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**Nollywood Mothering: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the  
Concept of Motherhood in Select Nigerian Films**

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**Abstract**

In the two decades of Nollywood's existence, the industry has x-rayed the gamut of human happenings in Nigeria and non-Nigerian societies and films based on themes within the realms of the emotional, psychological, political, social, religious, ritual, cultural, economic and more have been produced. The various genres of filmic arts have been employed and the products of this filmic media have been produced for local and international circulation. No sphere of the Nigerian society has remained sacrosanct from Nigerian Movie Makers. The theme of Motherhood has, like other themes, been variously explored severally in Nollywood films. Motherhood in the Nigerian society is greatly esteemed and held sacred. It is at the same time an institution in which the mothers most times are treated with less than the dignity, respect and humanity they deserve from the society. The portrayal of Motherhood in Nollywood movies, have also spanned the spectrum of conceivable and inconceivable mothering abilities in the Nigerian society. This essay intends to critically analyse the concept of motherhood as portrayed by the Nollywood Movie industry, using select relevant films to advance our purpose. Findings are expected to determine the level of accuracy in

the portrayals vis-a-vis the levels of poetic liberty appropriated in the presentations of motherhood and its impact on the society in the contemporary Nigerian reality.

### Introduction

Art in some societies, is appreciated for what it is, Art. Scholars in that school of thought conform to the ‘art for art’s sake’ theory. There are, on the other hand, scholars and societies who posit that art should function beyond its perfunctory aesthetic value and impact upon the society that creates it. According to G.V. Plekhanov, cited in Foluke Ogunleye (72), ‘art should enhance the development of human consciousness and seek to improve the social order’. Also cited in Ogunleye, C. Chervishky corroborates Plekhanov’s position on art when he asserts that ‘any work of art that does not serve a useful purpose in society would remain useless and idle occupations’. The various art forms, to that extent, are expected to, and indeed do perform a myriad of functions in the societies that give birth to them.

The art of Movie making in Nigeria, is a vibrant industry that is relatively nascent yet has a long history that dates back to the colonial era. It is a tool that has been effectively employed in x-raying every aspect of the Nigerian society; it is an industry that has created employment for millions of Nigerians; but most importantly, it is a medium that has been appropriated to narrate and give expression to topical issues in the Nigerian society. These movies, irrespective of genre, have exposed, as expected, flaws in the Nigerian society. But do these films ultimately serve any useful purpose in the society? Do they, as Plekhanov would say “enhance the development of human consciousness and seek to improve the [Nigerian] social order” or are they merely “art for art’s sake”?

This essay intends to investigate, from the socio-cultural standpoint, Nollywood’s interpretation of the concept of motherhood in the Nigerian context. An investigation of this nature, must of necessity delve, no matter how cursorily into the realm of feminist discourse to better establish the concept from the African perspective. Primary research materials for the essay include the following Nollywood home-video movies: *Enslaved* (2005), *Soul of a Maiden* (2008), *Christ in Me* (2002), *Definition of Love* (2009) and *Strength to Strength* (2009).

### Brief History of the Nigerian Video Film Industry

The convenient point in tracing the emergence of the home video industry in Nigeria is the making and release of *Living in Bondage* by NEK Video Links in 1992. The industry however has deeper roots that go back as far as the colonial era. What is today known as Nollywood, began as a result of the business instincts and ethnic links of the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria and their dominance of distribution [outlets] in major cities across the nation (Wikipedia, 2012).

Moradewun Adejumobi (2002) traces the origins of Nigerian Video Filmmaking to the Yoruba travelling Theatre Tradition (77), Hyginus Ekwuazi (2007), dates it back to the era of the documentary activities of the British Colonial Film Unit (132), Nosa Owens-Ibie lastly provides the missing link of the year the Colonial Film Unit was set up. According to Owens-Ibie in *Nigreian Movies and Films*, a colonial Film Unit was set up in 1939, with most of its programme content consisting of British Documentaries (4 of 10).

