BENEVOLENT MISOGYNY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF IGBO WOMANHOOD IN *LOVE IN EVERY WORD*

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Abstract
This paper examines the representation of Igbo womanhood in the romantic Nollywood film series Love in Every Word (Parts 1 and 2, 2025), arguing that the films deploy what this study terms benevolent misogyny, a cultural form of gender control that disguises itself as love, protection and admiration. The argument is substantiated by Rosalind Gill's concept of postfeminist sensibility and Glick and Fiske's (1996) ambivalent sexism theory, which are used to conduct a close analysis of the films' narrative structure, visual choices and dialogue to show how the male lead's financial dominance, persistent pursuit, proprietary language and systematic management of the female character's autonomy are framed as romance rather than recognised as red flags. The paper gives attention to the Igbo name Achalugo, arguing that its deployment in the film both invokes and distorts the cultural meanings of Igbo womanhood embedded in the Igbo naming tradition. This study commends the effort of the producers in celebrating the Igbocultural identity through language and names, but however, these acts also construct a version of Igbo womanhood that is different from the power and agency Igbo women exercised during the pre-colonial era.The paper concludes that Nollywood's new romantic template is not a faithful cultural representation but a Post-feminism revision of patriarchy, one that dresses old constraints in the aesthetics of Igbo tradition.

Keywords: Achalugo, ambivalent sexism, benevolent misogyny, gender representation, Nollywood, postfeminism

Introduction

Nollywood has changed in its portrayal of the Igbo home. The images that once dominated Igbo home videos, the violent husband, the suffering wife, the cultural silencing of women in domestic space, have given way to a new genre of romance film, particularly in English-language productions targeting urban, middle-class audiences, in which the Igbo man is reimagined as a lover of extraordinary tenderness. He is seen as wealthy, attentive and fluent in the language of devotion. Unlike the past where the Igbo man demands to be fed, this new construct brings food to her office, builds houses for her mother, buys out jewellery stores for his woman and tells her she is his queen.

Love in Every Word (2025), directed by Stanley Obi and produced under OmoniOboli TV, became one of the most-watched Nigerian films on YouTube within weeks of its release, accumulating over 25 million views (Iloanwusi & Dike, 2025). Part 2, subtitled *The Wedding*, continued the story of Obiora, a wealthy Igbo businessman, and Chioma, a marketing executive and owner of a growing perfume brand. Audiences celebrated the films as evidence that the image of the domineering Igbo husband was outdated and this new replacement is one that should be admired by all. One of the things that made the film become widely

received and talked about is the phrase "Achalugo, I am going to marry you," which has become a cultural phenomenon reproduced across social media, commercial advertising and personal declarations (Iloanwusi & Dike, 2025). Many viewers, including young Igbo women, described the film as the most authentic depiction of how Igbo men love that they had ever seen on screen.

This paper does not dispute the fact that the films are well-written or that they represent genuine creative evolution within Nollywood. However, it argues that they perform an ideological work that needs to be brought to light because it is more complicated than the celebrations of the movies suggest. The paper recognizes that beneath the warmth of the man, the gifts and the devotion of the lead character, a pattern can be found. The lead female character, despite being adored and celebrated is not fully autonomous or independent. Even though she has a career and her ambition is acknowledged, her fulfillment is incomplete without the male lead and romantic interest. This can be seen when her greatest professional achievement was launched with his investment, and the fact that her financial contributions to their shared home are negotiated and decided by the male lead to just groceries. Viewers also tend to miss the moment when her body is described as his property as well as when he provides a house for her mother before asking for her blessings to marry her daughter.

As much as all of these actions are adored by many, proven by the comments on various social media platforms, this study reveals that beneath all that is a pattern known as benevolent misogyny, a term developed from the existing literature on ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007). Benevolent misogyny is, unlike that of open contempt, the misogyny that says to the woman "you are my queen" while structurally ensuring that the she cannot move without his provision. Unlike direct misogyny, this form of misogyny is the harder form to challenge because it does not feel like oppression since it appears in form (and feels like) of love.

The paper gives attention to the Igbo cultural dimensions of the films. It examines the use of Igbo names, language, customs and setting as part of to the films' claim to cultural authenticity and is central to the argument this paper makes. The version of Igbo womanhood the films construct is not, this paper argues, drawn from Igbo cultural history. Igbo women in the pre-colonial period held real economic power, institutional authority and political influence (Eche, 2024). They were market leaders, judicial figures, titled chiefs and priestesses (Obi-Nwosu, n.d.). The study adopts Igbo naming and language to create an aesthetic of cultural rootedness while constructing a version of femininity that mimics the Victorian ideals of dependent womanhood than to anything in the Igbo tradition. The study is informed by African feminist scholarship. Oyěwùmí (1997) cautioned against the uncritical importation of gender categories created in Western settings into African societies without distortion. This paper takes that warning seriously, questioning whether the films accurately represent the full humanity and historical agency of Igbo women and whether the cultural symbols they employ really mean what the films say they mean.

