

## Projecting Child's Rights through Films: A Content Analysis of Selected Nigerian Home Movies

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of the abuses suffered by children globally including in Nigeria and the quest to reverse the trend, this study examined films as an instrument of promotion of the rights of the child with specific reference to the girl child. The study aimed at three objectives as follows: to ascertain the images of abuse of the rights of the girl child portrayed in Nigerian films; to find out the technique employed by Nigerian films in constructing issues of the rights of the girl child; and to assess the ideological frame(s) within which Nigerian films represent issues of the right of the girl child. The study design was qualitative content analysis. Five locally produced films were selected across five-year period of 2013-2017. After the textual analysis of the films, it was found that images of abuse of the rights of the girl child portrayed in Nigerian films were those of child labour, child marriage, sexual abuse, physical assaults and social deprivations and that in constructing issues of the rights of the girl child, the films employed the narrative technique of weaving a story around a girl child protagonist who experiences rights abuses but with the plot resolved in the triumph of good over evil. The results also showed that the ideological frames within which Nigerian films represent issues of the rights of the girl child are that of the inalienability of the human dignity of the girl child, the wrongness of undermining this dignity through rights abuses and the imperative of justice for the abused girl child. It was concluded that films present for Nigeria a veritable tool for realization of the rights of the child particularly against the backdrop of the content of the five films analysed in the study and the fact that films enjoy a popular appeal as a source of entertainment among Nigerians. The study recommended, among others, that filmmakers in Nigeria should also produce films projecting the rights of the male child given that the studied films have tended to focus more on the girl child and almost leaving the boy child entirely out.

**Key words:** Child's Right • Films • Home • Movie and Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

Among the issues that have bordered the contemporary international community is the right of the child. A child, according to the United Nations, "Is a human being under 18 years of age unless the law of his or her country deems him or her to be an adult at an earlier age". The *UN Convention on the Right of the Child* recognizes the inalienable rights of the child to include right to life, identity, expression, thought, education, healthcare, dignity, privacy, family life, among numerous others. Article 19 of the Convention [1] obliges all state parties to "Take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse,

neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child".

Owing to certain socio-cultural variables that have been found in human societies, the girl child has been singled out for special consideration. In other words, the girl child is considered to be in especially vulnerable position within the society hence the need to pursue her protection with some emphasis-though without prejudice to the central goal of protecting the rights of every child whether boy or girl. The girl child has been found vulnerable to violation of her human rights as they concern life, education, health, dignity, physical safety, self-determination, etc. though this phenomenon has been

found to be global-rooted in pristine cultural heritage of mankind-its prevalence, at least today, has been most prominent in the developing world. Concurring, Adetusi [1] notes that currently “The basic health and life needs of the girl child are severely neglected worldwide. This is particularly true in the rural villages of the poor and undeveloped countries in Africa and Asia” Similarly, Agbanu [2] observes that “in rural areas, a girl has no value. This is due to some social cultural practices which expose a girl into forced marriage, female circumcisions, no freedom of expression, no right of inheritance and possession. But in more elaborately, Agnew [3] captures vividly the various faces of abuses to which the girl child is continuously subjected especially among these developing countries:

Girl child in poor household have a high work burden placed on them both through informal domestic labour including childcare, laundry, cleaning, cooking, gardening and water gathering as well as more structured wage earning activities. Leisure time is severely restricted, leaving girls little opportunity to develop interest and reach their full imaginative potential. Educational possibilities are often limited due to cultural barriers and fee issues that prioritise male school attendance and discourage girls and societal norms that encourage girls to remain in the home

The above statement explains the degree of the subjugation of the girl child to the background against the backdrop of prospects available to her male counterparts. Throwing more light on the faces of abuse that the girl child is usually subjected to, Akas [4] further highlights that most disturbing are the health and nutritional inadequacies faced by girl children in vulnerable households. Girls are the less likely sub-group to utilise health services and to receive treatment for health complaints. This situation according to Akasike [5] is falling between the focus on children under five and women of childbearing age, girl children are often “missing” in health statistics and programming. This health burden is further compounded by inadequate nutritional intake. Globally, girl children are three times more likely to suffer malnutrition than boys. Inadequate nutrition and insufficient pediatric care are often the result of pervasive cultural attitudes that cause female children to be considered as less important to and less productive than males.

