

**UNDER THEIR SHADOWS:
AN EXAMINATION OF FEMALE DOMINATION OF NOLLYWOOD**

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Abstract

It is perhaps natural to locate the study of women in films in the feminist theory school. But women film critics are also beginning to understand that, feminist assumptions will not facilitate a proper interrogation and deconstruction of the issues that surround the issues of women in film either as subject, critics or producers. It will be therefore more appropriate to approach the study of women in films from a multi-theoretical angle i.e through an examination of the structuralist, sociological, psychoanalytical, semiotic and other relevant theoretical planes. There has been an assumption by watchers and critics of Nollywood that Nigerian films often denigrate, ridicule and lampoon Nigerian females. This paper therefore poses the question, are Nigerian females the victims or victors of Nollywood? Through analysis, and exploration, this paper posits that women are actually victors and not victims of nollywood. They are more visible as the face of Nollywood. The women in actual sense are the centre and subject of Nollywood. As a re- occurring subject matter, their issues are constantly thrust into the conscience of opinion leaders and policy makers - they are front burner. Many of them are employed in the industry with amazing track record of expertise and professionalism. They also form the bulk of the film viewing population. The paper recommends that scholars and critics should undertake a deeper exploration of the benefits of Nollywood to Nigerian females.

Introduction

The Nigerian home video tagged Nollywood has indeed come a long way. Not only in terms of the duration of its existence but also to the extent of its treatment of issues and subject matter. Charles Igwe (2008) believes that the Nigerian home video has created an opportunity for Nigerians to create our own images and capture our own stories, it has given us a voice and a power to change perceptions of ourselves, of our surroundings, of our nation, both locally and internationally. Timothy Asobele (2003) states that of all media of mass communication, the motion picture has the most universal appeal and impact. It can rise above the limitations imposed by language and cultural barriers through its unique power of images, sound effects and commentary.

It is Alaba Ogunsawo (2000) who stated that that home video has captured the rapt attention of African audiences, threatening to bankrupt cinema houses. The home video has emerged today as Africa's strongest intervention for global equality. It is a fact that many African video films provide content and programme materials for many television stations in the continent and abroad. Many of them are currently broadcast on the satellite for global audiences. Today on DSTV Nigeria, two channels tagged AFR1CA MAGIC 1 and 2 have been dedicated to the broadcast of African drama most of which are based on traditional African subjects and materials. It is also a noted fact that the introduction of these channels has substantially increased subscription for cable stations across the world.

But the treatment or maltreatment of females has been a subject of many critics and analysts of Nollywood - Films like - Omata Women (2002), More than a woman (2005) - are blamed for questionable presentation of women.

The major point of criticism has been in the area that the films are pointedly a celebration of violence, ritualism and cover hooliganism. Acholunu (2000:55) emphasizes this when she states that: murder, witchcraft; are becoming the order of the day in Nigerian home video movies thus, driving more jobless youths towards satanic exercises.

In his own contribution to this debate - Enemaku (2003:69) notes that the treatment of themes, has been subject of many critical commentaries .He notes that alleged ethical breaches condemned by critics of the Nigerian Home Video include the following:

1. Sexual immorality, including nudity, sexually suggestive actions, incest and others.
2. Deification of wealth and opulence.
3. Witchcraft and voodoo
4. Barbarism and savagery
5. Tendentious handling of facts
6. Prostitution
7. Over concentration of indices of underdevelopment (poverty, archaic lifestyles)
8. Romanticism of official corruption and perverted moral values
9. Juvenile delinquency and violence
10. Other socially invalid trends