Conceptual Framework

Nollywood

Nollywood refers to the Nigerian film industry, which has grown since the early 1990s to become the second-largest film industry in the world by volume of output, surpassing Hollywood and trailing only India's Bollywood (Effiong and Iseyen, 2017). The term itself is a portmanteau of Nigeria and Hollywood, and it began as a home-video industry, producing films on video cassette and selling them directly to consumers at markets. It has since migrated to YouTube, Netflix and streaming platforms, reaching global audiences among the Nigerian diaspora and beyond. Nollywood is not simply an entertainment industry but over time, it has become a primary means of transmitting Nigerian cultural values, social norms and representing gender, class, ethnicity and family. According to Maton's (2018) observation, the industry has the capacity to construct meaningful cultural values but has frequently used that capacity to reproduce existing social hierarchies rather than challenge them.

Benevolent Misogyny

Benevolent misogyny is a term used in this paper to describe a specific configuration of gender ideology in which sexist attitudes towards women are expressed through the rhetoric of admiration, protection and devotion rather than contempt or hostility. The term builds directly on Glick and Fiske's (1996) concept of benevolent sexism but extends its critical application to a cultural context in which the benevolent dimension is not just an attitude but a fully elaborated aesthetic one that borrows from traditional cultural symbols to make the control it enacts appear as love. Benevolent misogyny is a subtle form of misogyny that arrives in the form of gifts, declarations and cultural prestige, and it is effective because it feels like the opposite of misogyny. In the context of this paper, benevolent misogyny names the specific ideological operation visible in *Love in Every Word*, in which the representation of Igbo womanhood as worthy of extraordinary male devotion simultaneously constructs that womanhood as incomplete without it.

Ambivalent Sexism

Ambivalent sexism theory, introduced by Glick and Fiske (1996), argues that sexism is not a singular, uniform set of negative attitudes towards women. Instead, it consists of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, two related but distinct dimensions. Hostile sexism has to do with the overtly negative attitudes that most people recognise as sexist, including the belief that women are manipulative, incompetent or dangerous when they occupy positions of power. Benevolent sexism, by contrast, refers to subjectively positive attitudes towards women that nonetheless restrict them to traditional roles. Benevolent sexism positions women as delicate, morally pure and in need of male protection, and rewards women who conform to traditional femininity while implicitly threatening those who deviate from it. Glick and Fiske (1996) showed that both dimensions are positively correlated creating a situation in which men who express high levels of benevolent sexism also tend to express higher levels of hostile sexism towards women who fail to conform. The two function together as a system, providing a reward structure for compliance and a punishment structure for resistance. Barreto and Doyle (2022) refined this framework by demonstrating that benevolent sexism is difficult to resist or even identify because it is received as warmth rather than constraint.

Gender Representation

Gender representation refers to the ways in which gender identities, roles and relationships are depicted in cultural texts, including film, television, literature and advertising. Representation is an active process of meaning-making in which particular versions of gender are constructed, normalised and circulated. Hall (1997) argued that representation does not simply describe the world as it is but participates in producing the world as audiences come to understand it. In the context of film, gender representation comprises how characters are framed visually, how conflicts involving gender are staged and resolved, what narrative choices are made about whose perspective is centred and how the camera positions audiences in relation to gender dynamics. For this paper, gender representation is the means through which the specific images of Igbo womanhood in *Love in Every Word* are examined.

Achalugo

Achalugo is an Igbo female name derived from the root *ụgọ* (eagle). In Igbo oral tradition and praise poetry, the eagle is an image of sovereignty, rare distinction and transcendent greatness. It is associated with those whose achievements place them above the ordinary. To call a woman Achalugo is to stir up this symbolism for the feminine and to name her as the dwelling place of that eagle quality, the one in whom greatness resides. The name belongs to a class of Igbo female names that encode not only physical beauty but also moral worth, communal significance and the cultural ideals that the community hopes the bearer will embody. Ufearoh and Jombo (2023) argue that in Igbo aesthetic tradition, beauty is inseparable from character and contribution to the community. In *Love in Every Word*, this name is how the male lead's romantic addresses the female character.

Theoretical Framework

Postfeminist Sensibility

The concept of postfeminist sensibility, developed by Rosalind Gill (2007), is the most essential theoretical tool for this analysis. Gill argues that contemporary media has absorbed the surface language of feminism, producing a cultural moment in which women appear empowered, independent and agentic while the same texts simultaneously reinscribe traditional femininity as the ultimate source of their value and fulfilment. The key mechanism is what Gill calls the "double entanglement," a combination of feminist and anti-feminist ideas that work together to make patriarchal arrangements seem like free choices made by liberated women.

This framework corresponds quite well to Love in Every Word. Chioma is a high-flying career woman, running campaigns and running her own business and refusing to take money from men on principle. The films go out of their way to show her as capable and independent, as seen when she stands up to her boss, fires a colleague who disrespects her, articulately argues her right to financial responsibility in marriage, and shows a sophisticated understanding of financial dynamics in romantic relationships. However, the entire story arc of both films focused on her integration into Obiora's terms of engagement, her career becoming a subplot.

