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## Gender Politics And Silences On Rape In The Nigerian Films „Tango With Me“ And „Code Of Silence“

### ABSTRACT

Current statistics indicate that about two in fifty cases of rape are reported in Nigeria, and the percentage of reported cases has continued to reduce over the years in spite of the observed consistent increase in the number of rape incidents. The burden of rape is more on women who do not have power balance with men to propagate or prosecute a majority of cases. The long silence of women due to the lack of support from male folk shows some kind of gender politics behind rape. Hence, the stigma associated with rape continues to discourage women from reporting rape cases. However, this issue has been continuously explored in many Nigerian (Nollywood) films. But to what extent have Nollywood films contributed to the mobilization of the Nigerian populace toward reducing incidences of rape in Nigeria? Using the framing theory of the media, this article examined two Nigerian films, *Tango with Me* (dir. Mahmood Ali-Balogun, 2012) and *Code of Silence* (dir. Emem Isong, 2015), which were purposively selected due to their storylines on rape. The movies were content analysed to highlight the role that men and women play, and the views of society towards rape incidences. The study also examined the gender roles vis-à-vis the stigma and trauma experiences of the victims (mainly the women) and the punishment meted out to the perpetrators of rape. Findings indicated that there is a code of silence; consequently, rape victims (mainly women) are not encouraged to speak out, for fear of losing their mental wellbeing and social status in society. The role of women in rape is passive and submissive to the dictates of a society which valorises patriarchy while the role of men shows aggressive and unrepentant behaviour, which society hardly punishes. The conclusion reached is that Nollywood content producers should help to raise the level of Nigerians' awareness through their productions to make rape victims see the need to promptly report rape incidents, so that offenders can be punished and deterrents can begin to emerge.

### KEY WORDS

Gender politics. Rape. Women. Nollywood content producers. Nigeria. Silences.

# 1. Introduction

The incidence of rape and gender related violence is on the rise.<sup>1</sup> The word rape derives from the Latin „rapere“, which means „to seize or take by force“. It is forced, unwanted sexual intercourse; it is sometimes also called sexual assault, which can happen to both men and women of any age.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Patricia Martin claims that rape is the embodied violation of another person, a felony in which a person is forced to have sexual intercourse without giving consent.<sup>3</sup> It is often a violent sexual relation intended to dehumanize the victim. Cooper-White asserts that rape is most often motivated by extreme anger toward the victim or a need to overpower the victim.<sup>4</sup> Also, it has been argued that the punishment often prescribed is skewed in favour of the male offender while more often than not, the female victim is stigmatized forever, with the possible consequences of being socially branded, divorced or neglected by the husband to whom she is already married, or ostracized, which may deny her the opportunity of getting a suitor to marry if she is yet unmarried.<sup>5</sup> The psychological effects associated with rape victims include severe anxiety, depression, difficulty in concentrating or sleeping, inappropriate guilt feelings, emotional numbness or irritability, negative flashbacks, nightmares and extreme fear.

Nevertheless, in Africa, many cases are never reported because parents want to save the honour of their daughters and protect their family from embarrassment. In a bid to avoid stigmatization, many rape victims do choose to suffer in silence. Awosusi and Ogundana observe that in Nigeria many sexually traumatized victims find it difficult to disclose the incidence or the assailant because of the need to protect their identity or family name. It is this kind of attitude that allows the pervasiveness of sexual violence to persist on the continent.<sup>6</sup> They further claim that „[...] the culture of double standard of social and sexual conduct for boys and girls may influence silence. For instance, a male child is seen as the cherished heir in developing countries like Nigeria. Everything a male child does is permitted by the culture but girls on the other hand, are treated as properties or commodities that must subsume their needs to males in the family. This culture could be blamed for the belief that men are unable to control their sexual urges and that women are responsible for provoking the sexual desire. Another reason for non-disclosure could be attributed to the cultural solution to sexual violence, whereby the sexually violated woman would be advised or forced to marry the assailant in order to preserve the integrity of the woman and her family.“<sup>7</sup> It has also been observed that a situation where the rape victim is related to the assailant who is the breadwinner, and who is socially influential, with strong community ties in rural areas may have aided silences on rape in Nigeria. The close-knit, self-contained and most often conservative rural culture tends to make it impossible for victims of sexual assault to turn to outsiders for assistance.<sup>8</sup> Odu et al. discovered that 50% to 90% of all rapes or attempted rapes were unreported and most cases of incest and molestation are never reported.<sup>9</sup> Elegbeleye

<sup>1</sup> Was I Raped? [online]. [2019-09-10]. Available at: <<https://www.medhelp.org/posts/Abuse-Support/Was-I-raped-Warning-Possibly-too-detailed/show/2355659>>.