In as much as Ekwuazi, Owens-Ibie and other scholars aver to the establishment of the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) as the beginning of film in Nigeria, Adejumobi is not off point in her assertion that the Nigerian video Film Industry has its roots in the Yoruba Travelling Theatre Tradition, since the concerns of the CFU, according to her, were mainly British imperial propaganda. Indigenous local content programming developed and further enhanced with the television productions of some of the stage plays of practitioners of the tradition in the 1960s and the subsequent production of some of those plays on celluloid by practitioners of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre Tradition in the 1970s and early 1980s (Adejumo, 77). Wikipedia (2012) however, claims that indigenous producers like Ola Balogun and Hubert Ogunde engaged in the venture of big screen film productions as early as the 1960s. In spite of the divergent opinions for the acceptable entry points of motion picture into the Nigerian scene, the above scholars agree that the high costs of production; a depressed economy; increasingly low financial returns; inaccessibility of loans and materials, were major factors that forced a shift from celluloid and television technology to video film production in Nigeria.

While it is worthy to note that the making of Yoruba films using the video technology began as early as the 1960s, it was the making and releases of such video films as *Living in Bondage*, *Nneka the Pretty Serpent*, *Circle of Doom*, *Taboo*, *Glamour Girls*, *Rattle Snake*, *Violated* and a host of others, that set the stage for Nollywood as it is known today (Hyginus Ekwuazi, 2007; Jenkeri Okwori, 2003).

By the turn of the 21st century, Nollywood ‘exploded into a booming industry that pushed foreign films off the shelves, and became an industry marketed all over Africa and the rest of the world’. Nollywood, according to Hala Gorani of CNN (cited in Wikipedia 2012), has become a multi-million dollar movie industry that releases about 200 videos for the home video market every month. A 2009 UNESCO Report further confirmed Nollywood to be the second biggest film industry in the world after Bollywood in terms of output. Nollywood is also reported to be the second largest employer of labour in Nigeria (Wikipedia 1 of 3) after the banking industry.

### Trends in the Development of Nollywood

In the evolution of any phenomenon there are decipherable landmark shifts that authenticate or debunk the reality of that phenomenon. From the beginnings of the Nollywood phenomenon to the present, remarkable shifts have been noticed in the industry. Initial players using the video technology to produce their films for circulation were practitioners of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre Tradition. In the early 1990s, players from the South-Eastern region followed suit. With the incursion of producers of Igbo extraction, Nollywood became a household name, and a vibrant industry, and lastly the North also registered their presence in the industry, thereby according it full status of a federal charactered venture.

With this delineation according to geography and demography, different genres are being associated with video film productions. For instance, Adejumobi is of the opinion that “though it is difficult to describe the typical Nigerian film, certain trends have been established”. “The Industry”, she asserts, “is tending towards a diversification of style and content motivated by emerging delineation of audiences and particular types of video films”. She justifies her claims with: “Romance predominates in Hausa films of the North; Action Drama is the staple of Igbo and English films while Melodrama provides the characteristic format for many Yoruba films” (78).

Another trend observable in Nollywood discourse is the unbridled negative criticisms heaped on the Industry. Scholars, practitioners, stakeholders and audiences are quick to condemn the Industry and its productions. For Adejumobi: ‘Nigerian films attract criticism for their lack of artistic content, tendency towards stereotyping characters, suspect ideological positions, immorality, and negative portrayal of contemporary Nigerian culture’ (87-8). Hyginus Ekwuazi, upon reeling off a long list of negativism in his “Nigerian Literature and the Development of the Nigerian Film Industry” (2007), avers that “the Nigerian home video leaves much to be desired as a means of artistic expression. All it has succeeded in doing”, he continues, “is the branding of the country as a land of occultists, drug barons, swindlers and go-go girls” (134-5). In the concluding remarks of her paper titled “Emergent Issues in Widowhood Practices in Igbo Culture: Between the Video Screen and Reality” (2009), Gloria Ernest Samuel, recommends that: ‘it is imperative for filmmakers to understand the politics of patriotism and ensure that only the positive aspects of our cultures are promoted in the films’ (193).

The scholars, practitioners, viewing audience and all who are quick to condemn Nollywood conveniently forget the initial motive behind the creation of Nollywood Industry – capitalism. In producing *Living in Bondage*, Kenneth Nnebue did not in the first instance consider what ‘art for art’s sake’, functional art, or aesthetics of art involved. He did not ponder on the use or abuse of art, neither did he take into consideration, the philosophy and parameters applicable to the art of movie-making.

