explore the male perspective and is forced to accept some uniform male position.

A number of film critics have challenged Mulvey's proposition on the main function of women in classical Hollywood films as that of satisfying male desire and their interventions are also important since they will also inform my study. With regards to the male gaze, Laurie Shrage (1993:143), argues that "it contains a claim that needs to be rethought or re-qualified: the assumption that language and culture are male, or inextricably infused with patriarchal logic." Shrage further states that "the problem with this idea is that it does not recognize cultural variability with respect to power and forms of patriarchy. Yet patriarchy may be experienced differently in accordance with race, class, nationality, religion, and so forth". Following the same line of criticism is Carmen Coustaut who argues that Mulvey's generalization does not fit black woman who ordinarily is not considered a fetishized object to be gazed at by man as it is with the white woman. Coustaut advises that "a contextual criticism must recognize that the interpretive principles of those who see psychologies are often valid only for members of

the dominant culture" (Shrage, 1993: 141). D.N.Rodowick[24] and Christine Gledhill (1978:482) have questioned Mulvey's treatment of both feminine and masculine "subjectivity as human universals." Furthermore, Gledhill notes that "critics who employ the psychoanalytic approach tend to ignore how subjectivity is raced, classed, and inflected by the categories of ethnicity, sexual orientation…"

Anneke Smelik (1999:1), restates that Mulvey's theory does not accommodate differences such as "class, race, age and sexual preferences." Furthermore, Smelik identifies lesbian feminists as among the first to raise objections to the heterosexual bias of Mulvey's psychoanalytical feminist film theory. Patricia White (1991), in a similar vein, affirms that the ghostly presence of lesbianism haunts the Hollywood gothic's as well as the feminist film theory. The cautionary notes that are made with regards to the male gaze are applicable to an African context as well. The work on eroticism and the African woman's body by Françoise Pfaff' (1996) reveals that different modalities are operative in Africa. She notes that nudity for Africans is of much less importance in creating erotic desires as it is for Europeans and Americans. This is because the woman's breasts in Africa stand for fertility and a source of nourishment for infants. Furthermore, she notes that erotic desires also differ in relation to factors such as gender, age and class and that one should not generalize.

There is much, however, in Mulvey's writings, even on the male gaze, that is richly suggestive and that is relevant to this study. In order to address some of the limitations that have been attributed to her work, I will also draw on the image approach in my engagement with Nollywood videos.

[24] D.N Rodowick argues in *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference and Film Theory*. New York: Routledge (1978) that using a monolithic method to judge all films as Mulvey propounds is unacceptable since it does not accommodate interest such as the historical experience of race, class nor deviant sexuality.

The Image Approach

Another approach within feminist film theory which resonates with my interest on the representation of women in Nollywood videos is the "image approach" propounded by Noel Carroll (1996). He argues that Mulvey's sense of scopohilia and male gaze are the basis for judging a film in modern times. However, the psychoanalytic approach differs with the image approach, which does not really see visual pleasure as Mulvey does. Rather, it interrogates how female characters are represented in films in order to validate their position in film. According to the image approach proponents, if the latter is the real interest of feminist, then two things need to be said: (1) the question of pleasure is of interest only insofar as it illuminates the function of film in abetting sexism, and (2) the image approach is a competing perspective in relation to the question of pleasure, even if it makes the issue of pleasure less central to feminism than does Mulvey's approach. Furthermore, the image approach can provide the means of analyzing how films function"in the service of sexism."

The paramount concern of the image approach is the negative image of women in films. On the other hand it also pays attention to the positive images of women in films. For instance, in Rosalind Russell's *His Girl Friday* the female protagonist is read as "an inexplicable anomaly to the psychoanalytic system" But it is possible to comprehend her significance within the image approach. The image approach "allows that there can be positive images of women in film which may play a role in positive emotional responses to real women" (Carroll, 1996: 270). The image approach is concerned with the different ways in which the paradigm scenarios can impact on the treatment of women. This is in terms of their emotional needs which could be compromised because of "fallacious images such as the 'spider woman' of *film noir*."(Carroll, 1996: 270) Another aspect which the image approach highlights is that if the images of women in films are mostly limited to the binaries of mother/whore as is sometimes the case, there is the tendency for women in real life who are not thought of within the scenario of mother, to find themselves being abused under the whore scenario. The image approach calls for

feminist work that will help in redeeming the image of women and propel them towards a positive future.

The image approach seeks to give the female a more valid place in film. This is achieved by paying attention to how women are depicted in films and also their reactions in order to ascertain whether the female audience is impacted upon either positively or negatively. There is a sense in which women watching films can also identify with the heroine. For instance, Jackie Stacey (1999:199), suggests that rather than employ psychoanalytic theory to a film text in order to establish how the eroticizing of the female body brings about identification, she prefers using the "audiences representations and its meaning" as her starting point. In her survey of identifications with film by spectators, she divided the responses in her research into two: one aspect looks at the fantasy of identification and the other interrogates how the spectator actually goes beyond the identification process that leads the spectator to transfer such identified practices outside the cinematic arena. For example, some people imitate the hair styles and styles of dressing favoured by film stars. The fact that film actors and actresses are looked upon by spectators as role models thus calls for the characters to be portrayed in ways that when the female spectator identifies with a film star, it will bring about a positive impact for the female spectator. Its importance is that it will provide women film patrons with models to copy and such role models will go a long way to encourage real women's economic independence. The "image approach" accounts for how women are portrayed in film in consonance to the everyday lives of the film's audiences.

I am also interested in the implications and consequences of negative depictions, especially the limits and possibilities that result from stereotypes and their bearing on how women can face changing challenges of life in the modern Nigeria. Does the representation of women reflect the dynamics of the Nigeria's socio-political and economic needs? Do the images give women a sense of belonging in the society? Do Nollywood videos privilege women as role models as a way of providing women in the real world with exemplary characters to emulate rather than with images of women that

make real women feel that women, as a gendered social group, are debased beings whose role in the society is insignificant in comparison to that of men?

The ability of the "image approach" within feminist film theory to effectively aid in the exploration of this important issue is what makes it a useful approach for dealing with the way films mirror and influence society. Diane Waldman (1990: 17) addressing the benefits of image approach in films contends that:

> The notion of 'positive image' is predicated upon the assumption of identification of the spectator with a character depicted in a film. It has an historical precedent in the 'positive hero' and heroine of socialist realism. It assumes that most of what children see are 'negative images,' distorted stereotypes, and that the corrective to this is exposure to 'positive images'….Yet the mechanism of identification goes unchallenged and unchanged….

She argues that if nothing is done with the way negative images are consistently used in films, students will not be able to distinguish between positive and negative images and, even worse, could form erroneous impressions. She believes that positive images of women are of pedagogical relevance given the influence they have on spectators. She stressed that blatant sexual stereotypes should be attacked by all while "positive images" should be applauded whenever they are depicted. This is because the notion that media representation contributes in shaping "children's attitudes, behaviours, and expectations" (Waldman, 1990: 18) cannot be overemphasized.

This shows that filmmakers should not just aim at creating sensational women characters in order to satisfy their selfish or market desires. Instead, films should be deployed as a medium that will help in the propagation of societal ideals through the construction of positive images of women, in line with the proposition of the image approach. Thus, women who identify with characters in a film will find good models to emulate. Buttressing this view Sharon Smith (1999:18-19), contends that women in films must be portrayed in more positive roles ranging from those that will show "heroism," "human dignity" amongst others and desist from the usual "home making, loving a man, and bearing of children." While this are the roles which women are already known for in society, they should be depicted with additional attributes which will reflect the changing

needs of women in the societies they live in . She adds that "woman must be shown as active and not passive."

Furthermore, Smith explains that it is not a good trend to always have women depicted in ways that end up ridiculing them even when they start up well at the beginning of the film. She is of the view that though culture influences the content of a film, and film likewise influences culture, this does not necessarily mean that it should continue "to be a vicious circle." Such portrayals show that most of the themes constructed around women are those that the films borrow from cultures like myths, stereotypes, folklore, amongst others, in a bid to represent women within the roles that culture stipulates for women. As Carroll aptly points out, "one of its pressing advantages theoretically, is that the image approach…provides a way to avoid the tendency of psychoanalytical feminism to commit itself to unsupportable generalizations in its attempt to read all film history through the categories of psychoanalysis" (Carroll, 1996: 269). But the image approach seeks to identify how the image of women is depicted in films to generate the archetypal binaries where they are either good or *femme fatals*. I am of the view that, used in tangent with the psychoanalytic approach, the image approach is the most suitable theoretical framework for the evaluation and analysis of the types of images of women that are portrayed in Nollywood videos. All in all, feminist film theory will be important in how I will interrogate patriarchy and the representation of women in Nollywood videos.

CHAPTER THREE

FEMALE FILM PRODUCTION AND REPRESENTATION IN *I WAS WRONG*

> Religions endeavour to communicate a meaning and purpose to human life and relationships. Religions present a core teaching on how human life can lead to fulfillment and lasting happiness; they indicate a path of salvation or liberation in this life and in the hereafter.
>
> Tissa Balasuriya, *Religion and Globalization* (2002:4)

This chapter examines *I was Wrong* (2004), produced by Helen Ukpabio and directed by Frank Vaughen, a Nigerian Christian video which deals with Christian morality, and valorises good over evil. The video's major theme is conversion which helps to explain why the Nigerian Christian videos portray people as victorious when they get converted. In the film *I was Wrong*, its protagonist, Pauline Clark, explifies the theme of conversion at its best and the role of Pauline Clark is played by the video's script writer and producer, Helen Ukpabio. The theme of conversion is interrelated with other sub-themes such the virtue of long suffering, patience, forgiveness, witchcraft, and child abandonment. The implications of conversion, and its bearing on women's identities and social roles in Christianity is the overarching focus of this chapter. While interrogating the representation of women, the chapter also seeks to analyse why women continue to be portrayed according to absolutist divides despite the other choices which are available to filmmakers within the Nigerian Christian video genre. Furthermore, the chapter inquires into why it is that such absolutist divides are drawn upon in the portrayal of women but are not used to when it comes to male character archetypes. Using the exemplary work of Helen Ukpabio in her film *I was Wrong*,

we argue in this chapter that women do not need to be portrayed within the binaries of good versus evil and that the latter is not the only way of proselytizing in Christian theology.

The Video *I was Wrong*

The narrative of *I was Wrong* is structured around two central female characters, Pauline Clark, who is the main protagonist, and Lydia, who is Pauline's foil or antagonist. The story uses Pauline to show that people can change from their old bad ways and embrace Christ. Pauline takes a decision to follow the ways of God and abandons her previous way of life which saw her dressing flamboyantly and accepting Chieftaincy titles and honorary degrees all over the country. When the story commences, Pauline, who is a Woman Rights Activist, is billed to have a yet another chieftaincy coronation ceremony soon. But one day when she is representing her husband at a church launch, she is converted and becomes a born again Christian. Her conversion also helps her to forgive her husband's girlfriends (as in the case of Nelly whom she leads to Christ), and, in the end, her husband as well. Despite her spirit of forgiveness and fortitude, the video also shows that after conversion, Pauline went through a lot of difficulties and suffering. The main turmoil in her life is when she and husband are estranged from each other because he cannot understand the sudden change in Pauline's life, especially with regards to the new priorities that she champions. For instance, she rejects the next chieftaincy that was to be bestowed on her, even though the invitations and arrangement for the ceremony have already been made.

Pauline's decision to cancel the coronation ceremony is due to the advice of the pastor who ministered during the launch at the church which she had attended to represent her husband. The pastor explained the spiritual implications of receiving chieftaincy titles as being one of the ways in which people are easily initiated into witchcraft. Pauline, who comes from a society that knows the destructive nature of witchcraft, is alarmed by the revelation. Touched and convinced by the sermon she decides to convert and become a born again Christian: that is a follower of Christ. The irony is that after her conversion, she is assailed with trials and tribulations. For one, she is subjected to a lot of persecution by her husband. He starts to

maltreat her and brings young girls to their matrimonial home and, effectively, he completely abandons her. He causes her untold pain and hardship by withdrawing many of the privileges and comforts, like cars, that she previously had access to. Life with her husband became unbearable which emphasises that Christianity comes with it challenges and that it is not a simple calling to follow. This helps to bring out the theme of patience and long suffering that Christians face and endure in their walk with God. During this phase in her marriage, Pauline is reduced to the status of a house mate as her husband continued with his extra marital affairs, particularly with a girl called Rita who Pauline was not able to convert. The next twist in the narrative is when Chief Clark became seriously ill and he was advised to seek medical attention abroad. With flight arrangements in place, the trip is put into jeopardy when Rita, his mistress, absconds with his money to Canada. After learning about these new developments, Pauline intervened and offered her husband the money needed for his medical treatment abroad. Her act of kindness and the fact that she forgave her husband all his wrong doings to her by showing him kindness in his period of need, touched Chief Clark and he decided to also repent and become converted.

Lydia, on the other hand, pursues different detrimental choices and journeys which threaten to mar her future in *I was wrong.* Lydia is the daughter of Mr and Mrs. Itohowo and she has a brother named King. Both Lydia and King are not raised according to the biblical strictures which are meant to ensure a good upbringing and life for them. Their father Mr. Itohowo, who is a disciplinarian, tries his best to correct his children's behavioural patterns. His interventions in his attempts to improve their conduct for the good range from offering advice to other corrective measures such as reprimanding and beating them. In contrast to Mr. Itohowo, his wife, Mrs. Itohowo feels pampering, making excuses for the children and covering up their excesses and crimes is an indication of her love for them. As a result, the two children became delinquent. Lydia gives birth to a baby girl and abandons it because she feels she is not ready to take on the responsibility of being a mother. She is also still staying with her parents and the society frowns upon single mothers. But her choice to abandon the baby becomes her undoing when many years after, she decides to get the child back from Sister Rachael who picked up and raised the child as her own. Sister Rachael is a born-again sister whose marriage did not produce any children. Furthermore, because of her inability to

have a baby, her in-laws maltreated and threw her out of her matrimonial home. Upon seeing the abandoned baby, Sister Rachael is moved with pity for it and decides to offer it a home. However, after some years, Lydia, the biological mother, reappears and tries to reclaim the child. Lydia is eventually denied motherhood of the child by the social welfare department who insists that she does a DNA test to determine her maternity of the child. Not having the means of doing the test, she loses the child to Sister Rachael. Her experience ends in regret even as she admits her fault in abandoning the child but she cannot turn events into her favour. Similarly her brother King also became a failure because of their mother's protective delusions. King graduates from petty stealing into being a full time criminal. One day he staged a mock robbery with his friends at his home and the shock of seeing armed robbers, shocked his father and he went into a coma and he later died. It was only after discovering that it was King who staged the robbery and that Lydia had a child, that Mrs Itohowo realised her faults in the manner in which she raised her children. She also acknowledges that she should have followed the example of her husband who insisted on raising the children in a morally upright manner. It is too late for her to change the cataclysmic errors in her family's life. She does however, over and above her lamentations, decide to start attending a Bible teaching classes and church.

Video films and Christian Evangelism

The use of videos as a source of outreach for the evangelization of Christianity has become common among many church ministries in Nigeria. This trend follows from the industrialized Western countries' Christian Ministers whose gospel messages are usually reproduced into audio and visual recordings that are then used for the spreading of the gospel in various parts of the world. Initially when this trend started, it was only audio recordings that were used but as time went on visual recordings were also introduced. These were more appealing and effective because patrons could now make use of both their auditory and visual sensory abilities Also, as Asonzeh Ukah (2003:211) observes, visuals are conducive to how most people think of conjured-up spectacles such as "miracles" which the videos are able to recreate. These spectacles not only sell the power of God to the unbelievers but they also

allow viewers to imagine things and possibilities that can be achieved if they only believed in God.

Among the mostly American tele-evangelist ministers who have adopted this method of proselytizing the Christian theology are Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart and Robert Schuller. (Ukah (2003:211) Apart from Ukah's list of tele-evangelist, others working within this trend are Reinhard Bonnke, T. D. Jakes, Ernest Angelis, Chris Oyakilome, David Oyadepo, and William F. Kumuyi,[25] to mention but a few ministers. These ministers have been able to evangelise to wider audiences through the use of Christian videos as an evangelical medium.[26] However, this is not to say that Christian videos are not produced by private individuals outside of the church. The Nigerian video industry has recorded a good number of videos with Christian story lines and themes which have not been produced by Christian ministers but by individuals located outside the church and solely for commercial purposes. The list of such videos include *Living in Bondage* (1992)[27], *Saviour* 1&2 (2004), *Broken Edge* (2005), *The Church and the Tradition* (2005), *The Chosen One* 1&2 (2003), and *Behind Closed Doors* (2005). The reason for private entities and individuals venturing into the production of videos with religious and biblical themes is partly because of the profit motive and also because religious themes are also amenable to the exploration of people's living conditions and they also resonate with the patrons' desires for hope and a better life.

The appeal of evangelical themes and the increased status and appeal of the Church is because as a nation, Nigeria has undergone very trying moments characterized by political instability, civil war, prolonged military dictatorships and periods of economic depression. With such demanding times and challenges, people have tended to gravitate to religion and to films with Christian themes which depict the possibility of 'lives of misery' turning, at some

[25] Pastor Kumuyi, who is the president and founder of the Deeper Life Ministry and is in Lagos, Nigeria, records his messages on tapes and video cassettes for his church members in different parts of the world, and particularly those in rural areas . At times when the church adherents have Easter or Christmas retreats and other religious observances, it is these recorded messages that serve as sermons.

[26] Asonseh Ukah (2003:211) highlights the initial users of such tapes to include "young, university-educated leaders of the post-war campus Christianity in Nigeria who often mimicked what was on these tapes." It was also used by "neo-pentecostalist movement as an instrument for the spreading of spiritual ideas, religious messages, attitudes and beliefs."

[27] *Living in Bondage* (1992) is the first Nigerian video film to depict the myth of salvation in moments of crisis in its storyline.

point, for the better. Christian films, then, tend to offer some solace and temporary escape from the difficulties of life. The decades of turmoil and upheaval in Nigeria are the years which, drawing on a biblical reference, are "frequently characterised as years locusts have eaten" (Ukah, 2003: 211). Mathew Hassan Kukah (1992) attributes the peoples' Christian inclinations and the upsurge in spirituality in Nigeria to economic, social, political and religious factors. Ukah recounts how military dictatorship influenced the type of storylines that Nigerian videos engaged with. He notes that Nigerian videos depict societal issues: "films depict all aspects of Nigerian social, political, economic and religious life...but there are also a number of factors that converge in privileging religion in social and national discourses in Nigeria. Significant here is the recent past history of the country ...The activities of military dictators and their cheerleaders reduced the country to 'a crippled giant' in the eyes of other nations" (Ukah, 2003: 211).

The various conditions which have bedeviled Nigeria include "massive unemployment, decay of social infrastructure (educational system, healthcare facility and social amenities) high rate of inflation and violent crimes." (Ukah, 2003: 211). Given the problems created by the political, economic and social contradictions in the country, Nigerians, from the mid 1980s onwards, started clamouring for succour. They found solace and refuge from socio-economic and political tension by gravitating to available social institutions (including the Christian religious institutions[28]) that could offer them with some relief The Christian religious institutions, most especially the Pentecostal denominations, appeared to be capable of providing solutions to the wanton disillusionment that engulfed the nation. The Pentecostal churches gave their followers psychological and therapeutic guidance which, arguably, helped believers to navigate their problems more effectively knowing that better times will soon come.[29] This is one of the reasons for the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria and also for the high patronage of Christian video films. According to Foluke Ogunleye (2003: 105), videos in general have played a vital role and impacted upon human life and culture in Nigeria. She notes how videos have been used in ways that "reflect

[28] It should however, also be noted that Islam is among the major religions practiced in Nigeria.

[29] The phrase "better times" highlights the promises that Christians stand to gain as they continue to work in the ways of God. It should be noted that such a "prosperity" gospel is mostly preached by the Pentecostal churches and such preaching continues to be pervasive amongst those denominations.

and also shape human views, norms, and attitudes." The videos, informed by the everyday experiences of people in specific physical, geographical and cultural spaces, can help viewers to have a better understanding of the world they live in.

Traditional Beliefs, Witchcraft and Nollywood narratives

The religious inclinations of Nigerians are complex and diverse and they need to be understood in relation to other beliefs and practices such as witchcraft which precede the adoption of Christianity and Islam. Witchcraft, which is a key factor in the crises experienced by Pauline Clark in *I Was Wrong*, together with other traditional values and practices, necessitate a deeper and longer grasp of the history of religions in Nigeria. In a sense, one is confronted with contending beliefs and ideologies, and African traditional religious practices also have their respective intellectuals such as witch doctors, native doctors and chief priests amongst others. For our purposes in this chapter, the significance of traditional religious practices is in their proposal that there are events and actions that can be masterminded by powers that are beyond human control or explanation. It is believed that certain deities or priests are responsible for either the evil or good that befalls people. The latter witch doctors are revered for bringing succour to people who have been bewitched by others, while other witch doctors are feared for their devilish powers which cause evil things to happen to people in the society. Whichever way witchcraft is examined, it is regarded as having advantages and disadvantages. Its pros are seen as its ability to connect people with their ancestors and to offer possibilities of different forms of healing and delivering people from evil. The cons are revealed in the destructive practices that are ascribed forms of witchcraft that cause untimely deaths, sickness, mishaps and untold hardships to innocent and harmless people and taking them out of their God given destinies. Accordingly, this accounts for why some shrines are not popular since they are associated with evil while others are seen as good and are consequently venerated as places of worship in Nigeria.

It should be noted however, that before the advent of Christianity, Nigerians, just like other Africans, had their own indigenous religions and gods that they worshipped. For that matter, different parts of Africa, just like different parts of the world, have objects as well as places

of worship that are peculiar to them. Charles Anyinam (1999) reveals that various parts of Africa and the world held certain items as sacred from ancient times. For example, he notes that overwhelming evidence which cuts across numerous cultures, points to the fact that the issue of "sacred space" (devotional reserved places for worship) has gained a lot of prominence and also has a long standing in history. For instance, among the Efiks of Cross River State in Nigeria, the various rivers have their own gods and goddesses, like the Afiaawan and Anansa, who control the activities of rivers and seas. This is also applicable to the Affafanyi people also in Cross River State, who believe that a god, Efune (which is believed to be represented as a Crocodile with a palm tree on its back), controls the activities of the river and the lives of the people. It is from such beliefs that moments of disequilibrium are attributed to supernatural forces that cause evil mishaps and sometimes it is believed that an entire community or certain individuals can be are punished by the deities or gods or ancestors for not performing certain rituals to appease them.

It becomes important to use these diverse traditional religious practices in Nigeria and to juxtapose them with Christianity and, particularly, to understand why certain African traditional religious practices, such as ancestral veneration, have continued to survive despite the spread of Christianity and its denoting of traditional beliefs and practices as pagan, barbaric, and mundane. The importance given to ancestors in Nigeria and Africa in general, further accounts for why some of the traditional religious practices are still vibrant in many parts of Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general.[30] On the other hand, the belief that traditional religious practices can have devilish elements also gives rise to the need for people to break away from traditional African religions and to become Christians. This serves as important factors in understanding the appeal and spread of Christianity over the years in Nigeria and it also accounts for why Nigerian Christian videos have received much patronage which has kept the Christian genre in production and continuity. In essence, the Christian video genre, through its storylines and themes, implores that the Christian religion should be privileged over traditional African religions.

[30] This chronicles the claims that some African leaders despite their Christian religious inclinations, still patronize traditional African religious practices as their source of power (see Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar (2001).

Pentecostalism and its influences on Christian video productions

Within Christianity, the Pentecostal denominations have tended to be very successful in their evangelical efforts within the continent. This arguably explains why the fastest growing brand of the Christian faith is "Pentecostalism." Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar (2001:1) observe that the Third World has witnessed a remarkable religious transformation during the late twentieth century. This chronicled "an exuberant flourishing of Pentecostal and charismatic varieties of Christianity" which in itself is a further demonstration of the global upsurge in new religious movements. According to the duo, the religious re-awakening tended to generate "international networks that binds groups of people together.**"** These they observed created "effective connections that criss-cross the globe" (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2001: 1). The social relevance of Christian videos is in that "they are becoming important instruments of evangelization in Nigeria and are shaping attitudes in a social context of fear, helplessness, and hopelessness" (Obododimma Oha, 2000:193).

The views of the early orthodox Christian churches are different from those held by the newer mostly Pentecostal Christian churches and denominations in Nigeria. For instance, according to Obododimma Oha (2000:192-3), the early traditional Christian churches did not believe that evil spirits could posses human beings. Therefore, any inference to such an occurrence was seen as very superstitious by the early Christian churches. In contrast, the Pentecostal denominations believe that humans can be possessed by evil spirits and by evil forces. They even go further to state that they also believe that the mission of the evil spirits is to work to destroy those they possess by bringing untold hardship, diseases, barrenness and other numerous problems on them. The Pentecostals acceptance of the notion of the evil possession of human beings may stem from the New Testament reference that "the thief (that is the devil) comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy. I (Christ) have come in order that you may have life- life in all its fullness" (John 10:10). Oha asserts that Christian videos are being used to promote this awareness. (Oha, 2000:193)

Various Pentecostal Nigerian videos have delved into story lines and themes which highlight the general topic of demonic interference with humans. The Nigerian videos which have

done so include *The Coven* (2003), *End of the Wicked* (1999), *Highway to the Grave* (2000), *Just a Little Sin* (1998), *Married to a Witch* (1997) and *The Blood Covenant* (2002). These films explore the various ways in which evil spirits interfere with humans and how, in some cases, the evil spirits take over the people's lives and destroy them. As far as the producers of the Nigerian Christian videos are concerned, the videos serve to educate their viewers about the existence of satanic forces in their lives. The second major purpose of the videos is to highlight the fact that the only way to escape such demonic interference, is to welcome God wholeheartedly into their lives. This requires a life dedicated to following the dictates of Jesus Christ. Of course, as already pointed out, such beliefs and pronouncements by the Pentecostal churches and their videos is at variance with the basic beliefs of the early Christian churches that simply emphasised that people will gain salvation into the next world by following the teachings of Jesus Christ in this world.

While the orthodox Christian videos represent the general patriarchal tendencies of regarding women as evil in line with biblical stereotypes such as those of the Eves and Jezebels, the Pentecostal videos go a step further in imputing demonic tendencies to women. Women are often cast as being witches and using their powers to destroy the family and society. This explains why some Christian videos depict women as witches, Mermaids and satanic priestess. Thus the dichotomy between orthodox churches' disavowal of the possibility of devilish powers possessing humans and Pentecostal's openness to the 'possession of humans', opens an intricate web of the limits and possibilities in the representation of women in Nollywood Christian videos.

Representation of Women in the Christian video genre

At this juncture, the important question to ask in terms of gender representation, is do Nigerian Christian videos portray women differently from the way that they are generally portrayed in the mainstream Nigerian videos? We argue here that female representation in the Christian videos is not significantly different to the portrayal of women in secular videos. Generally, Nollywood videos represent women as the incarnation of the evil that society is plagued with. In this sense, secular videos are drawing on the Biblical creation story that

exemplifies Adam to be at peace with his creator until Eve came onto the scene and caused the chaos that made them to be banished from the proverbial garden of paradise. The creation story appears to be increasingly used as the template for imagining women's characters in Nollywood videos. Women are presented as having lost the sense of distinguishing goodness with the result that Eve has become an archetype for the degeneracy of women and many are her followers.

Not surprisingly, given that mainstream videos are themselves shot-through with Christian beliefs, women occupy the shameful social status of being transgressors of all moral codes (thieves, murderess, cheats, diabolical, destroyers of family ties and so on) and they are instruments that lead men to losing their destinies like in the case of their forbearEve. This trend has gained another dimension in Christian videos where women are given an additional attribute, that of being witches who embody a range of societal maladies. The number of videos that cast women as vampire has also increased. Whether they are rendered as witches or mermaids, devilish women have entered even the sanctuary of the church. In a number of videos they destroy churches by seducing church ministers thereby creating an environment that the congregation is at the mercy of Satan and the church falls apart. The implication is that women are destroyers of the church of God, and that they oppose God's will for mankind from coming to pass since the church which serves as link between God and the faithful is often destroyed by the devilish powers of women. Expressed differently, the female antagonists take church ministers out of their task of building and sustaining people's communion-ship with their creator in the same way that Eve took Adam away from God's friendship.

It could be argued that representing women as witches becomes a way in which Christian videos are used to continually reinvent the Christian moral stance that celebrates virtue over vice with women being placed in a wider generic context (covering mankind) in order to show that those who follow vice are doomed. In most of the Christian videos, there are countless examples of how women who pursue vice end with regrets and doom at the conclusion of the stories. But the very idea of representing women in outrageous ways underscores them and only enforces pre-existing societal stereotypes of women as evil. This

tendency in the Christian videos, like in the secular Nollywood videos, recreates and in some cases re-invents pre-existing stereotypes of women as the icons of wickedness in the society. Such a reading is in line with John Lyden's (2007:4) views on the hegemonic nature of films and how they can perpetuate dominant ideologies. According to Lyden, "drawing on liberationist and feminist critiques of hegemonic discourse, religious scholars trained in these approaches have viewed popular American films, as a prime example of that which secures and perpetuates ideology in America." Lyden goes further to note that, as scholars of religion, they have been able "to identify the theological and mythological forms used to secure this ideology." Arguably, these hegemonic ideological constructions are also able to frame and film production in most parts of the world. In the particular case of Nigeria, the evidence suggests that there is a prevailing ideology in Nollywood videos that privilege patriarchy. This position is informed by the fact that in many of the Christian videos, when the absolutes of good and evil come into play they invariably are with regard to the character representation of women. This is why Ogunleye (2003:125), concludes that:

> The films make use of parallelism, juxtaposing various elements such as theme, character and plot, inviting the viewers to compare them. This is what usually motivates the sub-plots that are manifest in most Nigerian Christian films. It is to afford the viewer the opportunity to see the two sides of the religious coin and help her/him pick the better one. This helps the audience to know what is right and what is wrong.

Thus, there is always a good or evil woman or group of women within the Christian videos. The good woman is always employed to exemplify the Christian way of life which is steeped in morality and righteousness. This morality builds upon the biblical injunctions of "thou shall" and "thou shall not." These injunctions are traceable to the origin of man's story in the Bible when the Creator (God) admonished Adam and Eve not to eat of a certain fruit which is in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15-17). Right from the origin of man, as it is depicted in this biblical story of creation, the woman has arguably been portrayed as having some evil tendencies. This is chronicled in the events which led to the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The story of creation reveals that it was Eve who caused her husband to fall from God's grace by giving him the fruit from the middle of the garden after she had been convinced by Satan to taste it. This representation of women as having bad inclinations has fuelled theories within secular and theocratic domains

for centuries. For instance, Marie Richmonds-Abbott (1983:16) succinctly notes that "….As women were associated with the earthly body and its desires, they also became associated with impurity and with evil. We begin to find Greek tales such as that of Pandora's Box, where a woman let loose all manner of evil upon the world. Later, in Christianity, Eve was the evil woman who tempted Adam out of the Garden of Eden, with the result that all mankind is supposedly cursed with original sin." Thus, the Bible sets the tone for women's representation within Christian morality[31] and the tone is then accepted and enshrined in the Nigerian Christian videos. The "do [s]" and "do not [s]" conditioned most aspects of the Christian faith. A good example of this is the "Ten Commandments" which highlight what should be done and what should not be done.

Character Contrasts and Thematic Exploration in *I Was Wrong*

I Was Wrong explores the religious conversion of two women who were unbelievers. It deals with the decisions taken by individuals who are unbelievers and who did not find God and consequently made terrible decisions which they later admitted were the wrong ones. As noted previously, the narrative is structured around the film's heroine, Pauline Clark, who is presented in a strikingly different light than her character-foil, Lydia. Pauline is first introduced as a worldly person who is socially recognized as an outstanding personality. She is depicted as someone who appreciates good quality clothes and expensive jewellery. For instance, the first camera shots on Pauline reveal her as someone who spends a lot of time in ensuring that she looks good. The early opening scenes reveal Chief Clark, her husband, waiting for Pauline to get ready before they can proceed to an event together. When Pauline finally emerges, she is introduced to viewers through a long shot which shows her as very flamboyantly dressed in a Nigerian costume which includes an expensive gorge wrapper, an expensive lace blouse to match the wrapper, and a tower-like styled damask head-tie. As she steps onto the floor of the sitting room, the camera gives a close up of her and finally settles on her facial construction, which is emphasised by the manipulation of the light on her face.

[31]This morality chronicles the "dangerous and daring femme fatale …" of literary works (Oliver Lovesey 1993:151) and can also help to explain women's outrageous representation in Nollywood videos. Lovesey's example is Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* character Wariinja who in one passage is associated "with Eve." Thus, this buttresses the point that the Biblical Eve has always served as a reference point for women with evil traits.

The light on Pauline's face shows her cosmetic make-up which makes her face full and youthful. As Rudolf Arnhein (1958:65-66) observed, "by the help of a clever lighting, irregular features can be made to look harmonious; a face can be made to look haggard or full, old or young."

In the rest of the film, Pauline is, for the most part, shown addressing various gatherings of women as she fulfils her role as a "Woman Rights Activist**"**. Her advocacy work made her highly respected and recognized, including, ironically, amongst some of the girls that her husband brings home later on in the video. At other times she is shown deputising for her husband at official ceremonies. One such event is the launch of a church building fund where Pauline receives the calling, decides to convert and becomes a "born again" Christian. The phenomenon of being "born-again" is typically associated with the Pentecostal denominations within Christianity. In effect, it refers to the occurrence when someone, who hitherto could be considered non-religious, suddenly experiences a religious conversion and begins to lead a spiritually upright life. The pattern of worship and style of living of born again converts is tailored towards the tenets of the apostles of Christ after the out pouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. During the religious ceremony where Pauline receives the calling, the camera reveals Pauline as being extravagantly dressed and very different from the other women at the gathering. The camera's pan on her shows her to be listening attentively as the Pastor preaches a sermon against the acceptance of chieftaincy titles because they subject recipients to witchcraft initiation rites which, he reminds the congregation, is against the teachings of Christ. The camera closes in on her face to depict her initial disdainful facial response, as well as her body movement when she shrugs her shoulder. The sermon struck a chord since she was due to receive another title. It is shortly after this sermon that Pauline responds to the Pastor's call for repentance and the need to change from her old lifestyle.