<sup>2</sup> OMOERA, O.S., AKINWOLE, O.T.: A Review of Literature: Rape and Communication Media Strategies in Nigeria. In *Benin Mediacom Journal*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1-2, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> MARTIN, P. Y.: *Rape Work: Victims, Gender, and Emotions in Organizations and Community Context*. New York : Routledge, 2005, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> COOPER-WHITE, P.: *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response*. 2nd edition. Minneapolis : Fortress, 2012, p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> AKINTUNDE, D.: *Rape: An Infringement on the Rights of Women*. Ibadan : Institute of Women in Religion and Culture, 2002, p. 1.; ONYEJEKWE, C. J.: Nigeria: The Dominance of Rape. In *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2008, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> AWOSUSI, A. O., OGUNDANA, F. C.: Culture of Silence and Wave of Sexual Violence in Nigeria. In *AASCIT Journal of Education*, 2015, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> ODU, B. et al.: Prevalence of Violent Sexual Assault on South West Nigeria Girls. In *European Scientific Journal*, 2014, Vol. 10, No. 7, p. 472.

reveals that one in five women reports sexual assault and one in three girls reports forced initiation into sexual acts.<sup>10</sup> Many factors may be implicated for the non-disclosure of the attack; nonetheless, the reasons for non-reporting of sexual violence are complex and multi-faceted. The poor disclosure of sexual violence has made many perpetrators escape being punished because the victims keep silent either due to the fear of being stigmatized or closeness of the assailants. Among the numerous reasons for under reporting sexual violence to professionals or concerned authorities are shame, concerns for confidentiality, guilt and fear of not being believed.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of this established culture of not reporting rape,<sup>12</sup> the subject of rape has formed the central theme of a majority of movies produced in Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry. Based on the role of the media as a watchdog of society, to what extent have some of these films been able to break the silence of rape in their storylines and provide a new direction to redress the issue of rape in Nigeria? This study, through framing analysis, examines how the issue of rape is addressed through the character/characterization setting, traditional/cultural setting and storylines of two Nigerian films, *Code of Silence* (dir. Emem Isong, 2015) and *Tango with Me* (dir. Mahmood Ali-Balogun, 2012).

## 1.1 Conceptual Clarifications

The subject of rape has continuously pervaded Nollywood movies so much that it is becoming a cause for concern. That the movie industry in Nigeria produces films with rape as a major theme shows the trend of events within Nigeria's social and cultural development since the media always draws inspiration from societal trends. Rape, as earlier noted, is a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration perpetrated against a person without that person's consent. The act may be carried out by physical force, coercion, abuse of authority or against a person who is incapable of giving valid consent such as one who is unconscious, incapacitated, has an intellectual disability or is below the legal age of consent.<sup>13</sup> Petrak and Hedge contend that the word rape is sometimes used interchangeably with the term sexual assault. People who have been raped can be traumatized and develop post-traumatic stress disorder. Serious injuries can also result along with the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS.<sup>14</sup> A person may face violence or threats from the rapist, and, in some cultures, from the victim's family and relatives. Hence, Merrill conceptualises a rape situation as any sexual intercourse, or other form of sexual penetration, initiated by a perpetrator against a victim without their consent.<sup>15</sup> However, Maier claims that the statistical report on rape is inconsistent between governmental health organizations, law enforcement agencies, health providers and legal professionals which have varied historically and culturally.<sup>16</sup> Some countries or jurisdictions differentiate between rape and sexual assault

<sup>10</sup> ELEGBELEYE, O. S.: Is Rape in the Eye or in the Mind of the Offender? A Survey of Rape Perception among Nigerian University Stakeholders. In *Educational Research and Reviews*, 2006, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> AWOSUSI, A. O., OGUNDANA, F. C.: Culture of Silence and Wave of Sexual Violence in Nigeria. In *AASCIT Journal of Education*, 2015, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> ONYEJEKWE, C. J.: Nigeria: The Dominance of Rape. In *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2008, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. *Sexual Violence Chapter 6*. [online]. [2019-10-10]. Available at: <[https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/global\\_campaign/en/chap6.pdf](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf)>.