Treatment of Females in Nollywood

The study of the treatment of the females and the roles they interpret in Nollywood, can be located in the area of Feminist theory. Feminist theory, generally aims to understand the nature of gender inequality and discrimination. It basically examines women's role in politics and other live endeavours. It is also aimed at promoting women's interests, rights and issues-these themes include sexual discrimination and subjugation. This area of study according to Wikipedia emerged in 1792. Central to feminism, is the believe that women are subordinated to men and that males engage in female' bashing and male gazing .There are several sociological approaches to the study feminist theory in films. They include structuralism psychoanalysis and semiology. Those of the psychoanalytical school' believe that early child experiences among women account for this feeling of subordination. Feminist theory therefore refers to re-reading and re -interpreting of history from feminist perspectives. In doing this Elaine Showater identifies three phases of the feminist theory- according to her the first is, Feminist critic, this examines ideologies behind literary phenomenon in the study of feminist theory. The second according to her is Gyno criticism -where women are producer of theme and meaning,-third stage is the gender theory where ideological inscriptions are explored.

Some analyst of Nigerian video film believe that Nigerian video films see women from their attributes of body only- that they celebrate their body and men are centered on the mind. Agatha Ukata (2011) believes that Nigerian female films like Glamour Girls typified women in outrageous ways that women have nothing good to offer. She notes that issues in Nigerian film bother on negative depiction of the Nigerian female-pre-marital sex, money problems, witchcraft, jealousy, balancing professional life with other jobs. She notes that there is the need to explore feminism in African film from an African

perspective, such that women must not be seen as psychologically disempowered as corrupting and subverting the natural order.

There are several postulations that African women and that includes Nigerian women were made subordinate by oppressive and repressive costumes, traditions and religion. Among the Hausa in Nigeria for instance several commentators have highlighted that the principal plight of the Hausa women lies in their being in purdah or seclusion. This is believed to have made her become more dependent or submissive to and dominated by the male. This has also led to perceived female backwardness in the political and economic spheres as well as in other social activities.

But Bergstrom (2002:2-2) studying the treatment of women in Nigerian society, in culture and society in Nigeria reports that women in many parts of Africa-there are historical and mythical heroines who were venerated and even deified on account of their exploits and achievements. Many of them have adapted for plays and films. Films like Queen Amina are based on the historical accomplishments of Queen Amina of the Hausa Kingdoms. Bergstrom notes that Hausa land exercised a lot of freedom before the islamization of the region. According to her there existed aristocratic women in Hausa land that period who occupied important public position as tax collectors, market leaders and religious leaders. But with the institution of Shariah law women were slowly removed from public positions of power and relevance which they once held and their status became associated with seclusion or purdah.

There are also several prominent women recorded in the traditions of many Nigerian cultures-there is the story of princess Inikpi among the Igala who willingly accepted to sacrificed alive in order to save her fathers' kingdom from defeat.

The New Deal

There has been a conscious and deliberate effort to change the perceived negative image of African women through films. And this new raw deal is being made by women themselves. One of them is Fanta Regina Narco, who is the producer of the film is **Bintou**, (which is a product of the mama Africa series.) Under the Mama Africa series many African female directors came together to make a number films. In **Bintou**, this woman struggles to educate her child and in so doing, her the freedom she deserves. Regina Narco-(2009) notes that there is so much illiteracy foisted on our women folk in Africa. She therefore deliberated set out to make I films that will liberate and empower the African female.

Another critic Micere Mugo (2009) believes that as artiste that we should not prescribe or tell people what they write. She suggests that we can map out the area where the greatest need lies. She states her concern really is in the area of our children, our youth and what vision we are feeding them with in other for them to move forward. According to her 'I Keep pointing out to the arear of women and the role that women can play and I really think these are areas you can map out'. She feels a very big need to be a scribe for them in order for those stories to come forward.

Amaka Igwe a famous film and television producer in Nigeria on her part states that in her films, she talks about family as the basic unit of what is good and what is right in society, which is the basic strength of Nigeria. Nigeria is one country that has a strong family unit and because of that the society is not like the ones of America and Europe. She explains that in Nigeria, you can't run your relationship through your cousin, if you have a problem they are there to solve it for you. .There is a bond between the child and his mother's family. Those are things that are totally Nigerian and those

are the things we want to teach to the outside world. She states that she has tried a lot of things. Some of them have worked and others are yet to work. She adds that her training company has been engaged in bringing up artists. 'We train different categories of people like actors. We get them raw through audition, train them, people with talents, organize workshops for them, employ some of them. According to her she also trains editors, graphic people etc, at Amaka Igwe Studios.

