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Nollywood's Treatment of Male Child Abuse in *Shining Star* and *October 1*

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Abstract: *Child abuse is a pervasive and complex issue that affects millions of children worldwide, with severe consequences for their physical, emotional and psychological well-being. Despite its prevalence, male child abuse remains a largely overlooked and underreported issue, particularly in Nigeria. Nollywood (Nigeria Video) films have effectively utilized storytelling to raise awareness and advocate for the prevention of child abuse, contributing to a growing national discourse on the issue. This study examines the portrayal of male child abuse in two Nollywood films, *October 1* (2014) and *Shining Star* (2024), through the lens of the Media Framing theory. The study analyzes how the two films frame male child abuse, highlighting its causes, effects and consequences on the victims and the community. The films depict the severe physical and emotional harm inflicted on the victims, as well as the perpetuation of cycles of violence and abuse. This paper argues that the Media Framing Theory is relevant in understanding how Nollywood films can shape public perception and attitudes towards male child abuse. By framing this issue in a specific way, the films can spark conversations, and advocate for prevention and intervention. It concludes that Nollywood has a crucial role to play in addressing male child abuse in Nigeria, and that the Media Framing Theory provides useful framework for understanding the power of media representation in shaping public opinion and societal attitudes.*

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1. Introduction:

In the recent past, to the benefit of humanity, there has been an increase in profile and awareness of child abuse. Unfortunately, the narrative has mostly had a stereotyped view of child abuse with female victims and male perpetrators. Yet, recent happenings have shown that male children are also victims of various forms of abuses. For instance, in mid-November 2024, various media in Nigeria carried the story of a 10-year-old boy who was sodomized by his 22-year-old teacher identified as Prosper at the Blessed Peace School Egbeda Lagos State. This is one of the cases of abuse against male children that get reported.

The experiences of young men are usually less understood and consequently overlooked and underreported. Hence, it is a widely acknowledged fact that abuses

... affecting boys remains largely unknown, unacknowledged and not responded to, across a wide range of contexts and cultures, mostly ... gendered social norms, which influence perceptions of boys' vulnerability. These also pose an obstacle to disclosure by boys, identification and acceptance by others, recognition of harm caused, and recognition of the support needed to recover. (Family for Every Child,2)

There is not much literature on the abuse of the male gender as against that of the female gender. The situation applies to third-world countries with more emphasis. It is worse in a country like Nigeria where cultural beliefs and societal expectations pose restrictions on the male gender reporting this. The fact that abuse against male children is under-reported has led to contradictory views in the conceptualization of female-to-male child abuse. The boy child abuse is an issue that, as pervasive as it is, has garnered very minimal attention in our society. Some of the suggested causes of boy child abuse include society's expectations of the male gender, gender roles, family dynamics, poverty, and substance abuse by parents.

Of major concern to this study is the paucity of films on boy child abuse in Nollywood - the film industry in Nigeria. Many films on child abuse concentrate on female child abuse. It is only in rare cases that such films gloss over male child abuse by portraying scenes showing a boy child being abused. The emphasis is always on aspects of abuse of the female child. Not many films have purposely woven plots to address this issue, which is worrisome.

1.1. Related Works: Male Child Abuse-Myth or Reality

The male gender is usually seen as the perpetrator, and not the victim, of child abuse. Yet, it is true that male children also suffer various forms of abuse such as physical, psychological/emotional, sexual, economic, social, and spiritual abuse like their female counterparts. "The recent exposure of several high-profile cases involving historic long-term abuse of boys has brought to light the issues of ... violence against boys, a longstanding phenomenon which has been denied, obscured, and covered" (Alaggia n.p). Hence, it will be right to assert that the prevalence of male abuse generally is higher than initially thought. Akinyemi conducted a cross-sectional study in south-Western Nigeria, and came up with the conclusion that, "66.4% of male children reported experiencing at least one form of abuse." (23) Similarly, Olawale reported a prevalence rate of "61.1% among male secondary school students in Lagos state." (456) Adeosun reports on physical abuse in male children, stating that, "52.3%

of male participants in their study had experienced physical violence.” (789) Also, it has been stated that “Emotional abuse are also common, often manifesting as verbal aggression, neglect, or exploitation.” (Oluwaniyi, 234) another study by Akinlusi found that, “4.8% of male children in their study had experienced sexual abuse.” (678) The low critical attention given to this stems from the fact that the male gender is seen as strong enough to protect himself. It is also culturally seen as a sign of weakness for the male gender to report cases of abuse. Such a report carries some form of stigma around it. To further affirm this, Đurđević and Lukić (393) assert thus: “in the patriarchal society we live in, it is a shame for a man to admit that he was being abused.”

