



Rethinking Trauma and Gender Dynamics in Nigeria Films: A Comparative Analysis of *Damage* and *Mr. and Mrs*

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Abstract: *The subjugation of women within certain aspects of Nigerian culture is a significant concern that necessitates comprehensive efforts across multiple levels, including individual, relational, community, and societal interventions. Recently, both organizations and filmmakers have sought to highlight various societal issues that persistently traumatize women and children in the country. This research, therefore, offers an in-depth comparative analysis of trauma and gender dynamics as portrayed in the films *Damage* and *Mr. and Mrs*. Utilizing a qualitative methodology that combines content analysis of the selected films with Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence, the research posits that the intricate depictions of violence in both films can be understood through their societal and cultural contexts. By examining the characters' responses to challenges and conflicts, the study evaluates how effectively these films confront and dismantle traditional gender norms, fostering essential discourse on trauma, resilience, and societal transformation. A crucial aspect of the research involves examining audience attitudes and behaviors related to gender-based violence (GBV), assessed before, during, and after the viewing experience. This component provides significant insights into viewers' perceptions, emotional reactions, and their understanding of GBV and its implications. Moreover, the study engages with crucial questions about establishing a more equitable community, where the dynamics between men and women move beyond the oppressive 'master and slave' paradigm. By delving into these themes, this research aims to enhance the growing body of literature that investigates the media's critical role in shaping public perceptions and narratives surrounding gender-based violence*

Keywords: *Gender-based Violence (GBV), Resilience, Structural violence, Nollywood, Trauma*

I. Introduction

The film, a narrative conveyed through a sequence of dynamic visuals intended for presentation on television or in theaters, refers to a flexible plastic roll with light-sensitive properties similar to that used in photography. Commonly known as movies or motion pictures, films consist of a series of moving images derived from recording photographic stills or generating visuals using animation and visual effects techniques. Films are a popular entertainment and a potent tool for education and influence, particularly among children. According to Cook (2007), films comprise individual image components known as frames, which create the illusion of motion when shown rapidly in succession. As a medium of mass communication, film plays a vital role in society, serving to educate, entertain, and inform audiences. The Chamber Dictionary of the twentieth century describes the film as a thin surface of a mainframe coated with a light-sensitive substance used to capture photographs on a strip of celluloid prepared with the same coating. This process facilitates the creation of instantaneous photographs preserved through cinematography as a series of motion pictures.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English defines violence as the unlawful use of physical force or intimidation relating to conduct, treatment, outrage, and injury. It is a complex phenomenon encompassing various forms of harm across interpersonal, institutional, and structural relationships, including physical, psychological, emotional, and social dimensions (Trends in Organized Crime, 2020). The effects of violence on female children and women are profound, manifesting as physical, sexual, and emotional violence, along with neglect (World Health Organization, 2023). These forms of violence can result in severe consequences for health and quality of life, including physical injuries, trauma, and significant mortality rates among adolescents (World Health Organization, 2013). Additionally, violence contributes to various health issues, such as mental health disorders and chronic diseases (Trends in Organized Crime, 2020).

The impacts of violence extend beyond individuals, affecting families, communities, and societies as a whole. Violence against female children and women undermines their fundamental rights and hinders social and economic development. It perpetuates gender inequalities, limits educational and employment opportunities, and contributes to the overall disempowerment of women (World Health Organization, 2013). Therefore, addressing and preventing violence against children and women requires comprehensive efforts at multiple levels, including individual, relational, community, and societal interventions (World Health Organization, 2013).

The subjugation of women in certain aspects of Nigerian culture remains a significant concern. According to Odunjinrin (1993, cited in Ihechu et al., 2017), practices that empower men to oppress women are widely tolerated in many societies and are deeply ingrained in cultural beliefs. This includes the acceptance of husbands physically chastising their spouses. Despite efforts by policymakers, civil society organizations, and activists to combat this issue, gender-based violence remains a significant challenge in the country. Filmmakers have taken it upon themselves to address this pressing issue in many movies.