Gill (2007) argued that postfeminist sensibility produces a particular kind of female subjectivity in which women's resistance to romantic arrangements is framed as a psychological problem requiring resolution rather than a position deserving respect. This is explicitly how the films handle Chioma's reluctance throughout. Her principled refusal to accept Obiora's money is eventually explained as a consequence of her father's abandonment. Once the psychological backstory is in place, the film implies that the right move is not to respect her stated preferences but to wait patiently for her to heal enough to' accept his provision. Audiences, responding to what the film frames as Obiora's emotional intelligence, have celebrated this patience as a form of love. Gill's framework helps explain why this framing works so effectively. Since Chioma looks and sounds empowered, her gradual incorporation into his world feels like her own chosen evolution rather than a structural surrender.

Ambivalent Sexism Theory

Glick and Fiske (1996) transformed the understanding of sexism by demonstrating that it encompasses not only overtly hostile attitudes towards women but also subjectively positive ones. They termed the latter benevolent sexism, defining it as a chivalrous ideology that casts women as pure, delicate and morally superior counterparts to men, therefore deserving of protection and cherishing, but only within the confines of traditional feminine roles. Benevolent sexism consists of three sub-components: protective paternalism, which positions men as women's necessary protectors; complementary gender differentiation, which assigns women communal traits like warmth and nurturing while reserving agentic traits for men; and heterosexual intimacy, which idealises women as the necessary objects of men's romantic devotion.

Glick and Fiske (1996) showed that benevolent and hostile sexism are positively correlated. Men who express benevolent sexism towards women who conform to traditional roles are the same men who express hostility towards women who deviate from those roles. The two operate together, rewarding compliance and punishing resistance. Barreto and Doyle (2022) elaborated this, showing that benevolent sexism is perceived as harmless and even romantic, which is precisely why it is so effective. Women exposed to benevolent sexism often report feeling flattered rather than constrained, even as research consistently demonstrates that it limits their professional ambitions, self-efficacy and life choices (Chisango et al., 2024).

"Odogwu" expresses all three components throughout both films. His protective paternalism appears in his insistence on handling all domestic expenses and his barely concealed discomfort when Chioma asserts financial independence. Likewise, his complementary gender differentiation surfaces in the consistent

framing of Chioma as warm, emotionally deep and creatively gifted but persistently in need of his guidance on strategic and financial matters. His heterosexual intimacy is the film's dominant register, the devotion, the naming, the declarations, the gifts. Chisango and Maunganidze (2025) found in their study of lobola valuation in Zimbabwe that placing a woman on a financial pedestal is not simply affection. It creates obligations, expectations and ultimately consequences for women who fail to stay on the pedestal. The dynamic they describe in the context of bride price negotiations maps onto the domestic architecture of *Love in Every Word* with considerable structural similarity.

Gill's postfeminist sensibility and Glick and Fiske's ambivalent sexism theory provide a two-level framework for this analysis. Gill explains how the films construct the illusion of female empowerment while reinstating traditional gender arrangements. Glick and Fiske explain what those arrangements are and why they are so difficult to resist or even name.

Literature Review

Scholars have extensively documented the stereotypical representation of women in Nollywood. Onyenankeya et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal content analysis of ten Nollywood films over a twenty-year period and found that the representation of women had not radically departed from traditional preconceptions. Women were consistently underrepresented in high-status professional roles, more likely to be defined by their domestic relationships and frequently depicted as dangerous or pathological when they achieved financial or professional independence. Alola and Alola (2020) found that the most commonly deployed female stereotypes included femme fatale, trophy wife, primary caregiver and dependent, with male characters typically occupying professional and leadership roles. Similarly, Nyamkoh and Ngwa (2021), in their analysis of Nollywood films centred on marital power, argued that the films consistently constructed wealth as the primary index of power within domestic relationships.

Ogunbola et al. (2024) analysed four Nollywood films released between 2012 and 2020 and found that while some films showed progressive female characters, the dominant narrative still positioned women's worth in relation to marriage and male approval. Udoh (2025) examined gender representation through dialogue in six contemporary Nollywood films and found that male characters used assertive, commanding language throughout, while female characters, even when professionally successful, used language reflecting subordination in the domestic sphere.

The existing literature has not fully addressed the configuration of the new romantic Nollywood film, in which the woman's professional identity is prominently displayed but undermined by the narrative. Previous scholarship focused largely on films in which women were overtly passive or victimised. The new genre, exemplified by *Love in Every Word*, requires a different analytical lens because the misrepresentation is less visible. This study attempts to provide that lens.

