






**Psychological Trauma and Socio-Economic Burden of Girl-Child Marriage in Nigeria:
Stephanie Linus' 'Dry' as a Filmic Advocacy**
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Psychological Trauma and Socio-Economic Burden of Girl-Child Marriage in Nigeria: Stephanie Linus' 'Dry' as a Filmic Advocacy

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Abstract

The need to proffer solutions to the consequences of girl-child forced marriages in Nigeria has continued to draw scholarly attention within the ambits of sociology, history, law and human-right, women and gender studies, health, and psychology studies. However, studies examining the application of Nollywood films as advocacy texts in this regard are scarce. In response to this gap, this study examines interpretively Stephanie Linus' 'Dry' as a filmic advocacy text, portraying the psychological trauma and the socio-economic burden of girl-child marriages in northern Nigeria. Our interpretive analyses utilize theories espousing how denial of childhood can become traumatic to the child-wives and eventually become a socio-economic burden to their family, community, and country. The key observation is that 'Dry' typifies a proper and efficacious utilization of film as an advocacy platform to interrogate and communicate matters relating to health and wellbeing revolving around girl-child forced marriages.

[Keywords: child-marriage, filmic advocacy, girl-child right, northern Nigeria, trauma]

Introduction

Studies indicate that child marriage is a global phenomenon with distressing socio-economic consequences, which cost the world economy trillions of dollars. These studies demonstrate that poverty, social norms, gender inequality, socio-political instabilities, and gaps in law and enforcement mechanisms are the major propelling factors (WHO 2011; Maswikwa et al. 2015; UNICEF 2020). Studies show that the prevalence of child marriage has decreased significantly worldwide, from one in four girls a decade ago to approximately one in five currently (UNICEF 2020). However, the practice remains widespread mainly in poor and low-income countries (UNICEF 2020). Nigeria a country where this practice continues to thrive has the highest number of child brides in Africa. The northern region of Nigeria has some of the highest prevalence in the world, where 39% of girls are married off before the age of 18, and 16% are married before they turn 15 years old (World Bank 2017; UNICEF 2020). An analytical look at some study reports on child marriages indicates that there is a salient concordance that girl-child marriage increases the incidences of chronic psychological trauma, depression, and mental instability. These conditions

emanate from compromised socio-economic development, aspirations, self-actualization, happiness and well-being of the child-bride (Akpan 2003; Clark 2004; Godha et al. 2013; Nguyen & Wodon 2017; UNICEF 2021). The aforementioned studies indicate that realities surrounding child pregnancies, which interrupt the girl child's formal education and limit her opportunities for a meaningful career and vocational advancement, are the factors that propel the mentioned negative outcomes on the child brides.

More so, the above-cited studies indicate that multiple pregnancies by adolescent mothers aged 10–19 years, enhance the risks of debilitating/life-threatening physiological consequences. Examples of possible health conditions are eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and vesicovaginal fistula (VVF) (Neal et al. 2012; Neal et al. 2018). Other examples of socioeconomic consequences of child pregnancies include the high prevalence of maternal mortality which has “remained high in Nigeria in the last two decades, with the country currently accounting for about 20% of global maternal deaths” (Ope 2020: 1). In addition, there are cases of abandonment and isolation of adolescent mothers who have developed and remained with VVF by their spouses, families and friends in parts of northern Nigeria (UNICEF 2021).

The prevalence of the socio-economic burden of girl-child marriage transcends geographical, religious, cultural and ethnic boundaries in Nigeria and the world. More so, the discussions revolving around its consequences and the advocacy efforts toward ending it similarly transcend disciplinary, ideological, methodological, and national boundaries. Clear support for this assertion is embedded in the policy statement of a multinational organization known as 'Girls Not Brides'. This organization is a global partnership of more than 1500 civil society organisations from over 100 countries, which are working together to end the continuation of child marriage globally. Just like the organization 'Girls Not Brides' there are several other vibrant advocacy organizations, very many advocacy study reports and publications examining the consequences of girl-child marriages. However, the interviews we conducted in parts of northern Nigeria reveal that very few parents and individuals interviewed have seen or read the advocacy reports.

Filmic enactments aimed at ending girl-child marriages through audio-visual representations of the consequences are welcome contributions. Hence, this paper discusses the creative utilization of 'Dry' as a means of enabling effective communication and exposing the consequences of girl-child marriages in some parts of northern Nigeria, specifically the psychological trauma and socio-economic burden. To discuss the film's authorial inclination nuances in contextualizing the consequences of girl-child marriages in 'Dry', the portrayals of the shades of psychological, physiological and socio-economic challenges the girl-child faces or is likely to encounter as a subsisting 'child-wife' will be interrogated using interview responses to highlight concordance and inconsistencies.