The Director of Photography (DOP) who has the potential to determine to a great extent what should be seen or not, employs throughout the sermon the technique of fade-in and fade-out, that is, the forward and backward movement of camera angles. With this technique, the DOP successfully draws a connecting relationship between the speaker of the discourse of

conversion, the pastor, and the listener (Pauline) who is moved by the message into a religious conversion. Finally, the DOP artistically fades-out the shot from the speaker to focus on the message decoder. This is done to achieve an emphatic stress which leads to the realization of the authorial position in the film. Thus the director, through this technique, records a change in behaviour in Pauline from this moment onwards. Meanwhile, the viewers are also carried along into the thoughts of the creative team and the main character. Following this sequence, viewers know that Pauline's previous lifestyle would be affected and altered by her newly found faith.

In contrast, her husband, Chief Clark, becomes the victim of a conflict of ideas. This is because he is operating in ignorance of the present state and events that have established the spiritual transformation of Pauline. Thus, as the film progresses, it is inevitable that the relationship between the two characters are to undergo increasing strain. Pauline's style of dressing also changes from being ostentatious and becomes more somber as befits her present religious belief that advises moderation in dressing and lifestyle. Interestingly, there are no longer no close up shots of her, probably because she no longer appeared gorgeous without make-up, artificial hair and jewellery (especially in the eyes of her husband but she still looks beautiful and presentable in her moderate dressing). One can argue that the cinematography can become a way in which the camera helps to tell position the different points of view within the narrative. Also, the earlier close-ups objectified her as commodity for her husband's and viewers' gaze, playing on the idea of how a beautiful woman who is married to an important, influential and economically powerful man should look like. Within the context of the Nigerian society that adores wealth, Pauline's decision to adopt moderation becomes a point of judging and undermining her husband's economic status. This may also constitute the hidden fear of Chief Clark and it may be reflect his change in attitude towards Pauline.

Pauline's husband Chief Clark is forced to make many attempts to get her to reconsider her decision to become a born-again Christian. He takes her to exotic places including hotels and parks outside their house to talk with her and persuade her to rethink her decision. He invites her mother and uncle to also prevail on her to change her decision but she refused. This is

where the crises that almost destroyed the family set in as their relationship degenerates and there is no longer any form of intimacy between them. As a result, the narrative spirals towards its climax as Chief Clark resorts to bringing young girls to their matrimonial home in his pursuit of extra marital affairs. But most of the girls did not continue with their affairs with Chief Clark. Some came to know that the story that Chief Clark told them of his wife's death as the reason why he wants to marry them was a lie as they came to discover that his wife is alive and that she is the influential Woman's Rights Activist, Pauline Clark. Apart from the fact that the knowledge of Pauline Clark being Chief Clark's wife is a strong reason to intimidate and frighten them to leave her husband, there is a another reason. The second and more important reason for most of them discontinuing their relationship with Chief Clark is Pauline's role in evangelism. The video depicts Pauline talking to the young women that her husband brings home to live up to Christian morals. Pauline counsels these women to desist from having relationships with married men and to rather focus on their education. She also leads some of the women to church. For instance, there is a scene where Pauline is portrayed walking with one of the women, Nelly, coming back from a fellowship (Christian gathering). The scene, also establishes Chief Clark sitting and chatting with a friend outside the house. It shows his surprise and anger as he sees the duo walking towards them. He is angry because he sees his wife as interfering with his love life by dissuading the women from continuing their friendships with him.

Pauline's evangelism makes her husband to sever his relationship with her and Pauline's crisis leads viewers to appreciate the long suffering and endurance that Christian believers face. This depicts the theme of long suffering and endurance as virtues which Christians must possess as catalysts for triumphing over difficulties and temptations in their walk with God. The narrative portrays many such instances where Pauline is subjected to humiliation. There is a scene where Pauline is barred from entering, at night, the compound by the gateman, at the orders of her husband. Left without any choice, Pauline resigns herself to the fate of sleeping outside the gate by just leaning onto the fence to catch some sleep. Subsequently, the camera moves downward to depict Pauline's gradual downward slump into a sitting position, looking for a more comfortable sleeping position. This incident, which takes place at night, shows that things have gone out of control to the point that her husband does not

care about her safety. However, Pauline does not mind to suffer any mishap for her Christian beliefs. Even if the night is not a good time for a woman to be left without any security, this further dramatises the fact that God protects His own. Thus, Arnheim observes that "light, just like other properties of film, has been called to serve definite decorative and evocative purpose…" (1958:66). Meanwhile, the black outline against the grey street, at dawn, emphasis that the "figures in the somewhat lighter street help to emphasize the mystery of the dawn, the strange intermediate state between light and darkness" (Arnhein, 1958:64). The intermediate phase in the film is analysed through a connecting segment within the same scene through a shot on Pauline that reveals that she had remained outside the gate throughout the night as the light on her slowly increases showing the coming of the morning.

The next significant twist in the narrative is when Chief Clark becomes very sick and we see her providing succour to him despite their estranged relationship. We see her making contact with his doctor by telephone asking him to come and give her husband medical attention. She also assists her husband to contact friends and business associates to assist him with much needed funds for his treatment. This yields no positive results. The viewers are given verbal information through a telephone conversation, to know that one of Chief Clark's Mistresses, Rita, who Pauline could not convert, has absconded to Canada with the money meant for Chief Clark's medical treatment. It takes Pauline's efforts to turn things around in Chief Clark's life as the narrative depicts her offering to give him the money needed for the treatment. This gesture of kindness touched Chief Clark and made him to know that Pauline was a very religious person with a forgiving heart. This made him to ask her to bring her church people to come and pray for him, noting that if they did, he will recover from his illness.

The experiences of Pauline are presented in parallel to those of Lydia who, in a sense, represents the contrastive opposite of the good that Pauline symbolises. Lydia is a younger, single woman who falls pregnant and is unable to take care of the child and has to abandon the child. The opening scene of the video depicts cutaways of people gathering to see a baby abandoned on a street corner. The mother of the baby is Lydia. The narrative's main lesson is that Lydia has degenerated to this point of having a baby and abandoning it because her

mother, Mrs. Itohowo, did not fulfill her motherly role and raise Lydia and her brother King in a Christian way. This is why Lydia is able to trick her parents and keep them from knowing that she has a baby, which does not also allow them to know that she also threw the baby away. The character of Lydia is controversial in the sense that at one point we see that she is unwilling to become a mother, even as a single parent. Despite rejecting the socially accepted role of motherhood, she shows a measure of motherly concern for the child. We notice this as she waits to see who picks it up and follows Sister Rachael to know where the child is eventually taken to. This makes her complicity with the crime of child abandonment circumstantial in nature even though the film is clear that her actions call for outright condemnation. Lydia later makes efforts to get the child back. The efforts she makes at getting back the child is a critique of her initial act and it also again demonstrates that her act was unnatural. The very decision to abandon the child is against the Christian morality that condemns evil. Lydia's role and character in the video is contrary to Pauline's perseverance with suffering in order not to compromise her Christian faith for earthly gains and reputation. In contrast to Pauline's choices that are in line with biblical standards, Lydia and her mother are depicted as unbelievers and they would rather protect their reputation than own up to faults and led to their undoing in the end.

Lydia's role as an antagonist in the story serves to condemn vice as her portrayal contrasts with that of Pauline who exemplifies and is used to eulogize virtue in the narrative. The two women are used to illustrate the two dimensional way of representing women as either good or bad in Christian films. Such representation, which is stuck along the polarities of good and bad, further illustrates the way most Nigerian Christian videos portray women as either archetypes of good or evil in the society. The videos pursue these extreme and one-dimensional representations to drive home the message of the need for change in characters who are, at first, bad and lead condemnable lives.

The depiction of Lydia's mother, Mrs. Itohowo, as a mother who has failed in her motherly responsibilities also parallels the exemplary conduct of Sister Rachael who demonstrates motherly obligations in the manner in which she raised Lydia's child. Sister Rachael not only

loves the child Comfort but corrects and gives the child the good guidance that will equip her well to live in the challenging world around her. The story portrays scenes where she reprimands and advises the child not to collect things from strangers. This parallel explores the difference between Christian upbringing and the unbelievers' way of bringing up their children. Sister Rachael knows that laying a good Christian moral foundation for her child when she is still young will help her to have a better future. But the laxity and ungodly upbringing of unbelievers' children sets the conditions for their miserable lives in future. For instance, we see an example of Mrs. Itihowo's nonchalance in a scene where King refuses to go to school and stayed at home because he knew that his father was away. King's character shows him to be a spoilt child, truant and a thief who is at the verge of becoming a big nuisance to his family. His role in the story highlights the different approaches used by his mother and father in raising children. While his mother condones his truancy from school, his father wants him to be responsible. Upon his return from his journey, when his father questioned why he did not attend school his mother stood up to defend King by telling lies for him. This is the regular situation in the household as she consistently covers up the bad things that King does even when he starts to steal.

Mrs. Itihowo's protection of her children leads to their bad end and it explains why King eventually blames his mother for her failure to raise him up well. This according to him, is what leads to his moral degeneration and his father's sudden death from shock resulting from his own son who had staged the robbery at home. To illustrate King's grievances with his mother for earlier condoning his excesses, while in the police station, King beckons his mother to come closer to him so that he may whisper something into her ears. As soon as she does, he gives her a big bite on the ear, followed by a speech. The speech details his reasons for biting her ear and, essentially, he tells her that if she had met her parental obligations, he would not be in prison. This event makes both mother and son to attest that they are wrong. Thus, King's character depicts the biblical axiom in proverbs that spare the rod and spoil the child. His role in relation to Lydia builds on the very notion that a good religious moral upbringing guarantees a loving, peaceful and better future for the family. The reverse is what King and Lydia represent in *I Was Wrong* , that is, a life of regret and catastrophe for the parents and their children. Lydia, for her part, tries taking her own life by hanging after she

does not succeed to regain her baby back. She is rescued and taken to the hospital. The scene of Lydia lying on a hospital bed portrays her as very miserable especially as a social welfare official tells her that she was too irresponsible to be the mother of Comfort, the now grown girl. Furthermore, the welfare official told her that only a DNA test, which is not done in Nigeria,[32] will be the only acceptable proof of her maternity to Comfort. Since Lydia does not have the money to travel outside the country to where the DNA test could be performed, it therefore meant that she could not legally claim Comfort as her daughter.

The demands and benefits of Conversion amidst the spectre of Witchcraft

In *I Was Wrong* the theme of conversion is explored in a manner that draws attention to its intricate links to a number of sub-themes that amplify and reinforce the imperatives of conversion. The other sub-themes include witchcraft, child abandonment, conversion, patience, the virtue of long suffering and forgiveness. Like in other Nigerian Christian videos that pursue the myth of salvation in moments of crises, the themes ensure a verisimilitude that facilitates its evangelical appeal. The verisimilitude is also achieved through the linking of parallel characters who, through their relationship, makes the issues to look real and pertinent. The function of parallels in *I Was Wrong* is used to amplify, from a Christian moral perspective, what behavioural traits are in line with biblical standards and those that are not. For instance, in the film, the story parallels the characters of Pauline, Nelly the girl Pauline helps to convert, Sister Rachael and her friend Sister Rose. All these characters can be classified as those who have made the right choices by becoming born-again and whose representation contrasts with those of the group of Lydia, her mother Mrs. Itohowo and her brother King who did not choose to follow godly ways but instead lived easy and worldly lives. The moral lessons flowing from the choices made by the two groups of characters is that Lydia and her likes are sorrowful and regret their choices in the end, while Pauline's group rejoice at the end. The first group are characters whose choices to serve God and live according to Christian tenets expose them to periods of long suffering. This leads to perseverance, which is a test and testimony of their patience and which finally culminates in

[32] It should be noted that DNA testscan be carried out in Nigeria but the filmmaker may have created the erroneous impression that DNA tests cannot be done in Nigeria to fufil her artistic purpose.

forgiveness that further brings about lasting joy and peace in their various life experiences. All of these experiences serve as a trial of their faith in God. The second category choose to live outside the Christian principles and morality and in the end, the choices which they hitherto felt were not demanding and entailed no suffering, become their undoing. This is exemplified in Lydia who walks out of the crucibles of motherhood for an easy going and care free life which in the end of *I Was Wrong* portends no hope and lasting peace as the characters, in the end, are each seen lamenting their earlier choices which have ruined their lives. This is in contrast to those in the first group who are happy at the end and validate the melodramatic plot that the video uses to stress its position of the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Pauline's role in the narrative is of great importance in that it emphasises the Christian message that is conveyed in *I Was Wrong.* It illustrates how when people decide to turn from their old ways to embrace God, the devil fights them through tribulations and temptations in an attempt to make them go back to their former ways. Pauline's character also highlights that her triumphs over all the odds that challenge her choice of becoming born-again is used to encourage Christians to be firm in their resolve to walk with God. Pauline's victory plays the role of testing God's might over Satan and in the end, her victory proclaims that God is supreme over Satan. It is also used to portray that those who choose the ways of God would be victorious in the end over Satan and all his scheming. The celebration of God's victory over Satan, as captured in the range and relationships of characters in *I Was Wrong* is echoed by Ogunleye's point that it is the Bible that forms a crucial guide to the themes and character types that are favoured in Christian videos.

The theme of conversion is the foundation by which other themes in the video are anchored. Without conversion there would be no long suffering and perseverance working out the patience of characters which then culminates in forgiveness in *I Was Wrong*. Conversion is also made possible through the knowledge and presence of antithetical forces and practices such as witchcraft. Witchcraft as a prevalent power and the ways in which it raises anxieties in Nigerian society is represented in the narrative. By delving into the concerns of witchcraft, *I Was Wrong* addresses the socio-cultural aspects of the society and it tries to explain the fears and anxieties of the people. There is always the fear of people being contaminated with

witchcraft and being regarded and feared as being witches. This helps to shed light on why the protagonist Pauline Clark does not resist the message of repentance, nor postpone her decision to become a converted Christian. This is because she does not want her crave for chieftaincy titles, even with the socio-political glamour that they hold, to destroy her life. The geographical setting of the story is Calabar and the film deals only with the aspects of witchcraft that is understood in the area, and that is "*Ifot.*" "*Ifot*" is a destructive vampire cult with the spiritual ability to kill and to destroy people. It has nothing good to celebrate or offer people unlike the other aspects of some versions of witchcraft as earlier discussed where certain witch doctors serve as healers and cure diseases that are inexplicable in the society. Amongst the latter is the ability to remove spells that have been cast on people by their enemies or using witchcraft knowledge to heal strange sicknesses like madness and other mentally manipulated conditions. It is as a result of her knowledge of the different possible manifestations of witchcraft that informs Pauline Clark's decision to give her life to God. Her choice can be likened to that of Stella in *End of the Wicked* who, according to Okome, has not gone through any "thorough rules of conversion." As much as Stella and Pauline know the danger and destruction that witchcraft portends, both women's purpose of conversion differs from each other. For Stella, as Okome (2007:182) observes, it is to enable her to get back her husband as well as to right things in her family. As for Pauline, the knowledge of chieftaincy title serving as an initiation into witchcraft cults, which she greatly detests, is her main reason for making the decision to abandon her former ways of life.

Chieftaincy is a royal and prestigious traditional institution in Nigeria in general and in Calabar in particular. The royalty of the chieftaincy or kingship institution in Calabar has continued to receive great recognition and the Obong of Calabar, who is also a paramount ruler, is highly respected. Thus, it explains why people, who are not from the royal family, also try to get recognition by contributing to developmental projects in the society. They hope that their contributions will make them to be recognized as illustrious sons and daughters worthy of being conferred with chieftaincy coronations. The recognition as an elder statesman or woman can earn the receptors of chieftaincy titles political appointments and government contracts as well. In Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State, which are sister states that share the same cultural and religious beliefs, people believe that chieftaincy

has a spiritual undertone. There is the belief that the crown or cap that is given to chiefs during coronation ceremonies and the wine they are also made to drink is a ritual to symbolically transfer witchcraft to them. Within the two states, most people are always afraid of chiefs as they see them as evil and do not belief that a chief can be a good Christian. This is because a chief performs traditional rites like pouring libation to ancestors, especially during public functions. This makes people to doubt the sincerity of the claims of chiefs to be Christians since such practices should not be seen or performed by Christians. The dual role that chiefs play underscores that with regards to Christianity, "for it to be meaningful and relevant, Christianity must offer protection against black magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, all of which are issues of vital concern to African society" (Moyo 2007:334). It explains the view that if people profess that they are Christians then they should stay away from traditional institutions and practices like chieftaincy that is in opposition to their Christian faith that rejects satanic practices.

The level of acceptance of chiefs as good Christians has not changed even though chieftaincy has become an important social status, especially for politicians who want to gain political acceptance. The problem is that the perception around chieftaincy and witchcraft initiation has not changed. Ukpabio through the film brings to the awareness of Christian believers, who have started giving into cultural practices such as acquiring chieftaincy titles, to desist from receiving such titles. She also exposes the vain glory of all those who are clamouring for titles and she shows, through Pauline, that knowing God brings lasting peace, joy and hope. Rather than the titles enriching ones' life, they get people into entangling themselves with wicked powers such as witchcraft, water society cult membership, marine possessions and others which they never bargained for. She allows her audience to decide who they would rather serve, God or vain glories.

The knowledge of witchcraft around the Niger Delta minority states of Cross River and Akwa Ibom in Nigeria has a relationship with the concerns of witchcraft that are raised in *I Was Wrong*. This is because it shows how the fears of the society are played out in videos and how especially the Christian genre negotiates these fears in order to educate and proffer solutions to the people of Cross River and Akwa Ibom states with their very strong mythical

beliefs in witchcraft. In his summation of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom state, Daniel Offiong's (1991:121) explains that "belief in witchcraft provides the Ibibio [of Nigeria] with a theory of causation for misfortune, death and illness" (121). Offiong's position in a way helps our understanding of why Ukpabio, the writer and producer of *I Was Wrong*, who is an indigene of Akwa Ibom and knows about witchcraft beliefs within that space, uses witchcraft to serve as the major catalyst that makes Pauline to decide to give her life to God. This in a sense becomes Ukpabio's way of calling on the film's patrons to also become born-again Christians even if it is for the ability of dealing with their fears and anxieties concerning witchcraft. A point which is given more light by Okome (2007:175)who attests that:

> Helen Ukpabio is working around a known local episteme of witchcraft. The local audience-for whom this film[33] was produced in order to shock it into a newer state of consciousness-already knew the existence of such stories and may even profess to having been part of the acts of witchcraft practiced in one way or the other. This is a common social narrative in Calabar as in most parts of Nigeria where there are still tangible ties to the traditional past. The frequent return to the theme of witchcraft reiterates this social trope and also shows the reconfiguration of the Manichean duality between good and evil, a favourite structure of Ukpabio's video films.

Ukpabio navigates through the Manichean duality between good and evil in her characterization in a manner that does not impinge women as the sole evil in the society but to expose how the society tries to make it seem as if women are evil ones. Instead, she shows that both men and women need salvation. Being a minister of the gospel herself she also has the gift of discerning and eradicating witchcraft, Godly gifts which her Pentecostal Ministry is known for. She is aware that there are witches and wizards and not only witches as social stereotypes claim. For Ukpabio, both men and women need to be delivered from witchcraft as she demonstrates in *I Was Wrong*. Furthermore, since her church headquarters are also in Calabar, the capital city of Cross River state, it explains her film and earlier books deal with witchcraft.

Apart from the general belief in witchcraft in Calabar, it is also a city widely acclaimed to be the long standing headquarters of most religious organizations in Nigeria including, arguably, the "Satanic church" of Olumba Olumba Obu. (Okome, 2007:175). The awareness of people within this space of false religious and witchcraft

[33] The video film which Okome refers to here is Ukpabio's *End of the Wicked* (1999). However, the scenario applies to our discussion of I *Was Wrong*.

beliefs, explains why Pauline cannot postpone her need to convert and to be resolute about it. Such a stance is consistent with Birgit Meyer's (2003:11) position that "Pentecostal-charismatic churches owe much of their appeal to the fact that they easily, and effortlessly, tie into popular understandings, and, in particular, take seriously anxieties about the evil machinations of demons and witches, whom they represent as vessels of Satan... In this way, they mediate between frustrations and anxieties and the wish for a better, more prosperous life with God."

Pauline's knowledge of local witchcraft facilitates her rethinking of her life's choices. It helps her to choose a more secure life for herself. The life she chooses is a life with God. Her decision here contradicts her earlier life style where she did whatever her husband approved of. For instance, Pauline, initially, even as an activist for women's rights gave all the glory to her husband which was a contradiction of her pro-women stance. She even proclaimed in one of her speeches during a women's convention that "I give all the glory to my husband who has made it possible for me to be here" (*I Was Wrong*). This alludes to how successful women in high society and the wives of government officials in Nigeria attribute their achievements and reputations to their husbands. However, glory is supposed to belong to God only.

Pauline's speech serves as an entry point for the film to critique patriarchy, especially in how it conditions women to ensure their husbands come first before anything else in their lives. This highlights what Christine Obbo (1980:8) says about how patriarchal hegemony thrives through notions which are upheld in societies. According to Obbo, patriarchy conditions women to believe that "the pride of a 'proper' woman is a husband, with the warning that they miss out on this blessing or fulfillment through insufficient submissiveness." By portraying Pauline's character in relation to her husband in terms of according him glory, the film is used to draw attention to and rebut second-class status of women in a chauvinistic society.

As previously noted Pauline's conversion results in her helping one of her husband's girl friends, Nelly, to be converted too. Nelly's conversion aggravated the estrangement between Chief Clark and Pauline since Chief Clark viewed it as a demonstration of Pauline's efforts

to remove all happiness and joy in his life. In fact, he asked Pauline "did I do anything wrong to have married you? When I go into any relationship you talk the girls out of it. Tell me, did I do anything wrong by marrying you?" The treatment of the two women's conversion opens a set of questions around Nigerian Christian videos: firstly, is there a sense in which their depictions give women a chance to break loose from traditional patriarchy? And, does Christianity provide an avenue for women's self assertion outside of their husband's glories?

The answer to the first question is yes and no. Although in some respects Christian videos do reinforce pre-existing stereotypes, in other respects they suggest a way in which women can break away from the traditional patriarchal ideology that does not permit women to be individuals and deciders of their own destinies. For instance, in *I Was Wrong,* Pauline's conversion shows that within Christianity she is called upon to make independent decisions of her own. Therefore, Christianity arguably celebrates individual choice-making over collective or patriarchal choice. This premise derives from the Biblical position (mainly within the New Testament) that every human is accountable to God, the creator, and will stand alone before Him on judgment day. Furthermore, it explores the sense in which an individual is responsible for his or her own actions. Thus, Pauline evokes a sense of freedom of choice and individuality through her conversion. As an individual within the Christian space, she makes her choice to transform herself from her traditional role of adhering to and applauding everything her husband holds as right to embracing a new form of behaviour and thinking that allows her to weigh such positions against those that are inherent within the religious ambit. In so doing, Pauline transforms herself into a person who now weighs her actions as against what is considered "right" or permissible by God.

However, even the newly found independence brought about by Pauline's conversion to Christianity does not serve as her passport out of the traditional patriarchal commitments of marriage and to the notion of women being bound to their husbands no matter what. For, as we see in the film, Pauline decides to remain in her relationship with her husband notwithstanding all of Chief Clark's actions and acts of infidelity. This is because Christianity also has great reverence for marriage. This brings to light various similarities between Christian and patriarchal valorisations of marriage and where, on both cases, it is

incumbent on women to be submissive to their husbands. The situation explains Pauline's uncle's advice to her husband when he said that "we trust in your ability to discipline her and to bring her once again under your control." Both Christianity and patriarchy see marriage, especially on the women's part, as a lifelong commitment and "for better and for worse." However, judging from the strained relationship between Pauline and her husband, it becomes obvious that she understands that Christian marriage demands that women be submissive to their husbands. Thus, her insistence to continue living in Chief Clark's house even when their relationship strained points to the fact that she is sensitive to the societal stereotypes that expect women to remain in dysfunctional marriages in order not to bring shame to herself and her family, or to be regarded as failures. Such polarities determine how many African societies, including Nigeria, explain the social construction of women as either celebrated women or failures. Such constructions also show how a prostitute is usefully (for patriarchy that is) defined in the society hence the notion that an unmarried woman "must be" a prostitute, notwithstanding whether, in reality, they are or not. This means that integrity for women is only assured through marriage. Little wonder then that Maggie O'Neil (2001:136) points out that "discourses and representation of the prostitute or prostituted woman help to sustain the ways in which meanings associated with the prostitute as "other" are maintained in the public imagination." She further reveals that such discourses "are deeply embedded in the patriarchal imagination and are enacted through hegemonic heterosexuality" (136). This affirms why Pauline, who has a good knowledge of the politics of marriage that are inherent within the society and by extension her religious affiliation, has no other choice than to remain in her marriage, no matter how strained her relationship is with her husband. In such societies, a woman, as Obbo rightly points out, has no pride without her husband. Within the church setting a woman cannot call herself responsible person if she is a divorcee. This is because, as earlier mentioned, the church is strongly against divorce.

Nevertheless, Pauline's depiction as a woman who understands both the religious and traditional roles of women within the society helps to build upon the melodramatic nature of the film. Her decision to stay in her husband's house created an avenue to witness everything and test her faith and perseverance and also allow her to be around when her husband took ill

so that she can come to his rescue and facilitate their coming together as husband and wife in the end of the film. Her insistence to stay on gives cogency to the fact that she understands the demands of the spheres of culture and religion, especially since she is a woman who is economically viable and can fend for herself outside the confines of her matrimonial setting.

Pauline's portrayal further seeks to enshrine women as agents for the conversion of other family members. *I Was Wrong* shows us that a woman, once converted, is capable of helping to influence the conversion of her entire household. This is revealed in Pauline's patience and perseverance that, finally, brings her husband, Chief Clark, back to her and also paved the way for his conversion to Christianity. This character portrayal is similar to that of Laide, the protagonist in *The Wounded Heart* (2000), a video film produced by Mike Bamioye and directed by Elvon Jarrett. *The Wounded Heart*, just like *I Was Wrong*, also focuses on Laide, a woman who was not a Christian at first and enjoyed her marriage but who later became a born again Christian and lost her husband Bode's admiration, just like Pauline. This led to a very long period of suffering for Laide whose husband abandoned her for another woman. His period of absence created another difficulty for her when she was threatened by her boss's sexual overtures in the office. She had the choice to succumb to a relationship with him or lose her job. The patience and the perseverance she depicts in holding onto God and not giving in to her boss' overtures even when she knows that she has no other source of income should she lose her job, shows how God is faithful to rescue those who wholly surrender to Him. It is also another manifestation of the Christian videos demonstration of the evangelical myth of salvation in moments of crisis. For Laide's husband later discovered that the other woman who he abandoned his wife for was using fetish powers to control him. This discovery led to a duel between Bode and his mistress. This ended the relationship between them and helped Bode to realise his mistake and come back to Laide. Incidentally, Laide had only that very morning of Bode's return lost her job because she turned down her Managing Director's romantic overtures. Upon his return, Bode became apologetic to his wife and eventually got transformed and became a converted Christian just like Chief Clark.

The two video films further seek to enhance our understanding of the Biblical virtue of long suffering among the Christian faithful. This is a popular theme in the Nigerian Christian video films. *I Was Wrong* highlights this theme by bringing to focus Pauline's ability, just

like Laide, to endure all the maltreatment that her husband subjected her to. His reasons for her ill-treatment were mainly because of her insistence, against his persuasions, to continue with her Christian ways. Examples of these include her attending fellowships, dressing up in a simple way, and by calling Chief Clark "my lord" just like we are told that Sarah did in the Old Testament to her husband Abraham. All these are aspects which show Pauline as conforming to the Christian teaching and depict her determination to have a new way of life that is distinct from her previous lifestyle in order that she might be saved. Pauline's ability to persevere and to endure this psychological and physical pain is brought to bear in the way the narrative juxtaposes her previous wifely position as an unbeliever with her later days in the house of Chief Clark as a born-again Christian. This serves to validate the fact that the choice of becoming a committed believer of Jesus Christ comes with real suffering in terms of how her choice to become a Christian made her to lose her former privileges as Chief Clark's wife. She was stripped off the care, car, love and affection of her husband but this is a price which must be paid. This position lends credence to the fact that Pauline's character conforms to the Christian moral goal that the filmmakers set out to achieve which is the proselytizing of Christianity. Consequently, it is not surprising that in the end Pauline, just like the other video film's characters similarly depicted, emerged as the celebrated heroes/heroines whose ability to tenaciously hold on to Christian virtues triumphed. Her long suffering, perseverance, patience, hope and love triumphed over all else. She not only emerged as a virtuous woman providing succour to her family but also, through her long-suffering, she was able to regain her husband. On the part of Chief Clark, his period of suffering as a result of various ailments remaining on the worldly side paved the way for his conversion. The result of his conversion was the restoration of a new hope and a new life for him. He got healed of the multiple diseases which threatened his life. Also, through Pauline's contact with Interpol, he recovered his money which Rita had absconded with to Canada. Finally, he was able to once again have a harmonious family whose craving for vain glories had given way to a more lasting crown of glory, the reward which is received by those who diligently serve God.

While the above themes build upon conversion and the myth of salvation, it is also important that we identify the theme of forgiveness which equally serves as a catalyst to the attainment

of salvation. Without forgiveness, Pauline would not have been able to endure all the punishment which her husband perpetrated on her and still wholeheartedly accept him back in the end. In setting up their reconciliation in the third act, the director uses a close pan to depict Chief Clark's countenance which shows him frowning when Pauline entered his room. In this scene he is lying on his sick bed and he is surprised, unhappy and angry when he sees Pauline. His statement "don't touch me" (*I Was Wrong*) explains his feelings. Her humility, endurance, compassion and forgiveness made her to go on and advice and assist him , support that none of his friends, business associates and Rita could provide. Pauline not only called the doctor but she willingly volunteered to give him the forty million naira that he needed to enable him to get medical treatment overseas. This singular act brought her husband to know that Christians have a forgiving and kind heart that cannot be measured. This in itself brought about the turning point in Chief Clark's life and he could not delay his decision to also become a Christian. His conversion brings to focus James Spiegel's (2002:2) description of conversion as "gestalt":

> Those who finally come to realize they are dead do not do so gradually over time. Rather, their awakening is sudden, shocking, and life changing. Triggered by some unexpected event that forces them to see their actual condition, they awaken all at once to the truth….When spiritual change comes, it arrives with a gestalt switch of one's perspective on the world, as Paul notes that a Christian is "a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." Everything has changed. The new convert is, so to speak, a different person with wholly different view of the world.

Thus, Chief Clark's choice to become a Christian as the film ends is related to his wife's forgiveness and benevolence. It made him to discover the truth and reality about Christianity which, hitherto, was too opaque for him to see. The video film may also be suggesting that Christians who follow virtue should through their model lives, draw other humans to Christ. The couple's conversation below highlights the irony that explains how non-Christians define Christianity from the outside as a contradiction. It is only later when they converted that they come to realize the errors of their assumptions about the religion. . *I Was Wrong* builds upon an irony to highlight the difference between appearance and reality. We see this in Chief Clark's former and present knowledge of what Christianity truly represents:

Chief Clark: (in his house bar, pours a drink for himself) Listen to me, did I do wrong to have married you? I picked you from a wretched background…Now tell me what have I done to you?

Pauline: You know I am born-again.

Chief Clark: That's nonsense to me.

Pauline: I have found a new life in Christ.

Chief Clark: Then let me live my old life.

Pauline: With time you'll discover that Jesus loves you.

Chief Clark: (expressing his disgust) Say it to yourself. Just look at you! You have lost all your attractions; you're not dressing well at all…I do not want to be a Moses to lead Israel out of captivity… (*I Was Wrong*).

While the above conversation indicts Chief Clark's earlier dismissal of Christian tenets as being out of fashion, it also implicitly eulogises Pauline's victory. She eventually emerges as an archetype of forgiveness as a Christian virtue always triumphs over vice. Her role is used symbolically to allude to the Biblical teaching that God will always triumph over Satan.

In contrast to how Pauline is represented, the bad/evil woman dynamic in the video film is portrayed by the antagonist, Lydia. Her representation introduces us to another thematic preoccupation of *I Was Wrong* and that is the matter of child abandonment. It constitutes the second major theme and the film treats child abandonment as an inherent social evil plaguing modern day African societies. The theme of child abandonment highlights the multiple voices and interpretations (interoglosia)[34] of the character of the abandoned child, Comfort. The child represents different dimensions of the narrative in the story. She is used to symbolise the plight of abandoned innocent children and she thus becomes a social

[34] In the Bakhtinian sense, interglosia is the use of a double-voiced discourse and the dialogic resistance to monological positions. Interoglosia refers to the possibility of identifying multiple voices and interpretations to a character.

commentary on how the society's slack moral values and the stigmatization of single mothers encourages number of unwanted children. Comfort also draws attention to how other women, such as Sister Rachel who are ostracised for being 'barren', are divorced and separated from their families. Childless women like Sister Rachael face various traumatic experiences, like their in-laws and husband rising against her, and sending her away because she cannot fulfill the societal requirements of wives bearing children. Procreation is valorised since it guarantees the continuity of the family name's and it seen as also a measure of the success of a marriage. At another level, Comfort shows the different ways in which children are valued in the society: while some parents value their children, others, see them as stumbling blocks to their freedom. Thus the child facilitates multiple readings of the story's concern with child abandonment. Even her very name, "Comfort," symbolically adds to the triangular relationship between the child herself, her biological mother, Lydia, and her foster mother, Sister Rachael. The camera depicts Sister Rachael as one who got consoled by the baby coming into her life so unexpectedly. Her arrival meant the realization of her dream of being a mother which she had earlier been denied and which caused the break-up of her marriage.[35] Thus, to Sister Rachael, having to now take care of Comfort as if she was her own child brought her tremendous "comfort" both in reality and symbolically.