1.2. Theoretical Framework: Media Framing Theory

Media framing theory has been a significant area of study in communication research. The theory was introduced by Erving Goffman, an American sociologist in his book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. However, the concept gained significant attention and development in the field of communication studies through the work of Robert Entman in 1993. Entman’s work built upon Goffman’s ideas and introduced the concept of framing as a tool for understanding how media influences public opinion and shapes perceptions of reality. Since then, media framing theory has been widely applied and expanded upon in various fields including film studies.

This theory suggests that how information is presented to the audience influences how they process and interpret it. Entman defines it as, “the process of selecting and highlighting certain aspects of a perceived reality. (52)” Simply put, media framing theory refers to the way media selects, emphasizes, and organizes information to create a specific narrative or perspective. The theory is of the view that people give interpretations to what goes around them through their primary framework. Asemah et al (80) cite Entman (1993) as saying that “to frame a communicating text or message, is to promote certain facets of a perceived reality and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or a treatment recommendation”

Studies have explored various aspects of media framing theory. Scheufele and Tewksbury examined the impact of framing on public opinion, finding that frames can influence individuals’ attitudes and beliefs. (14) On their own part, Coleman and Thorson investigated the role of framing in shaping political discourse, highlighting the importance of frames in constructing meaning. (642) Visual framing has also been a focus of research as Messaris and Abraham explored the effects of visual frames on audience interpretation, demonstrating that images can convey meaning and influence attitudes. (220) Similarly, Griffin and Kagan examined the use of visual frames in news media, finding that they can shape public opinion and attitudes. (74) This work explores how Nollywood can effectively use media framing to raise awareness and promote positive change regarding male child rights abuse. Hence, the theory is adopted herein to conceptualize the power of film to alter existing attitudes, ideologies and institutions concerning the abuse of the rights of the Nigerian male child.

2. Method: Synopsis of Selected Films

October 1 is a Nigerian thriller set in 1960, just before Nigeria's independence. A series of gruesome murders occurs in the small town of Akote, with all victims being young virgins.

Inspector Waziri investigates, aided by Sergeant Afonjo, and they initially suspect a Hausa man, who a grieving father later kills.

As Waziri continues his investigation, he discovers that the actual killer is Prince Aderopo, a respected member of the community. Aderopo's motives are rooted in childhood trauma, having been molested by Reverend Dowling, a village priest. Waziri and Afonjo eventually stop Aderopo from claiming his sixth victim. The movie ends with Waziri being instructed by the British to withhold Aderopo's identity as the killer, to maintain peace during the independence celebrations.

The film *Shining Star* tells the story of Ofoma, a young boy who suffers physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his stepfather, Ehis. Despite his mother's knowledge of the abuse, she fails to protect him. When Ofoma's friend Lopada goes missing, suspicion falls on Ehis and another neighbor, Philip. However, the truth is revealed when Ofoma's mother discovers Lopada's rotting body in Ofoma's room. Ofoma confesses that he accidentally killed Lopada while playing baseball and hid her body out of fear of punishment. His mother apologizes for failing to protect him and calls the police, confessing to the crime and arranging for Ofoma to be taken to safety. The film ends with Lopada's body being removed and Ofoma's mother being taken away by the police.

3. Results and Discussion

The entirety of the plot of *October 1* (2014) is based on the consequences of male child abuse. The film reveals at the end that the person responsible for the murder of the girls was made a monster by the abuses he received in the hands of his caregiver. Unfortunately, this time around, he was abused by an ordained priest in the person of Father Dowling. Inspector Waziri notices a pattern with the murders – all the girls were virgins who were raped, their throats slit and a sign (which he later discovered to be a sign of the cross) engraved in their chests. The choice of the cross is metaphorical - the cross is a metonymy of the priest who abused and traumatized the perpetrators of the murder. But one is left wondering why they choose to mete out their revenge on the poor innocent girls rather than the priest or other priests.

The filmmaker crafted the film narrative in such a way that it keeps the audience in suspense till the end of the film when the murderer was fished out and motive behind his crime unmasked. Earlier in the film, Inspector Waziri and Sergeant Afonjo followed breadcrumbs and find themselves in Agbekoya's cocoa farm. Agbekoya is questioned and he dismisses them (Inspector Waziri and Sergeant Afonjo) giving them the impression that he does not understand English. Thus, when Inspector Waziri had a conversation with Tawa, the village school teacher that he realized that Agbekoya is not illiterate as he tries to make people believe and that he and Prince Aderopo were the ones given the scholarship to attend secondary school in Lagos, though he returned before the completion of his studies.