<sup>14</sup> PETRAK, J., HEDGE, B.: *The Trauma of Sexual Assault: Treatment, Prevention and Practice*. Chichester : John Wiley & Sons, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> MERRIL, D.: *Encyclopaedia of Rape*. Westport : Greenwood Press, 2004, p. 169-170.

<sup>16</sup> MAIER, S. L.: I Have Heard Horrible Stories... Rape Victim Advocates' Perceptions of the Revictimization of Rape Victims by the Police and Medical System. In *Violence Against Women*, 2008, Vol. 14, No. 7, p. 786.

by defining rape as involving penile penetration of the vagina, or solely penetration involving the penis, while other types of non-consensual sexual activity are called sexual assault.<sup>17</sup>

Omoera and Akinwale claim that rape is categorized as date rape, gang rape, marital rape, incestuous rape, child sexual abuse, prison rape, acquaintance rape, war rape and statutory rape. Also victims of rape or sexual assault come from a wide range of sexual orientations, genders, ages, and degrees of impairment or disability.<sup>18</sup> Perpetrators sometimes use objects for penetration, force the victim to penetrate the perpetrator, force the victim to perform oral sex or assault the victim with anal penetration. Furthermore, Widman and McNulty state that those experiencing non-consensual, forced sexual experiences and sexual assault include women, heterosexual men, homosexual men, boys, adolescent males, spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends, prepubescent girls and boys, adolescent girls, children, the elderly, and even infants. Forced sexual experiences can be committed over a long period of time accompanied with little to no physical injury.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the issues of consent in sexual situations can be complicated by language, context, culture and sexual orientation. Refusal or lack of consent is interpreted by cultural expectations of women which could be gender biased. This is instanced in a common view that women's refusal and non-consenting to sex can be misinterpreted to mean „keep trying“, or even „yes“. This, in a way, impels the men to claim lack of communication from women in which they can be coerced into consenting.<sup>20</sup>

While Widman and McNulty posit that sexual narcissism such as sexual entitlement, sexual exploitation, lower empathy and sexual skill predicted risk for sexual aggression,<sup>21</sup> Jewkes et al. claim that sexual narcissism predicted sexually aggressive behaviour such as unwanted contact, coercion and attempted or completed rape as perceived from a randomly selected sample of men from the general adult population in South Africa.<sup>22</sup> In a more recent study, Sigre-Leirós et al. found that factors associated with rapists in South Africa were having been raped by a man when younger; higher maternal education; gender inequality views on women; acceptance of physical violence against women; gang membership; higher scores on psychopathic personality; and sexual entitlement beliefs.<sup>23</sup> They further claim that rapists had higher likelihood to hold power and sexually aggressive beliefs about themselves.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Sadaf Ahmad (2016) content analysed some Pakistani films to demonstrate that there is a kind of gendered form of violence which serves multiple functions, providing the audience with gratuitous entertainment, developing the narrative and/or punishing women.<sup>25</sup> Ahmad further argues that the functions, which are by no means unique to Pakistani film, incite, excuse and normalise sexual aggression, encourage and legitimise rape, thereby supporting a strong rape culture because of the culturally specific honour-based ideologies in the films.<sup>26</sup> The WHO report documented by Krug et al. describes the negative consequences that may occur through these

<sup>17</sup> KALBFLEISCH, P. J., CODY, M. J.: *Gender, Power, and Communication in Human Relationships*. London : Routledge, 2012, p. 145-146.

<sup>18</sup> OMOERA, O. S., AKINWOLE, O. T.: A Review of Literature: Rape and Communication Media Strategies in Nigeria. In *Benin Mediacom Journal*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1-2, p.173-177.

<sup>19</sup> WIDMAN, L., MCNULTY, J. K.: Sexual Narcissism and the Perpetration of Sexual Aggression. In *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 2010, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 929.

<sup>20</sup> THORNHILL, R., PALMER, C. T.: *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*. Cambridge, Massachusetts : MIT Press, 2000, p.16.

<sup>21</sup> WIDMAN, L., MCNULTY, J. K.: Sexual Narcissism and the Perpetration of Sexual Aggression. In *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 2010, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 929.