Nnebue was just an astute businessman who saw an opportunity to make money. He seized the opportunity and made good use of it. Most of the early filmmakers in Nigeria from the south-eastern parts of Nigeria, went into filmmaking not to promote arts and cultures of Nigeria. It was a lucrative business enterprise to be explored for economic benefits.

Decades on, Nollywood is no longer an Onitsha or Idumota based business venture, it is now an industry that has gained global recognition and acclaim. With the giant strides Nollywood is making, one is tempted to ask what the contributions of arm-chair critics are to the development of the industry, given the current fact that currently Nollywood is one of the major representative images of the Nigerian society on the global stage.

### **Socio-Cultural Construct of Motherhood in Nigeria**

In a two pronged expose, John Scott and Gordon Marshall, co-authors of *The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, describe motherhood as a 'term encompassing the practical realities and social significance of being a mother. The term 'Mothering' they posit, is the process of being, while motherhood is the condition of being a mother (428). In the simplest of terms, God's presence Emily defines motherhood as 'the state of being a mother' (111).

The socio-cultural construct of motherhood is an issue that attracts differing arguments in feminist discourse. It is pertinent for us to restate here as we have already said elsewhere (Odi 2012) that: "while some feminist schools of thought would argue that the condition of motherhood is the pinnacle of any woman's existence, others would contend that motherhood is one of the major sources of women's oppression". These divergent ideological feminist standpoints have led to the asking of such fundamental questions as: do all cultures view motherhood in the same light? Are feminist thinkers and scholars from the developed Western world in agreement on this issue with their counterparts in developing Africa and yet to develop societies? How do Western feminist thinkers conceive of the concept of motherhood and how do African feminist thinkers construct motherhood?

Since the central focus of this essay is not a contention of the concept of motherhood as constructed by various feminist schools of thought, we will not go further into that line of thought. We will however maintain that the issue of motherhood has revealed a chasm in the discourse of women's issues as it has been discovered that some western feminists may think like Nancy Chadow who suggests that "the biological [f]act of childbearing, is the key source of women's oppression" (Scott & Marshall 2005:429). Ann Crittenden cited in Emily God's presence (113) is of the view that "motherhood is the single biggest risk factor for poverty in old age". These arguments are at variance with the positions of African scholars like Catherine

Obianuju Acholonu and others whose brand of feminism introduces an African cultural perspective to the feminist discourse. Acholonu describes her “Motherism” as a “multi-dimensional theory which involves the dynamics of ordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with Mother Nature on all levels of human endeavour”. She adjudges the Motherist to be that person who “defends and protects family values, seeks truth and true knowledge, is courageous yet humble, loving, tolerant, powerful yet down to earth”. She concludes her assertion with the following: “the Motherist of necessity must be one who is willing to protect the natural and cohesive essence of the family, the child, the society and the environment”. (<http://www.Ismaelreedpub.com/CatherineAcholonu.html>). These various philosophies of feminist thinkers show clearly that the thought processing patterns of western feminist thinkers and those of pro-African feminist thinkers are distinctly different and consequently, the cultural factors of the different societies becomes a vital factor in discourse on the woman issue.

### **Socio-Cultural Image of the Nigerian Mother**

Every society has unique cultures that contain norms and values which differentiate them from other cultures. The female gender of the human race constitute the greater majority of the global society, and from whichever perspective the woman in society is viewed at, it will be agreed that she is extremely indispensable to her society. The woman not only bears life, she nurtures life because all human form passes through her own body to become (John Mbiti 1988).

The Nigerian woman is identified and given recognition on account of her relationships with other members of her society. She is perceived either as a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, or most often a combination of more than one of the above identity markers.

In the African society, a woman’s individuality is subsumed within the above social markers. She is recognised first by her status in her family and community before she is recognised for who she is as a human person. Wifhood in the cultural worldview of the Nigerian society is a logically necessary rite of passage to motherhood. Wifhood is a revered institution in the Nigerian context. The traditional Nigerian wife, important as she is to the growth and development of her family and community at large, is viewed as incomplete and in some instances, no more than a decorative piece in her husband’s estate, until she is initiated into the higher institution of motherhood. Her status changes only when she becomes a mother. Motherhood elevates the Nigerian wife from her mute decorative status to, in the words of Taiwo Makinde: ‘she who has been conferred with the power to exercise authority in her husband’s house’ (167). Who then, is the Nigerian mother?

