



When Silence Becomes Overstretched: Exploring the Loud Silence in Women's Struggle for Liberation in Contemporary Nollywood

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Abstract

Lots of debates, contestations and criticisms have continued to trail the subjugation of women in Nollywood narratives. Film scholars and critics, especially those who tow the feminist line, keep bemoaning the manner in which patriarchy and male hegemony take centre stage in many Nollywood movies to the detriment of women. Employing the mixed research methodology (qualitative content analysis and key informant interview), this study explores the loud silence in women's struggle for liberation in contemporary Nollywood narratives. Three widely acclaimed and contemporary movies – Muna (2019), Omo Ghetto: The Saga (2020) and Fine Wine (2021) – were content analysed to foreground and highlight male chauvinism and hegemony as well as women's struggle for their liberation. Though women's silence in the movies is as prolonged as it is loud, the fierce fight they later put up against male oppression comes as a great solace. Therefore, it is concluded that Nollywood film-makers should continue to give preeminence to such issues in subsequent narratives.

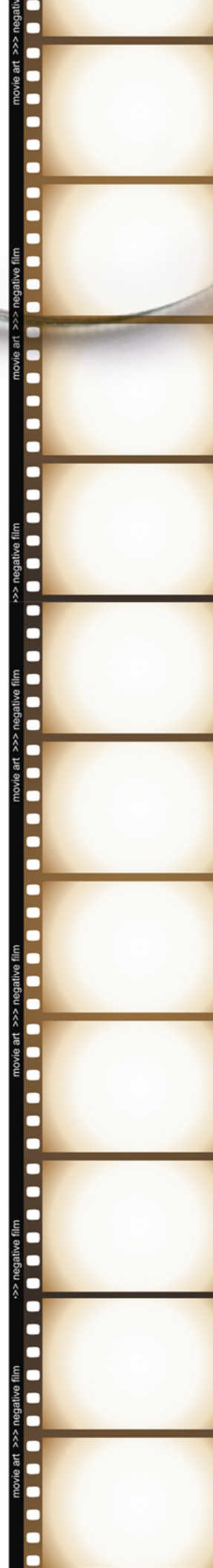
Keywords: Nollywood; Silence; Women; Women's Struggles; Oppression; Male Dominance; Liberation



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Osakpolor Emwinromwankhoe

Introduction

Vulnerability in terms of women's portraiture in films is the emphasis on the weakness of women, to underline male power or influence. It connotes a lack of agency and means to affirmation. This male influence or power is hardly countered by an equal sum of female power. Where it is, such women are regarded as deviants, whose revolt is considered an aberration. This is another means of making them defenceless. (Evwierhoma, 2016, p. 246)

The above assertion by Evwierhoma forms a very strong basis as well as a direction for this study. Women liberation is an issue which has continued to generate much debate and scholarship. Across all ages, ethnicities, races, cultures and societies, the need for women liberation has often been echoed and re-echoed (Ezeigbo, 1996; Akinola & Tella, 2013). This is because patriarchy and male chauvinism have constituted and still constitute solid walls which engage and prevent women from reaching out or achieving their full potentials. Although traces of female subjugation are seen in every society that makes up the cosmos, the trend is very much prevalent in the African continent (Okunna, 2002; Omatsola, 2016; Onyenankeya, Onyenankeya & Osukunle, 2019; Emwinromwankhoe, 2021a).

The dominant patrilineal nature and patriarchal culture as well as the lack of access to education greatly restrict African women and prevent them from easily gaining freedom as do their

counterparts in western climes. Thus, African women are easily and invariably debased, marginalised, hemlined, sidelined and dehumanised (Evwierhoma, 2001; 2016; Ibbi, 2017; Omoera, 2020). In Nigeria, a very important and popular country in Africa, the issue of women liberation has continuously been rehashed, reiterated and revisited. Events and developments reveal in more ways than one that the country is still incredibly steeped in patriarchy and gender inequality. Nigerian women are, more often than not, faced with endless intimidation, oppression and marginalisation from the male folk.