As a field study, development communication concerns itself with the role the various forms of communication could play in enhancing human advancement. It is the study and practice of deploying

communication to serve the developmental needs of humans. Development communication works on the principle that growth could be achieved by changing certain “Counter-developmental” attitudes in humans through carefully crafted and strategically conveyed messages. Such messages could come in the form of print communication, documentary, drama, film, etc. Fondly referred to as Nollywood, the film industry in Nigeria, which received impetus in 1992 with the release of the blockbuster *Living in Bondage* as produced by Kenneth Nnebue, has quickly and continuously gathered momentum over the last two decades that it is today a force to reckon with globally. It is the third most prolific of its kind after Hollywood (America) and Bollywood (India). The website [http:// www.thisisnollywood.com/nollywood.htm](http://www.thisisnollywood.com/nollywood.htm) offers the following insight into the success called the Nigerian film industry:

Currently, some 300 producers churn out movies at an astonishing rate-somewhere between 500 and 1,000 a year. Nigerian directors adopt new technologies as soon as they become affordable. Bulky videotape cameras gave way to their digital descendants, which are now being replaced by HD cameras. Editing, music and other post-production work are done with common computer-based systems. The films go straight to DVD and VCD disks. Thirty new titles are delivered to Nigerian shops and market stalls every week, where an average film sells 50,000 copies. A hit may sell several hundred thousand. Disks sell for two dollars each, making them affordable for most Nigerians and providing astounding returns for the producers.

The rapid growth of the Nigerian film industry is reflected in the fact that the sector has become a major wealth generator for the country. The industry has been included in the computation framework for Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the 2014 GDP rebasing by the Nigerian government. The industry, according to experts, generated 1.7 trillion naira (About 10.1 billion dollars) in [13].

Thus without doubt, locally produced films have come to occupy an important place in the realm of Nigeria’s contemporary communication culture which arguably positions them as a veritable tool for ideological propagation and social change. They have become a platform for projection of communal experience, values and norms. All these make the local film industry a potential tool for promotion of the rights of the girl child through projection of themes that reflect the negative cultural experiences of the girl child and offer ideological alternatives for bettering her enjoyment of her rights as a

person. Stated differently, given their popularity among the populace, locally produced films have the potential to shape the discourse on the rights of the girl child. This is true of Nigeria as it is for other African countries where Nigerian films also enjoy some influence.

**Statement of the Problem:** The challenge of protecting the right of the girl child in Africa is indeed a formidable and enduring one. Asogwa *et al.* [14] regrets that in “Real sense, African girl child development is still a day dream and full of squabbles. The efforts and campaign to raise the girl child in Africa is dull of policies and propaganda with no implementation. This problem, far from resulting from mere chance factors, has deep sociological roots (In the history and sacrosanct cultural institutions of African societies)-making the task of its removal a formidable one indeed. The word of Baran [15] lends credence to these assertions.

Thus, Bittner [16] rightly observes that “Media products ... are cultural artifacts that are deeply embedded in cultural, social and economic structures .... media professionals are not necessarily aware of using dominant gendered frames, that is, persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual.” The question then is: To what extent could the local film industry in Nigeria—a product of culture itself—possibly transcend the ideological boundaries of its environment to become a revolutionary platform for generating alternative gender philosophies for best realizing the rights of the girl child?

Another seemingly obvious challenge of realizing the rights of the girl child via Nollywood films is found in the cultural asymmetric nature of the Nigerian polity. Nigeria is not culturally homogenous. Within the context of gender discourse, the country could be viewed as encompassing two differentiated domains—on one hand, the predominantly Christian Southern region with more flexible cultural institutions that have been quick in assimilating western values and on the other hand, a predominantly Moslem North with more rigid cultural institutions and their inherent tendencies to resist values believed to be western. While the latter region has spelt far greater doom for the girl child, it is the one more likely to resist communications aimed at modifying her institutions for a better fortune for the girl child. A vicious circle thus emerges. This situation raises the following questions: Would Nigerian film producers be able to craft out content that would advance the cause of the girl

child’s rights while successfully negotiating through the snaky and tricky path of cultural differences of the nation? How could Nollywood films possibly deal with the likely resistance from the more conservative side of the Nigeria’s cultural binary while advocating the emancipation of the girl child through their themes?

**Objectives of the Study:** This study was focused on films as an instrument for promotion of the rights of the girl child. In more precise terms, the researcher pursued the following objectives:

- To ascertain the images of abuse of the rights of the girl child portrayed in Nigerian films;
- To find out the technique employed by Nigerian films in constructing issues of the rights of the girl child and
- To assess the ideological frame(s) within which Nigerian films represent issues of the rights of the girl child.