On the other hand, Lydia who had been blessed with the child did not initially appreciate the value of the baby and instead saw the child as a social hindrance. It was only much later in the film that she tries to reclaim the child. To Lydia, at birth, Comfort served to remind her of a past which she wished not to re-visit. However, later on, Comfort served as the way for her to be bestowed with another identity, that of being a mother. The little girl was well-raised by Sister Rachael and given motherly love and support. She made sure the girl was given a proper education too. In effect, Comfort was given all the comforts which an abandoned or motherless baby would not have if they were to be raised in an orphanage. However, while giving Comfort's character multiple significations, *I Was Wrong* highlights a message for the society at large. The message is simply that abandoned children should be raised in an

[35] It can also be argued here that childlessness still constitutes a major issue leading to divorce even within Christian marriages. Sister Rachael's divorce on account of 'bareness' and her husband, who is arguably a born-again Christian succumbs to divorce. It shows how the Nigerian society's cultural and patriarchal ideologies are sweeping into the church and shaping the attitudes of even professed Christians.

exemplary way as portrayed by the character of Sister Rachael. For the unmarried woman, apart from other things, marriage becomes very difficult as prospective suitors would be discouraged by both their families and societal pressures not to marry a woman who gave birth outside marriage. Given this scenario, it is understandable that Lydia even contemplates such a wrong and inhuman choice of throwing away her newly born baby. Such a situation echoes C.D Hayes' (1992:77) position that:

> No human experience is at once so transiently private and lastingly public as an unintended pregnancy. When the mother is herself a young adolescent the pregnancy is inevitably enmeshed in a ragged tapestry of personal, inter-personal, social, religious, ethical and economic dimensions.

We are provided with another option of reading Lydia's character against the backdrop of the psychological and social pressures that could make Lydia to break a moral code by debasing another human being, and a child for that matter. While it is important to categorically condemn such actions, it is important to acknowledge that she is operating within the ambits of societal pressures which may have driven her to take that action. However, the inability of female characters, even within the Christian video film genre, to seek remedies and alternatives the confines that patriarchy has placed upon them, arguably reinforces the societal stereotypes that make women pay a high price for contravening tradition. It would be very helpful to the effort of changing these stereotypes if the Nigerian Christian video producers and directors were to also take up the issue of the injustices which women continually suffer as a result of these patriarchal notions and stereotypes.

Overall, as a film, it is safe to say that *I Was Wrong's* central theme emphasises that those who are Christians and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ will always make the "right" decisions while those who are unbelievers will be susceptible to making "wrong" decisions. Thus, artistically, the video film's title "*I Was Wrong*" draws attention to the general narrative. The title becomes explicit in pointing us to the fact that certain character traits, storylines and thematic explorations within the filmic narrative deal with either "doing the right things or the wrong ones" depending on whether the character was a Christian at the time of the action or not. Symbolically, the film interrogates the absolutes of "good" and "evil" while at the same time begging the question "who is wrong?" Predictably, Pauline who found God and lived a Christian life also made "good" decisions that were worthy of

emulation, while Lydia who did not find God made bad decisions which she later knew and admitted were "wrong" but which she was helpless to change at that point of her realization[36]. Of course, the message here is that it pays to be a Christian since not being one will make you susceptible to making fundamental mistakes.

Helen Ukpabio and the Portrayal of Women

As the discussion so far has shown, the portrayal of women in the Nigerian Christian videos, with few exceptions, is very similar to the portrayal prevalent within the mainstream Nigerian video films. Women characters are disproportionately depicted in roles which cast them in a bad light as compared to their male counterparts. If the Nigerian Christian video film producers and directors are primarily interested in the proselytizing of Christian theology to as many unbelievers as possible, then one would think that an easier way to accomplish such an intension would be to cast as many men as women in the various roles which portray some sort of religious conversion to Christianity. It would stand to reason that many more male viewers of the Christian videos, if they are unbelievers, will be able to readily relate their situations with storylines which portray males as converting to Christianity and changing their lives from bad to good after having lived bad and terrible lives as unbelievers. This is if we assume that just as many men as women are readily susceptible to accepting the myth of salvation in moments of crisis which is the cornerstone of the evangelization objectives of the Christian videos. However, as we have seen in the discussion of the various portrayals, Nigerian Christian video filmmakers with the exception of the likes of Ukpabio in *I Was Wrong*, have chosen to cast a disproportionate number of women in bad and negative roles than men. In the process, they have ended up reproducing what prevails within the mainstream Nigerian video film space and within the larger male-dominated Nigerian society. This buttresses the fact that Nigerian videos represent women in

[36]Such was the case with Mrs Itohowo who, after realizing that she had raised her children badly, admitted that she was wrong and then she identified Pentecostalism as the vehicle which could ensure her transformation. Mrs Itohowo is then shown saying, "I was wrong give me another chance. Somebody advised me to start going to a Pentecostal church, had I known that this is how my life would end…" While negating her former ways means a better future for women, it reiterates the authorial emphasis that a theocratic tenet of living provides long lasting security.

roles which are not in consonance with the way they are in real life. It could be argued that the Christian video film producers are only using the dominant character types to pass a message to their general patrons. But the issue is that the impression created through such representations does not guarantee a good image for women within the Christian video genre. Furthermore, by portraying women in these stereotypically negative roles, we believe, they only seek to perpetuate the pre-existing societal ideas of gender roles and of women being bad.

However, from the discussion of *I Was Wrong*, it is clear that Helen Ukpabio, is one of the few producers and directors, like those of *The Chosen One*[37] *Story of my Life*[38] and *The Shattered Dreams*, who are among the few exceptions to this general trend among the Nigerian Christian video film makers. It would appear that Helen Ukpabio, as a female, seeks to use films to reconstruct the society by spreading the theocratic morality in pursuance of her functional role as an evangelist. In *I Was Wrong* she did a good job of maintaining a very balanced portrayal of both male and female characters in ways which did not perpetuate pre-existing notions of gender roles. She rather sought to show that both males and females were equally susceptible to making bad decisions as unbelievers and that they could just as equally be saved by being converted to Christianity.

Besides, films by women filmmakers transcend "arts for art's sake" to employ art as an agency for re-shaping women within the society, towards women becoming more independently defined and self actualized. In *I Was Wrong* Ukpabio uses art to address the socio-religious, political and economic concerns in the society. She uses her film to examine the society's weaknesses while seeking to interrogate why things are the way they are in terms of the derogatory roles associated with women and which also informs how women are

[37] The video film *The Chosen One*1&2 (2003), like *I Was Wrong*, tells the story of the conversion of two women, the protagonist Sandra and her friend Susan, who were prostitutes and they were helped by Pastor Henry Mensah, to abandon their life of prostitution, get other jobs and turn to God.

[13] *Story of my Life* (2002) and Shattered *Dreams* (2004) brings to focus the producers' efforts at trying to re-build the image of women from bad to good. *Story of my Life* also depicts a story of conversion.

represented in films. She does this with a view to re-shaping the society through films, in the same way Chinua Achebe (1975:17) advocates that literature should serve as a tool for transforming society. Achebe attests that "the writer must expose injustice whenever and wherever they exist especially as new brand of injustices are sprouting and flourishing all over across the continent of Africa."

Achebe's advocacy that literature be made to serve as a tool to address societies injustices should also be applied to videos because such injustices are seemingly the very ones which Nigerian video films, be it the secular or Christian video films, should also be implicated in changing society. This is where Ukpabio's role in addressing the character portrayal of women within the Nigerian Christian video film comes into focus. Being a filmmaker and an Evangelist, she tries to create a balance in order to address the representation of women in her video films. She shows that society must not be portrayed along stereotypical orientations that privilege patriarchal ideologies. *I was Wrong* enunciates that certain character portrayals in videos can be shifted to ensure that both women and men understand the message that is intended which is to change from evil to good. It is incumbent on Christian filmmakers to represent women in non stereotypical ways to achieve evangelical aims of the films. This position gives value to Ukpabio's mathematical re-creation formula in *I Was Wrong*, which reveals a non-sexist approach. The formula is as follows:

1). Bad women archetype + re-creating bad women archetype into good archetypes = a seeming better representation of women within Nigerian Christian video films.
2). Using the very bad women archetypes + making them to at least discover their wrong doings, thereby leading them to attest to their wrongs = a near sound method which tries to create ruptures from previous ways where women have always been portrayed as insensitive to their wrongs.
3). Using women + men in almost in the same proportional numbers in order to depict good/bad absolutes = No gendered stereotypes in Christian video films.

However, it is in her particular mediation of reality that Ukpabio succeeds in *I Was Wrong*. Her theocratic and moralistic position would appear to show that people can actually change from negative tendencies to more positive ones. This is since bad tendencies seek to ruin

them and take them out of God's will for their lives. Thus, Ukpabio in *I Was Wrong* points many people to the best choices in life which would profit them. The point she makes is that choosing the way of God guarantees lasting peace and happiness. This is against the choice of earthly wealth and involvement in frivolities. It is a point which is true for women as it is for men. This point is what she achieves in her portrayal of the heroine Pauline Clark who chooses to follow the way of God and this is celebrated as the ultimate choice. On the other hand, her choice parallels that of Lydia the antagonist, whose choice of a reckless life of frivolities sees her regretting her choice at the end.

Thus, we argue here that being a sensitive woman, Ukpabio has in the film *I Was Wrong* aligned herself with the cause of "womanism," to borrow the African feminist coinage by Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, who both posit a complimentary approach towards feminist notions which work for the improvement of both male and female within African society. Helen Ukpabio presents a convincing case that even when women characters are depicted within the dominant negative strands, the filmmakers still owe women the duty of re-creating such characters to know and identify their wrongs and be poised to change their ways for the better. This, in our view, succinctly captures Helen Ukpabio's position in *I Was Wrong.* It is a position that one wishes that many more Nigerian Christian video filmmaker would adopt.

Conclusion

Ukpabio's lead role as protagonist in the video film reassuringly emphasizes the need for the patrons of *I Was Wrong* to learn from her that the choices one makes to serve God stand to lead them to a more prosperous way of life than worldly choices which brings them into contact with witchcraft. Thus, her success as a church minister who is the president and founder of the Liberty Gospel church with branches in most parts of Africa, and her success in film production among others, exemplify that serving God brings success. It is therefore, her success as a video film producer that has given her the opportunity to address the image of women in the Nigerian Christian video genre. For women within the Christian/evangelical

genre are represented in ways that could result in creating the unintended perception that only women are generally bad or evil and in need of having their lives changed. Her ability to address the representation women in more diverse and balanced terms shows that if more women were to follow her exemplary leadership and role as producer, the negative image of women within the Christian genre and mainstream video films could take a positive turn. Therefore, apart from the call for more women to be involved in film production, Nigerian Christian video film producers and directors need to be very sensitive to this issue and factor it into their scripts and productions to avoid causing women to acquire the erroneous perception of being the incarnations of evil in the society.

CHAPTER FOUR

Gender and Political Agency in *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke*

> "Leadership can come from unpredictable places".
> (Angela Davis: Public Lecture University of the Witwatersrand, August 30, 2007)

This chapter focuses on and interrogates the depiction of women in Nigerian videos that deal with issues relating to leadership and governance. The chapter argues that women, in such videos have continued to be marginalised and stereotyped as sexually loose, as second class fiddlers and cheats. Such portrayals pave the way for how women have been represented as a generic group that is expected to conform to culturally specified roles that also reflect the biases of the male filmmakers. The chapter critically examines women's exclusion in matters concerning governance in the video narratives and the negative implications this has on women and their political role and obligations in Nigeria and by extension Africa. It further calls for a change in how women are portrayed through its examination of the exemplary heroines of the two films under analysis in this chapter, *The Tyrant* 1&2 (2003/04), directed by Mac Collins Chidebe and *Masterstroke* 1&2 (2004), directed by Lancelot Odua Imuasuen. Thus, the chapter eulogizes the political prowess of the female protagonists Jenny Moremi of *The Tyrant* and Simba Richards of *Masterstroke* respectively. We argue in this chapter that the story lines and characters of women in Nollywood should move away from those which ignore and marginalise the roles of women in leadership and, by implication, validate the tendency of making women to shy away from governance.

The marginal representation of women in politics in Nigerian videos illustrates Victor Gere's (1996:54) application of the concept of "marginality". He explains it as displaying the binary between the "centre" and the "margin":

> Marginality is often (mis) used in sweeping conflations to refer to writings, subjects, action groupings, or geographical demarcations (e.g. the colonized, minorities, subcultures, and the Third World, the O/ther, subalterns, outsiders, declasses, exiles, dissidents, e.t.c) that have allegedly resisted or escaped some or other "central" metanarratives, power, or class structure, or some form of oppression (e.g. the colonizer, Eurocentricism, the self, the nation state, capitalism, dominant culture, hegemony, e.t.c.)

Arguably, the marginal representation of women in the political sphere in Nollywood video films is in line with the structural arrangements obtainable within both the military and democratic institutions in the country. Thus most of the political videos continue to depict women as debased and politically irrelevant. It is our view that Nigerian videos should endeavour to create a confluence between film and real women in a manner that ensures that the depiction of women will be channeled towards sensitizing women to the need to contribute their own quota to leadership alongside men. Such portrayals will of necessity need to showcase women as politically conscious and competent rulers. The political mobilization of women can be encouraged through character portrayals of women that will serve as role models to others. *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke* are two films which have tried to foreground women as active participants within the political realm.[39] As will be seen in this chapter, these two films facilitate our understanding of the various discourses within around the exercise of political rule in Nigeria and particularly their effects on women's contributions to the political scene.

Since much of contemporary justifications of the marginalisation of the role of women in politics is based on cultural discourses, the chapter will chart the history of women's participation in the public sphere from pre-colonial times in Africa. This will be done to show that women were not excluded from governance in pre-colonial times and how, in comparison, colonial rule with its European notions of gender roles, which privileged African men. This had a profound impact on Africa in terms of rolling back the active participatory role of women in governance within the continent, a setback that can still be felt in post-colonial Africa. We will also make a case for Nigerian videos to be used as a

[39] It should be noted that both *The Tyrant and Masterstroke* come in parts one and two. However, it should be noted that the second parts only complete the stories that are told in the first part because of the length of the stories.

means of enlightening the public to embrace a better form of leadership. This is in line with Kaarsholm Preben and Deborah James' (2000:208) position on popular cultures as "being of crucial importance to the development of consolidated forms of democracy" in the South. Thus, through the villain General Amino, the video *The Tyrant* condemns the tyranny of military dictatorship in Africa and advocates for civilian rule through the efforts of the film's hero and heroine, the radical Barrister Nelson Moremi and his wife Jenny, the women rights activist.

The portrayal of Jenny Moremi will help us to interrogate the role women play in the national political scene. Its importance is that it makes a case for more women as role models in Nollywood videos. It is worth interrogating because of the benefits that can accrue when women are involved in active politics and struggles to expand and deepen democracy in Africa.

Leadership and Gender in postcolonial narratives

Debates on the dynamics of power, leadership and gender and their implications for the relations between the rulers and the ruled have become very popular in the narratives of post colonial Africa. This theme can be observed in Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1988), Ngugi wa Thiongo's in *Devil on the Cross* (1987), Ayi Kwa Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born* (1969), Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* (1974) and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1963), *A Man of the People* (1967), *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Achebe in his ground breaking masterpiece, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983:1), points out that leadership is mostly the problem that has held Nigeria, and by extension many African countries, in backward positions since their independence. Similarly, feminist discourses on marginalization centred on the relegation of women to the background in leadership positions in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Thus, feminist discourses have continued to examine how women are represented along stereotypical images in artistic renditions. Carole Boyce Davies (1990:15) explains that "a positive image, is one that is true with African historical realities and does not stereotype or limit women into postures of dependence or

submergence. Instead it searches for more accurate portrayals and ones which suggest the possibility of transcendence." Hence our argument that women should be given equal roles in governance together with men. As already alluded to before, Nigerian videos have gained widespread reception and as such can be used as an avenue to create a positive awareness around various notions surrounding the proper role of women in political leadership. This position will also help to bring in a wider range of possible solutions to the diverse problems affecting political rule in Africa. Rather than continue to depict women as promiscuous or as political blackmailers, Nigerian videos can play a more positive role by depicting women in better roles that also explore the demands of leadership. Such roles will in turn have the effect of making women within society to be seen as capable of contributing to solving the society's political, economic and social problems. It is worth noting that to date, the most common role in which women are depicted in most Nigerian political videos is that of being wives to husbands in power (at best being cast as the First Lady).

Such forms of casting and characterization have in turn created a gendered division of roles within the society with leadership positions categorized as being male prerogatives. This trend explains the way women have been relegated to the background as far as power and rule are concerned. This is especially because the political arena and political films have taken up the cultural and religious ideologies which argue, based on their replication of the family structure, that men are divinely anointed to lead, just as they are heads of their families. The supposed responsibility of women is to fulfill the patriarchally prescribed subordinate roles of being house wives and mothers. The preference for such traditional roles for women is stated in *Masterstroke* when a rival for the seat in the state-house reminds Simba Richards, the heroine of *Masterstroke* (2004), of her designated position in the society as a woman. In the video, her opponent's political gang sent a warning message through her father and step-mother to remind her that her traditional role as a woman is in the kitchen and not the political arena. It will be argued that such culturally identified roles for women have been privileged through patriarchal ideologies and the influence of colonial rule. In both instances, women were designated as the weaker sex and were therefore relegated to the margins as the voiceless

"other." At the same time, such ideologies privileged the man and father figure over the woman and mother figure. These propositions have continued to generate a lot of responses from feminist discourses around the topical issue of women's right to participate in governance.

Engaging *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke*

The Tyrant and *Masterstroke* are explorations of the limits and possibilities of governance, the first under military rule and, the second video, with regards to a so-called democracy. *The Tyrant* vividly depicts the enormous powers of a military ruler, in this case symbolized by the powers of General Idris Amino. *The Tyrant* is an examination and condemnation of the killing and brutality that accompanies the tyranny of military regimes in Nigeria and the continent. By exposing and calling for the end of the dictatorial rule of General Idris Amino, the military president of a nameless country, the narrative serves to state its preference for civilian governance over military rule. One of the hallmarks of military rule is depicted through General Amino's indiscriminate killings that indicate the absence of the principle of the rule of law that can guarantee the rights of citizens. Rather, military rule in *The Tyrant* mirrors the experiments with leadership in Nigeria and it portrays how they have been characterized by the tyrannical and brutal repression of people's civil rights. Metaphorically, *The Tyrant* alludes to the despotic rule of the likes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha of Nigeria, Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, and Samuel Doe of Liberia amongst others.

Furthermore, it builds on Colin Legum (1997: 254:-55) revelation that "General Idi Amin has made himself the dictator of Uganda-an absolute ruler who makes all decisions himself and who personally executes his orders including those to liquidate his challengers." For instance it chronicles the promotion and decoration of General Amino's little son, Aeron, to the rank of Brigadier General. While the narrative explores the usurping of power by the military it draws attention to the absence of the principle of checks and balances within such dictatorial regimes. It also, ironically, portrays the obsession with superficial pomp and pride that tends to mark military rulers while they

ignore the substantive requirements of governance. This is captured in the depiction of a mere kid being elevated to the rank of a Brigadier General just because his father had the power to do so. Thus, Aeron, without knowing the significance of his new rank, is shown in the film playing football while wearing the uniform. This recalls the corresponding reality of Idi Amin of Uganda who, while president, promoted his young son to a high serving military officer position. Other officers in the Army had to pay their respects to the small boy and it is no wonder that Colin Legum (1997:255) notes that "the story of Amin will furnish some future Ugandan Shakespeare with more than enough material for a black Macbeth or an African Henry VIII. Such an author will not have to embellish his plots, rather, he will find himself trying to censor the awful truth."

The second video, *Masterstroke,* represents the continuous yearnings of Nigerian citizens for democracy, and one that will be based on institutions and practices that are efficient and accountable to all and that will ensure good governance. It scrutinizes the electioneering processes that are supposed to underpin democracy and which, instead, give rise to the politics of money and corruption, intimidation, blackmail, the killing of opponents and other vagaries which characterize politics of Nigeria. Interestingly, *Masterstroke* does not follow the dominant patriarchal tenets that insist on excluding women from the exercise of power in the political sphere and it privileges a heroine, Simba Richards, in its narrative. She is portrayed as a single woman who challenges the social expectations that women should confine themselves to the kitchen and not the public arena as she vies for a seat in the State House of Assembly in her constituency. Her portrayal fits into Dina Sherzer's (2000:58) analysis of a female director, Moufida Tlatli, iconographic creation of all-round admirable characters. Thus, like Tlatli, Simba Richards "conveys a powerful feminist message which is effective because she positions the spectators strategically." Simba's depiction in a leadership role validates the feminist calls for more of such artistic creations.

The two videos under discussion make a case for awareness to be created through videos with political themes that expose poor governance and provide examples of what good governance entails. In both *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke*, the theme of

good governance is very prominent and the films explore examples of what constitutes bad leadership through the character of General Idris Amino in *The Tyrant* as well as Senator Adams (Donald Adam's father) in *Masterstroke*. The machinations of those who seek power are revealed, especially the violent and corrupt actions that they undertake in order to win elections. While unravelling the broader theme of governance, *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke*, also highlights the interventions of heroines and heroes who are presented as the true custodians of democracy and good governance. They are depicted in the two videos as characters whose quest for sound leadership is exemplary and worthy of emulation. In *The Tyrant*, Barrister Nelson Moremi and his wife Jenny Moremi's campaign for a form of rule that is accountable to citizens and their endeavours eventually bring succour to the masses who have long wished for a mass-based participatory form of governance. The actions of the Moremi's are similar to those of Simba Richards in *Masterstroke*, who dramatises that it is possible to conduct oneself in a non-corrupt manner, play politics according to fair rules and still win elections instead of preferring to engage in malpractices and other corrupt short cuts to victory.

In summary, *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke* put under scrutiny the desired transition from military dictatorship to civilian democracy in Nigeria. This is achieved by powerful critiques of the current states that hold sway in both narratives. In *The Tyrant* the undesirability of military repression and autocracy as represented by the central character and his cabal, a situation that provides the basis for advocating democracy as a better form of governance for the people. However, the advocacy for democracy, laudable as it is, is open to being compromised if vigilance is not exercised as we see in the democratic transition that is witnessed in *Masterstroke*. In the latter, the democratic transition is flawed and it is accompanied by a horrifying orgy of kidnapping, assassinations, blackmail and the rigging of elections. Not only are these developments a threat to the creation of a true democratic space but they also have the potential of turning the ideals and values of democracy into a perennially elusive goal for the African continent. The challenge of real democratic governance in Africa must therefore consist of putting in place not just the structures for holding credible elections but also the institutional

structures and practices - such as an effective judiciary, a free press and civic rights – that serve as a real check on the powers of elected leaders. Also social developments should also create the conditions for socio-economic transformation that will ensure that the dividends of democracy are felt by the entire citizenry.

The Representation of Women in *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke*

As is to be expected, the presence of women in the military is very insignificant when compared to that of men. Apart from the male dominated supreme military council, which is the highest law making body in the army, *The Tyrant* only shows six women as forming part of the lower echelons of the military personnel. The video, by showing the marginal status of women in the army, further highlights the fact that even the future has no meaningful promise of women being allowed into the top positions in the military. Instead, the largest group of women in the video are a group of girls who serve as the call-girls or concubines of the General and his cohorts within the presidential villa. As is to be expected, the girls have no function in the exercise of power except when they demonstrate their promiscuity at the swimming pool and the gym, where they are always entertained with the killing of innocent soldiers by their host, His Excellency. Their clamour around General Amino further heightens their role within the margins, as people who have lost their individual sense of right and wrong in exchange for fabulous sums of money which His Excellency promises: "I would give you one million dollars each" (*The Tyrant*). In a sense, the lingering camera pan on them objectifies and commodifies their bodies and they are symbolically reduced to prey just like General Amino's victims (those he kills). The camera gaze does not give the girls any sense of individuality even though some of them are undergraduate students from the university campuses. The others are prostitutes from brothels and two were handpicked by General Amino during his inspection of a guard of honour involving the only six women soldiers in his army. The visual representation of the girls is ambiguous because while it suggests the marginalisation of women, the camera pans also become a filmic technique which portrays the girls as allegorical and seductive representations of women within the military and in Nollywood videos.

I use the term representation in the sense which Gillian Swanson (1991:123) uses it ─ "the term 'representation' refers to the way images and language actively construct meanings according to sets of conventions shared by and familiar to makers and audiences." Thus, *The Tyrant*'s depiction of Amino's numerous girls becomes a symbolic representation of how men in top military positions look at women as objects. This conclusion is predicated upon the video narrative's inability to develop any of the girls beyond the social category of being sexual companions to His Excellency, who only uses them for his sport and to satisfy his amorous desires. Arguably, the video makers have used the usual social perception of the girls as prostitutes to illustrate the peculiar way in which women have always been portrayed in Nigerian videos with political undertones. Such portrayals illustrate Florence Stratton's (1994: 53) analysis of how prostitution has become the political metaphor for corruption: "prostitution is not related to the female social condition in patriarchal societies. Rather, it is a metaphor for men's degradation under some non-preferred socio-political system- a metaphor which encodes women as agents of moral contamination in society." In a sense, the filmmakers' prejudices are shown in the fact that the girls appear in a few scenes that have no significant dialogue or relevance to the plot. My point is that the girls do not contribute in the building up of the plot or to its climax nor do they function as a sub-theme. They serve to illustrate the associations of corruption with prostitution that is common in Nigerian political videos.

In contrast to the depiction of the girls, there are two women who are presented with notable individuality and social agency: they are Mrs. Jenny Moremi and Mrs. Ogazie. Jenny is the wife of a radical Barrister Nelson Moremi, who replaces General Amino after his government, is toppled by the United Nations Organization (UNO), who also abducted him. Mrs. Ogazie is the wife of General Monday Ogazie who refuses to be compelled by his friend General Amino to compulsorily retire from the military. General Amino considered all high-ranked officers are a potential threat and he wanted to purge them from the army by enforcing their retirement. When General Ogazie refused to heed the advice he was assassinated through a car bomb at the instructions of the military junta. The two women, who are in opposition to the General, are represented as dignified

women and do not conform to the stereotypical depictions – such as the case of the girls – who only enter the narrative frame as objects for male desire and consumption. So in a sense, *The Tyrant* seems unsure as to what point of view it should adopt with regard to its representation of women. The characters of Jenny and Mrs. Ogazi developed in depth and Jenny is very important to the overall plot development and Mrs. Ogazi contributes to the sub-plot of the narrative. The portrayal of the two women is in line with David Bordwell's image approach that encourages films to represent women in positive roles.

Women and perils of power in Nigeria

Nigeria's political history shows that Nigeria has had very few women in both military and democratic governments since independence. Five years ago the federal government because of the continuous insignificant number of women in ministerial portfolios, created a Ministry of Women Affairs that appointed women to head the ministry. This marginal position of women in governance is indicated in the fact that only six women are in the lower ranks in the entire army of General Amino's and that Simba Richards is the only female contestant for a seat in the House of Assembly in *Masterstroke*. By implication, it can assumed that women can hardly become rulers in a predominantly majority male leadership where there are only a few women to be selected from. This shows that women are still locked up in their traditional roles that are associated with the private domain (family) and that the public domain remains exclusive to men. This justifies the gendered division of labour whether in the domestic or public domains and it explains why women are predominantly represented in Nigerian videos as sexual providers which is the case with General Amino's girls and in videos like *Queen of Aso Rock*, and its rejoinder *Fall of the Queen of Aso Rock*, and *Girl's Cot* respectively. Alternatively, it can be argued that since the all-male military junta is a failure, it validates the view that more women should participate in politics and governance as in the example of Simba Richards in *Masterstroke*.

The experiences of women in *The Tyrant* are explored in two environments: the military and the civilian space. The heroine Jenny Moremi, wife of the radical Barrister Nelson,

represents the activist's point of view that serves to mediate the gap between the military and civilian space. Her role accords women a distinctive and valuable place in the national struggle for emancipation from military tyranny in order to transform society for the good of all. On the other hand, General Ogazi's wife represents the matriarchal ethos that exists in the familial space that exists in the military barracks. Mrs. Ogazie's exemplifies women's strength in home building which, in some senses, it depicted as also demonstrative of the strengths that can be found in women with regards to decision making. However, it is only recognized and defined within the domestic space. There are sequences when we are shown Mrs. Ogazie as she advises her husband not to disregard the General's instructions that he resign. She cautions him that "You know him... before ever he makes such utterance, his mind is made up. Accept the offer, eighteen months of rice importation. Your life is more precious to me" (*The Tyrant*). The interactions in this scene are depicted through a combination of long and close-up shots, which reveal the traditional hierarchical organization of the family with the husband as head. Thus, Mrs. Ogazie kneels down in submission to the headship of her husband in order to persuade him to see reason and also because of her premonition that he is unlikely to comply. It is through her that the role of women serving as support to their military husbands is brought to focus. Furthermore, the portrayal of the Ogazie family also shows the role of women in the military as revolving around providing a safe domestic haven that counters for stresses and violent experiences of their husbands. It further informs and suggests that women can ensure the security of their husbands because of their sensitivity and ability to read situations that appear too opaque for their husbands' full grasp. It further brings to the fore the agony that the wives of military men face when their spouses are involved in failed coup de tats or other problems and are made to face the death penalty. The scene before his assassination, Mrs. Ogazie implores her husband not to honour an invitation to a purported military council meeting at the behest of General Amino. There she says to him as he was about to leave for the meeting: "you are more powerful than him. My dear how I wish you could avoid this meeting". (*The Tyrant*)

Subsequent events confirm the sound sense of judgment inherent in African matriarchy and her strong morality when she turns down General Amino's romantic overtures

towards her and she also tears his ten million naira bank cheque in front of him. Her behaviour counters that of the girls who made themselves cheap objects ready for General Amino's beck and call. Mrs Ogazie, like Jenny, demonstrates the self worth and sense of responsibility that is inherent in women and which most male filmmakers refuse to depict and often choose what is depicted in General Amino's girls. Again, like Jenny, Mrs. Ogazie cannot be swayed by difficult times to go against the dictates of her conscience. Following her rebuff of the overtures of General Amino, we are shown a long shot of her and the military personnel who convey the head of state's message to her that she must vacate their official residence. As the conveyor of the message leaves, the shot gradually fades out completely on him and establishes Mrs Ogazie in a waist to head pan, dwelling on her face for some minutes, allowing viewers to read her emotional state as she nods her head. The shot stretches the thematic import of the sequence further by recording her verbal response: "just because I refused to be his mistress". (*The Tyrant*) The narrative mode attests to George Otieno Ogola's (2004:177) observation that "there is a sense in which the writer collapses the domestic space so that what is discussed within the family is read against the backdrop of national issues." Thus, General Amino's hostile treatment of Mrs. Ogazie speaks to the predicament of the widows of military officers' and members of the general public who are not morally bankrupt. It explains that they hardly find any support because of their refusal to play along with the corruption and immorality of the powers that be.

Women and Political Rule from pre- to postcolonial Africa

In order to understand the arguments around the marginalization of women with regards to the social and political agency in Nollywood demands that we interrogate the pre-colonial leadership roles of women. This is necessary since, firstly, a case needs to be made for why women need to be politically and strategically repositioned in postcolonial Nigerian politics and, secondly, in order to counter advocates of the cultural prohibition of women's participation in governance. Various studies have delved into various regional and continental case-studied that reveal how women played key roles in

traditional kingship institutions in pre-colonial Africa.[40] For instance, Queen Amina of Zaria, according to Kamene Okonjo (1983:211-21), succeeded her father as the heir to the throne "in the fifteenth century" when he died. Her "thirty-four years" of leadership and legacy still stands the test of time of pre-colonial African women who have distinguished themselves as amazons. It also portrays how women contributed meaningfully to the expansion and "fortification" of the territories bequeathed to them, both in the literal and metaphoric sense. Okonjo further highlights that women occupied important traditional political roles in Yoruba and Edo and argues that "before the advent of British rule" the Yoruba had women with titles such as Iya Oba, the king's "official mother" and Iya Kere, who controls the "greatest power and authority in the palace". The latter meant that she was the custodian of the secret items and kingship paraphernalia that included the "royal insignia", without which the king could not make a public appearance. She was also responsible for crowning the king during the coronation ceremony. In a way her role dramatizes the principle of check and balances within the traditional kingship institution since her position was indispensable especially in determining where the king can go. Furthermore, her ability to exercise oversight in the society is illustrated in the fact that she could deliberately refuse the king the use of his official garments, when she is not satisfied with his leadership. Mindful of the possibility that he could be refused access to his official garments mades the king to endeavour to do his duties well. Okonjo notes that, in general, the Yoruba women of the pre-colonial era established "very effective political pressure groups" which were used to persuade the political leadership to attend to issues that impacted on women's concerns and "deal with broader political issues" (Okonjo, 1983: 215). She also attests that the Benin Kingdom, like the Yoruba, had a position for the king mother- Iyoba. It is interesting to note that for the Benin Kingdom, the King's mother was sent by her son after three years of his reign to rule a part of the kingdom. This trend, as Okonjo highlights, began with Oba Esiegie in 1506 until the 1889 British conquest of the Benin Kingdom. During this period the British abolished the Iyoba office and refused another Iyoba's installation. Among the Ibos, even though they did not maintain a great level of centralized kingship position, the

[40] Kamene Okonjo (1983:211-12) reveals that "There is evident that at least until almost the end of the fifteenth century the status of women in Hausa was very high."

Ibo women like the Hausa and Yoruba, were very much involved in the politics of the Ibo communities. This is because the women like the males, managed their "own affairs" along their kingship institutions, "age- grades, secret and title societies" (Okonjo, 1983: 218). This according to Okonjo makes it difficult to ascertain the level of political powers that both sexes wielded.

The leadership roles of women in pre-colonial African societies brings to focus the nostalgia that postcolonial African women still hold of women of the pre-colonial era. If women were central to the exercise of rule in pre-colonial African politics, the same cannot be said of present day or modern African women. This is because despite the fact that women constitute the majority of the population in many countries, which potentially also signifies their voting strength, coupled with their participation in the women's wings of political parties during general election campaigns, all of these should translate to the increased representation of women in governance either as elected or appointed. However, women have been relegated to the margins of the domestic arena as wife, mother, sister, concubine and other roles that makes them politically irrelevant.

The shift in the leadership positions of women from that of central participation in pre-colonial times can be partially ascribed to the confluence of African patriarchy and colonial discourses. Colonial projects such as Christianity and Islam, whose God-head is male, and made them to privilege patriarchal ideologies. According to Marie Richmond-Abbott's (1983:20), an "ideology that justified a lower position for women was developed and enforced by religions that worshiped male deities. They developed philosophies that defined women as inferior or evil and justified their isolation from the everyday affairs…In practice, this meant that women were put in a world apart." This affirms Zulu Sofola's earlier summation that colonialism was responsible for the "de-womanhood of African womanhood" through what she refers to as "colonial brainwashing."[41] It also chronicles Bolanle Awe's position, as paraphrased in Andrea Cornwell (2005:11), that "ruling women enjoyed considerable prestige and power: the

[41] Quoted in Ukadike (1995:197). Okonjo also share Sofola's ideas and refers to colonial influences on women's political decline as "anti-feminine prejudices of many followers of Christianity and Islam" (221).

erosion of their prerogative and positions, particularly under the imposition of colonial rule, has been documented in societies spanning the continent as a whole."