Research Approach

This study is a product of a qualitative research approach, involving interpretive analysis of a filmic text and interview responses, aimed at deepening the existing understanding of social contexts of child marriage in specific locales in northern Nigeria. Our primary focus is on the consequences of child marriage as presented in the film text 'Dry'. Secondly, how the filmic portrayals correlate with comments from individuals who have survived a specific negative outcome of child-marriage

VVF. This study benefits from 4-month fieldwork in the towns identified in the film 'Dry' as the locales, and eventually, we found willing participants in a hospital designated for VVF patients. The respondents incidentally were back at the hospital for a check-up. As a phenomenological research, we aim to describe the context(s) of the phenomenon (child marriage) by exploring the perspective(s) of those categories of individuals to understand their point-of-view on child marriage. We interviewed respondents on a one-on-one basis and we made sure that no respondent is aware of the other respondent's involvement in this study. We adopted this approach to ensure the independence of their responses and to abide by their demand for anonymity because of possible stigmatization. Girl brides in parts of northern Nigeria who suffer from VVF are usually stigmatized and those who have recovered are afraid of rejection if people know about their past, hence they decline the publication of their names in published reports. Consequently, we cited the respondents with only their first names, which hinders easy identification. We interviewed 10 individuals through a combination of semi-structured and unstructured methods, which involve asking specific questions and allowing them to espouse freely. We also used an interpreter who translates the Hausa language (the respondents' medium of expression) into the English language.

Theories and Perspectives on Psychological Trauma

The pervading presence of trauma as a complex reality propels its study in various disciplines in sciences, arts and humanities. In scientific studies, scholars attempt to define and enhance the understanding of trauma by espousing its prognosis, diagnosis and therapies, whereas contributions in humanities assist in enhancing the understanding of various shades of traumatic experiences through creative and artistic portrayals. Scholars explain that psychological trauma is in many ways a complex life-long health condition, which bedevils individuals variously and differently with enormous socio-economic consequences. More so, psychological trauma represents forms of discomforting emotions, which are essentially manifestations as well as responses to one or a combination of events or stimuli describable as traumatic experiences. Scholars posit that the causes, intensity, duration, effects, mutation, and manifestations, vary from one individual to another (Brewin et al. 2000; Liamputtong 2007; North et al. 2009; Herman 2015; Williamson et al. 2020). Furthermore, the therapies for different forms of traumatic experiences vary and scholarly reports are suggesting that their causes are many. Hence, an individual may be undergoing multiple forms of traumatic experiences at the same period (Carlson & Dalenberg 2000; Borja et al. 2009; Klein 2012; Williamson et al. 2020). Meanwhile, some of the causative factors are child marriage, war, rape, divorce, fatal accidents, and tragic events. According to Christa Schönfelder, the study of trauma, which was "originally situated in the domain of medicine and then psychology", has "over the last few decades, become relevant in literary and cultural studies" (2013: 28). Schönfelder's suggestion indicates that humanities scholars are increasingly presenting the realities and incidences of trauma in creative literature, and films, which provide data for interpretive studies. As trauma studies emerge as a burgeoning field within humanities, scholars now explore the conceptualizations and contextualization of different kinds of traumatic experiences represented or enacted variously in fine arts, literature, music and films. Looking at the difficulty in providing an encompassing definition of trauma concerning the expanding scope, Schönfelder notes that "any attempt to define and theorize trauma involves a struggle to make

sense of the confusing array of current conceptualizations of trauma, ranging from PTSD to cultural trauma" (2013: 27).

Laurie Vickroy observes that "literary and imaginative approaches [to trauma] provide a necessary supplement to historical and psychological studies" (2002: 221). Elaborating on her comment, Vickroy suggests that the inputs of writers exploring various trajectories of trauma aim essentially to "make terrifying alien experiences more understandable and accessible" (2002: 222). Furthermore, such inputs are to provide an easy and widely assessable medium for purposes of "witnessing or testifying for the history and experience of historically marginalized people" (Vickroy 2002: 221). The 'terrifying alien experiences' refer to the harrowing manifestations usually exhibited by deeply altered individuals as a result of various forms of extreme traumatic experience(s) they have passed through.

Meanwhile, prominent among scholars who have championed this scholarly trajectory is Cathy Caruth, who in her works *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) variously elucidate the debilitating effects of traumatic experiences on victims. In her observation, Ruth Leys observes that scholars such as Cathy Caruth and her colleagues in their analysis note that, "massive trauma precludes all representation because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporally destroyed" (2000: 266). Describing the pathology of trauma, Caruth explains that, "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (1995: 4 – 5). Scholars widely observe that trauma represents a form of response to an overwhelming event or set of events. They also suggest that these responses may begin to manifest at no definite time and that the prognosis may be in form of intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviours such as sporadic flow dissociation exhibited in an apparent loss of language (Caruth 1995; van der Kolk et al 1995; Williamson et al 2020). The view here is that a good number of academic studies focusing on dimensions of traumatic events and occurrences, the impact on victims as well as the symptoms and signs' dynamics are aiding the interpretation of various forms and categories of trauma-induced behaviours, such as those propelled by debilitating consequences of child-marriage.