Armed with this information, Inspector Waziri heads to Agbekoya's farm and makes provoking statements in a bid to interrogate Agbekoya and it worked. Agbekoya says for the first time in many years that he and Prince Aderopo were constantly sodomized by Reverend Dowling. Suffice some lines of that conversation, though a long one, to appear here:

AGBEKOYA: (Crying) I was fourteen and Ropo was twelve when we left for Lagos. During the daytime, we attended school, but on Thursday night, Father

- would beckon. The man would do unspeakable things to me in that room. Things I could not understand, things that destroyed my soul. Afterwards... it would be Ropo's turn. That man violated me every Thursday for five months. I couldn't take it anymore. One day, I stole some of his money, I caught a bus and I came back to Akote here. And you said nothing?
- WAZIRI:
- AGBEKOYA: How could I speak the unspeakable? I only told my father education was not meant for me and he accepted.
- WAZIRI: What about Aderopo?
- AGBEKOYA: I pleaded with Ropo to come with me, but, he desired education more than I did. I had five months of Father Dowling, Ropo had six years.
- WAZIRI: How did you feel when you came back?
- AGBEKOYA: Angry!
- WAZIRI: But, they meant well. They never knew Father Dowling was a monster.
- AGBEKOYA: I was a child! And they released me to a stranger to take me away!

It was also revealed that the abused Agbekoya had already taken revenge for the abuse he received from Father Dowling. When, Inspector mentioned that he heard Father Dowling had passed four years prior, Agbekoya confessed that he did not die of natural causes. That Father Dowling had come back to the village to be appointed a Bishop and that when he went to Father's room that night to speak with him and ask him why he was abused, the anger welled up in him to the point that he had to suffocate him. He went further to request that he be arrested but Inspector Waziri said that he came to get the killer of the women. As soon as Agbekoya said that he was not responsible for their deaths, it dawned on him that it had to be Prince Aderopo. Inspector Waziri and Sergeant. Afonjo discusses his present discovery in these lines:

- AFONJO: So, Prince Aderopo has been killing out of anger for what Reverend Dowling did?
- WAZIRI: Sergeant, **six years of torture is enough to breed resentment in any man** (added emphasis)

The point of emphasis in the above line is a strong point that should be noted - most abuses in male/boy children create monsters that are too difficult to tame in the adult stage of such an abused.

Inspector Waziri understands this so well but cannot allow the murders to continue, nor the act to go unpunished.

Eventually, it is October 1 (Independence Day), and Prince Aderopo is set to travel the next day to London. Everyone is at the venue of the event and Inspector Waziri is keeping a close watch on the Prince. But in a blink, he could no longer be seen. When he enquires about his whereabouts, he is told that the Prince and Tawa were together. Agbekoya informs them that he knows where they might be, and it was a place only the three of them knew as children. He

offers to take them there. Prince Aderopo and Tawa are together in their childhood hideout and a conversation about their childhood ensues to further reveal the abuses they suffered in the hands of Father Dowling:

ADEROPO: Miss Tawa. You were the brightest in our class, why didn't Dowling take you to Lagos?

TAWA: Because I am a girl.

ADEROPO: True. Dowling preferred boys.

TAWA: Unlucky for me. Lucky for you.

ADEROPO: (Frowns) Lucky for me? (Raises his voice) Lucky for me? He violated me.

TAWA: (Stunned) Ropo!

ADEROPO: You have no idea what I went through. The whole town has no idea of what I went through under that monster for six years! But, you will all suffer!

TAWA: Why? Ropo, why?

ADEROPO: Because I'm in pain, and you must all feel my pain. Six Akote virgins, for all the years of suffering I endured. (He advances towards her)

TAWA: (Pleads with him as he forces himself on her) We are childhood friends!

ADEROPO: I didn't have a childhood!

TAWA: Would you take from me that which I would give you with all my heart?

ADEROPO: I don't want you to give it to me, I want to snatch it. Just like my innocence was snatched from me!

Agbekoya and the Inspector get to the hideout in time and when he hears them, he jumps out of the window, leaving Tawa behind. He hides in the bush and when Agbekoya gets close to him, he pounces on him and uses him as a human shield. He says:

ADEROPO: Stand back, I'll cut him!