**Research Questions:** Based on the above stated objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the research:

- What images of abuse of the rights of the girl child are portrayed in Nigerian films?
- What techniques are employed by Nigerian films in constructing issues of the rights of the girl child?
- Within what ideological frame(s) do Nigerian films represent issues of the rights of the girl child?

**Significance of the Study:** This is an enquiry designed to ascertain if development media theory will help to conceive film from the perspective of development communication; in other words, to view it as an agent of change vis-a-vis the rights of the girl child. The development media theory emerged as a result of the urgent need to address some of developmental challenges of the developing nations [23, 24]. The cultivation theory as well as diffusion of innovations media dependency theories is adopted to conceptualise the power of film to alter existing attitudes, ideologies and institutions in relation to the rights of the girl child.

The import is to understand how film could be used to canvas for the rights of the Nigerian child through the ideological frame within which such audio-visual contents were presented for consumption. It, therefore, probes the influence of perspective presentation as a probable cause of opinion formation and attitudinal change, as to ascertain the capacity of film as a viable tool modifying

attitudes and practices that are not in tandem with UN Convention on Child Rights. The work, then fits into the class of expository study as research in contemporary times.

According to Griffiths [25] "Studies abound in film violence particularly among children. Those studies used images presented as an illusion of motion since they are not static but dynamic". The advancement of culture and its result on attitudinal and behavioral change are easier to observe and measure than if the incoming communication was static as in news images. It becomes necessary to understand if a similar influence should be projected from film construed from the collection of the viewers' experience but aided by the information accompanying it as text knowledge about how illusion of motion influence the attitude of viewers, primarily when it relates to the rights of the Nigerian child, owing the forceful, persuasive and pervasive nature of film. It is the intellectual vacuum arising from an apparent relative absence of how film influence certain cultural practices that endanger the rights of the Nigerian child that makes this study necessary.

The findings of this research will also be beneficial to development communication, since film can create awareness or reinforce opinion and belief. It is the aesthetic and intellectual values of motion picture as a communication means that needs to be appreciated.

This study is justified since there is a need to understand how much the manner of projection of this cultural experience could serve the cause of the rights of the girl child. What makes the desire to react to the presented moving images needs to be known and understood so that drastic measure could be taken by stakeholders in the administration of child rights in relation with contentious issues, involving girl child marriage, child labour, child trafficking, girl child education among others. The study therefore, is expected to contribute substantially to development communication literature so that reporters, scholars and researchers will access an empirical evidence to know how films, particularly those that represent child right issues, influence policy and predispose attitude and opinion change on child right related matters.

**Scope of the Study:** This study focused on how child rights are projected via Nollywood films. Analysis was restricted to the rights of the girl child given her greater vulnerability as far as rights abuses are concerned. Similarly, the time frame was restricted to five years while only five films were selected for the analysis.

**Research Gap:** The researcher's literature search revealed that a number of empirical studies had been carried out on the issue of projecting human rights through the mass media. However, while these studies largely focused on newspapers, little appeared to have been done in relation to films. Similarly, these empirical studies had mainly treated human rights broadly and did not narrow the scope to the rights of the child. This constituted the knowledge gap that necessitated this study.

**Theoretical Framework:** To place this discussion in a proper theoretical framework, two theories were adopted i.e. development media theory and social representation theory.

**Development Media Theory:** Development media theory is a classical model which views the mass media as a driver of development. The theory emerged in the 1980s to fill the void which became increasingly noticeable as the gap between the developed and developing countries, widened. As the gap widened, it became apparent that none of the classical theories of the press was strictly applicable to the developing countries, even though the mass media in these countries were operating according to some of the principles of the classical theories [63].

The theory sees the mass media as being primarily an instrument of development. By guiding the operation of the media in line with certain principles, a country is able to integrate their developmental strive in their mass communication experience. [63] gives the principles of the theory as follows:

- Individual citizens and minority groups have rights of access to media (Right to communicate) and rights to be served by media according to their own determination of need.
- The Organisation and content of media should not be subject to centralized political or state bureaucratic control.
- Media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for media organizations, professionals or clients of the media.
- Groups, organizations and local communities should have their own media.
- Small scale, interactive and participative media forms are better than large-scale, one way, professionalized media.