The answer to the above question lies in Acholonu's Motherist theory. The Nigerian mother is that person who is "willing to protect the natural and cohesive essence of the family, the child, the society and the environment". She is that woman who is courageous, humble, loving, tolerant and above all, down to earth. The typical Nigerian mother would, for the sake of her children, endure a lifetime of an unhappy marriage (Makinde 167). The Nigerian mother therefore, is that woman who will do all within her natural abilities to provide for, protect, nurture, and safe-guard the lives of her children to her dying days. Mbiti asserts that "a mother's bond with her child begins when the child is conceived in the womb and lasts until the mother dies" (Mbiti 1988). Mbiti's assertion bears a serious contextual cultural significance since in the African society, a child is expected to outlive and bury his/her parents and not the other way round.

#### **Thematic Analysis of Select Nigerian Home Video Movies:**

Every art form mirrors the society that produces it, to that extent, Nollywood movies project themes existing within the Nigerian society. The theme of motherhood is one that is central to many Nollywood movies. This is because most Nollywood movies draw their themes from the domestic realm of the society. And being movies set within the domestic domain they revolve round the nuclear institution of the family. Any activity that revolves round the home must of necessity treat issues affecting members of the family and in any home, the role of mother is cardinal, irrespective of the light in which she is projected.

This segment of the essay is aimed at scrutinising the concept of motherhood as created, produced, directed and performed by Nollywood actors. It will, at this point be pertinent to state that all mothers are not cut out of the same mould therefore, to expect a template-like performance of that role will not be seen to be realistic. As no two human beings are exactly alike, so also no two mothers are the same anywhere in the world. Every mother has her own unique individuality, traits and mothering abilities. In Nollywood, there are some recognised actresses who for reasons of talent, abilities and possibly age, have become stock-mother role players.

This assertion is not made in a negative or derogatory sense. These famous and talented actresses, when they play out the roles of mother, always clinch the role. These actresses are as versatile as they are rounded to the extent that even within the box of stock mother role, their interpretations are fluid and dynamic in every different production. Actresses in this ilk include: Joke Silva, Ngozi Ezeonu, Ebere Okaro, Bukky Ajayi, Rachel Oniga, Patience Ozokwor, Uche Ebere, Kasandra Odita, Camilla Mgberekpe and Shola Sobowale to mention a few. For the purpose of this paper the following Nollywood home video films are going to be studied: *Enslaved* (2005), *Soul of a Maiden* (2008), *Christ in Me* (2002), *Definition of Love* (2008) and *Strength to Strength* (2009).

Because the identity of the Nigerian mother is subsumed by her relationships with other members of her family and larger society, she becomes a secondary consideration in the affairs of the society. It is therefore logical to presume that themes of motherhood will be subplots and subthemes in relation to the major plots and themes that revolve around other members of the family especially the husbands and children. For purposes of a better reading, this segment will be divided into two parts. The first part will give synopses of the main plots of the movies after which critical analyses of the theme of motherhood will be scrutinised in the second part of the segment.

***Enslaved*<sup>1</sup>:** *Enslaved* treats the theme of an incestuous relationship between an uncle and his orphaned niece. Dr Sam (Justus Esiri) a psychiatrist takes into his home, his little niece upon the death of her parents. At about age thirteen, Dr Sam manipulates the mind of young Monica (Stephanie Okereke), initiates and maintains a clandestine sexual relationship with her that lasts into her adult years. As an adult, Monica is unable to commit to any healthy sexual relationship with any man because of her schizophrenic personalities which are always at war inside her. Her split personality disorder, induced by her uncle's abominable inhuman treatment of her, turns her into a crazed Jekyll and Hyde serial killer.

In the cause of defending Monica in charges of multiple murders Barrister Andrew (Desmond Elliot) falls in love with Monica, and the two secretly get married. Dr. Sam on learning of the marriage, as usual, aggravates the psychotic side of Monica who attempts to kill Andrew as she had, the men in her previous relationships. In a bizarre Romeo and Juliet twist, Andrew stabs Monica and then stabs himself with intent to kill. Luckily, they do not die. They are rescued, taken to hospitals and treated. In the end, Dr Sam goes mad as he believes the ghost of Andrew is haunting him. The couple regains their health and are able to pick up the threads of their lives and live peacefully together thereafter.