The colonial construction of women has conditioned how African women are depicted in terms of their leadership skills in real life and artistic work. In real life, the leadership role of women has, arguably, deviated from the traditional roles highlighted above which accorded women ample opportunities to exercise power. The new post-colonial forms are those which suite male dominance of the political space. This view is confirmed by Jeff Hearn (1987:115) who points out that "political performance has been the most obvious way for men to show masculinity and 'machismo'". Elsewhere, Maria Nzomo (1997: 236) recounts the treatment of Kenyan women in political matters when she notes that "women were accused of lacking qualities of political leadership, because they were not considered aggressive enough, and hence were considered dependent upon the government to allocate them special seats." Her observation bears out some of the erroneous and propagandist views that men have used to cling on to power and silence women in the political arena. Perhaps if women are given equal opportunities with men in leadership roles, they could contribute their quota in transforming the notions of leadership and the societies in general. The crisis in Nigeria, as in other African states, emanated from the "mismanagement of the national economy," political instability, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, among other reasons.[42] Such topical concerns are central to and facilitate our understanding of *The Tyrant* 1&2 (2003/4), and *Masterstroke* 1&2 (2004). The two videos not only bring to focus the intricacies inherent in African leadership but also demonstrate women's contribution to the national and state political scenes. This is in line with Angela Davies' dictum that leadership can be attained from the most unexpected places.

Nevertheless, the two videos under discussion, while exploring the issues of governance, also delve into the socio-cultural ideologies that condition how colonial and post-colonial Africans define roles for males and females. It is the gendered ascriptions that beg the

[42] This also chronicles Jean-Francois Bayart's (1993) coinage of Africa's leadership as predicated on "the politics of the belly."

questions which seek to understand how women can compete side by side with their male counterparts in national politics, especially under civilian regimes. In regard to the possible continuities between the past and the present, Andrea Cornwall's (2005:10) analysis of women's contemporary political positions makes her to align herself with the views of McCormack (1975) who states that:

> stories of daring exploits of powerful women, of the clout of women's societies such as the Sierra Leonean Sande…, and an era in which women were makers and shapers of politics and the polity are the very stuff of feminist fables. Yet, in the intervening decades, the tales that were to be told were more mundane and depressing as writing on gender and governance came to shift from women in positions of power to women's tactics for managing their disempowerment and marginalization.

It also brings to the ambiguous acknowledgements of the roles that women, in the various parts of the continent, played during the nationalist struggle for independence.

There is arguably, no form of governance in Africa and in Nigeria in particularl, which has given women their rightful recognition within the parameters of governance. This is despite the fact that most artistic renditions draw on socio-political conditions and as Sinikka Sassi (2001:106), reflecting on on literary reflections on the public sphere, notes: :

> problems experienced in the life-world can find expression in artistic and literary forms, that is, in the broader public sphere. The literary and political public sphere are intertwined, the former articulating values and disclosing the world, the latter focusing on shared activities. Here we see again the interaction between politics, sociality and culture, emerging in relations of mutual dependency. If the public sphere is about achieving understanding and resolution in everyday matters, the social and cultural spheres provide the essential basis for such engagements.

Sassi's argument is consistent with Davide Harker's (1985:76) position that "…unless we locate cultural products with history, we cannot hope to understand culture." It also buttresses Stuart Hall's assertion (1992:293) that history is the "set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for or represent the shared experiences, sorrows and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to a nation."

Women and the national political scene in *The Tyrant.*

The Tyrant depicts Jenny's dual role in bringing about sanity to her country after it has been reduced to a military ghetto. In the early sequences of the film she is portrayed as supportive and acting in on her husband Barrister Nelson Moremi. For example, she makes him to understand the compromised nature of the judiciary under the military government and thus realized that he cannot rely on the law courts in his battle to force General Amino to hand over power to a democratically elected government. Secondly, she facilitates the eventual overthrow of General Amino's government through her liaison with the United Nations (UN). Her resolve to continue with the struggle after her husband's detention is given prominence during her discussion with her husband's associates Alex and his wife as she notifies them of her resolve to continue: "I have come to take over from where he stopped… Amino has not seen the power of a woman who has lost everything. First it was my son and now my husband…I will make foreign contacts and we are going to systematically jack him away from that seat. You know that I am a lawyer and have my contacts" (*The Tyrant*). Her subsequent actions confirm her steadfastness and mark the beginning of her activism to ensure both the release of her husband, and the redemption of her country from the clutches of General Amino's tyranny. Such a position contrast with how she earlier decided to relocate from the house out of fear of becoming General Amino's next victim like their son. At this point the narrative replays an earlier statement by Barrister Moremi as he tauntingly reminds her: "…women are known to have abandoned their husbands when the going gets tough" (*The Tyrant*). But Jenny proves herself the heroine and voice that expresses the African feminist view that does not negate husbands in their struggles for equality. She becomes the unmistaken voice of redemption and has to resist the General's attempt to co-opt her into his group. He summons her to his villa and offers her a post: "I want to make you an offer to run the Ministry of Women Affairs" (*The Tyrant*). She unequivocally rejects his offer:

> Let my people go, let the conscience of the people go. Where is my husband? Do you really think that you can get away with all this atrocity?

> …Now let me tell you, some day and someday soon, you too would be history. You have not seen anything yet, you have not seen the power of a woman unless you release my husband now… Sir I stand by the dictates of my conscience, I stand by the truth, I stand by justice for the masses, I will fight you. I will fight you with everything I've got and I will not apologize, I stand by the dictates of my conscience (*The Tyrant*).

The General's offer follows the fact that Jenny had mobilized the women of the country to go on a strike against General Amino's tyrannical government. The strong support for the strike and its impact is visually re-enacted through the detailed description provided by one of the women soldiers. The soldier creates an emotive visual picture of Jenny's popularity and the acceptance of her "operation save the nation" amongst the people and especially by women. The success of the strike action highlights the supportive spirit of women and their ability to unite for the cause of womanhood even in the face of extreme difficulties. The solidarity displayed by women to put an end to General Amino's tyranny echoes that of the Aba Women's Riot or Women's war. Amongst the demands articulated in "operation save the nation" is an end to the impoverishment of the masses through the pursuit of myopic economic policies. For instance, in *The Tyrant*, General Amino banned the importation of rice, medicines and other essential commodities without first building the infrastructure and the local capacity to service the needs of the citizens. The direct consequence of such short-sighted policies is that it leads to untold hardship for the ordinary people. This is in addition to how "he mindlessly and unremorsefully kill people." Her struggle soon metamorphosed into an international struggle, as she travels to meet with and inform the United Nations Organization (UNO) of the suffering in her country:

> Your Excellencies, Sirs, the situation in my country is the worst that has been seen over the years. I have come to report to you the deprivation that has been faced by the citizens of my country because of the extreme measures that has been taken by the current administration to make sure that no one speaks up. There is starvation– no one can eat. Babies are dying, the doctors have been killed, and importation of vital goods has been stopped (*The Tyrant*).

Her petition is to solicit the UN's assistance in putting an end to General Amino's tyrannical rule. The callousness with which he takes human life depicts his character as

one who does not care about what happens to his subjects. Indeed, his entire regime is characterized by killings, intimidation and the lack of freedom. General Amino's rule is the antithesis of democratic governance where leaders are supposed to be accountable to the citizens who voted them into power. Arguably, it reinforces the fact that, in democratic settings, there is the principle of the rule of law and citizens' rights are guaranteed in the constitution to which the rulers swear allegiance to when they are sworn in as leaders. For the military, there is no constitution but decrees that are promulgated based on the whims and desires of the military ruler. Therefore, the citizens' rights are trampled upon with impunity and the entire citizenry is at the mercy of the military ruler. Often, freedom of the press, which in democratic governance is enshrined in the constitution, is not respected at all in dictatorial regimes. This point is well-illustrated as General Amino mindlessly kills the journalist who was interviewing Barrister Moremi about the state of affairs in the country. Thus, military rule, as depicted in the film *The Tyrant*, not only shows but also satirically condemns the enormous powers of military rulers.

In the film the terrible abuse of power and the inhumane treatment of people is not reserved for the citizens of General Amino's country alone. It was also meted out to the first two man delegation sent by the UN as part of a "peace keeping mission." The UN delegation was subjected to intimidation and violence at General Amino's orders. To show that his insults and self exaltation knew no bounds, General Amino took the extra step of sending the pictures which clearly showed the torture meted to the delegates to the UN head-quarters. All these actions reveal the self-obsessed nature of the power that General Amino had acquired who also perceived himself as being larger than life itself: "I am the strongest and greatest leader in Africa and you must bow before me". (*The Tyrant*). Clearly, he saw himself as being above the UN's control and he earlier on telephoned Emeka, the Commonwealth Secretary General, to warn him that he must interfering with how he rules his country.

The video draws attention to how absolute power corrupts absolutely. We see the General's zeal for power when he told both the first and second delegations of the UN

that they must bow down as they entered the hut where he sat. In his mind, he seemed to think that they were paying him obeisance by doing so. The subsequent analysis of the hut and the bowing down of the delegation conveys different meanings to the parties involved in the visual narrative. It speaks to Gerald Mast and Marshal Cohen's (1979:160) point about camera narration that "successive close-ups do not give room to a single reading of the scene imposed." Thus, the visuals in the bowing sequences, through the close-up shots, amplify the possible multiple readings of the scenes. On their part, the UN delegates did not read any real meaning to their actions other than that they had to bow down so as to enter the hut since the doorway was low. But to General Amino, he ascribed a connotative reading to their action of bowing down, seeing it as the delegation's paying homage to his power. Thus, the hut becomes General Amino's way of dealing with those who he imagined thought of themselves as being above him, like the UN representatives. Another interpretation is that to General Amino, the whole world bows to him since the UN body literally represents the whole world. His reading becomes ironically symbolic when the second UN delegation, who he felt had understood his enormous power by the manner in which they bowed down to enter the hut, turned out to be the ones who not only led him out of the hut but also toppled his government. The manner in which he is ousted from power gives cogency to what Rudolf Arnheim (1958:84) in his "principles of Montage" classifies as "combination of long shots and close-ups." Such depictions of a character in a long shot "puts the subject of the close-up in a wider context" (Arnheim, 1958: 84). The wider context therefore interrogates the spatial temporal context of the narrative. For instance, it recalls and reflects on Nelson Moremi's question to General Amino in an earlier scene where he asked the former "when is your time table ending?" Paradoxically, General Amino's 'time-table' ends without his plan or the affirmation of the events that see him lose power. The scene contradicts General Amino's reaction and response to Nelson Moremi's question that "I will bring my entire military might on you" (*The Tyrant*). His loss of power and his deflation is ridiculed and is presented through the audience seeing him mesmerized and in an unconscious state, suffering from the effects of the gasses released into the air by the UN delegates, as he is being whisked away. His inability to defend himself is also

ironic since his arrest and unseating is masterminded by the woman at the UN who proposed the method they should use to displace General Amino:

> It has to be a high class kidnap. Our mission here is to save member nations from this ugly demise─ to save them from this lunatic called Idris Amino and after that set up a new government there….Just leave the rest to me .[43]

Her success is another example of the competence of women and as agents for finding permanent solutions to national problems. Her positive contribution to solving the organization's problem correlates with that of Jenny who helped to put an end to her country's national dilemma in the face of General Amino's tyranny. The success of Jenny's mission to the UN further validates her response to her husband when she noted that "women know how and when to fight and when to quit, they do not put everyone in danger." (*The Tyrant*) In an earlier statement, Jenny said that she was confident that she will succeed in her activism because of having the right connections and education. Jenny's ability to negotiate and circumvent the military space because of her education and connections draws a parallel with the scenes depicting the girls around General Amino. It debunks the assumption that education is not important for women and their abilities to participate on the national political scene. Jenny's representation, from the moment that she stepped into her husband's shoes, speaks to Arnheim's "prophetic vision" which reflects on the significance of the past in the anticipation of the future. The prophetic vision chimes with Jenny's ability to displace General Amino who earlier informed her that her husband is history: "you too will become history soon." The scene where General Amino's exits and which literally ends his tyranny is presented in a strongly suggestive manner to also evoke a larger continental imperative. It echoes what

[43] (*The Tyrant*). Note on the fact that it was ironical that it was through the conspiracy of certain western nations with the tacit nod of the UN that historical Idi Amin took over power in Uganda in the 1970s. Pius George Okoth recounts: "Idi Amin, who had been an NCO in the King's African Rifles, was steadily promoted through the military ranks by Milton Obote. He used his position quietly to put his friends in key places in the army. Certain foreign embassies helped persuade him to take over while Milton Obote was away. His career of mass murder was financed by foreign powers, from outside Africa."(*Drum*, 1982, 70).

one of the UN representatives said before at the UN that its agency would "…also try to stop military rule in the whole of Africa." Like the prophet of a new era, Jenny becomes the rallying point for democratic inclinations and, she, ultimately, saw her husband installed as the country's interim president.

Her positional shift from being a house wife to being an activist for human rights and democracy affirms the observation made by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996:40) that "as modes of representation are made and remade, they contribute to the making and remaking of human societies and of the subjectivities of their members." In the period of transition to civilian rule, Jenny sees task as to promote nation building by reforming the country and getting it to move away from its past mentality and forms of conduct. She is seen trying to encourage office bearers to rethink their understanding of civic duty so that they are good and accountable leaders and civil servants. Jane Jacquette's and Sharon Wolchik's (1998:4) contend that "because transition politics are periods of crisis and thus of intense politicization, they bring new ideas and institutions into political life." In one sequence Jenny is seen encouraging government officials and their wives to cut down on ostentatious extravagance and the wasteful use of public funds. In an earlier scene we saw Alex's wife telling her husband that, after he was given a ministerial position in the Interim government, "I need to change my clothes to reflect our new status" (*The Tyrant*). The wife of the Kakawa state Governor is also caught up in the mentality of the past administration just like Mrs. Alex. We see this when Jenny visits her region and she arranges a large entourage to chaperone Jenny. The way office holders and their wives view public funds is described by Eghosa Osaghe (1998:22) in the following terms:

> the failure of most citizens to realize that government revenue and public funds are collectively owned, and that all citizens have contributed to it by one way or another, largely explains the virtual absence of demands for accountability in the political culture of public finance. It also explains why plunderers of the government treasury are excused on the grounds that they have only 'taken their share of the national cake'.

But Jenny in her revolutionary role to change the society from this mentality makes the wife of the Governor of Kakawa state to know that such waste and paraphernalia is unnecessary and amounted to sabotaging the nation's economy. The exemplary leadership qualities of Jenny made Alex to advise his wife that they must also change their thinking and habits. He facilitates her understanding that the present government, unlike the previous, is sensitive to the concerns of the masses and cannot continue to mismanage public funds. Jenny thus serves as a role model to women in authority to be modest and prudent in their spending of state funds. Her sound morality, independence and disinterest in materialism is demonstrated when she and her husband experience a brief period of estrangement. During her visit to Kakawa state, one of her security agents answered her phone and her husband misconstrued the guard to be one of Jenny's alleged numerous boyfriends. Upon her return, he asked her to leave and to consider herself to be out of the marriage. To prove innocence and modesty, her husband was surprised that she was leaving with her hand bag only. When he asked why she is not taking all her belongings she reminded him that when she married him she did not move in with possessions. Her husband finally regains his trust in her and they reconcile. This proves that, on many levels, she is a true nation builder and a symbol of political emancipation. With the reinstitution of civilian rule after the demise of the General, we can now shift our analytical focus and highlight the challenges and dynamics that inform women, their representation and the politics of democracy.

Women and the dynamics of civilian rule in Nollywood video.

Judging by the extent to which Jenny was at the forefront of the struggle that ushered in the new civilian interim government, it can be argued that she deserved nothing less than being the head of the interim government. While this compromise may reflect the reluctance to fully accept women's central leadership in the political arena as associated with patriarchal viciousness , Jenny's non insistence on becoming the head of the interim government can be attributed to the fact that, like African feminism, she believes in the equality of men and women and sees their relationship as "a complimentary relationship

between both sexes…" The way Jenny negotiates her political position in *The Tyrant* contrasts sharply with the character of Maryam in both *Queen of Aso Rock* 1&2(2005) and its rejoinder *The Fall of the Queen of Aso Rock* (2005), both directed by Adim William. In the videos Maryam, the heroine played a key role in installing Gambari Dasuki as the next Vice-President to succeed the late and former Vice President. She lobbied on his behalf and together with other power-brokers, such as Idris Garuba, a distinguished serving senator of the Federal Republic, Mayam assured Gambari that "I will make you the vice president…You would be sworn in Gambari, don't worry" (*Queen of Aso Rock*). One would imagine that Maryam, who has such confidence in herself as wielding great power, should use her abilities to get herself into becoming the Vice-President rather than facilitate Gambari's assumption of the position. Her acumen in being a king-maker, in a manner similar to Lady Gold's in *Political Control* 1,2 & 3 (2005) also directed by Adim Williams, is in contrast to Jenny's in *The Tyrant* who displays genuine leadership and concern for the general welfare.

In *Political Control* Lady Gold is not interested in vying for any political post but she is very involved in the process of selecting those who would govern the country in the various official portfolios. The crave to make money by setting up political networks that ensure the election of cronies makes her to abandon her marriage and family in Lagos to live in Abuja, the seat of the federal government. In short, Lady Gold like Maryam, is used to investigate and dig up men's ugly past that is then used against them. Thus, Maryam and Lady Gold control and dispense political power through corrupt means such as blackmail. Lady Gold is arrested and charged at the end of the narrative and she also loses out in her familial life. In a previous scene she is seen being taunted by husband and children for abandoning her wifely and motherly duties for frivolities in the name of making money. Ultimately, the blackmail-ring that she runs is mean to be understood, as far as Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju (2006:19) is concerned, to underscore that *Queen of Aso Rock* "makes a gendered statement by exposing− through woman− the corruption of men in the corridors of power."

The characters of Lady Gold and Maryam are similar to the portrayal of women in most Nollywood political videos. Women are presented as a group that is only interested in the criminality that drives the political scene which shows their pursuit of personal gain and crass materialism and they are not interested in contributing to sound governance. For instance, while Maryam wields enough power in the society to possibly become Gambari's second wife and the 'number two lady' in the country, she instead sends assassins to kill the first wife. Her portrayal suggests that women are always scheming for money and easy lives from successful men. For Lady Gold, who like Jenny Moremi is a married woman with children, debases her womanhood through her actions and greed. The contrast between her and Jenny is that while her role in power breaking is for personal aggrandizements, Jenny's is to liberate her entire country through "operation save the country". The portrayal of the characters of Maryam and Lady Gold further conforms to the depiction of some of the female characters ─ Queen, Alisha, Eve and Bella in *Girls Cot* 1, 2&3(2006), directed by Afam Okekere. The film portrays these girls, as students of a fictitious Nigerian University, whose purpose and goal in life are not only to get education but money and fame. Pursuing their additional desires leads them to form a gang. Their gang comprises of prostitutes, forgers of all kinds, blackmailers and thieves. The girls deceive politicians into relationships where they record their romantic affairs and use them to extort money from the compromised politicians. It is clear that Nollywood videos continually depict women in ways that devalue them as greedy and money conscious at the expense of contributing to the general good.

The representation of women in the videos tilts towards the idea of the micro unit (the family) as the basic model that reflects the kinds of relationships that are possible between men and women. The family and its dynamics are then replicated at the level of the state or public domain. What do we get out of Nigerian videos? Importantly, it is the fact that the narratives do not push the agenda for equality. Secondly, since the videos, are a mirror of society, they reflect that African society is far from transforming to accord women equality, especially with regards to opportunities in leadership. In as much as there is advocacy work that is undertaken by women groups / NGO's, legal and

constitutional provisions, waves of feminism, evidence is showing that many of these interventions are largely irrelevant to the Nigerian society. Even after the Beijing women's forum, in reality there is little change or transformation towards ensuring the equality between men and women in Nigeria and this is evidently apparent in Nollywood videos as well. One has to be mindful of Sarifa Moola's (2006:128- 9) observation that "women's lack of power and efforts to represent themselves and their needs in negotiations poses significant challenges for their role in peace building." She goes on further to say that women "are often excluded from higher echelons of power and formal discussions, and when women are present, they are given less seats at the negotiating table, and their positions, if they are ever articulated, are inadequately addressed." This explains why Maryam, Lady Gold and Queen (the leader of *Girls Cot*) cannot stand the test of time like Jenny and, at the end of the narratives, they are wanted criminals and are arrested for breaking the law. One can argue that on a deeper symbolical level, the women externalise patriarchy's characterization of women's participation in politics as transgressive and deviant and as a development that has to be curtailed or arrested.

The Politics of Ideology and Gender in *Masterstroke* 1&2

The narrative of *Masterstroke* is structured around the political activities of its heroine, Simba Richards who is presented as an admirable character with the determination to challenge the socially prescribed role for women. She, in effect, goes against social expectations when she decides to contest a seat in the State House of Assembly. Her character depicts the true spirit of democracy and especially its calls for fair play. The fact that she is the only female contestant among five male contestants and her insistence to conduct her electioneering according to the right and fairness makes her success even more profound. Not only does it present the preferred ways of conduct to politicians, it also challenges the ways in which Nollywood videos dealing with political themes have tended to depict women. Most of the videos either confine women to the margins or they undermine their political participation through negative characters such as the ones we alluded to earlier: *Queen of Aso Rock, The Fall of the Queen of Aso Rock, Political Control* and *Girls Cot.*

The exploration of the relationship between gender and politics in *Masterstroke* highlights the gender divisions that are prevalent in society. It shows the ways in which the social construction of gendered roles results in the privileging and prescription of certain jobs, abilities and qualities along gendered lines that lead to the eventual inequality between men and women, especially in the allocation of political roles. It shows why feminists are concerned with how inequalities are recreated and rationalised in society. It brings to bear Barry Brummett's (2006:171) view that "the critical approach that draws attention to these kinds of inequalities between men and women is often called *liberal feminism*…And the liberal feminists today are concerned with involving more women in the already empowered echelons of business and government." [44] The video also speaks to the significance of rhetoric in the setting of political ambitions and horizons that are consistent with the needs of patriarchal systems.[45] The producers of *Masterstroke* depict Simba's activities as similar to those held by liberal feminists. For instance, when the hero Donald Adams expresses his readiness to enter politics, Simba's father is less enthusiastic about her ambitions. The video opens with the family discussing the impending elections and we are introduced to the prejudices that women have to contend with:

Donald: Must I follow your footsteps dad?

Senator Adams (his father): At your age I was already in the State House.

Simba: I'm ready now for politics.

Justice Richards (her father): It will not favour you, you're a woman.

Simba: I have a will, I intend to make it as possible as I can…do you promise me that I get your total support on this? (*Masterstroke*).

[44] Liberal according to Brummett is an approach that aims at increasing democratic participation. They try to change the existing voting laws to make room for more participation of people "within the already existing political system" ((Brummet, 2006: 171).

[45] The term rhetoric, argues Brummett, is a "complicated way of defining something… reasons why rhetorical theories change is because people may have reasons to define and explain the world differently… In short, changes in theory may be part of changes in power". (64) The term rhetoric is defined by I.A Richards and quoted in Brummett to mean "a study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (64).

The above discussion immediately provides us with the credentials of the contestants. Simba, for instance, asserts that she has "a will" and that she will not allow her father's perception of women to deter her contesting the elections. Such a will calls up David I Kertzer (1988:180) revelation that "people's emotional involvement in political rites is certainly a key source of their power." In a society where women are socialised into believing that politics is a male preserve. This perception will be tested by Simba's entry into politics. She, like women in the pre-colonial indigenous society, understands that politics ideally should be open to both sexes. In a way, her standpoint articulates that of Niara Sudarkasa who "suggest[s] that a formulation which makes an a priori judgment that any participation of women in the public sphere represents entry into the world of men simply begs the question." She argues that pre-colonial West African polities negotiated the "public space" which "was not conceptualized as 'the world of men.'" Rather, the public domain was "one in which both sexes were recognized as having important roles to play." (Sudarkasa, 1976: 28).

In an attempt to show the political arena was designated as a male space, the video shows how gender role are specified. It suggests that it is wrong that women are told that, traditionally, they belong in the kitchen and the home where they can take care of family's well-being. Women are not supposed to participate in decision making. *Masterstroke,* while building on the theme of women and their supposed domestic roles, condemns such prescriptions totally. She dismisses the injunction that "tell her that women belong to the kitchen and not the political arena." (*Masterstroke*) Such warnings have been stated to women in real life. For instance, one of the pioneers of women politicians in the modern era, Keita Diawara, recalls being always reminded by her husband Dr Daouda Diawara that:

> You observe [what is going on]. You should be busy in the kitchen with your colleagues from Segu preparing food…Already you represent us in the office and you also vote. That already is a great contribution. Avoid in particular talking politics. (Denzer, 2005: 221)

Simba, like Keita, would not budge to such dissuasions and, like Keta, she continued in her quest to secure a seat in the State House seat. The emphasis on steadfastly carrying is also exemplified in the life of Keita who was even criticised by traditional rulers such as the Fado who ordered her to get out of his village. He scolded her in the following terms: "it must be that you are not only daring but full of effrontery to try to measure up to men in accepting a man's place…I am not going to accept being controlled by a woman? Never" (Denzer, 2005: 221). Arguably, women just like Jenny Moremi in *The Tyrant*, acknowledge and try and navigate the patriarchallyascribed roles. At one moment Jenney declared, "let me go to my office, I mean the kitchen". However, just as Jenny rightly declared that "you have not seen the power of a woman" (*The Tyrant*), Simba, in turn, declares "you all know the power we possess as women"[46] (*Masterstroke*). Her affirmation depicts that women in this video have transcended the patriarchal ideologies that relegate women to the background. This is exemplified in Simba's decision to form the "Sisters for Emancipation"[47] where she tells the women that "someone told me that this is not a game for women but I'm not gonna take that." She goes on to implore the "Sisters for Emancipation" that she was soliciting their support to win the election.

At the meeting, camera captures the group in a long shot as it establishes their gathering and seating arrangement. It depicts them as women with a sense of unity as they sit around one table and it records each of their contributions to the overall discussion through a close shot of each subsequent speaker, portraying the speaker and the impact of their statement to the broad objectives of the association. One of the delegates asked Simba what office she was running for and she answered that it was in the State House of Assembly, the delegate asked "why not House of Representatives?" (*Masterstroke*). To her, Simba's credentials and their collective support were worthy of more than the State House of Assembly, hence the reference to the higher House of Representatives.

[46]Kwame Nkurumah praised women and he felt that the power of women is able to access places that man cannot. This point helped Nkrumah when he campaigned for Mabel Dove, the first West African woman to be elected by popular vote into the legislature. Besides each time insinuations of women's inferiority came up in Dove's campaign, Denzer notes that there was always an elder who quelled the agitations and made them to know that "they had once depended on their mothers, that their candidate will be their mother in the National Assembly". (Denzer, 2005:220).

[47] These are Simba's committee of devoted friends, who have come together to front the cause of Simba's political aspiration.

However, Simba is of the opinion that the House of Assembly would serve as the stepping stone to future political heights. One of the sisters concurs and says "why not climb the rope gradually and get there?" (*Masterstroke*) The video, in such sequences, shows the way and manner in which women should overthrow the patriarchal ideologies that have conditioned them to marginal roles. It reaffirms women's conscientious view of their marginality while making a case for women to be encouraged to aspire for political positions. Furthermore, it suggests that women must not consider themselves limited to local or state levels alone but that they can start from lower positions and gradually climb to national level. Iris Marion Young (2000:6) shows how struggles for inclusions stem from perceived exclusions from "basic political rights, from opportunities to participate, from hegemonic terms of debate. Some of the most powerful social movements of this century have mobilized around demands for oppressed and marginalized people to be included as full and equal citizens in their politics." Young's revelation throws more light on the Sisters' antiphon: "Sisters for Emancipation! Total Emancipation" (*Masterstroke*). The phrase not only depicts their total support and goodwill for Simba's victory in the elections to the State House but speaks to the concept of equal opportunity for the hitherto marginalized women and other sectors of society.

To validate women's power in achieving their goals, the Sisters each investigated one of Simba's political opponents who are all men and they devised various means to get information from them.[48] The information is to help them understand the strengths and weaknesses of the opponents in order to mobilize support for Simba. Thus, as the video's narrative builds up to the climax, each of the women gave feed back of their Simba's opponents: "some of them have been killed and others have chickened out for fear of being killed." (*Masterstroke*). One of the sisters, Jean, monitored Donald Adams who became the only opponent that survived the bruising electioneering campaign. Donald was a formidable and he was able to coerce Jean and try and get vital information from her. All the attempts he made, including threatening to kill her, did not work and she emphatically told him: "Donald can't you understand it's pointless, I'm speaking English.

[48]This speaks to the various ways in which women have organized themselves to achieve their goals. It exemplifies the Aba Women's Riot, the South African Women's Match that shook the erstwhile apartheid regime, and other collective efforts by women to bring about a positive change to situations around them.

That girl has a grenade for a heart." (*Masterstroke*). Jean told Simba that Donald was dangerous but Simba remained fearless. "The Sisters for Emancipation" are beacons of women's political movements and feminist concerns and it recall's Aili Mari Tripp's (2003:239) assertion that women are well versed in organizing in social and religious spheres:

> Women in many countries frequently had longer experiences than men in creating and sustaining associations, having been involved in church-related activities, savings clubs, income-generating groups, self help associations, community improvement groups and many other informal and local organizations and networks. Thus, they often found it easier to take advantages of new political spaces afforded by liberalizing regimes.

It should be noted that Simba's major opponent, Donald Adams, has two friends who, like the women, also help him to map out various strategies to ensure his victory. The first shortfall Donald and his friend's have is that while Simba draws a larger number of women followers, Donald has but two friends Ralph and Pete working for his success. However, the irony of his affiliation with them is that he cannot trust them in the same way as Simba does her friends. This state of affairs is clearly inconsistent with the prejudice that women cannot be trusted and that they cannot keep secrets. On the contrary, the "Sisters for Emancipation" have prove that women can work together and keep secrets, as demonstrated in Jean's resolute defiance of Donald. The Sisters, clearly, are examples of women's abilities to unite and build networks that enable the female agency that is needed to secure their political emancipation. Thus, *Masterstroke* serves to enlighten women on the political strength which they can gather if they team up to support the cause of women's emancipation. The ability of the "Sisters for Emancipation" to keep secrets in order to ensure Simba's success further supports Aniagolu─Okoye's debunking of male filmmakers portrayal of women as each other's enemies. Bias in the media is defined by Denis Mcquail (1996:42) as "a consistent tendency to depart from the straight path of objective truth by deviating either to the left or right." Also "most analyses of political content in media have questioned the extent of political bias that exists ─that is, specifically partisan, ideological bias." It is the assumed

inability of women to keep secrets that serve as a political strategy to exclude them from core decision making institutions in patriarchal, partisan politics. Such bias is responsible for why most Nigerian videos with political undertones often portray women in politically inconsequential roles and as being not active in politics, unlike the way in which Simba is represented in *Masterstroke*.[49]To this Oloruntoba-Oju (2006:7) observes, in films, there is:

> a deliberate and growing tendency to orchestrate female sexuality in particular as a site for power negotiations, to correlate sexual agency with power or dominance, and correspondingly to locate sex and sexuality within the domain of gendered contest. Power imagery and negotiation is deployed as much in action sequences in visual form as it is depicted through verbal language …

The ability of *Masterstroke* to open up other discourses around the representation of women in political affairs outside the most dominant stereotypes that objectify their sexuality like in *Glamour Girls* 1&2 (1994), *Executive Mess* 1&2 (2005), *High Street Girls* (2002) *Queen of Aso Rock* 1&2 (2005), amongst others, gives *Masterstroke* a feminist undertone. It shows that male filmmakers are capable of rising above social biases, depending on their ideologies and social objectives. Whereas, as according to Zulfah Otto-Sallies (2006:153), "most African films portray women as the objects of desire, with a few exceptions where women are shown as strong thinkers." *Masterstroke*'s is clearly different in its intentions and achievements, it is able to depict Simba as a strong, independent thinker and the video opens up space for debates on the representation of women in political films in Nigeria and their abilities to participate in politics.

Negotiating political terrain and the task for Women in *Masterstroke* 1&2

The political intrigues and battles that are mapped out in *Masterstroke* span issues such as politically motivated killings, intimidation, charms and huge costs involved in political campaigns. The thematic significance of all these matters is in how they reveal the characters of politicians and also the attendant social factors that impinge on the

[49] This echoes Chinweizu's conceptual claim of how women negotiate power with their bodies. See *Anatomy of Female Power: A Dissertion of Matriarchy* (1990).

feasibility of achieving democracy in Nigeria. We have already mentioned the number of times when Simba is dissuaded and even threatened not to run for office. Given the violence and turmoil that surround elections it is no wonder that, for some, politics is a terrain "where men fear to tread." At one point in the narrative, Donald tells Simba: "I came to see the lady who dared where men have fled. But then Simba looking into your eyes you are not an ordinary lady, you are intelligent, captivating, sensuous, and beautiful like Cleopatra." The attempt to equate Simba's political abilities and determination with her beauty is far from being a compliment. It seeks to rationalise the exclusion of women from the political sphere unless, according to its logic, the women are exceptional. It is important, however, to acknowledge the emotional and subjective hurdles that impact on candidates, especially those that emanate from the politics of fear and violence that seem to be central to political campaigns in Nigeria. Being determined to make a change, Simba refused to succumb to her father's plea that she quit because of the intimidation from rival thugs. She assured him that no one is going to kill her and counselled her father: "Daddy relax no one will kill...I will not let this opportunity pass me by…I am fully equipped." In contrast to her show of bravery, another opponent, Chief Coker choose to "chicken out" of the race after having being pointed with an AK47 riffle and warned that he will be killed if he refuses to quit the race.