According to Akas [4] the development media theory was put forward in response to the challenges facing the development of effective mass communication systems in the developing countries. These challenges

include technological dependence, dearth of skill and local media content. Daramola [19] goes further to state that the theory aims at achieving the following:

- The need for media to accomplish positive development efforts in conformity with nationally established policy,
- Freedom of the media geared towards the development needs of the society,
- The need for media to give priority to national culture and language(s) in their content.
- The need for media to give priority in their news and information to link with other developing nations in terms of geographical, cultural or political proximity.
- In an effort to gather information and carry out their tasks, media workers should have responsibilities and freedom.
- Direct control and intervention of the state justified in the interest of development of the state.

The development media theory therefore is one that recognises the central role of the media in helping to tackle developmental challenges in a developing country such as Nigeria. Abuse of child rights is one of the key development issues in the country [15]. Hence, by focusing on such issues, the mass media, including the local film industry, may contribute to solving them.

**Research Design:** The research adopted textual analysis. It is a kind of qualitative content analysis that systematically and critically reads a piece of communication in order to observe patterns relevant to the study objectives. Textual analysis was used in this study to arrive at generalizations regarding the pattern of representation of the rights of the girl child in Nigerian home movies, the extent and in what manner these rights are projected by the films.

**Population of the Study:** The study population covered all the home movies that deal with children and home affairs produced in Nigeria within the five years of 2013-2017.

**Sample Size and Sampling Procedure:** The researcher purposively selected five films produced in Nigeria between 2013 and 2017 which themes revolve around issues of the rights of the girl child. One film was chosen for each of the five years. The films were also selected based on their ratings and recognition by Best of Nollywood. According to [49]. "The Best of Nollywood awards is a prestigious annual film event created with the sole purpose of recognizing and honouring outstanding performances and achievements in the Nigerian movie industry".

Table 1: List of Selected Films

Movie Title	Release Year
Emotional & Physical Neglect	2017
Wives on Strike	2016
Dry	2015
Make a Move	2014
Ito-ro	2013

**Method of Data Analysis:** The method of data analysis was qualitative involving thematic treatment of the films. Based on the observations made in the films as well as the objectives of the study, the researcher identified a number of themes and proceeded to build the analysis on them. This thematic analysis and interpretation led to the findings of the study.

**Data Presentation and Analysis Synopsis of the Selected Films:** The five films selected for the study - *Dry*, *Emotional & Physical Neglect*, *Wives on Strike*, *Make a Move* and *Ito-ro*- all have their theme centered on the negative experience of the girl child in die Nigeria\*s cultural environment A brief synopsis of each of the films is presented in the sub-heads below.

*Dry* is a movie that exposes the ills of child marriage and one of its associated consequences - Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF). The film is an inspiring true story of Zara, a successful medical doctor who lives in Wales, UK and Halima, a 13-year-old girl from the northern part of Nigeria who was married by Sani, a man old enough to be her father. Released on August 14, 2015, the film, written, produced and directed by Stephanie Okereke-Linus, presents viewers with complications arising from early childbirth by child brides, against the backdrop of a rich African culture. The main actors/actresses in the film include: Darwin Shaw as Dr. Alex, the popular Liz Benson Ameye as the Matron, Bill McNamara as Dr. Brown. The award winning *Dry* also introduced Zubaida Ibrahim Fagge as Halima the teenager on whom the theme of child bride was woven around and who was married to a man supposed to be her grandfather. Also starring in the movie is: Olu Jacobs, TijjaniFaraga, HauwaMaina, Rahama Hassan, RekiyaAttah, Hakeem Hassan and AfamefunaKlintIgwemba. *Dry* has received numerous nominations and awards including: Award for the best overall movie (AFRICA) at the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards (AMVCA) 2016. The viewer in one hour fifty five minutes (1h 55m) duration, witnesses in drama format the prevalence of sexual abuse, rape, teenage pregnancy and its consequences as experienced by young girls in a typical African society.



Fig. 1: Dry



Fig. 2: Emotional and Physical Neglect

Produced by Chidiebere Solomon and directed by Adams Umar, the film *Emotional & Physical Neglect* presents the story of two adolescent girls. Stephanie and Nicky and Mrs. Edith - Nicky's mother and Stephanie's stepmother, as Stephanie repeatedly accept the blames for offences she never committed. Mrs. Edith continues to maltreat and starve the young girl. She even threw Stephanie out of the house, a situation that exposed the young girl to motor accident which almost claimed her life. Mrs. Edith continued to abuse Stephanie, her step daughter, without knowing that Nicky, her biological daughter, is the tsetse fly under the scrotum and the cockroach that ate the bread for which the rat was accused of. The movie which lasts for one hour thirty five minutes and fifty three seconds (1h 35m 53) duration, revolves around the child's psychological and parental relationship, trust, neglect, abuse and violence. Released in 2017, *Emotional and physical neglect* featured Chioma Nwosu as Mrs. Edith, ChisiomOguike as Nicky, ChidinmaOguike as Steph, Marygrace Ogbu as Ruth, Emma Chinedum as Silas and AmakaChukwujekwu as Joy. The film also stars Shola Johnson as Rasco, Rowland Alozie as Pastor, KingsleyAriole as Mike and Shalom Eyo as Nurse. The film which was presented in drama format has received numerous nominations both at national and international film academies.