Therefore, this research undertakes a thorough comparative analysis of the intricate themes of trauma and gender dynamics as depicted in Nigerian film narratives, with a particular focus on the films *Damage* and *Mr. and Mrs.* The primary objective is to investigate how these narratives influence perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) within the specific socio-cultural context of Nigerian society.

Employing a qualitative research approach, the study integrates an in-depth content analysis of the selected films with Johan Galtung's structural violence theory to provide a nuanced understanding of the various forms of violence illustrated in both narratives. This analysis encompasses a detailed examination of the types of violence represented ranging from physical and emotional abuse to societal oppression along with the contextual circumstances that give rise to such violence and the characters' responses to their situations. Additional secondary sources will include newspapers, journals, textbooks, the internet, and various media outlets.

Through this multifaceted lens, the research critically evaluates how these films challenge traditional gender norms and catalyze meaningful discourse on trauma, resilience, and empowerment themes. A significant component of the study includes an assessment of audience attitudes and behaviors regarding GBV. This encompasses pre-viewing expectations,

emotional responses during the films, and post-viewing reflections, thereby providing valuable insights into the audience's perceptions and understanding of GBV.

Moreover, the research delves into pressing questions about fostering a more equitable society where the dynamics between men and women are grounded in respect and equality rather than a hierarchical 'enslaver and slave' framework. By engaging with these critical issues, the study aspires to contribute significantly to the expanding body of literature concerning the role of media in shaping public perceptions and dialogues surrounding gender-based violence and societal change.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Historical Overview of Film and Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

Film, a narrative presented through dynamic visuals for television or theatrical display, encompasses a flexible plastic medium with light-sensitive properties akin to photographic film. Commonly referred to as movies or motion pictures, films consist of moving images produced through photographic stills, animation, or visual effects. As Cook (2007) articulated, these images, known as frames, create the illusion of motion when shown in rapid succession. As a significant medium of mass communication, film holds a vital role in society, serving to educate, entertain, and inform audiences, particularly children. According to the Chamber Dictionary of the twentieth century, film is a thin medium coated with a light-sensitive substance for capturing photographs, enabling the creation of motion pictures through cinematography.

The representation of violence in media has been a longstanding topic of debate among scholars. While studies generally agree on its prevalence, disagreements arise regarding its effects. The Kaiser Family Foundation (2003) found that exposure to television violence can lead to increased aggressive behavior and desensitization, resulting in a greater acceptance of violence as usual.

Iteji et al. (2021) argue that Nollywood plays a crucial role in Africa's self-reflection and identity construction, reflecting various cultural, economic, and political contexts (Kunzler, 2007; Iteji et al., 2021, 10). This influence is evident in films that address themes like marriage breakdown, gender-based violence, and divorce. Ogundipe's study analyzed twelve such films, revealing that:

Male dominance is apparent in all twelve films examined, although more heavily so in *Saworoide*, *Agogo Eewo*, and *T'oluwa N'ile*, set in traditional rural settings. Nevertheless, even in urban situations like in *Power of Love* and comical *Ukwa*, *Stupid*, *Atinga* and others, the men have upper hand and take all the decisions. Sites of patriarchy include domestic work, paid work, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions like the levirate and widowhood (95)

Consequently, Nollywood's utilization of the video-film medium to present narratives establishes its authority by allowing the audience to witness the unfolding actions through visual experiences. These film narratives, centered on themes of gender domination and gender-based violence, often mirror prevailing social realities in the present era, thus aiming to rectify the prevailing imbalance. Utoh-Ezeajugh and Anijah (2017) elaborate on how these film narratives intriguingly reflect potent cultural influences on gender dynamics and conflicts, particularly within marital relationships. Okoronkwo and Nwankwo in Utoh-Ezeajugh and Anijah (2017) further support this notion, asserting that the creative input in these film narratives is significantly influenced by cultural elements (105). Consequently, the depicted

images portray existing situations and convey motivational messages that stimulate social change. Each film story carries a motive that either sympathizes with or condemns individuals and situations to uphold specific moral values.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Structural Violence

The term “structural violence” was firmly established in social research in the 1960s by Johan Galtung and has since gained significant traction as a robust conceptual framework in public health research and medical anthropology. Structural violence embodies the systematic and indirect forms of harm, deprivation, and injustice entrenched in our social, political, and economic systems. It effectively reveals how societal arrangements and power dynamics create and perpetuate disparities, leading to unequal distributions of resources, opportunities, and overall well-being among individuals and communities.