Another obstacle that also helps to cripple credible women out of politics is finance, given that elections demand huge campaign expenses. For instance Dora Akunyili (2006:1), the former Nigerian National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) Director General and immediate past Minister of Information, complained about the lack of funding and "gender sensitivity" as the primary reasons why she did not contest the country's presidency despite her impressive records as a politician.[50] Her experience shows how women are excluded from certain jobs as a result of concerns which are "not only their social and cultural recognition but also their

[50] Akunyule has helped in reducing the use of fake and adulterated drugs, substandard and harmful products which had hitherto been responsible for many deaths in Nigeria. Her ability to overcome the corrupt syndicate gangs almost caused her assassination. She like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala the first Nigeria first female Minister of Finance and Foreign Affairs have been extolled for their great contributions to Nigeria. They have proven Angela Davis position that "leadership can come from unpredictable places." See http://odili.net/news/source/2007/nov/18/419.html accessed November 19 2007.

economic position." (Nira Yuval─Davis, 2006:200). The lack of financial support affirms Chris Weedon's (1987:5) observation that:

> …the power relations and interests which inhere in specific definitions of women's nature and social role is only the first stage in the process of change both for individual women and in the struggle to transform social institutions. This process requires the development of alternative senses of ourselves as women, and strategies for transforming existing institutions and practices. The range of contemporary feminisms offers different ways of seeing ourselves as women and implies different long-term strategies for change.

The politics of money also inscribes corruptive practices onto the electioneering processes and one of the complaints that Dove's made about campaigning is that it was riddled with "unfair practices, even requiring candidates to purchase constituencies, which was beyond her means." (Denzer 2005:222) In *Masterstroke*, Simba is able to offset her economic weaknesses by enlisting the full, including monetary, support of her family. This, in a way, highlights the need for family and social structures to be supportive of women in their political endeavours.

Then there is the dangers that emanate from the use of force and terror in order to discourage and eliminate political opponents. Simba's father is alarmed when a newspaper reported that one of Simba's opponents' was assassinated. But when he tells her to "run to fight another day…advice most needed is least hided", she tells him that "It would take three brainless gunmen to throw me off my tract." (*Masterstroke*) Such an assertion from a woman challenges the cultural stereotypes of women as weaklings. Another political video *Fair Game* (2004) directed by Collins Chidebe, also deals with the theme of women's bravery. In *Fair Game* politicians renege on an earlier agreement that incumbents will only serve one term in office. Instead, the serving governor Bassey starts to order the killing of opponents.[51] Like *Masterstroke, Fair Game* also draws

[51]The governor and the serving senator Tamunor Jacobs had reached an agreement to serve only one term in office and for the governor to make way for the senator to become the next governor. But as the party called for the next candidates, the governor made himself available. This highlights the pattern of leadership in Africa where both military and political office holders want to hold onto power forever.

attention to the desperation of political office seekers that even induces them to do anything, including the use of charms, in order to stay alive and win. In *Mastertroke*, Simba is the only candidate that did not dabble in protective charms or hire thugs in order to intimidate her opponents. In contrast to Simba, Donald Adams and his two friends Ralph and Pete used protective charms to safeguard them. Like Senator Jacobs in *Fair Game*, Donald and his friends were attacked by an opponent's thugs who wanted to kill them but could not because they had charms which protected them.[52]However, both videos attest to the fact that political killings have a long standing history in Nigeria.

One of the main twists in the narrative and in the election campaign is when Donald hatches a plan to marry Simba. In this instance, marriage would ensure that she is out of the race and guarantee his victory. He, in fact, claims that he joined the race to ensure her victory. The marriage proposal sets off a series of questions and expectation in viewers. Will she accept the proposal and what does it mean for how she has been presented as independent and fearless? Is the story projecting that women are still locked up in their traditional roles? That ultimately, they will be taken care of by men and who will invariably restrict them to the domestic sphere? Donald confides to his friend Ralph about his game plan and says: I have no choice, my father left a lot of problems along the lines and I have no choice than to marry her. But she is a woman and she is vulnerable to such charges...I have all the ways to get her to succumb."[53] (*Masterstroke*) Donald holds traditional views about the role of women and his proposal is also indicative of his patriarchal arrogance. He tells his father who is worried about this "kind of worms resonating again later," that: "I have sealed it (he symbolically demonstrates it by making a fist with one hand and using the other to cork the hole in the middle of the fist). I will marry Simba Richards and the next four years I will be gunning down for the senate…With Simba Richards as my wife, we'll be nothing but a winning combination" (*Masterstroke*). His father's overwhelmed joy throws more light on Simba's political credibility: "My God what a masterstroke." The father's exclamation, which provides the

[52]Such charms highlight the sordid reality and beliefs that are reproduced in Nollywood videos that the use of "odeshie," an Ibo coinage for a charm, that allegedly protects politicians and their patrons from bullet and knife wounds.

[53] Donald is referring to the discovery that his father had murdered his secretary twenty years before and he accuses his father of jeopardising his political career and using him as a sacrificial lamb.

film with its title, draws attention to all the scheming and corruption that is considered 'fair game and play' in Nigerian politics. *Masterstroke* in this scene is making a political statement that corruption and intimidation should be dissuaded and discontinued so that a better, more political mature culture can be cultivated. One that will foster true democratic principles and serves as a catalyst for promoting good democratic governance in Nigeria.

Furthermore, this "perfect plan" also helps to bring to focus the theme of political tolerance, a possibility that is implicit in the possible coming together of the two political opponents. It speaks to the fact that politics should not constitute a war zone where opponents cannot meet peaceably and iron out issues or be friendly. This is intimated when a journalist, who is aware of the fractious history between their fathers, asked Donald "how come you launch with your opponent?"[54] Donald responds by saying: "Politics is for mature minds…Politics is not all about gunning down your opponent, but recognizing their strong points and utilizing the strong points to serve the people better" (*Masterstroke*). We are expected to be aware of the ironies in his answer since, notwithstanding his championing of political tolerance, we are aware that his proposal is also in order to serve his political interests. Also, Donald's political dependency affirms M. J. Daymond's (1997:223) observation that "…men have more to lose when old structures of power and authority are challenged."

Masterstroke is an exemplary departure from the biased treatment of women in politics in video narratives, especially in the way that it highlights women's independence and political resourcefulness as a panacea to social and political developments. The video is

[54]While the scene facilitates our understanding of the concept of mature politics as that which embraces opponents as friends and not as enemies, it further ascribes some negative connotation to the mass media as being responsible for perpetrating political enmity. This in the video is achieved through the nuances that characterize their political reportage which made both candidates' parents to be angry at their children's liaison. Sinikka Sassi (2001:106) reveals that "…it seems as though the media are contributing to further fragmentation rather than unification of society…" The publicity which is given to the two opponents' friendship reflects on John Corner (2007:217) observation that "television has become a crucial space within which aspects of that contest become visible and heard (in the case of leaks, 'overheard') by the general public." Thus, the video suggest that reportage should be done in ways that can facilitate the cultivation of friendship between political opponents rather than tear them apart because of the economic gains which seem to be at stake.

also to be commended for its emphasis of how women and men can complement each other in life and social projects, particularly through its characterization of Simba and Donald Adams. For instance, he encourages women not to relent should their first attempts at political office fail. He tells Simba: "that is the problem I have with you women. If you try and fail that is not the end you should try again. The game of life is learning to chew from the left and from the right." Donald's position alludes to how women can be easily disenchanted by the intrigues that typify politics especially if they are like Simba who insists that: "I follow the rules." Thus, while Simba exemplifies that women 'play by the rules' and is vindicated in her success, her position makes a general political statement that politicians should insist on applying electoral rules as a way forward to democratic stability[55]. On the other hand, Donald's advice that women should not give up and the changes in his demeanour and conduct allows for the possibilities of change within the dominant male practices as well. His subsequent openness confirms Sylvia Tamale's (2003:1) exposition that "one of the most efficient ways that patriarchy uses sexuality as a tool to create and sustain gender hierarchy in African societies is by enshrouding it in secrecy and taboos." *Masterstroke*, through Donald, serves to advice men to drop the secrecy and taboos that they use to relegate and silence women from the public sphere and leadership. The two characters symbolise the worthy growth and contributions that both sexes can make to society. *Masterstroke* is a model for how Nigerian videos that deal with leadership can reimage their representations of women in ways that will educate the public to see women as possessing political competencies that are capable of moving Nigeria forward.

Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the commendable contributions of the filmmakers of *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke* by their positive portrayal of the roles that women can perform

[55] Recently, while addressing a delegation from Kano State branch of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua(2008:1) attests to the fact that only proper electoral processes can guarantee peace and stability in the country. He warned that "electoral malpractices must be a thing of the past in our country, or peace and stability will continue to elude us." It should be noted that the elections that brought him on board has were alleged to be marred with irregularities and rigging and the verdict of his victory was challenged by his opponents in an electoral tribunal up to the apex court.

in governance and related institutions. Both videos can serve as a powerful tool to reshape the society towards a deeper encouragement and appreciation of women as leaders in the society. The chapter calls for Nollywood filmmakers to desist from portraying negative women characters whose impact on other women will be to make them ashamed of being women. The chapter also suggests that with characters like Jenny Moremi of *The Tyrant*, and Simba Richards of *Masterstroke,* with good political attributes and who serve as role models of what true leadership should be, the society arguably stands to benefit from its engagements with their experiences. The films have also successfully intertwined the characters narrative journeys with the myriad of socio-economic and political challenges that hinder the establishment and promotion of democracy and sound governance in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FIVE

TESTING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE DOMESTIC SPACE

> It is indeed easy to see that real women are much more different and more diverse than their representations in the media would seem to suggest. If media images were indeed, a reflection of reality, 'real' women would be relatively rare in most parts of the real world…or Third World women would be virtually non existent.
>
> (Van Zoonen and Costera Meijer: 1998:298).

Nigerian videos that explore domestic life thrive on melodramatic patterns of representation in ways that are similar to the Christian video genre's celebration of good and the punishing of evil. The videos operate from the assumption that for "a social order to be purged, a set of ethical imperatives need to be made clear." (Brooks,1976:17) However, it remains worrisome that the mainstream Nigerian videos, exemplified in this chapter by *Omata Women* (2003), continue to draw on stereotypical archetypes of women in order to pass on their moralistic themes. Overall, whether consciously or unconsciously, the videos continue to represent women in ways which reduce them to being social misfits. *Omata Women* depicts women, as a generic group, as a species whose thirst for evil knows no bounds and, as a result, they are responsible for the dislocations and effacement of family ties. In extension of the pain and harm that they cause in the domestic space, women, in the Nollywood video crime genre, are also presented as transgressors of societal moral codes because of their status as prostitutes, murderers, and thieves amongst other anti-social identities that they adopt. This applies even to women who are educated and are professionals, they use their knowledge and skills for selfish and destructive ends.

The chapter problematizes such typifications and the attendant implications that they bear on the image of women generally. Firstly, it is interesting to note that the implication of such representational emphasis seems to suggest that educated and professional women are a greater evil to the family and the society than less or uneducated women. Implicit in such depictions is, of course, a tendency to validate views that do not support the education of women, never mind their pursuit of professional careers. If the end result of the lifestyles of women who should be celebrated as professional, is end up as prostitutes, murderers and thieves, then other women have very little to aspire for. Rather, it encourages the perspective that professionalism is accompanied by an unmerited negative social reputation and that, maybe, professional jobs are best left to men. This by implication would have an adverse effect on the society, as it will eventually lead to a decline in the number of professional women in the society.Unlike in the Christian genre, there are no women who approximate the good nature of a Pauline Clark or who embody the patience and perseverance that is regarded as being the backbone of a good housewife. It can, of course, be argued that the representation of women in Nigerian videos is a reflection of their social reality with all the bad and good that is found in communities. That the wickedness of the villains of *Omata Women* (Chinasa, Ifeoma, Nkechi, and Ijele) are all variations of wicked characters and that they are likely to alter as the context changes. My problem is when the nature of women is presented in essentialist terms that suggest women are naturally prone to being wicked. Nkechi, for instance, is first portrayed as embodying virtue she eventually 'degenerates' into prostitution and is instrumental in the death of her husband. Such a depiction is typical of the way *Omata Women* reproduces the constant representation of women as icons of wickedness.

This chapter challenges the association of women with wickedness in Nigerian videos. It argues that, at the very least, there are extenuating circumstances that inform the evil traits and conduct of particular groups of women. For instance, most of the women characters who indulge in prostitution, adultery, and murder, like Chinasa, Ifeoma and later Nkechi of *Omata Women* can be explained in other ways than as being simply the

consequence of their nature as women. Basically, their portrayal confirms societal stereotypes of women and the films do not offer much insight into the characters or lives of their protagonists. In a sense, the characters have no redeeming qualities and they are variations of the biblical Eves and Jezebels of the Christian videos. Not surprising given the waywardness of the female characters, the husbands of the major protagonists in *Omata Women* (Orimili, Nduka, Okey and Chidi) embody good attributes. Their characters are capable of sustaining good family relationships and they work towards maintaining the wellbeing of their families until matters are turned upside down because of the devilish desires and the evil nature of their wives.

Plot, theme and characterization in *Omata Women*

The story of *Omata Women* deals with a group of married women whose lives cross each other as friends and acquaintances. The story introduces Ijele, Chinasa and Ifeoma as friends who belong to the famous Onitsha Market Women Traders Association (OMATA). However, towards the middle of the narrative Chinasa is able to win another character, Nkechi, as a friend. They try to woo other women to join the association, promising them impressive benefits from such membership. This is how they introduce Nkechi to the Omata circle. However, contrary to the progressive picture painted of the association, there seems to be little benefit from it for the women as it merely proselytizes them (like Nkechi who is a lawyer by profession) into prostitution. The depiction of the women in their Omata association helps to weave a connecting thread between the natural evilness of women and the networks that they create. In short, most social organizations of women are likely to have a negative impact on them and they do not offer any of the benefits that they promise. This, of course, is not always true. There are a number of women's associations that have helped in bringing about valuable developmental projects and that have contributed to poverty eradication and the alleviation of other social problems. For instance an association such as the OMATA has in real life helped to elevate women from the status of being petty traders to being great business women through its loan facilities. This is particularly noteworthy since in

Nigeria support by the government for small traders has been abolished because of the economic downturn that the country is going through.

The relationships of the women under the umbrella of OMATA are contrasted with their respective interactions with their individual families, especially with their husbands. We see this in the case of the trio Ijele, Chinasa and Ifeoma and in Nkechi's case, we see how she relates with both her husband and children. From the first moments that we encounter Chinasa, Ijele and Ifeoma, their characters are presented as being questionable. The story opens with Chinasa's adulterous relationship culminating in her sending hired assassins (Shark's team) to kill her husband (Okey) after he trailed her to her boyfriend Dozie's house. She insisted on killing him so as to conceal her adultery because she wanted to avoid the punishment and humiliation that adulterous women are made to face in Onitsha when caught. The other two, Ijele and Ifeoma, are equally evil. Ijele uses charms to emasculate her husband Nduka and she becomes the head of the family. This is a reversal of the traditional family hierarchy with the man being the head of the family. Ifeoma (who has a lesbian relationship with Ijele), is married to Chidi, who has been laid off his job and maintains a small provision store to keep the family going. Because of Chidi's insistence on her being a house-wife even under their dire financial position, she decides to make excessive demands for money from him in order to compel him to change his stance. When he refuses to budge and allow her to work, their poverty increases and they are even unable to pay their rent for months.[56] It is only a matter of time before Ifeoma starts to flirt with the landlord. She accepts his adulterous overtures on condition that he cancels their debt. Ifeoma also maintains a faithful lesbian affair with her friend Ijele which further enshrines her as a 'natural' prostitute. Later in the narrative, Ijele betrays Ifeoma and tells Chidi of his wife's affair with the landlord. Armed with the information that Ijele provided him on where and when they usually meet (Ifeoma and Ogalandlord),

[56]This clearly portrays the challenges of colonization and the attendant need for both women and men to have a source of livelihood in order to maintain a good family. This is because the family's stability also depends on the economic well being of the family. In a society such as Nigeria and Onitsha for that matter, where one's appearance serves as a standard to judge the success or failure of a person or family, it is very important that women also contribute their own quota. Among the Ibo's it is not uncommon to see women who are gorgeously dressed with gold jewelry and matching accessories while their husbands wear only simple attire, walking behind them. Because the better and elegantly dressed woman is the pride of the man who has been able to marry and make her look well.

he is able to catch them and the incident ends their marriage. In line with the customary rites for a woman caught committing adultery, he sends her to go and confess to her parents and the village deity, Ogwugwu. If she does not comply and confess, she will face the death penalty. Frustrated with her estranged marriage and angry with her jilted lover, Ifeoma returns to the city avenges Ijele's wickedness by pouring chemicals over which kill Ijele. The death of Ijele removes the fetish spell that Ijele had cast over her husband Nduka. He regains his consciousness and, in line with the narrative's thematic purposes, Nduka is vindicated and rewarded for his virtue while Ijele is punished for her acts of vice. Such a resolution is in line with the theme of crime and punishment that conditions the overall portrayal of women in Nigeria videos.

However, the characters of the first three women are in sharp contrast to that of the remaining protagonist, Nkechi. While Chinasa, Ijele and Ifeoma are straight-forward incarnations of evil from the beginning to the end of the video, Nkechi represents the character-type that slides from good to bad. She is initially portrayed as a caring, loving and dutiful wife and mother but towards the end she is introduced to prostitution and she becomes unconcerned with the welfare of her family. Her life finally ends in tragedy. She is stabbed to death by her little daughter, Adora, for her motherly neglect and the ruining of the ideal home that her father, Orimili, had tried to build. Nkechi is not the only one that dies since Chinasa is also killed by the village deity, Ogwugwu, for falsely swearing to it after she had embezzled 1.5 million naira from her young boyfriend, Ejieke. Chinasa is also responsible for the deaths of her husband and another boyfriend, Dozie. To some degree, Chinasa's propensity for evil changes as her contexts changes but she basically walks between the extremes of prostitution and robbery. It is no wonder that it takes a deity to purge the society of her evil and that the only atonement possible for her sins is death. Thus ends the story of the *Omata Women*, women who seem to know no bounds in their evilness.

Between Binaries and Parallells: No Easy Path for Women

The number of women portrayed with evil tendencies in Nollywood video films bears out Farida Ayari's (1996:183) view that:

> It is worth noting that nine times out of ten, female characters in African films meet a sorry fate. No doubt because the film-makers feel they have a pedagogic and moral mission, the screen presents characters who cannot overcome. There are almost no positive heroines. Film-makers are quick to show us the examples that must be followed, but rarely do they show women with all their qualities as well as faults without judging them. And yet there are exceptions.

It is true that Nigerian women are also good wives, mothers and sisters as the character of Pauline Clark in *I Was Wrong* shows and embodies the tolerance, perseverance, and long-suffering that most Nigeria women endure in order to make their marriages work. Some aspects of Pauline's character also resonate in the earlier portrayal of Nkechi in *Omata Women*. The film's use of the binary divide between good and bad creates the nuances through which Nkechi is first presented to the audience. She is shown as being very submissive to her husband Orimili and caring for him and their children (Junior and Adaora). She leaves her shop to go home and prepare food for her family, and brings her husband's share to the market which in itself depicts her understanding of the traditional role and obligations which she has as a wife and mother in the family. Such an understanding of her role is further demonstrated through her cooking of her husband's favourite dish "*Ofe Olugbo*", a special delicacy among the Ibos of Eastern Nigeria. Her sensitivity to her husband's food preferences illustrates her traditional obligation to her family. Her family is, for the most part of the story, always represented in ways that chime with the filmmakers use of symbolic parallels in order to point to where the authorial focus and point of view lies. Nkechi's family comes in handy a positive parallel to those of the duo Chinasa and Ijele. When we are introduced to the duo and their families, we are immediately aware of the negative comparisons with Nkechi's model family.

Within the opening and second scenes of *Omata Women*, Chinasa's family is introduced. Chinasa is depicted as cheating on her husband Okey. Her portrayal as an adulterous woman shows the perils of women who move beyond the boundaries of the domestic

space, women who do not choose to adhere to the society's insistence on being faithful wives, end up destroying their husbands and families. The depiction of women as unfaithful to their husbands emphasizes that adultery, which accounts for most of the crises that destroy families in *Omata Women*, is a serious violation of societal morals and norms. This provides us with the reason why Chinasa hirers Shark[57] and his killer gang to kill her husband Okey. It further facilitates the understanding of her personality as an evil character which foreshadows the idea that anyone who becomes a close friend to her would become a femme fatal like her. It is a point that emphasizes how Nkechi later becomes culpable as an adulterous wife at the end of the story. Chinasa's character portrays her as an evil woman who would stop at nothing to kill her husband in order to conceal her adulterous relationship with Dozie. Her speech validates her decision to kill her husband: "I know what to do! I know what to do! I can't bear the shame! I cannot allow this man to tell other people about this. It is better for me to be a widow than to be humiliated, disgraced and thrown out of my matrimonial home. I know what to do. I know what to do. Shark! Shark!" (*Omata Woman*).

Both the opening and second scenes of the narrative portrays Chinasa's husband Okey's suspicion of her numerous women's prayer meetings. He finally decides to trail her to the supposed prayer meeting and her journey ends at Dozie's house instead of the purported women prayer meeting. The film uses the door as a symbolic representation to evaluate between innocence and guilt. For instance, when Dozie's door is closed with Chinasa inside the house, she still remains innocent and pure to her husband. But as soon as her husband Okey knocks on it and the door is eventually opened by Dozie, her innocence gives way to a new character which strips her of the former respect she bore to her husband of being a faithful wife. In a sense, the door is personified and assumes the character of an umpire or a judge who can assess the good and bad conduct of characters. Having introduced Chinasa, the film builds its use of parallels by introducing Nkechi's family.

[57] His name Shark matches the stereotypical view of human beings who destroy other people's lives and, like the sharks of the sea that devour humans, care less about the sacredness of life. Thus, the name Shark resonates with his role in the film as a hit man who is merciless because he sees murder as an avenue to earn a living just as Sharks see humans as prey.

Nkechi's family is depicted as an example of what an ideal family should be: peaceful, loving, warm and providing an atmosphere for happiness. The visuals during the scene of Nkechi's surprise graduation party organized by her husband, chronicles the harmony existing between wife and husband and their children. Firstly, unlike Chinasa and Okey where both of them drive out in separate cars, Nkechi and husband Orimili drive in one car to the ceremony. The unity of purpose is further emphasized where the Orimili's are depicted wearing the same colour of clothes and holding hands as they walk into the party arena. While there, the children come to greet their parents in felicitation shortly after their father ends his welcome speech and tells the guests to relax while they are treated to various delicacies. All of this helps to sum up the totality of harmony and love that radiates in this ideal family.

Nkechi's exemplary character, is starkly different from that of Chinasa's adulterous wild character and accounts for why Chinasa does not speak lovingly to her husband Okey. For instance, she is more interested in using inappropriate words and an unfriendly tone to keep her husband away from her. Thus, speech becomes a negotiating strategy for Chinasa to go wherever she wishes to. The narrative matches the visuals and the dialogue of the characters in a way that helps to illustrate the disaffection that Chinasa shows her husband. She snaps at his question "where are you going to…." and interrupts him with "Didn't I tell you that am going for women's prayer meeting?" Her husband reminds her that "Prayer meeting on a Tuesday? I thought you usually go for the meeting on Wednesdays?" Her final response is that "they can call for prayers anytime besides, I am late [She hurries out to the car and drives out]" (*Omata Women*).

In contrast Nkechi's character is accorded a disposition that ensures conformity with traditional matriarchy. Chinasa's use of the church as an excuse may be a way of also expressing the anxieties that are felt by most husbands whose wives are very involved in religious activities that demand their attendance of prayer meetings. Her portrayal indicts such religious gatherings that women attend and questions the authenticity of their beliefs. Such fears surrounding women and church activities earlier caused Pauline Clark

in *I Was Wrong* to be barred from entering her home by her husband Chief Clark. He perceived her commitment to the church when she became "born again" as an indication that she was having an extra-marital relationship with some man or the pastor. Whatever the reasons behind such anxieties, there is no gainsaying that the growth of the church and Christianity in Nigeria. This is due to the alleviation it offers the populace (both men and women) who have been faced with various hardships due to very myopic economic policies which have given rise to various austerity measures in addition to many years of military dictatorships and coups and counter coups in Nigeria, making life unbearable.

Most of the congregations in Nigeria are dominated by women and women as custodians of the home, see the church as having a redeeming role to play in addressing the issues that plague them either within their microcosmic family unit or the larger Nigerian society. Women groups are always holding prayers and fasting to pray for family and national well being. This basically means that they are still performing their traditional roles as providers of succor and these prayers are not even recognized as anything tangible since they are still within the private domain as in the family. To ridicule women's role as providers of succor the narrative of *Omata Women*, through its use of Chinasa's lies, belittles the benefits of women's prayer meetings and suggests that women have hidden agendas and that are far from holy.

The story depicts Nkechi who does not attend "prayer meetings" as an example of true African matriarchy. She knows how to speak with her husband and she does so in a way that conforms to how tradition dictates show women should behave with their husbands. For instance, even though the story shows that Nkechi would prefer to be allowed by her husband to practice law, the narrative builds on her painstaking patience and submissiveness by making her to wake her husband up from sleep in the middle of the night as the best time to get a good answer from him. Furthermore, the narrative eulogizes her tone which is soft and submissive and far from the antagonistic ways in which the trio of Chinasa, Ijele and Ifeoma speak to their husbands, especially in unpleasant circumstances. For instance, Ifeoma abuses her husband as being stingy, just to taunt him for compelling her to be a housewife. But the tone and mood of the dialogue

between Nkechi and her husband after her surprise graduation, is pleasant and indicative of the type of matriarchy which the filmmakers advocate for women. Her dissatisfaction with her husband's preference of making her a trader in the Onitsha main market does not result in any rudeness or disobedience on her part. It further reveals the gentleness of her disposition. She continued to gently remind of the cost he spent in support of her studies. Secondly, she reminded him that it took six whole years of training for her to graduate and be called to the Nigerian bar. Thirdly, she persuasively made him to know that she loved her profession and should be allowed to practice it even if it is only for a few years to justify her training.

There is also a sense in which Nkechi stands to indict the role and representation of another of the major characters, Ijele. For Ijele, her obsession with being in a heterosexual marriage without shouldering its attendant demands, makes her to use fetish powers to control her husband Nduka. Besides, her sexual desires serve as a subplot in the narrative and they lead to the crisis that ruins Ifeoma and Chidi's marriage. By making the two women's friendship to end in disarray, the filmmakers' voice their disapproval of lesbianism as an alternative to heterosexual marriages. The authorial view, by implication, also condemns what can be termed as new feminist preferences for same sex marriages or single-headed households over heterosexual unions. It speaks to how traditional African societies cannot approve of same sex relationships since lesbianism is seen as overthrowing the legitimacy of patriarchy which places men as husbands over women, whose roles as wives remains as subordinates to their husbands. Lesbianism further challenges Christian condemnations of same sex relationship as deviant behavior that constitutes a sin which is punishable by God as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible. Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed because of the sin of homosexuality thus earning the name which addresses gay relations as "sodomite." African tradition and Christianity's rejection of same sex sexual relations makes lesbianism as an option open to women unacceptable. In general lesbianism remains unwelcomed in Africa especially in the wake of the Pentecostal upsurge and its moralistic message of one man one wife.[58]

[58] It should be noted that what might appear to be lesbianism in Africa can be read differently in other contexts. For instance, amongst the Kamba people of Kenya a woman who may be barren or has great

However, it should be noted that African feminism opposes lesbianism. Lesbianism constitutes what African feminist critics describe as western feminism's militancy which African feminism disavows and instead prefers "womanism". "Womanism" refers to the approach that insists that both "the man and woman should be in harmony in the home and in the society at large" (Ogini, 1997:15). African feminism recognizes the heterosexual marriage institution despite the larger common interest that African feminism shares with mainstream western feminism since "both identify gender-specific issues and recognize woman's position intentionally as one of second class status" (Davies, 1990: 9).

In order to emphasize the importance of maintaining the traditional marriage the narrative uses the contrasts between Nkechi and Chinasa's family to reiterate that women should respect the traditional way that marriage should be contracted: with the man as the head of the family so that unnecessary conflicts in marriage can be avoided. The exploration of Ijele and her husband also suggests that long lasting marriages come about when women allow the pre-existing social order inherent in the traditional society to remain as is. It further validates the fact that women need to maintain the hierarchical positioning which sees men as the head of the family.

It is important, at this point, to note that the narrative gradually abandons the use of parallel comparisons as it later on deviates from portraying Nkechi as a good person. She

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wealth could, in the traditional sense, pay for and marry another woman of her choice, to raise children for her or live with her as an extended family member. But then she is free to choose her own man and have children with him or be his concubine while traditionally still remaining the property (wife) of the woman who paid for her bride price. This practice is also common amongst certain communities in Nigeria like the Bahumono's of Cross River State. In the case of the Bahumono clan such women that are brought into the family are given very high recognition because they are seen as helping to multiply and expand the family lineage. Such a practice gives rise to coinages such as slave and free born (oziza). However, the issue of slavery does not apply here in its customary sense. But the very notion that the women who are married are not from the community but come from elsewhere makes them to be seen as slaves within a considerably dignified context. I must quickly note that it is not only women but men also are brought into the families in the same context as being married to the women or men who pay for them. However, because of the legal implication of being possibly seen as human trafficking, which is a punishable offense in Nigeria, most people down play the once elaborate ceremonies associated with such marriages. In the Bahumono clan, the possessors of such marriages acquire a distinguishing title (rebort). But in all this the woman has no sexual relations with the slave woman. In a sense, the context suggests that such marriages can only be read within the traditional context of multiplying ones family lineage and as a way of showing affluence and not lesbianism.

soon loses all the virtuous qualities of traditional matriarchy that distinguished her from the other principal protagonists. Her recreation towards the end of the story depicts her as becoming both a bad wife and mother. As if to emphasize its misogynistic view of women, Nkechi is then used to show that even a good woman can become bad. Her degeneration, which culminates in her tragedy, is the results of her abandonment of her matriarchal role and duties as she starts to interact with the trio of Chinasa, Ijele and Ifeoma who induct her into deviant and transgressive forms of behavior, with prostitution being the quintessential one. Her transformation shows that morally sound and educated women can be changed for the worse by illiterate housewives and market-women. In short, irrespective of the intelligence, status or careers of women, they do not amount to any good once they operate outside of the control of traditional expectations and authority.

Women and Prostitution: life and death in the family

While *Omata Women* is unequivocal in its reduction of women to being serial culprits who repeatedly commit acts of wickedness, ironically, there are ambiguities that can be read in its representation of women. Such ambiguities, especially around the anxieties surrounding prostitution, can be used to read the narrative against the grain and to submit that there are possible understandings of the video's negative portrayal of women. These tensions can, in particular, be observed in the character of Nkechi. Of course, the women continue to be cast in the mould of the Biblical Eve and, as a result, most of the male characters in *Omata Women* are associated with goodness and they do not deserve the wicked wives that they marry. The men, for the most part, try to build decent homes with harmonious family relationships. The women, in contrast, are driven by selfish and insatiable material desires that they pursue to the end, even if it means killing their husbands. The implication is that the women are materialistic, greedy and full of evil schemes that are responsible for the disasters that hit their families. Put differently, they are responsible for the final destruction of the peace, tranquility, love and family ties that should make for an ideal home. The women of Omata, like the women of the Bible, ruin

and take their husbands out of their God given destinies, like Eve to Adam, and Delilah to Sampson.

The very fact that there is no conscious effort by most video makers to strike a balance in the character portrayal of women and men, as Ukpabio did in *I Was Wrong*, raises questions about the very morality of the filmmakers. The inability of filmmakers to present more balanced and diverse representations suggests that women are used, on the metaphorical level, as sacrificial lambs for the society's numerous social and moral anxieties. Instead of acknowledging the changing roles of women and dealing with whatever tensions and contradictions that arise as a result, filmmakers seem reluctant to countenance any other roles for women except as sisters, wives and mothers. The possibility of women entering the public domain, especially as educated and professional women, seems to elicit a lot of fears that are negotiated through the creation of stereotypes. The adverse effect of the anxieties is that it has paved the way to stereotype women as evil allowing them no redeeming traits. This is why most of the stereotypes that are created to undermine independent or strong women end up in variations of powerful women as prostitutes: a prostitute is a woman whose power rests on her body. This explains the representations of women in videos like *Queen of Aso Rock* 1& 1 and its rejoinder *The Fall of the Queen of Aso Rock*. It shows why the villain Maryam wields much power even to undermining the orders of her traditional ruler because she is a mistress to Gambari Dasuki, the vice president of the country. Clearly, it shows that women are mere appendages to men and that their source of power comes from men.

There are stereotypes around women politicians, contractors, and professionals like lawyers, nurses and secretaries being prostitutes and not suitable for marriage. It is such societal stereotypes that most Nigerian videos feed as is shown when a character like Nkechi, who is a trained lawyer, is suddenly reduced to becoming a prostitute in order to exemplify why it is not good for men to marry professional women such as lawyers. The lure of prostitution for Nkechi, is that it is the fastest way of making money for women. The video informs us that professional jobs give women more opportunities, which means that they leave their homes and the oversight of their husbands. For instance,

women lawyers will have more opportunities to engage in prostitution under the pretext of traveling around because of legal cases. It explains one of Nkechi's husband Orimili's reasons for not allowing her to practice as a lawyer: "so that you'll become public property?" (*Omata Women*).

Omata Women builds the theme of women as prostitutes by inscribing prostitution as a major cause for the breakdown of marriages in the video. This confirms why three out of the four representational families of the story are destroyed in the end, these are Chinasa's, Ifeoma's and Nkechi's. The theme of prostitution is further emphasized to show how innocent men lose their lives through their wives involvement in prostitution. It explains the rationale behind Chinasa, sending assassins after her husband Okey for trailing her to Dozie's house. Similarly Nkechi's fight with her husband Orimili which leads to his death is because of her prostitution with Onwa. And although Ifeoma's husband was not killed as a result of her prostitution with her landlord (Ogalandlord), he lost his marriage on account of it.