Perspectives to Interrogations Trauma in Films and Creative Arts

Espousing on the application of creative arts in the portrayal and contextualization of trauma and traumatic experiences, Schönfelder explains:

The literary imagination, with its ability to fictionalize and symbolize, can create a space in which experiences that appear to defy understanding and verbalization, that concern existential dimensions of the human condition – especially threatening experiences of vulnerability or mortality – can be explored from multiple perspectives. Literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma, which is often personalized and contextualized, fictionalized and historicized, as well as psychologised and metaphorized at the same time. (2013: 29)

Literary as well as filmic approaches to trauma representation, Schönfelder contends, "have the potential to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand and critical reflection on the other" (2013: 29). The implication is that these texts, (films, poetry, drama or prose), serve important socio-cultural and political functions. Geoffrey Hartman argues that "trauma study's radical aspect comes to the fore less in its emphasis on acts of violence like

war and genocide than when it draws attention to 'familiar' violence such as rape, and the abuse of women and children" (1995, 546). Similarly, Anne Whitehead observes that trauma texts usually articulate and project the realities around "the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" (2004: 82). According to Chukwuemeka Okpara et al "human attempts at understanding and adapting various forms of songs, dances, paintings and other forms of arts and humanities for the benefit of people in various capacities and circumstances concerning health and wellbeing has been on for long and has continued to generate more interest" (2020: 1). Furthering, Okpara et al observe that:

Scholarly endeavours purposely aimed at attaining a deeper human understanding of how creative arts represent various forms of emotional release from artists, how viewers of creative arts could be stimulated, the suppositions explaining factors propelling similarities and dissimilarities in viewers' responses, and how creative arts can be harnessed in dealing with human health conditions and realities, have been undertaken in different cultures for ages. (2020: 1 – 2)

Illuminating interpretively, on the dimensions of the efficacy of film as a creative art medium applicable in achieving perspective and ideology engineering in humans, Anita Cloete describes the film as an art that is pervasive and powerful. She explains that "as a cultural product and medium, film could be viewed as an important medium for meaning-making" because "cinema and film are embedded within culture and therefore a complex and interesting relationship exists between film, culture, ideology and the audience" (Cloete 2017: 1). What Cloete's contribution suggests is that films as a medium of presenting typical, actual or futuristic realities within specific contexts for viewers' orientation and appreciation, in many ways enhance the assimilation of the encoded perspectives. Elaborating on the classification of film as a form of creative art that possess the propensity to influence viewers' emotions, inclinations and worldviews, Emeka Aniago et al posit that:

The film medium in many ways is like the literary arts in its mechanics and dynamics of entertaining, embedding, consolidating, and re-aligning both culture-specific and universal ideas in the consumers, therefore, watching film massages and agitates the imaginations, ideologies and inclinations of the consumers. (2020: 1)

Furthermore, they maintain that "consciously or unconsciously, film viewers are infused with ideas after viewing films, though at different proportions" (Aniago et al. 2020: 2). The core idea in the above view is that "film as a medium, possesses the propensity to unleash both aggressive and subtle efficacious propelling force on the viewers in varying proportions", therefore, "it is plausible to suggest that such efficacy can invigorate or re-invigorate the consciousness, and re-engineer the viewers' worldviews and ideologies" (Aniago et al. 2020: 2). Aniago et al, Cloete, and Okpara et al are in accord that some films when applied properly help in interrogation of social concerns to achieve conscience and inclination aggregation. Moreover, in humanities studies', contributions towards solving health-related problems, such as 'psychological trauma', Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang observe that:

Cultural reproductions of trauma in the United States, Asia, Africa and many other parts of the world suggest that it is in the retelling and especially in visual representation, that traces of trauma can be preserved and transmitted, however unsatisfactory or even 'improper' that representation may be. (2008: 14)

Essentially, what Kaplan and Wang's position suggests is that capturing visible signs and manifestations of trauma-induced behaviours in film medium provides the viewers with visual evidence, which enhances the assimilation of the information communicated. Kaplan and Wang further suggest that "the visual media do not just mirror those experiences" but "in their courting and staging of violence they are themselves the breeding ground of trauma, as well as a matrix of understanding and experiencing" (2008: 17). In essence, what Kaplan and Wang imply is that "the visual media have become a cultural institution in which the traumatic experience of modernity can be recognized, negotiated, and reconfigured" (2008: 17). Hence, "the humanistic study of trauma needs to initiate a broader socio-historical understanding of the destructive forces of the modern world" (Kaplan & Wang 2008: 15).