President Muhammadu Buhari’s comment during an interview with the BBC that “my wife belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room” (BBC, 2016) greatly buttresses the aforementioned argument. The comment arguably brings to the fore the way most Nigerian men perceive and treat Nigerian women. If the President of the country – and the number one citizen at that – could speak of the First Lady in such belittling, debasing and denigrating manner, especially on such an international platform, then it means many other Nigerian men do not hold a better view.

Whilst analysing the comment, Omoera (2020, p. 2) remarks that what the President meant was that:

The First Lady should remain within the confines of basic biological functions, represented by cooking, bearing and raising children, eating, meeting the sexual

needs of the husband, etc. In performing these functions, her visibility and influence are to be mediated through the man or husband, who eats the food she cooks but who may ensure she interacts with no one else outside the domestic space, shares the bedroom with her but in the understanding that her significant influence stops there.

Ezeigbo (1996) and Okunna (2002) note that even with the liberation mantra that keeps dominating the body of literature as well as local and international fora, the incredibly patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society places Nigerian women in a helpless and hopeless position as they continue to be maligned, sidelined and marginalised by the male folk. The oppression of Nigerian women by their male counterparts is something that is as pungent as it is prevalent. This is the reason why Ewrierhoma (2016) contends that Nigerian women have been undervalued and marginalised for so long that they are now beginning to fight back.

One of the potent means through which Nigerian women fight against the forces of male domination and oppression is film (Emwinromwankhoe, 2021a; 2021b). As is the case with other societies and cultures, films afford people – filmmakers in this regard – the ample opportunity to influence culture, correct stereotypes and negative perceptions, mediate gender equity as well as change notions (Uzuegbunam & Ononiwu, 2018; Kurfi & Dahiru, 2020). With the instrumentality of films, wrong ideologies can be contested just as accurate ones are projected. Thus, a film is just as artistic as it is didactic (Ibrahim, 2013; Aromona, 2016; Emwinromwankhoe, 2021b).

As a stakeholder in the production and distribution of cultural products, Nollywood has risen to become a major voice as well as a formidable force. The industry has succeeded in stamping its feet not just on the shores of Nigeria but also those of other countries. As a result of the steadfastness and dedication of Nigerian filmmakers, Nollywood has garnered audiences from many African countries as well as the US, the UK and the Caribbean. Nollywood is third largest film industry in the world, behind only Hollywood in the US and Bollywood in India (Aromona, 2016; Kurfi & Dahiru, 2020; Emwinromwankhoe, 2021b).

Nollywood indisputably fits into the box of a highly influential and transnational cinema. It is therefore not surprising that some Nollywood film-makers have keyed into its products to tackle such issues as patriarchy and female subjugation and set the agenda for the liberation of women. As a result of the continuous entrance of female film-makers into an industry previously dominated by men, the quest for women's liberation now forms a substantial part of quite a number of Nollywood films.

Against the aforesaid, this study investigates and interrogates the loud silence in women's struggle for liberation in Nollywood narratives. Three films were selected for the study and they include *Muna* (dir. Kevin Nwankwor, 2019), *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* (dir. Funke Akindele & JJ Skills, 2020) and *Fine Wine* (dir. Seyi Babatope, 2021). The films were content analysed with a

view to unravelling and discussing the loud silence surrounding the female characters' struggle for liberation. Since films are reflections of events and trends in the society, the select films constitute a salient pivot and mirror through which we can see how Nigerian women struggle to gain freedom from domination and oppression by male folk.