WAZIRI: Prince, let Koya go.

ADEROPO: Listen, I didn't mean for this to happen. I just wanted to get an education, to fulfill my potential, that's all... but the pain won't go away.

This movie shows that potential abusers exist in all spheres of life, and it would take vigilance and collective effort to prevent child abuse. This story is one of abuse by a religious leader who would usually be loved and revered. It would not be considered by any parent that a person of such standing would indulge in such a despicable act. In addition, it depicts the far-reaching damage child abuse can cause in a community. This film ends tragically with Prince Aderopo being shot to save Agbekoya. The two young boys suffered personal losses as their dreams and aspirations were thwarted and their lives' courses altered. The losses of lives in the

community when Aderopo ran amok with his revenge brings to the fore the consequences of child abuse that can easily spread to innocent people bystanders.

Similarly, the film *Shining Star* (2024) is a powerful film that tackles the sensitive and disturbing issue of male/boy child abuse, this time from the angle of physical abuse. It tells a story of a boy Ofoma whose stepfather beats mercilessly at the slightest provocation. His mother, Endurance, is an onlooker to this abuse and makes no effort to prevent it. Indeed, she dreads her husband, Ofoma's stepfather. The film opens to Ofoma's wailing from repeated flogging and Endurance cringing. After every episode of Ofoma's battery by his stepfather, his mother tends to the wounds and reprimands Ofoma for getting his stepfather upset. She would make him wear long clothes to conceal his wounds despite the hot weather and this discomforts Ofoma.

Ofoma's experience of child abuse has a profound impact on his life and his overall well-being. He is unable to make friends and so finds solace in sports (baseball). He plays baseball both in school and at the gaming station, a luxury he can only afford by trekking to school and saving up his bus fare. On getting to know that Ofoma goes to the game station rather than return home right after school, his stepfather flogs him savagely and accuses him of stealing money for the game station visits. Ofoma's attempt at denying this accusation only earns him more beatings. On one occasion when she is nursing his wounds, he winces in pain and holds the following conversation with his mother:

- OFOMA: I walked to school to save the money.
- ENDURANCE: You will not kill me o, Ofoma, you will not kill me. Ehn, I'll tell you to do A you'll go and do B. Why now? Now, see.
- OFOMA: Why does he hate me so me so much, is it because he is not my real father?
- ENDURANCE: Stop saying that! He does not hate you.
- OFOMA: It's the truth, he's not my real father!
- ENDURANCE: Stop saying nonsense with your mouth! He's your father. It's not only blood that makes someone family.
- OFOMA: I don't want to be his family again. I'm tired. I wish my real father was alive. You know what? Let's just go. Me and you. I'll get a job and you don't have to worry about the money. Things will better.
- ENDURANCE: Ofoma you are just a child, all you have to do now is to read your books and pass your exams, that's all.

It is established in the film that once Ofoma makes an honest mistake that other children of his age can easily make, he is severely punished. Hence, he hides anything that can show that he has made a mistake. For instance, when he mistakenly breaks a plate and his stepfather walks in, he and his mum hide his bleeding hand which he injured while trying to hurriedly pick the pieces of the broken plate to prevent punishment. This leads to the grave error that cost them a lot at the end of the film. Again, when Ofoma mistakenly burns his step father's shirt while ironing one day. His stepfather tortures him to the extent that he brands him with the pressing iron. Neighbors hear him scream and call the estate security. When the security officials

forcefully gain access into their house, they find Ofoma tied to the banister with the sores from the pressing iron. Immediately, the child was taken to the hospital and Ehis, her husband, was arrested. Endurance pleads with the police to grant him bail. When the annoyed officer asks why she would want to bail a man who perpetuated such evil on her child, her response was:

ENDURANCE: Sir, thank God my son is okay. He is very okay. But, I'm a mother and a wife. I cannot take sides in my home. A family divided cannot stand. If anything happens to my son, God forbid, I'll be in trouble, likewise my husband. If anything happens to him, I'll be in trouble. So, please try and understand.