<sup>22</sup> JEWKES, R. et al.: Gender Inequitable Masculinity and Sexual Entitlement in Rape Perpetration in South Africa: Findings of a Cross-Sectional Study. In *PLoS ONE*, 2011, Vol. 6, No. 12, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> SIGRE-LEIRÓS, V. et al.: Preliminary Findings On Men's Sexual Self-Schema And Sexual Offending: Differences between Subtypes Of Offenders. In *Journal of Sex Research*, 2016, Vol. 53, No. 2, p. 204.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> AHMAD, S.: Sexualised Objects and the Embodiment of Honour: Rape in Pakistani Films. In *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 2016, Vol. 39, No. 2, p. 386.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 386.

acts as gynaecological disorders, reproductive disorders, sexual disorders, infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, pregnancy complications, miscarriage, sexual dysfunction, acquiring sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, mortality from injuries, increased risk of suicide, depression, chronic pain, psychosomatic disorders, unsafe abortion and unwanted pregnancies.<sup>27</sup>

The effect of rape was culturally viewed less as a type of assault on the female than a crime against the man due to female loss of virginity which was seen as a serious issue. The damage due to loss of virginity was reflected in her reduced prospects in finding a husband and in her bride price.<sup>28</sup> This was especially true in the case of betrothed virgins, as the loss of chastity was perceived as severely depreciating her value to a prospective husband. In such cases, the law would void the betrothal and demand financial compensation from the rapist, payable to the woman's household, whose „goods“ were „damaged“.<sup>29</sup> Omoera and Akinwole affirm that in most Nigerian traditional cultures, sexual infidelity is viewed as a serious infraction against the established community norm of morality.<sup>30</sup> Hence, offenders are severely punished. Unfortunately though, the punishment often prescribed is skewed in favour of the male offender.<sup>31</sup> More often than not, the female victim is stigmatized forever with the possible consequences of being socially branded, divorced or neglected by the husband, if she is already married, be socially ostracized, which may deny her the opportunity of getting a suitor to marry if she is yet unmarried. The woman at times can be sentenced to death where the community is yet fastened to the hard core traditional ways of doing things.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, many cases are never reported because parents want to save the honour of their daughters and protect their family from embarrassment. In its description of the judicial and legal system concerning rape in Nigeria, the 2006 Amnesty International Report on Nigeria confirmed this observation. To avoid this social and cultural effect most times referred to as stigmatization, many rape victims keep silent and do not talk about it but rather suffer the medical and psychological effects in silence.<sup>33</sup> This culture of silence continues among rape victims with no legal or cultural reprieve or backing. The Nigerian authorities at both federal and state levels appear to have failed to address adequately gender-based violence, including rape. There are scanty federal or state legislations criminalizing violence against women, and most bills initiated by non-governmental organizations on violence against women are still pending.<sup>34</sup> The reflection of weak legislation, socio-cultural acquiesces, and victim silences are vividly expressed also in media representation, especially in the production of many Nigerian films about rape. These movies do not provide the right direction to solving victims' problems resulting from rape but rather present rape in a negative way, with gender bias favouring the men against the women, who are the worst hit.

<sup>27</sup> KRUG, E. G. et al.: *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization. [online]. [2019-09-06]. Available at: <[http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/world\\_report/en/introduction.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/introduction.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> OLSON, T.: The Medieval Blood Sanction and the Divine Beneficence of Pain: 1100-1450. In *Journal of Law and Religion*, 2006, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> OMOERA, O. S., AKINWOLE, O. T.: A Review of Literature: Rape and Communication Media Strategies in Nigeria. In *Benin Mediacom Journal*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1-2, p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> AKINTUNDE, D.: *Rape: An Infringement on the Rights of Women*. Ibadan : Institute of Women in Religion and Culture, 2002, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> ELEGBELEYE, O. S.: Is Rape in the Eye or in the Mind of the Offender? A Survey of Rape Perception among Nigerian University Stakeholders. In *Educational Research and Reviews*, 2006, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: *Time for Justice and Accountability*. [online]. [2019-09-06]. Available at: <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR440202006>>.

<sup>34</sup> OMOERA, O. S., AKINWOLE, O. T.: A Review of Literature: Rape and Communication Media Strategies in Nigeria. In *Benin Mediacom Journal*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1-2, p. 165.