On the viability of applying Nollywood films in confronting health-related issues and concerns, Chike E. Onwe and Ihiaeme M. Ihiaeme argue that beyond the widely acknowledged reality that "the rapid growth of the Nigerian film industry is reflected in the fact that the sector has become a major wealth generator for the country" (2018: 1025). In their view, it is evident that "locally produced films have come to occupy an important place in the realm of Nigeria's contemporary communication culture which arguably positions them as a veritable tool for ideological propagation and social change" (Onwe and Ihiaeme 2018: 1025). The supposition in the contribution of Onwe and Ihiaeme (2018) is that Nollywood films have become a functional and efficacious platform for the projection of communal experiences, values and norms and a potent tool for the promotion of the rights of the girl-child through the projection of themes that reflect the negative cultural experiences they go through. Therefore, select Nollywood films such as 'Dry' aid in communicating to the world the realities of the child brides by presenting an easily appreciable representation of typical occurrences and conditions. The view here is that a film such as 'Dry' is built to confront viewers' perspectives on specific issues in a bid to instigate a re-orientation of ideologies and worldviews by offering progressive alternatives. 'Dry' presents salient interrogation and perspectives on the scourge of VVF as an actual reality in parts of northern Nigeria. It also portrays a dense contextualization of the complex socio-economic burden and ramifications propelled by VVF afflictions such as the overwhelming strain on health facilities and personnel, the increase in post-traumatic experiences disorders, and the increase in the number of victims that will become poverty stricken, destitute, and dysfunctional.

Brief Synopsis of 'Dry'

We are reading 'Dry' (released on 14th August 2015, written, directed and produced by Stephanie Okereke-Linus who acted as the character Zara) as an advocacy text portraying contexts of socio-economic burden and disquieting trauma that bedevil VVF victims in parts of northern Nigeria. Major actors in 'Dry' are Darwin Shaw as Dr Alex, Bill McNamara as Dr Brown, Liz Benson Ameye as the hospital Matron, Tijani Faraga as Mallam Sani, and Rekiya Atta as Hajia. Others are Zubaida Ibrahim Fagge as Halima, Olu Jacobs as Speaker of the Parliament, Hakeem Rahman as Honorable Musa, Norma Izon as Mrs Robbins, Afamefuna Klint Igwemba as Dr Mutanga, Jane Ugbe as Madam Kojo, and Paul Sambo as Dr Lundi. 'Dry's story revolves around two female characters, Zara and Halima. The central character Zara lost her parents and family after rebels attacked her village and burnt all the houses. She fled to her aunt's house for refuge. Not long after, her aunt's

husband began to make sexual advances to her. Despite her refusal, he raped her severely. She informed her aunt at some point about the rape. In response, her aunt got infuriated and abused her verbally. Promptly, she threw her out, accusing her of devious attempts to seduce her husband and ruin her marriage. Sadly, because Zara has no other option, she turns to the streets, where she sleeps and hawks to survive. One day, while she was hawking, the boys' of Madam Kojo (a brothel owner) kidnapped and incarcerated her in their brothel. Forcefully, Madam Kojo compelled her and other girls to sleep with men who usually patronize her brothel. At some point, she discovered that she was pregnant and her aunt's husband is responsible. After giving birth to a girl, Madam Kojo lied to her that her baby is dead. In connivance with the birth attendant, Madam Kojo sold the baby (Halima) to a childless couple. As a result of the reckless child delivery by the birth attendant, Zara began to suffer urinary incontinence due to VVF. Promptly, Madam Kojo threw her out because she wets herself uncontrollably and men who patronize the brothel do not want her. Again, Zara ended up in the streets. Luckily she was rescued and adopted by an American (medical missionary) named Mrs Robbins who visits parts of northern Nigeria periodically on a medical mission. In America, Zara attained a university and became a trained physician with sponsorship from Mrs Robbins. Subsequently, Zara relocated to the United Kingdom with Mrs Robbins to practice medicine. During one of her trips to Nigeria, Mrs Robbins discovered that Zara's daughter is not dead, thus she began a discrete search and documentation, and incidentally, Zara stumbled on these documents in Mrs Robbins' drawers.

Thirteen years after Zara left Nigeria with Mrs Robbins, her supposedly dead daughter Halima is alive and married to Alhaji Sani, a man about four times her age against her wish. Her adoptive parents bought from Madam Kojo. Halima developed VVF after an ill-fated childbirth before the age of 14 and her family cast her out, thus her health deteriorated due to a lack of proper medical attention, shelter and food. At the same time, Mrs Robbins could not embark on her usual medical mission to Nigeria because she is unwell, and Zara takes her place. Zara volunteers to perform surgeries at a VVF clinic and co-incidentally Halima was brought in for surgery by her friend whom Zara surgically repaired but Zara could not save Halima because it was too late.

Interpretive Reading of 'Dry'

An interpretive reading of 'Dry' shows that Dr Zara's and Halima's psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders are interconnected exposures to similar traumatic experiences or stimuli. Some of these are coercion to engage in sex at a very tender age, lack of proper parental care and love, denial of a happy childhood, pains of abandonment, consistency of violence, and vicious verbal abuse. Prominent signs of these disorders include sporadic and irregular anger modulation, abnormal phobia propelled by some suggestions of possible commitment to a relationship involving sexual intercourse obligation, sporadic erratic behaviour, and an increased tendency towards re-victimization of self and others (van der Kolk et al. 2007: 203). In an attempt at interpreting the portrayal of the complex socio-economic burden propelled by the unfortunate consequences of ill-fated child marriage in 'Dry', we are looking critically at how 'Dry' presents child marriage as a factor that leads to discomfiting sexual experiences in the life of the girl-child with long-lasting debilitating socio-economic aftermath. In the following dialogue between

Halima and her mother, 'Dry' portrays Halima as dejected due to her parents' resolve to marry her off regardless of her opinion, desire and dreams.