This movie revolves around women who collectively went on "Strike", a situation in which wives denied their husbands sex as a prize to press home their request for the full implementation of the child rights act across the nation. However, despite their husbands' relentless pressure to call off the "strike", they were determined to rewrite the wrong cultural practice of child bride, sexual abuse and eventual denial of freedom of the girl child. Amina played by UdokaOyeka decides to marry off his 13-year-old daughter to solve his family's financial issues. One afternoon Mama Ngozi (Oboli), Madam 12:30 (UcheJombo) and their friends decide to come up with a stirring strategy to help Mama Amina (Ufuoma McDermott) protect 'their' children-Released in 2016, the film stars notable actors like Oboli, Kenneth Okonkwo, Elvinalbru, OdunladeAdekola, Sola Sobowale, ToyinAimakhu, Julius Agu, ChiomaChukwuka, Uche Jombo, UfuomaMcDermot Within an hour, thirty one minutes and thirty two seconds (1h 31m 32s) the director (OmoniOboli), in a melodramatic style, presents a group of market women who decide to deny their husbands sex in an attempt to stir them into speaking up against child brides.

Niyi Akinmolayan in *Make a Move* presents a dance drama movie in which Osas and her sister Eseosa live with their mother in a tiny apartment on the wrong side of



Fig. 3: *Wives on Strike*



Fig. 4: *Make a Move*

town. Since the death of their father, mother has been shacking up with a shady fellow (Wale Adebayo) whose philandering ways are known to everybody else in the neighborhood except the mother. As played by Tina Mba, Osas' mum is an insecure woman who stands by idly and chooses to close her eyes to the abuse going on right under her nose. Osas thus has to play both protector and defender of her younger sister. Seeking release from the domestic abuse going on at home, she finds joy in dancing. While working as a cleaner in a dance studio, she does what only movie people do: abandons her mop and bucket and turns on the stereo to pour out her frustrations in the dance. Of course, she conveniently leaves the door unlocked so a tall, dark handsome stranger walks in on her and thus begins the Cinderella like story that you know is sure to happen. There are obstacles thrown at Osas' path, like unfriendly dance partners, silly plot twists as well as the threat on the home front Osas was determined to survive despite all odds. The entire film is an attempt at a feel good delight and soon a romance develops that survives

all challenges and is just enough to solve most of her immediate problems. Produced by IvieOkujaye and directed by Niyi Akinmolayan, starring Ivie Okujaye, Tina Mba, Beverly Naya. Wale Adebayo, Victor Godfery, Helga Sosthenes Releasedate: 6 June 2014 Nominations:Nollywood Movie Award for Best Child Actor, *Awards*: Nollywood Movie Award for Best Rising Star (Female).

Moses Inwang (Director of the film) presents Itoro, an orphan that was brought to the Udofia family as a housemaid. She was about fourteen years of age and did not go to school, as a result she could not speak English language. Itoro suffered physical abuse in the hands of her master and mistress. Elena, a neighbour, who lives in the same yard with them, witnessed the abuse on numerous occasions and reported it to the police. When the case was brought before the court Mr. and Mrs. Udofia were sent to prison following the witness of Elena, who was also a photographer and their neighbour, while Itoro was relocated to an orphanage. Released in 2013, the thirty three minutes





Fig. 5: Iloro

(33m) drama stars Iloro. Monalisa Chinda, UcheJombo, Kalulkeagu Keppy Ekkpenyong Bassey. The award winning film also featured Yemi Blaq and Bimbo Manue while introducing EmemUdononguak.

#### **Projection of the Rights of the Girl Child in the Films:**

In analyzing the projection of the rights of the girl child in the films, the researcher was able to identify four recurring themes as follows: the girl child as a less preferred species, inferior social role, sexual objectification and imperative of restoration.