The subjects of gender equality and women liberation have formed a huge and substantial part of the body of literature on film and popular culture. Scholars, especially those who tow the feminist line, have consistently and vociferously argued that women across various ages, religion, societies and cultures are invariably demeaned, sidelined, belittled and ill-treated by members of the male gender. Ezeigbo (1996) reiterates that women the world over are caught in a maze as societies are unequivocal and loud about the inferiority of females to their male counterparts. Ezeigbo (1996, p. 5) categorically states that:

As in other places, most women in Nigeria today are laboring and living under stress. The woman is often overwhelmed by the responsibilities in her life – those created by the society and by herself. She is expected to perform her traditional role efficiently; run her home, be a good wife, a super-mother and a supportive member of the extended family. She is expected to contribute to the family income. And she must perform creditably at her job or business to be recognised or to make progress. And this impossible task she has to accomplish in a culture where she is taught that she is inferior to her male counterpart.

Okunna (2002, p. 3) re-echoes Ezeigbo's viewpoint with the assertion that "gender relations in Nigeria are characterised by a lot of imbalance, to the disadvantage of women."

Okunna notes that although the Nigerian society is in the 21st century, tradition, norms, culture and religion have continued to widen the disparity between Nigerian men and women, by keeping the women in a position where they are inferior to men. Similarly, Aromona (2016) and Omoera (2020) contend that the Nigerian society has belittled and dehumanised women to the extent that the women now have a warped view of themselves. They stress that this is the apparent reason why some Nigerian women such as mothers-in-law, wives and grandmothers join the men in the society to intimate, oppress and subjugate the women. Contesting the disempowerment of females in *Adaze*, a Benin-language Nollywood film, Omoera (2020) opines that the worthwhile support received by the overly chauvinistic Iyengumwena from his mother, is a strong attestation to the fact that many Nigerian women are accomplices in the female subjugation that is prevalent in the country.

Omoera (2020, p. 3) further notes that:

Such a scenario, with slightly different shades or hues, has been observed in many parts of the world, including India, Pakistan, the Middle East, sub-Saharan African countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, to mention a few, where women are virtually emasculated and disempowered at the social, political, economic and cultural levels.

Joseph (2019) also argues that Nigerian women are often in a disadvantaged position because of the strong patriarchal and patrilineal walls that have long been erected in the society.

Joseph (2019, p. 4) stresses that “patriarchy is hierarchical, and even though men lead other men, they are still unified in a common goal of dominating women.” Joseph further avers that the domination of the science and arts fields by men has further worsened the problem. Building on Joseph’s argument, Onyenankeya, Onyenankeya & Osukunle (2019) posit that the continued dominance of Nollywood by male filmmakers has not helped matters as such male hegemony and chauvinism are often reproduced and accentuated in film narratives.

In the same vein, Evwierhoma (2016) laments that women in Nollywood films are often portrayed as weak and vulnerable persons whilst the males are portrayed as the strong and decisive ones. Evwierhoma argues that such depiction is extremely disadvantageous to Nigerian women because it makes them perceive liberation from male dominance as a battle that was lost even before it was begun. Babatope (2016) also tows the path of Evwierhoma and other scholars. Babatope argues that gender and sexual politics are conspicuous in many Nollywood narratives, often to the detriment of the female folk. Babatope further notes that although several Nollywood movies are centred around women liberation, such storylines are not usually treated in a lapidary and excellent manner.

A good number of studies have been conducted to investigate and bring to the fore the loud silence in women’s struggle for liberation in Nollywood narratives. Okunna (1996) conducted a study to examine the portrayal of women in ten select Nollywood movies. Okunna found that a

large number of the women in the movies were maligned and oppressed by the men, whilst the few who fought for liberation were branded as crafty, devilish, deadly and deviant. Omatsola (2016) embarked on a study to unravel the semiotics of feminism in Nollywood, using *Women's Cot* (2005) as a pivot for analysis. Omatsola found that the movie greatly projects the liberation of women from the shackles of male domination but however laments that the portrayal of majority of the women in a negative light does not bode well for Nigerian women.