## 1.2 Synopsis of *Code of Silence*

The movie opens with the main actress, Adanma, playing with her brother. Her beauty was later appreciated by the nurse in the hospital where she works. At night her fiancé proposes sex to her but she refuses. She with her friends at night were discussing sex, condoms and friendship when her brother overhears their discussion and this eventually leads to a disagreement between them. After the argument with her brother, Adanma decides that she wants to walk home without the company of her brother and she gets raped by a notable politician in the area. After being raped by the politician, she is raped by his men and dumped by the roadside. She becomes a topic for discussion in school, as the boys in class believe she was not raped. She starts having nightmares; her friend gives her some drugs to abort the pregnancy. She is about to use the drugs when her mother comes in. She eventually visits the hospital and gets medical attention and finds out that she is not pregnant and has no infection. The politician starts paying the in-laws to kill the case, the victim makes another attempt to kill herself and again, her mother comes to her rescue. They eventually get a lawyer but the mother still wants to keep quiet about it because of the stigma. However, with the help of the lawyer, her husband (a journalist) and another senator, the case begins to come into the public eye. The politician in his own case with a lot of promises asked his personal aide to claim the allegation that he, not his boss, raped the girl. The personal aide later exposes his bosses and the boss gets jailed. Adanma later gives birth to a baby boy and gets married to her jailed fiancé.

## 1.3 Synopsis of *Tango with Me*

The movie opens with the couple, Uzo and Lola, being joyous about their just concluded wedding. They head for honeymoon in a hotel. While the husband was waiting in the bedroom and dreaming about his wife, the wife was busy in the bathroom trying to undress for lovemaking. As both are preparing for a blissful first night of lovemaking some robbers come into the bedroom and while molesting the husband, the wife comes in and one of the robbers take a lustful interest in her and rapes her even as her husband pleads. The husband couldn't help but have flashbacks of the rape scene. Afterwards, both are appallingly shy and keep pushing the blame of the incident to each other. The husband consoles himself on hearing the news on the television that the robbers were shot dead after another robbery operation, he makes a move to make love to his wife but she is still too ashamed and traumatized. The wife tries to kill herself but the husband comes to her rescue. The wife watches a television programme which makes her give the marriage a second chance, but still, the husband finds it difficult to get the flashbacks of the rape out of his mind. This, unfortunately, leads to several conflicts between the couple. The wife eventually finds out that she is pregnant and they visit a doctor who counsels them to give the wife the opportunity to think and get prepared for abortion.

The husband, however, is desperate about having an abortion due to the shame of giving birth to a bastard. He hides behind a psychological trauma to avoid his wife and starts dating his boss who is desperately looking for a sex partner. Lola's parents support the option of aborting the baby to save the family's name. Lola eventually finds her husband Uzo in the company of his female boss in her matrimonial home. This deepens her confusion and drives the husband to guilt and alcohol. The guilt eventually leads the husband to a change of heart and to consider reconciling with his wife. He decides to reconcile with her and they afterward give birth to the baby in a happy reunion. The wife finally has another child through her husband.

## 2. Methodological Approach to Framing Theory

The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. In essence, framing theory suggests how something is presented to the audience (called „the frame“) and influences the choices people make about how to process information. The theory, that was first put forth by Goffman, states that people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework.<sup>35</sup> Hence, framing is the way a communication source defines and constructs any piece of communicated information. However, studies have shown that framing analysis could be applied both theoretically and methodologically. Methodological approaches to frame analysis can be broadly divided in two categories, the deductive and the inductive. Deductive approaches rely on predetermined framing categories that are brought into contact with the media information. Such methods typically follow the logic of conventional quantitative content analysis and focus on measuring the frequency with which certain frames occur in a given text.<sup>36</sup> Shah et al., in their deductive study, examined the news framing of European politics through five frames - conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility - the frequency of which was measured through a series of questions to which the (de)coder had to answer „yes“ or „no“.<sup>37</sup> But Touri and Koteyko are of the view that the shortcomings of the deductive approach can be tackled by inductive methods. According to them, these methods are open and qualitative and extract frames through thorough interpretations of the text in connection to a given cultural context. Hence, the inductive methods of framing can examine the key issues or episode/themes of a media story which is more qualitative than quantitative.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1 Materials

The study collated movies produced from 2012 to 2015 with specific themes on rape. However, 10 movies were selected but with themes on sexual exploitation, harassment and denials except two movies *Code of Silence* (dir. Emem Isong, 2015) and *Tango with Me* (dir. Mahmood Ali-Balogun, 2012), which categorically dealt with the theme of rape. These two movies were eventually selected for analysis in this study.

### 2.2 Procedure for analysis

This study uses qualitative narrative content analysis to gather information from the selected Nollywood films. Qualitative content analysis has been conceptualized as any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Mayring defines qualitative content

<sup>35</sup> GOFFMAN, E.: *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York : Harper and Row, 1974, p.1-2.