#### **Findings**

**The Girl Child as a Less Preferred Species:** Clearly portrayed by the five films under review is the patriarchal cultural prejudice that privileges the male child over the female child. Hence, the girl child becomes a less preferred species vis-a-vis the boy child. In *Dry*, Halima's ordeal of being married off at the age of 13 to a man old enough to be her father is definitely a product of this sentiment as seen in the conversation between her father, Ibrahim and Sani (The would-be bridegroom) just before the conclusion of the nuptial rites in which the father thanks Sani for accepting to marry Halima concluding that "It is certainly a great relief for a man like me with too many daughters to have one of them getting married". Sani concurred by stating that "Allah has answered your prayers." Implicit in the words "Too many daughters" as used by Halima's father is that this less desired species (i.e. female children) have so accumulated in his household to the extent of becoming a burden that he needs to be "Relieved" of through marriage offers as made by Sani.

Similarly, in *Emotional & Physical Neglect*, Stephanie's father is portrayed as tolerating, albeit hesitatingly, Edith's maltreatment of Stephanie contrary to his vehement opposition whenever she appears to extend such treatment, however slightly, to his son, Kelly. In his admonition to his wife, the sentiment behind this discriminatory reaction was laid bare: I don't know why you have failed to take that girl (Stephanie) as your own daughter. Though she and her brother were born by my former wife, you are now my current wife and should inherit them as your biological children... But let me warn that while you may have been maltreating that girl and getting away with it, any time you try that with my son, that day, you will regret ever coming into my life.

In *Wives on Strike*, the culture of child marriage which the wives are revolting against is portrayed as having its foundation on the belief that the girl child is a less important species and so can be conveniently disposed of once there is any ready suitor around. The same message is portrayed in *Make a Move* vis-a-vis the domestic abuse suffered by Eseosa in her home, just as the abuses suffered by Iloro as a housemaid implicitly bears the imprint of the cultural preference of the male child over the female child. In the latter case, Iloro is sent to become a housemaid upon the death of their parents whereas her younger brother, Etim, receives a different treatment as their relatives pool resources together to train him in school so that, in the words of one of their uncles, "He will become a great man that will lift the name of the family." Embodied by this statement is the prejudice that only a male child can assume such an ennobling role in a family.



On the whole, the discourse of male-child-preference becomes dominant in the films' representation of issues concerning the rights of the girl child. Scholars [11-13] are agreed that the generality of gender-based injustice in society has its foundation in the prejudice that male children are more valuable than their female counterparts. Interestingly, the films present this culture as unjust and as such should be undermined.

**Inferior Social Role:** Literature on gender relations generally holds that women are represented largely placed in roles that tend to make them socially inferior and less powerful [61-63]. A prominent form of this role playing is such that sees women dominantly in domestic positions (As wives, mothers etc) as against such roles that involves social visibility and power [44, 45]. The films under review portray this cultural trend particularly in the roles played by the major characters: Halima was a housewife; Stephanie was a step-daughter while Itoro was a housemaid. In *Wives on Strike*, the major characters, of course, are domestic figures - wives.

The films tend to point out that beyond these domestic roles, women can and ought to play more empowering role in society. In *Dry*, Halima's ordeal as a child bride is juxtaposed with the social successes achieved by Doris, a female lawyer, whose contrasting fortune is a product of her family's vision and faith in the value and capacity of the female child. In *Emotional & Physical Neglect*, Nicky's courageous defence of Stephanie against the maltreatment by Mrs. Edith comes through as a protest against women's subjugation as "Domestic species". In one of the dialogues between the two girls, Nicky spoke: You should not allow yourself to be subdued. Stand up courageously. As a woman you can be whatever you want to be. Your place is not the bedroom, it's not the kitchen. You have the wings to fly. You can become that famous woman your talent and skill can afford you, just like any of the famous women of our time and the times past.

In *Wives on Strike*, the protest by women is hinged, among others, on their disenchantment with the deprivation of the girl child the opportunity to acquire education and other social skills that will empower them for greatness and leadership. This deprivation, as seen in the film, is a product of the bias that the girl child is a domestic breed unfit for certain social roles and whose ultimate destination is a man's house as a wife and mother. In *Make a Move*, Osas' brave decision to break with her

past to pursue a career in the entertainment industry against all odds is portrayed as a protest against the idea that women are ideally to be restricted to the domestic space. Her quest for greatness in the outside world is a challenge to her confinement to domestic life and the accompanying abuses. This is much obvious in her repeated comments "I must realise my destiny. I must make a name for myself. In *Itoro*, the judge's comment while sentencing Mr. and Mrs. Udofia to imprisonment for domestic abuse of *Itoro* bears this tone as well: "Any civilised parent and guardian in this age ought to know that a child, whether boy or girl, is first and foremost entitled to quality education to empower him/her to face life." The Udofias have only kept Itoro as a housemaid and denying her the right to education.