In public health research and medical anthropology, structural violence is essential for scholars seeking to uncover the underlying social determinants and root causes of health inequalities. It emphasizes that factors such as poverty, discrimination, and institutional practices profoundly impact health outcomes and access to healthcare services, making it a critical focus for understanding and addressing health disparities. By studying structural violence, researchers aim to understand the complex interplay between social structures, power relations, and health outcomes to identify potential avenues for promoting social justice, equity, and improved health outcomes for marginalized populations. Paul Farmer and others in *Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine* (2006) believe:

... structural violence attempts to explain why certain people in society are particularly at risk of unnecessary suffering and death, accusing political, economic, and social structures within society of hindering people from meeting their needs and reaching their full potential. (1372).

Due to the inherent inefficiencies of societal structures, assigning accountability for this form of discrimination proves challenging, making structural violence a complex issue to address. Farmer elaborates on the concept of “structural violence” as “normalized social arrangements ingrained in society encompassing economic, religious, cultural, and political aspects—that generate disparities in access to resources” (2006). In this context, the term “violence” refers to the suffering inflicted upon victims despite the absence of overt physical aggression, often going unnoticed. Galtung (1993), as cited in Ho (2007), argues that violence includes “infringements upon fundamental human needs and, more broadly, life itself, suppressing the actualization of potential levels of need satisfaction” (197).

As previously emphasized, Farmer and other scholars regard “structural violence” as a fitting term for the suffering structured by historical processes and forces that conspire to restrict agency within the legal framework. In this understanding, structural violence limits individuals’ choices and opportunities, trapping them within a societal web that makes escape difficult, thereby diminishing their influence within the system. Consequently, structured societal disparities are central to structural violence, preventing individuals from realizing their full potential and denying them equal enjoyment of human rights in comparison to their counterparts.

The cinema exhibits resemblances to theatrical practices, particularly in fostering ensemble performances. Despite inherent disparities, both forms of expression are rooted in theater. As a medium for research and education, the film possesses distinctive attributes that

enable it to capture cultural dynamics, delve into social and political matters, address topics such as gender-based violence, and explore various dimensions of societal phenomena. The *Encyclopaedia Americana* argues that:

Films allow scientists to see the aspects of the world that are difficult to see with the human eye...the influence of motion pictures permeates all levels of contemporary life. The ideas and images people in different societies have of one another are greatly influenced by the films they have seen (566).

The aforementioned proposition highlights the significant influence of film as a medium in conveying ideas, concepts, and urgent global issues, particularly the fight against gender-based violence. Drawing on Luis Bunuel's viewpoint, Lee Bobker underscores the power of cinema as a formidable yet potentially dangerous tool, serving as an exceptional means to express a wide range of thoughts, emotions, and instincts. The artistic manipulation of cinematic imagery mirrors the workings of the mind during sleep, making it an unparalleled form of human expression. Furthermore, David Keer points out an intriguing aspect of Lesotho's famous theatre, which extensively utilizes various media forms—including radio drama, cartoon comics, and video performances. These media not only supplement but can also replace live performances, particularly in remote villages where accessibility is challenging.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Traumatic Experiences of Gender-Based Violence in *Damage and Mr. and Mrs.*

a. Synopsis of *Damage*

Despite intermittent periods of harmony, Taiwo and Sarah, a prominent married couple portrayed by Uche Jombo and Kalu Ikeagu, respectively, grapple with a tumultuous relationship marked by domestic violence. Episodes of extreme violence plague their relationship as the couple remains oblivious to the detrimental effects of their violent relationship until it reaches an irreversible point. Through its portrayal of the characters' experiences, *Damage* sheds light on the themes of gender domination and domestic violence, highlighting the far-reaching impact of such dynamics on both the individuals involved and their children. The narrative explores the reluctance to acknowledge the role of violence in the couple's relationship until it becomes too late to salvage the 'damage' caused.