Apart from the story portraying women in heterosexual relationships as prostitutes, the sub-plot also depicts women as lesbians. Lesbianism is another form of evil that can only destroy marriages and the family. The relationship between Ijele and Ifeoma in *Omata Women* is the reason why the former has to resort to fetish powers in order to emasculate and control her husband Nduka who she turns to a houseboy. This is done so that she can maintain her lesbian friendships which Nduka has insistently tried to force her to end. The story provides an avenue for the video filmmakers to register their disgust for lesbian sexual orientations. My sense is that this is in response to another anxiety that Nigerians are becoming apprehensive about. This is the increasing number of Nigerian women who are getting more and more involved in Feminism. Moreover, some feminists' open declaration of their lesbian sexual orientation has been seen as a direct threat to male supremacy and the sanctity of heterosexual marriages. This comes in the wake of some radical feminists supporting lesbianism as a way of saying that women are better off without men as their husbands. We have shown how in *I was Wrong*, Nigerian society is strongly rooted in a traditional ethos where women are made to believe that they are

incomplete without husbands. Hence Pauline Clark's decision to stay in Chief Clark's house even when their marriage was strained, especially since she understands that the Nigerian society frowns on unmarried and divorced women and worst still sees such category of women as prostitutes. The widespread existence and social power of traditional beliefs even in modern times better explains why lesbianism does not constitute a threat to the society and should not become a topical concern in Nigerian videos. Its entry in Nollywood narratives shows how male filmmakers are trying to buttress a patriarchal ethos that will continue to bring women under men's control. Sylvia Tamale (2005:12) has correctly suggested that certain gender issues receive loud attention from men especially "when it suits their heteropatriarchal interests" and that "they will fly the cultural flag to keep women in a subordinate position."

It is also significant that the setting of the story is Onitsha, an Ibo city, where marriage is highly valued and treasured by not only the husband and wife but it also serves as an unbreakable bond between the two families whose children are married. This, however, makes it worrisome to see that such a topical concern should emanate from a setting where marriage is a social standard and families are judged as responsible when there is no recorded incident of divorce in their family history. However, with the effect of globalization (which is regarded as undermining traditional cultural values) being felt in many aspects of the society, it could lead to such 'lesbian-anxious' threats. Thus, to ridicule lesbianism and show that it is not an alternative to the traditional heterosexual marriage, the two women involved in it, Ijele and Ifeoma, who both have bi-sexual orientations (heterosexual and lesbian) are not sincere and faithful to each other. Both women go after younger girls and this further builds on the theme of prostitution, showing that women are naturally prostitutes irrespective of their sexual orientations.

By so doing women are seen as the reason behind prostitution itself, over and above the social circumstances and other possible factors. This in itself questions the morality of the society that sees a woman as a prostitute but exonerates the man who she prostitutes with. This shows how society tries to devalue women as inconsequential and irresponsible while men are superior and possess the authority to maintain extra-marital affairs and

keep mistresses everywhere without earning negative names as prostitute. Clearly *Omata Women* vindicates the men who are involved with the women characters like Ifeoma (who is Ogalandlord) and Nkechi (who is Onwa). To further validate the typification of women as prostitutes, the narrative suggests that beautiful women are great temptresses who lure men with their beauty and it portrays men who marry such beautiful women standing the risk of loosing them to other men and that they could even lose their own lives. Okey is murdered because Chinasa, his wife, is very beautiful. Her beauty is best described with the Ibo axiom "Ifenkili" (meaning a thing of spectacle) that attracts all men. "Ifenkili" becomes the metaphor for women's lecherous traits and a social enigma for men's doom. Similarly, Nkechi who is also very pretty is described by Onwa as "Odiukonaba" (meaning a rare thing to come by). Odiukonaba, within this context, serves a dual purpose in the narrative. Firstly, it describes her exceeding beauty and secondly amplifies her professional status as a lawyer in a society where women lawyers are scarce. Secondly, her educational achievement makes her to stand out. But since her education is inconsequential to the evil which lies ahead of her, she is made to become a trader and this paves the way for her affiliation with the OMATA women. Thus, her friend Chinasa, while introducing her to the other women of OMATA, also describes her as "Odiukonamba" and she bemoans that fact that Nkechi's husband prefers her to be a trader rather than a lawyer. It appears that it is such male dominance that Chinasa tries to weaken by introducing Nkechi to prostitution. In short, the reenactment of the stereotypes around prostitution will continue to make real women to see professionalism in bad light as against the prestigious and valuable benefits that society stands to benefit from women's participation in professional careers. Professional women can contribute positively to the economic base of the family and to the nation. Nationally, they will also help to improve the socio-political, economic, scientific and technological sectors and promote better living conditions for the Nigerian citizenry.

What is instructive about the market women is that they soon trade not only in commodities but in their bodies as well. Every avenue of money making, including like prostitution and being a pimp, is in the final analysis a trade. The greed that is associated with the OMATA women is exemplified in the depiction of the character of Chinasa.

Chinasa is the undisputed trader in the Onitsha main market (popularly called Otu market) and member of the Onitsha Amalgamated Trader's Association (OMATA). As a determined trader Chinasa's morality and business acumen is centered on how she can make quick money. Her insatiable greed devalues her sense of right and wrong to the point where she sees prostitution and killing as acceptable ways of making money as long as they are recognized as the "movers and shakers of the town" (*Omata Women*). Prostitution, together with the dominant belief in getting rich without working hard, provides the second reason why Chinasa arranged the murders of her husband and young lover. She wants to inherit their wealth and even the women know that women kill their husbands for money. It is not surprising that the evil activities of the OMATA circle of friends starts when Ijele comes to sympathize with her friend Chinasa over the death of her husband. She comes pretending to mourn in sympathy but as soon as they are alone she immediately wipes her tears and tells her friend that she knew all along that Chinasa arranged the death. She further helps Chinasa to list the material possessions she stands to gain now that her husband is death. Ijele tells her "he has made you a land lady" and Chinasa immediately lists "five plots of houses in strategic locations, three houses in GRA (abbreviation for government reserved area) in addition to the one we are living in and numerous cars." Ijele celebrates in prayer-form intoning "let them be dying and leaving us things so that we can become land ladies." (*Omata Women*). This explains the second reason for Okey's murder which is that husbands are killed so that their wives can acquire material possessions. This, as noted, is a recurring theme in most Nigerian video films that explore the domestic space and can be seen in *Women's Cot 1, 2, & 3* (2005) where women kill their husbands in order to join the prestigious widow's cot which offers them money and social status.

While the above analysis explains the ulterior motive for the pointless murder of Okey (and later on Dozie), it also serves to represent and naturalize women as greedy, money conscious, murderers, and as a generic group that always wants to acquire things that they have not worked for. Such stereotypes and the fears associated with them may have a negative impact on how Nigerian men (rich and poor) may relate with their wives. Anecdotal accounts suggest that most men hide their bank accounts and other properties

from their wives out of the fear that such knowledge may hasten their deaths at the hands of the spouses. It has also given rise to rich men in Nigeria refusing to have a will for fear that they could be killed by their wives if they knew the value of their estates.

But what is the implication of not having a will in a society which embraces external family kinship? The results for the widows and children, as have been portrayed in a number of Nollywood videos like *Brother In-Law* (2005) and *The Portfolio* (2006), are traumatic. The nuclear family suffers deprivation and since the relatives know that there is no will, their first attack is to go after the wife who is quickly brandished a witch and being responsible for her husband's death. Women who are under suspicion have been made to drink the water used in bathing the corpse. Widows who die during the period of mourning are buried in the evil forest since their deaths are seen as an indication that the deities of the land have killed them for killing their husbands. Even the children may end of being reduced to being servants as punishment for being the children of a bewitching mother who killed their brother. It is to such forms of social violence that depictions of women as killers contribute to, whether intentionally or not. Of course, there are no similar responses or enquiries when the husbands of rich wives in Nigeria outlive their spouses. The men are allowed to remarry soon after their wives die and are not made to mourn as long as widows do.

The Fall of Nkechi: Reading the cracks of Patriarchy

The socio-political and economic crises experienced have identified marriage as one of the possible avenues for upward social mobility within the Nigerian postcolonial state. Such perceptions of marriage threaten the objective of marriage, that is, love as the cardinal factor which is a precondition for smooth and harmonious family relations. In the case of Nkechi, her marriage initially has love which should have ensured a sound marriage if it was not for the economic contradictions of the postcolonial Nigerian state. One of the key tensions in the deterioration of the relationship between Nkechi and her husband is when they are expected to aid in raising the bail for one of Nkechi's brothers. Nkechi's father, who is a retired pensioner who has not received his retirement benefits,

is unable to secure or contribute towards the amount. In short, the responsibility then falls on Nkechi to bail her brother Emeka from police custody. Nkechi finds herself as the only hope for her family to effect the release of her and it this circumstantial development that can be partially attributed to her degeneration from good to bad as the story ends.

The circumstances that surrounds Nkechi's moral degeneration create a space for a different reading of her transformation. Instead of being merely an attestation of the evil nature of women, the narrative, ironically, generates sympathy for her from viewers in the same way an undeserved sufferer can be pitied for being condemned because of a crisis that is beyond her or his control. Her situation explains the Aristotelian concept of "an error of judgment" which, according to Aristotle, is not strong enough to make a tragic hero to be "morally responsible" for the tragedy that befalls him (cf. *The Poetics*, 24). As much as the decision to engage in prostitution in order to raise the bail money is a wrong judgment in the face of a crisis, her previous status as a morally upright woman and the circumstantial nature of her degeneration evokes sympathy for her when she dies at the end of the story. This sympathy builds on a web that ties her tragedy to her extended family pressures. That she is able to raise the huge sum required for bail through prostitution, also speaks volumes about what her other possibilities would have been had she been allowed to practice as a lawyer. As much as the audience can blame her eventual tragedy on her extended family pressures, her character is to blame for taking to prostitution as the only option available to solve her problems.

The narrative in two scenes portrays Nkechi begging her husband Orimili to help with the money for the bail but he refused. According to him, Emeka's insistence on trafficking cocaine after being nabbed before and when there are other legitimate forms of businesses to do, means that he has to face the charges. One can also argue that her predicament, inadvertently, also restates the need for women to be financially independent as well. And paradoxically, because of the patriarchal prescriptions that forbid her to practice, it is at the Onitsha main market where a measure of economic standing can be achieved. At the market she is taunted by Onwa, an accomplice in her adultery, with "degrees are very, very unnecessary in the main market. This is where

money reigns." (*Omata Women*). This is since she is operating in a place (market) where she, as a lawyer, is a misfit who could earn well over the needed bail money with a single legal brief. This point emphasizes Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988:280) position of how women accept male negotiations of their economic viability through "restrictive practices":

> …the observance of restrictive practices is such a crucial element in the reproduction of family status that women will resist breaking the rules, even if observing them produces economic hardship. They forgo economically advantageous options… for alternatives that are perceived as in keeping with their respectable and protected domestic roles, and so they become more exploited.

Even if the narrative builds on her complacent role in reconciling herself to a lower economic status and compromises her strength in the marriage, we do see that she loves her profession and would love to practice it. However, her perception of the power of money in an earlier scene with her husband Orimili suggests that she does not fully grasp the changes in society and that, unfortunately, "money reigns." Her response to Orimili is that "money is not everything…I would do what you, say I should do but that is not what I like to do" (*Omata Women*). A feminist reading of Nkechi's fall suggests that there is no way that such a character could have been reduced to prostitution if she had not conceded to her husband's arrangements of not practicing law. This necessitates "a questioning of the fundamental, implicit assumptions behind arrangements between women and men" (Kandiyoti, 1988: 286). For instance, Nigerian society creates the economic inequality gap between men and women by reducing the chances of women of having good careers by promoting early girl child marriages which take the women out of school. This, *Omata Women*, exemplified in the fact that Nkechi only graduates as a lawyer in her matrimonial home. This speaks to the fact that most Nigerian women who, through patriarchal conditioning, are forced into early marriages would have been able to compete side by side with their male counterparts if they did not marry early and start procreating. These impositions have an adverse effect on their economic standing as it limits them from becoming economically independent. The case of Nkechi portrays that married women who venture to build a career are likely to be discouraged because of unfounded prejudices. Remember that her husband, Orimili, refuses her pleas because he fears that she will become other people's property if she practices. Tellingly, he uses the

following proverb to silence her: "after all, what are you looking for in cigarette if not the smoke."

Seeing her parent's devastation in this crisis, Nkechi is forced to face the reality that 'money reigns' and she is their "only hope". Her parents vehemently tell her that their survival depends on Emeka's release since he is their only son and his life portends their family's continuity as most African societies see the male child as symbolical of their family continuity. However, Nkechi's inability to raise the needed money for Emeka's bail either through her husband or friend's builds the climax of her dilemma. Finally, she comes to an uneasy acceptance of Chinasa's mercenary advice that "use what you have to get what you want" (*Omata Women*). The speech serves as her entry point into prostitution and it can be read as portraying the effects of women's economic dependency and their subjugation under patriarchy and that it is far from demonstrating that women are morally bankrupt. Chinasa's dialogue above illustrates the commodification of women's bodies. Such social pressures and practices are then simply rationalized as confirming the perils of prostitution and revealing the characteristics of women, whether illiterate or educated. I prefer to interpret it as revealing how women are coerced by social circumstances into prostitution. Thus, the portrayal of women as prostitutes ironically, provides a multiple reading of the story. This brings to bear Annette Kuhn's (1982:9) observations on authorial intentionality when she notes that:

> arguments against authorial intentionality tend to stress either that an author may incorporate elements in text unconsciously- that she or he may not be wholly aware of the implications of what is being written or painted, or filmed. Or, as an extension of this argument, it might be suggested that texts can in some sense generate meanings on their own, or at least that meanings which go beyond authors' intentions may be generated in a dynamic moment of reading or reception.

This provides a deeper and more logical reading of the ambiguities in the narrative of *Omata Women* which helps to locate the circumstances leading to Nkechi's degeneracy as more complicated than as simply the result of women being weak and immoral. In two separate scenes at their home, Nkechi is depicted begging her husband to help with her brother's bail money. Her cries and pleas have no impact on him not because he does not have the money but because he is insistent on not helping her family again. There is no compassion towards his wife. His attitude contributes towards her eventual tragedy and

helps to create sympathy for her. Her tragedy serves to show that post-colonial Nigerian society should encourage women to strive for professional jobs. In the recurring economic crises that engulf the country and the world, there is the need for women to also support and provide for their families. This can only be realized if all patriarchal ideas and structures that inhibit women from pursuing careers are abandoned and dismantled.

This is where Orimili's insistence on her becoming a trader rather than the trained career woman that she is, in a way condemns the authorial position adopted by the filmmakers who prefer to validate Orimili's position by turning her into a prostitute. This perspective is validated by how the narrative builds on her willingness to continue with prostitution after the first act that gave her the money needed for Emeka's bail. She is finally attracted to the easy life that prostitution ensures. It becomes clear that the filmmakers, in a bid to ridicule her initial role with African matriarchy and fidelity to her husband, present her subsequent acts to debunk any argument that the initial slide into prostitution was circumstantial.

The story of *Omata Women* consistently seeks to depict the male characters whose families are represented as admirable husbands and fathers who go out of their way to ensure the smooth running of their families. An example is when Orimili cuts short his visit to the village and returns to the city in order to be with his family. This show of love and care for his family depicts her husband as blameless in the fight which ends his life and as a perfect figure of a good husband and father. In contrast Nkechi chooses his period of absence to stay away from home for three days. This is an indication that she is more concerned with herself and not the welfare of her family. Thus women are depicted as the destroyers of family peace and tranquility. However, his implication in the eventual tragedy that befalls his family can be seen through his refusal to give Nkechi the bail money which triggers all the other issues that the story presents and validates Kuhn's suggestion that we 'read between the lines' in order to undercut the authorial point of view. Such a contrast draws from an interrogation which rhetorically poses a question: would Nkechi have degenerated to prostitution if she had been allowed to pursue her

dreams and if her husband had, as in other times, helped to secure her brother Emeka's bail?

Nkechi's acceptance points to John Peck and Martin Coyle (1984:149) explanation that in verbal irony, events are always more complicated than any individual can grasp or understand. It is her husband's failure to live up to his earlier promise of providing for her that facilitates the filmic irony which further serves to interrogate the patriarchal ideologies that deny women economic power in the society. It points to the idea that women need to become self reliant in order to contribute to the economic stability of their families. This backdrop, serves to critique how Nkechi lost her earlier good acumen to a life of prostitution whose end is marked by the destruction which defines the very choice she made. According to S. J Wilson (1991:28), "Women whose life choices have been based on the assumption that men will provide lifelong economic security are economically vulnerable." Thus, Nkechi's inability to put up a strong resistance to her husband refusal of her earlier career choice sees her resort to prostitution to settle her financial problems and it becomes a belated resistance.

The Boundaries of the Domestic Space.

Nigerian videos are constructed around a complex mix of Christian, traditional and modern ideologies. For the most part, the videos suggest that there is an ideal society founded on the principle of virtue as described in the Bible. As in the case with the Bible, the place of individuals and the relationships between genders are clearly defined. Man and woman have a distinct role to play and deviation from the ideal state creates the crises that most Nollywood video storylines thrive on. The presupposition is that the family is a metaphor for the wider society and, at its smallest and closest unit, it comprises of father, mother and children. It is an indivisible unit where every member tries to maintain their roles. Thus, each member of the family grows into assigned roles with the father, within the traditional and modern /Christian designation, is the head and bread winner of the family. He is, in addition, supposed to provide protection for his family. The mother in the family echelon comes directly next to the father and is

supposed to provide care for the family and support for her husband, in addition to being submissive to him in all things. Furthermore, in modern times and especially among Christians, the Bible continues to provide a good example of what an ideal family should be.[59] The structuring of family relationships in line with gender specifics is reminiscent of Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon and Ingrid Richter (1995: 154) view on how masculinities and femininity are generated. They note that:

> constructions of masculinity and femininity operate in the home, where family arrangements are often based on dominant gender-based ideologies. Traditionally, it is expected that men will be the providers for dependent women and children with women's role defined as homemaker, child bearer and nurturer of both men and children.

Being able to identify the family structure serves as an entry point for us to know how families are organized. Furthermore, deviations from the traditional family organizational structure constitutes the basis for testing the boundaries of the domestic space in *Omata Women*.

However, it should be noted that the traditional functions of both men and women in the wake of colonialism shows a move away from many traditional structured values that had hitherto characterized African societies. In pre-colonial times most women were wives and mothers who were very involved in the running of their families in terms of their welfare, nursing, household duties and food production. The pre-colonial Nigerian society believed in extended families and it thus privileged patrilineal and matrilineal kinships. It was also a society that gloried in the number of children that one has. This made women to have numerous children sometimes even at the expense of their health and it allowed them little time to be involved in economic ventures, as they depended solely on the men for their sustenance and that of their children.

[59] See Holy Bible, Ephesians 5 and 6 where the role of family members is laid out in full. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord…Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;…Children, Obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour your father and your mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth."

The society also cherished polygamous marriages and this accounted for why economically strong men, especially chiefs, had many wives and children as a demonstration of their greatness and wealth. A man's ability was tested in the number of wives and children he could feed and care for. On the other hand, women in the traditional society, counted it a joy to be married since they could not command any respect if they were not married. The society was conditioned in such a way that women where made to see marriage as the basis for getting their daily needs such as food, shelter, clothing and protection. Men usually married women who were younger than them and this, in a sense, made the women to see them as either father figures or big brother figures that they can depend on. As Goran Therborn (2006:9) rightly observes that "hierarchal coupling and family formation are expressed in the concept of the "head of the family", who is normally male. Normative male superiority is often further buttressed by a considerable age difference between groom and bride."

But modern roles for women in Nigeria and Africa in general and have added new dimensions which see women sharing some of the traditional roles which hitherto were exclusive to men and vice versa. For instance, women now have to contribute to provide food for the family by taking-up jobs especially within the modern day capitalistic economy. It demands that women take up employment that would take them outside their homes and indeed some jobs require that they travel long distances away from homes in order to contribute to the maintenance of a viable and stable family. These novel developments complicated the articulation between domesticity and masculinity in Nigeria. As Uchendu notes:

> Contemporary Nigerian masculinities have a domestic side. This emerged in response to unfavourable economic changes. Domesticity by men within the family set up is a post – colonial development but with its beginnings in the colonial period, when wage labor was instituted and men joined the labor market as domestics to colonial officers. They did not however, share domestic duties with their wives at home. Male participation in household jobs became obvious following the economic crisis that hit Nigeria, requiring the adoption in the 1980s of International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programme… Under a distressing economic situation, the concept of the male breadwinner whose masculinity hinges on his sole ability to financially provide for his family (Anselmi and Law 1998,161) was challenged. (Uchedu, 2007: 293-4)

Thus, the colonial and post-colonial economies, in a sense, have generated additional gendered roles and they have also altered some early traditional functions which were strictly for women. Since women now earn salaries, it is incumbent upon them to contribute to the up-keep of their families. Besides, some women have made a mark for themselves by becoming professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, architects, pilots, mechanics, among other jobs, which makes them to earn better remuneration. This position, which should be seen as an additional benefit in the battle to strengthen family ties since, in reality, it assists in improving the quality of life of the family,has been misrepresented in Nigerian videos.

Rather than celebrate the tremendous contributions which women are making, especially their economic contributions, while still maintaining their traditional roles as mothers and wives, the videos have demonized them as a curse and not a blessing. This is apparent in the representation of Nkechi in *Omata Women* whose slide from good to evil starts with her professional status. Compounded by her friendship with the other transgressive women, Nkechi changes from being a faithful wife and becomes a disobedient, adulterous betrayer of her family.

Breaking the Boundaries of the Domestic Space in Nigerian videos

Women's representations in most Nigerian videos have continued to depict them in ways which are quite different from how real women are. One of the ways in which they are different from how real women are is in the way that attributes which are eulogized of women in real world are re-written in the videos in ways which demean women. For instance, in the two videos under discussion, education bears a negative connotation when associated with women which is hardly the case in real life. In the videos, educated women are morally debased and so are women whose jobs take them behind the confines of the home. The narrative suggests that the professional work spaces such as law firms and trading sites like markets, provide women with other opportunities to negotiate and subvert their traditional roles in which are not beneficial to the women, their families and society. In contrast, it is the tenacity with which Nigerian videos insist on depicting good

women as those who conform to traditional roles that is alarming. Women who deviate, such as Nkechi and Ifeoma in *Omata Women*, pay the ultimate price for disobeying their husbands. Husbands who also commit adultery or practice polygamy are exonerated because it is normal for the dignity of women to be sacrificed at her alter of tradition which allows men to marry as many wives as they can afford. The women's grudging acceptance of their husband's choices explains why, for feminists, the task is to continue to "search for the source of man's power over women." Carol Buswell (1989:13) The story, by refusing the two women Nkechi to practice law, and Ifeoma to engage in a gainful employment illustrates that women are only better in their traditional roles as housewives.

But this does not also mean that when women are presented outside of the traditional and modern they are presented in qualitatively different terms. Women who operate within the traditional sphere and roles are also usually also represented as evil. This reveals that, in general, women in Nollywood narratives, are there for men to vent their anger and frustrations of life on them. It suggests further that men's opposition to educated and professional women is informed by the fact that this category of women poses more anxieties to men's patriarchal control over women. This is in terms of how such women's economic power and social positions question men's supremacy over them. Within the traditional context and ideology women remain the objects of men's power and control. The position gives cogency to Buchie Emecheta's view in her book *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) through its heroine Nnu─Ego. The book dramatizes the heroine's insistence to conform to the traditional expectations of marriage as an Ibo woman and portrays how it leads to her untimely death. A death, that Florence Stratton uses to interrogate marriage as constituting women's "shallow grave."

The setting of *Omata Women* and *The Joys of Motherhood* is Ibo. While the filmmakers delineate how women's bad characters culminate in the dis-functioning of families, Emecheta gives us a feminine perspective that leads to an understanding of how women do all that is possible to make their marriages work. Emecheta's characters like Nnu─Ego provides us with a contrasting view to those offered in videos and it necessitates an

inquiry into why literary representations of women, especially by females draw, are significantly different and nuanced than those presented by Nigerian male filmmakers. It further necessitates an inquiry into Janki Patel's (2002: 5) position, following her comparison of "scholarly writing" and Nigerian videos, that the negative representations of women in the Nigerian videos is due to the hasty development of storylines. She notes that the representation of women in literary works "draw on historical facts, while the movies appear to derive from hastily developed storyline." The Nigerian video industry, as Patel highlights, "still has a long way to go." If Patel's views reflect how representations between the two (literary and video) genres are achieved, then it points to how women in videos are rewritten in ways which do not align with how real women are in Nigeria.

In particular, the *Omata Women* narrative suggests how the filmmakers' want their archetypal ideal Ibo (Onitsha) society to be. Their ideal visual society is one in which women only do what is suggested and approved of by men. Arguably, this type of position, which the narrative privileges in this film will further relegate and condition women within Nigeria to the margins as the voiceless other. To that effect, the depiction of the ideal woman within such a utopian society as constructed by the filmmakers not only ridicules and satirizes women as peripheral voices, but it also compounds the existing contradictions in conventional culture. This is because as it stands, women's depictions in the narrative is at odds with what obtains in the contemporary world, where education is a pre-requisite for access to the means of life in the ever dynamic and challenging world we live in. Thus, it becomes unacceptable to women that the videos tenaciously, try to limit women's educational abilities. Hence, we argue that Nigerian videos, given their immense popularity, should be used as an agency to sensitize people on gender issues. Filmmakers should be using their work to create awareness of the benefits of education to the society. To achieve this will entail the rewriting, in future work, of characters like Chinasa, Ijele, Ifeoma and the negative side of Nkechi, the four major women characters in *Omata Women*.

Women and the Politics of the Occult

Nigeria is a country where there is freedom of worship and this has given rise to different forms of spiritual and religious beliefs and worship that includes African traditional cosmologies, Christianity and Islam, among others. It is not unusual to witness national ceremonies where a Christian priest can be called upon to pray, followed by a Muslim Imam and a traditional chief. Thus in Nigeria there are various deities for different purposes. There are gods who are said to control the territorial waters, gods of fertility, rain and prosperity among others. Interestingly, most communities have a deity that supersedes the others, as is the case of Ogwugwu who is the supreme deity of the fictitious Ibo community in the Onitsha setting of *Omata Women.* The multiplicity of religious beliefs explains why people believe that there is witchcraft in the society and that people can use *juju* in order to achieve whatever purposes are desired. Nollywood, in its storylines, has not been shy of using *juju* related themes and plots which have elicited a lot of criticism as pointed out in Chapter One. As was to expected, *juju* is often implicated the relations and battles between men and women, Women are often accused of using fetish powers to control their husbands and, in the process, reconfigure the traditional roles and obligations that should hold sway in the home and in society. At any rate, the politics of the occult stem from the belief people can cause diseases, misfortunes, untimely deaths through diabolical and other satanic powers.

Generally, Nigerian videos have a way of representing deities and occult scenes in a way that requires the suspension of disbelief and instead to create a fearful impression that is analogous to the dangers that are associated with deities and the occult world. The videos employ film techniques, and especially the use of sound, garments and make-up to evoke the supernatural state and forces. Even when humans take on the appearance of a ghost or witch, they are usually represented as dehumanized beings through the kind of make-up they are adorned and echoing such as the witches and wizards in *End of the Wicked*. In general, sound is telling factor when the filmmakers want to herald the appearance of the supernatural (god or goddess) as well as to introduce horror scenes. There is a particular horror jingle which dominates most Nigerian videos to the degree regular patrons of

Nigerian videos are able to predict that something horrific is about to transpire. It can foretell that someone is being killed either I in a ritual or coven. An example of such sound is in the scene where Chinasa, in *Omata Women*, is confronted by the deity Ogwugwu and is subsequently killed by the deity. Apart from the sound there is a lot of phantasmagoric images and transmutations of figures that help to create the effect of the supernatural.

However, these images and scenarios cannot be naturally explained but help to suggest the different forms of alienation that are felt in the society which have given rise to people indulging in the occult whether to secure power, wealth or to attack their enemies or those they envy. Besides the societal anxieties which are expressed through the depiction of the occult may be replicating traditional beliefs and customs that are part of African ontology. It could also be seen as a way of judging the 'barbaric ways' of African religions by post-colonial Africans along the Christian notion of good and evil. It could arguably also be a way saying that pagan practices have taken the continent backward and that Christianity should be chosen over African traditional religions and their attendant pagan practices. The above helps to throw light to the representation of women in *Omata Women* within the fetish (juju) stereotypes. This is clearly captured in Ijele's use of *juju* to overthrow Nduka's initial headship as husband and father figure in the family.

As previously mentioned, Nigerian videos' perception of how the family should be organized is in accordance to the Christian tenet that man is the head of a family as can be traced from the biblical Adam whose wife Eve was created from his rib and which makes Eve the helpmate. This creation story bears out the representation of women in Nigerian videos as it paves the way for how responsibilities and power relations are structured. So the respective roles that genders perform can be divided into those who are in charge and those who follow or, in other words, the dominant versus the subordinate. Divinely man is ordained to rule the family and this is reflected in the kinds of responsibilities and roles that men and women play in Nigerian videos. Women as subordinates, do the cooking and mothering while men are responsible for decision

making and financial control. The failure to uphold these religious and traditional ideas brings disarray as shown in the family of Ijele and Nduka. Ijele's subversion of the family's leadership structure is a social taboo in the story. It enunciates the authorial point that cautions patrons of the video on the dangers that are inherent when women undermine and over-throw the men as the heads of their families. Such a situation is regarded as unnatural and it can only be achieved, it seems, through the use of supernatural vices such as *juju*.

The re-making of power and responsibilities in the family of Ijele and Nduka's is achieved through the use of food laced with *juju* concoctions. Its effect on Nduka leads to what Carmela Garritano 2000:186) calls "figurative blindness." Such blindness is employed to expose the idiosyncrasies that follow Nduka's newly acquired behavior: he starts to do all the domestic chores that are expected of women. The videos, however, do not examine what would prompt women to use *juju* to control their husbands. I suppose it is enough to privilege the male point of view and its fears a more equitable division of labour in Nigerian society. The narrative allows Ijele to assume the headship of the home so that it can mock her gullibility and the buffoonery associated with her overthrowing of the traditional structure of the family. At one point she is satirized as she interrogates her husband, wanting to know "who is the head of this family?" Of course, being under her spell, Nduka admits that his Ijele is the head of the family. By posing this question, the filmmakers deliberately pass a message in any decent society, there exist certain boundaries that should not be crossed since these boundaries are culturally specified. In a sense they seem to be saying that the advocacy for equality by women, NGO(s) and other formations in civil society should not be allowed to transform the status quo. By ridiculing Ijele's headship and by showing its disastrous consequences, the film clearly endorses a misogynistic view of women.

Conclusion

The chapter explored the real and imagined boundaries of the domestic space in Nigerian videos through a discussion of *Omata Women* which typifies women as naturally evil,

greedy and materialistic. It argued that such representations are, for the most part, aimed at not delineating the complexities of the home but rather to caution against the perceived dangers and disastrous consequences that follow once women moved outside of prescribed traditional roles and spaces. Women are seen as appendages to men and that when they countenance a different sense of economic power and independence, it is through recourse to real and metaphoric practices of prostitution. This we argue is uncalled for since the opportunities and careers available to women - as medical doctors, lawyers, engineers among other roles – exceed prostitution and they can assist in improving both the family and the society at large.

The chapter also highlights the fact that it is women who are predominantly used to embody and preach patriarchal ideas and subject positions that, ultimately, lead to the social marginalization and subjugation. Firstly, Nollywood videos relentlessly use the stark binaries of good and evil to simplify the complex abilities, needs and desires of women, with good being reduced to identities and practices that are consistent with patriarchy. The representation of women and their relationships with men are biased and far from balanced and, as a result, there are no positive heroines in *Omata Women.* A character like Nkechi, who could have passed for a positive protagonist, is eventually reduced to a tragic heroine in *Omata Women*. The negative image which the video accords women is far removed from the day-to-day lives and struggles of in Nigeria to what Anyanwu calls the "degradation of womanhood." The chapter makes a case for women to be portrayed in video narratives in ways which will make them aspire to be educated professionals in order to make them fulfill the responsibilities of women in a postcolonial society such as Nigeria with its attendant socio-economic problems.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FETISHIZATION OF WOMEN IN *MORE THAN A WOMAN* AND *OMATA WOMEN*

> As men have traditionally been in power in the film industry, Theorist believe that the camera shows us the world through the stereotypical eyes of the 'male gaze.'
> Clare Lovey (2004)[60]

This chapter continues with the exploration of the depiction of women as deviant and transgressive but it extends its focus to look at the representation of women who live outside of the templates of the domestic space and heterosexual marriages. I am particularly interested in women who are represented as outlaws because they do not only disobey the traditional and patriarchal identities assigned to them, they go further and either circumvent or reverse societal identities and expectations. Paradoxical, such misconstructions thrive on conflicting framings of women which fetishize women in ways which reproduce and allay societal fears and anxieties about who are seen to be breaking norms and expectations. We have identified a range of negative ascriptions to women who are seen as anti-social: they are decried as being greedy, materialistic, lacking love, maternal care and faithfulness and even capable of being prostitutes, thieves and murderers. At the same time, in films such as *More Than a Woman* and *Omata Women*, they are also fetishized as objects or bodies of sexual desire that should be available for male gratification. To achieve their false representations, the filmmakers employ various thematic and aesthetic tropes such as women who engage in the reversal of roles, women as each other's enemies, as well as women as commodities that are to be consumed by men. These kinds of representational patterns still adhere to the overall tendency to present women as evil and as a danger to the society. As a result women are

[60]"Women Representing Women." www.MediaEd.org.uk the UK media and moving image education site.

most often punished in Nollywood videos for violating the social order. The latter prepares the ground for making sure that women, in real life, pay the price for the misdemeanors they commit and, hence, the other recurring thematic trope of crime and punishment in Nollywood video films.

As noted before, Nollywood videos have since their inception been mostly produced and directed by men and this has an adverse effect on how women are represented. Bunmi Olujinmi (2008:119) attests to the fact that film producers/directors churn out films that are consistent and reinforce the social power and dominance of men. The chapter poses two critical questions: firstly, why should women characters be saddled with outrageous roles and of what significance is this to the overall image of women in Nigerian videos? The second question seeks to ask why there are not other patterns of representations that are pursued? These questions demand some consideration of the social stratifications in the society since these partially account for why the male dominated video industry insists on portraying women in conflicting images. This arguably, does not need to be the case if Nigerian women become more involved in film production. Mabel Evwierhoma (2008:115) notes that the late entry of women in film production and direction in Nigeria is responsible for the way women are portrayed in Nollywood films. But, she cautions that the "social arrangements of masculinity that the home video entrenches" should be challenged. Noting that "what the world sees about the Nigerian woman through the eye of the camera" should be that which will dignify womanhood and not the misrepresentations currently in vogue in Nollywood videos.