On the whole, the films under review generally embody some counter-narrative against the patriarchal notion that women are to be confined to the domestic domain. The storylines, from various perspectives, try to debunk this ideology while reinforcing the notion that women have the capacity and ought to be supported as their male counterparts to achieve social success.

**Sexual Objectification:** Sexual objectification is the act of projecting one as a mere sexual entity, sexual object, while de-emphasising other attributes of such person's being [23]. In other words, it is a sort of reduction of one's personality to mere sexuality; placing so much emphasis on one's sexuality (Sexual features, sexual prowess, sexual attractiveness, etc) while de-emphasising other components of his/her humanity. Writing with reference to women who are seen as "by far the greater victim of sexual objectification in our society," [27] notes that it (Sexual objectification) is a "clear alienation of the female personality because female personality is reduced to sex and sexual matters; in fact, these are substituted for the woman personality." In two of the films under review - *Dry* and *Wives on Strike* - sexual objectification is highlighted as one the issues of the rights of the girl child. The child marriage suffered by Halima in *Dry* is one of the instances where the theme of sexual objectification is highlighted. In child marriages, a girl child is typically treated as an object and not a human person [29,30].

The abuses suffered by female children which the women are protesting in *Wives On Strike* include sexual abuse which is one important way sexual objectification of women manifests in society. The act of sexual abuse

alienates a woman's sexual autonomy, her right to freely make sexual decision, as the abuser imposes himself on her, treating her as a sexual object instead of subject [8].

In *Dry*, Halima's mother-in-law, Hauwa, admonishes her that one of the ways of being a "good wife" is not to deny her husband sex "no matter the circumstances." Here, the scriptwriter, through the voice of Hauwa, is highlighting a form of sexual objectification wherein a wife is expected to be the willing sexual tool of the husband irrespective of her personal disposition and welfare. This sort of sexual objectification has been a prominent issue in the discourse of the rights of the woman in a matrimonial setting [14-16]. In Halima's case, however, the stakes are higher, as being a mere child, with the accompanying frailty and complacency, she is more amenable to such objectification.

In *Wives on Strike*, there is an emphasis on the instances of sexual objectification manifesting by way of rape and other forms of sexual assault both within and outside the home. For instance, one of the protesting women, Daniela, who is a wife of a rich businessman, while speaking to some of his fellow disgruntled wives, states: "We must stop these shameless men from violating our daughters." The word "violate" evokes the image of a sexual act that fails to recognise the other person as a free agent with the right to accept or reject sexual advances, but rather treating her but as an object that must submit to such advances.

Generally, the treatment of sexual objectification in the two films largely unfolds as a counter-narrative against the phenomenon portrayed in negative light. In other words, it is a negating discourse that seeks to achieve a reversal of the status quo.

**Imperative of Restoration:** The narratives in the five films studied contain both explicitly and implicitly the theme of the imperative of restoration of the rights of the girl child. In other words, running through the storylines is a sentiment that portrays all the treatments that tend to negate the rights of the girl child as an anomaly that ought to be corrected and justice done to the offenders and the offended.

In *Dry*, both Halima's father and Sani her husband are portrayed as having done something unfair and anomalous by getting her into child marriage. Referring to complications arising from early childbirth by Halima, the doctor at the hospital where she was admitted said to her husband: "I was indeed shocked when I learnt the age of

Halima. For goodness sake, it's most unfair to subject an underage child to this sort of trauma." All through the story, Halima's role portrays an image of an oppressed victim who deserves justice.

The same is seen of Nicky in *Emotional & Physical Neglect* where her ordeal in the hands of Mrs. Edith does nothing but evoke an image of oppression, abuse and injustice which necessarily cry for correction. However, with *Wives on Strike* and *Ito*, this sentiment becomes very explicit and concrete. The storyline of *Wives on Strike* is that of advocacy, a movement for the stoppage of abuse of rights of the girl child. The scriptwriter uses the protesting wives, their utterances and actions, as a vehicle for making strong statements on the evil of abuse of the girl child and the necessity for correction of such.

On the other hand, the storyline in *Ito* has its climax in the court's jailing of Mr. And Mrs. Udofia for the abuses the little Ito suffered in their hands. It is a definitive resolution to the plot which unmistakably projects the ideology that such infringements on the rights of the girl child are evils that should be punished. In *Make a Move*, Osas' triumph over the forces of gender-based restrictions has the same effect of subjecting to censure the abuse of the rights of the girl child. The life of the major character, Osas, becomes a vindication of the idea that all gender-based prejudices against the girl child are ultimately unfounded.