Similarly, Evwierhoma (2016) carried out a study to unravel the vulnerability of women in Urhobo inter-communal conflict films, using *Oshenye* (2013) as a case in point. She found that the women in the film were mostly depicted as vulnerable and helpless and noted that in the very few instances where they fought against male oppression, they were cautioned and/or ridiculed by the men in the society. Babatope (2016) equally embarked on a study to investigate gender and sexual politics in *Narrow Path* (2006), a movie directed by Tunde Kelani. Babatope found that the women in the movie were under tremendous subjugation and oppression from the men and concludes that the movie further strengthens the patriarchy and male chauvinism that are hitherto prevalent in Nollywood.

In addition, Omoera (2020) undertook a study to contest the disempowerment of females in *Adaze* (2003), a Benin video film. Omoera found that the women, having being demeaned and

intimidated by their husband for too long, fought for their liberation. Omoera nonetheless notes that it took quite a stretch of time for the women to fight back; in other words, there was a prolonged silence in women's struggle for liberation in the film. Drawing from the findings, Omoera recommended that Nollywood filmmakers should do more at tackling the oppression and subjugation of females in films.

Joseph (2019) also conducted a study to ascertain and explore Nollywood female filmmakers' attempt at reconstructing the images of Nigerian women on screen. Joseph beamed scholastic searchlight on four films namely *Keeping my Man* (2013), *Flower Girl* (2013), *Dry* (2015) and *Wives on Strike* (2016). Joseph found that although some of the female directors did a brilliant job at reconstructing the images of women, there were still strong undertones of patriarchy and male domination. Joseph attributes the slightly unfavourable portrayal to the patriarchy which has eaten deep into every fabric of the Nigerian society.

The muted group theory (MGT) forms the theoretical basis for this study. The theory was propounded by Cheris Kramarae in 1974. MGT developed out of the field of cultural anthropology, but more recently developed in media studies mostly as a feminist and cross-cultural theory (Asemah, Nwammuo & Kwam-Uwaoma, 2017; Barkman, 2018). MGT presupposes that women as well as other marginalised groups in society are muted and excluded from decision-making processes through the use of language. Muteness in this regard has to do with a group's inability

to express themselves due to the dominance and control of language by other groups. Asemah *et al.* (2017, p. 253) opine that “mutedness is due to the lack of power; people with little power have trouble giving voice to their perceptions. As a result, they are overworked, muffled and rendered invisible.”

In a bid to elucidate the theory, Griffin (2000, p. 459) remarks that:

The language of a particular culture does not serve all it speaks equally; for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation. Women and members of other subordinate groups are not as free or as able as men to say what they wish, when and where they wish, because the words and the norms for use have been formulated by the dominant group – men.

Griffin avers that women’s words are often discounted in society while their voices are often unheard. Wall (1999) and Barkman (2018) equally argue that women are often not regarded when they are in the midst of men. Mahrukh, Ahmad & Iqbal (2017) note that this disrespect, intimidation and oppression is the singular reason why some women become tough and difficult whenever they are in the reins of power. MGT, therefore, rests on the following basic assumptions: (a) the dominant group contributes mostly to the formulation of the language system, including social norms, culture and vocabulary (b) members from the subordinate and maligned group(s) have to learn and use the dominant language to express themselves.

MGT holds the ace and is best suited for this study because it primarily focuses on how women, who constitute the dominant group in this regard, are dominated by the men in Nollywood narratives. The theory also explains how patriarchy and male hegemony have made the women muted. This protracted mutedness is what pushes and instigates these women to engage in the struggle for their liberation. Therefore, the theory is critical to examining the loud silence in women's struggle for liberation in Nollywood narratives as it helps to properly put the subordinate women and the dominant men into perspective.

The researcher adopted the mixed research method which comprised both the qualitative content analysis and the key informant interview (KII) methods. The population of study consists of all the Nollywood movies produced between 2019 and 2021. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), 700 Nollywood movies were produced in 2019; 2,599 movies were produced in 2020; whilst 1,051 were produced in 2021, totalling 4,350 movies. Thus, the population of study is 4,350 movies. The scope of the study covers only Nollywood movies produced between 2019 and 2021, from which the three movies were purposively sampled. The researcher's choice of this scope was borne out of the desire to study Nollywood movies that are as recent as possible, especially those that have not attracted intellectual or scholarly attention.