***Soul of a Maiden:*** *Soul of a Maiden* highlights theme of the Caste (Osu) system in South-Eastern Nigeria. When Prince Obieze (Mike Ezuruonye) comes of age, his father the King (Laz Ekwueme) of Afa-nasa, intends to choose a wife for him from the annual Virgins' Dance as is the custom of the Kingdom. Obieze's heart however is with Olamma, an *Nwa-Apata* (Osu). The King, vehemently opposed to the Prince's choice of bride, tries all he can to frustrate the Prince's effort to marry Olamma. Nuria (Mercy Johnson), the King's first choice of wife for Obieze is also advancing her own strategies to destroy the budding romance between Obieze and Olamma. As events unfold, Nuria, Agaba (Palace Chief Guard) and all those who conspired to have Olamma kidnapped are banished from Afa-nasa and the Osu system abolished in the Kingdom. In the end, the couple broke off the relationship and went their separate ways.

**Christ in Me:** *Christ in Me* treats the theme of jealousy among friends and a mother's unconditional love even for a stubborn child who refuses to heed her mother's advice. Linda (Maureen Silver) ignored her mother's (Shola Sobowale) advice to steer clear off her friend, Thelma (Pascaline Edward), who her mother dreamt was evil. On her wedding night, Thelma charms Richard (Tony Umez), Linda's husband, with a love potion. Richard abandons Linda for Thelma, who keeps administering the potion to ensure that Richard does not go back to his wife, Linda. Not content with stealing Richard from Linda, Thelma entreats the juju priest to turn Linda mad. Both mothers (Richard's and Linda's), on discovering that Linda, instead of being dead as they had earlier presumed, is actually alive but mad and roaming the streets of Calabar, go in search of her and rescues her. In a miraculous and religious twist, the juju priest commissioned by Thelma to perpetrate her evil deeds is struck by lightning and dies; Richard is taken to a church and delivered by the pastor of the church; Linda is miraculously healed of her madness by a love song composed by Richard especially for her. For all her atrocities, Thelma goes mad, is hit by a car and dies on the spot.

**Definition of Love:** in *Definition of Love*, the themes of Campus love that goes tragic and a mother's sacrifice for her son are played out. Laz (Van Vicker) and Lizzy (Chika Ike) fall in love on Campus and the relationship blossoms during the Holidays. While out on a picnic, they had an auto accident in which Lizzy goes blind. Blaming himself for Lizzy's condition, Lazz is determined to give sight back to Lizzy by donating his own eyes for her to undergo eye surgery. The fact that Lazz is diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour only strengthens his resolve to carry out his plan. Laz's father, Barrister Fred (Livinus Nnochiri) seeks medical attention for his son while trying to dissuade him from his fool-hardy mission. To succeed in his mission, Laz institutes a law suit against his father for denying him of his fundamental and constitutional right to do with his life and death as he (Laz) wished. Faced with imminent destruction of her family, Laz's mother (Ngozi Ezeonu) commits suicide. In her suicide note, she requests that her eyes be donated to Linda to enable her undergo the surgery, thereby saving her son from committing suicide as was his intent. Lizzy is operated upon, regains her sight, and is reunited with Laz who undergoes and survives neurosurgery.

**Strength to Strength:** the primordial theme of a mother's love for her children forms the powerful subtheme of the love story between Jane (Mercy Johnson) and Nick (Mike Ezuruonye). Madam Juwase (Patience Ozokwor), Jane and Angela's (Tonto Dikeh) mother bluntly forbids the relationship between her Youth Corper daughter Jane and the penniless radio mechanic (Engineering graduate) Nick. When the tables turn for Nick, the same Madam Juwase, seeing that Nick, having been employed by NNPC, in her estimation, now has a future that can better secure her daughter's future, becomes his staunch advocate. Nick's mother (Camilla Mgberekpe), badgers Nick persistently to get married so she can become a grandmother. The botched abortion Jane and Nick

committed in their days of penury, led to Nick's mother's belligerent attitude towards Jane who is unable to have children four years after marriage. For peace to reign in her home, Jane pleads with her sister Angela to help her save her marriage by marrying Nick to ensure that Nick has children. Angela and Nick get married, not long after, Angela is impregnated and she gives birth to a daughter. Nick's mother becomes a grandmother. When Angela gets pregnant a second time, Nick's mother is overjoyed. She goads Angela to antagonise her sister Jane. For her perseverance, Jane miraculously gets pregnant. Angela dies during childbirth and once again, Jane takes charge of her home.