Halima's mother: Halima! What are you doing here all alone? Why are you not with your siblings? You should come in and rest! You know, next week is your big day.

Halima: Mama! I do not want to marry now.

Halima's mother: Halima! You are too young to understand all these things. You are young and this is the right time. When you are old and worn out, who will marry you? And Sani has been so generous. See all the gifts he showered unto us, now and then. He seems to be the right man for you.

Halima: Why me? I don't want to go with him.

Halima's mother: Halima! Your father wants the best for you. Since you are the eldest, he wants you to get married first before your younger one Tani. She has been betrothed for over a year now. She is waiting for you to get married. So hers will come next. Can't you see how excited she is?

Halima: Mother! Please!

Halima's mother: Ha ha! Halima. You are very young and healthy. And very soon you will become a mother. See my Halima, getting married to a very rich man. Your friends and their mothers will be jealous of you.

In the above dialogue, Halima rejects the idea of marriage at her tender age because it will shatter her dreams and aspirations. In addition, she is scared and does not like Alhaji Sani. However, despite Halima's discontent and tearful pleas, her mother indifferently persuades her to accept wholeheartedly her father's decision, which projects the level of child-right abuse and the unfortunate place of mothers in the whole saga. Metaphorically, Halima's mother symbolizes society, which fails to protect the child from agony and melancholy. Another metaphor subsumed in the dialogue is an allusion to a subsisting culture of 'commoditization' of the girl-child, whereby appalling emphasis is placed majorly on her 'bride price' rather than her emotional well-being. This provoked pertinent reactions during our field study. According to one of the respondents Uwani, a survivor of VVF and traumatic experience of childbirth at the age of 14, after watching 'Dry' jointly with the research team tearfully laments:

It is bewildering to say the least, why a mother will unabashedly discountenance the opinion and emotional well-being of her 'tender daughter' and actively participate in imposing a reality that will propel perennial melancholy on her daughter. In my own time, my mother did not save me because she did not have a say regarding who I will marry and at what age. (Personal communication, May 14, 2019)

Uwani explains that her mother could not influence the decision of her father because her religion and tradition permit marriage for a girl at the beginning of puberty which for some starts at the ages of 12, 13 or 14. She notes that the pervading notion is that girls need to get married before they are 'spoilt' (not remaining a virgin) (Personal communication, May 14, 2019). Uwani's contribution aligns with the film's supposition as captured in the words of Halima's mother who strives to indoctrinate Halima: you are young and this is the right time. The right time means the

beginning of puberty for girls. Similarly, Aminatu another respondent (also a victim of child marriage) in her contribution emotionally relates:

I got married at the age of 13. My husband was a trader. He travels to the southern part of Nigeria to sell livestock. His parents made the marriage arrangement in his absence. They paid the dowry and I began to stay with his mother in the women's exclusive section of the compound to shield me from boys and men who may defile me. I waited and wondered about his attitude, likes and dislikes because I have never met him. I was only shown pictures of him. I got pregnant six months after a series of miscarriages, so I had my first child at the age of 15. My half-sister Bilikisu was not that lucky. She married a few months after me. She had her child about a year later. She developed 'the disease' not long after. She was passing urine at random and incessantly. Honestly, nobody knew exactly what caused her condition. Some say maybe it is witchcraft, while, some say it is our family's enemies who have afflicted her with that 'disease' through evil magic. Our father compelled her to reside in a secluded hut not too far from our family compound after her husband's family returned her to our father in disgrace. She cried every day, I cried too. Months later, she committed suicide. (Personal communication, May 20, 2019)

In her response to our question regarding her view about the film 'Dry' as an effective medium of orientation, to help people to change their worldview and misleading traditional perspective, Aminatu explains:

It (Dry) will be helpful if many people will see it, particularly, people in remote villages, where true knowledge of what causes the 'disease' is not available. She notes that while Bilikisu (her half-sister) was suffering from 'the disease' (VVF), people around consistently deliberated on a question such as, why is it that the affliction is on Bilikisu and not on Aminatu? For our family, it is confusing and as young girls, we did not know our left from our right. From knowing nothing, I ended up a mother and painfully I depended on my husband's mother who scares me all the time. (Personal communication, May 20, 2019)

Just as Aminatu explains that as young girls she and Bilikisu (her half-sister) were at the mercy of the decision of their parents, similarly in 'Dry' Halima is at the mercy of her parent's decision, and due to immaturity, she lived daily in fear of her mother-in-law who loomed large consistently. Looking at the dialogue between Halima and her mother, in her mother's prodding, 'soon you will become a mother,' is in many ways loaded with metaphors instigating provoking questions. From a literal point-of-view, the above comment suggests that Halima though a child, will forcibly go into childbearing and motherhood at the tender age of 14. Part of the metaphor is that though Halima's mother made this comment gleefully, the actual reality entails a complex socio-economic consequence for Halima as a victim and society as the indirect burden bearer. The consequences of Halima's childbearing as a child-wife are the loss of her childhood and the inability to obtain requisite formal education, which means a lack of the benefits of education. In addition, childbearing at such a tender age exposed her to intense gruelling experiences and a possible debilitating health condition such as VVF.