Plot, theme and characterization of *More than a Woman*

More than a Women draws on the action-thriller genre to explore the exploits of its heroine or villain, Trechia, who is an extraordinary criminal who specializes in shoplifting and daring robberies of fortified jewelry shops. She is presented as a highly educated computer scientist who studied abroad and, upon return to her country, gets involved in advanced roguery as she utilizes the educational knowledge she acquired in computer science to achieve it. The narrative, from the opening scene, displays her

many skills: she is an expert motor bike rider and can scale walls with great ease. With her knowledge and skills, the sky is the limit as far as her criminal and evil schemes are concerned. The opening montage immediately presents Trechia riding her motor bike at an excessive speed at night and establishes a connection between her and her target shop. The dim lighting and the pans move from the ground to the sky to establish the height of the fence to be scaled, together with shots of the two security guards who are guarding the shop, immediate place her as a powerful dare-devil. She beats up the one guard, scales the fence and we find her inside the shop, making her selection of the choice jewelry on offer. While she is collecting the jewelry we are shown, through close up shots on security cameras installed at strategic areas in the shop, that the shop is under constant surveillance. Trechia continues nonchalantly since, as we later discover, she has devices which blur her image on the recorded footage. The opening sequences invite us into what will be a roller-coaster ride until she is eventually caught at the end of the video.

The first major clue that we are provided about her character and background is that she is without a family and that she was raised in an orphanage. It was while in the orphanage that, at the age of fifteen, she met a boyfriend who came from a rich family. He eloped with her to overseas where she studied. The video present the back-story of her past life with her boyfriend through conversations with her co-lead character, detective Banjor Daniels who, together with his squad, is saddled with the responsibility of apprehending the notorious rogue who is terrorizing the society. However, it is not known to him that she is the very target of his assignment. Thinking that he has found true love and friendship, he even discloses most of his squad's operational strategies to her and it helps to better plan her roguery and not to be caught. The story hints, at this point, that the trope of absent family, is significant and it draws attention to the sub-theme of the importance of sound family structures in an ideal society. The implication is that most delinquent children have not been raised in a family setting that allowed for the positive moulding of their characters and Trechia is one such example. Her conduct becomes a social commentary on the need to address the place of the family in the building of society.

The introduction of the sub-plot of the detectives helps in depicting the theme of crime and punishment as a recurrent theme of melodramatic films. It portrays that crimes are committed and the perpetrators are eventually brought to book as it happens with all the women characters of *Omata Women* who got punished for their evil acts. Similarly, Trechia is eventually caught and hurt after a robbery and police chase. She is lucky not to be shot dead because detective Daniels finally saw through her camouflage. Earlier during the operation detective Daniels visited her house and discovered clothing and accessories that she used during operations to disguise herself as a man. This discovery helps him to be able to later link her with the attire and identify her as the suspect. One of the interesting factors, typical of crime-thrillers, is that her dazzling ingenuity makes her roguery somewhat admirable and seductive. In addition, her beauty is quite captivating and compelling and she is likely to win as many fans as condemners amongst the audience. The intriguing question is why is it a woman who is cast as a sophisticated thief?

Role Reversal: The Rewriting of Women in Nigerian Video Films

We have previously discussed the range of roles and responsibilities that are Biblically and culturally prescribed for men and women in Nigeria. The trope of role reversal is an intriguing way of engaging with the traditional observations on gender identities. To countenance the possibility that people may perform roles that are different or in opposition to what is socially or culturally expected, is to invite reflection on the appeal and ambiguities of non-conformists or rebels in society. It is also to foreground the politics that surround the representation of women in non-conformist roles and responsibilities and to consider why such roles peg women, erroneously, as outlaws who are trying to bring confusion to a once ordered society.

More than a Woman, in casting Trechia as a sophisticated burglar and robber, is giving her skills and qualities that are deeply associated with men and, hence, the video allows her to engage in a form of role reversal. Trechia's character is rewritten in a way that

approximates the finesse and insight that men – whether as heroes or anti-heroes – occupy in thrillers. She is detailed and calculating in her planning, is adroit in electronics, computer technology and surveillance systems. All in all, she is the epitome of professional ingenuity that is rare amongst men never-mind a woman. We see this in the way Detective Banjo Daniels, and the entire police force, are in awe and humbled by the suspect, even though at this stage they are not aware that the suspect is a woman. The inability of the police to decode her image from the surveillance footage marvels them. In fact, Detective Daniels confides in Trechia about the spectacular challenge that they are facing, inadvertently updating her on the police investigations and helping her to refine her modus operandi for the next job. As viewers, who are privy to her real identity, our sense of admiration for her slyness, probably exceeds that of the police.

There are other moments where we observe the reversal of her role and with it the reversal of social norms and expectations. There is, for instance, her interactions with Dan who buys stolen property from her. Ordinarily, it should be the other way around. Dan should be doing the stealing and Trechia the buying of the merchandise. The irony in the change-in-roles is captured in a telephone conversation between the two:

Dan: (the buyer of the stolen jewelry is established entering his jeep packed outside a building as he calls Trechia) …my partners are leaving for Europe tomorrow, so I want the goods delivered ….

Trechia: (reassuring but with some caution) Sure I will deliver. The police are at vigilance so after this you should change your line of business, I will deliver the goods.

During the above scene Trechia is already pregnant and, in an earlier scene, we saw Trechia and Detective Daniels doing shopping for the baby they are expecting. Even during her pregnancy, Trechia's abilities or movements are not adversely affected: she still rides her bike, runs and jumps over walls until she is finally arrested. Real women during pregnancy, of course, find it difficult to even do some of their daily routines. While her arrest ends the film narrative, her pregnancy serves to draw our attention to the

ambiguities that underscores the filmmakers' representation of her. Despite all her amazing qualities, she remains a woman who ultimately falls pregnant, that is, she cannot change or reverse nature. Furthermore, there is also the implication that while she falls in love with Detective Daniels, the deception that she subjects him to is another way of gesturing that, deep within her, the slyness associated with women, is still well and truly alive. In fact, looked at from another vantage point, it is consistent with her criminality.

The misrepresentation of women who engage in the reversal of roles can also be seen in the depiction of Ijele in *Omata Women*. For instance, Ijele's name, which is metaphorical of a fearful masquerade as well as a lioness, serves to illustrate the enormous strength that she possesses. Her character provides a re-reading of women in the Nigeria society as having undeserved power over their husbands. Her name also serves to introduce her willingness to play out the masculine role in the narrative. The narrative informs the video patrons that her real name is Agnes but because she is aware that the name does not resonate with her strengths, in terms of the kinds of evils that she is capable of indulging in, she chooses and prefers to be called by her nick name "Ijele." The only time that we are told that her proper name is Agnes, is when her husband is first introduced and is warning Ifeoma to desist from calling his wife Ijele: "for the last time if you don't know her name her name is Agnes." According to Lucy Rollin (1999:305), "even when names seem nondescript, there may be artfulness in the author's choices….Even secondary characters speak for their creators." This position supports the fact that it is only at the introduction of her husband Nduka that we see him acting out his traditional role as a man who has the authority to discipline a woman and bring her under his total control. The story enunciates his role as a man, when he meets his wife Ijele in the company of her lesbian friends and he orders her companions out. Just as Ijele's friends are making their exit Ifeoma makes her entry and he is seen also warning Ifeoma. This scene demonstrates the authority with which a traditional African man is supposed to have over his wife and children. It recalls one of the characters in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow* (2007, 435*)* who explains his masculinity and patriarchy in the following terms: "Listen. Tradition is on my side, it is the man who wears the pants in the house".

However, the viewers already know that Nduka's traditional role would be short-lived. This is because of her association with Chinasa, who we were introduced to in the third scene. In that scene, her role of telling Chinasa what she stands to gain with her husband's death leaves us with a strong sense of Ijele's character and foreshadows many other shocking revelations. Thus, within the second half of her husband's introduction, her role is reversed by the filmmakers to suite that which they prefer for her. She is shown giving her husband the poisoned food and declaring her expectations from him: "as from today whatever I say you must do! You must do!" As in most Nigerian video narratives that deal with fetish powers, the accompanying sounds become a way of telling that the unusual has taken place. Once Nduka swallows the food under the vigilant and monitoring eyes of his wife Ijele, the earlier popular sound that signifies that something unnatural is taking place is introduced. The man has been emasculated and his place has been taken over by his wife.

There are very many sounds that most Nigerian video films employ within scenes that depict the occult world but there is one that is the most popular and it is easily recognizable as is its function. However, no matter how new a particular sound may be, it is meant to shock and cause fear and to call to our attention, through its systematic auditory power, into believing that the atmosphere has been charged spiritually. This explains why in *Omata Women*, Nduka immediately clutches his chest with both hands as soon as the sound starts. He does it in a manner which serves to confirm that a transformation has taken place within him which he is unable to control. To establish the magnitude of the fetish powers released on him, the sound is repeated and each time it is louder. The sound then punctuates his facial contortions and he finally bursts out into hilarious shouts of "Ijele" instead of his wife's real name, Agnes.

Ijele's reaction is to nod her head and smile approvingly at the transformation going on. Shortly after, she walks out and goes to the beer parlour where she is hailed by customers and Ifeoma - "Ijele! Ijele!" The hailing portrays her toughness as a strong and feared woman whose popularity is undoubted. She walks over to where Ifeoma is sitting and announces to her that she has taken care of her husband and now belongs to Ifeoma as her

lesbian wife.[61] The choice of lesbianism over heterosexual marriage is unprecedented in Nigeria since traditionally women are made to see themselves as incomplete and unimportant without husbands. It is surprising, therefore, for the filmmakers of *Omata Women* to be concerned with the theme of lesbianism. The camera soon follows her back to their house where Nduka is still eating the food and, impatient to start controlling him, she starts giving him orders immediately "Nduka, take this plates to the kitchen and wash them." Her husband Nduka, who is now fully under the effect of the spell, willingly answers "with all pleasure I would wash them and wash them until they are sparkling clean as Ijele." (*Omata Women).* Under the influence of the spell, Nduka tells his wife that they can call her "Ijele from morning to night" and he also starts to call her Ijele from that moment until the end of the film.

Omata Women ridicules his state and warns viewers about the consequences of role reversals when we are shown, in a tracking shot, how Nduka sings and dances as he washes the dishes. From this time onward, we know that Nduka has been emasculated by his wife Ijele. This scene also builds upon the idea that the all wifely responsibilities have been transferred to Nduka and he graciously does them throughout the narrative until the final scene when the spell is eventually broken following Ifeoma's mutilation of Ijele's body with chemicals. The reversal of roles which sees Ijele performing the male role in her family recalls Catharine M Mackinnon's (2005:50) critique of the Aristotelian view on character: "excellence of character…the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying. And this holds of other excellences…." Mackinnon argues that "the sexes are different: men tell women what to do, women do it, and so on. Gender is defined as a difference, the sex difference. This has been as much social construct, imposed social fact, as philosophical argument. Human societies have tended to define women as such in terms of just such differences from men, whether real or imagined, generally enforced to women's detriment in resources, roles, respect, and rights."

[61] The idea of still maintaining roles as either husband or wife in lesbian and gay relationships defeats the very idea of a separate sexual orientation because it serves as a continuation of specifying roles which better conform to heterosexual expectations. It signals that somehow even gay partners still fit into traditional roles and family responsibilities.

In Nigeria and in the Onitsha video films in particular, it is not the duty of a man to do house chores like the washing of dishes and cooking for the family or going to the market to buy condiments for soup. But being under the spell, Nduka engages in these roles which the traditional society views as women's roles without realizing that his role has deviated from that which the society approves for men. The narrative draws the attention of the viewers to how he has lost his sense of manhood, by using another male character, Orimili, Nkechi's husband to satirize how Nduka has allowed his wife to use him as a woman. It shows that the story consciously makes an effort to point out that his emasculated role, as signified in his new responsibilities, clearly identifies him as a man who has deviated from the accepted norms within the society. Thus, the story depicts Orimili taunting Nduka for asking Orimili to give him the money that he owes his wife Ijele. He not only refuses to give him the money, on grounds that he did not transact any business with him, but makes the former to understand that the society frowns at men playing roles that are meant for women, like Nduka attending to his wife's errands. This culminates in his question: "Nduka, are you not ashamed of yourself going on an errand for a woman in main market?" (*Omata Women*)

The severity of Nduka's demise is dramatized when he is presented as tantamount to a houseboy, carrying a basket of goods on his head while walking behind his wife who shows him her customers at the market so that he will be able to know where to buy things. Their walk is accompanied by a song with lyrics that summarize his predicament and the authorial perspective: "this woman go turn you to houseboy, this woman fit to kill you.…" (Omata Women). At strategic moments the song is embellished with a voice-over of a male voice that details the many ways that women have dealt wickedly with their husbands. The state of the family and nation is in peril and the voice continues dispensing its patriarchal wisdom: "if you want to marry a woman, never you marry a bad woman, because that woman fit to kill you, they will plan, plot and lie and kill, just to control their husbands for house! They will plot lie and kill just to have their way…" (*Omata women*). The song, like George Burt (1994:7) explains, has the ability to create several underlining meanings, which serves to give more explicit meaning to the story.

He notes "the quality and language of music are vital aids in breaking down the objective explicitness of certain pictures where there is a need to redefine them in a way that is consistent with the intentions of the story". The song emphasizes that Nduka's status undermines men and it also makes the women to lose the value and essence of being women who should be loved and cared for by their husbands. Overall, Nduka and Ijele's inverted relationship in *Omata Women* is symptomatic, as in the case of "Mabel's manliness" and Joshua's "womanliness", of a world in disarray, and both characters suffer for their deviance. But such deviance interrogates the postcolonial nature of Nigerian society where both men and women can be seen working in offices and industry and where some women are in effect the breadwinner's in their families. The fear of women going into gainful employment is that there are bound to be changes in terms of their roles and responsibilities and that these will affect the conventional traditional responsibilities and duties for men and women. According to patriarchal anxieties, this is tantamount to a world in disarray or one that has become westernized. Nduka and Ijele exemplify how men and women should not act, and in so doing, they construct gendered norms similar to those described in *Hostages* and *Dust to Dust*. Similarly, Ijele's character exemplifies what Haynes and Okome say about Mabel's character that it embodies "immense frightening power", that is a perversion of her natural "roles" as mother and wife it "signifies her moral degeneracy" (Garritano, 2000: 180). Such a position also condemns the usurping of male powers by Ijele. Even the connotations between her name and its metaphorical evocation of the frightening masquerade, which is also a male preserve, prove the filmmakers point. Her name alludes to the fact Ijele's role in the story assumes a masculine form and it brings to bear the corruptive power and vengeance that inheres in the reversal of roles.

The Appeal and Danger of the Seductress

In as much as role reversals unleash a range of personal and social apprehensions they can also be the site of a wide range of repressed desires. Trechia's character which borders on being an anti-hero, in the crime-thriller mould, has much that is potentially appealing. This raises the possibility that for some male and female viewers could see her character as worthy of admiration than condemnation because of its combination of beauty, skill and power. Her exploits are further made aesthetically appealing because of the special effects and music that is used during her robbery sequences. The combination of filmic techniques creates an aura around her that is endearing. This builds on Eamonn Carrabin's (2008:124) view that "in thrillers the two stories are fused, so that the first story is suppressed and the second vitalized. The crime no longer takes place before the action; instead the 'narrative coincides with the action' and looks forward rather than back." The interface between events is apparent in that Trechia's shoplifting scenes are usually fused into the actual chases by the police. When she is cruising or speeding on her bike there is a tendency to intercut her action with either fast or slow motion actions. It serves to hold the audience spellbound and it creates the suspense that fuels the numerous police chases that we witness. The disruption of normal time adds to the sense of surrealism that the viewer experiences and it also adds to her superwoman status. The latter is interesting because, unlike all the videos that we have explored, Trechia is an individual or lonely orphan without any family relations. Her story is not located within the family narrative genre but in falling in love and expecting the child of Detective Daniels, the motif of the family is evoked as a future possibility. There is, of course, still the standard template at work. That is, by representing the story of an orphan who grew up without a family in an orphanage, and depicting how the lack of family upbringing becomes responsible for her becoming a delinquent, the film provides the historical context and suggests that some negative behavioural traits can be detected early and corrected by families. At the same time, the portrayal of crime in the society through her shows the dangers of crime and that it does not pay.

Overall, videos with a "multi-genre status" have a way of telling stories that not only points at one issue or factor as responsible for people's actions and inactions. They tend to further depict cause and effect in a way that dramatizes why certain actions are done, what initiates and sustains them, and, finally, who bears the brunt. For instance, Trechia's lack of family background causes the society to suffer crime and insecurity, likewise Nkechi's prostitution robs her children of parents and thus creates the conditions for more crime and the need for more surveillance and security to ensure people's safety. The "multi-genre status" of certain videos has the ability to add additional layers to the portrayal and grasp of women in ways that can show that women have no monopoly on the types of evil that they can be associated with.

The spectacle of the police chases accords her a heroic portrayal which matches the film title "*More than a Woman.*" The title suggests that the society is in 'trouble' if more women of her nature and caliber emerge, especially since she challenges the gender stereotypes for women as gentle and weak and lacking 'manly' attributes. Her hi-tech abilities also warn about may be one of the consequences of globalization. She distinguished herself as a woman with great strength during a duel scene between her and her boyfriend Detective Banjo Daniels. She meets the latter in her home after another successful escape from the police who were chasing after her. Ironically, Daniels fights her since he did not know that Trechia is the same person as the thief. This leaves Trechia no other choice than to defeat him during their fight in order to conceal her other identity from him. During the fight she matches Daniels' strength pound-for-pound and she eventually sprays a chemical into his face, temporary blinding him, allowing her to land the killer blow which knocks him unconscious. We must also remember with regards to the emphasis on her strength is that Daniels is not just an ordinary man, but a policeman who has undergone special training in combat techniques. As he falls down, the film's theme song takes over the screen: "more than a woman… deep in my heart there's a fire burning me out. I want to let you know how much I love you…More than a woman". (*More than a Woman*) The music's function in this scene, as in all the shoplifting scenes, is to drive home the message of Trechia's superwoman character. Thus, the song matches the visual action that explains Daniels unconscious state as he lies on the floor of her

house. This validates why one of her major victims, Madam Becky, is led to believe that she is a man and describes Trechia thus: "the thief [he] came here." Besides, it is not surprising that she is thought to be a man because such criminal expertise in Nigeria can only be seen amongst men.

Yet there are moments when Trecia's superwoman status is also imbued with redemptive qualities. After their duel and her change of clothes, we are immediately shown Trechia tending to Daniels and his wounds. Her tender care and ability to revive him – she soaks a hand towel in a bowl of water and places it on his forehead - depicts her love and great affection for him. The latter qualities and conduct construct a form of maternal care around her character, they help to justify her in the eyes of Daniels as someone that he can marry. The matriarchal role she plays out here conforms, in a sense, with her desire to have this relationship, having lived her entire life without any family love. The confluence between her superwoman and maternal qualities are also likely to make her even more appealing to viewers. The editing technique removes any areas that could portray her weaknesses after the fight but rather allows us to see only her courage, strength and ability to control things to her advantage. Besides, the fact that at this point it is a woman who the society sees as a weakling and should be easily beaten by a man is enough to accord Trechia a supernatural role in the story. This is one of the scenes in the film where Tricia's supernatural role is applauded in the narrative.

The depiction of Trechia's character as someone with great strength helps in sustaining the suspense and curiosity that functions in sustaining the entire narrative. This is because, for instance, during the duel sequence, the film succeeds in depicting how Daniels and Trechia's tensions are heightened as to who will beat the other. The increase in tension also applies to the audience by extension, since for the audience, the fight succeeds in holding them spellbound to the screen and provides for a multiplicity of readings. Firstly, for the two characters, the success achieved in this fight determines how their future will be and secondly, for the viewers, they can be rendered anxious as to whether their heroine is about to lose twice: the duel and the love of her life. At this point the creative ability of the filmmakers is brought under great scrutiny as the suspense

heightens until a temporal resolution to the crisis is introduced when Daniels is defeated and lies unconscious on the ground. The narrative thread is picked up again as the viewers are treated to comic relief when suddenly, as Daniels regains consciousness, he is seen kicking his legs in different directions showing his readiness to fight on and possibly defeat the burglar. His actions portray that his subconscious mind is still alert to his responsibility of apprehending the thief who has just proven to be illusory.

Furthermore, his explanations to Trechia about all that had transpired between him and the burglar further builds upon the irony of this segment of the narrative. This is because both Trechia and the audience share in the filmmakers' creative ingenuity that makes Daniels, the butt of the action. His naivety and innocence sees him search the room in a bid to see if his love's jewelries, which she claimed had been stolen by the burglar, could be found anywhere near. At this point, the camera is used as a narrative tool to validate his innocence of being unaware of the burglar's identity. But he is abruptly interrupted, when his walkie-talkie announces that his presence is urgently needed at the office. This implies that he has to leave Trechia alone who, now, is pretending to be very scared of being left alone to the mercy of the burglar. The irony is further emphasized when, as he turns to make his exit, the camera gives a close shoulder to face pan of Trechia, which sees her smiling satisfactorily at his ignorance. Her smile concludes and removes any iota of doubt she earlier nursed that he had suspicions of her being the burglar. This is because earlier in this scene after his recovery Daniels had raised some thought provoking questions:

DANIELS: (looking very surprised and baffled) how can a burglar come in here with all the security?

TRECHIA: (trying to allay any suspicions which could be pointing to her) how does a burglar burgle? You are a policeman; you should tell me how this is done!

Her answer explains that she was at this time not too sure if Daniels was convinced that the burglar was someone else. Her ability to outmaneuver him by hiding her jewelry and

purporting their theft, makes Daniels to feel sorry for letting her and the entire police force down. The 'burglary' leaves Daniels very upset since, as a policeman, he was in the house when the burglary occurred. To worsen matters, the burglar has also carted away Trechia's expensive jewelry. The many loose ends are similar to the tactics of suspense novels which "combine elements of the whodunit and thriller. They keep the mystery of the whodunit but shift attention to the investigation, and the detective may well be in danger and a suspect in the investigation." (Carrabin, 2008: 124).

Thus, she can only be equated with the Hollywood character of the film *Superwoman* or better still, the female gang in *Set It Off*[62]. The filmmakers are obviously drawing on global popular culture but a question can be asked why Trechia was not given heroic qualities that bear resemblance to Nigerian women whose heroic achievements are still eulogized in the annals of history like the great ruler Queen Amina of Zaria who is celebrated for ruling. A character like Trechia compels us to consider what kinds of characters and storylines would constitute a truer image of African women? It further interrogates the educational and therapeutic functions that films propagate in the African continent. For instance, even though the narrative of *More than a Woman* is audacious, it still begs the question why it presents us with a woman who is a glorified thief. Why would male filmmakers choose to adorn a woman with criminal ingenuity especially since there are few or no records of such women in Nigerian society? As Carol Smart (1995:16) explains:

> Female criminality has not generally been treated as a particularly important or pressing social problem not only because of its comparative rarity but also because of the nature of offences committed by women….Women engage mostly in petty offences and once apprehended women appear to be easily deterred – court appearances by women are mostly by first offenders not recidivists – therefore they pose no particular problem to the agencies of social control. As a consequence, academic research into female criminality has failed to attract much interest or to receive very much 'official' support or finance- hence the relative scarcity of studies in this area.

The near absence of women in serious crimes serves to confirm Marcia Rice's (1990:57) view on why for "over the past decade feminist criminologists have been challenging stereotypical representations of female offenders." Trechia's portrayal is ambivalent

[62] In both *Super Woman* and *Set it Off* women are depicted within the crime genre.

about her exceptional attributes and the fact that they are located within an identity of criminality. The predisposition towards an emphasis on the latter suggests that, ultimately, the film both celebrates and cautions viewers about seeing roguery as an admirable venture and one that is worthy of emulation by real women. This, bearing in mind her great beauty and the opulence of her house, may lead women to think that crime is a worthwhile career.

Women as Each other's Enemies

Omata Women through Chinasa portrays that women cannot help themselves in times of need and the video quotes the Chinese axiom that "teaching a child how to fish is better than dashing him a fish" (*Omata Women*) which serves to undermine Nkechi's education. It also brings to bear Aniagolu-Okoye's view that male filmmakers' continue to depict women as each other's enemy. In a number of sequences we see that Chinasa wants the other women to be unmarried like her. This explains why, initially, Nkechi rejects Chinasa's informal advice or education as she reminds her that she is married and has a loving and peaceful home and cannot, therefore, indulge in adultery. But the former, insists and tells Nkechi "wasn't I married before?" (*Omata Women*). This shows that most women will want others to suffer the same fate as themselves. Aniagolu's observation also applies to the characters of Ifeoma and Ijele whose misunderstanding could not be resolved amicably but leads Ijele to divulge the former's adulterous relationship with her landlord to her husband Chidi. While this behavior is consistent with the stereotype of women's enmity towards each other, it also serves to sustain the plot. Prolonging the plot is useful in that it allows the filmmakers to completely devalue women as morally bankrupt and unethical which is demonstrated the women's inability to keep each other's secrets. In a sense *Omata Women* presents the women's friendships as different from how the filmmakers' of *Masterstroke* and *I was Wrong* portrayed women. For instance in *Masterstroke*, the friendship that exists between Simba Richards and her friends the "Sisters for Emancipation", who maintained the necessary secrecy in their handling of Simba's political matters, exemplifies a good and trustful friendship. Friendship in *Omata Women* also deviates from how Ukpabio in *I Was Wrong* depicts the

friendship that exists between Sister Rose and Sister Rachael, as well as that of Mildred and the villain Lydia; and finally the friendship that the heroine Pauline Clark developed with Nelly. All these examples of friendship depict the possible strength and support which good friendship can bring to women.

It is important to note that the treacherous friendship that the women in *Omata Women* develop exemplifies how mainstream Nigerian videos continue to build a negative image of women. This constant portrayal of women as each other's enemies explains I.S. Popoola (2003: 134) analysis of the characters of Jennifer and Sophia in *Abuja Connection* 1, 2&3 (2OO3) as "being at each other's throat all the time." Jennifer tells the police lies that Sophia operates a robbery gang that has disposed her of valuable items. The police conduct a search on her bodyguards that results in the discovery of pistols on them. This was a plot to make sure that her former friend Sophia loses her social status and economic power. Such fractious relationships between women dramatizes and helps to explain how the trope of friendship in *Omata Women* functions. Friendship, ultimately, becomes a crucial factor in the destruction of the women's marriages. This clearly explains why Nkechi's marriage is destroyed by Chinasa's negative influence. In a related development, Ifeoma is estranged from her husband because of Ijele. The result finally is that Ijele is also destroyed because her friend Ifeoma unleashes revenge at her for divulging her secrets to her husband. The betrayals and counter reactions which chronicles the makeup of friendships in *Omata Women*, ends the story with the lives of the four friends in ruins. Women's enmity toward themselves is reiterated in *More than a Woman* though not in the motif of friendship but as a means of showing how women are each other's enemies. The story shows that one of Trechia's repeated victims, Madame Becky, is a woman. It would stand to argue that women should protect the interest of other women who try and compete in corporate, male dominated ventures as a way of encouraging each other, especially since social prejudices have created a wide gap between men and women. But this is not the case in *More than a Woman*. Trechia's robbery of Madame Becky's jewelry leaves the latter in a worse quandary since the jewelry was bought with a loan. Instead of leading to other women expressing sympathy towards Madame Becky, it leads to her and her sales girl to receive more punishment.

The narrative depicts Madam Becky begging Trechia, when the latter orders her to bring out her choice and very expensive jewelry, that the jewelry was bought with money that still needs to be repaid. It is here that we are shown Trechia's brutality and lack of compassion towards another woman. It confirms the belief that women are capable of becoming more "cruel and sinister than men" when they become criminals. (Smart, 1995: 21)

Overall, the friendship of the women in *Omata Women* and *More than a Women* contradicts the benefits that can accrue from female friendships. As Julia T. Wood (1994:187) summarizes women's friendship:

> women's friendships tend to develop out of the central role accorded to communication, which allows disclosures, expressiveness, depth and breadth of knowledge, and attentiveness to the evolving nature of the relationships. Because they know the basic rhythms of each other's life, women friends often feel interconnected even when not physically together.

Wood's perspective is contrary to Ijele's divulging of Ifeoma's secret to her husband. This gives cogency to my argument that Nigerian video filmmakers try to undermine women's social networks even in the face of the evidence and progress that women associations in Nigeria have brought about. The dividends of women associations in Nigeria can be seen in terms of enhancing community progress in the area of developmental projects. In most cases such projects have been sponsored by women initiatives either through the church, urban women's or market women's associations. In the case of urban women's associations, the famous Ibo women "August Meeting" has made a tremendous impact in the provision of basic amenities to the communities. Other women's organizations have through their monthly contributions secured thrift savings (*esusu* as such savings are popularly called in Nigeria) that are vital in serving as an agency for empowering women especially with the collapse of governmental cooperative societies which were the main sources of raising capital for businesses from the 60's up to early 80's. This chimes with Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry (2004:481) attestation that "elite women's voluntary associations brought females together and provided social spaces that accommodated women's needs and legitimated their concerns." According to her, such women's forums provided support and avenues the opportunity for sharing

information on matters that "affected females." Furthermore, she notes that "social gatherings promoted cross-cultural and inter-class/group sharing and assimilation of social conventions and etiquettes." This further buttresses the more positive views on women organizations and friendship as pointed out in the analysis of *Masterstroke* and its portrayal of the "Sisters for Emancipation." The Sisters, in short, exemplifies how women's friendships and associations help to build strength in women for their emancipation from the clutches of male chauvinism.

Women as objects in Nollywood videos

Nigerian videos, as seen in the two videos of our analysis in this chapter, objectify women as commodities that can, either, be easily bought for money as prostitutes or that they can be the imaginary embodiments of male desires. However, even the fact that tradition places a dowry on women as a condition for marriage makes them commodities in the first place. Because men have to pay when marrying a woman, the very idea of dowry imposes a transactional value on women in the society and their circulation amongst male lineages. This informs the basis for men's authority over them and further builds on the dialectics that women are always under men, whether it be their fathers or husbands. However, the Nigerian videos overplay the transactional value that the society has placed on women in order to further devalue them as a group that, in a sense, internalize their commodification and pursues the very materialism that will have them described as morally deviant. Men are always the ones that place the price on the head of women and there is a sense that Nollywood videos insist on using this fact and further shift it onto the ways in which women themselves will offer their bodies for money either as mistresses or prostitutes. At other times the Nigerian videos demonstrate Mulvey's position of woman being the object for the male gaze in films. The videos go even further to show that behind the very beauty which attracts the male gaze, there lurks the very evil that destroys society. For instance, in *Omata Women* the trio of Nkechi, Ifeoma and Chinasa are visually represented in some scenes as seductive objects for men. This also applies to Trechia's portrayal in *More than a Woman*.

In *Omata Women* for instance, Nkechi who was the only woman among the trio of Chinasa, Ijele and Ifeoma who had maintained her dignity degenerates to prostitution. In a hotel sequence, Nkechi, who is still trying to raise bail money for Emeka, accompanies Chinasa as they seek out possible clients. We see a medium shot of the ladies as they walk in through the entrance of the hotel which shows the unity of their purpose. They are observed by Onwa who is a long standing admirer of Nkechi, as they arrive. Chinasa's body movement is systematically visualized as the camera gives her both long and close-up shots as she cat walks into the room. The conjuring up of Chinasa's beauty is explained when Onwa verbalizes her beauty through an Igbo axiom "Ifenkili Onitsha" (that is a thing of spectacle in Onitsha). Perhaps, Chinasa herself is aware of her beauty and commodification by male eyes because there are scenes in the film when she refers to herself as "Ifenkili." This appellation explains her flirtatious character which is confirmed by her relationships with men such as Dozie and minors such as Ejike. The camera's focus, after Onwa's praising of Chinasa, is then shifted from Chinasa to Nkechi. The shot that follows then gives an indication of the change – from mother to prostitute – that Nkechi is about to undergo. The difference between the two women and the transformation that is about to occur is captured in the garments that Nkechi wears. She is dressed in a glamorous Nigerian outfit of expensively designed chiffon *buba* and *iro* with head gear, shoe, bag and coral beads to match. Her elegance draws attention to the fact that she is supposed to have dignity for herself as a married woman and also respect for her husband.

The fact that despite her dignified dressing as a responsible Nigerian married woman, she walks behind Chinasa into the hotel room serves to ridicule Nkechi's adultery as she is led like a sheep to the slaughter, to borrow the biblical phrase. As soon as Chinasa is done with the introductions, she takes her leave, again with the same sultry movements as when she first came in. As she walks out she is followed by the camera until she is out of sight. Chinasa is followed by Onwa who locks the door. The camera withdraws from Onwa to focus on Nkechi with bright light on her face to depict her beauty. At this time she wears a smile on her face which assures the viewers of her readiness to comply with Onwa's advances. This is in contrast to an earlier segment at the market, where she had

frowned her face when Onwa had made advances towards her. The close-up framing of Nkechi, gradually, sizes her entire body, moving from her face downwards towards her shoes and then it also picks up Onwa's legs, who is lying on the bed, waiting. The camera pan becomes a technique to create a link between Nkechi as a sumptuous commodity for Onwa's consumption, as he lies on the bed. This close up captures, inadvertently, the capitalistic economy and its attendant effects on women. It shows that money can buy even the most distinguished woman. Remember that Nkechi's earlier portrayal and status – as mother and lawyer – earned her the name of "Odiukonamba" (that is a rare commodity).

There is a sense in which Nkechi's compromise with adultery exposes the vulnerability of women to men, especially as it is Onwa who dictates the tone of the affair: "this is one million naira cheque, when I am satisfied, it is all yours." He orders her to undress and the close-up show her moving to the table where she removes her headgear, which she places on the table, and the camera fades out on her. This action is symbolic: it portrays complete compromise and serves to conclude her degeneration into prostitution. The technique of filming her compliance to the former's orders allows the audience to fill in the necessary gap for themselves. The camera then fades in on the vicious Onitsha women circle members, who are waiting to welcome their new associate from her initiation and fulfilled mission. This is further illustrated as the camera moves from the focus on the committee of friends and moves to Nkechi when she makes her entry. Besides, the camera is used to objectify Nkechi as prostitute in order to devalue her worth before her husband, Orimili, who before saw her as an asset of pride among his fellow men "don't you know that my wife is a lawyer, if I tell her she would lock you up" (*Omata Women*). He says this to Nduka. It is a way of boasting about his achievement of training a lawyer and, by extension, it also illustrates that although he is an illiterate trader, his educational status is greater than those of the other illiterate men traders as he is controlling a lawyer at home as his wife. This serves to explain how Nkechi's educational status further gives value to her higher status in the society.