### Portrayal of Mothers in the Films

In *Enslaved*, Andrew's mother (Kasandra Oditia) is portrayed as a mother who wants the best for her children. When her son tells her he is going to marry Monica, her primary concern is for her son's safety. She cannot comprehend why of all the girls in the city, he chooses to marry one that is insane. No African mother would willingly allow her child to marry a mad girl. In a heated argument with her son she tells him as much: "...in other words, you want to go and bring a mad woman as daughter-in-law to me..." She laments further "my son who has refused to marry...who has finally decided to get married has chosen to go to a psychiatric ward to bring me a mad woman as daughter-in-law". After that show of her disapproval of the marriage, she fizzles out of the picture. Her sole purpose in the film, it seems, is to show her disapproval of Andrew marrying Monica. Her character is not developed. Mrs Sam (Ngozi Ezeonu) probably because she is actually Monica's aunt-in-law and not her biological mother, does not notice anything amiss until her husband starts presenting signs of derangement. She goes to a pastor who reveals to her that all is not well with her family. From that point on, Mrs Sam is seen exhibiting nothing but concern for Monica's health and wellbeing.

Olamma's mother in *Soul of a Maiden* up till her death is very visible. But in her visibility, she is silent and helpless, bound by the shackles of culture and tradition. She is gravely worried when Olamma vows to remain and die a virgin so as not to subject any child of hers to the fate of an Osu. Even though her mother knows Olamma cannot, like her mates, hope to be married and be a mother and home builder, she is distressed by Olamma's vow for fear that it may come true. When Prince Obieze brings gifts to her home to ask for Olamma's hand in marriage, Olamma's mother is beside herself with joy that her own *Nwa-Apata* daughter is to marry the prince and have the kind of life she and her type can only dream of. All through the film, she is supportive of her daughter.

In *Christ in Me*, the characters of Linda and Richard's mothers are sequentially well rounded and progressive. In her dream, Linda's mother sees Thelma hurt her daughter. When she later sees Linda with Thelma, she sternly warns her daughter to

have nothing to do with Thelma. Linda's stubbornness leads to everything that happens thereafter. When Linda is declared missing, her mother is grief stricken. Richard's mother, in a similar vein, loves her daughter-in-law. When she learns that Richard is beating up his wife, she does not hesitate to give him the full length of her tongue. When both mothers are told that Linda has been seen roaming the streets of Calabar mad, without hesitation, they proceed to Calabar and do not return until they find Linda and bring her back home. The mothers, who incidentally, are widows, did not relent until they saved their children from the clutches of the evil Thelma.

In *Definition of Love*, the fathers' characters are more developed than those of the mothers. Lizzy's mother (Geraldine Ekeocha) is always just hovering in the background not making any meaningful contribution to the development of the story, except on the few occasions she stands up to her husband to allow their son, Laz see Lizzy. Laz's mother (Ngozi Ezeonu) is not positively portrayed either. She is presented as a mother whose whole life and purpose in the film is leading to the moment when she commits suicide so her eyes could be given to Lizzy. As a mother caught in the middle of a bitter and life threatening battle between her husband and son, her constant reprieve is in fainting, an act that portrays her as a weak helpless mother.

*Strength to Strength* highlights a widowed mother's resolve to ensure that her two daughters marry into wealth to secure their future. When Madam Juwase noticed her daughter Jane's involvement with the penniless Nick, she fails to see the potentials in the young graduate. In the face of Madam Juwase's antagonism towards Nick, Angela tries to convince their mother to give Nick and Jane a chance as her antagonism towards Nick is going too far. In response, Madam Juwase retorts:

if going too far is what will make you and your sister realise that I want the best for you, then, I am prepared to go too far, ten times over... A man that has no money has no future. A man without a future cannot marry my daughter.