Igbo Women and the Pre-Colonial Record

To understand what *Love in Every Word* does with Igbo womanhood, it is necessary to understand what Igbo womanhood actually contained historically. The record is considerably richer than the films suggest. Eche (2024) documented that women in pre-colonial Igbo society exercised substantial economic, political and spiritual authority. The marketplace was primarily a female domain. Women controlled the circulation of goods across the four-day market cycle, the Eke, Orie, Afor and Nkwo markets, and the most successful among them received public titles recognising their economic achievements. In Niger Igbo communities, the title of *Omu* was conferred on women who had distinguished themselves in economic life, carrying authority equivalent to the male Obi and including a seat on the governing council (Eche, 2024). The *Omu* presided over women's affairs and market matters and her pronouncements carried legal force.

Politically, dual-sex governance structures ran through most Igbo communities (Eche, 2024). Male political leaders managed general community affairs while female political leaders managed matters pertaining to

women, with both systems holding genuine authority. The Umuada, the council of daughters of a lineage who had married out into other communities, served as a final court of appeal in many disputes, including disputes men could not resolve among themselves (Obi-Nwosu, n.d.). Edemadu (2025) recorded that the Umuada and the Alutaradi, the council of married women of the household, maintained law and order in their communities and could sanction men who mistreated their wives, sometimes through public shaming and collective action. The 1929 Women's War, in which Igbo women organised a massive uprising against colonial taxation and the erosion of their traditional authority, was not an anomaly but the expression of a political culture that already existed.

Spiritually, women held major positions in Igbo religious life. They served as priestesses to various deities and were understood as intermediaries between the living and the spiritual world (Edemadu, 2025). The supreme feminine deity in Igbo cosmology, Ala, the earth goddess, was revered as the giver and sustainer of life, the moral arbiter of the community and the source of fertility. Ala's authority was not subordinate. It was foundational. As Eche (2024) noted, the fact that the most powerful deity in Igbo ontology is assigned the feminine gender reflects a cosmological valuation of womanhood that is absent from the romantic logic of *Love in Every Word*.

Obienusi (2025) acknowledged the real restrictions that Igbo customary law placed on women in certain domains, including limitations on inheritance and restrictions in public political office, but she also noted that many of the most severe constraints intensified under colonial influence rather than representing the original character of Igbo culture. Eche (2024) argued the same point directly. The British colonial administration, shaped by Victorian gender ideology that confined women to domesticity, replaced indigenous dual-sex governance with male-only administrative structures, installing warrant chiefs, dissolving women's councils and reassigning market oversight to men. What Nollywood frequently presents as Igbo tradition is, in many of its most constraining dimensions, a colonial inheritance.

The Cultural Significance of Igbo Naming

Naming in Igbo culture is not a casual act, but is a deliberate, community-sanctioned practice through which identity, aspiration and social meaning are assigned (Ufearoh & Jombo, 2023). Igbo names are typically given by parents or the extended family and carry meanings that connect the individual to the circumstances of their birth, the family's history, their relationship with the divine and the community's aspirations for their life. The name is understood as a form of prophetic speech, encoding what the bearer will become or what they represent.

Female Igbo names frequently invoke the qualities the culture most values in women. Ngozi means blessing; Chioma means good God; Amaka means she is beautiful or wonderful; and Nwando is a name that reveals resilience. Many Igbo female names conjure the relationship between the woman and the divine, her family or her community, encoding her as a giver of life, a bearer of good, a figure of grace and strength. Ufearoh and Jombo (2023) argued that Igbo aesthetic judgements about women are inseparable from moral and communal values. A woman is not simply physically beautiful. She is beautiful because of what she is and does within the life of the community. The name Achalugo is derived from one of the most powerful symbols in Igbo cultural life, the eagle (ụgọ). The eagle in Igbo cosmology carries connotations of majesty, sovereignty and rare distinction. It is an image associated with greatness. In Igbo oral tradition and praise poetry, the eagle is used to describe extraordinary individuals, those whose achievements place them above the ordinary (Edemadu, 2025). When a woman is called Achalugo, it means that she embodies the eagle quality, and the name is of genuine honour, suggesting not passivity but distinguished presence.

The film's use of this name is analytically significant because of the gap between what the name culturally encodes and what the film narratively enacts. “Odogwu” names Chioma “Achalugo” as a term of romantic address. The film presents this as beautiful, and audiences have responded to it as such. But in doing so, the film performs a quiet ideological manoeuvre by borrowing the cultural prestige of a name associated

with female greatness and independence and deploying it within a narrative in which the woman's greatness is consistently framed as dependent on and ultimately in service of, the man's love. The name says she is the resting place of an eagle, while the narrative ensures that eagle is him.

There is also the matter of who does the naming. In Igbo tradition, names are assigned by the community, not claimed by a romantic partner. Obiora's repeated use of "Achalugo" functions as his naming of Chioma, and this is indirectly his act of defining who she is and what she represents. This appropriation of the naming function is consistent with the broader pattern the films establish, in which Obiora consistently positions himself as the authority on Chioma's identity, psychology, potential and her worth. The film presents this as romance, but in the context of Igbo cultural practice, it is a usurpation of communal authority.