<sup>36</sup> TOURI, M., KOTAYKO, N.: Using Corpus Linguistic Software in the Extraction of News Frames: Towards a Dynamic Process of Frame Analysis in Journalistic Texts. In *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2015, Vol. 18, No. 6, p. 602.

<sup>37</sup> SHAH, D. V. et al.: Framing and Agenda Setting. In NABI, R., OLIVER, M. B. (eds.): *Handbook of Media Processes and Effects*. Los Angeles, CA : Sage, 2009, p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> TOURI, M., KOTAYKO, N.: Using Corpus Linguistic Software in the Extraction of News Frames: Towards a Dynamic Process of Frame Analysis in Journalistic Texts. In *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2015, Vol. 18, No. 6, p. 602.

<sup>39</sup> PATTON, M. Q.: *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage, 2001, p. 7.; DOSSOUMON, M.: *Class and Gender Representation in Nollywood Movies*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Edwardsville : Graduate School, Southern Illinois University, 2013, p. 3.

analysis as an approach of empirically and methodologically controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the framing theory was methodologically applied through a qualitative narrative content analysis approach that investigated the thematic perspective of how rape was portrayed in the two movies, *Tango with Me* and *Code of Silence*. The following stages were developed for the analysis of the two movies:

Stage 1: How the storylines of the films present the theme of rape

Stage 2: How the movies present the character being raped

Stage 3: How the cultural environment reacts to the issue of rape in the movies

Stage 4: How the setting contributes to the theme of rape in the two movies

Stage 5: How the theme of rape was resolved in the two movies

### 3. Findings and discussion

#### 3.1 Stage 1: How the storylines of the films present the theme of rape

*Tango with Me* relays the ordeal of a new wife raped by an armed robber while *Code of Silence* narrates the traumatic experiences of an eighteen years old medical student raped by a wealthy old politician. Both incidences were great misfortunes. However, both movies end cheerfully without the issue of rape being properly addressed based on the law and justice system operating in Nigeria. In *Tango with Me*, Lola, a new wife, was deflowered by the rapist in front of her helpless husband. Also, Ada, an eighteen years old student was kidnapped on a lonely path and deflowered by an old politician and a kidnapper. As regards these predicaments in the movies, a critical consideration should be given to the two scenes. Lola was so unfortunate to have stepped into the room which led to her molestation. Her case was such as an unavoidable prey for a hungry lion to devour. However, Ada's case in *Code of Silence* was a bit different. Although everybody has the right of movement, yet the kidnappers capitalized their crime based on her indecent dressing. They allege that she is a prostitute. Hence, the wicked politician also accuses her of being a „sinner“ whose prayers cannot be answered by God. Also, in the movie, a male student argues that most females attract rapists through their indecent dressing. However, the lawyer friend opposes that dressing does not have weight in committing such a crime. She maintains that a female has the right to dress based on her gender satisfaction just as her male counterpart does. This presupposes that a female's indecent dressing is not the basis for a male's uncontrolled appetite for sex. The fact that this issue is not properly resolved in the movie could easily encourage male dominance of the female gender in relation to sexual satisfaction.

Another critical issue to consider in the movies is virginity or faithfulness as revealed in *Tango with Me* where Lola jealously kept herself and waited for her wedding night to be deflowered by her husband. However, when the unforeseen event occurs, Lola is encouraged to still stay at home but Uzo engages in extramarital affairs with the burden of „being raped“ placed on his wife. This, in a concrete way, shows that the guilt or burden of rape is placed on the female gender while the man keeps enjoying himself. This situation was also exhibited in *Code of Silence* when it was even stated that the assault would reduce Ada's worth before her future husband. Yet, Chuks, the brother, who frolics and philanders with numerous girlfriends, sleeps around without reducing his worth in the eyes of society. The question is, between a male and a female, for whom is it mandatory to be a virgin, or to be faithful? The two movies show how empathy, love, care, support and unity can restore the hope and joy of rape victims. However,

<sup>40</sup> MAYRING, P.: Qualitative Content Analysis. In *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2000, Vol. 1, No. 2. [online]. [2019-06-09]. Available at: <<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089/2386>>.



the films under investigation did not promote the potency of the law and justice to handle the issue of rape except to a limited extent in *Code of Silence*. Hence, there is a need for gender balancing in storyline presentation in order to re-orientate the majority of the teeming audience who are consumers of Nollywood films in Nigeria and beyond.