When the concerned mother notices that the tables have turned for penniless Nick as he secures a job with NNPC, she welcomes him as her daughter's suitor with open arms. Nick's mother on the other hand, only wishes her son would marry and give her grandchildren. She is completely blind to the fact that her son is a principled and focused young man who bears his life of penury with dignity. She is ready to force him to marry a village maiden, to achieve her goal of becoming a grandmother. Initially, she was not averse to Nick marrying Jane. But when Jane could not get pregnant four years into marriage, Nick's mother determines once again to reinstate the village maiden option to have the grandchildren she craves, because according to her "any woman who cannot reproduce cannot parade herself as a wife". As soon as Angela gave birth to her first child and got pregnant with the second child, Nick's mother could not contain her joy and appreciation of Angela.

### **Cultural Reality of Nigerian Mothers**

From the beginning of time, the Nigerian woman's identity is subsumed in her relationship with male members of her family especially her husband and children. As soon as the Nigerian woman gets married, she loses her individuality and identity to her husband. During the ceremonies, she is exhorted to love, honour, obey and be submissive to her husband (loss of individuality). She is bound by traditions and cultural norms that work towards excluding her from important decision making processes in her family and larger society. Strangled as she is, by patriarchally constructed cultural practices, she hovers perpetually on the brink of obscurity.

The fundamental factors that keep mothers from being active participants in decision making processes are succinctly highlighted in *Enslaved* and *Definition of Love*. The mothers in *Christ in Me* and *Strength to Strength* are firm and assertive. This exhibition of strength may probably be due to the fact that they are widows and do not have visible male family members to make and take decisions on their behalf. They are thus emboldened by their circumstances and take charge of their lives and issues concerning their children.

In the course of analysing the films, in addition to the above, the following observations were made:

- i. The mothers<sup>2</sup> were subsumed within the identities and personalities of their husbands and children where applicable;
- ii. The mothers' characters were not proportionately, logically or sequentially developed in relation to those of other characters in the films;
- iii. The mothers for the most part were only hovering in the shadows of their children and husbands, not making any meaningful contributions in the affairs of the family or to the general development of the story;
- iv. Where applicable, the mothers become the sacrificial lambs that save the family from disaster, chaos and anarchy.
- v. The worth of mothers as human persons of value in the family and society is not recognised or celebrated in any way in the films.

The portrayals of mothers in the films are reflexive of the Nigerian mother in society. While the gestures, mannerisms and thought processing faculties of the mothers in some of the films are either understated, pedestrian or exaggerated, they clearly relay that the Nigerian mother in the films, just like the actual Nigerian mother in society, lives for her husband and children.

### **Conclusion**

Nollywood home video movies like every other art form, x-rays the characters, activities, and institutions of the Nigerian society. Given the fact that art imitates life

but is not real, artistic liberties are taken to increase the aesthetic values of the filmic productions. Nonetheless, the movies essentially, mirror the Nigerian society. The theme of motherhood and mothering techniques, have been given ample attention in Nollywood movies. In mirroring the Nigerian institution of motherhood, the social and cultural inhibitions of the female gender cannot escape being brought to the fore.

The mothers are projected as hovering in the shadows of their children and husbands without a real face or identity of their own. Mothers, no matter their mothering abilities or skills, in the Nigerian context, qualify as humans only by their affinities with their husbands and children. Nollywood to that extent captures the socio-cultural strangulations of mothers in the patriarchal society that is Nigeria and indeed the whole of Africa.

The irony however in the matter of a mother's socio-cultural loss of her individuality and identity lies in the fact that it is a phenomenon that cannot be overturned at least not in the immediate future. Nonetheless, mothers as the sole procreators of the human race and therefore deserve to be respected and treated as human persons on their own merit and not as appendages or extensions of other [especially male] members of their families.

Nollywood holds up the mirror of the Nigerian society but can distort reality only so far. Before Nollywood's portrayal of the condition of motherhood and the process of mothering can be expected to be exhibited positively via the medium of home video movies, the society must first have a complete over-haul in their perception and treatment of women and give them the respect, dignity and space that are their rights as human persons belonging to the Nigerian society.

#### Notes

- 1 the African society is a communal one hence a mother in the African context is not just she who gives birth biologically to a child. The African mother are all those who contribute positively to the education, growth and development of children in the community.
- 2 Madam Juwase in *Strength to Strength* to great extent is different from the other mothers in the films not because her role was crafted any differently from the others but because Patience Ozokwor is a strong actress that dominates every scene she appears in no matter the role she is playing.

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