b. Traumatic Experiences in *Damage*

The producers of the film *Damage* engage meaningfully with the issue of domestic violence, presenting a cinematic work that highlights urgent socio-cultural realities in Africa. This aligns with Higson Farmer's focus on the structural violence perpetuated by patriarchy within African societies. The strained relationship between Sarah and Taiwo exemplifies this power dynamic, marked by frequent conflicts stemming from their struggles over respect. Sarah, feeling that Taiwo is insensitive to her and their children's emotions, often argues with him. Taiwo, in turn, insists on his way of doing things at home, clashing with Sarah's independence and undermining his sense of masculinity. In many African cultures, there is an expectation for wives to depend on their husbands, but Sarah defies this norm with her successful entrepreneurial pursuits. Her financial independence equips her with the confidence to assert herself in her interactions with Taiwo, who, in turn, resorts to violence. According to him:

TAIWO: I do not need to be here. My wife was better positioned to be brought here while I was in the office, working so hard. You could have at least called my wife. I mean, she is more suitable to handle things like this.

SARAH: Excuse me?

TAIWO: Honey, please am trying to make a point here...

SARAH: Don't! I hate it when you come out sounding all important like you are the only

one with a job. I was called out of the office too, I was working.

TAIWO: Office? You call that an office? Where you sit around dolling out your father's money to various charities, office? We both know that is one of your (mimics) *Hey! Daddy, I don't want to be one of those sit at home mummies, get me something to do kind of business.*

(To SARAH) I work for a living, I provide for our family, so don't you ...

SARAH: Do you know how irritating it is, to hear you insult my family like this at every chance you get ...

TAIWO: I am not insulting anybody, I work for a living and I was brought out here for nothing, for this? You should have been at home, being a house wife ...

(Damage, 2013)

Taiwo uses both structural and psychological tactics to dominate his wife, Sarah. Her unwavering confidence increasingly undermines his ego, leading him to verbal abuse and personality degradation. He exhibits extreme jealousy, forbidding Sarah from having visitors, including family. For instance, he prevents his sister Dorothy from discussing essential matters with Sarah, even escorting her away.

Sarah suffers daily spousal abuse over trivial issues, expected to give Taiwo her full attention and avoid indifference. This dynamic reflects a form of "domestic slavery," where Taiwo's authoritative language contributes to emotional abuse. Although Sarah comes from a privileged background, she submits to his control. Attempts to discuss essential issues often trigger Taiwo's masochistic tendencies, resulting in conflicts. The couple frequently fights in public, regardless of their surroundings.

This couple engages in frequent and public fights, regardless of the audience or location, even in the presence of their children. In one instance, they are summoned by their son's principal due to an issue he has with another student at school. However, upon arriving at the principal's office, they lose control and engage in mutual insults, even directing their ire towards the principal himself.

PRINCIPAL: Your son has a problem with resorting to physical confrontations.

TAIWO: I believe my son is not the problem here; rather, I think the school is the issue.

PRINCIPAL: What I am trying to convey is that your son requires parental guidance on conflict resolution.

TAIWO: Listen, on the contrary, I believe it is the school that requires a reorientation on how to handle children... After paying such a high fee, the school is unable to teach an eight-year-old child the importance of dialogue and communication. *(Damage, 2013)*

The principal inadvertently loses control of the intended briefing session and becomes a spectator to the unfolding drama. Sarah, unable to tolerate Taiwo's insults, storms out of the principal's office and into her car, with Taiwo following suit. The altercation continues along the highway until the intervention of a police officer is required to bring an end to the situation.