The Achalugo Brand

Iloanwusi and Dike (2025) analysed the viral spread of the phrase "Achalugo, I am going to marry you" and its rapid commercial appropriation across multiple industries, from logistics companies and mobile banking apps to educational institutions and real estate firms. They noted that the phrase's emotional resonance and cultural cachet made it a powerful marketing tool. They also flagged tensions in its commercial deployment, including the way it reduced complex Igbo feminine identity to an aspirational consumer profile. This paper builds on that observation and extends the critique inward, into the films themselves.

Part 2 deepens the Achalugo symbolism significantly. Chioma names her perfume brand "Arena Sense" but creates two original fragrances for the launch, one called "Achalugo" and one called "Odogwu," which she describes as representing the love that holds her. In her launch speech, she says: "Achalugo. This is for the women who raised me, held me, healed me. For my mother, my sisters, my achalalugo." "Odogwu," she says, is for Obiora, "a scent made of stillness, of safety, kindness that doesn't ask to be witnessed, of love that holds you even in chaos." This is a genuinely moving speech. But it is also structurally telling. "Achalugo" is the name she gives to the feminine, to her mother, friendships, and community, while "Odogwu" is what she gives to her love for Obiora. In the film's emotional economy, the name associated with Igbo female greatness becomes the domain of support and origin, and the man becomes the domain of peace, safety and arrival.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis of *Love in Every Word* (2025) and *Love in Every Word 2: The Wedding* (2025) as its primary method. The films are treated as cultural texts composed of narrative structure, visual construction, scene staging, character interaction and dialogue. Film textual analysis attends not only to what characters say but to how scenes are built, what the camera chooses to show, how conflicts are resolved and what emotional registers the films invite audiences to occupy. Four recurring thematic patterns were identified through close viewing and analysis of both films: the pursuit as consent override; financial dominance as romance; proprietary language and the female body; and community enforcement of gender norms. The themes were derived inductively from the films and subsequently interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of Gill (2007) and Glick and Fiske (1996). Throughout the analysis, the films are read against the backdrop of Igbo cultural history, asking at each stage whether what the films present as Igbo tradition is consistent with the documented record of Igbo women's lives.

Summary of *Love in Every Word* (1 and 2)

Love in Every Word 2015) begins at a traditional wedding held in Anambra, where Chioma, a marketing executive and owner of a small perfume brand, crosses paths with Obiora, a wealthy Igbo businessman known in Lagos social circles as "Odogwu," a term that references the powerful, culturally rooted Igbo man. At the time they met, Chioma has just ended a two-year relationship and is emotionally guarded. Obiora, however, is certain of his feelings for her and he tells her within minutes of meeting her, that he is

going to marry her. He calls her Achalugo and while she is unimpressed and laughs it off, he pursues her regardless.

His pursuit can be seen when back in Lagos, Obiora tracks her down. He finds out where she works and begins pursuing her persistently by sending gifts to her office and even going at length to commission a traditional Igbo drumming performance outside her workplace to get her attention. When she still keeps distance, he purchases the building her company operates from, which means her employer cannot remove him when he shows up. Chioma is annoyed but slowly becomes curious, but eventually they begin spending time together. Chioma, however lets him know that she does not date wealthy men and that she has invested money in past boyfriends who wasted it, lost respect for them afterward and does not want to repeat that dynamic. She also tells Obiora she will not accept his financial investment in her perfume business, Arena Sense, under any circumstances. He listens but does not accept her conditions. One night, Chioma's abusive boss calls her at 3am shouting at her about work and Obiora takes the phone and tells the boss he is speaking to the husband of the woman he called. Chioma eventually confronts her boss herself, invokes her rights, threatens legal action and quits, taking a junior colleague with her to start Arena Sense properly.

Things are going well between them, but Chioma's financial boundary remains. Obiora, confused by her resistance, speaks to her friends without her knowledge. They tell him about her father, a wealthy Igbo man with an accent just like Obiora's, who had a second family and abandoned her mother when Chioma was young. Obiora visits Chioma unannounced, tells her he now understands, and reframes her resistance not as a principled position but as a psychological wound she needs to heal. This scene eventually softens Chioma. In a separate storyline, Chioma's mother arrives from the east after hearing about Obiora. She fasts and refuses to eat until Chioma agrees to pursue the relationship and she tells Chioma that Obiora's wealth is God's provision for both of them that she cannot let pass. By the end of the film, Chioma has accepted Obiora's love and his investment in Arena Sense.

Part 2 opens with Arena Sense is growing and Chioma launching her “Achalugo” and “Odogwu” perfume line that gets sold out over night. Not long after, Chioma secures a major partnership with a company called Supreme, which would significantly expand her distribution. She is managing both the business and the wedding simultaneously, and this adds to her pressures. Along the line, Chioma faces complications, one of which is Obiora's mother opposition to their marriage. Her objection is because she had learned that Chioma was born outside of wedlock, and she considers this a disqualification for a woman marrying into their family. Obiora pushes back, defending Chioma, but his mother is firm, putting wedding in jeopardy. The second complication was from Chioma’s ex coming back into her life, sending gifts, and becoming a part of Supreme. She refused his advances and this causes the Supreme partnership to collapse.