### 3.2 Stage 2: How the movies present the character being raped

In the movie, *Tango with Me*, the protagonist, Mrs. Lola Dike (Genevieve Nnaji) is a victim of rape. This incidence which dishonours her virginity happens on her wedding night in front of her spouse. Although Lola keeps herself undefiled by any man and waits anxiously to be deflowered by her husband on her wedding night, an armed robber does. The storyline reveals her as helpless, unworthy and a weak character that cannot do anything to help the situation. She accepts the ordeal as a personal predicament. Her husband's lack of support or care as well as the myopic view of her parents who prefer to maintain tradition as justice for their daughter are further goads to her silence. This scenario compounds her helplessness, indecisiveness and dilemma. The option of abortion (an illegal termination of pregnancy in Nigeria) is not presented to her in an agreeable manner but as a revenge to hide her being raped and the family shame. Lola, however, agrees to bear the shame and agony in keeping the pregnancy. She suffers emotionally from this predicament. Her confidence is lost; her heart is filled with trauma; her home is silenced with agony while her marriage is on the verge of collapse. She sees herself as an inopportune object of the misfortune. Contrary to the title, Mrs. Lola Dike tangoes alone all through. The movie did not develop the character of Lola as an empowered woman who should be able to take decisive decision to deal with rape or related issues. This, in a way, goes a long way to mislead many young girls in society who may have been raped not to speak up but to tango along with their predicaments while the majority of the culprits (predators) go unpunished. Lola's character is weak and this has the potential of endorsing the temperament of silence in young girls that are being raped on a daily basis in society.

Adanma Uwueze, an eighteen years old medical student is the protagonist of *Code of Silence*. Her hope of keeping her virginity till her wedding night is ruined by a rape incident. This event transforms her into a silent, forlorn lady. Though she confesses the identity of the rapist, she is still being haunted by the sexual assault and the injustice done to her. Adanma accepts the ordeal as her fate and does not want legal action against the incidence. Her resentment is further incensed when her family members relay the consequences against publicizing it. She loses all hopes when they betray her trust for justice, all in the name of defending their family name (tradition). This situation makes her to recoil into silence. Also, Ada is presented as a weak character that cannot fight for justice in the face of tradition. However, Chief Artor Igwe (Kofi Adjorlolo), a political candidate is the antagonist to the heroine in the movie. He rapes an eighteen year old girl, Ada. Yet, he denies the accusation and uses his wealth to stop the avenging bendable kinsmen. He sees the crime he commits on the innocent lady as an enjoyment, and flimsy to take up with.

Lola's husband, Mr. Uzo Dike (Joseph Benjamin) in *Tango with Me* witnesses the rape of his wife on their wedding night. He could not rescue his wife from this sexual assault but powerlessly watches the unsightly scene. Initially, he sees it as a completed event of no consequence to their present marital life. However, the couple could not relate or discuss mutually. Consequently, it slowly drains his love, power and support for his wife, Lola. He later sees his wife as the only victim of the rape, which makes him involve himself in extramarital affairs as an escape route to forget the repulsive memories. He can not fulfil his marital vows to love and care for his wife in all situations. Hence, he leaves his wife to dance the tango of the rape ordeal. The weak character of Lola's husband can not even suggest any legal option to bring the justice needed to his wife. This, in a significant way, buttresses the weak justice system in Nigeria and

the hopelessness of rape victims. Lola's parents (Joke Silva and Ahmed Yerima) though react to the sad news of their daughter and feel embarrassed about their daughter's pregnancy, yet they encourage her to keep it secret to protect the family name. They are willing to suffer the shame of the pregnancy with her but will not support her to divorce her unfaithful and uncaring husband. They still prefer to take the risk of abortion, even at the risk of their daughter's life and to violate their religious laws; rather than supporting a broken marriage.

However, in *Code of Silence*, Mrs Ngozi Uweze (Patience Ozokwor), Ada's mother, empathizes with her daughter who is sexually molested but too helpless to fight for justice. Therefore, she gives in to her kinsmen to defend the unfair treatment meted out on her daughter. The group of Amaka (Ini Edo); her lawyer friend; Chris (Ada's boyfriend) and Chuks (Ada's brother) want justice to prevail. They see the rape incidence as a great crime that must be punished. However, tradition and fear continue to render it hushed (silent) in the movie. The framing of weak and undeveloped characters downplays the theme of rape in the movies under investigation. Consequently, *Tango with Me* and *Code of Silence* cannot be seen as good antidotes to solving the issue of rape. Perhaps, the aesthetics of depicting the characters in the way they are portrayed in the films is to show the horrendous experience being confronted by rape victims, their parents and the negative influence of religion and tradition in dealing with the issue that is „silently“ ravaging society.