Muna (2019), *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* (2020) and *Fine Wine* (2021) were purposively selected for two major reasons. Firstly, women constitute the lead characters in the movies. This

integral feature made it a lot easier for the researcher to focus attention on the actions of the lead characters as well as those of other females in the movies. Secondly, they are all widely acclaimed Nollywood films. *Muna* grossed a total of ₦30.4 million at the box office whilst *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* grossed a whopping sum of ₦636.1 at the box office (*Bizwatch*, 2021). *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* is ranked as the highest-grossing Nollywood film of 2021 as well as the highest-grossing Nollywood film of the decade (*Guardian*, 2021; *Pulse.ng*, 2021). On the other hand, *Fine Wine* grossed a total of ₦24.2 million at the box office. The movie has also been described as one that has all the tell-tale features of a classic romance (*Soda and Popcorn*, 2021).

With such box office success, it is unarguable that a good number of persons may have seen the movies. Thus, the researcher is of the notion that the tackling and treatment of women's struggle for liberation in the select movies is parallel to those in other movies that form part of the scope of study. Regarding the key informant interview, the researcher purposively chose the person of Professor Osakue Stevenson Omoera who is a revered Nigerian scholar as well as a Professor of film, gender and media studies. The interview guide served as the research instrument.

Synopses of the Films

Muna (2019) is an action movie produced by Emmanuel Ojeah and Unoma Nwankwor, with a running time of 1 hr, 54 mins. The movie tells the story of its eponymous character, Muna, a young girl raised by her grandmother and the only surviving child of her late parents. Fuelled by the dual desire to become great and help cure her grandmother's protracted ailment, Muna decides to secretly embark on a journey overseas with a man named Patrick. It was not until they get on the journey that she realises that Patrick is not actually the person he claims to be; he is a notorious human trafficker who had sold many young girls in the village into slavery.

Muna, together with the other girls, is maligned, oppressed, molested and humiliated by Patrick and the other men. Infuriated by Muna's grandmother's move to report him to the police, Patrick sends some men to execute her in the village. On the day Muna and the girls are to embark on their final journey from Lagos to their destination, Muna, having hit one of the marauding men with a battle-axe, tries to escape. She is helped in the process by Ikechukwu, a member of the gang. Through the latter's connection, Muna travels by sea to meet a man called Barrick in Brazil from where she travels to the US.

Whilst in the US, Muna receives training and ends up becoming a gallant and dexterous fighter. This triggers her desire to embark on a revenge mission with a view to eliminating Patrick, Luca and the other men who had contributed in no small way to her sordid and terribly horrible past. Meanwhile, she gets to find out that Tony, a man with whom she had fallen head over heels

in love, is the son of Luca. Resolute and unrestrained, Muna embarks on the revenge mission, thus becoming a consummate *femme fatale*. She kills all the men involved, including her lover's father. In the end, Muna, Tony and Barrick live happily ever after.

Omo Ghetto: The Saga (2020) is a crime comedy produced by Wendy Imasuen and directed by Funke Akindele & JJ Skills, with a running time of 2 hrs, 26 mins. The film is actually a sequel to *Omo Ghetto*, a Nollywood film released in 2010. *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* revolves around the life of Lefty, a lady who is terribly crude, primitive and uncouth and who likes hanging out with her three friends – Nikky, Choco and Busty – in the ghetto. Lefty has a twin sister, Ayomide, who, in contrast, is refined, educated and sophisticated. While Ayomide is married and is making waves in her chosen career, Lefty is single and prefers stealing her mum's money and belongings which she regularly distributes to the people in the ghetto.