Due to Obiora’s mother opposition, Chioma calls off the wedding and goes on vacation to a resort. At the resort, Chioma's mother and Obiora's mother are also brought together. His mother, spending time with Chioma's mother and seeing her warmth, softens. She gives them her blessing and they eventually continue with the wedding plans. The film ends with the wedding.

Analysis

The Pursuit as Consent Override

The opening movement of *Love in Every Word* establishes the film's central romantic logic before the two leads have had a meaningful conversation. At a traditional wedding ceremony in Anambra State, Obiora first encounters Chioma. The setting is culturally loaded: a space of Igbo ritual and family gathering, a place where social arrangements are made. Chioma has just ended a two-year relationship. She is tired and she says so. Within minutes, Obiora tells her, “I am going to marry you. I believe that I am going to marry you.” She laughs. He repeats it. The scene is photographed warmly. The ceremony surrounds them with colour, music and communal joy. The film visually endorses the declaration before Chioma has offered anything in return.

The phrase becomes the film's emotional signature. Obiora does not say he hopes to marry her or that he would like to, instead he states it as a fact. He makes this declaration to a woman he has known for minutes, who is emotionally recovering, who has expressed no interest in him, and who has already been identified, without her knowledge. His certainty is framed by the film as confidence and strength. There is no counter-shot that lingers on Chioma's face processing the presumption of it.

This pattern continues throughout the film. Chioma attempts to maintain distance after their initial dates. She does not respond to his calls. Obiora's response is that of steady escalation. He sends gifts to her office, arrives unannounced at her home, and commissions a performance of traditional Igbo drumming outside her workplace to draw her attention. When she tells him, she is not interested in his financial investment in her business, he continues offering it. When she objects to his Igbo accent, he visits her unannounced, tells her he has spoken to her friends without her knowledge, announces that he "now understands better" why she has been resistant, and delivers a speech reframing her stated preference as a psychological wound rooted in childhood trauma. The scene is staged as an emotional breakthrough, shot in the intimate lighting of her home, with soft music underlying his words. The film causes the audience to feel the romance of the moment, masking off the boundary violation that occurs. This act is precisely the post-feminist mechanism that Gill (2007) describes. Her resistance is not heard as resistance but is considered a psychological symptom instead. When Obiora gets the psychological backstory, the film implies the right response is real understanding, not acquiescence to her expressed preferences. The film shows that he does not stop chasing her but is rewarded when she eventually gives in.

The Igbo cultural dimension of this is worth dwelling on. In pre-colonial Igbo marriage practice, the process of marriage negotiation was carefully structured and involved multiple stages of family consultation and explicit consent at each level. The man's family would approach the woman's family and Investigations are conducted. The woman is then consulted because her response mattered. The structure of traditional Igbo courtship was not built on individual male persistence overriding female reluctance. It was built on communal process and negotiated agreement. However, what *Love in Every Word* frames as authentically Igbo, the wealthy man who simply knows he will have this woman and waits for her to come around, has no strong parallel in that tradition.

Financial Dominance as Romance

The most sustained and structurally revealing dimension of the films' gender ideology plays out in the handling of money. Chioma is established as financially capable. She runs Arena Sense and has a professional salary. She has thought carefully about financial dynamics in relationships and articulates her position with considerable clarity in Part 1:

> I would rather take a loan from a bank than from a man. Before you I have never in my life dated a rich man. I am usually the one who invests in my boyfriend's businesses and I know how disappointed I feel when they waste my money. I know how I lose respect for them. It's annoying and I would not want to put anybody through that.

This is a substantive statement that reflects a woman who has earned her own money, invested it in other people, experienced the emotional consequences of that investment going wrong, and arrived at a principled position about financial independence in relationships. The film does not honour that position. It pathologises it. Chioma's reluctance to accept Obiora's money is eventually traced back to her absent father, a wealthy Igbo man with an accent like Obiora's, who maintained a second family and abandoned her mother. The financial independence is reframed as a wound. Once Obiora grasps the psychological origin of her resistance, the film positions him to wait it out and she eventually accepts his investment. The business succeeds and this indirectly shows that he was right to persist.

Part 2 of the movie sharpens this financial issue. In a scene in which Chioma and Odogwu discuss the financial arrangements for their marriage, she proposes contributing to domestic expenses. He refuses. "How much do you earn that you now want to be using this money that you make to be paying for something that I can pay for and it will not pinch me?" When she persists, he offers alternatives: "You can buy clothes, you can buy hair, you can go on vacation. You can even give your mother money." She continues to push back, saying the marriage is a partnership and she needs financial responsibilities. He eventually concedes that she can handle groceries, for one year, after which they will renegotiate.

The scene is played in a tone of gentle comedy. Obiora's resistance is presented as the expression of a man who loves her too much to allow her to stress herself. But the structural reality of the scene is glaring. A financially independent adult woman who runs her own business and earns a professional salary has had to argue, negotiate and push back simply to be permitted to buy groceries for her own household. And when she wins groceries for one year, the film treats this as a happy resolution.