### **3.3 Stage 3: How does the cultural environment react to the issue of rape in the movies?**

The movies show that the characters hold in high esteem their religious and cultural/traditional beliefs. We see two movies in which tradition and religion are sacrosanct regardless of the plight of the two rape victims, Lola and Adanma. The question from the two movies is on the role that tradition or religion should play in the event of rape. Lola, based on her religious conviction and for the family name not to be besmirched in *Tango with Me*, remains silent and bears the burden of being raped, while in *Code of Silence*, Ada, the brother and her mother are convinced by their kinsmen to remain silent on the rape incident so as to protect the victim from marital problems and stigma. The tradition holds that demanding justice against the culprit (oftentimes, a male sexual predator), by publicizing the incident may scare away suitors from Ada; or even reduce her bride price. What is more, they do not allow Ada to go for medical treatment; rather they prefer to remain silent and allow time to heal her physical and emotional pains. This shows that the movies indirectly reveal the decadence and gender biasness of certain aspects of Nigerian (African) traditions and religions which tend to favour male folk.

### **3.4 Stage 4: How the setting contributes to the theme of rape in the two movies**

The producers make use of plot devices such as flashback and symbolism to effectively address the issue of rape in both movies. In *Tango with Me*, the producer utilizes flashback to connect the plot. Through a series of flashbacks, the story unfolds to show how Lola meets Uzo at 06:27 to 07:05; the ladies testimony time where Lola recounts how she and Uzo are able to stay celibate during their courtship and she is presented with a negligee that will eventually represent her saddest moment at 07:57 to 10:14; the wedding ceremony at 11:25 to 12:28 and the actual rape scene at 13:09 to 17:28. However, through a series of flashbacks in *Code of Silence*, Ada could not sleep because of the traumatic experience during her ordeal with her captor, Chief Igwe, who raped her. The setting establishes the circumstances of the movies linked with the reality and experience of rape victims.

### 3.5 Stage 5: How the theme of rape was resolved in the two movies

Mahmood Ali-Balogun, the director and producer of *Tango with Me*, presents an unsightly scenario between the new couples, Mr and Mrs Dike, who have to tango to overcome their dilemma. However, the wife is left alone in the ordeal because of her faith against the option of abortion. Yet, she stands firm and decides to tango alone. Eventually, the husband joins her in the final stage, a twist which turns the mourning dance into a melodious ball. *Tango with Me* presents the traumatic experience a rape victim goes through in her home. The movie empowers such victims to still stand and be hopeful, even against all odds. In a way, the producer appears to give a hopeful message to rape victims in society and encourages their friends and families to show love and support. Also in *Code of Silence*, the producer and director, Emem Isong, relates the experiences of innocent victims of rape in society. Most of these victims are denied justice due to financial problems to hire lawyers; or even tied down by their traditional cum cultural beliefs to continue the code of silence. Thus, wicked men are encouraged to molest females; both under-aged and aged, without any check. Nonetheless, the culprit is later apprehended in the movie. The distressed process undergone by the lawyer, who herself is also a victim of rape breaks the code of silence that the tradition might have encoded.

## 4. Conclusion

The aesthetic styles adopted by the producers of the two movies are strategically deployed to portray the trauma of the female gender, negative treatment of women, unequal opportunity for male versus female, lack of fairness and justice to women, social and cultural biases against women, display of women as sexual objects and men as chauvinists, sexual violence, harassment, powerlessness of the female and empowerment of the male. The film media in Nigeria, particularly Nollywood, tends to promote the male over the female and are discriminatory toward the female. A critical look at this approach might portray the Nollywood content producers as being biased in their productions. However, the style appears to present a realistic situation which many women are experiencing in Nigerian society. Also, the producers of the two movies attempt to display the evil of rape, the rapist, the traditional gender bias and the powerlessness of women, which manifest in their silence in the event of rape. It is, therefore, suggested that future productions by Nollywood content creators and indeed the broader media should project aspects of the law and justice system that address rape to further reinforce public confidence in them and, possibly begin the process of healing the wounds of rape victims.

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