Lefty has a fiancé, Stone, whom she loves deeply and to whom she gives her all. Stone is an Internet fraudster and is the head of a four-man gang. Together, they trick and swindle white people out of their hard-earned monies. They also receive worthwhile assistance from Inspector Dede, a police officer in the vicinity. Events however turn sour when Stone and his gang members, with the aid of three prostitutes, break into the residence of three opulent Internet fraudsters. One of the fraudsters dies in the process and a number of persons, including Lefty, are fingered in the

murder case. Lefty is arrested and sent to prison. Nevertheless, with the help and influence of her mother, Lefty is released.

Shortly after her release, Lefty hears that Stone is on the verge of marrying a white woman after which they both would fly out of the country. Overly irked by the development, Lefty's friends abduct the white woman in question and the face-off that follows makes the latter land in the hospital. Stone and his team also retaliate and in the process, they abduct Ayomide. The remaining scenes of the movie focus on the move by Lefty and her team to go liberate Ayomide from the clutches of Stone's gang. There is the exchange of fists, series of shooting and mass destruction of property. The policemen sent by Lefty's parents later come in as a *deus ex machina*. Lefty, terribly injured, is rushed to the hospital for proper treatment whilst Stone and his gang members are arrested.

Fine Wine (2021) is a romantic comedy produced by Neville Sajere and directed by Seyi Babatope, with a running time of 2hrs, 10 mins. The movie centres around the lives of Kaima and Mr George. Kaima is a twenty-five-year-old corps member serving in a commercial bank where she meets and gets involved in an amorous relationship with Tunji, a senior account officer. Whilst in the relationship, Kaima gets to find out that Tunji is extremely egocentric, chauvinistic, abusive and oppressive.

Mr George, on the other hand, is a fifty-five-year-old business magnate who has two children from a failed marriage. Through what can best be described as the worst circumstance, Mr George gets to meet with Kaima. He soon realises that the girl, aside from her beautiful nature, is highly respectful, affable and homely. He helps Kaima to secure an appointment as a staff in the bank and in no distant time, they move from being just acquaintances to full-blown lovers.

When Tunji notices that Mr George is getting the better part of Kaima's time and attention, he fears that losing her is imminent. This makes him pretend to turn over a new leaf and propose marriage to Kaima. Kaima however puts two and two together and reads in-between the lines. By so doing, she realises that Tunji's chauvinism is as ingrained as his egocentrism. Kaima then dumps Tunji publicly after which she and Mr George re-unite.

Loud Silence in Women's Struggle for Liberation in the Select Films

In *Muna*, there are a good number of women who endure male hegemony and oppression for so long a time before one amongst them, Muna, decides to fight back. Women's silence in the film before Muna's intervention is as prolonged as it is loud. Muna is therefore an archetype of all the women in the film and by extension, the women in the society. She takes up the pains, the struggles and the plight of the women, bares them on her own chest and fights for their freedom.

Male oppression and chauvinism are brought to light in the very first scene of the film. We see a girl, Adaeze, accosted by two men who are friends. Her offence? Adaeze's unreserved boldness and assertiveness are getting on their nerves. The men then decide to cut off Adaeze's "wings" by scratching a side of her face with a very sharp knife, the aftermath of which is the presence of a deep and long cut. All this happens in the very presence of Muna. Obviously fed up by the long and interminable oppression of the women by the men in the community, Muna hits the chief assailant with a stick. This makes him fall to the ground. As he winces and growls in pain, Muna instructs Adaeze to run.

While Muna and the bevy of other girls are in a building having been trafficked and sold into slavery, they face all manner of cruelty, ill-treatment and malevolence from the men. The men regularly come in to malign, beat and torment the girls. That, however, is not the worst of it all. The girls are often raped by the men. On one of such instances of sexploitation and in a bid to free one of the girls from the clutches of the paedophile, Muna hits the latter with a battle-axe. Muna then tells the girls to join her in her move to escape but they refused. Their refusal in this regard carries a lot of weight. The girls have become so used to male oppression that they have decided to give in and submit to the extremely patriarchal structure of the society. This buttresses the stance of Aromona (2016) and Omoera (2021) that the continuous oppression of Nigerian women by males has made them throw in the towel and accept their subordinate positions in society. Omoera

(2021, personal interview) contends that the patriarchal walls erected in the Nigerian society have made many Nigerian women to gladly accept their positions as subordinates and made them close their eyes to male subjugation.