Glick and Fiske (1996) identified this dynamic as protective paternalism, the benevolent sexist tendency to restrict women's access to resources and responsibilities under the guise of protection. Obiora does not deny Chioma's competence but acknowledges it instead. What he denies, however, is her right to exercise that competence in the shared domestic space. And because the denial is accompanied by warmth and the offer of holidays and gifts, the films ensure audiences read it as generosity rather than control. This shows how protective paternalism operates, presenting itself as care and is received as care while limiting women's sense of agency in their own lives.

There is also a subtler financial mechanism at work. Before formally asking for Chioma's hand, Obiora builds her mother a house, from scratch, beginning construction the morning after their very first meeting. He presents the completed house to the mother as a gift for raising "the love of my life" and uses the presentation as the occasion to request her daughter's hand in marriage. The mother is overwhelmed. In the Igbo tradition, bride price (ime ego*)*, is a meaningful gift from the man's family to the woman's, intended to express appreciation and to formally mark the union of two families (Nwabude, 2022). It is, in the traditional setting, a communal negotiation, not a unilateral financial statement designed to move the woman's family into a position of gratitude before the woman herself has been formally approached. Obiora's act of building a house and presenting it as a fait accompli while requesting her hand, places Chioma's mother in a position of significant financial indebtedness before Chioma has been asked anything. In the film, the gesture is experienced as the ultimate act of romantic devotion. In its structural logic, it is a pre-emptive financial claim on consent.

Obiora himself offers a comment in Part 2 that the film intends as humility but which inadvertently captures the problem: "I still believe that you would have made this happen without me. I only helped you get there faster." He does not say it is entirely hers but positions himself as the accelerant. And the film, across both instalments, supports this positioning. The Arena Sense launch is celebrated as a joint achievement. The narrative ensures audiences understand his financial investment as the decisive factor. By doing so, Chiomas's own talent and labour are acknowledged but subordinated to his intervention. This is a postfeminist tendency to present female success as relational rather than self-generated.

Proprietary Language and the Igbo Body

A scene in Part 1 reveals something the film itself does not appear to register. Chioma is dressed for a public event but Obiora objects to her outfit, telling her she cannot "show my property to the public like this" and pressing her to change, because "you can't put my property on display now." She tries different outfits after this statement is made. The scene is staged playfully, in the warm comedic register the films consistently deploy when Obiora asserts his preferences over hers. The word "property" passes without the film offering Chioma a beat to respond to it. There is no pause, no raised eyebrow, and barely any moment of reckoning with what has just been said.

The word is not a slip; it is an expression of the film's underlying logic articulated with unusual directness. Throughout both films, Obiora's romantic language consistently encodes ownership. He calls Chioma "my queen," "my Achalugo" and "my wife" before any formal agreement has been reached. In one scene in Part 1, responding to a 3am phone call from Chioma's abusive boss, he tells the boss he is "the husband of the woman you called." He claims spousal authority even before Chioma has agreed to marry him and before any traditional rites have been performed. In the Igbo marriage tradition, a man does not speak of a woman as his wife until the proper stages of courtship and bride price have been completed but Obiora claims the title before earning it, and instead of condemning it, the film presents this as protectiveness.

The naming, as discussed above, is another dimension of this proprietary logic. "Achalugo" in Igbo naming tradition connotes independence, greatness and distinction. *Ugo* (the eagle), is a symbol of sovereign power and rare achievement. To call a woman Achalugo is to invoke the fullness of that symbolism for the feminine and to acknowledge her as a figure of extraordinary worth. But within the film, Obiora uses the name as his own coinage and his own act of defining Chioma. He does not use her birth name, Chioma, which means "good God," carrying its own spiritual weight in the Igbo naming tradition. He renames her, and the name he gives her, for all its cultural prestige, functions in the film's logic as his gift to her rather than her own inheritance. She becomes his Achalugo, a distinction he bestows rather than one she possesses. In Igbo aesthetics, beauty in a woman is not purely physical. It is inseparable from her character, her communal contribution and her moral presence. A woman who is physically beautiful but lacks these qualities is described in Igbo cultural discourse as *ochakaomaka* (a feigned or superficial beauty). This description is a concept of feminine worth that is rooted in the woman's own selfhood and cannot be conferred from outside. The film's use of "Achalugo" as a term Odogwu applies to Chioma, rather than a quality she is already recognised as possessing, sits at odds with this Igbo understanding of where a woman's worth actually resides.

Community Enforcement and the Architecture of Expectation

Neither film leaves the work of gender enforcement to Odogwu alone. The community surrounding Chioma, and most pointedly the mother figures in both films, participates actively in constructing and reinforcing the terms of her position. This communal enforcement is ideologically important. It means the films cannot simply be read as the story of one man's controlling tendencies. They present a whole world in which Chioma's incorporation into Odogwu's provision is the natural and desired outcome.