Even when they relocate to Lagos and things get much better for them financially, Ofoma's abuse moves to Lagos with them. In the same estate where Ofoma and his family lives is a twelve (12) year old girl Lopeda. In contrast to Ofoma's experience, Lopeda is an only child to a loving and supportive single mother. She is allowed to express herself and she is confident and assertive. She is fond of Ofoma who is about the same age as her and begs her mother to allow her to go and play with him. The mother reluctantly agrees after much persuasion but insists that Lopeda would only be allowed to go for her play date with Ofoma with her nanny as a chaperon. On one of these outings, Lopeda goes to Ofoma's house without her nanny and does not return on time. A search is organized for Lopeda within the estate and the first port of call are the homes she usually visits which includes Ofoma's. Ehis blames Lopeda's disappearance on the absence of a father in Lopeda's home. Not quite long after, he gets arrested and taken to the police cell because the entire estate had previously witnessed him abuse his stepson and suspect that he could have a hand in Lopeda's disappearance. In the police station, both the mother of Lopeda and Ofoma are seen together. The following dialogue ensues:

ENDURANCE: What did my husband do to you?

CARA: See, Madam, if you know what is good for you, tell that wild animal you call a husband to provide my daughter.

ENDURANCE: What does he have to do with this?

CARA: What does he have to do with this? What does he have to do with this?
That same idiot that burnt your son because of one useless shirt.

ENDURANCE: See, if you cannot raise your daughter the way a mother should raise a child, don't look for who to blame!

CARA: (Indistinct) You have the nerve to talk to me about parenting? You allow a man destroy your son because of what? How much is he giving you? How much is he giving you and you're talking to me about parenting.

ENDURANCE: At least, my son is not the one running around the whole estate looking or bachelors, all in the name of chess.

These two women call themselves out in the areas of parenting where they failed, which exposed their children to abuse. On one hand, Endurance turned a blind eye to her child's physical abuse

to stay married to her husband who handles her financial responsibilities, On the other hand, Cara was too busy working to earn a living, as such, was not available to take care of her daughter. She was also too permissive, to please the daughter, hence granting her access to outsiders in her absence which put her in harm's way.

The movie touched on several issues that border on the well-being of the child. It shows the contrast in outcomes when a child is raised in a loving and caring home as opposed to an abusive and turbulent one. Lopeda turned out an assertive and confident child, unlike Ofoma who had repeatedly been subdued to a timid and weak child who could not make good judgment the one time it mattered. This is evident when Ofoma decides to hide Lopeda's body after the baseball accident rather than speak to an adult about it. Lopeda's death may have been averted if he had reached out for help on time or worse, the death would have been recognized for the accident that it was.

In addition, the film balances the value of granting liberty/freedom to a child to attain his highest potential against the need to establish boundaries and exert some control over their actions. Lopeda's mother trusted her daughter's judgment in a way that turned out detrimental. One would expect that she would be hesitant to allow her child to interact that closely with Ofoma given that their parenting styles are different. Children are on their best day not capable of seeing potential harm in their actions and would require adult guidance to keep them safe. The failure of a parent to play this role effectively is termed neglect and it is, a form of abuse. The movie ends with Ofoma's mother being carried away to detention when she admits to the murder to cover up Ofoma's act. The loss of the only supportive parent he had would plunge him into the depths of guilt, pain, and regrets that might affect the adult he turns out to be. The emotional torture that follows abuse is one of the reasons abuses should be prevented as healing may take a while or may never happen. *Shining Star* (2024) is a thought-provoking film that sheds light on the dark reality of child abuse and its devastating consequences.

4. Conclusion

“The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” (Malcheff, 5) This quotation applies as much to the ability of films to direct their audience on what to think about. The Media Framing Theory on which this work is hinged is the postulation that media have the wherewithal to influence the thoughts and subsequent actions of its audience. The two films read in this paper, *October 1* (2014) and *Shining Star* (2024), placed emphasis on the negative consequences of boy/male child abuse, not only on the victims, but also the people the abused come in contact with in the course of their lives. These include physical harm, emotional trauma, social stigma, and in extreme cases, death,

The issue of male/boy child abuse is the major concern of this study. The films *October 1* and *Shining Star* mirror the forms, causes, effects, and consequences of the abuse of the male/boy child on the victims and the community. It is established that the abuse of the male/boy child has not received as much clamoring as female child abuse both in literature and film production, whereas, male/boy child abuse is gnawing ferociously at the fabrics of society, as much as female/girl child abuse. To attempt to tackle the issue of male/boy child abuse in Nigeria, however, a multi-faceted approach and strategy is required, and Nollywood cannot be seen sitting on the fence here.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that supports the findings of this study are available within the article (and/or its supplementary materials).

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INFORMED CONSENT

We declare that all subjects gave their consent to all opinions expressed unless otherwise expressly stated.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

We declare that there are no ethical violations during this research or its writing.

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