Besides, Muna's grandmother suffers from a reprisal attack from Patrick because of her move to fight against male subjugation. When she finds out that Patrick had tricked Muna into travelling with him to the city, she moves to report him to the police. This infuriates Patrick and makes him send some assassins to kill her. In this regard, Omoera (2021, personal interview) stresses that the Nigerian culture is apparently designed to silence the women. Omoera adds that whenever a Nigerian woman decides to fight back, she usually faces a backlash or reprisal from the men in society. The basic assumption of the MGT is as well very instructive in this instance. The continued dominance of language and other societal structures by males makes it terribly difficult for women to fight against their mutedness and concomitant subjugation.

Therefore, having watched her fellow women suffer for a very long time in the hands of the men and having been a victim of such male oppression and domination, Muna takes it upon herself to fight back; to break the patriarchal structures in the society and to rid the society of these fierce, vicious and heartless men. She however does this in a negative way as she kills all the men who make up a large part of her terribly sordid and inglorious past. Underscoring women's struggle

for liberation in Nollywood narratives, Omoera (2021, personal interview) argues that “women in Nollywood films are making concerted efforts towards liberating themselves from the shackles of tradition, the shackles of societal taboos and every other thing that has restricted them for so long.”

There is also a web of silence surrounding women’s struggle for freedom in *Omo Ghetto: The Saga*. Although Lefty is portrayed as a consummate lout, her dissatisfaction with male chauvinism and oppression is palpable and laudable. For instance, when Lefty is in a bar with a man and sees another man verbally abusing his fiancée, she wades in and pleads with him to stop treating his woman in such a denigrating manner. Nonetheless, the guy’s chauvinism, insolence and arrogance make Lefty hit a bottle on his head.

Lefty dates Stone for four good years and during those years, she loves him unconditionally and makes every effort to please him and provide for his needs. Lefty even steals her mum’s money and belongings regularly just to ensure that Stone lives comfortably. In the instance where Stone pays ₦250,000 to a drug peddler for the safety of Lefty and her gang members, Lefty ends up doubling the amount for Stone. Nonetheless, Stone has no atom of love for Lefty. He merely sees her as a machine that spews money to meet his endless needs; that is, a means to his own ends. When Lefty is sent to prison because of the incriminating phone Stone leaves in her car, her love for Stone makes her protect his identity.

While Lefty rots in prison for the short time, Stone makes no effort whatsoever to visit her. Even when she sends her friends to him, he shows no sympathy. As if those are not enough, Stone cheats on Lefty with a white woman and impassively calls off the relationship when he is confronted with his sins. Stone's words to Ayomide, whilst the latter is in their custody, reveals his true intentions towards Lefty in the movie: "Just look at me. Look at me. Do I look like your sister's spec? If I had your silver spoon, you think I'd be with someone like her? Someone so street, so uncouth, so wretched? Circumstances brought us together."

Apart from Lefty, Stone uses other women in the movie as a means to his own end. The three harlots whose efforts granted Stone and his men access into the residence of the affluent Internet fraudsters are good examples. Having used them to achieve their aim, they refuse to pay them. From this very scene, we also get to find out that Aza, one of the members of Stone's gang, had earlier slept with one of the prostitutes without payment. This act underlines the fact that exploitation is a form of women's oppression in the movie. According to Omoera (2021, personal interview), the sexual exploitation of women by men is one of the major forms of female subjugation in Nigeria and in Nollywood films.