In Part 2, Odogwu's mother provides the film's most explicit articulation of its gender ideology. When the family discusses Chioma's successful business, the mother tells Obiora: "I hope you have told her that when she gets married, she should start shifting her focus on having offspring for you. I don't even know why you are allowing her to work. Obi's wife does not need to work before people will start saying that Obi cannot take care of her." Obiora pushes back: "I am not allowing her to be working. Chioma is her own person. She loves to work." The film stages this as a generational conflict, the enlightened son resisting his traditional mother. But Odogwu'sdefence does not challenge the mother's framework. He does not say the question of permission is misplaced. He says Chioma loves to work, as though her career is a personal preference he accommodates rather than a professional identity she holds regardless of his opinion. The framework, in which her work is contingent on his stance, goes entirely unchallenged.

The mother's concern is also framed as cultural. She says people will talk, that others will read a working wife as evidence of a husband who cannot provide. This is a real dimension of social pressure in many Nigerian communities. Its presence in the film as an uncontested cultural fact, rather than a norm to be critically examined, means the film presents it as common sense rather than ideology. In indigenous Nigerian films, women consistently bear the moral burden of preserving community honour through their domestic choices. The mother's speech in *Love in Every Word* reproduces this dynamic precisely, placing Chioma's professional identity in tension with communal judgement in a way the film never fully resolves in Chioma's favour.

Chioma's own mother enforces the same logic through different means. In Part 1, she travels from Anambra to Lagos after hearing about Obiora and declares a hunger strike until Chioma agrees to pursue the relationship. “Don't do this to your mother,” she says. “This man is a very wealthy man, a good man. Let us be freed from suffering.” This framing reveals that Chioma's marriage is not presented as her personal decision but as a collective economic rescue. Her mother's material situation becomes leverage. The emotional and familial pressure is not violent or coercive in any conventional sense but embedded in love and care. However, it is pressure nonetheless, and it positions Chioma's romantic choice as something she owes her family rather than something she owns for herself. The pressure Chioma's mother applies, rooted in the idea that Obiora’s wealth represents the family's salvation, reflects a conception of feminine worth that is financial and relational rather than intrinsic. It is the kind of thinking that has worked historically to limit Igbo women's full participation in economic and political life.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that *Love in Every Word* and its sequel represent a new configuration of gender ideology in Nollywood, one that is in important ways more insidious than the overt sexism that preceded it. The older Nollywood showed women suffering visibly. The new Nollywood shows women thriving, but on terms that remain structurally a man's. The mechanism is benevolent misogyny, which is the misogyny that admires, protects, provides and names, and in doing so, claims.

The films achieve this through four interlocking patterns. The pursuit is constructed as romantic persistence but functions as the systematic override of female consent. Financial dominance is framed as generosity but structurally ensures Chioma's household agency is mediated through Obiora’s decisions. Proprietary language, including the deployment of “Achalugo” as a name Obiora confers rather than one Chioma already possesses, quietly encodes ownership beneath the rhetoric of devotion. Community enforcement, through both mothers, makes the arrangement feel like culture rather than ideology.

Most significantly, the films use Igbo cultural symbols, the name Achalugo, the language, the ceremonial settings, the bride price gesture of the mother's house, to claim that what they depict is rooted in Igbo tradition. This claim does not survive scrutiny. The Igbo women of the pre-colonial record were market authorities, political councillors, judicial figures, priestesses and economic agents in their own right. They held the Omu title, the Umuada authority and the OtuNludi network. The cosmological foundation of Igbo spiritual life is a feminine deity, Ala, the earth goddess, who is not a supporting character but the moral centre of the universe. A Nollywood that was genuinely faithful to Igbo cultural tradition would represent that inheritance, not reduce Igbo womanhood to a beautiful and grateful recipient of a wealthy man's love. The name Achalugo encodes this contradiction most clearly. The eagle, in Igbo symbolism, represents sovereign greatness. To name a woman Achalugo is to say she embodies that greatness for the feminine, that she is where the eagle rests because she is worth resting in. The film uses this name while building a narrative in which the woman's greatness is consistently dependent on the man's support. The name points to one thing. The story delivers another. The gap between them is the space this paper has tried to describe. None of this means the films should not be watched, enjoyed or even loved. It means that watching them critically matters, and that the conversation audiences have about what they represent is a conversation worth having with care. Nollywood has genuine power to shape how Igbo culture, Igbo marriage and Igbo womanhood are understood, not only within Nigeria but globally, on the platforms where these films circulate. The version of Igbo womanhood currently on offer is not the full story. It is not even most of the story. Igbo women deserve the full story on screen.

Future scholarship might usefully examine audience reception of these films among young Igbo women, asking how the ideology is consumed, negotiated or internalised. Comparative analysis with other contemporary Igbo romantic films would help establish whether the patterns identified here are specific to *Love in Every Word* or characteristic of the genre more broadly. This paper has established that the

celebration these films have received is premature, and that the gilded cage deserves the same scrutiny as the iron one.

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