The third character Ifeoma is objectified through her tight dresses that highlight the contours of her body and that the Landlord's gaze cannot resist. The Landlord is captivated by her looks and in a bid to see more of her, he asks if she is alone at home, and getting the affirmation, he requests her to give him water. It is when she is bringing the water that viewers are led to know that the Landlord's initial mission of collecting rent from the couple has given way to a new desire which is that of having Ifeoma as girlfriend. The medium shot only allow the viewers to see Ifeoma's hands as she holds out the glass of water to the Landlord and not her upper side. It is only the Landlord who is able to view her chest upward. In this framing of the shot, the point of view of the audience is disadvantaged while the actor is privileged to see everything. In this way the audience is not shocked to see that the man's gaze is not synchronized with the supposed action of collecting the glass of water. This is because his hand moves in another direction from where the glass is located. The male gaze is again privileged as she places the saucer on the table. At this point both the male actor and patrons have more advantage to see her chest through a tracking zoom angle. The chest helps to depict her more as an eroticized object. It follows why the Landlord is drowned in his gaze, until Ifeoma takes her seat opposite him. For it is only then that he takes a sip of the water and drops the glass of water on the saucer on the table. What baffles the spectators is how the major issue that brought the Landlord to the house is not given any prominence. Rather, the action of the story is slowed down to dwell on the eroticism of the female body. The authorial point is given value as the camera shots lingers on her for an unusual long time before bringing in the major reason for the visit. In this way the director gives us an insight into what the filmmakers' initial and strong intentions for the scene are. That is to indict Chidi, Ifeoma's husband, position that having her as a full time house-wife would protect her from the gaze of other men. To that effect, women in all walks of life are depicted in the film as objects of male desires and that, more often than not, there are willing seductresses.

More than a Woman creates a slightly different point of departure in its illustration of why women are visually objectified in Nigerian videos. It shows that the villain Trechia is, in a sense, objectified by Detective Banjo Daniels gaze because he is wanting to

ascertain whether she is suitable to become his wife. The reason for Trechia's objectification in the story contradicts the visual narrative of an unnamed girl who attends the senators' party, which is the setting for this scene, where Trechia and Daniels make their first acquaintance. During the party, a girl is introduced by one of the senators to another senator. The girl is an example of how politicians organize girls to grace their parties and speaks to the fact that while men are true to their roles as controlling the public arena, women enter even the private domain as sex providers in line with traditional roles to men. Her position represents the depiction of women in deviant roles as either a mistress to the senator or a prostitute. The senator, to who she is introduced to, tells the introducer "don't forget, let her come to the senate chambers on Monday, we'll arrange something for her" (*Omata Women*). This shows women as commodities that can easily be bought with money and it brings out the power relations between men and women in state governance. It also reveals that women only serve private roles that have nothing to do with political or policy making roles. However, the narrative draws our attention to another reason why women can also be objectified by drawing a parallel between the unknown girl and Trechia. This is in how it creates a link between the two major characters of the film (Trechia and Daniels), as both walk into the senator's party venue. For instance the camera's view on Trechia as she makes her entrance, through the same steps that Daniels makes his appearance at the party earlier on, foreshadows a possible relationship between Trechia and Daniels. In that scene Daniels is given an accompanying long shot as he walks into the party hall through some adjoining steps. Detective Daniels used the same route which Trechia is seen taking as she makes her entrance. The camera gives her a long shot which singles her out as an erotic object for the male gaze of Banjo Daniels and colleague Rasheed. The camera after focusing on her entry goes slowly but steadily from her shoe to legs and proceeds, to the thigh, hips and buttocks up to her head. The camera now takes a sideways view of her, which helps to establish her face as well as establish the link between the camera's focus and Daniels. This is done in a contrapuntal way that helps in bringing to bear the effect that her beauty has on Daniels as he moves in closer towards her. The camera returns its focus on Trechia after establishing the relationship between them and this helps to explain why Daniels stands before her. At this point the focus rests on her face and the lighting is

enhanced. The bright lighting serves as a technique, especially as it is a night scene, to magnify her facial beauty by revealing all aspects of her face. The face matches the earlier presentation of her attractive physique. This attests to David Bordwell's (1985:12) position that "figures, lighting, setting, and costume are constructed so as to make sense only from vantage points…All film techniques, even those involving the "profilmic event," function narrationally, constructing the story world for specific effects".

At this point, the filmmakers' position is revealed, which depicts why Trechia's beauty is greatly enhanced through the lighting. This is to make a case that behind this perfect beauty, that makes her acceptable for the male gaze and as a potential wife, there also lies dangerous traits and temptations that can come in-betwixt them. This recalls Andrew Sarrris' (1979:19) view that "the way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels." This accounts for how Trechia's introduction in the first scene contrasts with that of the second scene. The opening scene of the film presents a disfigured woman who is made possible by the assembling and disassembling of Trechia's disguise (she wears artificial beards and mustaches, helmets and male clothing). The second scene portrays her as a normal woman of great beauty that can ignite feelings of attraction as seen through her welcoming interaction with the protagonist Daniels. In the first scene as a thief she is depicted in a way that readily explains her role in the narrative and the second scene enunciates her beauty and appealing qualities in ways that guarantees a perfect woman. The second meeting of the two, which takes place the following night after the senators' party, also sees the camera continuing in objectifying her for Daniels' gaze. Trechia arrives first at a hotel and stands on the balcony as Daniels drives into the venue. As he walks in the rather dim light, he sports Trechia's figure. This time around the camera allows us to see Trechia from Daniels' gaze. This helps us to see how she is shot and seen from her legs gradually to her head. The camera angle is intrusive and revealing of her outfit: a very short skirt and a top which displays her bare back amongst other features. This posture confirms the image that Daniels saw of her the previous night. We are able to see how he gets to her and greets her and this is when she turns and both of them walk to take a sit. As they walk together the camera focuses on them from an upward angle that helps to take a full

view of them as they sit down. Beyond its obvious appeals to the demands of the male gaze, Trechia's beauty leaves one many questions such as why she could not utilize her beauty, skills and educational abilities for a more honorable profession? It is the consistency with which Nollywood videos reproduce the limited stereotypes of women – and especially as fetishized objects - that validates Chukwuma Anyanwu's (2003:88) position that Nigerian videos constitute "a poor reflection of our society in general and our women in particular".

Crime and Punishment in Nollywood Videos

Each of the four major characters' of *Omata Women* as well as the villain Trechia in *More than a Woman* are, as is the norm in Nollywood videos, ultimately punished for the various crimes that they committed. Chinasa pays with her life for killing both her husband and Dozie. However, it is a later crime, where she embezzles Ejike's money, that finally brings her to also pay for the previous ones. In a sense, Chinasa takes on more than the male authority of her husband and lovers. When she refuses to confess, she also dares the might of the village deity, Ogwugwu. This is seen in her attempts to seek alternative remedies from native doctors to ensure that she is seen as innocent. Chinasa's insistence on not returning the money to Ekike, as she was advised by the first native doctor she consulted, leaves Ogwugwu with no option but to intervene. The deity is first revealed as an omniscient persona with the ability to collapse time and place. His representation is consistent with other depictions. For instance, in Simeon Umukoro's (1989:76) analysis of the Dervish figure in Tewfik Al- Hakim's *The Tree Climber* (1966) observes that for Ogwugwu, as a deity like the Dervish in *The Tree Climber*, "reality of all times and places is one undifferentiated whole. So that in one spot and at one moment, he can perceive and interfere with what happens everywhere and every time." This is why Ogwugwu appears out of the blue with a mysterious atmosphere and shocking sound which immediately notifies Chinasa of the presence of a supernatural being. Being fully aware that she has contravened human laws she starts begging the deity for forgiveness. But the deity punishes her for transgressing against the society's moral code and swearing falsely to it. The deity spews a white substance from its mouth which penetrates

into Chinasa's stomach and she falls down and dies. By showing to us how the society has a traditional way of revealing and punishing offenders it validates the statement made by John Ladd (1957: 268) that the right way to justify a moral principle is to see how it appeals to tradition. This allows for people to always weigh their actions in terms of how they are approved or disapproved in traditional terms, as he observes that "the right way is the way which the ancestors used and which has been handed down. The tradition is its own warrant. We should therefore inquire whether the moral code we are investigating is justified on the grounds that it is 'the way the old people used to do it'."

Essentially, the video suggests that Chinasa has offended tradition and her actions demand that punishment is instituted through tradition and the gods who need to check the excesses of human conduct. The fact is that the deity is represented as only a head with a face of a man becomes a telling factor to enunciate the unprivileged status of women in a patriarchal society, as it is still a male representative who executes judgment and punishment for erring women within the Onitsha society. This in itself serves to explain why women in this society stand to be more condemned for acts perpetrated against men than the reverse, since it is a male deity that punishes them. Chinasa's death serves to indict Ifeoma who earlier on said that she would not confess her adultery since in her time Ogwugwu has not killed anyone. We are already aware that she has lost her marriage to Chidi and that she is likely to die for her adulterous act with the Landlord if she fails to make a confession to the deity as is the custom. The duo of Nkechi and Ijele are not punished by Ogwugwu but they still pay for their various crimes. For Ijele, her punishment was the reversal of the spell which she cast on her husband, Nduka, in order to emasculate him. She is destroyed by Ifeoma who pours chemicals on her for divulging her secret, adulterous affair with her Landlord to Chidi. In retrospect, there is irony in her fate in that Ijele explained to her friends how the spell functions and Ifeoma had added her prayers of long life for Ijele so that throughout Ijele's life Nduka will continue to take orders from her. Ironically, she becomes the very person who occasions the harm on Ijele and that sees her destroyed and as paving the way for Nduka to be rid of the spell. The redemption of Nduka explains how melodramatic films always insist on the innocent being vindicated while offenders are punished. It highlights that melodrama:

> starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue. It plays out the force of that anxiety with the apparent triumph of villainy, and it dissipates it with the eventual victory of virtue…Melodrama is indeed, typically, not only a moralistic drama but the drama of morality: it strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to "prove" the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of judgment, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men. (Brooks, 1976: 20)

While Ijele deserves the punishment she gets for her wickedness, Nduka's victory portrays him almost as a "comic character" in the same manner as Garritano notes of Joshua in *True Confession*. Joshua's figurative blindness explains his comic character role. This resonates with how Nduka's comic character is built on his ability to see seven other counterfeit images of himself which are symbolically created by the spirits which had earlier possessed him, disentangle from him and flee away. The act invokes a mysterious sound that is accompanied by a thunderous lightning flash. The totality of the action which seems weird and unbelieving to Nduka, especially as it meets him sweeping the entire compound, immediately leaves him with disbelief which sees him touching himself as if to make sure that all these things are happening to him in real life and not in a dream. He is more bewildered as he notices that he must have been sweeping since he has the broom, which immediately sees him drop the broom as he touches himself. In all, the audience through the events is made aware that the spell has been broken and that Nduka has experienced a return to live a normal life. For Nkechi, the culmination of her adultery into the sudden death of her husband makes her to discover the emptiness of her life without a husband. This discovery leads her into drinking and neglecting her children's welfare which leads to her little girl, Adora, to stab her to death.

In *More than a Woman*, Trechia is finally caught and is made to face the law together with Dan, the buyer of the stolen goods. The reason for them to face the might of the law is provided in an inscription which provides an open ending for the film. But earlier, the visuals depicted the psychological trauma that Trechia suffers when she sees that it is her lover, Detective Daniels whose chase and identification

of her, makes her to stop her flight during the last police chase and she is eventually apprehended. (Daniels' makes the connection that Trechia is the robber after he discovers a spare costume of her camouflage in her wardrobe. However, fearing that she might be shot he identifies her to his colleagues and informs them to arrest rather than kill her). Daniels' rushed to the scene of her capture and ensured that he personally runs after her. We see her as she turns to face Daniels with tears in her eyes, showing the shame which culminates in her remorsefulness as the latter asks her "Trechia why?" In a way, the two video films expound on the theme of crime and punishment in a manner that condemns the very act of crime.

The narratives point to the fact that however rewarding, in terms of the gains that the criminals derive from it, criminals will definitely have to pay for their crimes. The video films, in that way, make a larger statement that society would be a better place if people stop crime, and if criminals are made to face the law for their crimes. Nevertheless, such a conclusion still begs the question: why is it that it is mostly women who are used as archetypes to pass the message onto society? Why is it that given the range of possible case-studies and scenarios, it is mostly women who are associated with evil and which leads men to their doom? For films to achieve their educational role in society, male filmmakers should desist from using crime to devalue women's domestic and social roles. Rather the video narratives should depict women in ways which will help to reflect the everyday battles of real women to cope with the trials and tribulations of life and, especially their valiant contributions to ensure the smooth running of their families. Such depictions will lead to an alternative perspective that will correspond with how real women are and the patrons of Nollywood videos will be able to evaluate actual women in the proper way and not rely on the imaginary negative roles that the films imply.

The imaginary rendition of women in this chapter is consistent with those depicted in *Dark Goddess* and *True Confession* which, as Emenyi and Eko affirm, "satisfies patriarchy and promotes expediency to the detriment of creating a sustaining vision of reality" (Emenyi and Eko, 2002: 178). There is a need for Nigerian video makers

to take up the challenge of representing society in their films in more complex terms, especially with regard to the gendered nature of their visions. This reiterates Olujinmi's opinion that video filmmakers should "wake up and come out of the patriarchal dreams and fantasies." For according to her "there is no doubt that there may be some women who fit into the pictures painted in the films. However, these negligible cases should not be turned into a norm." (Olujinmi, 2008: 125) The constant representation of women in Nollywood videos in outrageous ways clearly denotes the anxieties and fears of male filmmakers of successful women in the society. Rather, Olujinmi has urged film producers to bear in mind how "African men shy away from marrying highly successful women." She notes further that they "feel threatened that their patriarchal powers should be weakened" (Olujinmi, 2008124). It is men's anxiety of losing their power over women that according to Olujinmi that is one of the significant reasons behind the gendered bias and negative representation of women in Nollywood videos.

The use of Music and voice-over as a tool for judging Women

In *Omata Women*, as in the other videos of this study, music plays an important role as part of the techniques use to realize the thematic and aesthetic intentions of the filmmakers. In *The Tyrant*, as an example, there is the constant use of sound as stylistic device. The sound track serves as a meta-narrative and helps to create both temporary and permanent shifts within the powers that are under scrutiny. For instance, the opening credit sequence starts with heavy marshal music and a still picture of the tyrant General Amino which is excessively lit. The intention is to create a relationship between General Amino and the foreboding martial music. Thus, it is not surprising to see that the sequence ends with General Amino shooting two of his soldiers for allowing a car in his convoy to break down because it ran out of fuel. However, when exploring civilian spaces, the martial music is replaced with ordinary soft musical tones. So, through the use of music, sound helps to organize the structure of the narrative and its reception by viewers. Thus, the music builds upon the themes, characterization and aesthetics that govern the video narrative. The latter is echoed in the theme song that is played during

the emergence of the interim government with lyrics that are derived from the Bible: "when the righteous rule, the people rejoice. But when the wicked rule the people suffer." (*The Tyrant*) The music creates a binary musical framework that evokes the brutal repression of human rights under military dictatorship and its opposite, the humane face of civilian rule. The sense of morality that the music enunciates becomes symptomatic of civilian rule and it emphasises the fact that great sacrifices were made to achieve an egalitarian society. It also makes the character of Jenny to be enshrined with the moral symbolism of being a champion of the oppressed.

In *Omata Women* music is constantly used as a form of personification as it assumes the status of a judge that passes comments on the characters of the women in the film. Music is used to draw attention to crucial relationships and how they embody the icons of wickedness that women in this video are associated with. It is through music that, furthermore, the representation of the men (husband) characters is imbibed with positive qualities (such as that they are good and stable home builders) as against the greedy, conniving and power-hungry women whose actions put the society in disarray. It further facilitates the way women are represented and how their behaviour affects the male characters. Sometimes some of the music is given more emphasis by being overlaid with a voice-over that further emphasizes the moralistic messages that patrons are supposed to get. For instance, Nkechi's husband Orimili's psychological state is captured through a voice-over which accompanies the sound track: "if you marry a bad woman, everyday *na wahala you go dey so so* find yourself for bar on top of beer bottles." [Its translation is that if you have a bad wife, you will be having problems to contend with which will result in you taking alcohol] (*Omata Women*).The song and its voice-over is used to explain the transformation which has taken place in Nkechi's life. The story reveal that Nkechi travelled with Onwa to Port Harcourt for two days, and abandoned her matrimonial duties for prostitution. Upon return from his short trip to the village, Nkechi's husband Orimili, discovers that his wife has been away for two days. The story portrays how worried he is that she has changed from the once caring mother into a carefree mother who can abandon her children to the care of his niece (Obiageli). Her

absence means that women have abandoned their roles as home builders and that it is the men, as depicted in this sequence, that assume the responsibilities of building the home.

The music and voice-over are deployed strategically to bring out Nkechi's deviant behaviour and to portray how that experience induces Orimili to take some alcohol. This explains how music and the voice-over in *Omata Women* functions as authorial commentary particularly, as they correspond with scenes where women are depicted as demons in the society. Besides, it helps to draw a similarity between the Eve's and Jezebels or Delilah's of the Bible and the women of *Omata Women,* in terms of portraying how women can take their husbands away from their destinies. Nkechi's role as it changes from good to bad, like that of Mabel's in *True Confession*, contradicts her formal position which is like that of Moses who was to lead women towards actualizing an ideal society but which she compromised for money. Her latter conduct is "equated with the unchecked greed and insatiable desire that has infected Nigerian culture with a rampant immorality, the very immorality Moses hoped to eradicate." (Garritano, 2000: 187). Aesthetically, most of the music is embellished with Pidgin English, a few Igbo language words and proverbs which gives the film its local flavor. Its aesthetic relevance is that it helps to locate the setting of the story to be Onitsha, an Ibo town in eastern Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have shown the conflicting tensions and contradiction that emanate from the framing of women in *More than a Woman* and *Omata Women*. We have drawm particular attention to the ambiguities that result from the trope of role reversal and, ultimately, the trope facilitates for ways of rewriting women that continues to cast them as deviant and evil. This is in as such as the reversal of role can be seen as capable of subverting conventional roles and expectations. Even though women are shown as being able to recast their roles and relations to each other, they are also shown as remaining each other's enemies. Such bias is indicative of how filmmakers are trying to generate fear among women and to dissuade them

from friendships and organizations which will empower them economically, socially and politically.

We have also explored the ways in which women are objectified in Nigerian videos as a way of explaining or confining to traditional and stereotypical identities. Women should become subjects of discussions and not objects for males to entertain themselves. This means that women in Nollywood need to serve as role models to aspire to success and greatness and that requires that their representation transcends their current status as objects for the male gaze and consumption. Fulfilling the mail gaze only enforces the patriarchal function of films and it does not develop women to meet the varied challenges of the 21st century women. Finally, the aim of interrogating crime and punishment as a recurrent theme in Nollywood videos, is to show how women have earned a negative and evil reputation in videos through the characters and roles that they are assigned. Often, women are reduced to being vehicles for the education of society in how to recognize and choose between good and evil. Because of the biased representation, women are generally represented as the custodians of evil in the society and this account for the punishment they get at the end of most films. This is unacceptable and should be revisited in order to create more balanced perspectives. The significant – and large scale - implications of the need to effect the reappraisals of women is apparent in Ali Mazuri's (2008:23) caution that "in Africa no ethnic checks and balances can endure unless women are also involved in a serious way. That is why we also need gender checks and balances." Thus, apart from male filmmakers reviewing the way women are represented in films, more women film producers, directors and writers should be involved in filmmaking and to also address the challenges of Nollywood.

CONCLUSION

REPRESENTION AND THE NIGERIAN VIDEO INDUSTRY

> Society's expectation of the home video when it first emerged was that it had come to right the wrongs done to the black race using other media including film. It is however disappointing to note that a great percentage of home videos produced in Nigeria portrays women as evil, witches, husband poisoners, greedy, prostitutes etc, as well as being prone to all the other vice that anybody can imagine.
>
> Chukwuma Anyanwu (2003:81)

Anyanwu's assertion sums up the representation of women in most Nigerian videos. The failure of the Nigerian video industry to give Africa and women in particular a positive representation perpetuates the patriarchal perceptions and stereotypes of women. It can be argued that one of the aims of the industry, as it is often claimed during film festivals and conferences,[63] is to help in the showcasing and improving the image of Africa in contrast to Hollywood films. However, this has not been the case as demonstrated by the films referred in this study. This has resulted in the criticism expressed against the industry since its beginning. The distortions are, in some ways, increasing in line with the fast growth of the industry and increased production. All of this is contrary to the stated aims of the industry.

It can be asserted that one of the hallmarks of the industry is how video representations often parallel and reflect what is happening in the society. The complex relation between reality and its creative representation is what necessitated this study to interrogate the

[63] "Independent and Student Filmmakers" Film Festival, Augsburg- Germany 1997. Solana's paper, and many others, contend that Northern America and Third World filmmakers should deviate from making and trying to copy films, or trying to compete with Hollywood because African filmmakers do not have the resources for big budget films. They should tell their own stories targeting their own audiences instead of targeting American audiences or audiences from the West. The same vision was re-iterated in Limerick University in Ireland conference on "Cross Boundary Third World Cinema", 1999.

images of women as depicted in the Nigerian film industry. Critical statements such as that of Anyanwu above, in addition to the ones which have already been alluded to earlier like those of Anyaigolu-Okoye, Chinyere Okunna and a few others, bring to the light the insensitive nature of Nigerian filmmakers when it comes to the portrayal of women and their social experiences. Arguably, the portrayal of women in derogatory roles debases and demonizes them. Producers however tend to engage in this misogynistic casting of women as a way of feeding into sexist prejudices. More specifically, by placing the profit motive above work with integrity has created a need for sensationalist roles amongst filmmakers and audiences. For instance, in videos like *Abuja Connection* (2003), *Women's Cot* (2005), *Girls' Cot* (2006), *Queen of Aso Rock* (2005) and *The Fall of the Queen of Aso Rock* (2005), the portrayal of women is exceptionably extreme as women are depicted as pimps, prostitutes, money ritualists, murderers and power mongers. Most of these videos are based on the lives of women and it can be deduced that since they spawned sequels (mostly 1-3 volumes) the sensationalist manner in which they portrayed women must have been popularly received. However generalised this presumption may appear to be, it is an important entree point on the subject matter of Nollywood and its representation of women.

What has been of importance in this study has been the way that women are portrayed in most Nigerian videos since we felt that the portrayals are generally at variance with how real women are in Nigerian society. There are many types of women, good and bad in any society but the videos feed mostly off the negative stereotypes that reduce women to be the personifications of evil. One can say that it does not matter how representations are done or mediated, what matters is whether filmmakers are able to provide their patrons with story lines that entertain and inspire the public to patronise the films. But then the question still is: what role and influence does the "commercial orientation" (Shaka 2003:63) have in the industry, especially with regards to the thematic and character portrayals sought in most Nigerian videos? An attempt at providing answers to the question would first mean that we look at the economic viability of the Nigerian video industry, particularly in terms of the massive number of videos that are produced on a weekly basis. As Haynes notes, they far outnumber what the celluloid yearly productions

use to achieve. Secondly, we need to know how the filmmakers are able to creatively strategise in order to maintain patronage. A careful examination of these points throws more light on how characters and plots are structured in Nigerian videos in ways that will continue to sustain the interests of audiences and keep their productions going on. For instance Shaka also highlights that:

> in both domestic and public spheres, gender inequalities are constantly rehashed and played out without much room given to creative political projects of the sort that will help liberate the female gender. The production orientation and structures of the Nigerian video film industry are yet to be subjected to a radical politicization of the sort that will challenge old regimes of authority which negate the unhindered and unrestricted satisfaction of female gender desires and aspirations... in sustaining the myth of male superiority in keeping with the commercial orientation of the industry.

This points to Sam Awoyinfa's (2008:1) view that, with the ever increasing releases of videos into the market, and the supposedly dwindling purchasing power of viewers as a result of the present economic circumstances and "competing hierarchy of needs," marketers, producers, and the actors are now adopting a desperate re-strategising move which will reposition the industry, "for optimum performance and profitability." Worthy of note here is that the bottom line in the strategy ends up being concerned with increasing the profit margins for the industry. This partially explains how the videos, in order to maintain their audiences, depict their characters in ways that align with the traditional gender inscription of men as subjects and women as the objects of the stories which eventually translates into the one-dimensional depiction of women.

Our argument is that, much as profits are needed to sustain the industry, this should not be done at the expense of first examining what kinds of representations are showcased and which can have either a positive or negative impact on Nigerians. This is consistent with the concern about what image do the videos accord Nigeria. Such introspection echoes Laolu Akande's (2006:2) revelation of how a Nigerian musical video, *The Master*, that dealt with the operation of 'fraud stars', raised a lot of worries and concern for Nigerians when it was broadcast by an "ABC report 20/20- investigative programme" in the United States. According to Akande, the effect of the "news-uproar" created a security threat to Nigerians in the US as, according to him, their "colleagues would

bombard them with all kinds of questions and even negative attitudes as a result of the ABC report." This provides an example of how Nigerian videos can impact on the overall image of the country. To this effect, films should not be simply viewed as mere art and which have no bearing on the society and people that they depict. The distribution and consumption of art is such "once in circulation, music and other cultural forms cannot remain bounded in any one group and interpreted simply as an expression that speaks to or reflects the lives of that exclusive group of people" (Negus, 1994:121). It is in this sense that Nigerian videos invariably set a paradigm for how Nigerians and other people see, read and judge Nigerians. Furthermore, clearly creative works also have serious implications for how women are presented and perceived by men and women. It is therefore reasonable to discourage the imaginary depiction of women in ways that are negative and demeaning.

In this study I have been engaged with the question of representations of women in the Nigerian video industry, otherwise known as Nollywood. I have done this using a feminist approach to analyse what images of women should be discouraged and those which should be encouraged. The primary texts used were five Nigerian videos: *I Was Wrong, The Tyrant, Masterstroke, Omata Women* and *More than a Woman.* I noted that two of the video films, *The Tyrant* and *Masterstroke,* and also sections of *I Was Wrong,* portrayed women in positive ways and they presented characters who can serve as role models to women and patrons can learn good values from them. The other two films, namely *Omata Women* and *More than a Woman* and parts of *I Was Wrong,* depict women badly and from a negative angle.

The first group of films are seen as positive representations of women that should be encouraged in productions for their contribution in providing good models that best set the ideals and pace for women in real life to emulate. The videos have portrayed women in ways that lead them to success. The heroines in this first group of films have transcended the docility and mediocrity that a sheepish acceptance of patriarchal constructs can turn women into. Instead these video films offer us examples of what an ideal woman should be politically, socially, economically and otherwise. The second group of videos are full of the negative portrayal of women precisely because they accept

and reproduce the key tenets that sustain patriarchal hegemony which does not augur well about the image(s) of women in the 21st century. The depiction of women in this second group of films is expressed in ways which relegate women to the margins of society and they also debase them. Women are not given any good options to choose and, remarkably, even education and professional benefits for women are given negative connotations in the stories. The videos castigate educated and professional women in order to enforce the patriarchal structures that are inherent in the society. They also serve as an anxious response to the changing social roles that modernity and city life encourages and that are seen as undermining tradition and male dominance. The study understands that change can cause unease and that elements of change can be bad but in no way does this rationalise and validate the demonization of women and their denial of equality. To that effect, this study advocates for social and creative transformation and that the videos can play a crucial role in the political conscientisation of women through films. For a start, such mobilization can be done by depicting women characters who are positive and beacons who will be able to sensitize women to come out of the margins and participate in governance and other social and economic ventures which would benefit the society. It is my hope that the issues that the various chapters have raised will propel filmmakers towards a more positive direction in representing women.

As a background to the study in the introduction, I have looked at the emergence of Nollywood. This is in terms of its traditional and cultural influences, economic hardships and technological developments which paved the way for the development of the video production format. In addition, I have also engaged with the contributions made to Nollywood stemming from the ethnic backgrounds of some of the major players and groups involved in Nollywood. That is, apart from recording an increase in the number of films produced in English in Nigeria, the intervention of video production in indigenous languages like Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo has done much to highlight the value of the cultural variety associated with Nollywood. The cultural specificities of the different linguistic and cultural groups, in as much as they have given Nollywood a distinct identity, they are also implicated in the ways in which gendered identities are created and circulated in the videos.

The second chapter mapped out the larger feminist discourses and theoretical dynamics that were to provide the framework to guide the study. It identified some concerns that are crucial to the arguments that this thesis advanced around the politics of gender and how these affect representations, as well as the socio-cultural biases that account for how women are represented in erroneous portrayals in Nollywood.

In Chapter Three, I looked at the Christian/evangelical genre of Nigerian videos. I engaged with the general position of how videos have become a medium for proselytizing the Christian theology in Nigeria. Specifically, it highlights how women are represented within the Christian genre as archetypal characters. Their representation exemplifies the desired character traits that will lead people to a more blissful life on earth and eventually earn them a place in heaven. Not surprisingly, such depictions are contrasted simultaneously with those characters that lead people to hell on account of their choices in the world. The chapter problematized the depiction of women within the absolutist divides of good and bad women archetypes, especially since it is mostly women that are used to pass the evangelistic message even if in reality it is both men and women that are in need of repentance and redemption. The chapter used the video film *I Was wrong* produced by the only woman producer among the five films analysed in this study, Evangelist Mrs Helen Ukpabio. It exemplifies that a balance can be struck in terms of using characters of both sexes to focus on the myth of salvation in moments of crisis for the realization of its theme. Mrs. Ukpabio's own choice of becoming a converted Christian and founder and president of the Liberty Gospel Church, which has many branches in Africa, and her attendant success as a film producer, were used to suggest the choices that are available to film patrons to choose from and to become successful in life. Particularly noted is her ability to use the popular absolutist divide of good and evil in a way that uses and implicates both female and male characters, and the same in the selection of characters that are seen as positive archetypes. Also commended is her ability to build her storyline in a way that allows even the condemnable characters, both men and women, to recognize their faults and be poised for a change of attitude. Thus, the example of Ukpabio, has been used to make a case for more women to be involved in film production as this will help to create an impact as well as bring about a positive

change in films. This is what also happened in the field of African literature as a result more women becoming authors. To that extent, women in film production will help to reposition women in films in the same way that Helen Chukwuma notes of the upsurge of feminist ideology in the African novel serving as an avenue to "present a different image of women from the traditional docile lack-lustre figure of subjugation" (Chukwuma, 1994:vii).

Chapter four analysed the political gendered notions in Nollywood films. The chapter looked at how Nigerian videos have become a purveyor of the gendered prescriptions of what are considered to be the suitable roles for women within the larger Nigerian society. This is in terms of how Nollywood films have tended to reserve prominent leadership or governance roles for male actors, while the female actors tend to be confined to the margins of the films as money conscious, dubious individuals, sex perverts and as being politically inconsequential. To this effect, women are represented as a generic group, and as a result, the filmmakers feed into pre-existing stereotypes of how women have been socially looked at, especially when they transcend the boundaries between what constitutes the private and public spheres. The chapter also considered the various limitations which have emanated from the polarization of women's location between the private and the public arena. It questioned the premises surrounding the private and public boundaries and, in particular, its erasure and discouragement of women in positions of leadership and institutions of governance. The chapter critically examined such exclusions and their negative implications for women within the political scene in Nigeria and Africa. It used its two video case studies as examples of a possible positive departure by taking an in-depth look at the portrayal of heroines in *The Tyrant* 1&2, and *Masterstroke* 1&2. The portrayal of the heroines in these two films represents a fundamental departure from the norm and is worthy of emulation by other filmmakers. The chapter further argued that storylines and character representations of women should deviate from those that make them to shy away from leadership roles. Lastly, the study praised the effort of the male filmmakers who produced the two films and extolled them as providing a good example to other male filmmakers. This is in terms of how they mostly portray women as supporters of one another in achieving outstanding feats. The

approach invariably gives cogency to Aniagolu-Okoye's view that women are not each other's enemies.

In Chapters five and six, I engaged with the video films that deal with the domestic space and crime genres and focused on *Omata Women* and *More than a Woman* 1&2. While chapter five dealt with how women are typified as evil in *Omata Women*, chapter six examined how women are fetishized in *More than a Women* and *Omata Women*. These two productions are shown to conform to the observation made in the opening quotation of this conclusion in that they are symptomatic of the tendency in Nollywood to depict women as evil, thieves, prostitutes, husband poisoners and greedy, among other vices. The overall image of women that is presented in these two videos leaves much to be desired. This study condemns such representations and makes a case for women to be portrayed in better ways. It is such negative portrayals of women that this thesis disavows. In line with the feminist view that representations of women should help to better the social status, roles and lives of women, the study is critical of the social surveillance and marginalization of women through patriarchal ideologies. To that effect, all stakeholders in film production in Nigeria must make concerted efforts to remove such demeaning images of women from the Nigerian video screen. This will help to bring about a positive self-image amongst women and men and that will meet the changing needs of the society. Otherwise, the traditional hegemony will continue to hold sway where "man owns the spiritual and material world. While women …stand before men deprived by the world of her freedom, her name, her self respect, her true nature and her will. All control over her spiritual and material life has been taken away from her" (El Saadawi 1988:76).

The subjugation of women is also aided by the predisposition of male filmmakers to insist on depicting women mostly in ways that will reflect the traditional roles. It is in this light that the study advocates for various and new ways that can reduce the unrealistic and stereotypical images of women and that filmmakers should rather consider more positive thematic and character possibilities. As scholars have noted:

> African feminism confronts the constraints which the society designs for women but it does not ignore the positive aspects of African culture…The experiences of women are shaped by the society; and should they find a need to reconstruct their individual experiences, the society needs not to be destroyed in the process. Eko and Emenyi (20002: 175).

Rather than destroy the society through derogatory representations of women, Nigerian videos should be used as a medium to educate and gear the society towards achieving an ideal state where positive images of women will be a motivation for the development of good character and conduct in society. Since the portrayal of women matters on many levels in society, I am of the opinion that filmmakers, producers and directors need to pay attention to the way women are portrayed in their particular films. If the portrayal of women is positive then the society stands to benefit, and if it is negative then the society will remain retrogressive and it will continue, even at the level of the imagination, to reproduce the vilification and subjugation of women, whether as individuals or as a social group.

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