The question arises as to what is the impact of growing up in a hostile household where abuse is prevalent. Such an environment leads individuals to derive solace from witnessing the brutalization or immolation of suspects, thereby fostering a sense of excitement and motivation towards engaging in thuggery in service of unscrupulous politicians. Nicole Ndigwe, one of the authors of *Damage*, asserts in an interview that our society must acknowledge that the effects of domestic violence on children differ based on gender. Males and females comprehend and respond to the same realities in distinct ways. Nicole Ndigwe's assertion highlights the complex ways in which boys and girls process and react to domestic violence, shaped not only by their individual temperaments but also by societal expectations and norms. For instance, boys who grow up in hostile environments may learn to respond with aggression, often feeling pressured to embody traditional notions of masculinity that equate strength with domination. Their exposure to violence may lead them to engage in rebellious, confrontational behavior, viewing physicality as a means of asserting control or gaining respect among peers. This reaction could drive boys like Dami's possible male counterparts to become involved in street gangs or criminal activities, believing these actions validate their identity and masculine prowess.

Conversely, girls like Dami may experience internalized feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness due to the patterns of abuse they witness. As Dami does with the fighters, they might respond by seeking safety through relationships or alliances with solid figures. Such connections may offer a semblance of security in a chaotic world. However, they could also lead to potentially harmful choices, such as engaging in dangerous fights to prove their worth or gain approval.

Additionally, societal expectations often encourage girls to be nurturing and empathetic, which can complicate their response to violence. For example, Dami feels compelled to care for her parents despite their abusive behavior, viewing her role as a peacemaker. This nurturing instinct traps her in a cycle of emotional turmoil, making it difficult for her to advocate for her own needs or escape the toxic environment. She had to seek solace and refuge by attaching to fighters engaged in organized fights for monetary gain. These fights become a form of business, with participants placing bets and earning income through combat. Dami befriends one of the fighters, who becomes the sole confidant she can rely on.

In a conversation between Dami and the fighter, the harsh realities of street fights are brought to light, warning Dami against participating due to the inherent dangers involved. However, Dami shares her recent academic achievement, suggesting she might ask her father to enroll her in taekwondo lessons as a celebratory gift. Amused, the fighter encourages her to approach her father, highlighting the positive nature of her accomplishment and the potential for a reward. Inspired, Dami considers sharing her idea with her father and excitedly hurries home, leaving the fighter behind.

This newly adopted lifestyle directly results from the constant conflicts and property damage witnessed within her household. It is widely acknowledged that nature and nurture play crucial roles in an individual's development. The relentless quarrels and fights that Dami is exposed to daily at home significantly influence her behavior towards her parents, ultimately leading to a psychiatric concern.

3,2 Synopsis of Mr. and Mrs.

"Mr. and Mrs.," directed by Ikechukwu Onyeka, explores gender disparities and domestic violence within a patriarchal society through the lens of two households. Ken Abah, a wealthy

entrepreneur depicted by Benjamin Joseph, embodies chauvinism, while his highly educated wife, Susan Abah (Nse Ikpe-Etim), feels constricted in her role despite her successes. As Ken insists she is a homemaker, Susan faces objectification and demands, ultimately leading her to confront him after discovering his infidelity. Their divorce is complicated by family politics during gubernatorial elections, forcing them to cohabit. Through this arrangement, Susan embraces her independence but continues to face Ken's jealousy. Meanwhile, close family friends Charles and Linda struggle with their issues, compounded by Linda's demanding job, leading Charles to have an affair with their housemaid. Both couples seek counseling from the same lawyer, ultimately working through their challenges and striving for reconciled relationships.

3.3 Content Analysis of *Mr. and Mrs.*

The film *Mr. and Mrs.* presents contrasting households that exemplify different dynamics related to domestic violence. In Family "A," Ken embodies patriarchal dominance, reflecting the African cultural context. Conversely, Linda in Family "B" represents a Western feminist perspective within a family setting. Meanwhile, Susan in Family "A" represents the African "Womanist" ideology, where women are traditionally confined to domestic roles, leading to feelings of subjugation. Susan, however, embraces her role as a wife and mother, diligently maintaining her home and striving for excellence in her culinary skills. Despite her qualifications as a lawyer, she is denied the opportunity to hire a house cleaner and pursue professional work, solely due to her husband's desire to fulfill the role of a 'housewife' because he feels she may become arrogant once she starts earning. He affirms this with their Therapist when he asserts:

Doctor: Mr. ABAH, people do not work just for the money.

There's the fulfillment you get when you know you are meeting a need somewhere. You meet people, feel relevant

Mr. Abah cuts her short... yeah, you just got it; she wants to socialize.