Therefore, having endured male oppression and subjugation for an incredibly long time, Lefty and her team decide to fight back. They first kidnap the white woman Stone is involved with

and deal with her. The peak of the women's struggle for liberation however comes after Ayomide's kidnap. The ladies, in the company of a man, all head to the place where Ayomide is held hostage and exchange fists and power with Stone and his team. Lefty's and Nikky's acts are very pertinent in this scene. Kikky deals Aza some death blows which drive the later into an unconscious state while lefty slugs it out with Stone. By so doing, the women fiercely fight against the forces of male oppression and repression within the film's diegetic space. Moreover, the white woman's act of calling off her relationship with Stone is another angle through which female liberation is underscored in the film.

In *Fine Wine*, Kaima is a representative of the many Nigerian women who endure extreme oppression and repression from the male folk. The silence surrounding Kaima's quest for liberation is long, protracted and loud. The poignancy of Tunji's dominance and oppression is largely seen and felt. Tunji's pugnacity, egocentrism, arrogance and marginalisation take centre stage in his and Kaima's relationship. Though Tunji professes undying love for Kaima, he prefers to have clandestine meetings and discussions with her. He also prefers to call her "Corper" in the presence of his colleagues. Kaima's words to Tunji in one of the early scenes reveal her immense frustration and dissatisfaction. She tells Tunji that: "I am not asking for a special treatment. All I am saying is [sic] be less condescending."

Tunji uses Kaima as a tool to achieve his selfish desires. To him, Kaima is nothing short of a means to his own end. When Kaima transfers her aggression and speaks rudely to Mr George, Tunji mandates her to go tender an apology. As is clearly revealed, Tunji's instruction in this regard is not borne out of his good wishes for Kaima; all he wants is to keep Mr George as his client so he can keep meeting his business target. When Tunji makes a terrible mistake regarding the figures he wrote on a document, he goads Kaima into visiting Mr George so that the latter can resign the document. Tunji does all these because of his greed and desire to keep his job.

Besides, Tunji gives no form of attention to Kaima's feelings and emotional needs. He always reneges on the many promises he makes about taking Kaima out for a date. He even forgets Kaima's birthday. Tunji's apathy towards the relationship as well as his ill-treatment is the force that pushes Kaima in the direction of Mr George. When Tunji later realises how close Kaima is to Mr George, he reprimands and maligns her. He even goes as far as referring to Kaima as a cheap slut. Tunji's proposal of marriage to Kaima on her birthday does not really come from his heart. As events later reveal, the act is borne out of his desire to "cage" Kaima from Mr George's intentions and moves.

Thus, when Kaima has had it up to her neck, she decides to fight for her freedom. This fight for freedom is however not for Kaima alone; it is for the many Nigerian women who keep

enduring masculine oppression, dominance and repression. Kaima calls off her relationship with Tunji publicly and throws Tunji's engagement ring – a symbol of his prolonged dominance – to his face. Then throwing the reactions of her mum and a number of significant others to the wind, Kaima reunites with Mr George and they both live happily ever after.

Conclusion

The study has brought to the fore the loud and protracted silence in women's struggle for liberation in Nollywood narratives. The three movies reveal in more ways than one the masculine oppression, dominance and repression that keep playing out in the diegetic universe of many Nollywood narratives. This is in spite of the series of contestations and condemnation of the trend in the body of film literature. Filmmakers are not the ones to blame for the trend. This is because films are a huge reflection of the society in which they are made. Since the Nigerian society is still deeply rooted in patriarchy and male hegemony, it is natural for Nollywood film-makers to tap into such issues in their narratives. However, joy and solace come when the subjugated women in the films decide to break the patriarchal structures and fight for their long-sought freedom. The fight of the women is thus a fight for every Nigerian woman. It is a fight against every form of patriarchy in the Nigerian society. Albeit the traces of patriarchy in Nigeria are still manifest and latent, constant treatment of the subject as well as women's struggle for liberation would help

trigger some change. Therefore, Nigerian film-makers must not rest on their oars. They must ensure that the aforementioned subjects are constantly explored in subsequent narratives with a view to effecting significant changes in the society.

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