Commenting on the agonizing realities faced by a child-wife such as Halima in 'Dry', Hanatu (another respondent), notes that a girl-child married in northern Nigeria, in most cases represents an end to possible formal education for the child-wife. She explains:

I got married at the tender age of 14 and had my first and only child at the age of 15. During childbirth, I had a massive complication, though my baby survived. I got 'the disease' (inability to hold urine). I was treated and I am well but I have not been able to conceive for 15 years and the pain of my experience has remained with me. Sometimes I cry. I could not continue with schooling after marriage. Now I am a tailor thanks to a non-governmental organization. I own a shop and I am coping. My daughter will go to school and I will not allow her to go through the experience I had. (Hanatu, personal communication, May 21, 2019)

In line with the comments of Hanatu, Aminatu, Uwani and the portrayal of child marriage in 'Dry', the socio-economic impact is that most child brides are more likely to struggle to become very productive economic wise. Thus, victims are most likely to remain shackled with poverty and ignorance, and unable to pursue a dream career leading to self-fulfilment. Consequently, the denial of formal education to child brides denies their communities and nation a large poll of well-trained individuals needed for nation-building. Some of the respondents that watched 'Dry' think it is metaphorically amazing that most members of the community appear to be oblivious to all these realities. 'Dry' indicates that child marriages usually force the child brides to become completely dependent on their husbands for every material need. In most cases, when their husbands die or are thrown out from their matrimonial homes, just like Halima, they usually become full or quasi-destitute dependent on social subsidy.

The dialogue below between Halima's husband (Sani) and her mother-in-law elucidates the burden of ignorance, which remains a major variable in the people's perception of VVF in parts of northern Nigeria particularly among illiterate peasants. This dialogue also illustrates an important purpose of 'Dry', which is to demystify the aura of the paranormal surrounding VVF in the perception of a large number of people in northern Nigeria.

Halima's mother-in-law: The whole village is talking about Halima and this dreaded disease that she has brought to our household.

Sani: I don't know what to do.

Halima's mother-in-law: You don't know what to do? E-e-e Sani! You don't know what to do? Well, if you don't know what to do, I do. I will arrange to send her to the boka's (native doctor) house. Because I suspect that, these are evil attacks or witchcraft, Sani.

Sani: Hajia! witchcraft?

Halima's mother-in-law: Yes! Sure! If it is not witchcraft, then what is it? Can you imagine the amount of money we spent on that girl and her family, only for them to turn around and make us a laughingstock in this village? Don't forget that they say that she may have even committed adultery.

Sani: No...! No...! How can you say she committed adultery? I disvirgined the girl and she has remained in the confine of this home since I married her.

Halima's mother-in-law: What about that time she ran away and we couldn't find her until her mother brought her? Do you know whether she went in search of her old boyfriend? And the other time! Do you remember when I sent her to call Adamu's mother for me? She went away and never came back. When she got here, she said that she got lost. Got lost in this tiny village, where cockroaches can find their way around to the stream. Don't be naive Sani, don't be naive.

At this point, in Halima's ordeal, practically everyone in the household became very unfriendly. Some jeered at her, derisively telling her that she is a smelling witch and should not come near them. As Sani continues to perceive ailing Halima as a burden, a source of embarrassment and shame, who to him is irredeemable, he sends her to her father's house. In response, Halima's father in his lack of compassion promptly returns Halima to her husband with a warning to him not to return her to his house. Out of frustration, Sani and his mother placed Halima in a dilapidated hut considerably detached from their compound. From time to time, just one of her co-wives would voluntarily bring food for her, until one of her friends who is a VVF survivor, was operated on by Dr Zara recently, came and took her to the clinic for a surgical operation. Dr Zara discovered that Halima is her child, but unfortunately, she died because her case has worsened by the intervention. Fatima (another respondent and VVF survivor) in the narration of her experience observes:

My husband's family labelled me a witch. They said I brought a curse to their family. They all abandoned me and I was without a friend. When they returned me to my father's house, my father accepted me and promptly sent me to a hospital. Before my cure, I gradually began to hate myself. Now, I feel fine, though each time I cast my mind back, I feel dreadful and angry. I left my village because they perceive me as not good enough for the men there. To them, I am a leftover. (Personal communication, May 21, 2019)

Fatima's narration correlates with portrayals in 'Dry' in several areas, such as how in-laws and husbands of child-wives who developed VVF are maltreated, the abiding belief that victims of VVF are responsible for their affliction because of their evil-doings, that VVF is a curse, and that the victims mostly remain with long-lasting psychological trauma. Also in accord with the respondent's narration, 'Dry' relays that child marriages will inevitably lead to girl-child pregnancies, which in many ways are surrounded with unfortunate realities.