Doctor: giggles! So?

Mr. ABAH: C'mon. I won't have it; you know how women are? They would have a negative influence on her. Most of the women who do these things rebel against their husbands, and considering my social and political status, I can't have it; it will be embarrassing. (M&M, 2011).

While Susan had been a well-behaved wife throughout her life, her background is one of the significant reasons the husband believes she is not supposed to be seen with him outside. He confirms this when he says:

Mr. ABAH: now take for instance, meet Mr. WILLIAMS, the son of the Nigerian Ambassador to the US and his wife, the daughter of the Senate President... and meet KENNETH ABAH and his wife... daughter of who? Wash-man? C'mon.

This assertion can be seen as the height of humiliation; any man, not to mention one spouse, can give to any woman. Even Dr. ... was so disappointed at him for such a "shallow way of thinking" (M&M, 2011).



Figure 1. A depressed Susan complaining about her looks (Source: M&M, 2011) **Figure 2.** Mr. Abah showing his anger in disgust of the wife (Source: M&M, 2011)

Before she finally decides to leave her marriage, Susan expresses her frustration, particularly regarding her inability to care for her appearance, which contributes to her feeling marginalized.

SUSAN ABAH: I need Help
 Mr. Abah: To cook for me?..
 Susan: I'll do the cooking... to tidy up.
 Mr. Abah: Why do we have to go over this again? Just because I...
 SUSAN ABAH: Just because I am tired of being a slave in my own home, just because I have lost my self esteem, Just because I am no longer the woman I used to be. Look at me, Look at my hair, I'm unkempt. **(for emphasis)** (M&M, 2011).



Figure 3. Mrs. Abah's tired look after a hectic day of cooking and cleaning (Source: M&M, 2011) **Figure 4.** Mr. Abah making sexual demands of the tired Susan (Source: M&M, 2011)

Despite Susan's persistent complaints, her husband remains obstinate and maintains that she nags too much.



Figure 5. Mr. Abah refuting the peaceful discussion (Source: M&M, 2011)

This conflict sets the stage for the narrative's exploration of these societal norms and serves as a means to convey important lessons. Furthermore, the film highlights the abusive behavior exhibited by Mr. Kenneth toward his wife, Susan. This portrayal exemplifies the manifestation of patriarchal dominance, as Susan endures both sexual and psychological abuse at the hands of her husband, driven by the socioeconomic and political status of the "Abahs." This is seen in the conversation below:

Mr. Kenneth Abah: your nagging is becoming unbearable, honestly.

Mrs. Susan Abah: was I like this before your father owned oil blocks? Now let me take you down memory lane...

Mr. Kenneth Abah: No no now listen to me. My father has done us a world of good. The children go to the best school in town... what more do you want?

Mrs. Susan Abah: I want to be happy KEN, I want to be called your wife in public not stuck in the kitchen like a slave. Ken I've lost my pride, I've lost my self esteem ...

Mr. Kenneth Abah: Then go and find it...

Mrs. Susan Abah: ...can you imagine, me, a lawyer, stuck in your kitchen.

Mr. Kenneth Abah: Yes, courtesy of my family who sent you abroad for your masters programme. Where was your wretched family? (M&M, 2019).



Figure 6. Susan standing up for her family (Source: M&M, 2011)

Mr. and Mrs. explore the dynamics of power and control that often characterize relationships, offering a profound commentary on the toxic masculinity exemplified by Mr. Abah. The film poignantly portrays Susan's complex struggles as she grapples with her partner's oppressive behavior, highlighting the emotional and psychological toll it takes on her well-being. Mr. Abah's steadfast refusal to recognize his faults further emphasizes the pervasive nature of gender inequality and the insidious reality of domestic violence that many face. As the story unfolds, it becomes painfully clear that the challenges Susan experiences are not merely individual circumstances but indicative of a far-reaching societal issue that requires urgent attention. The film eloquently reveals how societal norms and expectations perpetuate cycles of abuse and silence, thus necessitating a collective response. Ultimately, *Mr. and Mrs.* serves as a compelling reminder of the importance of standing up against injustice and advocates for a cultural shift towards greater awareness and change. Its incisive narrative calls on viewers to confront these uncomfortable truths and champion the cause for equity and safety in all relationships.