In all, looking at the manner in which the storylines of the five films unfold, it becomes obvious that their portrayal of the abuse of the rights of the girl child is ultimately advocatory. The trajectories of the stories and the themes are such that lead to the final conclusion that these abuses are evil, should not be tolerated and ought to be ended and punished.

**Analysis of Research Questions:** In the first research question ["what images of abuse of the rights of the girl child are portrayed in Nigerian films?"], which sought to ascertain the images of abuse of the rights of the girl child portrayed in Nigerian films, the textual analysis of the five films revealed that human rights abuses suffered by the girl child were portrayed largely in terms of child labour, child marriage, sexual abuse, physical assaults and deprivations of social benefits particularly education. These portrayals of abuse of the rights of the girl child are found spread almost simultaneously in all of the five movies analysed. Consequently, it could be stated in answer to the first research question that images of abuse

of the rights of the girl child portrayed in Nigerian films were those of child labour, child marriage, sexual abuse, physical assaults and social deprivations.

In the second research question "What techniques are employed by Nigerian films in constructing issues of the rights of the girl child?" the textual analysis showed that the films under review represented issues of rights of the girl child largely by constructing their narratives around a girl protagonist whose life embodies an experience of abuses and ultimate triumph. It is only *Wives on Strike* that departed from this pattern as the narrative was woven around the protesting women who eventually triumphed against child abuse. Based on the foregoing, it may be stated in answer to the second research question that in constructing issues of the rights of the girl child, Nigerian films employed the narrative technique of weaving a story around a girl child protagonist who experiences rights abuses but with the plot resolved in the triumph of good over evil.

The third research question sought to assess the ideological frame(s) within which Nigerian films represent issues of the rights of the girl child. The manner of development and resolution of the storylines in the five films studied indicates an effort by the filmmaker to project the girl child as a human person whose humanity has been debased, who has been abused and deprived, hence deserving of justice and restoration. The characters of Halima, Nicky, Osas and Ito (In Dry, Emotional & Physical Neglect, Make a Move and Ito respectively) much convey this sentiment. In *Wives on Strike*, this sentiment became evident in the manner the women employed all they could to battle the abuses suffered by the girl child. Consequently, it could be admitted in answer to the third research question that the ideological frames within which Nigerian films represent issues of the rights of the girl child are that of the inalienability of the human dignity of the girl child, the wrongness of undermining this dignity through rights abuses and the imperative of justice for the abused girl child.

## **CONCLUSION**

Films in Nigeria could serve the purpose of child rights advancement as exemplified by the five films in focus here. For one, the films were able to project the characteristic rights abuses suffered by the Nigerian child, especially the girl child and made a case for a new culture that reverses the status quo. Against this backdrop, it

could be concluded that films present for Nigeria a veritable tool for realization of the rights of the child which stands out as one of the leading human rights issues in the contemporary world [37, 38]. This agrees with the postulations of the development media theory that view the media as a partner in development to society as media become a source of communications that advocate change in society [5].

Furthermore, the above impact may be felt even more since films now serve as a major source of entertainment for Nigerians [20, 21] they can go a long way in helping with the country's social transformation, especially as it relates to child's rights. This is in line with the media system dependency theory which holds that the more people depend on the media for information, education and entertainment, the more likely the media would exert its influence on them [58].

## **Recommendations:**

- Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations were made by the researcher:
- Filmmakers in Nigeria should produce films projecting the rights of the male child also. This is against the background of the finding that films with themes centered on child's rights have tended to focus more on the girl child and almost leaving the boy child entirely out. This is irrespective of the fact that male children also suffer abuses globally [21].
- There is need for television stations and cinema houses to constantly feature films focusing on child's rights as a way of enhancing the societal impact of such films.
- Continuous exhibition of such films would help create awareness and educate people on issues of child's rights, their abuses and the need and how to reverse the trend.
- Future studies should expand the scope of this study through enlarging the sample and integrating other research designs such as quantitative content analysis, semiotics and critical discourse analysis. This would make for more generalizability of the findings.
- A survey version of this study should also be undertaken with the view to understanding the extent of audience exposure and response to films focusing on the rights of the child. Findings of such study would complement the results of the present study for a deeper insight into the role of film in projecting the rights of the child in Nigeria.

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