'Dry' poignantly points to how traumatic experiences witnessed by Halima and Dr Zara coalesce and develop into a deep-seated post-traumatic stress disorder. A portrayal of this turmoil appears in the scene where Dr Zara's therapist encourages Zara to unbundle freely her troubled mind to reveal the ongoing emotional upheaval bedevilling her for many years as a means of attaining catharsis.

Doctor: It has been three months since our last session.

Zara: Is it already three months?

Doctor: Yes, where did you go?

Zara: I had to take care of my mom.

Doctor: What happened to your mother?

Zara: She is been suffering from her last trip and I believe she is planning another trip to Africa.

Doctor: You know that that is what keeps her going?

Zara: I know! Yes! But she is been doing it for years, travelling every year for her medical missions.

Doctor: You know one of those missions saved you.

Zara: I know! Maybe I just miss her. It is just the two of us.

Doctor: Do you feel she is not proud of you anymore?

Zara: No, she is.

Doctor: Do you think you might go with her on one of these trips someday?

Zara: E-e-e-m-m-m... That I do not know.

Doctor: Why don't you want to go?

Zara: Because I told you, my life is here.

Doctor: When do we break this wall?

Zara: What wall?

Doctor: Your fears.

Zara: I do not have any fears.

Doctor: We have been going around in cycles each session, when do you let me in?

Zara: Maybe, I need to trust completely.

Doctor: You don't trust me?

Zara: (*Phone rings*) Hospital! I have to leave now. (*She departs*).

The conversation demonstrates that the series of maltreatments Dr Zara endured as a child is a reason she developed a behavioural complex symptomatic of PTSD, such as a firm lack of trust, denial tendency and introversion penchant. A respondent corroborates the manifestation of similar symptoms because of her VVF affliction and the responses of people to her predicament in the following contribution:

I feel unsettled each time I hear people discuss marriage and childbirth. I usually feel they are talking about me. I will quietly leave such a place because the discussion has remained to me a consistent source of anguish. It remains me of my ugly experience, which makes me feel very miserable. In such moments, I will have flashbacks and I will recoil and keep to myself. When a man attempts to woo me, I will respectfully decline and begin to avoid him. I do not know if I will ever marry again. (Talatu, personal communication, May 19, 2019)

The narration by Talatu in some ways corresponds with the post-trauma effects emanating from Dr Zara. This indicates that traumatic experiences can influence an individual's patterns of behaviour and inclination. Hence, post-traumatic experience behaviours are "a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (Balaev 2008: 150). In addition, the behavioural tendencies of Dr Zara and Talatu's narration align with the supposition that "trauma, abuse, or maltreatment in childhood has been linked to alteration of the brain structure and the neurobiological stress-response systems which have consequences for health and emotional well-being" (Kelly-Irving et al. 2013: 721). Therefore, the exhibition of PTSD by Dr Zara and Talatu revolves around their recollections, which intermittently instigate melancholic memories of their brutal and agonizing childhood. Both Dr Zara and Talatu exhibit sporadic mood swings, alternating symptomatic nuances of fear, guilt, and shame impulsively. We also grasp from Dr Zara and Talatu's narrations that the vulnerable and abused girl-child, from time to time usually

wonders whether the negativities said intensely about her are indeed true. Based on their narrations, the socio-economic reality is that most traumatized child wives will progressively become mentally unstable, impulsive and sometimes destitute.

Again, 'Dry' presents an example of a trauma-induced complex (morbid phobia) in the scene where Dr Brown (the hospital Medical Director) asks Dr Zara to join a medical mission to Nigeria. Due to the subsisting ill feelings in Dr Zara's consciousness, owing to her traumatic experience in Nigeria, she declines. Her refusal to travel to Nigeria indicates an avoidance of the subject, location, and individuals that reminds her of the traumatic past. Three respondents Asabe, Mai'muna, and Hajara in their narrations, observe that any discussion, which includes child marriage, marriage, husbands, childbirth, and mother-in-law usually makes them sad because they remind them of their traumatic pasts (Asabe; Mai'muna; Hajara, personal communication, May 22, 2019). Similarly, just as Dr Zara avoids topics relating to specifics of her traumatic past, Asabe, and Haraja notes that they relocated from their villages because meeting individuals directly linked to their traumatic pasts is unbearable (Asabe; Haraja, personal communication, May 22, 2019).

In the scene where Zara visited her boyfriend to narrate her encounter with Dr Brown, 'Dry' projects traumatic experiences as capable of inducing the development of chronic morbid phobia about certain things in a victim just as the narrations of Asabe, Haraja and Mai'muna indicate. Here, Dr Zara exhibits clear signs of morbid phobia about a possible permanent relationship with a man, which will lead to a demand for a commitment to conjugal rights continually. In an episode where Dr Alex (Zara's boyfriend) was preparing for a candlelight dinner and Zara was attempting to retrieve cutleries from a drawer, she beheld a box of an engagement ring; she instantaneously flinched because she presumed that Dr Alex would propose to her. In a bid to avoid a proposal, she pretends to answer a call from her mother. She raises her voice and announces to Dr Alex that she is leaving immediately because her mother urgently needs her.