3.4 Comparative Analysis of *Damage* and *Mr. and Mrs.*

Both films demonstrate satisfactory technical attributes and showcase a contemporary setting and story. They delve into the Western and African concepts of patriarchy, where men exert control over their female counterparts. The films address the issues of abusive marriages and high levels of domestic violence rooted in the imbalance of gender power dynamics. In the film *Damage*, Mr. Taiwo Ajayi displays a temperamental and domineering nature. He asserts his authority as the head of the family through physical assault, demanding unwavering respect and prohibiting any form of opposition from his wife, Sarah. He perceives himself as superior, and any challenge to his opinions triggers violent outbursts.

Similarly, in *Mr. and Mrs.*, Mr. Kenneth Abah adopts a patriarchal stance. The film showcases a significant level of patriarchal dominance, with Kenneth viewing his wife, Susan, as an object meant to be seen but not heard. Due to the socioeconomic and political disparity between them, he demotes his wife (a qualified lawyer) to the role of a housemaid, subjecting her to both sexual and emotional abuse. While Taiwo and Ken physically abuse and mistreat their wives, the women handle their emotions differently.

Interestingly, in both films, the men exhibit love for their wives despite their domineering behavior and use of violence to enforce compliance. However, any perceived threat to the relationship induces psychological stress in them. In *Damage*, Taiwo experiences great distress upon discovering that his wife's brother, Jude, has taken her and their children away. Similarly, when Ken in *Mr. and Mrs.* realizes the potential loss of his wife through divorce, he earnestly attempts to annul the divorce.

A significant convergence exists in both films, highlighting the themes of women's emancipation from Western and African perspectives. Sarah and Susan embody the African concept of "womanism" in *Damage* and *Mr. and Mrs.*, respectively. Their characters exemplify their resistance to being confined to the kitchen and marginalized. By standing up to their husbands, they assert their rights as human beings with equal worth. It is important to note that their resistance is not aimed at controlling or refuting male superiority claims but rather at asserting their rights.

Furthermore, the films explore women's challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. In one family, the wife's demanding job leaves her with limited time to care for the children, leading to dependence on a maid. In the other family, the wife's commitment to her parents' business hinders her ability to focus on her children, prompting her to seek help from a psychologist. The characters of Ken and Taiwo transform the films. Initially portrayed as solid and domineering, their stances gradually shift from positions of strength to vulnerability in order to save their marriages. Ken's insistence on his wife's confinement weakens as conflicts escalate, while Taiwo's domineering nature weakens when he must protect his daughter's life, albeit unsuccessfully. Overall, both films shed light on the complexities of gender power dynamics, the struggle for women's emancipation, and the challenges faced in marriages marred by violence.

IV. Conclusion

This study explores the complex relationship between domestic violence and masculinity, recognizing it as a significant global concern. While much research points to patriarchy as a core factor in abuse against women, the origins of domestic violence are diverse, reflecting varied power dynamics in familial roles, especially within marriages. Film narratives play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes toward gender dynamics and

domestic violence. By depicting patterns of gender domination, these films can perpetuate stereotypes or inspire social change, making it vital to assess their impact on viewers critically.

Therefore, it is hoped that future research will analyze how audiences interpret portrayals of gender-based violence, particularly in Nigerian cinema, and evaluate interventions that promote positive narratives. Engaging stakeholders like policymakers and educators in media literacy programs can deepen understanding of gender relations and help reduce the cultural dynamics that contribute to violence. Acknowledging the study's limitations regarding film scope and sample size, further research is needed to fully understand film narratives' influence on gender-based violence across different contexts. Nonetheless, this research adds to the discourse on the need to critically engage with media as a means to promote gender equity and social change by arguing that the complexities of domestic violence and its narratives are crucial for fostering a more equitable and violence-free future. There is a pressing need to harness the power of film and media to challenge outdated masculinity notions and promote healthy gender relationships, ultimately creating a safer society for all.

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