The changing fortune of female film makers

Nigerian female film producers are actually beginning to rule the industry. Also critical is the fact that many more films are beginning to treat female issues. The African female is increasingly the subject matter and face of African film. They are the heroines, the new stars.

Political Babes (2011)

In the film **political Babes**, we are introduced to the world of 'the endless possibilities of the female power. Produced by Uchenna Eloibeke Umbunabo and featuring Amanda Elegh, Asibi Aneni and Ubong Bassey Ewa -screen play-The story is about a young girl Fiona who is just about 25 years old. She exploits the power of her youth and beauty to blackmail top politicians including the Governor of a state and the party chairman into endorsing her father as gubernatorial candidate and to also ensure that he becomes the governor of the state. In an interwoven another girl her friend and age mate called Karen is able to seduce the governor to become his wife so that she becomes the first lady. The two girls are also in a contest of power when they both struggle to make a young man Richard who is dating both of them to be a commissioner of works. In the end, the Governor discovers that the young man is a dupe. He also breaks his relationship with his so called wife and reconciles with his daughter.

The movie is a display of the sheer strength of the power of women- they are the political players and grand lords, we see them walk around with body guards, they promote thuggery and use thuggery with visible signs of violence and bloodletting..

HOT GIRLS (2011)-Directed by Arinze Esimbe

As the title indicates in Hot Girls the girls have become hot- They call themselves Akata girls and they are involved in all kinds of atrocities. They are determined to be movie producers and in their ambition they use men to achieve their goals. They are lesbians and they claim that they have the 'solutions'. The lead character Nicole goes into the agreement with a popular and widely known producer Ted, but Ted tries to use his reputation to abuse young girls and take them to bed in the name of making them movie stars. He and Nicole fall apart and she accuses him 'over' touching younger girls. Nicole decides to continue to make her movie on her own terms and proves that women have the guts to call off the bluff of men. She states that women need to change their mentality and avoid the use of seduction to achieve growth and success in life.

Desperate models – produced by – Paul Ojei

Desperate house wives parades stars like Eucharia Anunobi, Mercy Johnson, Angela Ijeoma Okorie and Cha Cha Eke, written by Uche Nancy the film talks about the desire of women to attain stardom through the glamorous industry of modeling. The film presents a totally female dominated world where ambition and glamour are interwoven to display the power of the woman.

Eucharia is on top of the chain as the chief executive of the modeling company, she employs young men, dates them as uses them as sex tool. She exercises so much control she could intimidate them and warn them to stay off other women. In one of the scenes she cautions the young man 'I don't want to see you with any other women - never. If you behave well I will change your fortune as long as you make me happy- I will make you happy-I don't want to see you with any other lady. 'She is authoritative, domineering and outright abusive of the women and men around her.

A cursory look at the stone s above prove certain trends- that there is an increasing redefinition of the roles of the women in Nigerian video -film. They are the chief executives, they are the ones that wield the power, and they make things happen, very much in control of the men. The female in Nollywood has become the new 'oppressor'.

Ahmed Boulour (2012) of NATION ON 21-22-2012, notes that 20 percent of cinema releases in 2011 was produced by women. He points out that Funke Akindele's RETURN OF JENNIFER sold over 30 million naira. He notes that films shot by women like BURSTING OUT AND HOLDING HOPE, Shan George's FINDING GOODLUCK, KISS AND TELL by Monalisa Chinda made headlines in the year. Boulour notes that the role of women has changed significantly, almost a total reversal.

Conclusion

Does this contradict the feminist notion that the females are victimized and the most represented in their destiny in their own hands, they are re-writing the image of the Nigerian female one in which the female is the victor not the vanquished.

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