What these two scenes portend is that Dr Zara exhibits psychological trauma characterized by morbid phobia towards commitment to a permanent relationship with any man because her involuntary engagement in prostitution at Madam Kojo's brothel, and the incessant rape episodes by her aunt's husband, make her feel emotionally battered, ashamed, and afraid. Dr Zara shows a classic form of introversion during her sessions with the psychotherapist, which accords because some traumatic experiences can make a victim begin to exhibit typical signs of "alterations in self-perception, chronic guilt and shame, feelings of self-blame, of ineffectiveness, and of being permanently damaged" (Van der Kolk et al 2007: 203). Therefore, the guilt and pain exhibited in these instances by Dr Zara may also lead to the exhibition of other signs such as intrusive hallucinations, dreams, anti-social tendencies and distrust (Caruth 1995: 4).

More so, in 'Dry' there are indications that victims of traumatic experiences usually recover at differing paces and levels through resilience, which comes in diverse forms. In some cases, the courage to face the source of trauma just as Dr Zara accepts to take the position of her mother to travel to Nigeria eventually, which is the source of her PTSD, enhances resilience. Her visit essentially provides a therapeutic opportunity for her to confront the people who perpetrated the traumatic events leading to her PTSD. According to Ann S. Masten, resilience as a factor in combating PTSD refers to the "capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from

significant challenges that threaten stability, viability, or development" (2011: 494). Masten adds that the building of resilience can come from clinical support therapies and social remedies such as confronting the source(s) of one's traumatic feelings and the provision of economic palliatives (2011).

In another scene, 'Dry' indicates that witness to similar events and realities that propelled a victim's traumatic feelings can induce recall of past traumatic experiences, which may or may not exacerbate the subsisting traumatic feeling of a victim. For instance, the scene where a young couple resolutely insists on the natural birth process against informed medical advice by Dr Zara reminds Dr Zara of her traumatic experience. In agony, Dr Zara recollects her experience as a child bleeding to death, while a beleaguered local birth attendant continued to pull the baby from her womb even though she was rapidly losing the energy to push.

Conclusion

This study examined the creative utilization of the film 'Dry' as an efficacious medium of social criticism and advocacy, to portray the shades of socio-economic burden and psychological trauma that typifies the realities of the girl-child who is compelled to become a child-wife in parts of northern Nigeria. The study looked at two pertinent questions raised in 'Dry': What are the consequences of child marriage and how are psychological trauma and VVF linked to child marriage? In response to these questions, we discussed how 'Dry' explores the deep-seated cultural worldviews and inclinations that constitute obstacles to VVF eradication in northern Nigeria. The study outlined what 'Dry' presents as the causative factors and how filmic portrayals can help in the sensitization of people in a bid to end the practice. Poignantly, the study looked at the presentation of women in parts of northern Nigeria as those on the frontlines directly upholding this marginality, victimhood, and debasement of other northern Nigerian women. In addition, we examined how 'Dry' portrays these 'front-liners' as victims of ignorance because they are scarcely informed. We discussed child marriage in northern Nigeria as a metaphorical symbolism subsuming the subsisting apparent dysfunctional political ideology that denies these 'front-liners' functional and sufficient formal education that could have brought illumination and progress. We looked at how the anguish and travails of the characters Dr Zara and Halima, and the respondents (Uwani, Aminatu, Hanatu, Fatima, Talatu, Asabe, Mai'muna and Hajara), are laden with a multiplicity of variables and propelling factors which situate their experiences as 'complex trauma'. Our finding is that the situation in northern Nigeria remains alive due to the retrogressive ideological worldview, poverty, disinterest, and failure of leadership. 'Dry' depicts a society lacking comprehensive care disposition regarding the emotional well-being of the girl-child. We looked at how 'Dry' depicts Halima as a symbol of the subjugated girl-child in parts of northern Nigeria usually compelled to endure a husband far older than her. 'Dry' interrogates the contributions of home births conducted by birth attendants whose training does not cover complicated childbirth issues. In addition, 'Dry' highlights the tales of agony that trail an overwhelmed village birth attendants in parts of northern Nigeria, that result in fatal ruptures of some vital reproductive organs and parts that lead to VVF.

Consequently, an advocacy film such as 'Dry' which highlights the consequences of girl-child marriages in some parts of northern Nigeria is a better medium of advocacy in this context

because of its unique accessibility qualities. This is because more people are likely to see a film and understand it, than the number of people who are likely to read a research report and understand it. Far more people have seen the film 'Dry' than those who have read research reports detailing the circumstances of child marriage. Film is widely acknowledged as more attractive to more strata of society than a written research report because it is a form of entertainment devoid of the drudgery and encumbrances of academic research reports. Hence, for advocacy purposes, the film is a more viable medium of projecting socio-economic and cultural matters to the public particularly the illiterate peasants because the film as an audio-visual text and a phenomenal mass communication platform provides a massive opportunity for multi-purpose creative utilization.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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